

Infinitely Dangerous, Infinitely Saviour: Gabriel Marcel's Commentary on Nietzsche's God is Dead Statement

Haluk Doğan

Research Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Manisa Celal Bayar University

Abstract

Gabriel Marcel's writings are intricately intertwined with Nietzsche's philosophy. As one of the most respected representatives of existential thought, Marcel acknowledges the significance of Nietzsche's ideas while recognizing that he grapples with a thinker who is both distant and very close.

Marcel's references to Nietzsche's philosophy are linked with Nietzsche's statement "God is dead." For Marcel, the declaration of the "death of the divine" emerges as a theme that underscores both the magnitude and tragedy of Nietzsche. In this context, Marcel regards the contradictions in Nietzsche's philosophical thought as both dangerous and fruitful.

This study will discuss the influence of Nietzsche on Gabriel Marcel's ideas and Marcel's interpretation of the phrase "God is Dead."

Keywords: Gabriel Marcel, Friedrich Nietzsche, God, Danger, Salvation.

1. Introduction

Marcel's tense relationship with Nietzsche is also related to the environment in which Marcel was raised. In one of his texts, Marcel expresses the truth as follows:

"Given the agnostic environment in which I grew up, it was almost impossible for religious ceremonies and rituals to seem to me anything other than strange remnants of ancient times that had only just survived. Nietzsche's "God is dead" was a phrase I would later come to recognise, but throughout my childhood and even adolescence, everything developed in an environment in which it was as if God really was dead."¹

Nietzsche's thoughts permeate every aspect of Marcel's philosophy. Marcel is in a constant dialogue with Nietzsche. For example, Nietzsche said that emotions are a stage that "only brings disaster, pulling its victim down with the weight of stupidity". Emotions, which Nietzsche called "passions", are often the source of considerable psychic suffering, even despair, in everyday life. Nietzsche's antidote to this sad state of affairs is not to suppress and repress strong emotions, but rather to initiate the process of "spiritualisation of emotion". The "spiritualisation of feeling" is called love, and the "spiritualisation of enmity" is a deep appreciation of the value of enemies. This spiritualisation is a different expression of a return to nature. But this return to nature is not going backwards as Rousseau understood it; it is ascending. To ascend to a high, free, even terrifying nature, and to a naturalness in which magical tasks are and can

¹ Gabriel Marcel. *Music and Philosophy*. (trans. Stephen Maddux and Robert E. Wood), Marquette University Press Milwaukee, Wisconsin: 2003. s.45.

be played like a game.² For Nietzsche, the suggestion of "ascension" is the transcendence of one's own essence and the "re-evaluation of values".³ At this point, the "atheist" Nietzsche and the Christian Marcel are on the same existential ground, for they both emphasise that the great-souled man is a creator, the one who brings things into being. Marcel, sounding like Nietzsche, states: "Can it not be said that creation is always a creation that transcends itself; it is creation on a higher level than itself?"⁴ With this statement, Marcel says that creation is not only an external act, but also means that the individual transcends his/her own potential and creates something at a higher level. The process of creation is the individual's endeavour to produce new and original things by using his/her existing knowledge, skills and experiences. However, this is not only limited to existing knowledge and abilities, but also related to the individual's effort to overcome himself/herself. The act of creation pushes the existing limits of the individual. It develops him/her and brings him/her to a higher potential. Thus, creative people can overcome themselves and produce higher level works and ideas.

Marcel recognises Nietzsche as one of the most respected representatives of existentialist thought. Marcel's enthusiasm peaks with Nietzsche's phrase "God is dead"; this phrase is the motif that holds together all the Nietzsche references interspersed in Marcel's texts. The death of God appears as a theme that emphasises both Nietzsche's greatness and his tragedy at the same time. Marcel wants to replace the idea of "God is dead" with its original meaning: A tragic-existential quality obscured by Nietzsche's imitators. In this interpretation, Marcel pursues a double strategy. On the one hand, he removes the heavy metaphysical meaning of the aphorisms about the death of God attributed to Nietzsche, especially by Heidegger. On the other hand, he tries to prevent a shallow reading that decontextualises the aphorisms and turns them into advertising slogans - here Sartre becomes the target. From these two limited interpretations of the declaration of the death of God, Marcel opens a clean slate. Behind the cry "God is dead" there is the presence of an anxious man who, in his solitude, experiences the real death of God. A man who realises that he has killed God with his own hands is haunted by chills, who will henceforth have to live in a completely different way. But the death of God is not the end. Marcel sees a new beginning at the point where nihilism is overcome and *Übermensch* is born. This beginning contributes to a new spiritual horizon:

"It is clear that a metaphysics of faith can be built on the ruins of humanity, and there is an obvious dialectic here. If it is possible to say that the death of God in the Nietzschean sense is the cause of the human suffering we are now witnessing, it is equally possible to say that God can and must rise from the ashes of man."⁵

Marcel goes to the very depths of Nietzsche's thought, he realises that the way out is really down there, in the most remote regions of being. He is not afraid of the contradiction of Nietzsche's thought; on the contrary, he sees the contradictions of Nietzsche's philosophy as at once infinitely dangerous and infinitely healthy.⁶

² Walter Kaufmann. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books, New York: 1982. p. 486.

³ Paul Marcus. *In Search of the Spiritual*, Karnac Books, London: 2013. s.19-20.

⁴ Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being. Volume I: Reflection and Mystery*. South Bend, St Augustine's Press: 2001, s. 44.

⁵ Gabriel Marcel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*. translated by Emma Craufurd, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago: 1951. p. 156.

⁶ Paolo Scolari. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God*. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 2018. p. 398.

2. Nietzsche as Witness and Seer

"Madman - Didn't you hear about the madman who lit a lantern in the pre-dawn light and ran through the marketplace, shouting, "I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!" Since most of the people there were non-believers in God, his behaviour caused great laughter, and they provoked him. "What, has he lost his way?" asked one. "Has he lost his way like a child?" said another. "Or is he hiding?", "Is he afraid of us?", "Is he on a journey?", "Or has he passed away?" They laughed loudly at each other. "Where is God?" asks the madman, leaping between them and piercing them with his gaze, "and I will tell you this, we killed him - you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do it? Who can drink the sea? Who gave us this sponge to wipe all around you? What did we do on earth when we freed him from the chains of his sun? Where is the earth going now, where are we going? Away from all the suns? Are we not constantly, in vain, thrown backwards, forwards, sideways, in all directions? Is there no top or bottom left? Do we not lose our way in a seemingly infinite nothingness? Do we not hear the breath of empty space? Does the air grow colder and colder? Isn't it getting more and more, more and more night? Is it not necessary to switch on the lanterns before noon? Do we hear anything but the clamour of the gravediggers burying God? Do we smell anything but divine decay - the decay of God? God has decayed. God is dead! God is dead! We are the ones who killed him!"⁷

Marcel's emphasis on the importance of Nietzsche culminates in the phrase "God is dead", which holds together all the Nietzsche references scattered throughout Marcel's texts. In an interview with Pierre Boutang, Marcel states that he "admires Nietzsche and especially Nietzsche's *The Science of Joy*.⁸ The reason for his admiration of *Science of Joy* is the profound expression of the issue of the death of God. In this book, the announcement of God's death is described in the richest and most profound way. According to Marcel, the theme of God's death emphasises Nietzsche's greatness and tragedy more than any other theme. For him, Nietzsche is a tragic witness and contemporary leader of modernity. On the one hand, Nietzsche emerges as a profound thinker with extraordinary analytical ability. On the other hand, he is a "seer" with a keen "power of foresight". There is an ancient *pathos* that pushes him beyond his own time, making him a necessary crossroads for those who wish to address modern thought.⁹ Marcel seriously analyses not only Nietzsche's horizon of contemplation but also his practice of living. Because Nietzsche is a thinker who lives the adventure of life fully, who builds his destiny and character together:

"Whatever we may think of Nietzsche, his fate is always exemplary for us. Why? Because Nietzsche, one might say, lived his adventure to the full, going all the way to madness and death. Who can deny his originality in this sense? This feature, which modern philosophers lack, is admirable. Of course, this is no reason to adopt Nietzsche's theories, but it is at least a serious reason to recognise his eternal greatness."¹⁰

3. Danger and Salvation

Marcel is determined to return the expression "God is dead" to its original meaning. This meaning is a tragic-existential feature that Nietzsche's imitators do not take into account. Marcel sees Nietzsche's announcement as a very powerful weapon against the mentality of the contemporary world. He needs to use Nietzsche's commentary on the death of God to destroy misunderstood ideas. If "the death of God,

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science*. (trans. Levent Özşar), Asa Kitabevi, Bursa: 2003. p. 130

⁸ Gabriel Marcel. *The Mystery of Being II*, translated by G. S. Fraser, Regnery, Chicago: 1960. p. 118.

⁹ Paolo Scolari. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God*. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 2018. p. 399.

¹⁰ Gabriel Marcel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope*. translated by Emma Craufurd, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago: 1951. p.199

which Nietzsche correctly proclaims, is the first-moving God in the Aristotelian tradition", Marcel justifies this obituary: "To summarise my proof, I would say that the first mover God, the God of the Aristotelian-Thomsonian tradition, could be the God whose death Nietzsche rightly proclaims." ¹¹

Marcel sees Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God as close to his own practice of life and faith. Although he is a devout Christian, he positions himself against the traditional understanding of God: "Marcel, as a Christian who converted to Catholicism, believes in the God of this religion, but he sees faith as intertwined not with a particular religion but with a transcendence that transcends the limits of formal determinations. It is clear that not all religions speak of a God who can be described in words, who can be narrated, who establishes the universe in a rational order. On the contrary, he states that God is a transcendence that cannot be compressed into words, rules or reason, but can only be experienced sincerely at every moment in concrete lives." ¹²

The death of God must abolish an obsolete, obsolete, invalid God, no longer able to speak to contemporary man, and replace it with a new idea of human existence. When reading Nietzsche, Marcel feels as if he is thinking along with him. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre Nous. Thinking-of-the-other*, Emmanuel Lévinas captures this relationship very well and says: "Amidst the wreckage of the death of God and the end of the world, Marcel thought of this end, or appealed to this end". The idea of "dissolution" means "at least the beginning", "at least the beginning", which involves a "new wisdom" and a "new reasoning". ¹³ The death of God is not the end. In moving beyond nihilism and beyond Nietzsche's Übermensch, Marcel sees the seed of something new and at the same time a new beginning. Talking to Nietzsche, he realises that he is in communion with the greatest spirit of his age; he realises that Nietzsche is the one who has contributed most to renewing the spiritual horizon. As Nietzsche delves into the deepest depths of thought, he realises that the way out lies at the lowest, most remote points of being. Unafraid of Nietzsche's "contradiction", he states that his thought "bears the mark of a real contradiction and is at once infinitely dangerous and infinitely redemptive". ¹⁴

4. A Hybrid Mixture: Heidegger's Reading of Nietzsche

Gabriel Marcel opposes Martin Heidegger's metaphysical interpretation of the death of God. According to him, Heidegger's reading is undoubtedly an original hermeneutical proposal, but it is a highly abstract reading. It is a reading that does not recognise the tragic-existential burden of Nietzsche's announcement. Marcel points out that Heidegger wants to make Nietzsche a metaphysician by force, and that this aim would lead us away from Nietzsche's thought. In the text "On Nietzsche's 'God is Dead'" (1950), Heidegger follows a double path. On the one hand, he reads the philosophies that came before him as if the whole history of thought should constitute a view of his own philosophy. On the other hand, Marcel says that Heidegger uses Nietzsche to indicate the commonality with his own thought: What Heidegger does is almost inevitably a hybrid mixture between his own philosophy and the philosophy whose meaning he wants to convey. The main motivation is to "fit Nietzsche's metaphysics into the framework of his own

¹¹Gabriel Marcel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi", (trans. Medar Atıcı - Işıl Yüce), in *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları, İzmir: 1997. p. 91.

¹² Medar Atıcı. "Gabriel Marcel'in İnsan Anlayışı", in *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları, İzmir: 1997. p. 65.

¹³ Emmanuel Lévinas, "A New Rationality: On Gabriel Marcel", in: Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre Nous. Thinking-of-the-other* (London/New York 2006), p. 53.

¹⁴Gabriel Marcel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi". (trans. Medar Atıcı - Işıl Yüce). in *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları. İzmir: 1955. p. 80.

personal understanding". But Marcel respects Heidegger's approach. Of course, he does not want to imply that such a grand interpretation is wrong. At the same time, however, he thinks that the impressive metaphysical framework created by Heidegger fails to fully grasp Nietzsche's thought. For Marcel, the primary meaning of the phrase "God is dead" has an impact that cannot be the result of a metaphysical discussion. Heidegger's reading ignores the tragic and truly existential weight of Nietzsche's claim:

"(...) This statement makes it clear that when Nietzsche says "God is dead", he is referring to the Christian God. It is less clear, however, that in Nietzsche's thought both the name God and the God of Christianity are often used to denote the supersensible world. But this is what needs to be considered. God is the name of the realm of ideas, of ideals. Since Plato, or more precisely, since the late Greek and Christian interpretations of Platonic philosophy, this realm of the supersensible has been regarded as the real, original, true world. In contrast to this real world, the sensible world is only this-world, a world that can change, and is therefore only an image, an unreal world."¹⁵

According to Marcel, the assertion that God is dead is not merely a rejection of a "doctrine". To say that "God is dead" means not only the destruction of the supersensible; it means much more than that.¹⁶

5. Simple and Ordinary: Sartre's Reading of Nietzsche

Marcel's criticism of Heidegger parallels his criticism of Jean-Paul Sartre. According to Marcel, Sartre is also misguided and misinterprets the significance of the event of God's death. Sartre leans towards an abstract version of the event, as in Heidegger's work, and at the same time tends towards the direction of a simple theatrical spectacle. Moreover, "God's expression of death in Sartre" does not depend on "tragic consciousness".¹⁷ Marcel's polemic against Sartre is not based on texts in which Sartre talks about the death of God. The cause of the war is further fuelled by a misrepresentation, probably unrecognised by most people other than Marcel. In 1946, as Sartre landed at the Geneva airport, when journalists came to interview him, he declared "God is dead, gentlemen!". This raw statement was enough for Marcel to suspect that Sartre did not know the meaning of God's death. This event, like a wound that never heals, leaves a deep scar on Marcel.

Marcel claims that many people who say "God is dead" do not understand the context in which Nietzsche made this claim famous. Nietzsche's existential claim is not that he announces the death of God; it is a bold claim that makes oneself the perpetrator of God's death. The only people who can rightly recognise the harm caused by God's death are those who recognise their own guilt in the murder. According to Marcel, there are three types of people who face the death of God. The first group are people who, like Sartre, have never believed in God. These atheists have no right to proclaim the death of God, since they lose nothing by God's death. The only moral conclusion they can draw is therefore Sartrean absolute freedom and ultimately meaninglessness. The second group are atheists, theists and agnostics who either do not understand or do not accept their own guilt in God's murder. Such people are easily taken in by materialism and are favourable to the ability of technology to objectify human beings. The last group are theists and atheists who know that God died by his own hand. These atheists have to make sense of their

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger. *Nietzsche'nin Tanrı Öldü Sözü ve Dünya Resimler Çağı*. (trans. Levent Özşar), Asa Kitabevi, Bursa: 2001. p. 17-18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 18.

¹⁷ Gabriel Marcel. "The Transformation of Man into Question". (translated: Medar Atıcı - Işıl Yüce). In *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları. Izmir: 1955. s. 79.

grief: These people, who had hoped or believed that God existed, realise that they have killed God of their own volition. These theists can only create meaning when they recognise the divine blood on their hands. A moral life of transcending suffering, once confronted with evil and the responsibility to choose it, is possible for everyone, whatever their theological beliefs.¹⁸ Marcel states that the moral life is risky. This is because this kind of life requires recognising that we have a stake in the creation of our own suffering, and also that we already have the means to help alleviate the suffering caused by our actions. The risky moral life, according to Marcel, is an indispensable responsibility for believers and a matter of choice for non-believers.¹⁹

Marcel finds the trivialisation and simplification of Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God dangerous. What Marcel refers to as a simplifying and trivialising interpretation is Sartre's interpretation. Marcel's criticism of Sartre's simplification of God's death can be compared to a passage in Nietzsche's work where Zarathustra criticises his animal companions for making his eternal return seem like a simple "Song of the Laterna".²⁰ Sartre interprets Nietzsche's words in a simplistic way; thus, he falsifies the death of God and Nietzsche's philosophy in three ways. First, by sensationalising Nietzsche's words, he turns his philosophy into nonsense. According to Marcel, Sartre is like a Hollywood star who makes bizarre statements, does not pay attention to the content of his words, and at the same time is confident in creating a scandal. Sartre's statement to journalists is nothing but a belittling and insulting of Nietzsche's real idea. Secondly, Sartre's interpretation of the death of God is very abstract. The death of God is misrepresented as a "metaphysical axis". It is a pleasant laterna song of Heidegger or someone else echoing in your ears, but it is existentially weak and unproductive. Finally, Sartre's reading runs the risk of making Nietzsche's philosophy a tool of everyday politics, which can have devastating consequences. To trivialise Nietzsche takes his words out of context and makes them available to a dictator or a politician. These politicians can reconstruct Nietzsche's thought to justify their own "monstrous enterprises". Marcel gives the example of how Nazi ideologues falsified Nietzsche's thought for their own political ambitions.

6. The Death of God and the *Shattered World* as a Newspaper Headline

According to Marcel, Sartre considers the death of God as a dramatic expression and reflection of an inner experience. The cry of the anxious individual explodes in these dramatic words. This cry of despair concerns only this individual and "but no one else can take it upon himself". Furthermore, in the reading of Sartre, Nietzsche's announcement is not experienced subjectively, but objectively, almost like a stage audience. When people no longer manage to effectively ask the question of the self or to reach its ultimate limits, or even to experience the need or meaning for an ultimate question, they begin to live in what Marcel calls a "fragmented world". This fragmentation of the human world grows out of an over-confidence in the power of objective knowledge and an over-respect for everything that can be grasped or obtained.²¹ It brings with it thoughtlessness, a rejection of imagination and a denial of the transcendent. This objective view, devoid of "existential weight", does not put the problem in the right place and leads us away from the truth.²² What fragments and distorts the world is the ontological imperative, silenced by

¹⁸ Jill Graper Hernandez. *Gabriel Marcel's Ethics of Hope*. Continuum International Publishing Group, New York: 2011. p. 28.

¹⁹ Gabriel Marcel. *Problematic Man*. (trans. B. Thompson). Herder and Herder, New York: 1967. p. 107.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Böyle Söyledi Zerdüşt*, (trans. Mustafa Tüzel), İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul: 2016. p. 221.

²¹ Clyde Pax, *An Existential Approach to God: A Study of Gabriel Marcel*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands: 1984, s.80.

²² *Ibid.*. p.67.

an unconscious relativism that refuses to transcend the human being. Marcel's goal is to move towards the Transcendent through lived experience. Action and experience are the essential elements of transcending the human and turning towards the Transcendent. Marcel calls man to action. This call to action and Marcel's message of the "fragmentation of the world" echoes the political awakening demanded by thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben and Frantz Fanon. But while Agamben and Fanon emphasise violence, Marcel argues that every action must be based on active reflection. The role of the philosopher and the artist is to point to the fragmentation and guide us to move beyond it.²³ Marcel expresses the state of the fragmented world as follows:

"Philosophy must reveal the deep but often unexpressed discomfort that man experiences in this technocratic or bureaucratic environment. In this environment, the most profound and important things are not only ignored, they are constantly trampled underfoot."²⁴

Marcel points to the opportunity for transformation on the basis of active reflection and action. Man must not return to power or to the violent brutality of isolation, but must cross the threshold presented by the fragmented world. Marcel does not propose a return to the status quo, but a leap forward through active action.

Against this background, Marcel criticises Sartre: "If we stick to the content, the words are the same, but in fact, the existential context is completely different." In Nietzsche's statement in *The Science of Joy*, "this terrible declaration is a whisper of a secret, uttered by a thinker in fear and trembling". In a square full of people mocking him, the tragedy of this scene is heightened. In contrast, Sartre's statement at the airport is almost like a preface to an interview intended to shock journalists: "God is dead" is devoid of existential content and "reads like one of the banal headlines of an ordinary Parisian newspaper." When the death of God is presented as a mere newspaper report, the declaration "God is dead" carries an inherent ambiguity. In this way, the true meaning of God's death is ignored. In this case, however, much more than a simple piece of information is involved. At first glance, God's death can easily be thought of as a "notification" of an offence. The announcement of the madman in the marketplace can be read like a news item in a newspaper. The death of God can be presented as a concrete event that is reported, like the death of any historical figure. According to Marcel, however, there is much more to Nietzsche's words than the mere transmission of information. The death of God can never be thought of as a fact objectively determined by a historian, for such a view would lose the most authentic meaning of the matter.²⁵ Marcel comments on this in his *Man Against Mass Society*: When the death of God "is announced like a newspaper headline, one can never really understand its deeper meaning." This crippled view not only loses the whole meaning of the issue, but also turns it into a cynical parody.

Marcel reveals that the madman and Sartre develop two different positions on the question of the "death of God". Both utter the same phrase, "Dieu est mort" (God is dead). But between these two statements there is an insurmountable gulf, a real existential difference. The hero of Nietzsche's aphorism does not speak; he sighs, sobs. Sartre's statement is like an advertising slogan. Sartre uses this statement as

²³ Lynn Panting. *Broken World, Fragmented Being: Marcel and the Embodied Aesthetic*. (Master Thesis), Department of Philosophy, Memorial University of Newfoundland, May 2008. pp. 4-5.

²⁴ Gabriel Marcel. *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, translated by Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, Northwest University Press, Evenston: 1973. s. 14.

²⁵ Gabriel Marcel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi". (trans. Medar Atıcı - Işıl Yüce). In *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları. Izmir: 1955. s. 78.

propaganda and aims to "create an emotional impact".²⁶ On the other hand, the madman has no specific goal. He does not say "God is dead" in order to shock the audience, on the contrary, he expresses a pain that he can no longer contain. It is like emptying a chalice that has already begun to overflow. This is how Nietzsche describes the reaction of the marketplace crowd to the madman: They are atheists who do not believe in God and do not understand the deeper meaning of his murder. They turn the proclamation "God is dead" into an attention-grabbing slogan presented to the public (exactly as Sartre did at the airport). Therefore, its existential meaning is lost and it becomes an element of humour. Its tragic character is lost and the crowd in the market square is happy to read it on the front page of the newspaper. Marcel makes a sharp and fundamental criticism of the philosophical figures of his time. The world is full of pseudo-philosophers who try to seduce crowded market squares by imitating Sartre's words: "Gentlemen, I announce to you that God is dead, here we are!" This approach prioritises news and noise over real philosophy. And so, philosophy is lost in the hands of advertising agencies and entrepreneurs. Having betrayed their original profession, intellectuals become the playthings of advertisers and entrepreneurs. In their desire to attract attention, these "cultured people" do not refrain from playing the revolutionary and anti-bourgeois game.²⁷

7. Madman versus Sartre

The final stage of Marcel's commentary on the trivialisation of the death of God is found in the text *The Question of Man* (L'homme problématique) (1955). In this text, he argues that following Sartre's way of thinking ultimately leads to two misinterpretations of the event of God's death. On the one hand, Marcel argues that the human way of recognising oneself as responsible for divine decadence is overlooked; on the other hand, Sartre's thought rejects experience. The death of God does not equate to a simple atheism and at the same time cannot be the ultimate ground on which special certainties can be reconstructed. Marcel and Sartre do not understand the same thing from Nietzsche's 'God is dead'. For Marcel, Nietzsche speaks not only of the death of God, but of a murder whose perpetrator is ourselves. "We have killed God, we are all his murderers," he says, expressing the fear of the loss of the sacred. But Sartre understands in this statement the disappearance of the fear of holiness. Marcel reminds us that with the announcement of this death, the consciousness of the change of the source of values, which have hitherto been accepted as the highest values, also begins. With this announcement, man realises the will to power as the main principle of values. For this reason, Nietzsche states that the death of God can be a starting point for a creative and sacred breakthrough; otherwise, the superhuman would be unthinkable. If the death of God is accepted as the ultimate point, the destination is absolute nihilism. According to Marcel, Nietzsche's intention is to overcome nihilism. If this intention is ignored, there is a danger that Nietzsche will be completely misunderstood.²⁸

According to Marcel, this event is "possible through the act in which God confronts his death and realises that he is somehow responsible for it".²⁹ Disturbed and disorientated, the madman desperately searches

²⁶ Gabriel Marcel. *Man Against Mass Society*. (trans. G. S. Fraser), Henry Regnery Company, Chicago: 1962. pp. 68-69.

²⁷ Paolo Scolari. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God*. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 2018. p. 404.

²⁸ Gabriel Marcel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi". (trans. Medar Atıcı - Işıl Yüce). In *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları. Izmir: 1955. s. 79.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 80.

for God in the market square in broad daylight with a fully lit torch. He is prepared to continue his search, even if in the end he will have to admit that God is dead and to deal with this fact.

Like Sartre, the statement "God is dead, gentlemen" at the Geneva airport is the declaration of a man who aims to reach a destination, but paradoxically tries to skip the journey. This is a man who rejects God, but at the same time loses the realisation that he is an assassin. Sartre's individual is static and has already reached the end of the journey. He does not reject God after a desperate search for him. He always knows where the end point of the journey is, without shortcuts, simply, without travelling. Sartre could easily be among the crowd of atheists in the market square. His position is in the opposite direction to that of the madman. People in this position ridicule those who refuse to travel, but accept atheism as the last port of call and take it upon themselves to search for God.³⁰

Unlike Sartre and the people in the market square, Marcel wants to return to the experience of the journey, and this is already a challenge in itself. If one has experienced the existence of God, there is no need for proof. In fact, this idea of proof is nothing but an insult to the *sacred* for the experiencer.³¹

Consequently, according to Marcel, in Nietzsche's philosophy the event of the death of God is not a goal, not a destination, but a point of departure. This event has a preliminary character: The madman who proclaims the death of God is preparing himself for the coming of the superhuman.³²

8. The Death of God and Tragic Existence

After exploring Heidegger's and Sartre's misunderstanding of Nietzsche, it is significant that Marcel returns to Nietzsche's words to extract the tragic meaning of this event. In *Man Against Mass Society*, Marcel emphasises that man, not God, is the central figure in the event of the death of God. The twilight of every absolute triggers many questions for modern man, questions that he has not even dared to ask before. Moreover, the last remaining certainty is taken from him and surrenders him to a groundless painful existence.

Marcel's reading offers a way of interpreting this event in a new and unique way. It is an existential exegesis of the death of God, not abstract and logical, but concrete and existential.³³ Behind the cry about the death of God there was always first an existence in which God was believed to be "alive, living". The relationship between God and man is not ontological or abstract; it is passionate. At a certain point it is interrupted by a violent divorce and culminates in the death of God.³⁴

In both *Man Against Mass Society* and *Man Becoming a Question*, Marcel portrays Nietzsche "as a philosopher of anxiety".³⁵ He does so because Nietzsche emphasises the central role of the individual playing out the drama of God's death. Through his horrific narratives, he reveals the tragic side of human existence. According to Marcel, "at the centre of Nietzsche's tragedy", if people really accept the death of God, they live in a constant "agony". The suffering human being is the one who experiences the echo of the "Nietzschean cry" of God's death. This suffering is the "experience" that one must personally go through in order to face one's own "loneliness" on this epic journey. It is a concrete sign that can be read on the surface, a tangible sign that confirms that he has touched the strings of his soul. Such existential

³⁰ Paolo Scolari. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God*. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 2018. p. 405.

³¹ Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being II*, (trans. G. S. Fraser), Regnery, Chicago: 1960, p.147.

³² Marcel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi". p. 79.

³³ Gabriel Marcel. *Man Against Mass Society*. (trans. G. S. Fraser), Henry Regnery Company, Chicago: 1962. p. 13.

³⁴ Paolo Scolari. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God*. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 2018. p. 405.

³⁵ Marcel. "The Transformation of Man into Question. p. 79.

suffering goes beyond the form of the announcement. The "declaration" of God's death must be a whisper in the human consciousness, like a strangled scream, "murmuring anxiously". This cry need not be openly uttered or spread through the streets.

The place where the madman goes to the market square to make the proclamation is not the place where his awareness of God's death first appears. The square is only the place where the proclamation is made and misinterpreted. The people in the square do not feel any anxiety. Their faces do not reflect any concern, only apathy. The people in the crowd are laughing about something they have already understood but have not internalised. The men in the market square are sure that God no longer exists, but they still do not realise the tragedy of what has happened. Although they have learnt that they have caused God's death, they have not yet realised how catastrophic this event is.

The peak of this existential anguish is reached when man begins to feel a sense of guilt for what has happened because of him; when he realises his full responsibility for the event of God's death. In fact, according to Marcel, "Nietzsche does not limit himself to saying 'God is dead'." If he had done so, it would have been a declaration made by Plutarch two thousand years ago, not unlike the voice in *De Defectu Oracolorum*, celebrating the twilight of the prophecies, saying "Pan the Great is dead".³⁶ Or it was a repetition of Hegel's statement in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), eighty years before the *Science of Joy*, "What is the religion of the new time based on - feeling: God is dead".³⁷ Marcel, however, believes that the "death of God" in Nietzsche's thought is unique and "utterly tragic". He not only announces that God is dead. There is much more to this madman's statement. According to Marcel, "Nietzsche's statement is infinitely tragic because what is being said is that we have killed God", and this is the reason for the "infinite horror of Nietzsche's statement".

9. Nietzsche's "God is Dead" as a Springboard

Marcel believes that Nietzsche has understood the true purpose of his philosophy. For Marcel, the bloody murder of God is a tragic event, but not an end in itself. It is at once morally reprehensible and liberating; it is bloody, but it heralds a new life and a new horizon. *Übermensch* can only be reached through such a step. In *The Question of Man*, Marcel agrees with Nietzsche that "God is dead" is not the end, but the beginning of a new and exhilarating adventure for humanity: "It is like the starting point of the great leap and the creative breakthrough without which the superhuman, the superhuman existence is unthinkable." With *The Will to Power* of the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche aims to overcome "nihilism". Marcel believes not only that he fully understands Nietzsche, but also that "Nietzsche's deep intention can never be understood if it is not recognised that his overriding aim is the will to overcome nihilism".

According to Marcel, the widespread loss of value in the contemporary world, which Nietzsche, like a prophet, foretells, begins with the collapse of faith in God. When God, who had hitherto been the creator and solid foundation of all values, loses his credibility, human values based on him also crumble to dust. Following this dissolution, Nietzsche not only declares the death of God, but also states that it is a murder.³⁸ The death of God deeply affects Marcel's contemplation of the modern world. It is not only God who dies, but everything that is considered valuable. However, instead of falling into pessimism in the face of disappearing values, man must face this destructive problem and create new values by overcoming

³⁶ Marcel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi". p. 78.

³⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen* (Hamburg 1962), pp. 123-124.

³⁸ Medar Atıcı. "Gabriel Marcel'in İnsan Anlayışı", in *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak*, Etki Yayınları, İzmir: 1997. p. 65.

it. The nihilism resulting from the death of God should not be a final condition, but a stepping stone towards a new anthropology. The realisation of the violent suppression of the sacred heralds man's entry into a new age. This age "can be the beginning of a story that is both different and more sublime. For "with the awareness of the death of God begins the story of a radical reassessment of values previously recognised as the highest".³⁹

The proclamation of the death of God does not represent an absolute destination. It is the expression of man's transition towards a new conception of man. Both Nietzsche and Marcel inform modern man that: "By pushing oneself to the limit of an inner experience, as in the case of the death of God, one can realise that absolute despair can be a springboard for the highest affirmation."⁴⁰

References

1. Atıcı, Medar. "Gabriel Marcel'in İnsan Anlayışı". In *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak* (pp. 63-68). Etki Publications, Izmir: 1997.
2. Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche'nin Tanrı Öldü Sözü ve Dünya Resimler Çağı*. (trans. Levent Özşar), Asa Kitabevi, Bursa: 2001.
3. Hernandez, Jill Graper. *Gabriel Marcel's Ethics of Hope*. Continuum International Publishing Group, New York: 2011.
4. Kaufmann, Walter. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Penguin Books, New York: 1982.
5. Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Entre Nous. Thinking-of-the-other*. London / New York: 2006.
6. Marcel, Gabriel. *Music and Philosophy*. translated by Stephen Maddux and Robert E. Wood, Marquette University Press Milwaukee, Wisconsin: 2003.
7. Marcel, Gabriel. *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, translated by Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick, Northwest University Press, Evenston: 1973.
8. Marcel, Gabriel. *A Path to Peace*, translated by Katharine Rose Hanley, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: 2007.
9. Marcel, Gabriel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*. translated by Emma Craufurd, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago: 1951.
10. Marcel, Gabriel. *The Mystery of Being. Volume I: Reflection and Mystery*. South Bend, St Augustine's Press: 2001.
11. Marcel, Gabriel. *The Mystery of Being II*, translated by G. S. Fraser, Regnery, Chicago: 1960.
12. Marcel, Gabriel. *Problematic Man*, translated by B. Thompson. Herder and Herder, New York: 1967.
13. Marcel, Gabriel. "İnsanın Soruya Dönüşmesi". (L'Homme Problématique). (Der. Nejat Bozkurt). (trans. Medar Atıcı-Işıl Yüce). *Felsefelogos Devlet ve Ahlak* içinde (71-95). Etki Yayınları, İzmir: 1997.
14. Marcel, Gabriel. *Man Against Mass Society*. (trans. G. S. Fraser), Henry Regnery Company, Chicago: 1962.
15. Marcus, Paul. *In Search of the Spiritual*, Karnac Books, London: 2013.
16. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Böyle Söyledi Zerdüşt*, (trans. Mustafa Tüzel), İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul: 2016.
17. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Şen Bilim*. (trans. Levent Özşar), Asa Kitabevi, Bursa: 2003.

³⁹ Marcel. "The Transformation of Man into Question". p. 78.

⁴⁰ Paolo Scolari. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God*. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 2018. p. 409.

18. Panting, Lynn. *Broken World, Fragmented Being: Marcel and the Embodied Aesthetic*. (Master Thesis), Department of Philosophy, Memorial University of Newfoundland: 2008.
19. Pax, Cleyde. *An Existential Approach to God: A Study of Gabriel Marcel*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands: 1984.
20. Scolari, Paolo. *Gabriel Marcel and Nietzsche. Existence and Death of God. Nietzsche-Studien, 47(1), 398-409*. De Gruyter: 2008. (doi:10.1515/nietzstu-2018-0018.)