

Jim Finley:

Greetings. I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. Greetings, everyone and welcome to our time together turning for trustworthy guidance to the teachings of Gabriel Marcel. In the introductory session with Kirsten and also in the previous session, we explored the way Marcel tries to help us cultivate a spiritual worldview, how to be established in experiential spiritual understanding of ourselves, others, and all of life really.

And we saw at the very heart of this vision is his distinction on the winding path between problems and mystery. Problems in life, those problems where we seek a solution or an answer to things that are dualistically other than ourselves. So the example we use is if our car won't start, or if there's a leak in the roof, or if we're trying to find the answer to a complex math problem. All these are problems.

And in the facing of a problem, we look for a method to solve the problems, or we go to someone who's trained in that method to solve the problem. And then once it's solved, we're done. We move on to the next problem. But mystery is very different. Mystery, we realize that when we turn towards things that are mysterious or of mystery, we ourselves are included in what we're turning towards.

So if I ask what does it mean to be a human being, it's I as the human being that I am that's asking what does it mean to be a human being. If I ask what is consciousness, it's I in my consciousness is asking about consciousness. If I ask what is love, it's me and my desire to love and be loved is asking what is love. And so these things are not problems, they're mysteries that I'm included.

But here's the key to Marcel, it's not in the reductionistic sense, so everything refers back to me like my personal opinion about who I am, my personal opinion what consciousness is, my personal opinion or feelings or attitudes about who others are. It's the opposite. I realize that I'm included in that the very presence of myself extends out into and is woven into the mystery of humanity.

The very consciousness of myself extends and is woven into the mystery of consciousness. The very mystery of myself is woven into the mystery of love. And what he's really saying ultimately is that my very self is woven into being. That's the ontological mystery. Ontological. Ontology means our being. And he understands being to be infinite. And Kenneth Gallagher points out that he's doing this in a way to seeking the presence of God outside of religions.

Later he's going to look at religion. So right now we're looking at kind of an experiential exploration of the presence of God outside of belief systems and religious faith. But he says, practically speaking, the infinity of being is God. So really what mystery is, what he's really concerned about is how do I realize I'm being carried along in a presence, an infinite presence, that transcends me, but it always includes me?

That my very presence extends out into the infinite presence of God because the infinite presence of God is giving itself to me as a very presence of me. And that trans-subjective communion is what he's trying to help us find. He's trying to find this. And we said too then, we see this in certain moments, which are the moments of thou, he uses as a prime example of this.

So father, mother, sister, brother, friend, beloved teacher, student, community that you're serving, to be in the presence of thou is you're in the presence of someone that you love, and you see who the person is factually. That as you know what they look like, you get to know them, you know their personality, and so on. But to know them as thou, Harry Zucker and Martin Buber, fills the entire horizon of your being.

You realize that the infinite presence of God is presenting itself in and as the presence of the beloved. So that to be in the presence of the beloved is to be in the presence of God. And your ability to see the thou of the beloved reveals you to yourself as thou. This thou moment, what love empowers us to see, it transcends, and to see means to interiorly realize what our finite eyes can't see, to recognize or to realize what our conceptual mind can't define or explain.

It really evokes a sense of awe, the thou moment, like an awakening. We also saw this thou dimension is carried out throughout all of life. So there's the thou dimension of the darkness of the night. There's the thou dimension of the smell of flowers. There's the thou dimension of silence, the thou dimension of solitude. There's the thou dimension that echoes in the voices of poets.

The artist's visual mystics that they help us to see the landscape and flowers, to help us see the thou dimensions of all of reality. So that's Marcel. That's what we're talking about. Now, we're going to see Marcel does what... Notice and turning to the mystics, all the mystics do this too. The mystics talk about certain moments that were quickened with a sense of oneness, of God's oneness with us in life itself.

And then we see how these moments of oneness, these moments of intimately realized oneness, evokes the desire to abide in the oneness. That is the intuition is that the thou moment, we realize that it isn't that something more is given in the realization of thou, but rather a curtain parts in that moment that reveals the true nature of every moment. See, that every moment is thou. And realizing that every moment is thou, then I become aware that I'm not aware of the thou nature of myself.

Hence, my suffering. Hence, my fear. Hence, my confusion. Hence, my wayward ways. So the real question then is how do I stabilize in a path, a way of life to be ever deeper, more habitually stabilized in the thou dimension, which is really the dimension of my very presence extending out into and woven into the infinite presence of God, that's extending out and woven into the very presence of me and trans-subjective communion onto everyone and everything that I see?

What is a way of life where I become habitually established in that unit of awareness? So this is Marcel's concern, as with all the mystics we've been looking at. We also saw each mystic has his or her own way of voicing this. We looked at John of the Cross or Teresa or Julian of Norwich. So Marcel has his own way of voicing this path, and he voices it as fidelity, hope, and love are his three.

What makes Marcel so accessible, as always, he always starts with an actual example in real life. Turning then to Kenneth Gallagher 5, where we find this material on fidelity. He gives an example of fidelity. What does it mean to be faithful and on what conditions can there exist of being capable of fidelity? Let us take a simple instance. I have been to see my friend in a hospital.

His life is drawing to an end. He knows it. He knows that I know it. In the presence of the terror, which each day advances nearer, in the presence of his loneliness and heart-wrenching attempt at courage, my whole being is flooded with pity, with a necessity to stand with him at all costs. I promised faithfully to come back and see him again very soon. And when I made that promise, my feelings were completely sincere.

It's fidelity. And what he's really suggesting here this way is that in that moment I'm so moved because the dying friend, I was seeing the dying friend and my love for my friend is thou. And then the thou in me responds in fidelity to the thou. I'll keep coming back. I will stay close. He's calling this a moment of fidelity as an event. Marcel continues. But several days have passed and what I felt on that occasion is just a memory.

I tell myself I ought to go, that he deserves my sympathy, that I ought to feel the same way. Through conscientious self-flagellation, I can even conjure up a kind of abstract facsimile of sympathy I felt, but its unworthy falseness inspires repugnance in me. The question is, am I bound by the promise I made? And if so, why? So I did it. I meant it. A couple days have passed, I no longer feel it.

And therefore, should I be bound to something I said in a feeling that I no longer feel? And if I should be bound, why should I be bound? And then Marcel says, and this is so good because it's like psychotherapy. He's inviting us to relate to how experiential this is. Like he's helping us to see this is how our minds work. He suggests two ways that we might continue to stay faithful to see the friend, but neither one of them is fidelity.

One is I want to see my friend because it would be so insensitive if I would say to the friend, I promise I'll stay close if I feel like it. That doesn't sound very good to your dying friend, so you're going to avoid that one. He also says, I could continue to see the friend to be true to my image of myself as someone who's faithful to his word. But Marcel says this is not fidelity.

This is me being faithful to an image I have of myself in my own eye. And so that's not fidelity either. So if neither one of those is fidelity, we can understand this psychologically. How are we to understand then, fidelity is an access to the death of our very presence woven into and one with the very presence of God woven into us? The trans-subjective communion of fidelity.

This is where he's taking us. Such a view consists with a purity of heart, consists of an ingenuous response of the unsullied demand of the instant. Only thus will I refrain from a betrayal of my true self. Now, there is quite evidently a dialectical refutation with suggest itself here. We can only set up the principle of fidelity in the instant as a summum bonum, as a supreme good insofar as it transcends the instant.

Remember when we were going through T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, and he did a lot about time and about eternity. And here's something that helps me to see this, what we're getting at here poetically. You might say that we live in incremental realizations of infinite generosity, echoing when we were doing Meister Eckhart. If we think of God as generosity, the generosity of the infinite is infinite and we are the generosity of God.

We are the song that God sings. And so there's nothing incremental about it. That infinity is infinitely giving the infinity of itself away as us in our nothingness without God. That's the constancy of the infinite generosity of God. That is the nature of the person, the mystery of the person that we are as the beloved. What's incremental is a degree to which we're conscious of that.

So in the thou moment, the infinite generosity of God that is our very being, the self-donating presence of God presencing itself is our very presence that are nothing without God. The thou moment is where it breaks through into consciousness, like the sun shines through the clouds. And just for a moment, we see the thou nature of ourself in consciousness that's always there as our very being, as our very ontology. That's the moment.

But the moment passes and these moments we were saying, they come in all kinds of ways, lying in the dark, listening to our own breathing, looking up and seeing the face of a friend who comes walking into the room, the pause between two lines of a poem. These happen in endlessly varied ways, these moments, these thou moments. But there is supreme good. When they pass, the moment that transcends time has to be continued in time, and that's fidelity.

I will not break faith with my awakened heart. In the thou moment, I know, I realize the fullness, the oneness without which my life is forever incomplete. And although I no longer feel it, I will be faithful to it because I will not break faith with my awakening heart. That's fidelity as a path. I will be faithful this way. And notice in any kind of committed love, you're not true to the love when you feel like it. It's not capricious like that away at all.

Likewise, any deep call this way to any depth of things, call to solitude, the call to silence, the call to creativity, the call to service, it's not capricious, it's not this way at all. There's like a fidelity, like an inner imperative of your awakening heart to continue to be true to the awakening that has graced your life now moving into what he wants us to see about fidelity. Continues. The question is how do we transcend the instant?

If fidelity is a victory over time, it must not be thought of as an entrenchment in some kind of formal identity, not involved in the temporal flow. Certainly one requirement of fidelity is a unity of the self beyond and across the immediate states of consciousness. It is literally unthinkable that I can be united with another unless I'm united with myself.

We can see this. Now we can see the direction we're headed in. Like this rings true. This rings true to be faithful in this way. Through fidelity, I transcend my becoming and I reach my being, but the being I reach is not a being which is already there. It is only there in as much as I reach it. So it isn't as if there's some ethereal kind of me of fidelity, but rather it is the fidelity of me and my ongoing intention to constantly live in this fidelity.

I'm actualizing it. This is a subtle point, but I think it's important really. Marcel says that in the moment of I choose to be faithful, that fidelity then creates my fidelity to this creates me in my fidelity. But here he is saying something he can't say yet because he's not speaking religiously yet. What he's saying, what we're saying if we look at the mystics and he's implying this, that what begins in time ends in time.

So in one of our previous sessions, we quote somebody said, "We don't understand human nature until we understand why a child on a merry-go-round will wave at its parents every time around and they always wave back. Death and resurrection. Death and resurrection. Death and resurrection." So every time the child swings around again and appears, the appearance is in time and they wave.

But the child's appearance, it begins in time, ends in time, as the child disappears again. And so here's the point, the point where we appear in time, our birth is not our beginning, it's where we appeared. And us appeared in time and we're now in time, as I'm speaking now, I'm in time, as you're listening, you're in time. In death we're all going to disappear as mysteriously as we appeared.

But the point is that the moment we appeared in time is not where we began. Rather, the moment we appeared is God exhaled us out of the eternal depths of God hidden with Christ and God before the origins of the universe. And we were exhaled out of the eternal depths of ourself in God into time. And it's through time then that we're to discover this through fidelity.

That in time we see the eternality of ourselves, we see that in us that it is beginningless, which is also the self that will never die. We're all eternal. But through fidelity we see that in us that will never die, it never ends, a mysteriously ribbon through everything that keeps ending. The fleetingness of this conference I'm giving now, we're well into it, but it's going to end.

We're going to come to the end and ring the bell, it's over, like everything. But what we're bearing witness to in this reflection, we're bearing witness to that which never ends, which is shining through this moment together. And this is the sensitivity Marcel is trying to help us to cultivate here. He said the key to holding us together is presence. Fidelity is not an arid dedication to the preservation of one's title of self-esteem.

Its axis is not the self at all, but another. It is a spontaneous and unimposed presence of an I to a thou. This sheds an indispensable light on self-creation which has been spoken of. The creation of the self actually is accomplished in the emergence of a thou level of reality. I create myself in response to an invocation which can only come from a thou. It is a call to which I answer present and saying, here I create my own self in the presence of a thou.

Fidelity is the act of perpetuation of presence. And here we were saying what we were saying earlier, we would say in the light of the mystics, I don't create myself, but I co-create with God the uncreated mystery of myself and the desire to be faithful. Because we see each other thou unto thou as siblings of the infinite thou, of God, of being, that's giving itself as the thou of us intimately realized.

And he also then says, what we're talking about is an appeal in our heart to exist at the level where fidelity makes unassailable sense. It's like I can't explain it, but I know this is true. And I also know that knowing about this fidelity, if at least I don't try to stay faithful, I will not be who I deep down really am and been called to be. I just know that it's true. I can't explain it, but it's the truth of my very being that Marcel is helping us to put words to and helping us to see and to experience.

He goes on. Fidelity implies an ontological permanence that is a permanence in being, eternity, beginningless and endlessness, but a permanence which exists in time into an unfinished unity which continually needs moments in order to recreate itself as a unity. That is to say, I'm constantly... Say when I'm giving this talk and preparing this, in creating this talk, it gave me an opportunity to experience fidelity.

And when I'm sharing this talk with you, I'm actualizing fidelity this way. In the moment, that's why this moment is sharing, this is a gift to me. And in so far as you're touched or moved by the subtle beauty of what you're listening to, it bears witness of fidelity being awakened in you. It's only because this rings true to your heart. That it bears witness that you're already on this path of which Marcel speaks, creating this fidelity.

There's a philosopher that he was very influenced by, Royce. He says, there only is a person in as much as there is the acceptance as a certain task assigned to us by the absolute. You will know that you are a cell precisely insofar as you intend to accomplish God's will by becoming one. God creates me that I may realize through my life of fidelity who God eternally knows me to be hidden with Christ and God forever this way.

And so I'm actualizing and co-creating through my fidelity, God's fidelity to me. Marcel says, the intelligibility, which is revealed in the realm of existence, which fidelity makes possible, is simply not there for itself, which does not inhabit this realm and which it does not inhabit in thought. And I want to reflect on this. There are words which break the silence, which Martin Heidegger calls chatter, but there are also words that embody silence.

The words I love you. The words are you okay. The cry of the poor, the healing word. And there's also thoughts that distract fidelity as distractions. But there's also the thought that embodies fidelity. And notice we're doing it right now and that's what makes this *lectio divina*. See, notice we're not defining anything. It's not definable. We're not explaining anything.

It's not explainable. But rather, we're speaking in such a way that makes sense to us because it's words that are putting words to the mystery of fidelity, which is the very mystery of myself extended out into the presence of God presencing itself in me each unto each this fidelity. And so we're now in *lectio divina*, and this is the first session that I gave too, is this is secondary reflection. So primary reflection is factual and objective.

Secondary reflection is a reflective state in which we see the inadequacy of primary reflection as being adequate to who we are. So we have to drop down into a reflective attentiveness. And in that reflective attentiveness, we come to the deeper level because we're being immersed in our very presence that's immersed in the very presence of God presencing itself as our very presence.

Like the words of the mystics, like the deep understanding of everything that Jesus says, the Psalms, we're now in a *lectio* stance of thought that embodies and expresses this fidelity. It is now quite evident, Gallagher says, that that what we have all along been calling fidelity to being could just as well be called fidelity to God. An appeal can only issue from a thou and a being as the presence that calls for fidelity can be nothing but personal or supra-personal, and yet the alternative expression was used deliberately.

That is calling it fidelity instead of faith. There seems a good reason to believe that fidelity to a transcendent may precede a well-defined definition of a deity. It is in fact in function of our fidelity that the true notion of God can be sculpted as we shall see. The more our unrationalized response to being takes cognizance of itself, the more perfect becomes our conception of the being that evokes it.

In no case, however, is fidelity tied to a specific dogmatized version of the absolute. Insofar as it remains an adherence to a presence, it always overruns our attempts to delineate its object. For the more effectively I participate in being, the less able I am to know or to say what it is and what I participate. What's that mean? We'll use this as a way to end for today. It's this.

It is perhaps when I think of God, it is perhaps most helpful before I turn to any theological belief system like dispensations of grace, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sufism, whatever, that I first turn to the unrationalized response. That is to say I have to first turn to the awe moment where I'm immersed in a boundaryless presence of myself, immersed in a boundaryless presence of the awe moment that I cannot define. St. John of the Cross says this.

We were looking at St. John of the Cross in earlier sessions. He said, when we're out walking in the mountains, through possessiveness of heart, we think we can maybe own it like real estate. He said, we get a little deeper in our awareness of the mountains, we realize the beloved has passed this way in haste. We get even deeper, he says, my beloved is the mountains, that the world is God's body that is bodying forth the love that's uttering it into being.

John of the Cross says to, have no light to guide you except the one that burns in your heart and is the light that shined forth in the thou moment of fidelity this way. The rains fall from your hands and you're giving yourself over to the substantiality of the awe I that's evoked in the presence of yourself and the presence of God. And it is perhaps the more we're grounded in that, the more authentically we can turn to any belief system.

And by the way, we might say this, this is the essence of fundamentalism. See, fundamentalism is looking for proof texts as though there's certain revelation of a set of facts as an answer that you can flip back and forth and prove things. Where this way we open the scriptures and we see the truths of God not as facts, but as poetic metaphors that are luminous or invitational to see the presence of God shining.

This is why Jesus spoke in parables instead of giving lectures. And notice he always invited us to look at life, always looking at a moment, like Marcel is doing. So how can we learn to be more authentically present to our own presence, realizing it to be immersed in the presence that's giving itself to us an infinite presence as our very... Not just in a momentary moment where it flashes forth, but how can we choose a path?

And this is why later we're going to be looking about how to pray with Gabriel Marcel, how to use him as a lectio of meditation and prayer, how it becomes contemplation. This is our meditation on the fidelity as path, as an habituated state. So with this then, we'll end with a sit. I want you to sit straight. By the way, this decision to enter into this meditative state is fidelity.

This is a moment where fidelity renews itself. And the free choice to give ourselves over to this infinite fidelity to us, it inspires us to be faithful to this. So this very act now embodies it. So I invite you then to sit straight, fold your hands, and bow. We will slowly say the Lord's Prayer together. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come.

Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen. Mary, Mother of Contemplatives, pray for us. St. Francis, pray for us. Julian of Norwich, pray for us. Blessings until next time.

Kirsten Oates:

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