

Modernism and Modernity: Religion in Early Twentieth-century Narrative in Spain

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Since the 1980s, considerable critical work has been devoted to demonstrating the unhelpfulness of the at that time accepted distinction between Spanish and Spanish-American *modernismo* and the Spanish Generation of 1898 for an understanding of early twentieth-century fiction in Spain. My own contributions drew mainly from the works of Ramón Pérez de Ayala to demonstrate how early twentieth-century fiction in Spain exhibited features and concerns that aligned it with the European movement known as Modernism and in some respects even anticipated major developments elsewhere.¹ The case for a work such as Unamuno's *Niebla* (1913) was relatively easy to make and now, a quarter of a century later, the concept of a Spanish modernist novel has become a new orthodoxy.

The philosophical and ideological implications of Modernism's engagement with Realism have been well studied, as have their formal consequences for the new novel of the early twentieth century.² Similarly, the impact of new social and political theories, of industrialisation and modernisation, of foreign influences on artists and intellectuals, have

¹ John Macklin, *The Window and the Garden: The Modernist Fictions of Ramón Pérez de Ayala*. Boulder, Colorado: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 1988. Also 'Competing Voices: Unamuno's *Niebla* and the Discourse of Modernism', in *After Cervantes: Seventy-five Years of Iberian Studies at Leeds*. Leeds: Leeds Iberian Papers, 1993, 167-93

² C.A. Longhurst, 'The Turn of the Novel in Spain: From Realism to Modernism in Spanish Fiction', in *A Further Range. Studies in Modern Spanish Literature from Galdós to Unamuno*. Edited by Anthony H. Clarke. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999, pp.1-43; John Macklin, 'Ramón Pérez de Ayala y la novela modernista europea', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, Nos.367-68 (1980), 21-36; Nicholas G. Round, '*Misericordia*: Galdosian Realism's "Last Word"', in *A Sesquicentennial Tribute to Galdós 1843-1993*. Edited by Linda M. Willen, Newark Delaware: Juan de la Cuesta, 1993, pp.155-72

to varying degrees been researched and analysed.³ One area of relative omission, however, surprising in view of the importance of the religious question in Spain, has been any sustained consideration of the relationship between religion and modernity in the fiction of the turn of the century.⁴ The first decade of the twentieth century in Spain is of course framed by Galdós's *Electra* (1901) and Pérez de Ayala's *A.M.D.G.* (1910), works which indicate the importance of the religious question and highlight the anticlericalism of a significant sector of the intellectual elite. In this respect, the new novel of the twentieth century displays a marked continuity with its nineteenth-century predecessor. Contemporary interpretations of Spain's turbulent nineteenth century, in which there were the Peninsular Wars, seven constitutions, fifty-two revolutions and three civil wars, had Catholicism at their centre, whether as the cause of, or the cure for, Spain's ills. This debate is reflected in the thesis-novels written by both camps, which include Alarcón's *El escándalo* (1875), Luis Coloma's *Pequeñeces* (1880), Pereda's *De tal palo, tal astilla* (1901), on the one hand, and Pérez Galdós's *Gloria* (1877), Alas's, *La Regenta* (1885), and Blasco Ibañez's *La araña negra* (1892), on the other. The whole period from the Restoration of the Monarchy until the Second Republic is a complex one but, whatever their political stance, the main writers of the period were products of a culturally Catholic society. From the time of the Catholic Monarchy it was taken for granted in the dominant ideology that national greatness and the transmission of Catholic values were inseparable.

³ E. Inman Fox, *Ideología y política en las letras fin de siglo (1898)*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1988; Lily Litvak, *A Dream of Arcadia. Anti-Industrialism in Spanish Literature 1895-1905*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1975; Gonzalo Sobejano, *Nietzsche en España*. Madrid: Gredos, 1967

⁴ An important exception is *Religión y Literatura en el Modernismo Español 1902-1914*. Co-ordinated by Luis de Llera. Madrid: Editorial Actas, 1994 which, in addition to looking at questions of interdisciplinarity and historiography, examines aspects of the work of Ortega y Gasset, Unamuno, Baroja, Ramiro de Maeztu and Felipe Trigo.

The Counter-Reformation origins of modern Spanish Catholicism are embodied, *inter alia*, in concept of the Christian Crusade, the imposition of orthodoxy, the Inquisition, the Christianising of the New World, the Council of Trent, the inseparability of Church and State, the Jesuits. Ranged against these are the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, Protestants, freemasons, and all kinds of foreign ideas. That is not to say, as the novels above attest, that there was no dissent from the dominant ideology. The importance of Krausism, with its faith in reason, in the harmony of the universe, in the metaphysical nature of reality, cannot be underestimated.⁵ In the next century, Eugenio Noel, writing in his *Semana Santa en Sevilla* in 1916, could comment that Spain was a Catholic country, yet so little religious. This comment, which earned him notoriety, and also excommunication, also raises another kind of question, that of a change of emphasis within Catholicism towards a Catholicism of modernity. Hostility to the Church, however, was often godless, violent and fanatical. The Church was seen to be allied to wealth and power and not sufficiently concerned with the condition of the poor in society. But what of currents of thought among believers which sought change and reform, rather than extirpation and obliteration?

Although theological, or religious, modernism did not have the obvious manifestations in Spain as it did in other countries, notably Germany, France, Switzerland, and further afield in the United States, some of the earliest literary historians of the period, including those who adhered to and promoted the 98-*modernismo* division, did perceive a

⁵ Juan López-Morillas, *The Krausist Movement and Intellectual Change in Spain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981

connection between the two movements. The most notorious of these perhaps, Guillermo Díaz-Plaja, wrote that:

coinciden curiosamente ambos modernismos, el estético y el religioso, en su postura antitradicional, en la sustitución de los dogmas por actos de sinceridad interior, en la predicación de un agnosticismo, en el valor de las formas intuitivas por encima de las racionales, en el culto al misterio como campo de la intimidad efusiva.⁶

The most consistent advocate of a close connection between literary and theological modernism was of course Juan Ramón Jiménez who argued against:

las críticas generales que han sustentado el error de considerar el modernismo como una cuestión poética y no como lo que fue y sigue siendo: un movimiento jeneral teológico, científico y literario que en lo teológico, su intención primera, comenzó a mediados del siglo XIX en Alemania y se propagó a distintos países, Francia, Suiza, Estados Unidos u otros.⁷

The conventional wisdom is that in the case of Spain the transition to modernity was slow, painful and delayed. Indeed the preoccupation of writers and intellectuals with the problem of Spain, whose final relegation from its once powerful position as imperial power is marked by its defeat by the United States as the nineteenth century neared its end, has been amply documented and studied. Some interpretations which identify this problem entirely with the mindset created by an all-pervasive Counter-Reformation Catholicism stress the fact that modernism in the Church, so influential elsewhere, was virtually non-existent in Spain. While theological modernism has been identified by many

⁶ Guillermo Díaz-Plaja, *Modernismo frente a Noventa y Ocho*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1951, p.8

⁷ Juan Ramón Jiménez, *El modernismo. Notas de un curso (1953)*. Mexico: Aguilar, 1962, pp. 225-26

critics, most notably in Spain, as we have seen, by Juan Ramón Jiménez, with the wider phenomenon of artistic modernism, Spain seems to present a curious case of the one emerging without the other.

Literature and religion have been so closely intertwined in Spain at least since initiation of the Catholic Monarchy that it might seem unnecessary to stress the impact of the one upon the other. In the Golden Age, readings of Tirso de Molina, Calderón, Santa Teresa, Luis de León, Quevedo and others would be impossible without an understanding of the theological context. In a secular age, as Ronald Cueto demonstrates, the modern scholar needs to be aware of the system of codes inherent in the works of writers reared on the tenets of a Counter-Reformation Catholicism.⁸ To take a simple example, Galdós's *Doña Perfecta* (1876) depends on our making a link between the eponymous character and the notion of the Church as a 'societas perfecta'. In turn, Pepe Rey's name identifies him with the liberal state, and the conflict between them mirrors the conflict between Church and State in the wake of the 1868 Revolution, touching on questions such as papal infallibility, promulgated in 1870, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, promulgated in 1854, the French Revolution, freedom of conscience, the respective limits of civil and ecclesiastical power. The novel depicts the struggle between two institutions and two opposing mindsets. Seen in this light, over-subtle readings of the novel (such as seeing Pepe Rey as Christ, or as a plea for tolerance) seem unconvincing. Galdós had written as

⁸ Ronald Cueto, 'Our Lady, the French Revolution and Don Benito Pérez Galdós', in *A Face not Turned to the Wall. Essays on Hispanic Themes for Gareth Alban Davies*. Edited by C.A. Longhurst. Leeds: The University of Leeds, 1987, pp.159-70

early as 1870 that ‘descuella en primer lugar el problema religioso’.⁹ The key issues in the religious debate were the relationship between Church and State and the vexed question of truth and error. The whole question of truth is, in turn, fundamental to the question of realism in fiction and at the centre of the movement from Realism to Modernism in the novel.

While it is true that the real modernist debate in religion takes place in the early twentieth century, a key text being of course Pius X’s *Pascendi Gregis* (1907), issues of reform which led to the encyclical had been present for some time. The encyclical takes up the thread of Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864. The late nineteenth century witnessed polemics over such issues as the social question, the role of the religious orders in education, the authenticity of the Scriptures, the historical Jesus, authority versus individual conscience, the compatibility between religion and the theory of evolution. Although, unlike other countries, Spain produced within the Church no groups of modernists, this should not be taken as a sign that there were not those within the Catholic Church more inclined to spirituality than dogma, to freedom of conscience rather than authority, and who could not easily submit to the latter in the face of exposure to new intellectual currents. I have already quoted Eugenio Noel in the early twentieth century. A resurgence of spirituality and a ‘return to Jesus’ can be observed in late nineteenth-century Europe and Spain, notwithstanding the integrist reaction to liberalising tendencies in the politics of the 1880s,¹⁰ was not immune from what might be termed Franciscan currents based on the Evangelical teachings on charity. For example, Paul Sabatier’s *Vie de Saint-*

⁹ ‘Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea’ (1870). Galdós’s critical writings can most easily be consulted in Benito Pérez Galdós, *Ensayos de crítica literaria*. Edited by L. Bonet, Barcelona: Península, 1972

¹⁰ In 1884, for example, Félix Sardá y Salvany published *El liberalismo es pecado*. Barcelona: Librería y Topografía Católica, 1884. Within a year it was in its third edition.

François d'Assise was published in Paris in 1894 and was translated into Spanish by Leopoldo Alas (Clarín) in 1897. Emilia Pardo Bazán had published a work on the saint in 1881 and a translation of his *Fioretti* in 1889.¹¹ Galdós's *Misericordia* (1897) reflects some of these currents of thought.

Modernist thinkers publicly lamented the increasing gap between Catholicism and science, a conflict explored, and resolved on one side, by Armando Palacio Valdés in *La fe* (1892). This meant in effect that the intellectual vanguard of Catholic circles was increasingly distanced from the mass of the faithful and the clergy. One area where this could be seen very acutely was in the area of scriptural exegesis, where the modernists argued for a symbolic rather than a literary understanding of Scripture. This is one of the propositions (no. 2) condemned in *Lamentabili sane* of July 1907: 'The Church's interpretation of the Sacred Books is by no means to be rejected; nevertheless, it is subject to the more accurate judgement and correction of the exegetes'. Similarly, modernist insistence on the primacy of individual experience is in direct conflict with the Catholic definition of dogma as a truth revealed by God through the teaching authority of the Church. Traditional Catholicism is theocentric, whereas modernism tends towards a form of Christian humanism, which in turn leads to a downgrading of devotional practices and particularly the sacraments. The Church comes increasingly to be seen as a temporal, indeed political, body devoted to its own preservation, masked by notions such as its status as the Mystical Body of Christ. The force of these ideas of course derives from intellectual currents of the time and from which Church thinkers could not be insulated.

¹¹ Sabatier was also the author of *Les modernistes*. Paris: Fischbacher, 1909, in which he defends the modernists against the condemnation of the Vatican.

Leo XIII believed in training Catholic scholars and making them familiar with developments in knowledge so that they might be better able to combat the new ideas, but in fact many were actually persuaded by them. In France, the leading modernist l'abbé Alfred Loisy was influenced by l'abbé Louis Duchesne at the Institut Catholique, and from 1882 to 1885 he attended the lectures of Joseph Renan, which aimed to examine the relationship between the historical and divine Jesus. Such investigations of course open up the complex question of the relationship between faith and history, between religion and science. The spirit of progressive thinking in the late nineteenth century was essentially tolerant and therefore was manifest in a relativism on the question of truth, a concept sharply in contrast with the absolutism of traditional positions. Cardinal Newman, for example, took a very antiliberal position on this question. In 1879 he wrote that '[l]iberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion, but that one creed is as good as another'¹² or '[t]hat truth and falsehood in religion are but a matter of opinion [...] that we may safely trust to ourselves in matters of faith'.¹³ Pius X raises a similar objection in relation to pantheism in his encyclical *Pascendi Gregis*: 'The doctrine of *immanence* in the Modernist acceptation holds and professes that every phenomenon of conscience proceeds from man as man. The rigorous conclusion from this is the identity of man with God, which means Pantheism' (*Pascendi Gregis*, 50). It was the work of thinkers such as Adolf Harnack, for example, in his Berlin lectures *What is Christianity?*, first published in 1900, that suggested that the Kingdom of God was wholly interior, and Christ did not found a Church - that was the work of his followers - and that

¹² John Henry Newman, *Newman against the Liberals*. Devon: Augustine Publishing House, 1978, p.14

¹³ Newman, p.20

the sacraments were not divinely instituted.¹⁴ As its name implied, modernism was concerned to reconcile the Church and the modern world. The failure of neo-Thomist philosophy to free itself from its image of medievalist obscurantism together with its heavy emphasis on rationality rendered impossible any accommodation with modernist ideas, generally wed to an espousal of the non-rational or intuitive. Traditional religion was of course firmly rooted in Spain, primarily because of her role as the champion of orthodoxy since the Reformation, but also in more recent times because of the increasing strength of the Church under the Restoration, the importance of Carlism, and an inherent hostility to liberalism, one of whose many manifestations could be seen in the debate over the right to freedom of worship in the Constitution. As Frances Lannon points out:

Since the past provided such powerful legitimation of intolerance and repression as a patriotic duty, it is not difficult to see why modernity was regarded with suspicion. It carried connotations of Enlightenment scepticism and mistrust of established authority, free enquiry and liberal principles, the rights of man rather than duty towards God and God's ecclesiastical and secular representatives. The dominant Catholic culture in Spain was profoundly anti-modern, and hostile to those European influences that helped to identify modernity with pluralism.¹⁵

It might be argued that Galdós's *Misericordia* (1897)¹⁶ marks the beginning of Modernist fiction in Spain, though convincing arguments have been put forward for its inherent realism. Certainly, Galdós's concern with the very real, and unpalatable, social conditions

¹⁴ Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?* Translated by Thomas Bailey Sanders. Introduction by Rudolf Bultman. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986

¹⁵ Frances Lannon, *Privilege, Persecution and Prophecy. The Catholic Church in Spain 1875-1975*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, p.38

¹⁶ *Misericordia*. Por B. Pérez Galdós. Con un prefacio del Autor escrito especialmente para esta edición. Paris: Thomas Nelson & Sons, undated. Galdós's Preface is dated February, 1913

of Madrid in the 1880s is all too evident in the text and is underlined in the author's own 1913 preface to the Nelson edition of the novel. He was aware of the historical circumstances which led to those conditions, but also of the religious underpinning of social attitudes to poverty, principally through the practice of charity. The novel mainly concerns a saintly beggar woman named Benina and a blind Jew, Almudena. As far as realism is concerned, religion, even with its otherworldly preoccupations, was perceived as very much part of reality, inseparable from the individual's moral engagement with his world and also from his interpretation of it. A significant feature of the novel is Benina's invention of a priest, from whom she claims to receive money in order to hide from her mistress, doña Paca, the fact that she is in fact begging. Later in the novel a don Romualdo, very like Benina's invention, actually appears.

Evident here is the non-realist dimension of Galdós's novel, seen variously in the role of the supernatural, in the invention of a don Romualdo and then the appearance of a real don Romualdo, or in the importance accorded to fiction-making, made manifest also through the neuroses of some of the minor characters, who create and inhabit imaginary worlds as a bulwark against the unpalatable aspects of their own reality. What we seem to discern here is the triumph of the creative imagination. Galdós's text may be said to articulate the modern conviction that with the collapse of the redemptive framework of Christianity and of the rationalist Enlightenment belief in the possibility of human progress, literature, in its imaginative transactions with the finite limits of the material world, can fill the void at the centre of our systems of sense-making, can provide the 'imaginative expansion of human sympathy and empathy as a basis for that social and political solidarity no longer available in the philosophical, historical or religious grand narratives of the past', in the

words of Patricia Waugh, written from a quite different perspective, but which seem applicable to this work.¹⁷ Galdós's novel, however, is much closer to pressing contemporary concerns than such a modernist, literary reading might suggest.

One key theme in the novel is the old dichotomy between true Christianity and the institutional Church. For several critics, not only Russell,¹⁸ the main character Benina is likened to Christ, in her humility and in her practice of true charity, anticipatory of post-Vatican Council theology. The real parallel, however, is with the suffering Christ, whose Passion leads to Redemption. As she views the world around her, at her lowest point, the narrator says of her: 'Había alcanzado glorioso triunfo; sentíase victoriosa, después de haber perdido la batalla en el terreno material'(227). This is the language of Christ defeated but triumphant, whose loving sacrifice brings fulfilment and victory and brings it, moreover, in this world and not the next. Inevitably, although this implies a different kind of human relationships, based on self-sacrifice and community, it still provides a theological justification of poverty. Benina's acceptance of her own reality, nonetheless, implies an acceptance of the supernatural, a belief in mystery, an affirmation of faith. It is religious, non-rational, but it is not institutional.

The fundamental historical thread running through the novel is the relationship between religion and society manifest in the alliance between the Church and the conservative and commercial bourgeoisie. The interdependence of the two in economic terms, with the consequent underside of the economic system they sustain, the marginalised poor, is suggested metonymically not only in the locations of the novel, churches, lower middle

¹⁷ Patricia Waugh, *Practising Postmodernism/ Reading Modernism*. London: Edward Arnold, 1992, p.6

¹⁸ R. H. Russell, 'The Christ Figure in *Misericordia*', *Anales galdosianos* (1967), 103-30

class homes, but in the frequently telling detail. For example, Almudena and Benina sit under the statue of Mendizábal, unaware of who he is, in an unmistakable allusion to the first, ecclesiastical, *desamortización*, with its economic consequences, in particular the consolidation of the large estates and the worsening of the conditions of the rural poor. From the Church's point of view, disentailment led to the religious houses seeking other forms of income, often competing with ordinary workers, to a loss of economic independence and a reliance on wealthy benefactors, thereby consolidating the alliance between the Church and the rich. In his treatment of this theme, Galdós explores the social question through the prism of charity, and in the context of the religious debates of the late nineteenth century in Spain. For the conservatives of the Catholic revival, the social question, in the words of Raymond Carr, 'derived from the increased secularisation of society which had produced a godless working class'.¹⁹ In *Misericordia*, the practice of charity, predicated upon a belief that Church authority is being undermined through increased secularisation, reflects the state's reliance on Catholic charitable organisations to alleviate poverty. The presence of Guillermina Pacheco is a reminder of the role of Catholic middle-class ladies whose charity is linked to their proselytising among the traditionally non-practising poor. References to hospices like 'La Misericordia' and 'El Pardo', are reminders of the Church's role in welfare, or charity. The opening pages of the novel are of course a good illustration of the connection between bourgeois materialism and conventional devotional practice. Don Carlos uses holy water and then goes to the chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Blanca. Whether such a Virgin exists or not, the irony of the pun is unmistakable. The myth of a lower class reformed through a policy of

¹⁹ Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808-1898*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966

recatholicisation is exposed in Galdós's unflattering portrayal of world of the beggars. But against this is placed the kind of spirituality found in Benina and Almudena, devoid of rational support, just as Almudena's religious tolerance stands in contrast to the dogmatic adherence to the notion of the one, true religion as promulgated in the Catholic catechism of the time, and since. The religious syncretism embodied in Almudena, and the non-rational foundations of his behaviour, however eccentric, are made to appear more appealing than both the existing economic and ideological bases of Spanish society and the dogmatic positions of the Catholic Church. It is difficult, then, to separate the wider concerns of *Misericordia* from contemporary social and religious concerns, however much it might be seen as a precursor of Modernist fiction in Spain.

1902 is often seen as a kind of *annus mirabilis* for the new novel in Spain, for in it were published four experimental novels which, each in its own way, broke away from the conventions of nineteenth-century realism. Two related novels published in that year, Azorín's *La voluntad*²⁰ and Baroja's *Camino de perfección*²¹, are directly relevant to our theme. A striking feature of *La voluntad* is the space accorded to descriptions of churches and places of worship. In the first chapter, for example, the insistent sound of bells is emphasised as the narrator lists the churches of the town. In the second, the interior of the cleric Puche's house emphasises the prints of saints, each with their particular attribute, and reflects the popular basis of contemporary devotional practice. The Prologue opens the text with the apparent anachronism of a large Gothic church being erected in the nineteenth century, a monument to the medievalism of the Catholic Church and to the

²⁰ J. Martínez Ruiz, *La voluntad*. Ed. E. Inman Fox. Madrid: Castalia, 1968. All references are to this edition.

²¹ Pío Baroja, *Camino de perfección*, Madrid: Caro Raggio, 1974 All references are to this edition.

piety of the inhabitants of Yecla. As the detail of this building work is conveyed to the reader, the narrator adds a reminder that this church is being erected on the site of a pre-Christian temple, where similar rites and devotions were enacted in earlier times, thereby emphasising the non-Christian origins of Catholicism and the relative values of all religions. Almudena, in Galdós's *Misericordia*, evokes the patron of Madrid, and the cathedral of that name is said to stand on the site of a former mosque and a former synagogue. In the context of progressive religious thinking, this was a key question, namely the notion of the one, true, Catholic Church as against a plurality of religious belief and practice. It is related to the error (No. 53) condemned in *Lamentabili sane*: 'The organic constitution of the Church is not immutable. Like human society, Christian society is subject to a perpetual evolution', and, as a part of this, to the debate about a scientific understanding of the Scriptures, a historical appreciation of the origins of Christian thought. Again, *Lamentabili sane* refers to a related error (No. 64): 'Scientific progress demands that the concepts of Christian doctrine, concerning God, creation, revelation, the person of the Incarnate Word, and Redemption, be adjusted'.

The two main characters in *La voluntad*, Yuste and Azorín, engage throughout the novel in a philosophical dialogue. Yuste espouses a phenomenological philosophy which asserts the primacy, and ultimate unreliability, of the world revealed by the senses, culminating in his assertion that 'El error y la verdad son indiferentes', a position directly inimical to Catholic teaching, and condemned as an error (No. 58) in *Lamentabili sane*: 'Truth is no more immutable than man himself, since it evolved with him, in him, and through him'. In a major Modernist novel by Ramón Pérez de Ayala, *Belarmino y Apolonio* (1921), we read that 'Hay tantas verdades irreducibles como puntos de vista', hardly shocking

nowadays, but undoubtedly a riposte to any notion of a single, divinely revealed truth. In both cases, there lurks the contemporary battle between religion and science, a chasm which the modernists endeavoured to overcome. The battle was waged most fiercely in the field of education. When under liberal attack, the hierarchy closed ranks on toleration, on freedom of worship and on education.

The 1876 Constitution gave the Church a special place as the State religion and enabled it to occupy a dominant role in education, above all at secondary level. The Escolapians are the religious order most mentioned in both *Camino de perfección* and *La voluntad*, but the Marists, the Jesuits, the Benedictines, the Augustinians, the Salesians, the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, all had schools, and few middle-class children evaded their influence. Their aim was to promote traditional Catholic values throughout Spanish society. Indeed, even state primary schools were not free of their influence where orthodoxy and conformity were insisted upon as against free inquiry and openness to new ideas. In terms of ideology, the Church was particularly defensive in its stance and the clerics in *La voluntad* are frequently seen to be intolerant and intransigent. Pedro Nuño is fanatical ‘Más que la irreligiosidad [...] le indignaban algunas cosas nuevas; el neocristianismo de Tolstoi [...] le sacaba de quicio [...] El mismo odio sentía por los autores del Norte’ (p.145), introduced into Spain through reviews, journals and the press. The reference to Tolstoy is not accidental in this context. The increased awareness of Russian literature in Spain (of which Emilia Pardo Bazán’s 1887 Ateneo lectures are but one manifestation) brought as one of its corollaries a different religious emphasis, more Evangelical, departing from traditional Catholic observance and ritual, with less conventional morality and a growing interest in the marginalised, the poor and the suffering, in short, a compassionate, inward

turning which shunned the conventional theological debates about reason and faith, truth and error. Ossorio's experiences in *Camino de perfección* likewise relate to this. He is not atheist: 'El no creía ni dejaba de creer' (p.157), but insists not on revealed truth, but an appreciation of a divine spirit through the senses which are 'fuentes de la idea, medios de comunicación del alma del hombre con el alma del mundo' (p.158). He expresses himself, in other words, in profoundly religious terms. In contrast, religious education is stultifying: 'Los escolapios tienen allí (Yécora) un colegio y contribuyen a embrutecer lentamente el pueblo. La vida en Yécora es sombría, tétrica, repulsiva; no se siente la alegría de vivir; en cambio, pesan sobre las almas las sordideces de la vida' (p.208). Later, Ossorio comments that Yécora is 'hostil a todo lo que fuese piedad, caridad, simpatía humana. Allí no se podían tener sino ideas mezquinas, bajas, ideas esencialmente católicas' (p.213). Catholic education is painted in entirely negative terms, 'odioso cuartel', 'un lugar de tortura', 'la gran prensa laminadora de cerebros' (p.228-29), infusing in young minds above all a deep awareness of sin, 'hipertrofiándole la memoria, obscureciéndole la inteligencia, matando todos los instintos naturales, hundiéndose en la obscuridad de la superstición, atemorizando su espíritu con las penas eternas' (p.228).

The kind of education Ossorio receives is exemplified through the example of the *Ejercicios espirituales* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. He is capable of reconstructing imaginatively scenes from the life of Christ, as when he represents to himself the scene on Calvary when he is a wild and deserted place. Later, however, he buys the *Ejercicios espirituales* and finds them curiously disappointing, 'la producción de un pobre fanático ignorante y supersticioso [...] sencillas vulgaridades' (p.163). Despite their shortcomings, the desire to reach something beyond this life, beyond the material world, convinces

Fernando that he is ‘un espíritu religioso’ (p.164). This is, however, something very removed from the kind of religion inculcated by the Jesuits, and later in Marisparza he recalls the Exercises and feels that in those surroundings he understands ‘la religión católica en sus últimas fases jesuíticas, seca, adusta, fría, sin arte, sin corazón, sin entrañas’ (pp.244-45). By the end of the narrative, Fernando seems to feel he has shed his ‘locuras místicas’ (p.324), freed himself from ‘ideas perturbadoras’ (p.334) and that he will educate his son without reference to institutionalised religion: ‘no le enseñaría símbolo misterioso de religión alguna’ (p.335). And yet the novel ends with the mother of Dolores sewing a page from the Gospel into the child’s clothes, evidence of the continued presence of Catholicism and its hold over the minds of many Spaniards. This incident sums up the debate between the modernists and the traditionalists. Dolores’s mother accords to the Gospel a divine status, and endows it with a kind of power, whereas for the modernists it is a historical document to be studied without the preconceptions which come from its being considered as divine revelation.

Both *Camino de perfección* and *La voluntad* exemplify many of the religious issues which are central to the modernist debate. Writing against a traditionalist background which held that there is only one truth and that this is imparted through the Catholic Church whose values must therefore permeate all levels of society and civil life, both authors engage with the intellectual pressures of modernity in a spirit of pluralism and freedom of conscience. Fernando Ossorio, in *Camino de perfección*, seems to be losing the battle against traditionalism. The lasting impression of religion in *La voluntad*, on the other hand, is not negative. Azorín feels ‘toda la tremenda belleza de esta religión de hombres sencillos y duros’ (p.137). In this way, a constant dialogue is maintained in the structure of

the book between traditional religion and the new philosophy. While the darker aspects of Catholicism with its emphasis on sin and the flesh are set against a more vitalistic ethos, the value of religion is never underestimated and is connected with notions of Spain as a nation. Yuste sees in the simplicity of the peasants ‘una Fe enorme...la Fe de los antiguos místicos...[...]. Esa es la vieja España...legendaria, heroica...’ (p.92). The ‘Fe ingenua y creadora’ of previous generations is set against the scepticism of the moderns who ‘paseaban sus ironías infecundas’ (p.102). The novel maintains a dialogue between the two polarities in a way in which earlier thesis-novels did not.

Neither novel devalues nor denies the value of religious experience, and each asserts the primacy of the irrational and the importance of individual consciousness. Revelation could be nothing other than the consciousness man acquired of his relation to God. As such, dogmas, sacraments and liturgy are shown to be only interpretations and evolutions of Christian thought which have increased by an external series of additions that which is latent in the Gospel. The Church is shown, through the words of its clerics, to be hostile to the progress of the natural and theological sciences so that the modern intellectual is forced into a new understanding of his place in the nature of things and his relation to other human beings. Starting from a critique of the oppressive weight of traditional Catholicism in its most conservative Spanish manifestations, both novels embody aspects of a much wider intellectual debate affecting religious life which, so far as we know, is largely absent in Spanish theological circles. In this way, in addition to displaying some of the formal features artistic modernism, they can be said to make a significant contribution to the movement towards religious modernity in Spain at the turn of the century.

The most celebrated and controversial treatment of the theme of religious education is Pérez de Ayala's *A.M.D.G.* (1910)²², a barely veiled account of the author's experiences with the Jesuits in Carrión de los Condes and, more especially, in the Inmaculada Concepción in Gijón. When staged as a play in Madrid, at a time when the author was Spanish Ambassador to London during the Second Republic, it caused serious disturbances in the theatre. With the exception of pirated editions in South America, until Andrés Amorós's scholarly edition of 1983, the novel had not been republished since 1931. It was dropped from the *Obras completas* of 1964, with the acquiescence of the author, who in the years after his return to Spain from exile needed the income provided by advance royalties. He had earlier repudiated the theatrical version, the cause of much embarrassment to him in London. At the time of its publication, the novel produced heated polemics, a series of lectures in the Ateneo, favourable critiques by Ortega y Gasset, and spawned Fernando Gil y Mariscal's *Los jesuitas y su labor educadora* (1911) and Julio Cejador's *Mirando a Loyola* (1913)

The 1876 Constitution, as we have seen, had established the Catholic Church as the official state religion, but it had also permitted freedom of religion where practised in private. It also gave the Church control over education and indeed, in the 1880s, many French teaching religious had come to Spain as a consequence of the French Republic's laicising laws. There was a growth in the number of religious in Spain, though Catholicism itself did not significantly expand its influence beyond its traditional strongholds. It did, however, greatly expand its network of schools. The Jesuits appeared to many the epitome of the religious life and religious education. In the early twentieth

²². Ramón Pérez de Ayala, *A.M.D.G.* Ed. Andrés Amorós. Madrid: Cátedra, 1983. All references are to this edition.

century, in fact, there were signs of weakening in the State's support for religious education. Although religious institutions were by far in the majority and religion was compulsory in state schools, the early century witnesses the growth of the 'Escuelas Nuevas' or 'Escuelas Racionales', initially in Catalonia, associated with Francisco Ferrer in alliance with Alejandro Lerroux, leader of the Radical Republican Party.

A.M.D.G. had been announced at the end of Ayala's first novel, *Tinieblas en las cumbres*. This first novel, published in 1907, gives an early indication of the young's author's anti-Church leanings. It is an attack both on the artistic and philosophical movements of the day and on the Catholic Church and clergy. The sexual and the religious are blended, as a brothel becomes a convent with the 'Madame' as the Mother Superior. It dismisses the idea of immortality through the words of one character who asserts: 'muerto el perro, se acabó la conciencia', a direct anticipation of Andrés Hurtado's words in Baroja's *El árbol de la ciencia* (1911): 'Acabado nuestro cerebro, se acabó el mundo'. *A.M.D.G.* is unoriginal in its critique of the Jesuits and attacks, among other things, external religiosity, the *Spiritual Exercises*, hypocrisy, mistrust, militarism, blind obedience, lack of culture and education, a puritanical morality, reactionary anti-liberal politics, economic interests and alliances with the rich and powerful, destruction of individual dignity, opposition to what is natural, obsession with death, frustration of emotional and sexual development, superstition. In essence, the novel is not so much about religion as about education. Jesuit education is seen to uphold bourgeois morality. It subordinates everything to religion, opposes the spontaneous and the natural and starts from the premise that man is fundamentally bad. This is a good illustration of the conflict between the idea of original sin and the notion of the perfectability of man. The critique embodied in *A.M.D.G.* is akin

to the pedagogy of the ‘Escuelas Nuevas’ in that it is concerned with this kind of issue and not with learning and science. Interestingly, *A.M.D.G.*, along with a later short story *El Anticristo*, was written not long after the awful events of 1909 in Barcelona, known as the ‘Semana trágica’, when churches and religious houses were sacked and burned and numerous religious murdered, and also around the time when in which the ‘Liga Anticlerical Española’ was formed (1911). *A.M.D.G.* refers to the 1909 manifestation of extreme anti-Catholicism and the fear experienced by members of religious orders. In the short story, published in 1911, the Antichrist, modelled on Alejandro Lerroux, leader of the Radical Republican Party to which Ayala belonged at the time, turns out to be kind, forward-looking and tolerant, and not the demonised figure initially imagined by the nuns. We can see, then, that some early twentieth-century novels show continuity with nineteenth-century novels in their engagement with the religious question. Nonetheless, their modernity may in significant respects be related to developing ideas on religion – on spirituality, on the non-rational, on the primacy of individual conscience, and indeed consciousness, and on questions of authority in interpretation.

Many of the themes considered thus far come together in Unamuno’s *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, published as a book in 1933, though written in 1930.²³ An incredibly rich novel, despite its brevity, it narrates the life of a village priest as seen by one of his female parishioners. This is a multilayered novel and has, for example, been fruitfully studied from a social perspective²⁴ and from the point of view of the emotions and psychology of

²³ Miguel de Unamuno, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*. Madrid: Alianza, 1971. All references are to this edition.

²⁴ Julia Biggane, ‘Introjection, Loss, and the Politics of Possession in Unamuno’s *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*’, *Hispanic Review* (2005), 329-49

the narrator ²⁵ and as an expression of Unamuno's concern with the fragility of human personality ²⁶. Nevertheless, its religious dimension is the primary concern of this study. Essentially, it appears, on the evidence of the narrator (his now old parishioner Angela Carballino), that this apparently exemplary priest, who is being proposed for canonisation, did not in fact believe. Despite this, he continued to instil faith in his parishioners in the belief that this would make life more bearable, would bring them consolation in the trials of life. The novel grows out of Unamuno's well-known preoccupation with the conflict between faith and reason, the desire to believe in the perpetuation of the self and the absence of rational proof of such a possibility. This is a conflict which is never resolved and the state of permanent tension between the two is part of what Unamuno means by 'el sentimiento trágico de la vida'. The tone of the novel is markedly hagiographical and the text resonates with similarities to the Evangelical accounts of the life of Jesus, to whom Manuel is frequently likened. The appalling implication of Angela's narrative is that Jesus himself did not believe, but provided others with the consolations of faith. This Jesus is a historical, but certainly not divine, figure.

Manuel hides this truth from his parishioners, saying at one point: '¿La verdad? La verdad, Lázaro, es algo terrible, algo mortal; la gente sencilla no podría vivir con ella' (p.46). This inevitably identifies truth with death and by implication illusion with life. Truth which can be something we believe, the vital impulse, as opposed to truth revealed by reason. In a phrase which can only be a strong rebuttal of the truth of any one religion, and an appeal for pluralism, Manuel says: '¿Religión verdadera? Todas las religiones son

²⁵ C.A. Longhurst, 'The Problem of Truth in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*', *Modern Language Review*, 76 (1981), 580-97.

²⁶ M. Gordon, 'The Elusive Self: Narrative Method and its Implications in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*', *Hispanic Review*, 54 (1986), 147-61.

verdaderas en cuanto hacen vivir espiritualmente a los pueblos que las profesan?’ (pp.46-47). It is the question of truth in the narrative that most links *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* to our central theme, and the religious question to modernist interpretations of the real. Angela, the narrator, increasingly questions both her own account and her own motives as the narrative proceeds. Any first-person narration, as is well known, is problematical in terms of objectivity in interpretation. Her realisation that she might only be narrating her own consciousness is followed by a whole series of questions about the nature of belief. This concern with the authority of her own narrative of course raises the question of the authority of any narrative, indeed of the Gospels themselves. We come here to the very heart of the religious question which links infallibility, obedience, education and dogma. In the final chapter, Unamuno, having effaced himself behind Angela’s narrative, now appears as narrator himself. In the first place, he returns to the question of canonisation and associates Angela with the Devil’s Advocate, the person in the process designated to make the case against canonisation. He then goes on to assert the superiority of imaginative literature over history, arguing further that the Gospels are enhanced, not diminished, by being called novels.

San Manuel Bueno, mártir, then, although it is often seen as different from Unamuno’s other novels, is essentially of a piece with them. From our perspective, it concerns a number of persistent themes in the struggle between the Catholic Church and its discontents. Far from being an encouragement to throw off the shackles of a godless *angst*, the novel undermines any notion of a divine Jesus, emphasises the textual nature of histories, not least the Gospels, explores the role of religion in a rural community in Spain, enters the truth and error debate by denying the primacy or authority of any one religion

and, in the practice of the writing, teases out the problematical nature of interpretation. While there are contemporary allusions – Manuel does not object to the peasants forming a union, for example – the novel does not continue the tradition and techniques of the thesis-novel. Like virtually all of Unamuno's works, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* is in no sense realist. Its essential modernism, however, does not prevent it from engaging with what was perhaps modernity's most pressing problem in Spain, the role of religion, or more precisely Catholicism, in national life.

There is a case for prolonging this narrative through the twentieth century, taking in, for example, the impact of Vatican II on writers such as Miguel Delibes, and looking at the literary landscape post-Franco. After all, Spain became truly a non-confessional state only in 1978. It is clear, however, that even this survey of some early twentieth-century novels in Spain omits many significant works and, indeed, omits important facets of the works discussed. Since the end of the Dictatorship, religion has not been a prominent theme in Spanish writing. Generally less introspective than hitherto, Spanish writing has been more cosmopolitan, with an increased emphasis on the urban social novel, including detective fiction, and on the historical novel. Religion has not been totally absent, as a work like José María Merino's *Las visiones de Lucrecia* (1995), concerned with the prophecies and trial of a sixteenth-century visionary, testifies. But even this is a social, political, and historical novel, rather than a religious one. It would be interesting to trace the process by which interest in religion declined in contemporary narrative and whether it has been replaced by something similar, such as myth. If we return, however, to the early twentieth century, we can discern unambiguously a kind of religious modernism which, in different guises, infuses some of the most important works of the period. The treatment of religion

exhibits a continuity with the fictional concerns of the nineteenth century. But we can perhaps see increasingly, amidst the ferocity of the politics and anticlericalism, a deeper concern with the meaning of religious experience linked to the Modernist preoccupation with the nature of truth and representation, with creation and with interpretation, and which lead to novels which do not set out to prove or defend positions, but to explore, question and problematise them. When a lot more research has been undertaken on non-fictional works of the period to establish whether or not there was a significant presence of modernist theological ideas in Spain, shall we be able to do full justice to this complex, but fascinating, subject.

List of publications to date:

No. 1. *The American Dream in Spanish Poetry: Some Early Twentieth-Century Visions of the United States*, Dr Terence McMullan, Queen's University Belfast, February 2000.

No. 2. *Autobiography and Intertextuality in Carajicomedia by Juan Goytisolo*, Dr Stanley Black, University of Ulster, November 2000.

No. 3. *Radical Propensities and Juxtapositions: Defamiliarization and Difficulty in Borges and Beckett*, Dr Ciarán Cosgrove, Trinity College Dublin, February 2002.

No. 4. *Voices From Lusophone Borderlands: The Angolan Identities Of António Agostinho Neto, Jorge Arrimar And José Eduardo Agualusa*, Dr David Brookshaw, University of Bristol, March 2002.

No. 5. *National Identity – a Revisitation of the Portuguese Debate*, Professor Onésimo Teotónio Almeida, Brown University, Rhode Island, USA. October 2002.

No. 6. *Translation for the Stage: Product and Process*, Professor David Johnston, Queen's University of Belfast, November 2002.

No. 7. *Sujeto femenino en contextos de modernidad tardía*, Professor Francisca López, Bates College, USA, March 2003.

No. 8. *Antonio Machado And The Royal Art: Fact And Fiction*, Dr Philip Johnston, University College Dublin, October 2003.

No. 9. *The Censors' Confusion: (Mis)Interpretations of the Works of Alfonso Sastre*, Dr Catherine O' Leary, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, February 2004.

No. 10. *East Timorese Poems of the Revolution and Beyond: The Poetry of Francisco Borja da Costa and Celso de Oliveira*, Mr Anthony Soares, Queen's University Belfast, March 2004.

No. 11. *Borders, batos locos and barrios: Space as Signifier in Chicano Film*, Dr Catherine Leen, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, November 2004.

No. 12. *Camões, Portuguese War Propaganda, and the Dream of a Safe Colonial Empire, 1914-1918*, Dr Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, March 2005.

No. 13. *Remembering the Spanish Civil War: Cinematic Motifs and the Narrative Recuperation of the Past in Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida*, Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina*, and Manuel Rivas' *O lapis do carpinteiro, Dr Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, University College Dublin, April 2005.**

No. 14. *Size Matters: The Satiric Body in Saramago's *Memorial do Convento, Dr Mark Sabine, University of Nottingham, UK, April 2006.**

No. 15. *Spirituality and Society: Aspects of Religion in Early Twentieth-century Spanish Fiction*, Professor John Macklin, University of Strathclyde, February 2007.