

Gabriel Marcel on Creative Fidelity, Hope, and Transcendence

Jove Jim S. Aguas

University of Santo Thomas, Manila, The Philippines

Abstract

Despite the materialistic and secularistic tendencies of the world today, we cannot ignore our relationship with God. Our existence as human beings is defined by our relationship with our fellow men and God. Two values that characterize our relationship with our fellow men and God are fidelity and hope, which were the focus of the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. In this paper, I discuss Marcel's notions of creative fidelity and hope to show how they serve as the foundation of our relationship with our fellow men and the transcendent and mysterious being. Creative fidelity and hope lead us to the source of our being – the transcendent being – God.

Keywords: fidelity, hope, transcendence, Gabriel Marcel.

Introduction

In a world that has become materialistic, individualistic, and secularistic, our human spiritual values, relationships with fellow human beings, and God are often ignored or set aside. The focus is usually on the individuality or the independence of man and the material progress of society. While these matters are important to man and society, we cannot ignore the spiritual and relational aspects of human existence. Man, after all, is not just a physical and independent being; man is a relational and spiritual being who establishes relationships not only with his fellow men but with the Divine Being – God. The two values that define our relationship with our fellow men and God are faithfulness or fidelity and hope. In ordinary language, fidelity is usually associated with faithfulness, and faithfulness is related to commitment, so that fidelity, faithfulness, and commitment are often used interchangeably. But the question is, how does one become faithful and committed? What is the very basis of fidelity? Is fidelity merely

faithfulness or constancy over time? Is fidelity real, or is it even possible to be constant and committed to a person over time? What could guarantee our fidelity? Hope is often associated with despair, which is the overcoming of despair. It is often understood as an expectation or desire for deliverance from an undesirable condition. The person who hopes somehow anticipates a favorable result or outcome. The French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel relates these two values. Our faithfulness and commitment are not only confined to our relationship with our fellow human beings; we also have a relationship with the Divine Supreme Being or God. So how does fidelity relate to our connection with God? And how does hope relate to our faithfulness or fidelity to God? In this paper, I discuss Marcel's notions of creative fidelity and hope to show how they serve as the foundation of our relationship with our fellow men and the transcendent and mysterious being.

Creative Fidelity

At the outset, it seems easy to connect fidelity with constancy or with immutability. According to the French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel, constancy could be considered as the “rational skeleton of fidelity.”²⁷ The two, however, must be differentiated. Constancy could be construed as perseverance in a certain goal or purpose. Constancy could also be understood as immutability which means remaining unchanging over time. But fidelity requires more than just constancy over time; it implies another element which Marcel refers to as *presence*.

Marcel admits that it is difficult to put in clear words the meaning of “presence.” When I regard someone as a faithful friend, for example, I mean he is someone who does not fail me, someone who stands by me no matter the circumstance or situation is. In this sense, presence is different from constancy. Constancy can be applied to others and to one's self as when somebody is constant to himself for his own purpose. But one is *present* for the other or, more precisely, to a *thou*.²⁸ To be present for someone is to assure the other with all one's intentions that his inner feelings and dispositions for the other will not change. So that if one is not there at the very moment when his presence is needed, then his fidelity becomes questionable. Presence, of course, should not be construed as always being physically present for the other; it involves making

²⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 153.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

the other feel that one is *with* the other. The mark of presence is the mutual bond with the other. For Marcel, it means that the self is “given” to the other and that givenness is responsively received or reciprocated.

Fidelity as constancy can be based on duty or obligation; it could be interpreted as fulfilling one’s duty or obligation to the other. One can make great efforts to be steadfast for the other, to stand by the other’s side when the other needed him most. But if his presence is simply based on his idea of duty and he simply wants to be the person or friend he thinks he is must be – a faithful – dutiful friend, then this sense of fidelity as constancy based on duty or obligation can hardly be a genuine fidelity for the other. While his conduct is admirable and unquestionable, he is more faithful to his idea or model of himself as a faithful friend than as faithful to the other. Marcel poses this question: “If I will be constant, or if I am careful to fulfill certain obligations, I can, and almost inescapably seem to myself to be, a faithful friend of X. But how does the situation seem to X?”²⁹ Of course, X will appreciate my actions or gestures. But somehow, something is shattered within him because the gestures are made out of duty or obligation, not because of him. Duty or obligation can be dispensed with we can turn our back on our obligation, and when duty is dispensed or abandoned, will faithfulness still be there? A husband is faithful to his wife because, as a good husband, he has the duty to be faithful and stand by her side. Other people will probably appreciate him for being a faithful husband, but such faithfulness is not genuine.

A genuine fidelity for Marcel is one that is based on spontaneity, that is, a faithfulness that is not “coercive” but rather independent of the will – a pure spontaneity. Marcel expresses that “fidelity as such can only be appreciated by the person to whom it is pledged if it offers an essential element of spontaneity, itself radically independent of the will.”³⁰ A constancy that is based on duty or obligation alone cannot prosper into a genuine fidelity. It is in danger of being replaced by an inner struggle that could develop into aversion. Marcel cites the example of fidelity to a particular ideology. When one joins a political party or a social group, he is expected to follow and obey certain rules and prescriptions. This is to ensure compliance and discipline on the part of members. To a certain extent, such discipline could be coercive, and there is the danger that such discipline could be internalized to the point that all inner spontaneity on the part of the individual is lost. The more

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

organized the group or party, the more it could encourage hypocrisy and subservience. The extreme result could be a kind of totalitarianism. Such danger could also lurk into some basic personal relations like friendship and marriage. While the marital union is based on personal and individual decisions and will, one spouse could be faithful to the union and the other only out of a pure feeling of duty. Fidelity then is reduced to a constancy that is based on duty or obligation.

Now, what does it mean to be faithful or to pledge fidelity? According to Marcel, the pledge to fidelity is based on some inner disposition. But we know that inner dispositions could change over time – inner dispositions, whether feelings or decisions, could be affected by a lot of factors. Hence the question is, can one still guarantee that the disposition he has at the moment he commits himself will not change later on? When I commit myself and pledge my fidelity, I am almost certain that my inner disposition, decision, and resolve will not change. It seems almost certain at that moment. However, will this seeming certainty be enough to hold my promise? Will this anchor fidelity on a solid foundation? How about if the person I pledge my fidelity to, changed in the course of time? Certainly, my inner disposition can change, either because I changed or the other person has changed. With this possibility, can I still act as though my disposition is unchangeable?

Assuming that in the future, I can still act as though I still have the same disposition, say, for example, I can make an effort to make it appear as though as I am still in love with the other person, even though I am no longer in love with the other, can I consent to promise something about myself which will turn out to be a lie later on?

Marcel shares a story of somebody visiting a friend.³¹ Supposed I visit a disabled friend out of pure politeness of being by his side. The visit delighted him, and I sympathize with his solitude and understand his need for company. Feeling such impulse to relieve him of some sufferings, I commit myself to visit him regularly. When I made that promise, I was not dwelling on the possibility that my present disposition would change; neither did I anticipate that there could be other factors that could change it. When I made the promise, it seemed to me “to spring from the inmost depths of my being.”³² I truly pitied him then, but later the pity was no more than theoretical. I have to recognize that the

³¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 47.

³² *Ibid.*

impulse no longer exists. But when I made the promise, my situation has changed; someone was already counting on my promise. Now suppose that at one point I have been invited to a very important occasion which I really want to attend but it coincided with my visit to my friend. I do not want to break my word and disappoint him. Although it is very much possible that he could understand if I do not come for a visit. So it is on me whether to visit him or honor the invitation. I have to act, and I decided to visit him hesitantly, keeping the invitation to myself and just like in the past my friend is delighted.

Here lies the paradox of fidelity according to Marcel – I and the other person to whom the promise or pledge is made mutually imply each other; both cannot be separated. In the situation we just narrated, there is the appearance of fidelity in the eyes of the other and a lie in my own eyes. The truth about this situation is that there is something which does not depend on me; it does not rest with me not to prefer the invitation over the visit, which has become an irksome duty.³³

Given this scenario, it seems to lead to the following implications. I have to acknowledge that the commitment I made was wrong in the very first place because I will not be able to fulfill it because of certain constraints. Second, I have to ask myself whether I should have revealed my real feeling and not concealed it because I was wrong at the onset. In other words, we are not supposed to make any commitment or pledge fidelity because we cannot guarantee that our dispositions will not change, and therefore we cannot honor our promise, we are sure to fail in our commitment – in a sense, fidelity is sure to fail, if not tomorrow in the future. But such an attitude would make social life quite impossible because nobody can depend on or trust anybody.

Such attitude is based on certain postulates. At a certain moment, I can identify myself with my state, which I can apprehend at this precise moment. Everything outside this state is obscure, impenetrable and I cannot make any valid assertion about it.³⁴ This postulate is linked to a particular representation of the inner life which Marcel characterizes as “cinematic.” It interprets inner life like a film I am watching, which I can pause at any moment and take “snapshots” of my inner life and make assessments of it. Such is impossible, and even if that would be theoretically tenable, the “snapshots” of our inner life must be evaluated in terms of a larger

³³ Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 160.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

whole which is actually indeterminate. “The personality infinitely transcends what we may call its snapshots states.”³⁵

Another postulate holds that the future state will occur the way external events happen; they are as unpredictable as the weather. So I may be in a good mood right now, but who knows what will be my mood tomorrow. Such a position is tantamount to saying that there is no efficacy on my part with regard to my inner life. I am denied of any capacity to act for myself and for creating myself.³⁶ In other words, we just go through the motion in our life; we do not determine our actions.

However, on the contrary, according to Marcel, when I commit myself, I guarantee in principle that such commitment or pledge will not again be put in question, I do not doubt my commitment in the very same manner that I do not doubt the inner disposition I have when I made the promise. This active volition not to question “intervenes as an essential element in the determination of what in fact will be the case. It at once bars a certain number of possibilities; it bids me invent a certain *modus vivendi* which I would otherwise be precluded from envisaging.”³⁷ Marcel refers to this as *creative fidelity*.

To ask how I can test the initial assurance, which is the ground of my fidelity, leads to a vicious circle. In principle, according to Marcel, “to commit myself I must first know myself; the fact is, however, that I really know myself only when I have committed myself. That dilatory attitude which involves sparing myself any trouble, keeping myself aloft...is incompatible with any self-knowledge worthy of the name.”³⁸ Fidelity of this sort may appear to a spectator to be a vicious circle because he views it from the outside. When viewed from the outside, fidelity may appear to be incomprehensible, impracticable, maybe a grave risk. But what may appear from the outside as incomprehensible is experienced from within as growth, as deepening, or as an ascending. Marcel says: “In swearing fidelity to a person, I do not know what future awaits us or even, in a sense, what person he will be tomorrow; the very fact of my not knowing is what gives worth and weight to my promise. There is no question of response to something which is, absolutely speaking, *given*, and the essential of a being is just that – not being ‘given’ either to another or himself.”³⁹

³⁵ Ibid., 162.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 163.

³⁹ Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, 47.

All fidelity, according to Marcel, is based on a certain relation that is felt to be unchangeable, and therefore it has the assurance that it cannot be fleeting. The mystery of commitment or fidelity is focused on a privilege and decisive moment. Of course, it cannot be avoided that such mystery could be reduced to habit or some social constraints. There is always an attempt to devalue fidelity by interpreting it as a mode of affection for oneself or human self-respect and pride. Such an attempt is related to the subjective interpretation of knowledge, which asserts that I cannot know anything except my conscious states.

By relating fidelity to spontaneity, Marcel implies the element of sincerity, genuine feeling or love. Sincerity is distinguished from an obligation that has a coercive character. He is critical of the ethical rigorism of Kant, who based the rightness of an act on duty or obedience to an imperative, which could lead to inner conflict between one's inclination and one's obligation. The fulfillment of an obligation against one's inclination and devoid of sincerity cannot be identified with fidelity.

An ethic of obligation can be based on egoism, especially when one does the right thing simply because he wants to come up to one's own standard. According to Marcel, an ethic of obligation can be construed as symptomatic of "fanaticism of the ideal." What is then problematic for Marcel is a kind of commitment that avoids the rigorism of the Kantian position, which is devoid of any positive feeling or desire on the one hand and a kind of commitment that is contingent on one's own state of feeling or desire.⁴⁰ Scheler avoids the formalism of Kant by positing a kind of ethics that is based on a feeling of values. In order to avoid both extremes, Marcel proposes a creative fidelity that is neither coercive nor contingent.

However, how can fidelity be creative? In what sense is fidelity creative? To be creative is to exist existentially. It is easy to construe existence as simply to be or to live, to breathe. But for a human being to exist is not only to live or breathe or move. For Marcel, to exist existentially is to exist as a thinking and feeling and creating being. To exist is not only to function like objects; according to Marcel, human beings have a creative impulse. Our mode of being or existence is dependent on our creative development. Those who pursue their creative development live their life qualitatively at a higher mode of being than those for whom experiences are another facet of their functionality. Marcel says, "A really alive person is not

⁴⁰ See Robert Rosthal. Translator's Preface, in Gabriel Marcel's *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), xxxiii.

merely someone who has a taste for life, but somebody who spreads that taste, showering it, as it were, around him; and a person who is really alive in this way has, quite apart from any tangible achievements of his, something essentially creative about him.”⁴¹ The acts of love, admiration, and friendship are creative acts. Hence to exist existentially is to love, to admire, to relate with others.

Moreover, the creative spirit moves away from the objectification of our humanity. To exist creatively is not only to develop oneself but to relate with others; creativity is essentially tied relationally to others. Creativity, therefore, is connected to intersubjectivity. Intersubjective relations or our participation with others allow us to respond to others as creative and participative beings. Intersubjective relations as creative draw us to an experience of the self as a being-among-beings.

Creative fidelity entails a commitment to acts which draw the person closer to others, which is balanced with proper respect for the self, thus, self-love, self-satisfaction, complacency, or even self-anger are attitudes that can hinder one’s existential progress and could go against the creative impulse. In order to have a greater sense of being, one must have creative fidelity. For Marcel, “it is real fidelity only when it is truly creative.”⁴² In other words, creative fidelity is fidelity that *creates* the self to meet the demands of fidelity.

As we have already mentioned, fidelity as a belief in someone requires presence aside from constancy over time. Presence implies an affective element; thus, a mere constancy over time is not enough. For Marcel, “a fulfillment of an obligation *contre-cœur* is devoid of love and cannot be identified with fidelity.”⁴³ The “problem” then posed by fidelity is that of constancy; the mystery of fidelity is the question of commitment, of commitment over time. How are we able to remain *disponible* over time? How can we provide a guarantee of our “belief in” someone? The possibility of fidelity gives assurance that *disponibilité* or availability and creativity are related ideas. Availability or disposability is to believe in the other; it means to place oneself at the disposal of the other and maintain the openness of *disponibilité*. Creative fidelity is to actively maintain ourselves in a state of openness and permeability, in *willing* ourselves to remain open and available to the other. The truest fidelity is creative, and as such, it creates the self so that it can respond to the demands of fidelity. According to Marcel, the

⁴¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being I*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), 139.

⁴² Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 168.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

temptation to be unfaithful is always there, either on the part of the self or the other. Such temptation is seen in terms of a test of the self rather than in terms of the betrayal of the other. Thus, if fidelity fails, it is more of a failure of the self than a failure of the other.

However, fidelity is always open to doubt. One can always call into question the reality of the bond that links one to the other. One can doubt the presence of the person to whom one has been faithful. Thus, one can suspect whether the other will also be faithful. However, the more disposed the self toward the ontological affirmation to the affirmation of Being, the more that the self is inclined to believe that the failure of fidelity is his or her failure that results from one's insufficiency rather than that of the other. According to Marcel, "the ground of fidelity that necessarily seems precarious to us as soon as we commit ourselves to another who is unknown, seems, on the other hand, unshakable when it is based not, to be sure, on a distinct apprehension of God as someone other, but on a certain appeal delivered for the depths of my own insufficiency *ad summam altitudinem*."⁴⁴

Marcel further elaborates on the nature of creative fidelity. Creative fidelity is based on the collaboration of two acts, one of which depends on our own initiative and the other on the response of the other. A commitment implies a refusal to put a future state of mind or attitude in question, and this attitude is based on our interpretation of the future conflict between how one feels and what one ought to do, as a temptation or trial. The apprehension of the possibility of conflict between what one feels and what one ought to do makes the commitment a risk. Although this conflict can be resisted, it is not enough to erase the doubt that my commitment may have been mistaken. The object of one's commitment may not prove to be worthy of the commitment, or certain conditions have already changed.

Hope

Marcel stresses that the commitment must be infused with hope to make this commitment unshakable and establish the relationship on solid ground. "Hope is the final guarantor of fidelity; it is that which gives me the strength to continue to create myself in availability to the other."⁴⁵ However, what is hope? In what sense can it be the guarantor of fidelity?

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁵ Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 85.

Hope, according to Marcel, is always related to how we deal with and overcome the trials of life. These trials can be in the form of illness, separation, exile, or slavery. Hope is situated within the framework of the trial, not only corresponding to it but constituting our being's veritable *response*.⁴⁶ Throughout a particular trial, one finds himself "deprived for an indefinite period" of a certain light for which one long for. Such trials can be considered as a "form of captivity" and can cause despair, and one can "go to pieces" or lose himself. Thus, for Marcel, there is no hope without the temptation to despair, and hope is understood as "the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome."⁴⁷ Hope guarantees fidelity by defeating despair – it gives us the strength to continually create. Thus, when there is hope, there is always the possibility of despair, and only when there is the possibility of despair then can we respond with hope. Despair is equivalent to saying that there is nothing in the whole of reality to which I can extend credit, nothing worthwhile. Marcel further says: "Despair is possible in any form, at any moment and to any degree, and this betrayal may seem to be counseled if not forced upon us, by the very structure of the world we live in."⁴⁸ Hope is the response to this betrayal; it is the affirmation that reality will ultimately prove worthy of an infinite credit, the complete engagement, and disposal of myself.

One of the often-repeated statements of Marcel about hope is that the essence of hope is not "to hope that *X*", but merely "to hope ..." But does it mean to simply hope? When we hope that *X*, it means that there is a specific object that we desire, that we want to attain like "I hope that my illness will be cured," or "I hope that this pandemic will end soon," or "I hope that my family will not be infected by the COVID 19 virus." Thus, it would seem that hope is always associated with some specific or peculiar objects, and by some calculation of different possibilities, the desired object could be attained. But to simply hope does not have any object. Marcel says, "hope, by a *nisus* which is peculiar to it, tends inevitably to transcend the particular objects to which it at first seems to be attached."⁴⁹ The person who hopes does not imagine or anticipate the condition that would deliver her from her plight; rather, she merely hopes for deliverance. There may not be a certainty that one will be cured, the pandemic will end soon, or that one's family will

⁴⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951), 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Manya Harari (New York: Citadel, 1995), 26.

⁴⁹ Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, 32.

not be infected by the virus, but the person merely hopes for deliverance in whatever form. The more that hope transcends any anticipation of the form that deliverance would take, the less it is open to the objection even in cases when the hoped-for deliverance does not take place. One's desires can be thwarted, but he remains to hope, and no outcome will shake him from hoping. According to Marcel, it is the very non-specificity of hoping that gives hope its power. This clearly distinguishes the tone between the absolute statement "I hope ..." and the statement, "I hope that ...". This distinction, according to Marcel, clearly runs parallel to that which obtains in all religious philosophy and which opposes "I believe" to "I believe that."⁵⁰

If hope does not have a specific object or it tends to transcend the object attached to it, what about the subject who hopes? What is the fundamental characteristic of the subject in "I hope?" This subject who hopes is definitely not identical with the "I myself ...". According to Marcel, the subject in "I myself" is always present and will manifest itself whenever there is a question not of hope but of certainty or even doubt. The "I myself" is always identified as an ego that draws attention to itself and distinguishes itself from others. The "I myself" is identifiable with the statement "It is I who ..." such statement implies that there are, on the one hand, those who are excluded about whom one must be careful not to think, and, on the other, there are those we want to be our witnesses.⁵¹ In other words, the ego always wants to be recognized as different from others; it detaches itself from others. The same attitude underlies the statements "I am sure" and "I doubt." According to Marcel, it is different with "I hope." He says, "Here there is not, and there cannot be the note of defiance or of provocation which, on the contrary, so easily becomes essential to *I doubt* and *I am sure*." The difference is due to "the fact that "I hope" is not orientated in the same way: there is no statement directed towards, and at the same time against, some other person either present or imagined."⁵² The subject in "I hope" does not see itself as against or opposed to others.

This brings us to the difference between hope and optimism. It is easy to identify hope with optimism. Optimism, like fear or desire, imagines or anticipates a favorable or unfavorable outcome. We "desire that x" or "fear that x." The optimist is he who has a firm conviction, or in certain cases just a vague feeling that things tend

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵² Ibid., 33.

to "turn out for the best."⁵³ However, as already mentioned, hope for Marcel is different; we do not hope that x, we simply hope.

According to Marcel, the optimist always thoroughly reconsiders things from a sufficient distance or detached manner to 'extrapolate the conclusions. The optimist believes that "It always comes out right in the end"; "We shall be bound to see . . ."; "If only we don't allow ourselves to stop too soon ..." These are the formulae that constantly recur in the speeches of optimists. ("speech" because the optimist is essentially a maker of speeches.)⁵⁴ Such optimism "remains strictly in the province of the "I myself." The optimist introduces himself indeed as a spectator with particularly keen sight."⁵⁵ Such optimism excludes the intervention of faith, or even the direct participation, the engagement, which comes into being as soon as life is regarded as something other than purely external. The optimist sees the cause of despair or of a desperate situation as something that can be analyzed, and given the right calculation and consideration of the possibilities, everything will turn out right.

Marcel admits that it is quite difficult to describe hope as he says that hope is a mystery and not a problem. A problem is a question in which the identity of the person asking the question is not an issue. In a problem, one is not personally involved in the issue at hand. A mystery is a "problem that encroaches on its own data."⁵⁶ Such a "problem" is, in fact, meta-problematic; it is a question in which the identity of the questioner is an issue. On the level of the mysterious, the identity of the questioner is tied to the question.⁵⁷ Thus, to describe hope as a mystery is to always relate it to the person who hopes, to the person's desires and trials. Hope indeed is not something definite and specific and of a fixed pattern, to hope is not to rely on some objective calculation of possibilities based on certain data or technic, something that an optimist would do. The very basis of hope is the non-validity of certain assertions, the truth that the more the real is real, the less does it lend itself to a calculation of possibilities on the basis of accepted experience. Marcel further explains, "hope quite simply does not take any heed of this sum total." In a sense, it might be said that hope is not interested in the *how*: and this fact shows how fundamentally untechnical it is, for technical thought, by definition, never

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 19.

⁵⁷ Brian Treanor, *Gabriel (-Honoré) Marcel*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://meinong.stanford.edu/entries/marcel/index.html>.

separates the consideration of ends and means. An end does not exist for the technician if he does not see approximately how to achieve it.⁵⁸ The person who hopes to recover from illness is not so much concerned about how he will be cured; the person who hopes for the pandemic to end soon is not so much concerned about how the pandemic will end, and the person who hopes for his family to be safe from the virus is not so much concerned how his family will be safe from the virus.

According to Marcel, “hope consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data, beyond all inventories and all calculations, a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me, which cannot but will that which I will, if what I will deserve to be willed and is in fact, willed by my whole being.”⁵⁹ To hope is always to hope against hope, that is, Marcel adds, even when I cannot find a sufficient reason to hope, even when there is no empirical proof for what I hope for. This is the connection between faith and hope; a mysterious being affirms the person who has faith and hopes.

It is the essence of hope “to exclude the consideration of cases... and it can be shown that there exists an ascending dialectic of hope whereby hope rises to a plane which transcends the level of all possible empirical disproof – the plane of salvation as opposed that that of success in whatever form.”⁶⁰ Hope, therefore is not some form of passivity or resignation or surrender; it remains active; it wills not only for oneself but also for others. The essence of hope is just to hope. The person who hopes does not accept a current situation as final, nor does he or she imagine or anticipate the circumstance that would deliver her from her plight, rather he or she merely hopes for deliverance. He who hopes says simply: “It will be found.” “In hoping, I do not create in the strict sense of the word, but I appeal to the existence of a certain creative power in the world, or rather to the actual resources at the disposal of this creative power.”⁶¹

Marcel, however, points out that that there could be some degradation of this understanding of hope. It is possible that “to hope in” becomes “to expect from” then “to have due to me,” that is to say, “to count on” and finally “to claim” or “to demand.” This is because we have a tendency to substitute for an initial relationship, which is both pure and mysterious, subsequent relationships, that

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁹ Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, 52.

although more intelligible, are more deficient as regards their ontological content.⁶²

Concluding Remarks

Man is a *homo viator*, a wanderer in search of a higher purpose; there is an ontological exigence toward something greater than us. Creative fidelity and hope are ontological phenomena that have a significant bearing on our relationship with others and to that mysterious being or Absolute Thou. Our existence has a transcendent nature, and this is manifested in our concrete human experiences. Our experiences show this value-laden nature of our existence and being, which gives us insight into the transcendent nature of our existence. We are not isolated self-contained subjects or individuals. We do not solely cause the value of our lives, or of our existence. There is “a transcendent aspect to human existence because it is already endowed with value, which no individual brought to it, or created, but which we recognize, and which will exist after we are gone.”⁶³ There is something beyond us.

Such experience of transcendence is something that should be understood not as coming from the outside, although we recognize that it has independence from any individual. We recognize the transcendent from our own experiences, both in our personal experiences and in our experiences with other beings. Hence transcendence can also be understood as “reaching out of myself toward the intersubjective nature of our existence,”⁶⁴ and such reaching out is essential in our existence, without which we will not experience authenticity and fulfillment. Such experience of transcendence is enriched by creative fidelity and hope. Thus, we can say that creative fidelity and hope are essentially related to transcendence, and they allow us to experience not just our fellow human beings, but then it leads us to that transcendent and mysterious being – the Absolute Thou who is the source of creative power. “Absolute hope is inseparable from a faith which is likewise absolute.” And for Marcel, this only possible source from which this absolute hope springs must always be stressed. To finally conclude, I end with this insightful quote from Marcel about absolute hope: “It appears as a response of the creature to the infinite Being to whom it is conscious of owing everything that it has and upon whom

⁶² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶³ Brendan Sweetman, “Introduction,” in *A Gabriel Marcel Reader*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2011), 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

it cannot impose any condition whatsoever without scandal. From the moment that I abase myself in some sense before the absolute Thou who in his infinite condescension has brought me forth out of nothingness, it seems as though I forbid myself ever again to despair, or, more exactly, that I implicitly accept the possibility of despair as an indication of treason, so that I could not give way to it without pronouncing my own condemnation. Indeed, seen in this perspective, what is the meaning of despair if not a declaration that God has withdrawn himself from me? In addition to the fact that such an accusation is incompatible with the nature of the absolute Thou, it is to be observed that in advancing it I am unwarrantably attributing to myself a distinct reality which I do not possess.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, 47.