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Introduction

A Map for the Journey

Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936), Spain's most distinguished man of letters during the twentieth century, published in every possible genre—drama, poetry, the philosophical essay, the short story and the novel. Some readers of Spanish literature know him as a leader of the Generation of 1898, the group of writers who sought to redefine Spanish national identity after "El Desastre," the loss in the war with the United States in 1898. Philosophers will know him for his major philosophical work *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*The Tragic Sense of Life).* Others know him best for his short novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir (Saint Manuel the Good, Martyr*), his story about an unbelieving priest whom the Church wanted to canonize.

This book examines the life and work of Unamuno through the lens of his faith. Because of the polemical nature of the Unamunian corpus and its breadth, there has been a substantial amount written on the faith of Miguel de Unamuno in Spanish and in English, though to my knowledge no entire book devoted to the topic in English. Those Hispanists who have access to the extensive bibliography on faith and Unamuno in Spanish will not find an exhaustive summary of that material here, but what they will find is a fresh look at some of the most vexing problems in Unamuno's understanding of faith. Those readers of English who are not familiar with Unamuno will find a clear exposition of the most important themes in Unamuno along with a framework through which one can profitably begin to read the primary works. No one book can encompass all that has been written about

Unamuno and faith, but I trust that both specialists and beginning readers will find in these pages helpful insights to enhance the reading of Unamuno and motivation to read more.

My aim in this work is to describe Unamuno's religious convictions in a sympathetic yet not uncritical manner. I will try to illuminate his faith with comparisons to thinkers Unamuno himself read, appreciated and appropriated, particularly Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), and William James (1842–1910). Genuine religious beliefs are not just grist for unending debate; what one believes, if it is to be valid, must affect how one lives. This stance is Unamunian to the core, as we will see in chapter 3 as I discuss the nature of truth from Unamuno's perspective. I shall therefore begin with how life events affected the faith of Unamuno, but the book will end with an account of how Unamuno's faith shaped his life and his legacy.

Unamuno's religious convictions have proven difficult to pin down. Various critics have attempted to situate the Spanish philosopher within widely differing recognized religious traditions: Unamuno has been seen as a Catholic, a modern Erasmus, a Lutheran, a Protestant Liberal, a Krausist and a panentheist. Chief among the defenders of Unamuno as a Catholic is Julián Marías who sees in Unamuno's life a constant working out of the New Testament which Unamuno knew intimately.[1] Unamuno was called a modern Erasmus by the antagonistic government in Salamanca after the fateful day, October 12, 1936, in which he dared to oppose Franco's General Millán Astray in the Paraninfo of the University.[2] In an early article, Nemesio González Caminero lays the blame for Unamuno's loss of his Catholic faith and his "initiation" into the Lutheran faith at the feet of Kant.[3] Nelson Orringer has ably demonstrated the influence of Protestant liberal theologians like Ritschl and Harnack on Unamuno's thought, which Michael Gómez further illuminates in his study of religious modernism in Unamuno and Nietzsche.[4] In "The God of Unamuno," Armand Baker has a detailed exploration of Unamuno as a Krausist and panentheist, someone who believes that all life and nature are identical with God but who also believes that God is more than our understanding of life and nature. In

1. Marías, *Unamuno*, 144–45.
2. Lapuente, "Unamuno y la iglesia católica," 29.
3. González Caminero, "Las dos etapas católicas," 227.
4. Orringer, *Unamuno y los protestantes liberales.*

my view, none of these labels fits Unamuno very well, and I believe that he would have rejected all of them.

Some critics have even called Unamuno an atheist. The most strident of those is Antonio Sánchez Barbudo. In *Estudios sobre Unamuno y Machado* he says, "Unamuno era en verdad un ateo, pero tan anheloso de Dios, de eternidad, por un lado, y tan farsante y ansioso de fama, por otro; tan desesperado a veces y tan retórico otras muchas; y sobre todo, tan avisado, tan cuidadoso de ocultar su verdadero problema, esto es, su verdadera falta de fe."[5] ("Unamuno was in truth an atheist, but so desirous of God, of eternity on the one hand, and so anxious of fame making that a farce on the other, so desperate at times and so rhetorical many other times; and above all, so judicious and so careful to hide his real problem, that is, his true lack of faith.") Other commentators like Carlos Blanco Aguinaga in *El Unamuno contemplativo* find Sánchez Barbudo's judgments harsh and inaccurate because they do not take into consideration the whole of Unamuno's work.[6]

In January of 1957 the Catholic Church made its judgment official when it included two of Unamuno's works, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, (*The Tragic Sense of Life*), and *La agonía del cristianismo*, (*The Agony of Christianity*), on its then extant Index of Forbidden Books. But already in 1903 Unamuno was condemned by the bishop of Salamanca, Fray Tomás de la Cámara, early in his career at the University of Salamaca,[7] and the same ecclesial office prohibited the reading of his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* in 1942.[8]

The heterodox nature of the Unamuno corpus gives rise to all of these theories. Much as one can give proof texts from the Bible to substantiate contradictory claims, some critics have gone to the works of Unamuno and have found passages to further their own agendas. Unamuno himself gives plenty of fodder for such critics because of his own penchant for contradiction; he does not want to be confined or limited by any school of thought. The purpose of this study is not to try out one more religious label on Unamuno but rather to appreciate the fullness of Unamuno's faith for what it is without shying away from saying what it is not.

I will speak about Unamuno's faith rather than Unamuno's religion. Whenever Unamuno takes up the topic of religion he gets combative, as in

5. Sánchez Barbudo, *Estudios sobre Unamuno y Machado*, 281.
6. Blanco Aguinaga, *El Unamuno contemplativo*, 290.
7. Lapuente, "Unamuno y la iglesia católica," 28.
8. Nozick, *Unamuno: The Agony of Belief*, 18.

his famous essay, "Mi religión." There he accuses those who would want to know what his religion is of wanting only to be able to categorize him or dismiss him. Those who demand to know what his religion is seem unaffected by the deep, eternal concerns of the heart, as he says, "se apartan de las grandes y eternas inquietudes del corazón" (3:261). ("They withdraw from the grand and eternal restlessness of the heart.") By contrast, Unamuno's essay, "La fe," ("Faith,") is a treatise that is full of passion and life rather than ridicule and defensiveness. There he says that faith is sincerity, tolerance and mercy (1:970).

I begin in chapter 2 with a narrative of what is known about the spiritually formative events of Unamuno's life, woven together with three of his works that are specifically aimed at questions of religious belief. *Diario íntimo* (*Inimate Diary*), *El Cristo de Velázquez* (*The Christ of Velázquez*), and *Agonía del cristianismo* (*The Agony of Christianity*) chronologically mark different moments in Unamuno's spiritual journey, but they address many of the same concerns. While some scholars carefully compartmentalize Unamuno's spiritual journey into specific periods of leaving his childhood faith, his embrace of Liberal Protestantism and his return to what he called "popular Spanish Catholicism," my emphasis is on the continuity of the critical questions with which Unamuno wrestled.

In chapter 3 I explore Unamuno's foundational notion of truth and the need for truth to have existential relevance. Here I begin the contrasts with Søren Kierkegaard, and it is right to pause a moment to justify the extensive use of Kierkegaardian thought in this book on Unamuno's faith. It is well known that Unamuno discovered Kierkegaard through reading criticism on Ibsen and that he purchased the first edition of Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker* (*Collected Works*), when it was published from 1901 to 1906. The pages of almost all of the fourteen volumes are marked by Unamuno, both with glosses on the Danish in Spanish and German and also with marginal notations indicating passages of particular interest. But Unamuno was widely read in theology and philosophy. Why take Kierkegaard, and (I should add) Pascal, as interlocutors here? The major reason is the honor Unamuno bestowed on the two philosophers and the seriousness with which he took their thought.

In the first chapter of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* Unamuno names Kierkegaard as one of the men who possesses the tragic sense of life. Kierkegaard is a man who is "cargado de sabiduría más bien que de ciencia," ("burdened with wisdom rather than knowledge,") one who understands

that if philosophy is to matter, it has to be lived (7:120). In *Agonía del cristianismo* Unamuno so identifies with both Pascal and Kierkegaard that he says, "Pero éste he sido yo! Y he revivido con Pascal en su siglo en en su ámbito, y he revivido con Kierkegaard en Copenhague" (7:314). ("But I have been this person! And I have lived again with Pascal in his century and in his environment, and I have lived again with Kierkegaard in Copenhagen.") In the passage in which this quote appears Unamuno is talking about how he reads an author, saying that he doesn't read to argue with a writer but rather attempts to become that person, that soul, in order to glean the truth from him. There is much in the Kierkegaardian and Pascalian soul with which Unamuno resonates, but I will show that Unamuno mainly appropriates the agonic, conflicted elements of their writings and little of their attempts to resolve that conflict. So it is appropriate to critique Unanuno's views through a wider reading of these writers whom he valued.

I explore the concept of "lived truth" in the third chapter through the Kierkegaardian claim that "truth is subjectivity." Unamuno begins his most philosophical work with the declaration that a philosopher must first be a man for whom the truth that he seeks affects the way in which he lives. A study of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and Unamuno's response to it allows us to understand the nature of lived truth. Here we see that propositional truth is always an approximation, that one never fully arrives at ultimate truth. Because of that, truth claims are always held modestly and with an awareness of their uncertainty. Truth only becomes truth as it is acted on in passion and becomes embodied in a person's life. All of the above are part of the Unamunian and Kierkegaardian soul, but there are significant differences in how each of the authors construes objective truth which will be outlined carefully.

Chapter 4 takes up the truth on which Unamuno would act passionately for his entire life after his spiritual crisis of 1897. That truth is the inevitability of death and the deeply felt need for there to be life after this one. Immortality and Unamuno's multi-faceted struggle with how one can attain it is the focus of this chapter. I will here draw again from *Diario íntimo* as Unamuno considers possible ways for one to live on after death. Even though it seems as if Unamuno's obsession with immortality is almost narcissistic at times, his passion will be seen as the impetus for the development of the Unamunian concept of *querer creer*, (wanting to believe), of the importance of the will to believe in the formation of belief. Although Unamuno rejects the normal proofs for God's existence and says many times

that his own faith was destroyed by trying to rationalize God, he presents a compelling and richly intricate ground for belief in God, the only possible guarantor of our living after death. To justify a belief in the God who would be the guarantor of eternal life, Unamuno borrows from and builds on the philosophy of William James. Whether or not Unamuno ultimately believed in that God is still questionable because of Unamuno's insistence on the role of doubt in faith, which brings us to chapter 5.

In this chapter we take up the following questions as they are posed by Unamuno, Kierkegaard and Pascal. Is doubt a necessary part of faith? Are doubt and faith mutually exclusive? Are there dangers in claiming certainty for belief? Although a nuanced explanation of his view is necessary, Unamuno would say yes to all of these questions, and he believes that Kierkegaard and Pascal agree with him. The nature and the uses to which reason can be put are the central issues at stake in this discussion of doubt and faith. While I will argue that Kierkegaard and Pascal share much of Unamuno's view, it is ultimately Unamuno's view of reason that is the source of his inability to make the leap of faith that Kierkegaard and Pascal make. Kierkegaard and Pascal see that there are limits to human reason and this makes them approach the problem of the "hiddenness of God" very differently than does Unamuno. One can reasonably ask if Unamuno's stance of privileging doubt over faith keeps him from the more robust Christian faith of Kierkegaard and Pascal.

When doubt is applied equally to faith and to reason, the end result is a life of struggle. Unamuno does not back down from his embrace of a life of conflict and even goes so far as to use the metaphor of the "unhealed wound" to describe the life of longing to which he calls his reader. The unhealed wound is a metaphor that is found in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and one that I believe Unamuno seized on, believing that Kierkegaard's view of the necessity for suffering for authentic human existence was correct. Chapter 6 will show the origins of the metaphor of the unhealed wound in both authors and then will set out the similarities and the differences in the two authors' views of suffering. Our present culture avoids suffering through physical and mental therapies for every type of ailment. These two authors offer an important counter-discourse for our twenty-first century aversion of suffering, but the ultimate purposes of that suffering are very different in Unamuno and Kierkegaard, and those goals should be clear to anyone who would take up the possibility of seeing positive ends for suffering.

The comparison of Unamuno with Kierkegaard and Pascal leads to the conclusion that Unamuno cannot be considered to have the faith of an orthodox Christian. Nevertheless, there is much that a seeker of religious truth can find in Unamuno. Chapter 7 will offer an appreciation of the depth of Unamuno's faith using the category of Kierkegaard's Religiousness A, once again found in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Religiousness A is one of the stages of existence that Kierkegaard believes must be traversed if one is to achieve authentic existence. It comes after the stages of the esthetic and the ethical and before Religiousness B, which is Christianity. Its requirements of resignation, suffering and guilt are very high, and Unamuno fulfills most of those requirements. Unamuno's faith is at once demanding and life encompassing. Most certainly, it has consequences for how one will live.

The final chapter will describe how Unamuno lived out his faith. It is only fitting that Unamuno be judged in this way. Unamuno claims that truth must be lived and his truth, his faith is *querer creer* (to want to believe). "Creer en Dios es anhelar que le haya y es, además, conducirse como si le hubiera; es vivir de ese anhelo y hacer de él nuestro íntimo resorte de acción. De este anhelo o hambre de divinidad surge la esperanza; de ésta la fe, y de la fe y la esperanza, la caridad" (7:219). ("To believe in God is to long for his existence and is, besides, to conduct oneself as though he existed; it is to live from this longing and make of it our intimate spring of action. From this longing and hunger for divinity rises hope, and from hope, faith and from faith and hope, love.") There are certainly practical, ethical and political consequences to Unamuno's faith. It is important to record the actions taken by this Spanish philosopher that affected the trajectory of Spanish history, actions that sprang from his faith and his longing for God to exist. Only then can one properly appreciate the strength and the validity of Unamuno's faith.