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In 1930, the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) wrote one of his most well-known novels, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* [*Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*]. The novel is about the fictional character Manuel Bueno, a catholic priest from a small Spanish village who, despite being unable to believe the Christian claim that there is an after earthly death life, devotes himself to the spiritual care of his people, being thereby sanctified after his death. The aim of this paper is to show that the guideline of *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* is the expression, in fictional, non-philosophical language, of the conception of religious faith Unamuno had already defended in his major philosophical work, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos* [*The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*].

Unamuno's Religious Faith in *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir*

Alberto Oya

I. Introduction

In his major philosophical work, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos* [*The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*],¹ published in 1913, the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) argued for a natural, non-evidential foundation for religious faith; that is, according to Unamuno, religious faith is not legitimated because God does in fact exist, but because it is something we are naturally led to. This is why Unamuno’s religious faith has nothing to do with believing, with accepting as a truth the factual claim that God exists or that the world is such and such and not otherwise. Religious faith, according to Unamuno, consists in a religious understanding of the world, in seeing the world as a sort of personal conscious being and in feeling, through the practice of charity, as if we were in a personal relationship with it — from conscience to conscience, so to say.

In 1930, seventeen years after the publication of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos*, Unamuno wrote one of his most well-known novels, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* [*Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*].² The novel is about the fictional character Manuel Bueno, a catholic priest from a small Spanish village who, despite being unable to believe the Christian claim that there is an after earthly death life, devotes himself to the spiritual care of his people and is sanctified after his death. The aim of this paper is to show that the guideline of *San*

1 The edition cited throughout is Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, in *The Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno* (vol. 4), ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 3–358. In square brackets I cite the original Spanish text, published in Miguel de Unamuno, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas* (vol. 7: “Meditaciones y ensayos espirituales”), ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966 [1913]), pp. 109–302.

2 The edition cited throughout is Miguel de Unamuno, *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, in *The Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno* (vol. 7), ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 135–180. In square brackets I cite the original Spanish text, published in Miguel de Unamuno, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas* (vol. 2: “Novelas”), ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1967), pp. 1127–1154.

Manuel Bueno, mártir is the expression, in fictional, non-philosophical language, of the conception of religious faith Unamuno had already defended in his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos*. By abandoning the use of philosophical jargon and expressing his view in a concrete form through the life and works of the fictional character Manuel Bueno, Unamuno is likely trying to make his conception of religious faith comprehensible to a wider audience. That this was Unamuno's intention in writing this novel is clear from what he says in the prologue to *San Manuel Bueno, mártir y tres historias más* that it should be considered as: "[...] one of the most characteristic novels of all my fictional production. And he that says fictional production—I add—also says philosophical and theological production. [...] I am aware of having put into this novel all my tragic feeling of daily life".³

II. God and Our Natural Appetite for an Endless Existence

Unamuno's defense of religious faith starts with the claim that all singular things naturally and primarily seek an endless existence—*i.e.*, that they all suffer from what Unamuno named as "*hambre de inmortalidad*" ("hunger for immortality"). An important point must be made here. Unamuno's reasoning does not rely on the psychological claim that we all, as an empirical fact, have the desire for an endless existence. What Unamuno's argument requires is the stronger, metaphysical claim that the most basic natural inclination (or appetite, if we are to use Spinoza's jargon) of all singular things (not only sentient beings such as us) is to seek an endless existence.⁴

3 Miguel de Unamuno, "Prólogo a San Manuel Bueno, mártir y tres historias más", in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas (vol. 2: Novelas)*, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1967 [1933]), p. 1115. My translation, the Spanish text reads: "[...] una de las más características de mi producción toda novelesca. Y quien dice novelesca—agrego yo—dice filosófica y teológica. [...] Tengo la conciencia de haber puesto en ella todo mi sentimiento trágico de la vida cotidiana".

4 Unamuno's "*hambre de inmortalidad*" has been commonly misread as referring to the psychological, empirically contingent claim that we, human beings, have the desire for an endless existence. However, Unamuno's explicit

Unfortunately, all the evidence we have goes against the claim that we will enjoy of an endless existence. As far as we know, people die sooner or later. In light of this, and by a simple induction, the only conclusion we can reasonably infer is that we too are going to die and in so doing our existence will come to an end.

There is, it is true, a long philosophical tradition which aims to prove the immortality of human beings through the use of philosophical and theological reasoning. But, according to Unamuno, these arguments are completely off the point. Even if these arguments were successful — which Unamuno argues they are not— they would only demonstrate the survival of the human soul. But we are not (at least, not only) souls: we are, as Unamuno so vividly put it, “*hombres de carne y hueso*” (“men of flesh and bone”). Therefore, these kinds of arguments cannot provide

endorsement of Spinoza’s argument for the *conatus* at the very beginning of his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos* makes it evident that he is not treating this “*hambre de inmortalidad*” as referring to a desire for an endless existence that we, human beings, have. This “*hambre de inmortalidad*” is rather a sort of primary natural tendency (*i.e.*, an *appetite* in Spinoza’s jargon) to seek an endless existence, which *all* singular things essentially have. And by singular things Unamuno is referring to human beings as well as other conscious animals and *prima facie* non-sentient beings such as plants and rocks. It is interesting to note that the common failure to realize that Unamuno’s reasoning does not depend on the psychological, contingent claim that we all desire an endless existence but on the metaphysical claim that all singular things seek, as their most basic natural inclination, an endless existence, is what has impeded Unamuno scholars to realize of the core and genuine aspect of Unamuno’s reasoning, which is that Unamuno’s religious faith is founded in our own natural condition and so legitimated as something we are naturally (and so, inevitably) impelled to. It is also one of the main reasons that have motivated the common misreading of Unamuno in pragmatist terms, as if Unamuno’s religious faith were something we should voluntarily embrace after realizing its practical adequacy. For a detailed account of why we should not read Unamuno’s “*hambre de inmortalidad*” as referring to the psychological, empirically contingent claim that we, human beings, desire for an endless existence, but to the stronger, metaphysical claim that *all* singular things (*i.e.*, not only human beings but also *prima facie* non-sentient beings such as plants and rocks) seek an endless existence, see Alberto Oya, *Unamuno’s Religious Fictionalism* (Gewerbstrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 13–27. On why we should not consider Unamuno as a pragmatist philosopher in any philosophical relevant sense of the term, and why Unamuno’s notion of religious faith cannot be identified with William James argument for religious belief as stated in his “The Will to Believe”, see Alberto Oya, “Unamuno and James on Religious Faith” (*Teorema. Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, vol. XXXIX, n. 1 (2020), pp. 85–104).

any sort of justification for the claim that our natural appetite for an endless existence will be satisfied: the sort of immortality they attempt to demonstrate does not refer to *us*, the individuals we are here and now, it is not *our* immortality they are talking about. This point is repeatedly emphasized by Unamuno throughout most of his texts —take, for example, the following quote from his *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos*:

Without some kind of body or spirit-cover, the immortality of the pure soul is not true immortality. In the end, what we long for is a prolongation of this life, of this life and no other, this life of flesh and suffering, this life which we abominate at times precisely because it comes to an end.⁵

So, it seems that we cannot reasonably claim that our natural inclination for an endless existence will be satisfied. However, Unamuno argues, this conclusion seems avoidable if we are to accept the possibility of the biblical testimony about the Resurrection of all dead that is said to be announced (and exemplified) by Jesus Christ. According to the biblical testimony about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, this kind of immortality is not restricted to some part of our human nature (*i.e.*, the human soul) but it refers to us, the “*hombres de carne y hueso*” that we are here and now —and therefore, in contrast with the traditional proofs for human immortality, this kind of immortality announced by Jesus Christ seems to succeed in preserving our own singularity. Furthermore, since Resurrection refers to an after earthly death existence, we can still hold to the reasonable claim that we are all going to die without this diminishing the possibility of enjoying an endless existence. So, Unamuno concludes, it seems that only if (the Christian) God exists, will we enjoy an endless existence. This is what allows Unamuno to shift the focus of his discourse from our natural appetite for an endless existence to our natural appetite for God — more concretely, Unamuno’s argument here can be outlined as follows: we naturally seek an endless existence; only if (the Christian) God

5 *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, p. 254 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, p. 236].

exists, will we enjoy an endless existence; therefore, we (*mediately*) seek God.⁶

Now, the problem is, according to Unamuno, that we are not justified, on an evidential basis, in claiming that God exists. Arguments from natural theology fail to demonstrate the existence of God because they start from the erroneous assumption that the existence of God can be inferred as being the only explanation (or, at least, the best explanation) for some worldly events. These arguments take the logical form of abductive inferences and, as such, they only work under the assumption that an explanation in terms of God's acting has some sort of explanatory power. But theistic explanations, Unamuno says, have no explanatory power: God is not a scientific theoretical entity, and theism is not akin to a scientific hypothesis. God gives the world an ultimate meaning and purpose, but accepting the existence of God does not help us to explain why a given fact has occurred or why the world is such or such a way and not otherwise. God answers the "*¿para qué?*" ("wherefore?") of the world, but not its "*¿por qué?*" ("why?").⁷ The claim that we cannot come to believe, on an evidential basis, that God exists is continuously present in the novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, and it is what explains Manuel Bueno's inability to form the belief that God exists (and, hence, that he will enjoy an endless after earthly death existence). It also explains Lázaro's words to Ángela when he first meets Manuel Bueno:

6 For a more detailed account of Unamuno's reasoning for claiming that as a consequence of the "*hambre de inmortalidad*" we all long for the Christian God and His Salvation, see Alberto Oya, *Unamuno's Religious Fictionalism* (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 37–50.

7 See *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, p. 168 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, p. 200]: "We need God, not in order to understand the *why*, but in order to feel and assert the ultimate *wherefore*, to give meaning to the Universe". For a more detailed account of Unamuno's reasoning for claiming that we cannot come to form on rational, evidential basis, the belief that the Christian God actually exists, see Alberto Oya, *Unamuno's Religious Fictionalism* (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 40–43 and 51–57; see also Alberto Oya, "Unamuno and James on Religious Faith" (*Teorema. Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, vol. XXXIX, n. 1 (2020), pp. 85–104), pp. 95–98, and Alberto Oya, "Análisis de *Un pobre hombre rico o el sentimiento cómico de la vida*, de Miguel de Unamuno" (*Estudios Filosóficos*, vol. 70, n. 204 (2021), pp. 367–374).

“Now this is something else again”, he told me as soon as he came back from hearing Don Manuel for the first time. “He’s not like the others; still, he doesn’t fool me, he’s too intelligent to believe everything he has to teach”.⁸

In fact, Unamuno considered that any attempt to address the question of God in a rational way was ill-flawed from its very beginning. Take, for example, the so-called problem of evil. The obvious existence of evil and pain in the world seems to go against, or at least undermine, the core claim of theism that the world is the result of the intentional activity of an all-good and all-powerful supernatural being. At least with regard to natural evil, it seems that the only way to make the existence of evil consistent with the very notion of God (*i.e.*, as an all-good and all-powerful supernatural being) is by accepting our ignorance of God’s intentions and purposes: although we cannot comprehend God’s benevolence, we should rely on the assumption that God is an all-good being and so His actions are necessarily benevolent. But this is nothing more than recognizing our incapacity to comprehend God.⁹ This point is nicely illustrated by Manuel Bueno’s words:

Often he [Manuel Bueno] used to accompany the doctor on his rounds, and stressed the importance of following the doctor’s orders. Most of all he was interested in maternity cases and the care of children; it was his opinion that the old wives’ sayings “from the cradle to heaven” and the other one about “little angels belong in heaven” were nothing short of blasphemy. The death of a child moved him deeply. “A stillborn child, or one who dies soon after birth are, like suicides, the most terrible mystery to me”, I once heard him say, “Like a child crucified!”¹⁰

8 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 153 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1139].

9 For a more developed characterization of this line of reasoning, see Alberto Oya, “Is it Reasonable to Believe that Miracles Occur?” (*Teorema. Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, vol. XXXVIII, n. 2 (2019), pp. 39–50).

10 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 144 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1134].

We are, then, not justified in believing that God exists. Shall we conclude from this that God does not exist? Unamuno's answer is in the negative: the lack of evidential justification for believing that God exists does not constitute positive evidence for forming the belief that God does not exist. And, Unamuno says, there is no argument which succeeds in demonstrating that God does not exist.¹¹ So, the most reasonable conclusion is to neither affirm nor deny the existence of God, but to accept that the question of God's existence is an open question which cannot be solved on an evidential, rational basis: "Reason does not prove to us that God exists, but neither does it prove that He cannot exist".¹²

Philosophical reasoning is, therefore, of no use here. Nonetheless, we cannot stop seeking God, in so far as we cannot silence our own nature, and only through God's grace will our most basic and natural inclination be satisfied. In such circumstances it is understandable that one might find desirable simply forgetting about epistemic justification and start believing without evidences, by a passionate, irrational act of will, that God exists (and that He will concede us an endless existence). This attitude can be found in Manuel Bueno's longing for the faith he had when he was a child—and which is nothing more than what Unamuno in his philosophical essays called "*la fe del carbonero*" ("the faith of the charcoal burner"):¹³

"Angelita, you have the same faith you had when you were ten, don't you? You believe, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe, Father"

"Then go on believing. And if doubts come to torment you,

- 11 See Miguel de Unamuno, "My Religion", in *The Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno* (vol. 5), ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 212 [Miguel de Unamuno, "Mi religión", in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas* (vol. 3: "Nuevos ensayos"), ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1968 [1907]), p. 261]: "No one has succeeded in convincing me rationally of God's existence, but neither have they convinced me of His non-existence. The reasoning of atheists strikes me as being even more superficial and futile than that of their opponents".
- 12 *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, p. 165 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, p. 198].
- 13 *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, p. 84 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, p. 153].

suppress them utterly, even to yourself. The main thing is to live..."¹⁴

Unamuno, however, explicitly rejects this possibility. We cannot willingly form the belief that God exists without being concerned about the evidence for the existence of God and simply because this belief being true is desirable to us. We cannot form the belief that God exists without committing ourselves to accepting the claim that God exists —such a thing would not be believing, but self-deception:

The believer who resists examining the foundations of his belief is a man who lives in insincerity and lies. The man who does not want to think about certain eternal problems is a liar, nothing more than a liar.¹⁵

III. From the "*Sentimiento trágico de la vida*" to Religious Faith

So, we have seen that Unamuno is assuming the metaphysical claim that the most basic natural inclination of all singular things (not only sentient beings) is to seek an endless existence. Unamuno, of course, recognizes the obvious fact that we have overwhelming evidence to conclude that we all are going to die. Furthermore, Unamuno argues that traditional philosophical arguments for proving human immortality fail in their purpose because they do not succeed in preserving our own singularity, to continue being the same individuals of "*carne y hueso*" that we are here and now. Only if (the Christian) God exists, Unamuno says, will our appetite for an endless existence be satisfied —which would now refer to an after earthly death endless existence. The problem now is,

14 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 160 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1143].

15 Miguel de Unamuno, "Verdad y vida", in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas* (vol. 3: "*Nuevos ensayos*"), ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1968 [1908]), p. 266. My translation. The Spanish text reads: "El creyente que se resiste a examinar los fundamentos de su creencia es un hombre que vive en insinceridad y en mentira. El hombre que no quiere pensar en ciertos problemas eternos es un embustero, y nada más que un embustero".

however, that we lack any evidential support for believing either that God exists or that God does not exist. This is what Unamuno called the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” (“the tragic feeling of life”); *i.e.*, the struggle (“*agonía*”) between our wanting an endless existence (and so, derivatively, our wanting God to exist) and our lack of evidential justification for believing that God exists (and so our lack of evidential justification for believing that we will enjoy an endless existence).

The “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” ultimately arises as our reaction to the “*hambre de inmortalidad*”, which is, according to Unamuno, our most basic and natural inclination —this is why Unamuno calls it “*de la vida*” (“of life”). Likewise, since our longing for an endless existence is a natural, non-intellectual need, something we are impelled to because of our own nature, the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” is not a theoretical struggle but a sentimental one, something we intimately feel —this is why Unamuno calls it “*sentimiento*” (“feeling”).¹⁶ The conflict is “*trágico*” (“tragic”) because it is irresolvable: we cannot override our lack of evidential justification by voluntarily forming the belief that God exists (or that God does not exist) because our beliefs aim at truth (*i.e.*, we cannot believe that P without believing that P is true), and neither can we suspend our judgment and resign ourselves to doubt since this would amount to silencing our most basic natural inclination. As Manuel Bueno says, once we become aware of our situation, there is no turning back:

Like Moses, I have seen the face of God —our supreme dream— face to face, and as you already know, and as the Scriptures say, he who sees God’s face, he who sees the eyes

- 16** See *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, pp. 121–123 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, pp. 174–175]: “The question of the immortality of the soul, of the persistence of individual consciousness, is not a rational concern, it falls outside the scope of reason. As a problem — whatever solution is assumed— it is irrational. Rationally, even the stating of the problem lacks of sense. The immortality of the soul is as inconceivable as, strictly speaking, its absolute mortality would be. For purposes of explaining the world and existence —and such is the task of reason— there is no need to suppose that our soul is either mortal or immortal. The very statement of the supposed problem then, is irrational. [...] This vital longing is not properly speaking a problem, it can not be given any logical status, it can not be formulated in propositions rationally disputable; but it poses itself as a problem the way hunger poses itself as a problem”.

of the dream, the eyes with which He looks at us, will die inexorably and forever.¹⁷

Our incapacity to solve the struggle, Unamuno says, causes us a sort of anguish. This spiritual suffering, however, despite being painful and inescapable, should not lead us to refusing to enjoy this earthly life. Again, our longing for an endless existence is our most basic and natural inclination, which means that we cannot stop desiring to exist. This attitude is clearly present in Manuel Bueno, when he exclaims: “Yes! One must live”.¹⁸ And this is what explains why Manuel Bueno, who fully embodies the spiritual suffering that the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” carries with it, and who at times goes on to define his own life as a “[...] kind of continual suicide, or a struggle against suicide [...]”,¹⁹ never stops valuing his earthly life. In fact, Manuel Bueno does not hesitate in claiming that the lack of desire to enjoy life is “a thousand time worse than hunger”:

Listen, Lázaro, I have helped poor villagers to die well, ignorant, illiterate villagers who had scarcely ever been out of their village, and I have learned from their own lips, or sensed it when they were silent, the real cause of their sickness unto death, and there at their deathbed I have been able to see into the black abyss of their life —weariness. A weariness a thousand time worse than hunger!²⁰

17 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 170 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1148].

18 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 161 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1144].

19 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 163 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1144].

20 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 163 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1144]. See also *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 145 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1134]: “‘The most important thing’, he [Manuel Bueno] would say, ‘is for the people to be happy; everyone must be happy just to be alive. To be satisfied with life is of first importance. No one should want to die until it is God’s will’. [...] Once he commented at a wedding: ‘Ah, if I could only change all the water in our lake into wine, into a gentle little wine which, no matter how much of it one drank, would always make one joyful without making one drunk... or, if it made one drunk, would make one joyfully tispny’”.

Actually, this spiritual suffering is not something we must try to silence or avoid, but is rather a “*dolor sabroso*” (“sweet-tasting pain”).²¹ The anguishing situation that results from our incapacity to escape from the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” is something desirable in itself since it is precisely from this spiritual suffering that religious faith emerges:

All these speculative confessions amount to so much wretchedness, I know; but from the depths of wretchedness springs new life, and it is only by draining the dregs of spiritual sorrow that the honey at the bottom of life’s cup is tasted. Anguish leads us to consolation.²²

By suffering, Unamuno says, we become aware of our miserable and tragic situation, faced with which we can do nothing but commiserate with ourselves. Thus, our spiritual suffering makes way for compassion. And compassion is where love originates, since when we commiserate with someone we are also loving them: we only worry for those we take into consideration. But, according to Unamuno, we are not alone in this suffering. As soon as we realize of the universality of the “*hambre de inmortalidad*”, that the longing for an endless existence is the most basic and natural inclination of all singular things, we come to realize that the entire world shares our anguishing condition with us. This allows us to comprehend Manuel Bueno’s suffering when contemplating the lake—there, alone with nature, is where he realizes the universality of the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*”:

“What an incredible man!” he [Lázaro] exclaimed to me [Ángela] once. Yesterday, as we were walking along beside

21 See *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, p. 307 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, p. 275]: “There is no point in taking opium; it is better to put salt and vinegar in the soul’s wound, for if you fall asleep and no longer feel the pain, then you no longer exist. And the point is to exist. Do not, then, close your eyes before the overawing Sphinx, but gaze on her face to face, and let her take you in her mouth and chew you with her hundred thousand poisonous teeth and swallow you up. And when she has swallowed you, you will know the sweet taste of suffering”.

22 *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, p. 64 [*Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*, p. 143].

the lake he [Manuel Bueno] said: "There lies my greatest temptation." [...] "How that water beckons me with its deep quiet!... an apparent serenity reflecting the sky like a mirror —and beneath it the hidden current! [...]." And then he added: "Here the river eddies to form a lake, so that later, flowing down the plateau, it may form cascades, waterfalls and torrents, hurling itself through gorges and chasms. Thus life eddies in the village; and the temptation to commit suicide is greater beside the still waters which at night reflect the stars, than it is beside the crashing falls which drive one back in fear."²³

Since only conscious, living beings suffer, claiming that the whole world suffers as we do is tantamount to adopting a religious understanding of the world —*i.e.*, we cease seeing the world as an *it* and start seeing it *as if it were* a conscious, personal living Being. By becoming aware of the universality of our anguishing situation, we come to commiserate with and love the whole world. And compassion, in its practical, ethical sense takes the form of charity. To cultivate charity, Unamuno says, is to act in such a way as to lovingly give ourselves over to the spiritual care of others. Charity is an attempt to liberate ourselves and the entire world from the spiritual suffering and the tragic situation in which we all live: it is through the practice of charity that we *come to feel as* part of others and so we somehow surpass our own individuality without ceasing to be the individuals of "*carne y hueso*" we are here and now. And by the practice of charity, by our agapeic giving ourselves to the world and leaving our mark on it, we come to spiritualize the world — which is tantamount to saying that *we feel as if there were* some sort of communion between us and the world as a Conscience, as God. We find exemplified this feeling of communion with the world in Ángela's words at the end of the novel:

23 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 162–163 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1144]. See also Ángela's words to Lázaro after Manuel Bueno's death: "'Don't stare into the lake so much', I begged him" (*Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 174 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1150]).

One must live! And he [Manuel Bueno] taught me to live, he taught us to live, to feel life, to feel the meaning of life, to merge with the soul of the mountain, with the soul of the lake, with the soul of the village, to lose ourselves in them so as to remain in them forever. He taught me by his life to lose myself in the life of the people of my village, and I no longer felt the passing of the hours, and the days, and the years, any more than I felt the passage of the water in the lake. It began to seem that my life would always be like this. I no longer felt myself growing old. I no longer lived in myself, but in my people, and my people lived in me.²⁴

Ultimately, Unamuno's point is that carrying out an agapeic way of life, commiserating with and lovingly giving oneself to the whole world, does not constitute a diminishment of one's own singularity but is rather the only way to increase it. It is only through the agapeic giving of ourselves that we come to feel in communion with the whole world while preserving our own singularity, while continuing to be the same individuals we are here and now. According to Unamuno, then, an agapeic way of life is not merely consistent with human nature but an affirmation of it, the expression of our natural and most basic inclination to increase our own singularity.²⁵

24 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 176 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1152]. I have modified Kerrigan's translation of the first sentence of this quote. The original Spanish text reads: "¡Hay que vivir!". Kerrigan translates it as "Life must go on!". A more accurate translation of this sentence is: "One must live!".

25 This is what explains Unamuno's comments on Nietzsche's criticisms of the Christian, agapeic way of life (see, e.g., Miguel de Unamuno, "Uebermensch", in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas (vol. IV: "La raza y la lengua")*, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966 [1914], pp. 1367-1369). Unamuno's reasoning starts from a metaphysical assumption similar to that of Nietzsche—that is, a modified version of Spinoza's *conatus*, construed not only in terms of self-preservation but also in terms of increase of power. Whereas Nietzsche claimed that a Christian, agapeic way of life is something antinatural insofar as it goes against the natural tendency to increase one's own power, Unamuno responded by arguing that an agapeic way of life is precisely a direct consequence of this natural tendency. It is through our agapistic giving of ourselves over to the whole world that we come to *feel/communed* with the entire world, and so we *somehow* come to surpass our own individuality without losing our own personal identity, without ceasing to

Now it becomes evident why Manuel Bueno, whose religion consists in “[...] consoling myself by consoling others, even though the consolation I give them is not ever mine [...]”,²⁶ embodies Unamuno’s conception of religious faith. It is precisely *because* Manuel Bueno is unable to rid himself of his doubts and fails to come to believe that God exists, that he devotes himself to the spiritual care of his people. If there is something that defines Manuel Bueno it is his selfless giving to the care of others:

How he loved his people! He spent his life salvaging wrecked marriages, forcing unruly children to submit to their parents, or reconciling parents to their children, and, above all, he consoled the embittered and weary in spirit and helped everyone to die well.²⁷

Religious faith, then, is expressed in the practice of charity, which is a practical, non-theoretical issue. This is what explains why Manuel Bueno does not like engaging in theological discussions: religious faith is to give oneself to the others, not to save oneself by getting lost in intricate theological thoughts.

His [Manuel Bueno’s] life was active rather than contemplative, and he constantly fled from idleness, even

be the individuals of “*carne y hueso*” we are here and now. And once conceded that what emerges from this natural tendency to increase one’s own power is Unamuno’s notion of religious faith, then Nietzsche’s ideal of the Overman, and his implied denial of the Christian understanding of the world, is nothing more than a cowardly self-deception, an attempt to silence one’s own natural anguished condition (*i.e.*, the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*”) instead of accepting it by making it the foundation of his acting and understanding of the world (*i.e.*, Unamuno’s religious faith). For a more detailed account on why Unamuno’s defense of religious faith can be read as a response to Nietzsche’s criticisms of the Christian, agapeic way of life, see Alberto Oya, “Nietzsche and Unamuno on *Conatus* and the Agapeic Way of Life” (*Metaphilosophy*, vol. 51, nos. 2–3 (2020), pp. 303–317).

26 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 159 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1142].

27 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 138 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1131]. See also *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 139 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1131]: “He treated everyone with the greatest kindness; if he favored anyone, it was the most unfortunate, and especially those who rebelled”.

from leisure. Whenever he heard it said that idleness was the mother of all vices, he added: “And also of the greatest vice of them all, which is to think idly”. Once I asked what he meant and he answered: “Thinking idly is thinking as a substitute for doing, or thinking too much about what is already done instead of about what must be done. What’s done is done and over with, and one must go on to something else, for there is nothing worse than remorse without possible solution” Action! Action! [...] And so it was that he was always busy, sometimes even busy looking for things to do. He wrote very little on his own, so that he scarcely left us anything in writing, not even notes; on the other hand, he acted as scribe for everyone else, especially composing letters for mothers to their absent children. He also worked with his hand, pitching in to help with some of the village tasks. At threshing time he reported to the threshing floor to flair and winnow, meanwhile teaching and entertaining the workers by turn. Sometimes he took the place of a worker who had fallen sick. One bitter winter’s day he came upon a child half-dead with cold. The child’s father had sent him into the woods to bring back a calf that had strayed. “Listen”, he said to the child, “you go home and get warm, and tell your father that I am bringing back the calf”. [...] In winter he chopped wood for the poor. [...] He also was in the habit of making handballs for the boys and many toys for the younger children. [...] Often he would visit the local school too, to help the teacher, to teach alongside him —and not only the catechism. The simple truth was that he fled relentlessly from idleness and from solitude. He went so far in this desire of his to mingle with the villagers, especially the young people and the children, that he even attended the village dances. And more than once he played the drum to keep time for the boys and girls dancing; this kind of activity, which in another priest would have seemed like

a grotesque mockery of his calling, in him somehow took on the appearance of a divine office.²⁸

We have just seen that Manuel Bueno embodies Unamuno's conception of religious faith. However, it is worth mentioning that Manuel Bueno is not the only character in the novel in whom we can find expressed Unamuno's conception of religious faith. We also find it exemplified, albeit perhaps in a subtler way, in the clown who continues to work and make others laugh despite his wife being mortally ill. Why does Manuel Bueno not hesitate in calling the clown a "Saint"? It is because his actions are not (at least, not exclusively) driven by a selfish motivation, but by the purpose of taking care of others and making their life more enjoyable:

One day a band of poor circus people came through the village. Their leader—who arrived with a gravely ill and pregnant wife and three children to help him—played the clown. While he was in the village square making all the children, and even some of the adults, laugh with glee, his wife suddenly fell desperately ill and had to leave; she went off accompanied by a look of anguish from the clown and a howl of laughter from the children. Don Manuel hurried after her, and a little later, in a corner of the inn's stable, he helped her give up her soul in a state of grace. When the performance was over and the villagers and the clown learned of the tragedy, they came to the inn, and there the poor, bereaved clown, in a voice overcome with tears, said to Don Manuel, as he took his hand and kissed it: "They are quite right, Father, when they say you are a saint". Don Manuel took the clown's hand in his and replied in front

28 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 143–144 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1133–1134]. See also *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 147 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1135]: "It is not at all because my sister is a widow and I have her children and herself to support—for God looks after the poor—but rather because I simply was not born to be a hermit, an anchorite; the solitude would crash my soul; and, as far as a monastery is concerned, my monastery is Valverde de Lucerna. I was not meant to live alone, or die alone. I was meant to live for my village, and die for it too. How should I save my soul if I were not to save the soul of my village as well?"

of everyone: “It is you who are the saint, good clown. I watched you at your work and understood that you do it not only to provide bread for your own children, but also to give joy to the children of others. And I tell you now that your wife, the mother of your children, whom I sent to God while you worked to give joy, is at rest in the Lord, and that you will join her there, and that the angels, whom you will make laugh with happiness in heaven, will reward you with their laughter”.²⁹

IV. Religious Faith is not Believing

We have just seen that, according to Unamuno, it is precisely from doubt, from our lack of evidential support for believing neither that God exists nor that God does not exist, together with our *natural* appetite for an endless existence, that religious faith emerges. Doubt, therefore, is essential to religious faith: without doubt, there is no faith. Thus, in Unamuno’s schema, incredulity is not an impediment, but the cause of a holy life. Something I must emphasize here is that Unamuno’s religious faith does not aim to put an end to doubt: the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” remains tragic, irresoluble, no matter what we do. Unamuno’s religious faith consists in adopting a religious understanding of the world and in entering into a sort of personal relationship with it. But this religious understanding of the world is not a description of the world, it does not lead us to form the belief that God exists or that He will bless us with an endless after earthly death existence. And this is so because Unamuno’s faith is justified as being a consequence of our own human nature (*i.e.*, something we are naturally, and so inevitably, led to), not because of its being true.³⁰ That religious faith does not solve the question

29 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 145–146 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1134–1135].

30 For a more detailed account on why the kind of religious understanding of the world Unamuno’s religious faith consists in is not a description of how the world actually is, see Alberto Oya, *Unamuno’s Religious Fictionalism* (Gewerbestrasse: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), especially pp. 59–86.

of God's existence is nicely illustrated in the following conversation between Lázaro and Manuel Bueno:

When I [Lázaro] said to him: "Is it really you, the priest, who suggests that I pretend?" he [Manuel Bueno] replied, hesitatingly: "Pretend? Not at all! It would not be pretending. 'Dip your fingers in holy water, and you will end by believing', as someone said". And I, gazing into his eyes, asked him: "And you, by celebrating the Mass, have you ended up by believing?" He looked away and stared out the lake, until his eyes filled with tears. And it was in this way that I came to understand his secret.³¹

Again, Unamuno's religious faith is not a theoretical, intellectual issue. Religious faith is not believing, it does not consist in accepting as a truth that the world is such and such and not otherwise. Religious faith is nothing more than our subjective, non-evidentially grounded but experientially felt, understanding of the world. And this religious understanding of the world, in its practical, ethical sense, is expressed through the practice of charity: in a loving, agapeic giving to the whole world. This is precisely what Manuel Bueno means when he says that:

As for true religion, all religions are true insofar as they give spiritual life to the people who profess them, insofar as they console them for having been born only to die. And for each race the truest religion is their own, the religion that made them... And mine? Mine consists in consoling myself by consoling others, even though the consolation I give them is not ever mine.³²

This non-theoretical nature of religious faith is present in Manuel Bueno: his already commented refusal to enter into theological disquisitions

31 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 157 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1141].

32 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 158–159 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1142].

should be read in this context.³³ It is also what explains that there are no intellectual motives behind Lázaro's conversion.³⁴ This non-theoretical nature of religious faith also allows us to understand the role of the character Blasillo, who receives the appellative "*el bobo*" ("the fool") because of his lack of intellectual development. Blasillo accompanies Manuel Bueno in delivering his masses and he continuously repeats, presumably without understanding its meaning and simply as an act of imitation, the words of Jesus Christ that Manuel Bueno so vividly exclaims in his masses: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken

33 See *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 149 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1137]: "Another time in the confessional I told him [to Manuel Bueno] of a doubt which assailed me, and he responded: 'As to that, you know what the catechism says. Don't question me about it, for I am ignorant; in Holy Mother Church there are learned doctors of theology who will know how to answer you'". See also *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 164 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1145]: "Don Manuel had to moderate and temper my brother's zeal and his neophyte's rawness. As soon as he heard that Lázaro was going about inveighing against some of the popular superstitions he told him firmly: 'Leave them alone! It's difficult enough making them understand where orthodox belief leaves off and where superstition begins. And it's even harder for us. Leave them alone, then, as long as they get some comfort... It's better for them to believe everything even things that contradict one another, that to believe nothing. The idea that someone who believes too much ends up not believing anything is a Protestant notion. Let us not protest! Protestation destroys contentment and peace'".

34 See *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 156–157 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1141]: "'Lázaro, Lázaro, what joy you have given us all today; the entire village, the living and the dead, especially our mother. Did you see how Don Manuel wept for joy? What joy you have given us all!' / 'That's why I did it', he answered me. / 'Is that why? Just to give us pleasure? Surely you did it for your own sake, because you were converted'. / [...] Thereupon, serenely and tranquilly, in a subdued voice, he recounted a tale that cast me into a lake of sorrow. He told me how Don Manuel had begged him, particularly during the walks to the ruins of the old Cistercian abbey, to set a good example, to avoid scandalizing the townspeople, to take part in the religious life of the community, to feign belief even if he did not feel any, to conceal his own ideas—all this without attempting in any way to catechize him, to instruct him in religion, or to effect a true conversion." Notice that Kerrigan's translation of this last sentence is inaccurate. The sentence "to instruct him in religion, or to effect a true conversion" does not appear in Unamuno's text. The original Spanish text reads: "[...] para que ocultase sus ideas al respecto, mas sin intentar siquiera catequizarle, convertirle de otra manera". A more accurate translation of this sentence is: "[...] to conceal his own ideas, without even trying to catechize him, convert him in a different way".

me?” (Psalms 22: 1).³⁵ Blasillo dies at the same time and in a similar way to Manuel Bueno:

He [Manuel Bueno] was carried to the church and taken, in his armchair, into the chancel, to the foot of the altar. In his hand he held a crucifix. My brother and I stood close to him, but the fool Blasillo wanted to stand even closer. He wanted to grasp Don Manuel by the hand, so that he could kiss it. When some of the people nearby tried to stop him, Don Manuel rebuked them and said:

“Let him come closer... Come, Blasillo, give me your hand”
The fool cried for joy. And then Don Manuel spoke [...]. Then he gave his blessing to the whole village, with the crucifix held in his hand, while the women and children cried and even some of the men wept softly. Almost at once the prayers were begun. Don Manuel listened to them in silence, his hand in the hand of Blasillo the fool, who was falling asleep to the sound of the praying. [...] On reaching “The Resurrection of the flesh and life everlasting” the people sensed that their saint had yielded up his soul to God. It was not necessary to close his eyes even, for he died with them closed. When we tried to wake up Blasillo, we found that he, too, had fallen asleep in the Lord forever. So that later there were two bodies to be buried.³⁶

That “*el bobo*” died in similar circumstance to a Saint, and especially the fact that at the end of the novel Blasillo is no longer qualified as “*el bobo*” but as “a Saint”, illustrates Unamuno’s claim that no special intellectual faculty is needed to exercise holiness.³⁷

35 See *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 140 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1132]: “Afterwards the fool Blasillo went about piteously repeating, like an echo, ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’ with such effect that everyone who heard him was moved to tears, to the great satisfaction of the fool, who prided himself on this triumph of imitation”.

36 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 171–172 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1149].

37 See *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1152: “[...] also about the memory of the poor Blasillo, my Saint Blasillo, and may he take care of me from heaven”. My

V. Unamuno's Religious Faith as a Return to Early Christianity

As I have already said, Unamuno's defense of religious faith depends on accepting *the possibility* of the biblical testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: if the Resurrection of Jesus Christ were something impossible (if, for example, the possibility of God's intervening in the natural world were something ruled out a priori, as being inconsistent with the very notion of God), or if the sort of immortality promised by the Christian God did not succeed in preserving our own individuality, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" would never arise because there would be no connection between the existence of God and the satisfaction of our natural inclination for an endless existence. It is important to emphasize, however, that Unamuno is not assuming that the Resurrection really did occur; what Unamuno's argument assumes is that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, despite being something which cannot be solved on an evidential basis, is an open possibility. If we were justified in accepting that Jesus Christ resurrected, then this very belief would give us evidence for the belief that God exists but, as we have just seen, the "*sentimiento trágico de la vida*" depends on accepting our lack of evidential support for believing that God exists.

Unamuno was, of course, well aware that his conception of religious faith did not fit with any conventional understanding of Christianity, but in so far as all his reasoning depends on the acceptance of the possibility of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Unamuno was somehow right in considering himself as a Christian. According to Unamuno, however, his position was not a reformulation of how Christian religious faith should be understood, but a return to the authentic, original conception of Christianity. His continuous references to the Bible, and especially to the "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Psalms 22: 1) and "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" (Mark 9: 24), should be read in this context.

translation. The Spanish text reads: "[...] y también sobre la memoria del pobre Blasillo, de mi san Blasillo, y que él me ampare desde el cielo". Notice that Kerrigan translates this sentence as: "[...] and even on the memory of the poor fool Blasillo, my Saint Blasillo —and may he help me in heaven!" (*Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 177). Kerrigan's translation is here inaccurate, since there is no "*bobo*" ("fool") in Unamuno's text.

Unamuno's claim that he was arguing for a return to the original conception of Christianity is present in most of his texts, and can be found as early as 1897, in his "¡Pistis y no gnosis!", where he explicitly claimed that for early Christians, faith was not to believe that God exists (*gnosis*) but to hope for God's Salvation (*pistis*).

The youth of the Christian communities awaited the next coming of the kingdom of the Son of God; the person and the life of the Divine Master were the compass of their yearnings and feelings. They felt swelled with real faith, with what is confused with hope, with what is called *pistis*, faith or trust, religious faith not theological faith, pure faith that is still free of dogmas. They lived a life of faith; they lived for faith in the future; waiting for the kingdom of eternal life, they lived life. [...] As the heat of faith dissipated and religion became more worldly, [...] the juvenile *pistis* was substituted by gnosis, knowledge; belief, not strictly faith; doctrine, not hope. Believing is not trusting. Faith became the adhesion of the intellect; what knowledge of life is began to be taught; converting the aims of religious practices into philosophical, theoretical principles, and religion into metaphysics revealed. Sects, schools, dissents, dogmas were finally born. [...] From then on, faith for many Christians was believing what we cannot see, *gnosis*, and not trusting in the kingdom of eternal life, *pistis*, in other words, believing what we did not see.³⁸

- 38 Miguel de Unamuno, "¡Pistis y no Gnosis!", in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas (vol. 3: "Nuevos ensayos")*, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1968 [1897]), pp. 682–683. My translation. The Spanish text reads: "Jóvenes las comunidades cristianas, esperaban la próxima venida del reino del Hijo de Dios; la persona y la vida del Divino Maestro eran el norte de sus anhelos y sentires. Sentíanse henchidas de verdadera fe, de la que con esperanza se confunde, de lo que se llamó *pistis*, fe o confianza, fe religiosa y no teologal, fe pura y libre todavía de dogmas. Vivían vida de fe; vivían por la esperanza en el porvenir; esperando el reino de la vida eterna, vivían ésta. [...] A medida que el calor de la fe iba menguando y mundanizándose la religión, [...] [l]a juvenil *pistis* fue siendo sustituida por la *gnosis*, el conocimiento; la creencia, y no propiamente la fe; la doctrina y no la esperanza. Creer no es confiar. Hízose de la fe adhesión del intelecto; empezóse a enseñar qué es el conocimiento de la vida; convirtiéronse los fines prácticos religiosos en

In his *La agonía del cristianismo* (1924) [*The Agony of Christianity*], Unamuno did not hesitate in claiming that theological dogmas appear with Saint Paul, not with Jesus Christ: “St. Paul made the Gospel biblical, changing the Word into the Letter”.³⁹ The Church, Unamuno says, aimed to silence all doubts regarding the question of God’s existence by dogmatically affirming the *truth* of Christianity. But this is nothing more than removing the “*sentimiento trágico de la vida*” and, with it, the very essence of Christianity: without doubt there is no Christian faith.

In fact, once Unamuno’s conception of religious faith is accepted, the very idea of a Christian Church seems to be off the point. As we have seen, according to Unamuno, religious faith is something we intimately feel.⁴⁰ Religious faith, therefore, has nothing to do with, and should not be confused with, politics, economics or any other social issues. This explains Manuel Bueno’s refusal to form an agrarian syndicate⁴¹ and to

principios teóricos filosóficos, la religión en metafísica revelada. Nacieron sectas, escuelas, disidencias, dogmas por fin. [...] En adelante la fe fue para muchos cristianos creer lo que no vimos, *gnosis*, y no confiar en el reino de la vida eterna, *pistis*, es decir, creer lo que no vemos”.

39 Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity*, in *The Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno* (vol. 7), ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 27 [Miguel de Unamuno, *La agonía del Cristianismo*, in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas* (vol. 7: “*Meditaciones y ensayos espirituales*), ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966 [1924]), p. 320], Notice that this distinction between word and letter is the same distinction we found between theology and religion at the end of *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*: “The poor priest who came to replace Don Manuel found himself overwhelmed in Valverde de Lucerna by the memory of the saint, and he put himself in the hands of my brother and myself for guidance. He wanted only to follow in the footsteps of the saint. And my brother told him: ‘Very little theology, Father, very little theology. Religion, religion, religion’. Listening to him, I smiled out myself, wondering if this were not a kind of theology too.” (*Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 173–174 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1150]).

40 See Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity*, p. 5 [Miguel de Unamuno, *La agonía del Cristianismo*, p. 308]: “Though, in actual fact, is there any Christianity outside each one of us?”.

41 See *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 165 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, pp. 1145–1146]: “‘A syndicate?’ Don Manuel replied sadly. ‘A syndicate? And what is that? The Church is the only syndicate I know of. And you have certainly heard ‘My kingdom is not of this world’. Our kingdom, Lázaro, is not of this world...’ / ‘And of the other?’ / Don Manuel bowed his head: ‘The other is here. Two kingdoms exist in this world. Or rather, the other world... Ah, I don’t really

aid civil justice.⁴² Having said this, it is also true that Unamuno did not reject the possibility of a Church in itself, but he rejected the notion of a Church as a sociopolitical institution.⁴³ Unamuno nowhere denies the legitimacy of a Church understood as a congregation of religious men. As

know what I am saying. But as for the syndicate, that's a carry-over from your radical days. No, Lázaro, no; religion does not exist to resolve the economic or political conflicts of this world, which God handed over to men for their disputes. Let men think and act as they will, let them console themselves for having been born, let them live as happily as possible in the illusion that all this has a purpose. I don't purpose to advise the poor to submit to the rich, nor to suggest to the rich that they submit to the poor; but rather to preach resignation in everyone, and charity toward everyone. For even the rich man must resign himself —to his riches, and to life; and the poor man must show charity —even to the rich. The Social Question? Ignore it, for it is none of our business. [...] No, Lázaro, no; no syndicates for us. If *they* organize them, well and good —they would be distracting themselves in that way. Let them play at syndicates, if that makes them happy'."

- 42** See *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 140–141 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1132]: "The priest's effect on people was such that no one ever dared to tell him a lie, and everyone confessed to him without need of a confessional. So true was this that one day, after a revolting crime had been committed in a neighboring village, the judge —a dull fellow who badly misunderstood Don Manuel— called on the priest and said: / 'Let's see if *you*, Don Manuel, can get this bandit to admit the truth'. / 'So that *you* may punish him afterwards?' asked the saintly man. 'No, judge, no; I will not extract from any man a truth which could be the death of him. That is a matter between him and his God... Human justice is none of my affair. 'Judge not that ye be not judged', said Our Lord'. / 'But the fact is, Father, that I, a judge...' / 'I understand. You, judge, must render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, while I shall render unto God that which is God's'. / And, as Don Manuel departed, he gazed at the suspected criminal and said: 'Make sure, only, that God forgives you, for that is all that matters'."
- 43** See Miguel de Unamuno, "Religión y patria", in *Miguel de Unamuno: obras completas (vol. 1: "Paisajes y ensayos")*, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966 [1904]), pp. 1110–1111: "[...] the Catholic Church was not instituted to promote culture, but to save souls. [...] Neither the Catholic Church was instituted to promote culture, nor were religious orders they founded designed to make or break homelands; the Church itself must have nothing to do with disputes between princes and states. The alliance between the Altar and the Throne is, in the long term, deadly for both.". My translation. The Spanish text reads: "[...] la Iglesia católica no se instituyó para promover la cultura, sino para salvar las almas. [...] Ni la Iglesia católica se instituyó para promover la cultura, ni las Órdenes religiosas que de ella han nacido tienen por misión hacer ni deshacer patrias, ni la Iglesia misma debe tener que ver con disputas de príncipes y de Estados. La alianza entre el Altar y el Trono es, a la larga, fatal a uno y a otro".

Manuel Bueno says, the sense of the Church should be “*bien entendido*” (“well understood”).⁴⁴

Throughout his entire *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, we find Unamuno’s claim that his conception of religious faith is a return to the original meaning of Christianity. To start with, “Manuel” is the Spanish name for “Immanuel”, a Hebrew word meaning “God with us” —and “Bueno” is the Spanish word for “Good”. Similarly, the narrator of the novel receives the name of “Ángela”, which is derived from the Latin word “angelus”, meaning a “messenger”. And Unamuno’s Lázaro, like the biblical Lazarus who the Christian Scriptures say was raised from the dead by Jesus Christ (John, 11: 43–44), is raised from his spiritual drowsiness by Manuel Bueno:

“It was he [Manuel Bueno]”, said my brother, “who made me into a new man. I was a true Lazarus whom he raised from the dead. He gave me faith”.⁴⁵

That Unamuno was aiming to draw a parallel between Manuel Bueno and Jesus Christ is already made explicit right at the very beginning of the novel, when Manuel Bueno is confused with Jesus Christ:

And when on Good Friday he chanted, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” a profound shudder swept through the multitude, like the lash of the northeast wind across the waters of the lake. It was as if these people heard

44 In the original Spanish text, the quote I am referring to here reads as follows: “Y tú, Lázaro, cuando hayas de morir, muere como yo, como morirá nuestra Ángela, en el seno de la Santa Madre Católica Apostólica Romana, de la Santa Madre Iglesia de Valverde de Lucerna, bien entendido” (*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1148). Kerrigan translates it as: “And Lázaro, when your hour comes, die as I die, as Ángela will die, in the arms of the Holy Mother Church, Catholic Apostolic, and Roman; that is to say, the Holy Mother Church of Valverde de Lucerna” (*Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 169). Kerrigan’s translation is here inaccurate since it simply forgets translating the “*bien entendido*” (“well understood”), which is, I think, the interesting point of the quote. A more accurate translation is: “And you, Lázaro, when you should die, die as I die, as our Ángela will die, in the arms of the Holy Roman Catholic Apostholic Mother, the Holy Mother Church of Valverde de Lucerna, well understood”.

45 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 173 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1150].

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, as if the voice sprang from the ancient crucifix, at the foot of which generations of mothers had offered up their sorrows.⁴⁶

Unamuno's advocating for what he takes to be the original meaning of the message conveyed by Jesus Christ helps us to comprehend why Manuel Bueno thought that Jesus Christ did not come to believe that God exists,⁴⁷ which is what led him to ask Ángela to pray not only for his own incredulity, but also for the incredulity of Jesus Christ:

And then, the last general Communion which our saint was to give! When he came to my brother to give him the Host —his hand steady this time— just after the liturgical "... *in vitam aeternam*", he bent down and whispered to him: "There is no other life but this, no life more eternal... let them dream it eternal... let it be eternal for a few years...". And when he came to me, he said: "Pray, my child, pray for us all". And then, something so extraordinary happened that I carry it now in my heart as the greatest of mysteries: he leant over and said, in a voice which seemed to belong to the other world: "... and pray, too, for our Lord Jesus Christ".⁴⁸

- 46 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 140 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, pp. 1131–1132]. See also *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 157–158 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1141]: "At that moment the fool Blasillo came along our street, crying out his: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And Lázaro shuddered, as if he had heard the voice of Don Manuel, or even that of Christ".
- 47 See *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, p. 174–175 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, p. 1151]: "Listen, Ángela, once don Manuel told me that there are truths which, though one reveals them to oneself, must be kept from others; and I told him that telling me was the same as telling himself. And then he said, he confessed to me, that he thought that more than one of the great saints, perhaps the very greatest himself, had died without believing in the other life".
- 48 *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr*, pp. 166–167 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, pp. 1146–1147].

Unamuno went even further than claiming that his conception of religious faith was the one professed by early Christians, affirming that his notion of religious faith was the only one that can make any sense to the common, worldly man: the dogma, the belief in the factual sense regarding theological statements, has no meaning for the concrete man, the “*hombre de carne y hueso*”. This point is explicitly made by Unamuno, now using his own voice and not one of his fictional characters’, in the short epilogue that accompanies his novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*:

I should like also, since Ángela Carballino introduced her own feelings into the story—I don’t know how it could have been otherwise—to comment on her statement to the effect that if Don Manuel and his disciple Lázaro had confessed their convictions to the people, they, the people, would not have understood. Nor, I should like to add, would they have believed the two of them. They would have believed in their works and not in their words. And works stand by themselves, and need no words to back them up. In a village like Valverde de Lucerna one makes one’s confession by one’s conduct. And as for faith, the people scarcely know what it is, and care less.⁴⁹

VI. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have argued that the core claims of Unamuno’s religious faith are present, in one way or another, in his novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*. To sum up, then, it seems reasonable to conclude that the guideline of Unamuno’s novel *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* is the expression, in fictional, non-philosophical language, of the conception of religious faith Unamuno had previously defended in his major philosophical work, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos*.

49 *Saint Manuel Bueno, martyr*, p. 180 [*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, pp. 1153–1154].