Approaching Spanish Religiosity through C. S. Lewis on the Meaning of Life: From Marcela de san Félix to Miguel de Unamuno

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Abstract: This paper presents the meaning of life according to twentieth-century British Christian apologist C. S. Lewis. It traces the connections between his understanding of meaning (love God and your neighbor) and what this means for the identity of the institutional church. To bring Lewis's ideas to life and in line with the my primary research interests, further connections and distinctions between this meaningful ideal for institutional religion and the real Spanish Catholic church in concrete time and space are made. Literary figures studied include Early Modern Trinitarian nun Sor Marcela de san Félix and C. S. Lewis's agonizing-agnostic fellow Modern, Miguel de Unamuno.
Keywords: C. S. Lewis, Marcela de san Félix, Unamuno, love, meaning of life, Catholic Church.

Resumen: Este trabajo presenta el tema del sentido de la vida según lo entiende el apologista cristiano británico C. S. Lewis. El texto traza las conexiones entre cómo Lewis entiende el tema del sentido (el amar a Dios y al prójimo) y la importancia que tiene sus conclusiones para la identidad de la Iglesia institucional. Para darle vida a las ideas de Lewis, y para conectarlas a lo que más me interesa en cuanto a la investigación, establezco algunas relaciones y distinciones entre este importante ideal para la religión institucional y la iglesia católica española. Las figuras literarias estudiadas incluyen a sor Marcela de san Félix, una monja trinitaria de la temprana modernidad, y el agnóstico agonizante contemporáneo de Lewis, Miguel de Unamuno.
Palabras Clave: C. S. Lewis, Marcela de san Félix, Unamuno, amor, sentido de la vida, Iglesia católica.

> If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. C. S. Lewis

I. The Meaning of Life According to C. S. Lewis

According to some philosophies, the very question of the meaning of life is illogical, since their own presuppositions prevent an answer to it. Nihilism is of course premised on the idea that life has no meaning; absurdism, which posits that humans are ultimately unable to distinguish whatever meaning existence might have, is another obvious example. Twentieth-century literary scholar and popular theologian C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) would claim that it is not the question, but rather such conclusions, that are invalid. In defying his own former[2] stance *vis a vis* ascertaining meaning, Lewis famously states: "... atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. *Dark* would be without meaning" (*Mere Christianity*, 46).

For Lewis, a Christian theist, the meaning of life is above all relational. He has said that value and purpose in life are found in understanding why we are on earth precisely with regard to the other-worldly Creator who made us, and that our primary aim must be to establish a relationship with that Creator, and from there, in the words

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[2] Lewis embraced theism at 32 and converted to Christianity a few years later.

of the quote at the outset of this paper, "[to do] most for the present world" (*Mere Christianity* 77).[3] In Matthew 22: 38-40, the Christ explicates this progression thus: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Lewis discusses this connection between love for God and our relationships with fellows on earth most popularly in *The Four Loves* (1960), clarifying that it is the Father's love for us in Christ that permits our own for Him: "The Father gives all He is and has to the [Christ the] Son. The Son gives Himself back to the Father, and gives Himself to the world, and for the world to the Father, and this gives the world... back to the Father too" (1-2). Although in this arrangement human love for God is almost always what Lewis calls "Need-love," in Lewis' scheme the love that we receive through it enables us to express both Need-love and "Gift-love,"—the kind God shows to us—toward other human beings.[4] It must be said that Need-love expressed among humans is a positive thing in its proper place, even though it is not always disinterested. First, Lewis reminds us that, in a certain sense, Need-love is what ultimately facilitates Gift-love among humans: "[Need-love] is the accurate reflection in consciousness of our actual nature. We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious, we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves" (2). Furthermore, it seems that even Need-loves are indispensible for experiencing significance in our earthly existence. For example, Lewis claims that Affection—the natural love that best approximates Gift-love but is often Need-love—"... is responsible for nine-tenths of whatever solid and durable happiness there is in our natural lives" (53),[5] which in turn lends it great non-transcendental value in terms of the meaning of life. Likewise, for example, Friendship is extolled in part because it makes life more welcome, lending it more significance on a purely mortal plane: "Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival" (71). As indicated above, however, for Lewis, effective love in this world—that "[doing] the most in the present"—has resonances for the next. All love, expressed elsewhere by him as the "wish for the ultimate good" of the beloved, takes us in this transcendental direction.[6]

[3] In the story of his conversion, Lewis discusses how God became present to him in the world for the first time in quite dramatic terms, jolting him from the realm of conjecture to that of action: "... a wholly new situation developed. As the dry bones shook and came together in that dreadful valley of Ezekiel's, so now a philosophical theorem, cerebrally entertained, began to stir and heave and throw off its grave clothes, and stood upright and became a living presence. I was to be allowed to play at philosophy no longer" (*Surprised by Joy*, 227).

[4] *Mere Christianity*, thought by many to be one of the best and most influential works on Christian apologetics of the twentieth century, suggests in this same vein that God "became man" through Christ so that humankind could be "amalgamated with God's nature" (60). The work further details the moral behavior the Christian assumes as a result of this fusion, which is most meaningful when directed toward others. Lewis directly emphasizes here also that proper behavior toward others will lead us to love them (whether or not we "like" them—a bit more on this later); this love is what is most meaningful here on earth, which Lewis considers one of the "great secrets" since it is so counterintuitive. Lewis also talks about self-love in this regard; we must not only be moral toward others but also toward ourselves: "Unless we go on to the... tidying up inside each human being... we are only deceiving ourselves" [72].

[5] Lewis categorizes human love according to the four Greek words for it: Affection, Friendship, Eros and Charity. Charity is the most God-like or virtuous of the loves, and thus the "greatest," while Affection is the "natural" love that is most often Gift-love. ("It is a Need-love, but what it needs is to give. It is a Gift-love but it needs to be needed" [32].) All loves are capable of contributing meaning to life, even though some lend this meaning greater transcendental value, and some purely mortal.

[6] Lewis points out in *The Problem of Pain* that the "next world" is the true fulfillment of disinterested love: "... we are afraid that Heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for the pure in heart want to. There are rewards that do not sully motives... Love, by definition, seeks to enjoy its object" (133).

All this does not mean that Lewis, a Christian in the tradition of the Church of England (Anglican), eschewed doctrine entirely in favor of the essentially relational; in fact, he is arguably one of the better apologists for the Christian thought system of the first half of the twentieth century. On the idea that, as far as religious systems go, "plain practical" ideas are better shared than theological ones, Lewis rejoins:

> I have rejected [that] advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool. Theology means 'the science of God,' and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children?" *(Mere Christianity,* 135*).*

Furthermore, as Lewis would have it, theology serves as the "map" that leads rational beings[7] to understand the purposes behind assuming the hard work that loving God and others implies. Otherwise, says Lewis, we would prefer either to attest to "a vague religion—all about feeling God in nature, and so on..." (136), or to assert that "Jesus Christ was [merely] a great moral teacher." This, to his way of thinking, leads to the same dead end as good advice from any moral system, which human beings have not usually been inclined to take: "If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, [it] is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference" (137). To return to the relational point, "... when the Bible talks of us 'becoming' sons of God, obviously it must mean something very different. And that brings us up against the very center of Theology" (138). That is, we need theology to achieve relationship with God and others, and hence the meaning of life is not only related to specific principles, but to some extent, is hinged on them.[8]

Just as theology is central to Lewis' understanding of the meaning of life, so is the difficult-to-swallow concept of hierarchy. Indeed, it forms part of the doctrine he espouses regarding the love between Creator and created necessary to generate and perceive meaning in life. Lewis says that "[l]ove between father and son... means essentially authoritative love on the one side, and obedient love on the other. The father uses his authority to make the son into the sort of human being he, rightly, and in his superior wisdom, wants him to be" (*The Problem of Pain,* 33). This same distinctive categorization that permits or enables meaning-sustaining love is the main part of what legitimizes Lewis's hierarchical stance from within the perspective of orthodox Christianity. In a recent article, Steven D. Boyer puts it thus: "... any serious doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*... involves the recognition of a real hierarchical distinction between God and the world. The difference between the great Creator who gives reality and the cosmos that receives reality is absolute" (2). At the same time, states Boyer, for traditional Christians like Lewis, "hierarchy is [a] source of freedom" (3). Of course, for without it, we could not love. Christians, in this scheme of things, first look to God for

[7] Our rationality, like our capacity to love, is from God, according to Lewis: "He is the source from which all your reasoning power comes..." (82).

[8] On this point, however, Lewis comes in with a caveat. In *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology*, he warns: "I have found nothing is more dangerous to one's own faith than the work of an apologist. No doctrine of the Faith seems to me so spectral, so unreal as one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate. For a moment, you see, it has seemed to rest on oneself... . This is why we apologists take our lives in our own hands and can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments, as from our intellectual counters, into the Reality... Christ himself" (103), the same Christ who suggests that reality chiefly concerns love. Of course, Matthew 22: 40 serves as a reminder in this regard that, somewhat paradoxically, "all of the law and prophets hang on" the two commandments regarding love that we saw earlier.

their model since he is their Creator, and follow the model of perfect love that they see in God (Christ), thus liberating themselves from self-serving impulse.

Lewis' belief in the necessity of hierarchy between an originating and sustaining Divinity on the one hand, and human creation on the other, begs a question that most postmoderns of any metaphysical persuasion find uncomfortable: what does this stance mean with regard to "hierarchical"[9] church? Interestingly, Lewis is not nearly so categorical on this point. For him, insistence on a hierarchical God, the Generator of meaning through relationship, does not necessitate a strictly hierarchical church in the way that most would anticipate; in fact, it would seem that he encourages something quite different. When Lewis first converted to Christianity, he distained church attendance, saying: "My own experience is that when I first became a Christian I thought that I could do it on my own, by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and I wouldn't go to the... churches and Gospel Halls" (*God in the Dock*, 60). Other motivations were not quite so pure: "I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems[10] set to sixth-rate music." Lewis claims that he eventually recognized the value of church attendance for a number of reasons. First, he mentions the Lord's Supper: "if there is anything in the teaching of the New Testament which is in the nature of a command, it is that you are obliged to take the Sacrament, and you can't do it without going to Church" (61), claiming that it is through this institution that we prepare ourselves experientially to share Christ's love:[11] "The command, after all, was Take, eat: not Take, understand... To me, I mean. All this is autobiography, not theology" (*Letters to Malcolm*, 104).

Indeed, other things that he has to say about what the function of churches should be point in the direction of this (inter)personal, relational, meaning-oriented purpose. Further describing his early institutional-Church experience, Lewis says:

> ... as I went on I saw the great merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns... were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit. (*God in the Dock*, 62)

Lewis is equally emphatic, however, about what the church as an organization should *not* be: it "... has not... a detailed political programme for applying [its moral code] to a particular society at a particular moment. It could not have." He goes on to say that "... of course, when [people] ask for a lead from the church most people mean that they want the clergy to put out a political programme. That is silly. The clergy are those particular people who have been specially trained to look after what concerns us as [immortal] creatures..." (*Mere Christianity*, 78-79). That is to say, the church should occupy itself with preparing its adherents for Love/Heaven, or, perhaps, the ultimate Meaning of Life. It should assist us, on a particular level, in being more moral people.[12] For Lewis, that is its foremost, if not only, task.

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[9] For our purposes, the appropriate emphasis of "hierarchical" would be the "institutional" church, as opposed to the "universal" church, which is understood to mean the body of all believers.

[10] Lewis was a medievalist who taught at Oxford, and a poet considered by those who know to be of no mean talent.

[11] Elsewhere, Lewis further confirms this love function, hearkening back to the love-over-like point raised in footnote three: "... being a unity of place and not of likings, [the Church] brings people of different classes and psychology together in the kind of unity [God] desires" (*The Screwtape Letters*, 32).

[12] This preparation, or path, is put most famously thus: "People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, 'If you keep a lot of rules I'll reward you, and if you don't I'll do the other

II. Lewis and the meaning of life: vital and literary applications

At this point, this study will shift directions. My intention thus far has been to elucidate the thoughts of a famous Christian theologian on the meaning of life to contribute to the purposes of an important collective project. I have carried the discussion in the direction of what sort of formal religious institution Lewis is a proponent of, all with an eye toward noting the distinctions between his idea and the ecclesiastical powers that a few important Spanish literary figures to a greater or lesser extent struggled with in their own search for meaning, in order to question what role the church may have played in this search. What interests me in this regard is this: what sort of a role might as important and powerful an institution as the Spanish Catholic Church have played in what most of us, no matter what our metaphysical orientation, would consider key elements in the search for meaning: love for self and others, expressed in word and action? Or, said another way, how closely did the Catholic church model the ideal structure that Lewis proposes—one that still takes "theology" seriously insofar as it is important to vitality, while still focusing primarily and predominately on spiritual and relational growth, or the meaning of life—in a given place and time? And, most importantly, what effect did this seem to have on those influenced by it, in terms of opportunity to dialogue (or not) about as important an issue as the meaning of life?

I have chosen to work with sor Marcela de san Félix and Miguel de Unamuno, not because they have much in common superficially speaking, but because the first comes from my area of expertise—Early Modern writing religious women—and is worthy of greater scholarly attention in any forum,[13] and the second is an approximate contemporary of C. S. Lewis who experienced an institutional church at direct odds with the one Lewis finds ideal, but nevertheless, conceives of the search for meaning in ways that are strikingly similar despite their very different philosophical approaches to the question.

Sor Marcela de san Félix

Marcela de san Félix (1605-1687) was born into and took part in Lope de Vega's theatrical household until she professed as a nun in the Trinitarian convent of san Ildefonso (Madrid) at sixteen or seventeen; her mother was comedienne Micaela de Luján. In spite of her illegitimacy and gender, during her childhood she was probably Lope's favorite offspring, receiving more numerous and more laudatory mentions in his contemporary personal correspondence (to his patron, the Duke of Sesa) than any other sibling, even the *fenix*'s legitimate son, Lopito.[14] It is likely that Lope's favoritism had to do with Marcela's superior intellect and talent as a literary figure, which she evidenced even as a small child through writing poetry, a skill and

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thing.' I do not think that this is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different than it was before... either into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature; either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred... . To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence... . Each of us at each moment is progressing to one state or the other" (*Mere Christianity*, 86-87).

[13] San Félix is one of the most prolific and best female authors of Early Modern Spain, including the colonies. Studies of her life and work are increasingly present in contemporary academics, including an anthology of her work compiled by Electa Arenal and Georgina Sabat de Rivers, an anthology including some of her work edited by Bárbara Mujica, articles and book chapters by these same scholars, and articles and book chapters by Susan M. Smith and others.

[14] Lope's attentions to Marcela continued after her profession; he paid her dowry, wrote a poem in dedication of her profession, and visited her almost daily.

passion which she continued to develop once inside convent walls.[15] In fact, most scholars who study the Trinitarian nun agree that, although it is most likely that Marcela entered the convent out of true spiritual devotion, it is at least a fortunate coincidence that she spent the most of her days in just the space where she could most easily and defensibly dedicate herself to letters.[16]

As a parallel to the relative freedom that Marcela had to write given her position as a convent leader, her scholarly proclivity, and the Teresian precedent for *entremuros* literary activity, Marcela also had the autonomy, solitude and time that she needed to practice mystical prayer, which Saint Teresa had also championed. But it was not only the female precedent that legitimated Marcela's practices, of course. Interestingly and unsurprisingly, it was in large part due to the increase in spirituality in the (fifteenth and) sixteenth century and the increased socio-political involvement and interests of the Spanish Catholic church of the seventeenth, that the practice of mysticism was at first championed and then somewhat neglected (in the latter case, perhaps especially among females). Indeed, returning to the paradigm that C. S. Lewis suggests for appropriate institutional-church functions (supporting personal spirituality as upheld by doctrine) and inappropriate ones (promoting or responding to political agendas), we see that Spain's Early Modern Catholic church moves from greater to lesser acceptance of the practice of mysticism with time.[17] We will now turn to this gradual shift, and what it might imply for Marcela and others like her.

Of course, mystic practice had had a long tradition in Christianity (and other religions) long before its resurgence in Early Modern Spanish Catholicism. It must be said, however, that the Spanish church of this time period is uniquely responsible for its spread and influence in Early Modern Europe. As A. D. Wright notes, "[t]he heroic pursuit of mystic experience within the bounds of orthodox contemplative spirituality undoubtedly influenced the long-term development of Catholic piety... [, and] subsequent export of female Carmelite reform... still depended on the initial achievement of Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross" (139). As is well known, the Catholic Reform of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, propagated by the influence of Erasmus and the thought and activity of important figures such as Cardinal Cisneros and Ignatius of Loyola, meant that understanding of biblical texts by lay persons (*Biblia políglota complutense*) and the defense of "innovative forms of spiritual expression" (Rawlings 35), including mysticism, became more normative. In Spain as elsewhere, resistance to post-Tridentine [18] foreign oversight of female convents "made Roman intervention in the reform of a religious order... more difficult" (140). All of these factors and others helped the mystic movement, and other elements of true spiritual reform, to flourish in Spain for both women and men for quite some time.

[15] Marcela's literary production eclipses that of most Early Modern women. Today, only one volume of Marcela's manuscripts survives; four or five she burned in the same act of apparent self-denial that she defended within their pages. The surviving tome contains one *vitae*, six one-act allegorical dramas, seven *loas* and twenty-two poems, including the one that I reference most here, *romance* #26, "A un afecto amoroso."

[16] Marcela followed in the footsteps of Santa Teresa, who was by that time canonized in the church (1622), dedicating a large portion of her time to biographical and didactic prose and to personal expression of her spiritual experiences *entremuros*. The majority of Marcela's surviving work is dramatic text.

[17] Of course, the response of the (Spanish) Catholic Church to the practice of mysticism and other elements of reform takes into account many factors, most of which we cannot even touch on here. For a recent comprehensive discussion on this topic, see Stanley G. Payne's *El catolicismo español* (2006) (trans. P. Elías and Cristina Pagès).

[18] Payne's study and others note the extent to which, and reasons why, the Council of Trent both contributed to church reform and hindered some aspects of true spirituality, perhaps especially among women.

As suggested by her surviving texts and supposed by her devotion to the Teresian model, Marcela de san Félix practiced mysticism herself.[19] If her doctrinal grasp of the soul and its relationship to Christ are any testament,[20] she did so with much personal spiritual success, since she regularly discusses this issue. What might surprise us anew from the perspective of this study, however, is that Marcela is essentially defining for herself what the meaning of life is, and enabling herself—with ecclesiastical support—to experience this meaningfulness in writing and through contemplation on a regular basis. Since this is the case, we might use her poetry to suggest what that life might be. What different vital meanings was Marcela able to envision and create for herself through her poetic expression? The ones suggested by "A un afecto amoroso," the poem on study here, are related to what engenders meaning from a Lewisean perspective: love. First, and again, the practice of mysticism itself (and the writing about it) is both an acknowledgement of love—the love of a "Hermoso dueño mío" (Christ) for an "alma... vil, ingrata y fea" (489) (Marcela)—and an expression of correspondence: she is "amante," "abrasada," and "vencid[a]." It is worthy of note that the love relationship here again suggests Lewisean terms: Christ's Gift-love—Bien sé lo que me amas, /... bien sé que no te obligo / con mi correspondencia" (490)—is met with human Need-love—"me da pena / por no poder servirte / cuanto el alma quisiera" (490); the reminder is that the beloved needs Christ to continue to be able to love at all. Another vital benefit of the poetic space that Marcela creates is the reiterated opportunity to express that love; indeed, all mortal lovers know that the expression is as much an experience for the lover as it is a message to the beloved. Marcela is, in a sense imbuing herself with Meaning through the practice of contemplative poetry.

Marcela's means of expression in this and other poems also suggest responses to the equation suggested at the outset of this study: divine love anticipates that humans will be effective agents of love in this world. Thus, Sor Marcela may be creating vital meaning through mysticism in more ways than we anticipate by bringing it also to a non-metaphysical level. One contemporary mystic practitioner puts it this way:

> La mística es "el dinamismo interno de toda actividad solidaria y creativa del cristiano. Crea personas de incansable entrega a los demás, de capacidad de transformación de las relaciones interpersonales." (Tamayo 106)

At the same time, Marcela's poetic texts (and, more obviously, her drama), were meant to instruct others as well as to create for them a sense of what the mystic experience was like. As mentioned earlier, Marcela's plays present the journey of a novice through the steps toward spiritual maturity; they are entertainment and example. In like fashion, her poetry invites other nuns to participate in the creation of what is meaningful, both on earth and in an afterlife, in what philosopher María Zambrano considers "[una] experiencia antropológica fundamental" (106). For example, although the majority of the poetic dialogue is a *tú/yo* exchange, there are

[19] As Alison Weber notes in *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, well-known portions of the Bible and "numerous devotional and mystical works were translated into Spanish and distributed to convents..." (21), which may have aided in Marcela's knowledge of and dedication to the practice.

[20] Marcela's *coloquios espirituales* explore the nature of the human soul and the love of the Christ, as well as detail the advance of the professing nun towards the spiritual maturity necessary for mystic union with the divinity. In like manner, her poetry upholds doctrines such as the Incarnation ("Otro. Al santísimo sacramento") and the Crucifixion ("A unas ansias amorosas") to support this practice. That is, she is able to confirm and uphold doctrine from within a relational context rather than one motivated by social or political agenda, which Lewis suggests is ideal to avoid the politicization of faith, which is necessary to substantiate spiritual growth or meaning of life.

times when Marcela references her beloved in third person, explaining: "yo me abrazo de amores, / sin duda yo me quemo," and of Him, "Es el amante mío / fino por todo estremo," etc. The obvious interlocutors of the poems are her fellow sisters, invited to consider this experience for themselves.

Moreover, mystic poems of a certain type may have evoked the experience of human/earthly love for the Sisters on another level; returning to Lewis' *The Four Loves*, I am referring to Eros. Lewis says of erotic love in its particularly sexual manifestation that, "it is the mystical image of the union between God and man" (98), but also that erotic love, or simply "being in love," whether or not it is sexually manifested at any given time, (91) is another of the ways that human love is uniquely expressed: "... eros makes a man want, not a woman, but *one particular* woman" (94, emphasis mine). Marcela, taking after San Juan de la Cruz, creates the space for the articulation of—and perhaps from there vicarious experience of—this type of love that would otherwise be unavailable (legitimately) to her and her fellow virginal contemplative sisters. Her expression of this love is reminiscent of San Juan de la Cruz; it is "el fuego amoroso, / que activo me penetra," (san Félix 489). The contemplative actively desires to be possessed: "te pido / que se rompa la tela, / y acabe de gozarte / en posesión entera" (490), to be "herida con tus flechas" and "en gemidos deshecha / hallarás a tu amante" (491). As Stacey Schlau and Electa Arenal point out, this expression or experience of desire may have helped the nuns to keep their focus away from senseless worldly distractions and on meaning: "Libidinal tension is reenacted as a drama of the soul: the attractions of rigid rule-following and unthinking, inquisitional impositions of censorship... can only be overcome by inner-directedness" (230).

Inasmuch as we surmise what mystical contemplation and creation meant for convent sisters in this regard, we can only assume that the decrease in mystical practice would have detracted from it. Indeed, the practice of mysticism did wane, and its decreased value had much to do with the political involvements of the Spanish Catholic church. The empire was collapsing, and exterior political altercations called not only for more and more of the Crown's finances, but also more attention from a partisan Church that accompanied statesmen, at least in spirit, into battles that were imbued also with religious significance. Increased concurrent fear of "lutheranism" (protestantism) intensified the (logically faulty) association of mysticism with the Illuminist movement and other heresies. Through all of this, one wonders what might have happened for other "Marcelas" had the Spanish Church remained more greatly concerned with certain aspects of spiritual growth[21] and avoided association with political agendas, as C. S. Lewis recommended. But such was not to be; by the eighteenth century, the mystic movement had died down, the Jesuits had been expelled from Spain (1777), and the reform movement had limited itself mostly to socially and politically legitimating practices (governmental appropriation of Church landholdings and conversions of peasants, etc.).[22]

> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." I Corinthians 15: 18

Miguel de Unamuno

Returning again to the outset of this study, we recall that C. S. Lewis prescribes a pursuit of transcendental meaning that is intimately connected to the quest

[21] As Payne points out, however, spiritual growth did continue; no human institution is either all good or all bad. Payne references, for example, missionary efforts to the Americas (95). Furthermore, the rationalist movement and Enlightenment emphasis also did much to decrease the popularity of mysticism.
[22] Of course, the Catholic Church is not all to blame for this phenomenon and its potential effect on female search for meaning. This project, however, limits itself to trying to show that C. S. Lewis's conclusions might have some (but not exhaustive) bearing on reality.

for significance on a human level. Related to this, we have just seen that (perhaps somewhat counterintuitively) Sor Marcela de san Félix's mystical pursuits likely enriched her earthly relationships and experiences, and that such may have been a significant goal.[23] As such, it would seem that C. S. Lewis would be critical of persons who are merely focused on what he often calls the "other world," even as he suggests that a Christian philosophy defends its existence. So too, Marcela (and, by extension, other mystics), perhaps, for we see that mystical practice might be as much about earthly self-actualization—again, through relationships and different experiences of the self—as anything else.[24] Indeed, for Marcela as for other mystics, the desire-for-Heaven motif, never expressed better than in the famous "Vivo sin vivir en mí,"[25] is intimately linked to *being more oneself* here on earth, largely through helping others—laying down one's life for one's friends (John 15: 13), loving the neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22: 39)—given that following the "Palabra Eterna" first means imitating what the "divino verbo inmenso" (san Félix 451) *did* on earth as a human being. Going back to Lewis, we note his criticism of Heaven-seekers *whose happiness in eternity is not predicated on seeking and self-actualization in the here and now*. In *The World's Last Night*, for example, he says of eternity:

> That it will come when it ought, we may be sure; but we waste our time in guessing when that will be. That it has meaning we may be sure, but we cannot see it... . We are lead to expect that the Author will have something to say to each of us on the part that each of us has played. *The playing it well [now] is what matters infinitely*. (106, emphasis mine)

That is, according to the philosophy of Christianity, heaven is an end, but only indirectly through self-actualization; it is the gradually revealed result of "getting it right" down here. Lewis says elsewhere: "every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different than it was before... ." That is, the "other world" is not some transcendental carrot on a stick, according to Lewis, who further clarifies: "People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, 'If you keep a lot of rules I'll reward you, and if you don't I'll do the other thing.' I do not think that this is the best way of looking at it" (*Mere Christianity*, 86-87).

I maintain these emphases now because Spanish philosopher and literary scholar Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), the other literary figure I wish to discuss, positions himself philosophically against a Catholic Church that was in many ways the direct contrary of the one Lewis supported, and at least quite different from the one that Marcela de san Félix experienced, institutions that could uphold a seeking, self-actualizing human congregant. My goal is to look at portions of Unamuno's philosophy and one of his more famous literary texts, *San Manuel bueno, mártir*, with this idea in mind, and from there draw my concluding remarks. As is well known, Unamuno, one of the principle figures of the Generation of '98, dealt heavily with the moral, social and political crisis affecting modern Spain, both in his literary and philosophical writings and on a personal level. And those ills were multiple, in his

[23] As Juan José Tamayo asserts, there has been "una modificación sustancial en la concepción de la mística y en la concepción de los místicos... Los más recientes estudios interdisciplinarios... y las experiencias religiosas profundas muestran que la mística compagina sin especial dificultad... [una] dimensión histórica" (106).

[24] The perfect distain for this world that most mystic literature asserts is, I believe, a figure of speech. Tamayo's work evidences the recent trend to move beyond oversimplification in this regard.

[25] Both San Juan and Santa Teresa have poems by this title. Marcela's own poetry is heavily influenced by this trope also.

opinion; for example, he despised the Restoration movement of the Spanish government, especially the *turno pacífico*, and equally detested the fact that the educational system, just as the government, was so profoundly controlled by religious interests. In fact, he rebelled against any system based on, for example, too-carefully orchestrated and/or religious ends for many reasons, but perhaps most fundamentally for our purposes because they gave no truck to the importance of process, or *becoming*. (We will come back to this point later.) Unamuno held equal distain for a religious institution that was overly involved in politics for the same reasons, chafing against the turn-of-the-century Catholic Church that historian William J. Callahan describes as pushing for a government that operated dependent on "divine and ecclesiastical laws," one that "met the definition of patriotism as defined by the Church, that is,... committed to advancing the cause of religion" (41). In sum, his view of church and government was negative most essentially because these institutions imposed a thought system on their citizens, and as a corollary denied any sort of self-actualization (or seeking, becoming) on any level, thus imposing a "resignation" that he philosophically opposed.[26]

Indeed, for Unamuno, meaning (or selfhood) is engendered by making existentially significant choices relevant to oneself and other people. In her recent book, Jan E. Evans points out one way to interpret Unamuno on this front that I find convincing: one must have time alone to fulfill the responsibility to become a self (through inner dialogue) (48), in order that one might realize the "external self," a self created in history, which Unamuno ultimately concedes is also part of identity (46).[27] In other words, as Lewis upholds in a somewhat different way, selfhood for Unamuno is, among many other things, both an interior and exterior process of becoming; it is knowing the self and acting accordingly. For Unamuno, as for Lewis, this acting on one's identity seems to include a strong bent towards sharing one's conclusions, or truths, with others, for their own consideration in *becoming* (self-actualization).[28] Here enters don Manuel of *San Manuel bueno, mártir*. Many critics have expounded on issues such as the relationship between don Manuel and the author, the ultimate morality of the fictional priest, whether or not he is truly "good," and so forth. The question I wish to address in the context of this study is a somewhat different one: whether or not this good man does what both Lewis and Unamuno seem to regard as ultimate, albeit through different systems and with profoundly different conclusions: allowing others (their readership, more specifically) the distinctive tools that they individually regard as most appropriate for searching for meaning. Yes, don Manuel is, according to many definitions, a "good" man, a moral man. On the word of the *novela's* narrator, Angela, "era un varón tan cotidiano, tan de cada día" (114) who visits the sick, sooths the souls and cures the ills of his parishioners. He wants nothing more than that they live happily ("viven contentos"). The problem, of course, is that Manuel himself does not believe, he is a christ with no Christ: "If only *for this life* we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (I Corinthians 15: 18, emphasis mine). He is, from the perspective of the most conservative Christian understanding, without Hope or ultimate meaning. Therefore, one of the ways in which he gives his own life meaning, to counteract his existential angst, is to give the people of the town he spiritually serves, Lucerna, what he cannot have. Literary critic Eric Pennington puts it this way:

[26] He says in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* that his "mission" is to "quebrantar la fe de unos y de otros... es combatir a todos los que se resignan, sea al catolicismo, sea al racionalismo, sea al agnosicismo; es hacer que vivan todos inquietos y anhelantes" (297-98).

[27] I cite pages in which Evans makes these points directly; her discussion of selfhood in *Unamuno and Kierkegaard: Paths to Selfhood in Fiction*, elaborates these points on pages 44-51.

[28] As Evans also points out, for Unamuno, the goal of this process is the "pure self," (47), unlike Lewis, for whom the end is more absolute: immortality.

> The religion he preaches is in reality the gospel of living as happily and as peacefully as feasible on this earth, for as long as possible. Indeed, he dedicates his life to seeing that his parishioners achieve such an earthly peace and that they not get caught up in doctrinal quandaries or contemporary social remedies. (14)

Further, as don Manuel himself asserts, his design is to "hacerles que se sueñen inmortales y no para matarles." What we begin to see, however, is that, as well-intentioned as he may be, don Manuel is denying the townspeople what, for all their differences, both Unamuno and Lewis provide: an opportunity for a quest that, while difficult, also lends our lives meaning. This is problematic, for in spite of the fact that don Manuel is on the face of things offering his parishioners what like Christian C. S. Lewis does those he would convince through his apologetics—immortality—the priest does so *ultimately at his people's expense* by denying them the vitality of seeking after the meaning of life that he allows himself. This happens in two ways: first, he permits himself to do the sort of inner dialoguing that Unamuno believes is vital for self –knowledge, and secondly, he satisfies himself on a historical dimension by acting in accordance with his conclusions and helping others. Given that he denies the townspeople access to the knowledge that they might need to find their own "*yo puro"* ("Civilizacion," 992), and instead condemns them to an existence not worth living, Socrates' "unexamined life." They are left merely with social convention and superficiality. Says Manuel:

> —reza por mí, y por tu hermano, por ti misma, por todos. Hay que vivir. Y hay que dar vida... —... —Y ¿por qué no te casas, Angelina?—
>
> —a sabe usted, padre mío, por qué.—
>
> —Pero no, no; tienes que casarte. Entre Lázaro y yo te buscaremos un novio. Porque a ti te conviene casarte para que se te curen esas preocupaciones [existenciales].—

In other words, don Manuel "gives" his people what Unamuno distains and finds a life-denying loss:

> "And that immortality of which you dream and for which you yearn so much, how will it be?" it can be said to me. In other words, how can we live in God? How? Who knows?... Our life in God will be life in... goodness, and in beauty. It will be the life on which God lives, but will we drown in it? Will we maintain the life of God by ceasing to live ourselves [?]... . How will be our life after death? How will we live in God? By losing our personal consciousness? (*Treatise,* 58)

I think that it is defensible that C. S. Lewis would even agree, somehow, that such would be a loss of "personal consciousness," and thus, of vital meaning. As we have said, he affirms that life after death exists—whether conceptually or in fact is the subject of another paper—only for those who *willingly choose it* in this life. For the rest, it is meaningless, and therefore not life.

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