

Unamuno and the Religion of Uncertainty

Hispanic Review, Vol. 58, No. 1, Winter 1990

Posted at: <http://www.armandfbaker.com/publications.html>

There has rarely been a writer who was more preoccupied with religion than Miguel de Unamuno, since almost everything he wrote can ultimately be related to his efforts to resolve the problem of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. It is often taken for granted that, in spite of his preoccupation with religious matters, most critics think that Unamuno did not believe, or as Vicente Marrero Suárez puts it: “Cada vez se ponen más de acuerdo los estudiosos sobre que Unamuno, en el fondo, no creía” (251). Nevertheless, I have found that this opinion is not completely accurate. Although many critics do regard him as a non-believer, they are by no means a majority, since there is a large group of writers who see him as a believer, and still another group feels that his attitude was somewhere in between the two extremes of belief and unbelief.

One of the first to express a positive opinion with regard to Unamuno’s religious faith was his friend and fellow-poet, Antonio Machado, when in the concluding lines of his poem, “A Miguel de Unamuno,” he wrote:

Él señala la Gloria tras la muerte.
Quiere ser fundador, y dice: Creo.
Dios y adelante el ánima española... (244)

Since Machado’s early testimony, one of the most respected proponents of this view is Julián Marías. Although many writers have pointed to Unamuno’s

frequent expressions of doubt as an indication of his lack of faith, Marías calls attention to his profoundly religious lifestyle as a sign that beneath his doubts there was an attitude of belief:

Unamuno se encuentra inserto en una tradición vital cristiana, católica mantenida y enriquecida a lo largo de su vida entera por sus constantes lecturas, sobre todo por la asidua frecuentación del Nuevo Testamento, cuyo original griego no lo abandonaba. . . . Esta vida sumergida en el ambiente religioso del Cristianismo, esta proximidad de Dios en su mente y en su ocupación toda provocan en Unamuno por debajo de sus dudas . . . una peculiar *confianza* en Dios---y ésta es la forma que en él toma la fe. (144-45)

The most outspoken opponent of this point of view is Antonio Sánchez Barbudo, who strongly contradicts the opinions of Marías. As though he were able to read his most intimate thoughts, Sánchez Barbudo affirms that Unamuno was ashamed of his inability to believe and that he therefore tried to hide it from himself and from the public. Much of what Unamuno wrote is not to be taken seriously, since his struggles and his doubts were only part of a role which he adopted in order to conceal his true feelings. In *Cómo se hace una novela*, and again in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* Unamuno almost revealed his lack of faith; but in the end he lacked the courage to admit the truth, and Sánchez Barbudo is forced to conclude:

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, que encubriendo ésta en un mar de palabras, y con toda su confusión, estuvo a punto de volver loco a medio mundo. (281)

Many critics have accepted this view of Unamuno's thought; however, like Marías, Sánchez Barbudo has his detractors. Victor Ouimette describes his conclusion that Unamuno lacked faith as "a simplification predicated on a false evaluation of the problem and stylistic double talk" (113). José Luis L. Aranguren agrees that Sánchez Barbudo's interpretation is a simplification (247) because, as Rivera de Ventosa has also noted, it only considers a limited

aspect of Unamuno's thought (119-20). Carlos Blanco Aguinaga has argued this point even more forcefully:

En sus estudios por lo demás agudísimos y fundamentales, comete Sánchez Barbudo, a nuestro parecer, dos errores básicos que podemos ya dar en forma de resumen: 1) escoger del Unamuno que de ocupa solo es aspecto negativo; 2) juzgar que ese Unamuno es el verdadero, y *el otro*, es decir, ahora el agonista, solo un hipócrita. . . . No ha sido ajeno a nuestra intención de indicar lo errado de cualquier juicio de este tipo, el que hayamos insistido tanto en subrayar la unidad de los dos Unamunos, lo positivo del "contemplativo" y la verdad de la realidad agónica. (290n)

Each of these writers is convinced that it is wrong to ignore the optimistic aspect of Unamuno's thought. But still the controversy continues.

José Ferrater Mora has insisted that for Unamuno "Dios es, en suma, una esperanza que coincide con una realidad" (75), but Gilberto Cancela objects that "ni esa inmortalidad ni ese Dios (de Unamuno) tienen nada que ver con una realidad" (80). P. Nemesio González Caminero says that Unamuno's writings show a total lack of belief, and then he declares: "Hablando para entendernos, debemos decir que Unamuno era un ateo. . . . El Dios de Unamuno solamente existe en la fantasía de Unamuno" (Sánchez Barbudo 98-99). Likewise, Joan Manyà feels that for Unamuno God and life after death are merely fictions of the mind, and this leads him to conclude that "la teología de Unamuno es atea" (78). However, these views do not deter Manuel Alvar who looks at Unamuno's sonnet, "La oración del ateo" and instead of unbelief finds "la duda del creyente" (8), which causes him to affirm: "Sí creía en Dios el ateo de Unamuno, como creía en Él el propio don Miguel" (19).

Based on this sampling of opinions, it is obvious that there is no consensus among those who have studied Unamuno's religious thought. Part of this confusion was undoubtedly caused by his unorthodox approach to religion ---his rejection of dogma, his criticism of the Catholic Church---which has made some writers judge him more harshly than they might otherwise have done. Nevertheless, for the person who wants to reach an understanding of Unamuno's work, this is clearly an unsatisfactory situation.

Therefore, in what follows I will make an effort to reconcile these conflicting views. In so doing, I hope to remove some of the misunderstanding which has obscured Unamuno's religious thought, and I also hope to bring to

light the beneficial aspects of his religious outlook. In “Mi religion” Unamuno asked his readers to join him in his struggle to understand: “Que busquen ellos como yo busco, que luchen como lucho yo, y entre todos algún pelo de secreto arrancaremos a Dios” (16: 121). At the very least, he tells us, this effort will make us men and women of more spirit. So let us begin at the beginning which, as we will see, is the failure of reason to provide an answer to our questions about life.

I. The Struggle with Reason

As a young man, Unamuno was a deeply religious person who was completely immersed in an atmosphere of traditional Spanish Catholicism. In 1880, at the age of sixteen, he left Bilbao to study at the University of Madrid, and his encounter with the rationalistic climate of the university produced a profound change in his religious outlook. When he returned to Bilbao in 1884, he had lost the simple faith of his childhood.¹ Much has been written about the crisis which then developed as Unamuno was caught between the affirmations of his heart and the denials of his mind. Brought to a head in the Spring of 1897 by the fear of dying with a heart attack and, perhaps also, by the fatal illness of his son, Raimundo, the crisis caused him to undergo a period of intense soul-searching during which he was filled with self-doubts and torn by thoughts of suicide and madness.

The suffering which was produced by this crisis seems to have given birth to an idea that has become a fundamental part of Unamuno’s thinking, that reason is not only incapable of explaining matters of religious faith, but it also negates them by turning them into meaningless abstractions. As he expressed it in the *Diario íntimo*, which was written during his religious crisis: “Con la razón buscaba un Dios racional, que iba desvaneciéndose por ser pura idea” (15), which then caused him to conclude that “la razón humana abandonada a sí misma lleva al absoluto fenomenismo, al nihilismo” (44).

¹ As Unamuno explains it in the *Diario íntimo*, this change occurred when he tried to use reason in order to understand the things which he had previously accepted on faith: “Perdí la fe pensando en el credo y tratando de racionalizar los misterios, de entenderlos de modo racional y más sutil” (169).

Some fifteen years later in *Del sentimiento trágico*, Unamuno continues to follow this same line of thought. In spite of the fact that Catholicism says that God's existence has been rationally proved,² Unamuno still feels that the use of reason will never lead to God. And when he is faced with the question of whether the existence of God can ever be proved, he responds: "He aquí algo insoluble, y vale más que así lo sea. Bástele a la razón el no poder probar la imposibilidad se su existencia" (16: 192). Since the use of rational thought leads us to deny all those things which cannot be proved, Unamuno is brought to the conclusion that life itself is opposed to reason: "(la vida) es contrarracional y opuesta al pensamiento claro. Las determinaciones de valor no son nunca racionalizables, son antirracionales" (16: 192).

Because Unamuno could not accept the rational proofs for the existence of God, some critics, who are themselves very rational in their outlook, have concluded that he did not believe in God. But what did Unamuno himself say about the limits of reason? Has he ever stated definitely that he does not believe in God? And if he rejects the use of reason, what does he say about other types of awareness? It will help to examine these questions separately.

A. *Unamuno's attitude toward non-belief.* Sánchez Barbudo seems to feel that Unamuno has stated clearly that he did not believe: "Que él no creía es lo que revela una lectura atenta de su obra y lo que muchas veces Unamuno viene a confesar" (99). However, in my reading of Unamuno's work, I have never found a definite statement of unbelief. In order to clarify this point, let us examine four occasions when Unamuno discusses the idea of non-belief.

In a letter to Luis de Zulueta written in 1909, Unamuno declares: "Y yo, que estimo respectable al que no crea que haya Dios ni que seamos inmortales ---yo mismo no estoy convencido de ello---, me repugna el que no quiere que lo

² In an essay entitled "La quimera" (1905), Unamuno criticizes the Church for its rational attitude toward matters of religious faith: "Y el catolicismo es, hoy por hoy, entera y radicalmente racionalista. Se ha empeñado en racionalizar la fe y en hacer creer, no los misterios, sino la explicación que de ellos da, y ha sustituido a la religion con la teología. No basta creer en Dios; es menester admitir que se puede probar filosóficamente la existencia de Dios; y a los que creyendo en Dios sostengan que no creen posible demostrar con argumentos de ninguna clase su existencia, a éstos, *anatema!*" (16: 817-18). In this passage, Unamuno seems to include himself among those who believe in God without accepting any rational proofs for this position.

haya ni que lo seamos” (220-21). In a letter to Pedro Jiménez Ilundáin which was written in 1911, Unamuno states again: “Que no se crea en Dios, puede ser. Nadie ha probado racionalmente su existencia. Pero que se diga que sin Él ni la otra vida hay consuelo para ésta, no no lo soporto. No creer en Dios es respectable (yo mismo no sé hasta qué punto creo); no querer que lo haya me es odioso.”³ In an article from 1914 entitled “La Honda inquietud única,” Unamuno writes: “Digo y repito que aunque no estoy convencido, ni mucho menos, de que mi conciencia personal e individual sobreviva a la muerte de mi organismo físico, no me resigno a que así sea, ni me parece digno y humano que los demás se resignen a ello” (16: 843). And finally, in “Confesión de culpa” written in 1917, Unamuno reiterates: “Los que conozcan mi obra *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* saben bien cómo pienso y siento a este respecto, y que si no soy un convencido racionalmente de la existencia de Dios, de una conciencia del Universo y menos de la inmoralidad del alma humana, no puedo soportar que se quiera hacer dogma docente del ateísmo” (10: 394).

Several points can be stressed with regard to these passages. First, in all four cases Unamuno expresses uncertainty, rather than disbelief, and this is directed primarily at the idea of rational proof, as in the last example where he says: “no soy un convencido racionalmente.” Then, there is the question of what he means with the word “convencido,” which is revealed in a discussion of Pascal in *La agonía del Cristianismo*. Referring to Pascal’s struggle to believe he writes: “Basta leerle teniendo el espíritu libre de prejuicios para sentir que él, Pascal, no ha creído con la razón, no pudo jamás, aun queriéndolo, llegar a creer con la razón, no se hubo jamás convencido de aquello de que estuvo persuadido” (16: 530). Adolfo P. Carpio has stated, and I think correctly, that this refers not only to Pascal, but to Unamuno himself (144). The word “convencido” obviously represents a stronger degree of belief---a certainty which is based on rational proof---while “persuadido” is open to doubt and is based primarily on feeling or sentiment. If it is true that, like Pascal, Unamuno was “persuadido” but not “convencido,” it would indicate that although he had no rational proof, he was inclined to believe, because of his feelings and emotions.

³ Unamuno’s letters to Jiménez Ilundáin have been published by Hernán Benítez in *El drama religioso de Unamuno*. This passage is found on p. 427.

Another important aspect of the passages quoted earlier is Unamuno's strong rejection of the idea of disbelief. Perhaps one of the better reasons for stating that Unamuno was not an atheist is the highly critical way in which he describes this type of person. For example, in a letter to Ilundáin he says that to take a definite stand against the existence of God and life after death "es padecer de estupidez afectiva" (Benítez 427), and in *Del sentimiento trágico* he speaks of those who do not believe as "hombres ligeros y . . . muy livianos" who are "esclavos de la razón" (16: 296). In "Mi religion" he insists that the existence of God has never been disproved, and he adds: "los razonamientos de los ateos me parecen de una superficialidad y futilidad mayores aún que las de sus contradictores" (16: 120). In view of his negative attitude toward the idea of disbelief, it hardly seems likely that Unamuno was an atheist, and this would therefore seem to refute the statements of those who have labeled him as such.

B. *Non-rational awareness.* The rejection of reason brings with it the question of non-rational awareness. Unamuno has indicated more than once that he recognizes the importance of another type of awareness which he identifies with the heart, as opposed to the head which is the seat of reason. For example, in *La vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*, he declares: "Aunque tu cabeza diga que se te ha de derretir la conciencia un día, tu corazón. . . te enseñara que hay un mundo en que la razón no es guía" (4: 314). And in *Del sentimiento trágico* he refers to a form of hope that surpasses all rational knowledge, which he describes as "esa esperanza cuya illusion vitalizadora sobrepuja a todo conocimiento racional, diciéndonos que hay siempre algo irreducible a la razón" (16: 325).

The problem which now arises is that of the validity of non-rational awareness. "¿Es solo verdadero lo racional?" Unamuno asks in another passage of *Del sentimiento trágico* (16: 279). William James has stated that the existence of mystical states of consciousness proves that reason is not the only basis for what we may believe, and he feels that in the final analysis these mystical states may be "the truest of insights into the meaning of his life" (327-28). Carl Jung has also stressed the limits of rational thought, and with regard to non-rational awareness, he says: "the more of the unconscious and the more of myth we are capable of making conscious, the more of life we integrate" (302). Unamuno has expressed a similar point of view in a letter to Ilundáin:

“¿Quién nos ha dicho que no hay más medio que la razón para comunicarnos con la realidad?” (Benítez 377), and in *Del sentimiento trágico* he repeats: “¿No habrá realidad inasequible, por su naturaleza misma, a la razón, y acaso, por su misma naturaleza, opuesta a ella?” (16: 279). As we have seen, Unamuno feels that reason leads us to deny the immortality of the soul, but he steadfastly refuses to accept this limited version of truth. As he puts it: “la sinceridad me lleva a afirmar también que no me resigno a esta otra afirmación y que protesto contra su validez. Lo que siento es una verdad, tan verdad por lo menos como lo que veo, toco, oigo y se me demuestra---yo creo que más verdad aún---, y la sinceridad me obliga a no ocultar mis sentimientos” (16: 245). In view of the fact that there are problems which reason can never solve, our feelings or intuitions may be as valid (Unamuno says “yo creo que más verdad aún”) as the evidence of our physical senses.

And now let us examine the way in which Unamuno feels that non-rational awareness can bring us closer to God.

C. *The experience of God.* Unamuno has stated on several occasions that for the person who has experienced the reality of God, rational proofs of His existence are irrelevant. For example, in a letter to Luis de Zulueta written in 1903, he declares: “El que tiene la experiencia de Dios. . . no necesita que se lo demuestra; la lógica le está de más” (46). In “Plenitud de plenitudes y todo plenitud,” he refers once again to the lack of rational proofs for the existence of God, and then he states: “No hace falta probar la existencia de aquello de que se tiene experiencia inmediata” (3: 765).

When Unamuno describes the awareness of God, it is clear that this is not a theoretical statement, but rather something that he has experienced personally. In a letter to Pedro Jiménez Ilundáin which was written in 1905, we see that he has not only regained his faith after the crisis of 1897, but that it is also based on some type of direct, personal experience. In one of the more significant expressions of his religious thought, he writes:

No soy ateo ni panteísta. . . . Creo que el Universo tiene una finalidad y una finalidad espiritual y ética. Lo que sí le dire . . . es que con argumentos lógicos no se llega más que a la idea de Dios, no a Dios mismo. . . . Ni en ciencia ni en metafísica hace falta Dios. Pero creo en Él porque tengo de Él *experiencia* personal, porque lo siento obrar y vivir en mí. Y no me pregunte más de esto que ni es cuestión de razonar ni me gustan las polémicas. Me quedo con mi Dios y le pido que se manifieste a los demás. (Benítez 399-400)

Sánchez Barbudo feels that Unamuno's belief in God was limited to a short period of time in 1905 and 1906.⁴ However, in *Del sentimiento trágico* Unamuno speaks once again of the experience of God which is the basis of his belief:

Dios mismo, no ya la idea de Dios, puede llegar a ser una realidad inmediatamente sentida; y aunque no nos expliquemos con su idea ni la existencia ni la esencia del Universo, tenemos a las veces el sentimiento directo de Dios, sobre todo en los momentos de ahogo espiritual.

Then, he gives us an explanation of how he reached this moment of spiritual anguish when the failure of reason gives way to the feeling of God's presence:

Mientras peregriné por los campos de la razón en busca de Dios, no pude encontrarle porque la idea de Dios no me engañaba, ni pude tomar por Dios a una idea. . . . Pero al ir hundiéndome en el escepticismo racional de una parte y en la desesperación sentimental de otra, se me encendió el hambre de Dios y el ahogo de espíritu me hizo sentir con su falta su realidad. . . . Y Dios no existe, sino que más bien *sobre-existe*. (16: 296)

When Unamuno says that God does not exist "sino que sobre-existe," he restates what he said at the beginning of this passage, that God is not an *idea*, since His being is beyond all rational efforts either to prove or to disprove.

We will see that on other occasions Unamuno felt this same sense of spiritual anguish when the skepticism produced by his intellect causes him to doubt, but here it is important to note that the struggle with reason does not lead to a loss of faith or belief. On the contrary, it seems to open the way for another type of understanding which, according to Unamuno, is the only way that God's presence may be felt. As much as his rational self would like to have concrete proof of God's existence and of life after death, Unamuno has to admit that the very lack of proof is perhaps his only source of hope. And this is why he has stated, paradoxically, that only those who doubt can hope to experience true belief.

⁴ When Benítez published the letters to Ilundáin, Sánchez Barbudo was forced to modify his earlier claim that Unamuno never recovered his faith after the crisis of 1897: "A lo más que llegó hacia 1905, fue a creer en Dios. . . y ello no debió durarle sino hasta 1906" (178).

II. The Positive Aspect of Doubt

Similar to what happened with regard to Unamuno's beliefs, his doubts have also caused widespread disagreement among the critics. Julián Marías says that in view of his strongly rooted sense of belief, these doubts are not to be taken seriously: "en verdad se adivina demasiada complacencia en esa duda. . . . Una inquietud que *puede* renunciar a intentar efectivamente calmarse no es radical y última" (143). For Adolfo P. Carpio, nevertheless, Unamuno's doubt is "las más radical de las dudas---porque no se trata siquiera de la duda al fin cómoda y complacida del escéptico que con ironía ve pasar las cosas" (145). Manuel Alvar feels that Unamuno's doubt is "la duda del creyente" (8), while Sánchez Barbudo pokes fun at what he calls the "castillo pirotécnico de sus dudas" and he goes on to conclude that Unamuno only began to talk about his doubt when he no longer had any doubts, after he was convinced that he could not believe (116). Victor Ouimette feels that Unamuno's doubt is sincere, and he points to the positive aspect of this attitude when he says that "Doubt is, at the very least, an indication of awareness. It shows a resistance to spiritual blindness and keeps the hero pure in his actions. If faith is never tested, it becomes complacency . . . or dogma" (111-12).

It is difficult to imagine how Unamuno himself might have responded to these descriptions of his doubt, but we will see that on several occasions he has in fact referred to the positive aspect of doubt mentioned by Ouimette. Likewise, Alvar's reference to "la duda del creyente" corresponds to a passage from *La vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* where Unamuno has written: "Sólo los que dudan creen de verdad, y los que no dudan ni sienten tentaciones contra su fe, no creen de verdad. La verdadera fe se mantiene de la duda" (4: 233). Doubt normally has a negative connotation, but it is obvious that for Unamuno the opposite is true. Since the person whose faith is not tempered by doubt is open either to fanaticism or to spiritual laziness, the feeling of doubt not only helps us keep an open mind, but it also helps us live and act with greater vitality.

But perhaps the most important aspect of doubt results from its confrontation with reason or, more exactly, from reason's confrontation with itself. We have seen that for Unamuno the use of reason leads to skepticism, and even to nihilism, since it denies the existence of those things which it

cannot prove. The crucial test of reason occurs, therefore, when it attempts to analyze the results of its own conclusions. When this happens, reason itself is put in doubt; or as Unamuno puts it in *Del sentimiento trágico*: “La disolución racional termina en disolver la razón misma. . . . El triunfo supremo de la razón, también analítica, esto es destructiva y disolvente, es poner en duda su propia validez” (16: 232). And once reason is put in doubt, we are left in a position of total uncertainty, where neither complete certainty nor absolute doubt is possible; as Unamuno says: “La certeza absoluta y la duda absoluta nos están igualmente vedadas” (16: 245).

Thus it is that Unamuno arrives at a position of last resort which he has called “el fondo del abismo,” where the radical uncertainty which results from the use of reason comes in contact with the desperate desire for immortality, and from this encounter emerges a basis for hope: “la incertidumbre, última posición a que llega la razón ejerciendo su análisis sobre sí misma, sobre su propia validez, es el fundamento sobre el que la desesperación vital ha de fundar su esperanza” (16: 234). If it were not for his fervent hope for immortality, perhaps the use of reason would lead him to a form of absolute skepticism that would result in a paralysis of the will to live; however, because of the determination not to surrender his desire for immortality, he remains in an open-ended state of uncertainty; or as he expresses it: “De este abrazo entre la desesperación y el escepticismo, nace la santa, la dulce, la salvadora incertidumbre, nuestro supremo consuelo” (247). And it is this uncertainty which for Unamuno “puede ser base de una vida vigorosa . . . de una religion y hasta de una lógica” (252).

This new “religion of uncertainty” will not be based on the logic that results from the use of reason, but on a non-rational “logic” that is more closely related to intuition or imagination. And as Unamuno begins to present this new religious attitude, he states that it will be closer to the universal imagery of poetry, or perhaps mythology. Since the problem of life after death does not have a rational solution, we must do as Plato suggests in the *Phaedo*: we must create a myth. There Unamuno concludes: “Vamos, pues, a mitologizar” (16: 252).

In the remaining portions of this study, I will discuss the main points of Unamuno's myth, and we will see whether he can rise out of his uncertainty to find a meaningful view of life.

III. The Value of Suffering

From the time of his religious crisis of 1897, Unamuno was aware that a moment of deep despair can produce a sort of "peak experience" when we sense the true reality behind the world of appearances. This process begins with a sensation of profound anxiety which he has often referred to as a "congoja." In one of the better studies of Unamuno's religious thought entitled "Unamuno en su congoja," Antonio Gómez-Moriana summarizes what he calls "los aspectos positivos de la vivencia de la congoja."

Pues aunque la "congoja" sea experimentada por el hombre mediante un encuentro con la *nada*, sin embargo no es una experiencia meramente negativa ni mucho menos. Todo lo contrario. El encuentro de la propia subjetividad en toda su Honda problemática es para Unamuno la puerta que nos abre el acceso a la verdad más profunda. (78)

Later, he defines the *congoja* as "[una] inquietud interior que constituye para Unamuno una verdadera revelación de Dios" (103).

Like most of the concepts we have studied so far, the positive aspect of suffering appears in all of Unamuno's major works. We see it first in the *Diario íntimo*, when the fear of ceasing to exist awakens in him a feeling of hope which is caused by the sense of God's presence within his own being: "Del fondo del dolor, de la miseria, de la desgracia, brota la santa esperanza en una vida eternal, esperanza que dulcifica y santifica el dolor" (101-02). Then, in *La vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*, Unamuno states that the fear of death not only makes us feel the divine presence, but it also awakens our inner senses, so that we feel ourselves exist on a deeper level of reality:

Hay veces en que sin saber cómo ni de dónde, nos sobrecoge de pronto y al menos esperarlo . . . el sentimiento de nuestra mortalidad . . . Y esta angustia, arrancándonos del conocimiento aparential, nos lleva de gole y porrazo al conocimiento sustancial de las cosas . . . A fuerza de ese supremo trabajo de congoja, conquistarás la verdad, que no es, no, el reflejo del Universo en la mente, sino su asiento en el corazón. La congoja del espíritu es la puerta de la verdad sustancial. (4: 313-14)

Never one to feel a great craving for material comforts, Unamuno lived in a spartan atmosphere of self-discipline, based on the highest principles. Now he asks the rest of us to join him in the experience of renunciation, since this will ultimately bring us closer to God. Thinking of God as the Great Totality in which we live and move and have our being (Acts: XVII, 28), he tells us not to be afraid of an immersion in the divine spirit:

Hay que echar a los hombres en medio del Océano, a quitarles toda tabla, y que aprendan a ser hombres, a flotar. ¿Tienes tan poca confianza en Dios? . . . Y si te hundes en Él, ¿qué importa? Esas congojas y tribulaciones y dudas que tanto temes son el principio del ahogo . . . ; déjate ahogar, déjate ir al fondo y perder sentido y quedar como esponja, que luego volverás a la sobrehaz de las aguas, donde te veas y te toques y te sientas dentro del Océano. (4: 354)

Only if we reach the depths of our anguish where we lose our narrow, egotistical concerns as well as our rational point of view, are we light enough to rise to the surface where we can experience our true being as parts of the Whole.

Still thinking along the same lines, in *Del sentimiento trágico* Unamuno writes that man is an animal who is “esencial y sustancialmente enfermo,” by which he means that his all too human nature is fundamentally imperfect. Paradoxically, however, this “sickness” is the source of our health, since it is our imperfect nature which brings us problems and conflicts through which we grow into a purer state of being. Or as Unamuno expresses it: “esa enfermedad es el manantial de toda salud ponderosa. De lo hondo de esa congoja, del abismo del sentimiento de nuestra mortalidad, se sale a la luz de otro cielo” (16: 169). Then, summarizing this concept which we first encountered in the *Diario*, he repeats: “del fondo de esas miserias surge vida nueva, y sólo apurando las heces del dolor espiritual puede llegarse a gustar la miel del poso de la copa de la vida. La congoja nos lleva al consuelo” (16: 184).

Thus, we have seen that after discovering the negative aspect of reason, Unamuno has chosen a non-rational approach which leads him through the experience of suffering into the presence of God. One can only experience God on this intimate, personal level, and this is possible, moreover, only if He is approached with love. In the final part of this study, we will see what Unamuno has to say about love and faith in God, and then we will examine his view that our actions can reveal the divine reality.

IV. Belief through Love and Action

In the *Diario íntimo* Unamuno states his belief that the existence of love proves the existence of God (55), and then he also tells us: “Condúcete como si creyeras y acabarás creyendo” (134). However, it is not until he writes *Del sentimiento trágico* that he develops these two ideas more completely.

Unamuno feels that faith in God begins with love of God. Contrary to those who maintain that it is our rational understanding which is the basis of our faith, Unamuno insists that love must come first:

No es posible conocerle para luego amarle; hay que empezar por amarle, por anhelarle, por tener hambre de Él, antes de conocerle. El conocimiento de Dios procede del amor a Dios, y es un conocimiento que poco o nada tiene de racional. (16: 295)

Unamuno says that love is identical to compassion, which is feeling with or suffering with another person, and he therefore feels that what we love is always personified. When we look within ourselves at the suffering caused by our human limitations, we sense that suffering is a basic part of the universe. This feeling of *suffering with* the entire universe makes us view it as a “person” with a consciousness similar to our own,⁵ and it also makes us realize that this universal consciousness is God:

Cuando el amor es tan grande y tan vivo, y tan fuerte y desbordante que lo ama todo, entonces personaliza todo y descubre que el total Todo, que el universo es Persona también que tiene una Conciencia, Conciencia que a su vez sufre, compadece y ama, es decir, es conciencia. Y a esta Conciencia del Universo que el amor descubre personalizando cuanto ama, es a lo que llamamos Dios. (16: 267).

⁵ In *Del sentimiento trágico* Unamuno says that all being has at least a rudimentary form of consciousness (16: 269). It is curious that while Unamuno rejects the concept of pantheism, his description of God as the Consciousness of the Universe is basically pantheistic. This is a problem which needs further study, but here I can say that when he objects to this way of thinking, he seems to have in mind a Spinozian form of pantheism which holds that God is identical to the existing universe. His own version of pantheism is similar to the Krausist conception adopted by Antonio Machado, which is discussed in the first chapter of my book, *El pensamiento religioso y filosófico de Antonio Machado* (Sevilla: Servicio de Publicaciones del Exmo. Ayuntamiento de Sevilla, 1985).

Thus, God is the totality of consciousness of which we are part---“solo así se comprende lo de que en Dios seamos, nos movemos y vivmos” (16: 281)---and love leads us to experience Him as a person.⁶

In this way Unamuno shows us that while reason can prove nothing about the existence of God, love is a force which leads to belief. And as an example of this personal love which leads to belief, Unamuno says that he believes in the existence of God in the same way that he believes in that of his friends:

Creo en Dios como creo en mis amigos, por sentir el aliento de su cariño y su mano invisible e intangible que me trae y me lleva y me estruja, por tener íntima conciencia de una providencia particular y de una mente universal que me traza mi propio destino. (16: 321).

Then, Unamuno gives us a lengthy description of his own awareness of God on a personal level. Once again he tells us that in moments of great anguish he has felt the divine presence:

Una y otra vez durante mi vida heme visto en trance de suspension sobre el abismo . . . y una y otra vez en tales únicos momentos he sentido el empuje de una fuerza consciente, soberana y amorosa. Y ábresele a uno luego la senda del Señor.

Puede uno sentir que el Universo le llama y le guía como una persona a otra, oír en su interior su voz sin palabras Pues así es como creo que el Universo tiene una cierta conciencia como yo, por la manera como se conduce conmigo humanamente, y siento que una personalidad me envuelve. (16: 321-22)

Then, as an example of this feeling that he is surrounded by the divine personality, he describes a moment when God is revealed through nature:

Y así, no de otro modo, mira al creyente el cielo estrellado, con mirada sobrehumana, divina, que le pide suprema compasion y amor supremo, y oye en la noche serena la respiración de Dios que le toca en el cogollo del corazón y se revela a él. (322)

⁶ This is not to say that Unamuno feels that God is limited to our concept of a person, or to our human level of consciousness. As he explains it later: “Y es que sentimos a Dios, más bien como una conciencia sobrehumana, como la conciencia misma del linaje humana todo, pasado, presente y futuro, como la conciencia colectiva de todo el linaje, y aun más, como la conciencia total e infinita que abarca y sostiene las conciencias todas, infra-humanas y acaso sobrehumanas. La divinidad que hay en todo . . . la sentimos personalizada, consciente de sí misma, en Dios” (16: 302).

Finally, he responds to this revelation of God's love by reaching out in return:

Se sale uno de sí mismo para adentrarse más en su Yo supremo; la conciencia individual se nos sale a sumergirse en la Conciencia total de que forma parte, pero sin disolverse en ella. (322-23)

On other occasions, Unamuno has expressed concern that perhaps his individual consciousness would be swallowed up when it returns to its source in the totality of consciousness which is God. But in this moment of oneness the personal identity is not lost, since it is always part of the divine awareness.⁷

And now that we have examined Unamuno's description of the way to God through love, let us see what he says about belief as it is affected by the way we live.

B. *Belief is reinforced by action.* Unamuno feels that belief in God is inseparable from action and, therefore, to believe in God is to act *as if* His existence were a reality. This idea is based in part on the creative power of faith which, in a certain sense, creates its own object, in that to have faith in God is to awaken the divine essence that is inherent in our being.⁸ In an even more important sense, since God is love, for us to act with love is to "create" God within ourselves; or as Unamuno expresses it: "Dios que es el Amor, el Padre del Amor, es hijo del Amor en nosotros" (16: 296). Therefore, not only do we create God through our faith in Him, but He also creates Himself in us through our love. For Unamuno, then, to act with love is a way in which belief is strengthened, since God responds to our love by showing us the reality of His existence:

Querer que exista Dios, y conducirse y sentir como si existiera. Y por este camino de querer su existencia, y obrar conforme a tal deseo, es como creamos a Dios, esto es, como Dios se crea en nosotros, como se nos manifiesta, se abre y se revela a nosotros. Porque Dios sale al encuentro de quien le busca con amor y por amor. (16: 321).

⁷ On several occasions Unamuno mentions the idea that individual consciousness is a permanent part of the divine awareness; for example, in *Del sentimiento trágico* he says: "si hay una conciencia del Universo y ésta es eternal, ¿por qué nuestra propia conciencia individual, la tuya, lector, la mía, no ha de serlo?" (16: 310).

⁸ Unamuno explains this idea in the following manner: "La fe en Dios consiste en crear a Dios. . . . El poder de crear a Dios a nuestra imagen y semejanza, de personalizar el Universo, no significa otra cosa sino que llevamos a Dios dentro, como sustancia de lo que esperamos, y que Dios nos está creando de continuo a su imagen y semejanza" (16: 320).

When he states that we create God, or that God is created in us through our faith or through our actions, some critics have mistakenly concluded that for Unamuno God has no reality outside of our own subjective desire for His existence. However, Unamuno has stated that he conceives of God as the Consciousness of the Universe, and it therefore follows that, as parts of God, we help to create His being through those of our actions which are in harmony with His spirit. Rather than wishing to say that God is only a product of our imagination, Unamuno is saying that there is a reciprocal relationship between the creature and the Creator:

Dios y el hombre se hacen mutuamente, en efecto; Dios se hace o se revela en el hombre, y el hombre se hace en Dios. Dios se hizo a sí mismo *Deus ipse se fecit*, dijo Lactancio. . . . y podemos decir que se está haciendo, y en el hombre y por el hombre. (16: 296-97)

We see that Unamuno conceives of reality as a continuous, reciprocal, creative process which takes place “en Dios.” God manifests Himself in and through those who act with love, so that conduct becomes a major factor in the struggle to believe. In a final statement which shows us once again the direct relation between action and belief, we also see that Unamuno is not afraid to judge himself by the same code of conduct on which he has based his religious ideal: “Mi conducta ha de ser la mejor prueba moral de mi anhelo supremo; y si no acabo de convencerme, dentro de la última e irremediable incertidumbre, de la verdad de lo que espero, es que mi conducta no es bastante pura” (16: 386).

C. *Unamuno's “myth.”* Now, after all this talk of love and action which lead to God, is it finally possible to say that Unmuno did in fact believe? It should be amply clear by now that, if this question refers to dogmatic certainty, the answer must be “no.” However, it should also be clear that within the atmosphere of uncertainty created by the lack of rational proof, Unamuno is ready to explore other avenues by which the truth may be reached or at least approached. And when it is said that these ideas are nothing more than myths, Unamuno reminds us that that was exactly how he presented them in the beginning. But then he asks:

¿Y es que el ensueño mitológico no contiene su verdad? ¿Es que el ensueño y el mito no son acaso revelaciones de una verdad ineffable, de una verdad irracional, de una verdad que no puede probarse? (16: 381-82)

Carl Jung also felt that everyone should have a myth to help him understand the things which reason is powerless to explain, and after describing the struggle to create his own myth, Jung reaches a conclusion that is similar to that of Unamuno:

The need for mythic statements is satisfied when we frame a view of the world which adequately explains the meaning of human existence in the cosmos. . . . No science will ever replace myth, and a myth cannot be made of any science. For it is not that "God" is a myth, but that myth is the revelation of the divine in man. It is not we who invent myth, rather it speaks to us as a Word of God. (340).

Unamuno would seem to be in complete agreement with his point of view as he goes on to formulate his own mythical, or non-rational solution for the religious problems with which he has struggled throughout his life:

¿Cuál es nuestra verdad cordial y antirrational? La inmortalidad del alma humana, la de la persistencia sin término alguno de nuestra conciencia, la de la finalidad humana del Universo.

And since there is no proof for this view, Unamuno offers us a moral justification which is based on the same rigorous code of conduct which he discussed earlier:

¿Y cuál (es) su prueba moral? Podemos formularla así: obra de modo que merezcas a tu propio juicio y a juicio de los demás la eternidad, que te hagas insustituible, que no merezcas morir. O tal vez así: obra como si hubieses de morirte mañana, pero para sobrevivir e eternizarte. El fin de la moral es dar finalidad humana, personal, al Universo; descubrir la que tenga---si es que la tiene---y descubrirla obrando. (16: 387)

Thanks to this non-rational approach, Unamuno is able to find a basis for his ideal of immortality and, like Jung, he has found "the meaning of human existence in the cosmos" which is to live in such a way that our personal consciousness becomes a permanent part of the divine awareness.

Because of the enormous quantity of Unamuno's works, it has been necessary to omit a study of several related works---for example, the "Salmos" from *Poesías* and the *Cristo de Velázquez*, both of which contain some important statements regarding his religious views. Most critics will agree, however, that Unamuno's basic philosophy is expressed in those works leading up to and culminating in *Del sentimiento trágico* and that in the latter part of his life no major changes in his belief occurred.

Looking back now at the conflicting views that have been presented in the course of the present study, I have to conclude that the critics who deny Unamuno's religious faith are not justified in doing so. We have seen that the lack of rational proof did cause Unamuno to doubt. But in addition to his statements which show that he leans toward belief based on non-rational awareness, to label Unamuno a non-believer is to overlook all that he has said about the importance of uncertainty.

For that reason, I agree with those who, like Julián Marías, have recognized Unamuno's belief in what he has called "la verdad cordial y antirracional." Unamuno was a passionate human being who experienced moments of deep anxiety and pessimism caused by the fear of nothingness, and it may be true that he never completely overcame his doubts. But it is equally clear that he never reached the opposite extreme of total disbelief. A pessimistic view of Unamuno's work would emphasize the idea that he never believed with complete certainty, while an optimistic one would point to the positive aspect of his uncertainty which leads to hope. In view of his intense desire to believe (is not the desire to believe itself a form of belief?) and in view of the serious consideration that he has given to different types of non-rational truth, there is no doubt that Unamuno was more inclined to belief than to non-belief.

Finally, Unamuno has reminded us that merely because a thing has not been proved does not mean that it is unreal. Not having rational proof of God and life after death sometimes causes us to doubt. But for those of us who really want to believe, as Unamuno did, this uncertainty not only helps us keep an open mind, but also awakens us to a fuller and deeper awareness of our being.

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