

IMMANUEL SPIRITUALITY IN THE LIGHT OF AN EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY BY GABRIEL MARCEL

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Abstract

Immanuel spirituality, rooted in the belief of "God with us," finds expression in the teachings of Fr. Arul Raj, who emphasizes the divine presence in everyday life. Fr. Arul Raj's spiritual guidance encourages individuals to recognize God's continuous involvement in their daily experiences. This philosophy promotes a deeper connection with the divine and offers spiritual guidance that aligns with the core principles of Immanuel spirituality. Both concepts converge in their emphasis on experiencing the sacred in the ordinary.

Subsequently, Gabriel Marcel, a prominent existentialist philosopher of the 20th century, offered unique insights into human existence, religious faith, and the nature of being. He is deeply concerned about life as it affects the individual in his situation in-the-world. Marcel's uniqueness stems from his attitude to the meaning of life. His whole philosophy can be summed up as the expression of an option: that life can have a positive meaning. This can be appreciated, he asserts, if life is seen in a theocentric perspective which is itself possible only when the "sacral" character of life is recognized. To understand Immanuel spirituality within the framework of Marcel's philosophical ideas, one must delve into the intersections of existentialism, faith, and transcendence.

Key Words: Marcel, Immanuel spirituality, Concrete, Transcendence, Mystery, Human Existence

Introduction:

Immanuel spirituality, rooted in the belief of "God with us," finds expression in the teachings of Fr. Arul Raj, who emphasizes the divine presence in everyday life. Fr. Arul Raj's spiritual guidance encourages individuals to recognize God's continuous involvement in their daily experiences. This philosophy promotes a deeper connection with the divine and offers spiritual guidance that aligns with the core principles of Immanuel spirituality. Both concepts converge in their emphasis on experiencing the sacred in the ordinary.

Gabriel Marcel was a French existentialist philosopher who made significant contributions to Christian existentialism. Immanuel Spirituality is a concept closely associated with Marcel's philosophy. Marcel offered unique insights into human existence, religious faith, and the nature of being. In Marcel's thought, Immanuel Spirituality refers to a form of spirituality that emphasizes the presence of the divine in everyday life and in human relationships. The term "Immanuel" is derived from the name "Emmanuel," which means "God is with us" in Hebrew. Marcel's Immanuel Spirituality underscores the idea that the divine presence can be encountered in the here and now, within the mundane and the ordinary aspects of existence.

Marcel believed that traditional religious experiences and doctrines often failed to capture the real, lived experience of encountering the divine. Instead, he argued for a more personal, relational approach to spirituality. Immanuel Spirituality encourages individuals to seek and experience God's presence through encounters with others, through acts of love, and through a deep appreciation for the mystery and depth of everyday existence. To understand Immanuel spirituality within the framework of Marcel's philosophical ideas, one must investigate into



the intersections of existentialism, importance of relationships, the human need for authenticity, faith, and transcendence.

Gabriel Marcel's Existentialist Philosophy:

Gabriel Marcel's philosophy is deeply rooted in existentialism, a philosophical movement that focuses on individual existence, freedom, and the inherent anxiety and uncertainty of human life. The early death of Marcel's mother and his Red Cross work with the families of deceased soldiers caused him to question the meaning of life and death. Losing his young wife emphasized for him this existentialist predicament. He was preoccupied with the idea of maintaining relationship with those who have been separated from loved ones through death. This led to his inquiry into these existentialist themes in which he explored ideas of loving faithfulness and fidelity. As well, his views on interpersonal relations were deeply influenced by his own family's relationships as he was growing up. Questions of openness and connection, of devotion and love, of fidelity and responsibility toward others grew in him as a result of these early experiences. As well, issues concerning conflict originated for Marcel in these early primary relationships. As an only child, and growing up in a household in which differing temperaments and opinions resulted in strained relationships, pressed him to take a more mature attitude than children at ease in their environment. He came to realize that "life presents radical incompatibilities which cannot be resolved by means of intellectual formulae or conventional attitudes." (Murchland 342). His difficult situation at home, as well as problems he experienced at school, resulted in a sense of anxiety that caused Marcel to seek philosophical and spiritual solutions.

A close friend, François Mauriac, (François Mauriac (1885-1970) was a French Catholic writer and winner of the 1952 Nobel Prize for Literature whose serious, psychological dramas revealed the workings of God in human lives) challenged him into acknowledging that his philosophic views implied a belief in God. Marcel comments that his subsequent conversion to Catholicism in 1929 "did not appear as a break but rather as the accomplishment and almost the conclusion of thoughts that had been developing in me for more than ten years" (Marcel 'The Existential Background, 64, 1963) Marcel relates that he "experienced a kind of peace" saying that "never had I felt freer while having to decide by myself and for myself while being fully aware" (Frederick Copleston 123). He describes his experiences of God as being "more interior than myself" (123) and his conversion as a necessary action following his experience. His commitment was experienced as neither a constraint nor an obligation, but "more like new evidence that I greeted than something I underwent" (124). He observes that "the need for transcendence ... is experienced above all, as a kind of dissatisfaction" (Mystery of Being 142). In this way, Marcel suggests the existence of a religious aspect in human experience.

Immanuel Spirituality and Divine Presence:

Immanuel spirituality, at its core, underscores the belief in the constant presence of God in one's life. The term "Immanuel" itself, originating from the Hebrew Bible, means "God with us." This notion holds that God is not distant or detached but intimately connected with every aspect of human existence. The idea of divine presence in the ordinary and mundane aspects of life resonates strongly with the existentialist concerns that Marcel explored. We need to find Him in our way of life. Our daily activities tend to pull us in different directions. For example, the time we spend with others, with television, with smart phones, the work we are entrusted with and the work we are engaged with, time spent in prayers, sleeping and eating, our service to others and our extracurricular activities pushes us back and forth. However, we try to realize God at all times in all our activities. Immanuel spirituality is our prayer to the Father, to be with Him always. For an Abba experience, Jesus seeks his

relationship with Him (Abba Father) and invites us too for such a relationship with God, the Father. Jesus says, "I and my Father is one, I come from Father and go back to Father." He teaches his disciples how to pray to the Father who is heaven (Lk 11:1-4). He finally on the cross commended his spirit to the Father (Lk 23:46). The Lord's experience of the Father is Immanuel spirituality and He leaves it to us for our spiritual journey. Our Father Founder gives us the same Abba experience lived out of his spiritual journey.

We are called to grow in our close relationship with the Father. It is Christ centered life in which we come in union with the Father. It involves in loving our neighbors, nature and all living creatures. It is a life long journey. It culminates in loving God and in serving the humanity. It has no limitations, no boundaries, nor expectations. It transforms us and the other. It is our potential we are nurtured with to grow to be of help to humanity. Our help to humanity could be by being, Loving, and Generous.

We see a similar strain of thought in the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. His philosophy is a search for the meaning of "being." He approaches to the concept concretely established through his analysis of the human condition "of being-in-the-world," which according to him is man's "specific mode of existence". It is Marcel's concrete approach to being, that forms the basis for his firm foundation for fraternal Society. (Donald, 2) The DMIs are fully conscious of their "being" as individuals and the DMI as a Society of the world. While being in the world, the DMIs reach out to the human individuals by their life and services, moved by the Charism "***Loving God in Serving the Poor to be Fully Human and Fully Alive.***" (DMI Constitution, 3) While the DMIs develop and devote to a loving relationship with God, the same love being shared with the human individuals, gives meaning to their existence as a society and the existence of the poor to be fully alive and fully human.

For Marcel, the "concrete" referred to the lived, everyday experiences of individuals. It is in this realm that Immanuel spirituality finds fertile ground. Marcel's emphasis on the importance of lived experience and relationships can be seen as a precursor to the idea of God's presence in the ordinary. Just as Marcel sought meaning and authenticity in the concrete, Immanuel spirituality suggests that the divine is encountered in the most mundane of experiences.

Loving God and Serving the Poor

What does it mean to love God with one's heart, soul and mind? Is it to be passively present to Him or to be actively engaged in His work? The society is a miracle; it is not the result of the meticulous planning of human brains but the mighty work of God through human collaboration. According to Marcel, love is nothing but the opening up of oneself to the Thou and to the other as the other. Loving God is not restricted to relate to Him as the Thou alone but to see the world and relate to it as God would. The direct manifestation of loving God is through prayer and its natural corollary, loving and serving the poor. As an organization centred on Christ and His work, the DMI has an advantage that secular organizations do not: its core values are shared, congruent and consistent with Christ's teaching.

Article 10 in Chapter II of the Constitutions of the DMI is titled "Being with God" and reads thus, "As Apostles we will ever keep alive the conviction that essentially we are people, called and sent by God... Our every apostolic action proceeds from an intimate contact with God in prayer and in community" (James Collins, 62). While

moments of prayer take the DMI closer to God, mission and apostolate help them take God and His Kingdom values of Love, Peace, Justice, Equality and Dignity to others. Only those who are able to be with Him can ever be sent out by Him with a special mission.

A proper philosophy of God is one that nourishes itself upon the relationship of I-and-Thou or what Marcel terms the invocation of the finite self toward the personal and loving God. Loving God or Being with God does not refer to contemplative moments alone. It is in truth, a way of life, closeness with God reflected in every thought, word and deed. Being with God is not a temporary closeness but an eternal choice. Loving God and Following Him is making an act of faith, taking a leap into the dark holding nothing else but His hand and trusting nothing but His word. Total abandonment of self is the external manifestation of the deep love within. The Absolute 'Thou' is present in the form of fidelity to the call and this fidelity expresses itself in authentic service to humanity.

Marcel's interpretation of religious experience and participation may be understood simply as being-with (Cain, 88). Here, we explicitly recognize and freely accept our bond of being with God, our dignity of being-alone-with-and-toward the personal God. In the human condition, feeling is a way of being-with, of actual conjunction and co-presence, and so are love and faith. But, for Marcel, religious experience is not merely a private encounter between the soul and God; it always and pre-eminently involves being-with others, so that even the act of solitary prayer enables one to participate in corporate communion (Cain, 89). To render and evoke the meanings of religious acts and virtues, Marcel directs our attention to experience "fidelity", "witness", and "promise" (MB Vol 2, 23). On the basis of his analysis of them, he concludes that Sartre and Heidegger have misread the human situation in conceding a relationship of human freedom only to being in some finite and non-personal meaning. These religious modes of human participation open up the human self to the initiative of the divine personal self. For the religious person to remain faithful means to adhere freely to its engagement with God and other persons, to retain these personal bonds under the temporal conditions of distraction and erosion and inquietude (James Collins, 62) To understand religious faith, Marcel suggests that we look first at the ordinary human acts of putting-trust-in or being-faithful-to, of making a promise and bearing witness.

The first step to serve the poor meaningfully is to be with them and to share their lives. This 'being with them' tells them undoubtedly that they are respected and not merely sympathized with in every process of their development. The sharing of their lives reveals to them the fact that they are loved and not merely given something. In brief, serving the poor from an elevated pedestal would be condescending in nature and would invariably keep the poor alienated. Rather 'pitching one's tent' (Jn 1:14) among them, as did Jesus, it would be in a way 'becoming themselves' and naturally it would lead to a closer communion. Loving and serving are more an attitude than a bundle of actions. Charitable acts can be done even without love – for publicity, out of necessity or even as an obligation. "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1Cor 13: 3)

This self-emptying spirit that is found among the DMI sisters is the reason for their readiness to go and be missionaries of love, staying with people even in the most difficult circumstances. The DMI Constitution is loud

and clear: “We will involve ourselves fully and more deeply in people’s problems and stay with them in the process of their upliftment and redemption, inspiring them through the Word of God.”

Loving God has led them to serve the poor and this aim was ‘*born out of need*’ with a clear-cut programme: ‘*to reach the un-reached*’, ‘*to be the voice of the voiceless*’ and to ‘*give them identity*’ and ‘*light up the future*’. DMI service would only cease when the whole universe is drawn towards the Father’s Kingdom. They see ‘*the poor in their many faces*’; and as ‘*prophets of future*’ come out with newer solutions to evolving problems. Just as Loving God is a way of living, serving the poor is also a journey and the process ever keeps evolving but always in the direction of building human lives, making people fully human and fully alive.

Fully Human and Fully Alive

A “fully human” life is one that has all the ingredients that make a human life truly wholesome and meaningful. In *A Unified View of Healing*, Stuart J. Kingma defines health and wholeness as “a dynamic state of well-being of the individual and society, of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social well-being, of being in harmony with each other, with the natural environment and with God” (Maurus J 10). “Being alive” doesn’t just mean biological existence. When one’s “being alive” means nothing to the other, he/she is more dead than alive. Instead, when one’s life means much to others, his or her death is a source of life to others. We are, by definition, social beings and it is in meaningful relationship that we realize ourselves fully. The meaningful way to live is to live and let others live. Human life can be considered only if there is humanness in it. The more a person is human, the more he / she is alive and vice versa. Being Human and Being Alive are the two sides of the same coin. Only the two faces make it legitimate and valuable.

We live in an age in which human beings are known more by their IDs (mail addresses and identity cards) than by their faces. The next door resident is more a stranger than a neighbour. Sartre wrote, “Hell is the other”. Human beings today try to live in happy isolation, totally unbothered, unconcerned and uninterested about other human beings. In the process, one loses one’s own identity.

Marcel treated the relationship between “human dignity” and the “universal” in his preface to *Man against Mass society*. For Marcel, the “universal” is the interrelationship of love and intelligence, not abstractly, but concretely (Man Against Mass Society 10). He claims that the man who has lost the capacity to love cannot participate in the universal or in human dignity, as in his example of the functionalist man and in the character of Raymond before his conversion.⁽¹¹⁾ The universal in man, which is the basis of his dignity, is his capacity to participate in “being” or “mystery”. It is through love and a fidelity to that love that a person begins to perceive the transcendence of being.

The Founder makes a roadmap for the DMIs in the Preface to the Constitutions, “DMIs are apostolic and prophetic missionaries. As prophets; we preach a New World and a New Human species to be born in Jesus. As apostles; we remain a living sign through our loving community. As missionaries; we prepare the people and in particular

the poor towards the New World to immerse in Jesus in whom the poor will be fully alive and fully human.” Through an active spirituality, based on the Word of God, DMI sisters involve fully through their ministries of spiritual enlightenment, holistic health, educative programmes and integrated human development. These ministries will help the human person in their many faces to be fully human and fully alive. The Constitution reads “We will involve ourselves fully and more deeply in people’s problems and stay with them in the process of their upliftment and redemption by inspiring them through the Word of God. We will be the healers of the wounded in society, which suffers and struggles to liberate itself from poverty, ignorance and ill health.”(The Constitution of DMI)

The DMI sisters are concerned about every genuine human need. The Society of DMI invites every one as the member to reach the fullness of life and replicate such fullness in others. It is therefore quite clear that all people in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of true life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more humane manner of life is fostered in earthly society. Marcel’s philosophical ideas are brought into clear focus, that, “human life is always a living of something other than itself (MB 171). Every apostolic society within the Church is guided by this principle, so is the DMI. The sisters of DMI keep themselves in constant dialogue with God in prayer for total human liberation. The urgent and most fundamental need of a fully human life ranges from healthy meal, decent clothing and a modest dwelling to the dignity of non-discrimination.

Transcendence and the Encounter with the Divine:

Transcendence, a central theme in Marcel's philosophy, plays a pivotal role in understanding the connection between his ideas and Immanuel spirituality. Marcel believed that human existence is marked by an inherent desire for transcendence a yearning to surpass the limitations of the material world and connect with something greater.

Immanuel spirituality resonates with this desire for transcendence. It asserts that, through an awareness of God's presence in everyday life, individuals can transcend the ordinary and find profound meaning and purpose of life and our relationship with God and the other human individual. Marcel's exploration of transcendence aligns with Immanuel spirituality's core message, emphasizing, that the divine is not confined to the realm of the abstract or the extraordinary, but is accessible to all in our daily lives. Of all the “concrete approaches” to the ontological mystery, hope is the one which most unambiguously announces its references to transcendence. With fidelity and love, the transcendent implications must be carefully substantiated by hope. The goal of hope is to reach the transcendent. When hope is directed to an absolute Thou, there is no longer any possibility of its being in vain. Of course, without any doubt, as Marcel maintains, “there must exist a possibility of having an experience of the transcendent as such, and unless that possibility exists the world can have no meaning (Dominic 152).

The hopeful men are always orienting himself/herself from the various states of transcendence to the Absolute. There he/she enters into a personal communion with the Transcendent, i.e. the Absolute Thou, through the creative testimony of fidelity and love. Here it is meaningful and appropriate to use the often used Marcellian terminology, i.e. participation. Transcendence is to rise above. Spiritual human beings rise above petty issues of selfishness, pride, ego, etc. Today there is so much disparity because of selfishness. There is a wide gap between the haves and the have-nots. Gandhi said that there is in this world enough for human need; but not for human greed. Jesus multiplied bread from what the people had. One thing is sure: transcendence helps people to rise above selfishness and other human weaknesses that cause so much inequality, disparity and division.

Implications for Spiritual Growth:

The convergence of Marcel's existentialist philosophy and the concept of Immanuel spirituality offers valuable insights into the potential for spiritual growth. It suggests that individuals can find deep spiritual fulfillment in their immediate surroundings and interactions. By recognizing the divine in the ordinary, Marcel's existentialism and Immanuel spirituality encourage a holistic approach to spirituality one that integrates faith and existential authenticity.

In conclusion, Marcel's existentialism, however, differed from that of his contemporaries in a crucial way. While existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre often grappled with the inherent absurdity and meaninglessness of existence, Marcel took a different path. He also believed in the fundamental importance of interpersonal relationships and sought to explore the human condition through an exploration of the "concrete." The Immanuel spirituality aims at spreading the Presence of God in this world beyond caste, colour and creed where God is seen as universal, Father. Striving to find God the Father beyond religions, the DMIs ever cherish and revere the Word of God with the love, obedience, and dignity due to it. They base their spirituality on reading, listening, and meditating upon the Word of God and, above all, living it out collectively as communities. This leads every community become fully dynamic and fully human to each other.

Immanuel spirituality, with its focus on the presence of God in everyday life, aligns with the existentialist philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. Marcel's exploration of the concrete, his emphasis on interpersonal relationships, and his concept of transcendence resonate with the central ideas of Immanuel spirituality. Together, they underscore the idea that the divine is not distant but intimately involved in the fabric of human existence. This perspective offers a unique approach to spirituality, encouraging individuals to find the sacred in the ordinary, and to seek transcendence in their immediate experiences, ultimately enriching their spiritual journey.

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