NIETZSCHE'S IMPULSE TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPT OF GOD THAT TRANSCENDS MODERN ATHEISM AND THEISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGICAL STUDY

A dissertation by

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Presented to the Faculty of Theology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR DIVINITATIS

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

2004

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Preface

I first came into contact with the philosophy of Nietzsche in 1990. Towards the end of the nineteenth century he made the statement: "Gott ist todt [sic]!" These words left an intense impression on me and prompted me to find out how anyone could make such a sweeping statement. I wanted to establish exactly what was meant by these words and as a consequence, my research on Nietzsche began. Having read Nietzsche's work, my interest in the man and his philosophy did not wane, but rather it intensified and so the decision to do a thesis on this subject, was almost inevitable. This therefore, is an attempt to explore and to come to a proper understanding of the famous statement by Nietzsche. It is my belief that, if understood correctly and seen in proper context, Nietzsche has a message for Christians of our time.

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Midrand, Johannesburg

2004

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following people:

- My promoter, professor Johan Buitendag, for his useful comments and ongoing support;

- My co-promoter, professor Conrad Wethmar, for his guidance and assistance;

- Professor Ted Peters, from the Center for Theology and Science in Berkeley, California, for his hospitality, assistance and for our invaluable discussions;

- The Center for Theology and Science at the Graduate Theological Union at the University of California, for their support and for the resources they supplied to me and my wife, during our stay;

- Dr Ted Crouch and the Presbyterian Church for accommodating us in Berkeley for a period of three months in 1999;

- The staff at the libraries of the Catholic University of America and Georgetown University in Washington, DC for allowing me to do research during the fall of 2003, especially professor John Pilch for having organised it;

- My friends who have supported me during all the phases of this undertaking;

- My congregations in Cradock and Midrand for allowing me to write this dissertation;

- The University of Pretoria and the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika* for the financial support;

- My parents and in-laws for their loving support and assistance;

- My loving wife for her support, critical remarks and the overall editing of the thesis. Her faith in me is what made the completion of the thesis possible.

I thank God for the opportunity He gave me to write this dissertation.

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Jonanda, and to our parents.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Nietzsche in his book, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (originally written in 1882) declared: "Gott ist todt [sic]!" (Nietzsche 1973:159). I will argue that Nietzsche thereby did not, *per se,* acknowledge or deny the existence of God. With this statement he was trying to spell out the consequences of modern atheism, for example nihilism. His was a reaction to a certain concept of God, especially the secular idea of God being part of the progress of history. To Nietzsche imagining that history would reveal absolute and total knowledge of God, was unthinkable. He thought it possible that a certain interpretation of the relation between God and history, rationality and morality could lead to modern atheism and theism. Thus, according to my understanding, by stating "God is dead", Nietzsche referred to a certain understanding of God associated with history, rationality and morality. The god of modernism is dead, the god that is related to progress in history, the god that can be known through reason and the god that exists on the grounds of morality, that god is dead, the murderers being those who support modernism and its doctrines. Nietzsche was looking for a concept of God that would be neither atheistic nor theistic.

I will give attention to the phenomenon of modern atheism since this was the very phenomenon Nietzsche tried to avoid in his development of a concept of God. The disappearance of God in the modern age as a result of the belief in the progress of history

was one of the reasons that led to modern atheism. I will analyse and evaluate the phenomenon of modern atheism so that the reader would understand Nietzsche's critique of a concept of God that could lead to modern atheism with nihilism as its direct consequence. I intend to use the insights of Kasper in this regard. Although the emphasis will be on modern atheism, I will also refer to theism, since Nietzsche had a problem with the understanding of God as the first cause of his creation and the one who is bound to the progress of nature and history.

In the twentieth century several theologians have taken up the challenge posed by modern atheism, namely the denial of God and, theism, where God is bound to the laws of nature and history. In this regard, I intend to discuss the views of Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters. They responded to the problem that Nietzsche had with the concept of God, as it was propagated in the modern period (cf Küng 1987:157).

Barth proclaimed a concept of God according to which God cannot be accessed through human reason. He stated the total, otherly difference between God and human beings. According to Barth, it is clear that history, reason or morality cannot prove God's existence. God reveals himself to the human race where and whenever he wishes to do so. He is in agreement with Nietzsche insofar as a wrong perception of God can lead to modern atheism and/or theism.

Moltmann wanted to counter the claims of a concept of God that are atheistic and/or theistic. His answer to both claims is that God knows suffering. He suffered and died on

the cross. He is not a theistic being that is witnessing the suffering of his children from afar. In order to escape the claims of modern atheism, he cautions us not to refer to the history of God, but to the history in God, for it is the history in God that convinces us that he is not responsible for all the calamities in the history of the world. The history in God tells us of the suffering of a Father and a Son who were willing to suffer for the love of others.

Pannenberg agrees with Nietzsche that any concept of God would require explanation. He avoids modern atheism and theism by claiming that God revealed himself indirectly in history. But he does so on his own terms, whenever he wants to. Human beings have no right to link the concept of God to world history. God has his own different history, which lies open to the future. Pannenberg develops a concept of God that is neither atheistic (a God that causes all the suffering in the history of the world) nor theistic (a God that is distant from the human race). This God makes a future possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To Pannenberg any theological enterprise should focus on the truth of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, which revealed an everlasting future to the human race.

Peters says about the concept of God, in agreement with Pannenberg, that it is of vital importance to explain the God concept. According to him, it is the act of explaining the God concept that provides the solution to modern atheism and theism. Any symbol, metaphor or depiction with regard to the concept of God that appears in the Bible or the Confessions of Faith, needs to be explained. Although he reacts to theism, he chooses in

favour of a proleptic theism that is different to modern theism. It is different insofar as God is continually involved in liberating creation out of nothingness and bringing it into the reality of life with the goal of finishing this creative work in the nearby future.

Although the solutions of these four theologians assist us in seeing another picture of God, Nietzsche's problem with the concept of God in relation to history, reason and morality remains central. It is a topic that needs to be addressed. Therefore, although their opinions are central in my discussion, I considered it prudent to bring other theologians and postmodern philosophers into the debate as well. In many respects they can provide new insights with regard to the analysis of the four theologians, as an answer to the problems Nietzsche had with the concept of God. Bultmann, in a totally different manner (from Barth and Moltmann), provides a view on God's relation to history, while Tracy provides a solution of talking about God beyond the dangers of atheism and theism. Van Huyssteen offers another perspective on knowledge about God which is different to the manner in which Nietzsche, Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters approached the matter. I will also focus on the insights of the postmodern philosophers Levinas, Derrida and Foucault, since in my opinion, they responded to Nietzsche's critique of the concept of God in relation to history, rationality and morality. They offer other solutions to the problem Nietzsche encountered with the concept of God in relation to history, reason and morality.

Throughout the study it will be my goal to make the reader aware of the challenge that Nietzsche's philosophy poses to theology. The reader will be able to understand the

nature of Nietzsche's problem with the concept of God as it was portrayed in his time and his quest for a concept of God that transcends modern atheism and theism.

1.2   METHODOLOGY

A literary study, in which the concept of God in the philosophy of Nietzsche will be scrutinised, will be undertaken (cf Vorster 1988; Van der Merwe 1996). Attention will be given to his published works, some articles, commentaries and interpretations of his philosophy by other scholars in books and journals. I will analyse his views on God's relation to history, reason or rationality, and morality.

Since Nietzsche's problem pertained to the concept of God, the scope of the dissertation will be set to include theology. In this regard I will critically compare and evaluate Nietzsche's views on God with those of the theologians Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters. For this purpose I will delve into their published works and articles, as well as covering interpretations by other scholars of their theologies. I will analyse their views on God's relation to history, rationality and morality.

Any material in support of, or material that serves as a critique of the main problem of the dissertation, will be included. For this reason I intend to investigate the phenomenon of modern atheism and works of other philosophers and theologians that might give us an insight into how the problem in respect of Nietzsche's concept of God can either be solved or revealed. I will study several sources on this subject and will search for works

of other philosophers and theologians who reflected on God's relation to history, reason and morality.

My point of departure in this research is that Nietzsche wanted to show the people of his time what the consequences of the death of God were, namely atheism, which ultimately led to nihilism. It is therefore relevant to seek the true meaning of Nietzsche's statement about the death of God. It is important to understand the consequences of this statement. In my view, his philosophy presents an impulse towards the development of a concept of God that transcends modern atheism and theism.

It is however acknowledged that the process of understanding and interpretation will never reach finality. It must always be open and anticipatory (cf Bernstein [1983] 1985:138-139). All understanding is temporal, conditional and bound by a historical dimension. "This is nicely captured by the term 'horizon', introduced by Edmund Husserl and which later was adopted in hermeneutics. All of us live within a horizon, and we perceive and understand within the limits of that horizon" (Allen 1985:272; cf Gadamer 1965:288-290). Hermeneutics therefore aims to join the different horizons of the world of the interpreter and that of the world of the text, which is to be interpreted. It is also known as the hermeneutical circle or the "fusion of horizons" (Allen 1985:272; cf Gadamer [1990] 1999:270-281; Lawn 2003:288-291; see Bernstein [1983] 1985:131-139; Palmer [1969] 1988:87, 88). The horizon of the interpreter consists of a pre-understanding, which influences one to understand the text that is being interpreted. Understanding is only possible when the interpreter moves from his or her horizon

towards a fusion of his or her world with that of the world of the text (cf Gadamer 1965:356-360, 374-375; Allen 1985:273). This can only be accomplished when the text itself is put into question and the interpreter listens to the text anew by allowing it to affect and reshape his or her understanding thereof. It is a constant flux of movement between the horizons of the two worlds, which in the end will move closer to a fusion of horizons (cf Allen 1985:273; Bernstein [1983] 1985:137-139; Gadamer [1990] 1999:270-281). I will allow myself to test my theory and will be open to any new insights that may occur.

Since the philosophy of Nietzsche, and the insights of the theologians Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters are central in my discussion, I provided summaries which can assist the reader in comparing their different views.

I decided to use the Harvard reference technique in my dissertation. For this purpose I made use of the book of Kilian ([1985] 1993) as main source of information.

1.3   OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation has five chapters.

Chapter one consists of the problem statement, the methodology and the outline of the dissertation.

Chapter two is an introductory chapter to familiarise the reader with the problem of modern atheism and the relevance thereof to Nietzsche. I will make use of the insights of Kasper and other theologians and philosophers to come to a better understanding of the phenomenon of modern atheism and, in a lesser degree, theism. Such understanding is important in order to evaluate and comprehend Nietzsche's statement about the death of God.

Chapter three deals in more detail with Nietzsche and his philosophy. I will introduce Nietzsche by providing the reader with a short biography and an overview of his philosophical works.   Nietzsche's philosophy will be analysed by focusing on his reaction:

- to the subject of knowing God, as is reflected in the philosophy of Descartes (rationality);

- against the philosophy of Kant in terms of which the existence of God is explained on the grounds of morality (morality);

- to God's involvement in world history as explained in the philosophy of Hegel (history);

- against Christians who do not practice what they proclaim, as is depicted in the works by Strauss.

In chapter four the different general reactions of the theologians Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters to Nietzsche's philosophy about the death of God, are discussed. By means of introduction the particular choice of these theologians is explained. Each

has in his different way contributed to our understanding of the difficult notion of the God concept beyond the dangers of modern atheism and theism.

Chapter five focuses on Nietzsche's problems with regard to the concept of God in relation to history, reason and morality, as explained in chapter three. The concept of God that Nietzsche is developing, one that is beyond the dangers of modern atheism and theism, is explored by means of a debate between his philosophy, postmodern philosophy and theology, culminating in a better grasp of Nietzsche's concept. While Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters take the centre stage in this debate with Nietzsche, the views of other postmodern philosophers and theologians will also be introduced in this debate. In providing an answer to Nietzsche's quest for a concept of God that goes beyond modern atheism and theism, the views of the theologians Bultmann, Tracy and Van Huyssteen, as well as those of the postmodern philosophers Derrida, Levinas and Foucault are used in support of the views of Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters. Their opinions are reflected in the proposals they suggest as possible answers to Nietzsche's problems with regard to the concept of God and its relation to history, rationality and morality. In the end it will be clear that Nietzsche was looking for a concept of God that would transcend atheism and theism. It is this concept of God that is reflected in the works of the four theologians, Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters. They responded to Nietzsche's impulse towards the development of a concept of God that transcends atheism and theism.

Chapter 2

THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN ATHEISM

2.1   INTRODUCTION

In discussing the challenge of modern atheism, I will largely make use of the insights of the theologian Kasper, especially as expressed in his works *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (1982a) and *Atheismus und Gottes Verborgenheit* (1982b). Kasper, among others, reacted to the atheism of the nineteenth century. His analysis of the phenomenon of modern atheism provides a background to understanding Nietzsche's statement that God is dead. His systematisation of the phenomenon of modern atheism assisted me in coming to terms with the challenge modern atheism poses to theology.

2.2   HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT *GOD*?

All Christian traditions believe in one God and hold the belief that no-one can be saved except by believing that this God, who has revealed himself through the Old and New Testament, is the God who saved humanity from sin and death. Theology is thus a discourse about God or a reflection on God (cf Barth 1947:1-10; McGrath 1996:117; see Berkhof 1990:32-39; [1982] 1991:12-15; Peters 1992:28, 68-78; Kaufman 1996:1-8). Atheism is the rejection of belief in God (see Berkhof 1990:8-10). But the question is: what does the word *God* signify (cf Large 2000:335, 339-345; see Ruprecht 1997:577)? If we do not explicitly say what we mean by the word *God***,** we will not be able to answer any question about the existence or the being of God (Pannenberg 1979:361). It is therefore important that we, before embarking on any theological enterprise, inquire

about the understandings of religions and theological traditions regarding the word *God* (see Levinas 1998:56-57). We must look at the history of the theological enterprises of the past regarding their understanding of the word *God*.

During the early centuries after Christ, the early church had to deal with its understanding of *God*. However, the early church was divided in its understanding of *God*. The controversy started in Alexandria, probably in the year 318 (cf Kannengiesser 1991:2-3, 473-475; Brakke 1995:6; Williams 2002:48; see Rousseau 2002:224). Arius, a prominent presbyter in the Alexandrian church stated that God the Father is the only one in the Trinity without a beginning (Williams 2002:97). Jesus Christ, the Logos, has a beginning, which precludes him from being God (Stead 1998:671, 674-684). God the Father made the Logos. In Arius' view therefore, the Logos was subordinate to God. The Logos must be either God or creature, and since there cannot be two Gods, it follows that the Logos (Jesus) is a creature (Walker et al [1918] 1985:133; cf Stead 2000:25; see Macleod 1996:122-123; Williams 2002:101, 109). Alexander, the pope of Alexandria, decided that Arius was in the wrong (Kannengiesser 1991:393, 398-401). To him the deity of the Logos and his exact likeness to God was important (Williams 2002:156). But it seemed as if these two assumptions contradict each other. How could there be two co-equal Gods and how would it be possible for the Father and the Son to be the same? The other bishops of the church were so confused they rejected both arguments. In order to solve the controversy between the two opinions Constantine, the Roman emperor at that time, summoned all the bishops of the Roman Empire to the city of Nicaea in Asia Minor for the first universal council of the church (Rousseau 2002:225). The council assembled

in May 325. The majority of the bishops came from the East. Only six were Westerners. Arius stated his opinion that the Logos was in being like God, but not wholly God (cf Stead 1998:674-682). Athanasius demonstrated that God the Father and the Son is of one and the same being (cf Kannengiesser 1991:105, 112-113). The council ruled in favour of Athanasius's view and this general opinion of the council is reflected in the text of the Nicene Creed: "We believe in one God….We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God…of one Being with the Father" (World Council of Churches [1991] 1996 = WCC [1991] 1996:11; cf Stead 2000:48; Young 2002:78-79; see Walker et al [1918] 1985:131-134).

Arius and his followers decided not to sign the Nicene Creed and were banned by Constantine (cf Williams 2002:67-71).[1] But the controversy did not end there (cf Lieu & Montserrat 1996:151-152; see Haas 1993:234-235; Barnes [1993] 2001:19-33). It soon became clear that the bishops did not understand the depth of the theological debate between the two opinions. To them it became even more confusing after the Nicene Council. And the debate continued until the year 381 when the Council of Constantinople decided again that God the Father and the Son is of one and the same being (Walker et al [1918] 1985:145). It was during the time of the emperor Theodosius. He summoned a synod to meet in Constantinople. They decided to extend the Nicene Creed to include the deity of the Holy Spirit, who in the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, "proceeds from the Father" (WCC [1991] 1996:12). The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed marked the beginning of the tradition to talk of God as

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[1] Constantine recalled Arius from exile in the winter of 327 (Williams 2002:74-75).

the triune God: one God with three distinct ways of existence. But it also ended a long and difficult controversy, which divided the church (cf Tilliette 2001:296).

Anselm of Canterbury said that God was the "id quo maius cogitari nequit" (the unthinkable) (Anselm *Proslogion* 2:245; cf Peters 1992:212-215; Leahy 2003:47; see Martin 1990:79-85; Miller 1995:25-39; McGrath 1996:130-132; Palmer 2001:4-9; Mansueto 2002:126-127). To Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* 1a.1.7, 1a.2.2-3, 1a.3.1-8) the word *God* denoted the ultimate origin of everything that exists (cf Smart & Haldane 1996:41, 87; Leahy 2003:14-17; see Palmer 2001:50-51; Gossiaux 2003:57-64). God is the infinite end of everything. Luther thought of God in an existential way (cf Berkhof 1990:15). To him it was necessary to state why it is important to believe in God (Luther 1964:92-93; cf Luther, in Pont 1984:13, 17-29, 33-34). According to Peters (1993:13) three understandings of the concept *God* can usually be discerned. He can be Yahweh, the God of Israel; the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and God, the Father of Jesus. Pannenberg (1988b:354) says *God*, according to New Testament usage, means without exception the Father and not the triune God. Nietzsche revealed another concept, one that explains God as having been created by human beings – an idol. Barth ([1922] 1924:19-21) calls this construction of God the "Nicht-Gott". When we talk about *God* today, we assume too easily that we are dealing with a universal concept.

Throughout the course of the history of theology, it has become clear that the concept *God* is shrouded in uncertainty and controversy. Human beings, unlike animals, have the faculty of reason, and therefore they address and question issues and have generally been

questioning the being and the existence of God. Humans can reach beyond and above everything else, which is liberating. However, this ability to address and question everything also makes them miserable and weary. The only solution to their misery lies in their ability to find meaning in their own existence and the existence of reality that exists around them. If we accept that God is not a reality among other realities and that he is a reality that comprehends all other realities on earth, we have to conclude that the reality expressed in the word *God* can provide an answer to the meaning of humankind's own existence and the existence of all other realities (cf Peters, C C 1998:118-119). Indeed, God encompasses and transcends all answers. The *God-question* is not a categorical question, but a question of transcendental nature. God is the question in all questions, which makes it possible for him to be placed in question.

In modern times everything considered to be true about the existence of God, has changed. In the past, religious people thought of God as the only true reality. In modern times, human beings have started to question this assertion. In the twentieth century God has been considered as simply being a reflection of the world, a pure ideological construct. In this sense, Nietzsche's statement about the death of God serves as indicator and analysis of modern culture. It has become an everyday occurrence to refer to the absence or death of God. World War II deepened the suspicion of people with regard to the existence of God, resulting in atheism settling in the hearts of people (cf Neusch 1982:19-20). Ultimately, this type of atheism has become a universal problem and a phenomenon which is summarised by the word secularisation (cf Neusch 1982:24-27).

Secularisation, or in other words, the atheism of the masses, has become an everyday concept. It has become customary for humans to conceive the world in an immanent way, without a trace of a transcendental being that exists outside the realities of this world. Different evaluations of this phenomenon have been offered. Some theologians reacted by means of a counter-Christian programme of restoration, while others reacted by having a new look at secularisation. This signified the beginning of Secularisation theology, with Weber, Troeltsch, Gogarten, Metz and Löwith as its exponents (cf Pannenberg 1988c:9-13; Hefner 1998:151). They followed Hegel's thinking by maintaining that modern secularisation is a consequence of Christianity and the fulfilment of Christianity within this world (cf Kasper 1982a:19; see Lüdemann 1998:96-97). Blumenberg (1988:1-19) offered yet another theory in an attempt to explain the modern age (see Vattimo 1998:17). According to him, the modern age is a reaction to Christianity (Blumenberg 1988:14-15, 20-34). It is humankind's attempt to be autonomous and free (cf Neusch 1982:19-20; Pannenberg 1988c:13-18).

A better explanation for modern secularisation would be to look at the realities of history (cf Neusch 1982:26). Because of the religious wars of the past, it has become important for modern society to put religion in a sphere of its own, as a private matter of the individual. Religion could no longer bind people together. Rather, it divided people and society (cf Pannenberg 1988c:20-21; Trost 1998:206-207). Reality is explained in a rational way. Regardless of whether or not God existed, everything in society carried on in an unaltered way. Another reason for secularisation is to be found in the rise of modern science, which has given new meaning to the order, the nature and the existence

of everything. Religion has become something of an internal affair, which has lost its contact with reality. Pietism has turned religion into a matter of subjective devotion, a religion of the heart. This has led Hegel (1965:281-282) to suspect that religion was seeking for the God it intuitively denied. He sensed that the objectification of everything that exists and the parting of religion into a subjective sphere, could only lead to an unrealistic notion of reality and the emptying of religion. The world has become a place without God; and God as objectless being has become something that did not need the world (see Hegel 1925:148). In the statement "God himself is dead" Hegel found the expression of modern culture and of the general feeling with regard to religion in modern times. The statement "Gott ist todt [sic]!" can thus be regarded as an interpretation of modern culture (cf Pannenberg 1984:10). In two hundred years of critical thought, the statement "God himself is dead" signified the death of the metaphysical God. Even Nietzsche knew that the Christian faith perceives God's death in terms of what he did in Jesus Christ. Jüngel (1988:109) mentioned the name of the romantic poet Jean Paul who first used the sentence (1789) in connection with the death of Christ. According to him, it was the dead Christ himself who proclaimed that there was no God (cf Moltmann 1965:152; Pannenberg 1984:9). Hegel (1959, 16:300-302) showed us that it first appeared in a Lutheran hymn (see Figl 2000:83-84), originally sung on Good Friday. It should however not be assumed that it was written by Luther himself. The phrases "Gott ist todt [sic]!" and "Gott ist gestorben" do not appear anywhere in any of Luther's own published hymns, although the idea of God's death was not alien to Luther. The phrases in question can be found in the Lutheran pastor Johann Rist's *Ein trauriger Grabgesang* (cf Moltmann 1970:139-140; Von der Luft 1984:263-264; see Figl 2000:83). In short,

modern secularisation has different roots. It started as a reaction within Christianity against an absolutist picture of God and in response to human beings wanting to be free from any ties.

Hegel (1959, 16:192-193) identified the Christian concept of God with the metaphysical concept of him in a positive way. Later on Feuerbach and Nietzsche identified the Christian concept with the metaphysical concept of God in a negative way. Hegel (1959, 15:103-114) contemplated God both christologically and metaphysically (cf Brun 1994:276, 284-288; Ward [1997] 1998:xxviii; Tilliette 2001:308-310).[2]   In Hegel's philosophy the statement about the death of God is a metaphysical one, although its Christian origin is also visible (cf Ruprecht 1997:576).   Hegel (1959, 15:299-300) reminded us of the true origin of the sentence "Gott ist todt [sic]!" and of our unfinished theological task (cf Link 1974). He showed us that its original foundation is Christian.

In the history of humanity the word *God* means that God is the ultimate ground of everything that exists. Whenever God disappears as the ground of all reality, the world and everything that exist on earth, become superfluous and without any ground, goal or meaning. Everything then plunges into a hole of nothingness. This state of nothingness is called nihilism in the spirit of Jean Paul, Jacobi, Novalis, Fichte, Von Schelling and Hegel. Nietzsche was the first to challenge the nihilistic consequences of atheism (cf Bayman 2001:183-184). This he did in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) in which the consequences of the death of God are discussed. If the mystery of God disappears, so

does the mystery of humankind. The death of God leads to the death of humankind (cf Lüdemann 1998:107-109; see Roberts 1998:187; Ward [1997] 1998:xxviii). Nihilism that originates from modern atheism is the real sign of the modern age.

2.3   HOW DO WE SPEAK OF GOD?

Speaking of God poses a problem (cf Martin 1990:40-43; Clayton 2000). To speak about God on the grounds of his revelation is problematic "because no answer is intelligible unless people first grasp the question to which it is the answer" (Kasper 1982a:25; cf Kaufman 1996:5-8). On the other hand, to prove God's existence without any pre-understanding and pre-supposition, is not possible either. Had we never heard of God, it would be impossible to prove his existence. Proof of God only convinces those who already believe in him. According to Kasper (1982a:25), in our talking about God we are forced to resort to tradition and to refer to it. His point of departure lies in the history of God-talk. Aristotle (*Met* 2 994a; see Matson 1987:131-136) said that sciences should start with those problems that emerged from previous study. Theology's goal is to give an account of the hope that finds expression in confessing God. Theology is about faith in God that seeks understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). The purpose of theology is to grasp the understanding, the seeking and the questioning, which form part of faith itself. God is an enigma. His being remains a mystery. The goal of theology is to link everything that exists to the mystery of God and to state the importance of the understanding of the mystery of God as a response to the mystery of humanity. It can be carried out by entering into debate with the interpretations that present-day forms of

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[2] Hegel (1965:123-125) focuses on the relationship between God as the infinite and humans as the finite. In his view, it was a necessary development in the life of God to be crucified. God had to suffer and die so

atheism offer as projects of meaning and hope. The conflict about God is also a conflict about humankind, which is an eminently practical problem with a political dimension to it, for it concerns humankind in all its dimensions.

2.4   A DEFINITION OF THEISM AND MODERN ATHEISM

2.4.1   Introduction

According to Peters (1992:125) theism is the phenomenon that describes God's distanced involvement in his creation. Davis (2001:1) adds that theists "hold that God is sovereign over his creation." According to Smart & Haldane (2003:8) deism is a form of theism. Jennings (1985:13-28) is of the opinion that theism started as a reaction against a trinitarian doctrine of God. During the Enlightenment period it was not plausible to speak of God in trinitarian terms. After all the religious wars, people were searching for a universal doctrine of God that would unite the human race. It was a time during which all the opposing religious views, such as the divinity of Christ, were abandoned and a universal doctrine of God was emphasised. The centre of attention was God as the infinite, eternal, personal and supreme being and the moral dignity of humanity (cf Jennings 1985:19; see Geisler 1997:16). The result was a combination of theology and Enlightenment philosophy in theism, "the belief in the existence of a supreme and beneficient Being" (Jennings 1985:19). It led to a certain image of God. In trinitarian language God was considered to be absolute being. Now he has become a personal being, the first cause of his creation and the one who is bound to the progress of nature and history of humankind (cf Kaufman 1972:222; Prevost 1990:152-153). The consequences of this view were teleology, theodicy and dissatisfaction

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that his infinity could become united with the concrete finite life of humankind.

with the moral dignity of humankind, consequences which Nietzsche predicted in his philosophy.

Atheism is the denial of everything that is divine, and in the modern age it has become a prospect to consider (cf Kee 1999:87-88). Atheism, according to Lalande (in Pannenberg 1979:348), occurs when humankind is able to explain everything without God, even ireligion. The Bible deals with the world in worldly terms and with God in godly terms. According to the Bible they are qualitatively distinct in an infinite degree. It would only be possible to deny God in a radical way if he was perceived in a radical way. During the twelfth and thirteenth century Magnus and Aquinas stressed the importance of the autonomy of the world (cf Matson 1987:230-242). To them God was an absolutist deity who acted in an arbitrary manner in the world. Descartes ([1911] 1984:92, 150) rebelled against this concept of God. His much-acclaimed saying: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think therefore I am), was the beginning of subjectivity, which Kant described as a Copernican revolution (cf Kee 1999:43; Leahy 2003:42; see Kant [1899] 1976:19-23; Kern 1982:11; Durfee 2003:194). However, Descartes was not an atheist. He tried to prove the existence of God through the ultimate thought of the human existence, that is to say, because I think, I exist; and because I think of God, God exists. Knowledge of God occurs in the medium of human subjectivity (cf Leahy 2003:19-36). The consequence of such an approach is that God can become a factor in the self-fulfilment of humanity. It must however be noted that Descartes never came to such a conclusion (Kasper 1982a:32).

Atheism has many forms (cf Mansueto 2002:78, 151; see Martin 1990).   Kasper (1982a:33) discusses two basic types, which correspond with two different understandings of autonomy in the modern age, namely that which stems from the autonomy of nature and the secular spheres where God is no longer needed on the one hand, and the autonomy of the subject who rebels against an omnipotent God on the other. Then there are the forms of atheism that protest against the evil and wrong of the world (cf Moltmann ([1972] 1976:205-214). Rahner (1964:461-462) referred to this form as "bekümmerte Atheismus", which encompasses the feeling of being trampled on by a secularised world, the feeling of no longer being able to make the divine real to oneself, the experience of God's silence and the fear of the emptiness and meaninglessness of the world (cf Kasper 1982b:35-37; see Kern 1982:30).   The phenomenon of atheism is a "complex and variegated phenomenon" (Fraser 2002:29). In Pannenberg's (1979:347) dealing with atheism of the modern age, he divides it into three different categories, namely atheism of freedom, atheism as per Feuerbach's critique of religion and atheism of transcendence. Moltmann (1970:18-22) discusses three types of atheism, which he calls "methodologischen und hypothetischen Atheismus der Wissenschaften", "Erfahrungsatheismus" and "humanistische Atheismus". Atheism has become an accurate interpretation of the modern age.   Nietzsche anticipated the consequences of modern atheism, especially nihilism (Heidegger, in Hemming 2002:165).

2.4.2 The autonomy of nature

The rise of modern atheism is the result of the conflict between theology and modern science which dates back to Galilei (cf Drake 1978:137-156; Fischer 1983:91-114; Joubert 1997:21; Sampson 2000:27-46; see Hawking [1993] 1997:63, 74) who invented the telescope and discovered that the sun did not revolve around the earth but that the converse was true. He thereby rejected the ancient biblical geographical picture of the earth. To him the earth was not standing on pillars. It was important for Galilei that natural science should contribute towards understanding and interpreting the biblical notion of creation. This debate continued through the centuries. Darwin ([1859] 1907) with his evolution theory, and De Chardin ([1965] 1970:69-84) with his principles regarding the evolution of organic matter, further challenged the church's ideas. These debates led to the division between natural sciences and theology, the church and modern culture. Talk about God was only taken seriously in modern culture when it could prove itself by the hard standard of scientific understanding of reality.

During the Middle Ages nature and the existence of God were considered to be one reality. Copernicus and Kepler retained humanity as the spiritual centre and the reference point of the universe (cf Allen 1985:158-162). Humans could stay at the centre of the universe through their own effort. Galilei and Newton developed a new scientific method not by formulating laws of nature from nature itself, but through the interaction between hypothesis and experience (cf Allen 1985:163-166). It represented a new mechanistic approach to explain the universe. But, it was also dangerous, because the cosmos was now seen as a gigantic clockwork that functions of its own accord. It became important

to find a synthesis between faith and knowledge. According to Feuerbach (1956:53) Leibniz was one of the scholars who tried to reconcile faith and knowledge. However, new scientific discoveries forced scientists to push God aside. He was only needed to fill in the gaps for which the scientists had no answer (cf Neusch 1982:28). The relationship between God and the world could be explained in terms of deism or in terms of pantheism. Pantheism is the notion that God is in his nature one with the creation or the whole of reality (cf Vesey & Foulkes 1990:214). De Spinoza (1922:2-35) regarded God as the one, absolutely infinite substance, which by a process of immanent causality engenders his own infinite attributes and finite modalities (cf Mansueto 2002:100; see Stumpf [1966] 1988:249-250). These ideas influenced Hölderlin, Von Schelling and Hegel, as well as Schleiermacher. Einstein did not believe in a God who dissolved himself in human activity. According to his understanding God did not interfere in the activities of human beings. Deism is the notion that God created the universe, but left it after its creation to operate according to its own natural laws (cf Kant [1899] 1976:596-598; Clark 2000:4-6; see Vesey & Foulkes 1990:76). Deism sees God only in a transcendental way.[3] It negates any understanding of God in a mystical way. According to this point of view, God is unconcerned with human affairs. The immanence of God in the universe is denied. The consequence of this notion is a dead God, a God that no longer plays an important part in the cosmos (cf Lacroix 1965:23).

"Methodische(r) Atheismus" (Lacroix 1965:21), replaced the doctrinaire atheism of the past, according to which the natural scientist as such can and must methodically distance

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[3] "Kant has given the term a new meaning: for him an enquiry is called transcendental if it concerns the *a priori* preconditions of any experience" (Vesey & Foulkes 1990:284; cf Kant [1899] 1976:98-99).

himself or herself from the question dealing with the existence of God (cf Kasper 1982a:40; Kern 1982:15; see Moltmann 1970:18; Heidegger, in Hemming 2002:46, 76). According to this notion a natural scientist's own method allows him or her to make statements that are restricted to natural sciences and can neither deny, nor positively justify, faith in God. Similarly, neither can a theologian deny or confirm theories in the natural sciences. It is accepted, in a nuanced way, that natural sciences and theology operate on different levels. God and the world cannot be seen on the same level (cf Lacroix 1965:22-23).   Then they become competitors, which mistakes both the absoluteness of God and the freedom of humanity. God cannot be an entity alongside or above the world.

2.4.3   The autonomy of the subject

The debate on human freedom led to the modern humanistic atheism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It started with Descartes who needed God to protect the human ego. Kant (1997:34; cf Wilkerson 1976:153, 158) took it further when he stated that he needed God for humanity's happiness (cf Clark 2000:18). God was no longer important on his own, but for human's sake. Fichte and Von Schelling continued with the idea of human autonomy. In their view God belonged to the moral sphere, to the dimension of freedom. Pascal (1966:168-170, 312-323) paved the way for Hegel when he spoke of the dead Christ. As far as Pascal was concerned Jesus Christ was the mediator in the historic drama between God and the human race (Plaisier 1996:167). Later on the "dead God" signified to Hegel Jesus Christ who died. Hegel expressed the culture of his time with the statement "God himself is dead" referring to the Lutheran hymn (cf Link 1974:11;

Pannenberg 1984:9).   To him God was a living God who had overpowered death (cf Jüngel 1988).   One of the consequences of Hegel's philosophy was atheism, which shaped the modern age.   It was mainly as a result of the interpretations of the leftist Hegelians.

Two thinkers can be regarded as the prophets of the new humanistic atheism, namely Feuerbach and Marx (cf Solomon 1988:86-98).   Feuerbach, a disciple of Hegel, changed theology into anthropology (cf Neusch 1982:33-36).   According to Pannenberg (1979:347) the first trend of atheism can be found in Feuerbach's critique of religion.   In religion humans projects and gives meaning to their own being (cf Saß 1970:230-259; Bayer 1972:260-309; Feuerbach 1981:203-240).   Humankind has a desire to be infinite and projects this desire onto God (cf Neusch 1982:37-39).   Humans strive to be god as an ambition of what they would like to be.   If God must be great, humans must be nothing.   This projection leads to the estrangement of humanity.   A *no* to God is a *yes* to humankind.   If the mystery of theology becomes the mystery of anthropology, then faith in God becomes faith in the human being himself or herself.   The end of religion is based in humanity (cf Feuerbach 1956:81-83).   Anthropology is theology that has become aware of it.   However, the reduction from theology to anthropology does not answer the question theology poses.   It is obvious that according to the theory of Feuerbach, a human being is depicted as an absolute, independent, powerful being.   This understanding of a human being is for Hegel the highest form of godlessness.   However, in the centre of this understanding of a human being according to Feuerbach, lies another form of atheism, namely the atheism of freedom.   This atheism can, according to Pannenberg (1979:353),

be found in Nietzsche's description of the will to power, which is the basis for his metaphysics. Pannenberg (1979:353) is of the opinion that it was Benz who showed the connection between Nietzsche and Feuerbach. According to Benz, the statement about the death of God in *The fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) means that God must be understood as a mythical person in human reason. Nietzsche calls the first human being in his book *Der Wille zur Macht* (1889) a second god, the "Übermensch". To Nietzsche all the gods are dead while the "Übermensch" is alive (cf Nietzsche 1968a:105).

Marx took Feuerbach's humanistic atheism as the basis of his view (cf Allen 1985:241; Ainley 1998:338; Wernick 1998:349). Humanity is responsible for religion. Religion does not make humanity. Humans can create their own world and they can decide in this world what religion is to be followed (cf Neusch 1982:66-70). Marx took religion as a presupposition for a criticism of the world. The criticism of God is turned into the criticism of the earth; the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics; and the criticism of religion into the criticism of law. With this view he goes beyond that of Feuerbach's. Marx criticised the philosophers for interpreting the world and not changing it. Religion is the opium of the oppressed people (cf Kee 1999:87; see Neusch 1982:57-58; Moltmann 1999:210). History must help to establish the truth of this world when the truth of God has vanished (cf Kasper 1982a:224-225; see Moltmann 1999:221). Atheism can only be fulfilled in communism. Humans are also their own redeemers. There is no life after death. Although it may sound very appealing, a human being cannot be his or her own god. There can be no new start, not even with a revolution. Humanity is bound by history and can only find consolation in the fact that God is the Lord of the

living. Humanity can only find hope and peace in this God and not in a projective society.

Nietzsche is the third prophet of modern atheism (cf Foucault 1999:91; Bayman 2001:203-205; Henriksen 2001:162-180). He is the one who was constantly aware of the result of atheism, namely nihilism (cf Gillespie 2000:141; Bayman 2001:183-185).[4] He reacted to the secular belief of history in progress and the belief that God can be derived from this progress in history.[5] He wanted to offer a counter religion to overcome the nihilistic unveiling consequences of the death of God (cf Lampert 1986:24; Fraser 2002:115-116; Durfee 2003:192-193). He reacted to Christianity because he considered it to be an enemy of life (cf Brobjer 2001:148-152).[6] Faith in this dead God is the reason

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[4] Nietzsche was not the first to use the term nihilism. Before Nietzsche it was used as a critique of German idealism. According to Cho (1995:205-233) the usage of the term goes back to Oberheit (1787) and Jenisch (1796). But the usage of the term by Obereit, Jenisch, Schlegel and other French sources, did not have an impact on the philosophical discussion in Germany. It was Jacobi, in his letter to Fichte, who introduced the term to the German philosophical world (cf Gillespie 2000:152). Nietzsche was influenced by the "nigilisty" and "nigilizm" of Russia (cf Cho 1995:220), through Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, Dostoevsky, Chernyshevsky, Bakunin, Herzen and Kropotkin (cf Gillespie 2000:142) and Pascal (cf Voegelin 1996:132, 153). According to Gillespie (2000:153) Nietzsche read the history of nihilism through Schopenhauer. He distinguished between two types of nihilism, namely active and passive nihilism (cf Kee 1999:51-54). To Nietzsche Buddism is a form of passive nihilism. He chose the path of active nihilism, to declare war on the *status quo* of his time's notion of history and moral values. Nihilism to Nietzsche is the "radical uncertainty in a god-forsaken world" or the situation when there is no answer to the question: why? (Ibanez-Noé 2001:13; cf Nietzsche 1970:14-15).

[5] History to Nietzsche did not mean the accumulation of past events but the realm in which decisions take place according to which human existence value and comprehend itself. He understood the history of the modern age as the unity of a twofold event, namely the death of God (nihilism) and the transvaluation of all values through the "Wille zur Macht" (Ibanez-Noé 2001:13).

[6] Esterhuyse (1998:239-261) says that Nietzsche's atheism is a result of his anti-Christian and anti-Semitic feelings. To Nietzsche the origin of the Christian religion is Jewish (cf Maurer 1994:102-103). Both religions made an immense impact on the society, politics and culture of Europe. Nietzsche denied the Christian moral-God. It eventually led him to atheism (cf Esterhuyse 1998:253). However, Murphy (2001:16) cautions against labeling Nietzsche an anti-Semite. I agree with the opinion that Nietzsche's anti-Jewish feelings are generally misinterpreted. Murphy (2001:16) says Nietzsche had a higher regard for the Jews than he had for Christianity. I also wish to add that I do not agree with Esterhuyse labeling Nietzsche an atheist. I think of Nietzsche as a prophet of the consequences of modern atheism, for example nihilism.

for nihilism. The "Übermensch" is the replacement for God. The will to live is the only drive for humanity. Nietzsche finds this in the example of Jesus. He finds in Jesus what he proclaims, a life at one with itself, a claiming back for humans of the attributes wasted on God. Nihilism to him is the belief that truth does not exist, the negation of a metaphysical world and the degeneration of humankind. According to Gillespie (2000:142) Nietzsche distinguished between two types of nihilism, namely complete (active) and incomplete (passive) nihilism. He identifies incomplete nihilism with utilitarianism, materialism and positivism which try to escape from nihilism without facing the dilemma of morals and values that come to the fore in the event of God's death. Complete nihilism on the other hand, is deeply concerned with the death of God and the end of all eternal values and morals. It can function in an active way by seeking to destroy the values and morals which Nietzsche identified with Russian nihilism, or in a passive way by rejecting the values and morals which Nietzsche recognised in the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

2.5   THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN ATHEISM

2.5.1   Introduction

To Pannenberg (1979:359) the transcendence of the hidden God, as a characteristic of modern atheism, has put atheism in question. It manifests in the form of the negation of the traditional concept of God. What the alternative way of thinking of God without this concept or depiction is, remains an open question. "Daβ die 'leere Transzendenz' als Person, als Gott begegnet, das vollzieht sich in der Geschichte der Religionen; und deren

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Wahrheit zu prüfen, bleibt der Untersuchung der besonderen Gestalt der einzelnen Religionen vorbehalten" (Pannenberg 1979:360).

Modern atheism challenged theology to self-examination in order to achieve self-definition and self-criticism (cf Kasper 1982a:48; see Neusch 1982:213-216). It is however important to note that atheism never stated the non-existence of God (Kasper 1982b:32-33). It negates a specific concept of God who oppresses and negates humanity and life. The question behind atheism is whether we can speak of God in human terms of being and existence or whether we can only allocate predicates based on action. Classical theology attributed God's action to his being, namely because God loves me, he is love. Modern philosophy reacted strongly to this approach. Philosophers such as Fichte and Feuerbach said that it is a narrowing of the being of God in the sense that he is reduced to human attributes, which exist in space and time so that he becomes an objectified finite being (cf Allen 1985:240). Fichte applies the divine attributes to the moral order, while De Spinoza applies them to nature, Feuerbach to humanity and Marx to society. Later on Fichte and Von Schelling wanted to avoid these atheistic consequences by avoiding reference to God as a substance, and to refer to him as a subject in a horizon of freedom (Kasper 1982b:37; cf Neusch 1982; Solomon 1988:94-98).   Modern philosophy ultimately confronts us with the problem of whether and how the question of being, or the question pertaining to the meaning of being, can be asked anew within the modern philosophy of subjectivity.

In the face of these challenges, theologians responded in one of two ways – either by preserving the *status quo* through the defense of their own position against the challenges of modern atheism, or by stimulating dialogue between theology and the challenges modern atheism poses.

2.5.2   Preserving the *status quo*

Modern atheism, in particular atheism of the masses which, for all intents and purposes deny God, has challenged the position of theology. Theology finds itself in a difficult position as far as its appealing to the people is concerned. Presuppositions for talking about God such as general symbols, images, concepts and categories, have faded. People do not have these presuppositions any more. It has put theology in a crisis (cf Kasper 1982b:33). Theology has reacted with an apologetic approach: negatively by rejecting the adversaries' arguments as non-provable and positively by showing that faith in God is reasonable. This approach is motivated in the Bible. According to Psalms 14:1 and 10:4 only fools would say: "There is no God". The wisdom literature emphatically states that all who lack knowledge of God are foolish (Pr 1:7). The New Testament also agrees with this statement. In Ephesians 2:12 mention is made of the ἄθεοι although not in the sense of modern atheism. In this regard it speaks of pagans who worship idols. In the Bible atheism can be defined as godlessness and idolatry, that is to say every deed that do not accept God as the one and only God (Kasper 1982a:33-34). According to the Bible everyone who has faith in God is saved. The Bible considers atheism as a moral failure and as a demonic attack on God. It must however be clear that the atheism or godlessness in the Bible is not the same as the phenomenon we call modern atheism.

2.5.3   Dialogue between theology and the challenges of modern atheism

Since the fourth century and throughout the Catholic and early Protestant periods of the church, atheism was initially ignored in doctrinal statements. It was only later in Vatican I that atheism was refuted on the basis of the destruction of the foundations of human society and as a contradiction of reason. Only in 1964 the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* of Paul VI paved the way for dialogue between theology and atheism (cf Abbot 1966:xv-xxi, 217-220; Flannery 1966:7-20; Kasper 1982b:34-35). Vatican II admitted to the seriousness of atheism, and that it deserved a more thorough treatment. With this attitude the Roman Catholic Church paved the way for dialogue (cf Abbot 1966:219). The Church agreed to handle the matter existentially in three ways. They tried to offer a definition of the problem while acknowledging the fact that there were different forms of the phenomenon of atheism. At the same time the Church also made an attempt to do justice to the positive aspects of atheism, such as the freedom of humanity, justice in society and a protest against evil in the world. Secondly, the Church used the above-mentioned positive elements of atheism as pointers for self-critique. Thirdly, the Church admitted that natural knowledge of God gained by reason could be supplemented by knowledge gained by human experience. However, the latter is rather unsatisfactory in the sense that it does not rhyme with the traditional teaching with regard to the possibility of a natural knowledge of God.

Rahner (1966:293; 1984:132-134; cf Kasper 1982b:35-36) is the one theologian in post-conciliar Catholic theology whose thinking made it possible for theology to enter into a dialogue with modern atheism. This he achieved by incorporating anthropology into the

realm of theology. To Rahner (1966:293) every human being has the pre-apprehension of the reality of the existence of God (cf Peters, C C 1998:116). In every spiritual act humans experience the necessity of the transcendental reality of God, even in the act of denying God. Rahner (in Pekarske 2002:265-266) developed a thesis outlining four possibilities to deal with atheism, namely that:

- humans can interpret their transcendental relatedness as theism and accept it ("true theism");

- humans can interpret their transcendental relatedness as theism and deny God with a free decision ("culpable atheism");

- humans can accept their transcendental relatedness and interpret it with the aid of an erroneous concept of God which can be rejected ("innocent atheism");

- humans can deny their transcendental relatedness and deny all the concepts of God ("culpable transcendental atheism").

Rahner's theory makes it possible to reflect on the inherent possibilities of the phenomenon of atheism in theological terms without denying, rejecting, or ignoring atheism as absurd or alien. It opens the way for dialogue since dialogue, by its nature, presupposes a common basis. However, this theory has its limitations. The question that arises concerns the presupposition this theory makes, namely the acceptance of the reality of God. Is it appropriate to still speak of atheism in the true sense of the word or are we merely dealing with a veiled theism? In Rahner's theory it is inevitable for every human being to acknowledge the reality or the existence of a transcendental being. The only thing that can be contemplated is the nature of this transcendental being. Is it an idol or

God? This theory has merit insofar as it deals with the positive elements in atheism. It makes dialogue possible. The negative side of this theory is that it admits to the transcendence of God, but restricts people to silently accept the transcendence as a mystery.

Heidegger (1960:15-28) moved beyond modern subjectivism and traditional metaphysics. It was important to him to state the ontological difference between being and the meaning of being itself. He did not have a problem with God's being as such but with the concept of God as the basis for what is (cf Heidegger 1983:8-9). This deprives God of his existence. God is a hidden reality.

Political theology and the questions it raises in the form of Liberation theology challenge modern atheism which does not deal with faith as such, but with the practices thereof. These theologies see modern atheism as a practical and political problem that can be solved through a new practice (cf Moltmann 1999).

2.5.4   A dialectical relationship between theology and modern atheism

Initially, there was no controversy between the Roman Catholic Church and churches of the Reformation about Natural theology. It was only in the twentieth century when the Protestant theologian Barth raised serious questions about Natural theology, that it became an issue. He made it *the* subject of much controversy (Kasper 1982b:37; Neusch 1982:219-221; Clark 2000:3). Barth stated the difference between God and humans. God is totally different than humans. Humans cannot know God and can claim nothing

from God. In Natural theology nature, history, reason and humanity's natural religiosity become the situation for and principle of faith, while Christianity becomes a particular instance of a phenomenon that is neutral in itself and is universally found in human beings. Barth saw in religion something of a human effort to take control over God and to form God after people's image and likeness (Kasper 1982b:37; cf Clark 2000:16, 137). Revelation from God is a different matter altogether. It comes solely from God. A human being is a subject of faith. Without God no faith will be possible (cf Barth 1947:258).

The debate started to go beyond theism and atheism. "Sie laufen alle auf den Versuch hinaus, eine Position jenseits von Theismus und Atheismus zu begründen und mit der Zurückweisung des Theismus auch die legitimen Anliegen des Atheismus aufzugreifen" (Kasper 1982b:38). It is in view of this that the statement of Nietzsche's is to be understood as an impulse towards the development of a concept of God that transcends atheism and theism. After Nietzsche, the statement "Gott ist todt [sic]!" (the origin of which can be traced back to the old Lutheran hymn) was re-entered into theology. Bonhoeffer (1977:394-396) saw in the cross of Jesus Christ the god-forsakenness of the world (cf Ford 2003:362-363, 371; see Kelly & Nelson 2003:138). God allowed himself in Jesus Christ to be helpless and weak in the world. In our situations of hopelessness God abides and helps us. According to Bonhoeffer atheism helped him to understand the biblical picture of a God who rules the world through his weakness. He took the theology of the cross as the starting point for his answer to modern atheism.

The statement on the death of God has different meanings such as the death of God in secularised culture (Vahanian); in language (Van Buren); in the silence of God (Hamilton); and in the death of God in Jesus Christ on the scene of world history (Altizer) (cf Altizer 1993; see Pannenberg 1984:16; Miller & Grenz 1998:79-86). But all these theologies have simply capitulated to modern atheism. They do not contribute to the dialogue between atheism and theology. Moltmann was the first to offer a counter statement to modern atheism. His argument (as Bonhoeffer's) starts with the cross of Christ, which he considered to be the foundation and criteria of Christian theology. To Moltmann it is clear that in the cross God anticipated atheism and conquered it. When the cross provides the point of departure, atheism becomes integrated in the reality of God and is both neglected and transcended at the same time. In this way, God is no longer a creature from outer space, but a being who suffers with his creation.

In the light of modern atheism, faith and theology have no choice but to again question at a primary level their own presuppositions as well as the conditions for their own possibility. It appears as if the questions pertaining to the relations between faith and thought, theology and philosophy, Natural theology and theology based on revelation, need to be looked at. In the case of Nietzsche's prophecy, the relation between God's revelation and world history needs to be explained for it was one of the problems Nietzsche experienced with the concept of God, as propagated in the modern age.

2.6   HOW CAN GOD BE KNOWN AND EXPERIENCED?

2.6.1   Natural theology, a possibility?

Basic presuppositions are required to understand faith. We therefore need to go back to the basic presuppositions of our faith and reflect thereon (cf Jüngel 1999). Reflecting on the basic presuppositions for the understanding of faith can be called Natural theology (cf Barth 1947:200; Kasper 1982a:92). Although we do not find any reflection on the presuppositions for the understanding of faith in the Bible, we do find several references to the presuppositions of faith (Kasper 1982a:92-93). The presuppositions of faith have been questioned in the modern age. It came about as a reaction to rationalism on the one hand, and on the other, as a result of the devaluation of reason, which has led to the claim that God is only reachable by faith and by way of tradition. This line was further pursued by thinkers such as Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Marx who destroyed the optimistic view of the Enlightenment rationalism in terms of which humans are able to know God through their own powers (cf Neusch 1982:7). Knowledge of God is only a projection of humanity. Barth (1947:134) continued with this criticism by calling Natural theology a product of idols, and by describing it as a maneuver of humanity to take power over God.

Pannenberg does not agree with Barth with regard to the issues of Natural theology (cf Müller & Pannenberg 1970:34-72). His critique against Barth is that he does not move beyond the empty assertion of God and that God himself becomes an example of modern subjectivity (cf Kasper 1982b:38). To him Dialectical theology makes of atheism a natural presupposition of faith, which turns it into Natural theology. Barth agrees with Luther that knowledge of God is only possible through faith (cf Kasper 1982b:39; Clark

2000:137). But according to Feuerbach (1956:105-106) this position of Luther's makes him vulnerable to the temptation of atheism, especially when Luther concludes that God is in your heart (cf Glasse 1975:28-35). According to Feuerbach (1956:51-52) your heart can become your god!

Atheism has become a form of Natural theology, but this does not mean to say that it meant the end of Natural theology in Protestant theology. Reflections on the intellectual presuppositions of the Christian faith continue in the work of theologians such as the later Barth, Pannenberg, Ebeling and Jüngel.

2.6.2   How do we experience God?

Humans pre-apprehend the absolute mystery of a perfect freedom. They are the beings who live in the existence of an infinite mystery, who wait and hope for the free self-revelation of this mystery (cf Jüngel 1978). Humans seek for signs and words in which this mystery will reveal itself to them (cf Peters, C C 1998:121). Analogy helps humans to formulate language when this mystery (God) discloses itself to them. Through the language of analogy humankind can express this self-disclosure of God.   Kasper (1982a:132) is of the opinion that we must consider the proofs for the existence of God as invitations to have faith in God. Different arguments are used to prove the existence of God, for example the "cosmological" (Palmer 2001:48-90), "anthropological" (Palmer 2001:285-343), "ontological" (Palmer 2001:1-30), "the argument from miracles" (Palmer 2001:170-224), "the moral argument" (Palmer 2001:227-282) and "the argument from

the philosophy of history", which Palmer (2001:92-166) calls "the argument from design", and to which Nietzsche reacted to (cf Kant [1899] 1976:566-583).

As far as Kasper (1982a:149-150) is concerned, it is only faith that opens the unending reality of God to human beings. Faith allows the human race to see a bigger picture beyond everything that is finite in this world. It liberates human beings from all the oppressiveness and sorrows of this world. In faith humans can share in the new world to come, an infinite world without pain and sorrow. Faith helps human beings to perceive their history as open-ended. It can do justice to the very reality of humankind, in its greatness and in its misery (Kasper 1982a:149).

Faith involves the whole person. "Deshalb ist der Gottesglaube weder ein rein intellektueller Fürwahrhalte-Glaube, noch ein rein willentlicher Entscheidungsglaube, noch bloβe Sache des Gefühls. Er ist ein Akt des ganzen Menschen, ein Akt, durch den es erst zur vollen Menschwerdung des Menschen kommt" (Kasper 1982a:150). It is this faith that helps human beings to live a meaningful life in relation to the mysterious reality of God.

Kasper (1982a:150) urges us to see every argument that sets out to prove the existence of God as a challenge to have faith in God. It is in this respect that we should hear the voice of Nietzsche. He showed us the nihilistic consequences of the death of God, a world without faith. His philosophy must be seen as a challenge to atheism and theism.

Chapter 3

FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE AND HIS STATEMENT:

"GOTT IST TODT [sic]!"

3.1   NIETZSCHE AS THE PROPHET OF NIHILISM

In his book, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* originally written in 1882, Nietzsche narrates the following story (a story that I must cite at length to understand its context):

Habt ihr nicht von jenem tollen Menschen gehört, der am hellen Vormittage eine Laterne anzündete, auf den Markt lief und unaufhörlich schrie: "Ich suche Gott! Ich suche Gott!" – Da dort gerade Viele von Denen [sic] zusammen standen [sic], welche nicht an Gott glaubten, so erregte er ein grosses [sic] Gelächter. Ist er denn verloren gegangen? sagte der Eine [sic]. Hat er sich verlaufen wie ein Kind? sagte der Andere [sic]. Oder hält er sich versteckt? Fürchtet er sich vor uns? Ist er zu Schiff gegangen? Ausgewandert? [sic] – so schrieen [sic] und lachten sie durcheinander. Der tolle Mensch sprang mitten unter sie und durchbohrte sie mit seinen Blicken. "Wohin ist Gott? rief er, ich will es euch sagen! Wir haben ihn getödtet [sic], – ihr und ich! Wir Alle [sic] sind seine Mörder! Aber wie haben wir diess [sic] gemacht? Wie vermochten wir das Meer auszutrinken? Wer gab uns den Schwamm, um den ganzen Horizont wegzuwischen? Was thaten [sic] wir, als wir diese Erde von ihrer Sonne losketteten?

Wohin bewegt sie sich nun? Wohin bewegen wir uns? Fort von allen Sonnen? Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach allen Seiten? Giebt [sic] es noch ein Oben und ein Unten? Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts? Haucht uns nicht der leere Raum an? Ist es nicht kälter geworden? Kommt nicht immerfort die Nacht und mehr Nacht? Müssen nicht Lanternen am Vormittage angezündet werden? Hören wir noch Nichts von dem Lärm der Todtengräber [sic], welche Gott begraben? Riechen wir noch Nichts von der göttlichen Verwesung? – auch Götter verwesen! Gott ist todt [sic]! Gott bleibt todt [sic]! Und wir haben ihn getödtet [sic]! Wie trösten wir uns, die Mörder aller Mörder? Das Heiligste und Mächtigste, was die Welt bisher besass [sic], es ist unter unseren Messern verblutet, – wer wischt diess [sic] Blut von uns ab? Mit welchem Wasser könnten wir uns reinigen? Welche Sühnfeiern [sic], welche heiligen Spiele werden wir erfinden müssen? Ist nicht die Grösse dieser That [sic] zu gross [sic] für uns? Müssen wir nicht selber zu Göttern werden, um nur ihrer würdig zu erscheinen? Es gab nie eine grössere [sic] That [sic], – und wer nur immer nach uns geboren wird, gehört um dieser That [sic] willen in eine höhere Geschichte, als alle Geschichte bisher war!" – Hier schwieg der tolle Mensch und sah wieder seine Zuhörer an: auch sie schwiegen und blickten befremdet auf ihn. Endlich warf er seine Lanterne auf den Boden, dass [sic] sie in Stücke sprang und erlosch. "Ich komme zu

früh, sagte er dann, ich bin noch nicht an der Zeit. Diess [sic] ungeheure Ereigniss [sic] ist noch unterwegs und wandert, – es ist noch nicht bis zu den Ohren der Menschen gedrungen. Blitz und Donner brauchen Zeit, das Licht der Gestirne braucht Zeit, Thaten [sic] brauchen Zeit, auch nachdem sie gethan [sic] sind, um gesehen und gehört zu werden. Diese That [sic] ist ihnen immer noch ferner, als die fernsten Gestirne, – und doch haben sie dieselbe gethan [sic]!" – Man erzählt noch, dass [sic] der tolle Mensch des selbigen [sic] Tages in verschiedene Kirchen eingedrungen sei und darin sein Requiem aeternam deo angestimmt habe. Hinausgeführt und zur Rede gesetzt, habe er immer nur diess entgegnet: "Was sind denn diese Kirchen noch, wenn sie nicht die Grüfte und Grabmäler Gottes sind?"

(Nietzsche 1973:159)

One cannot help but wonder what exactly Nietzsche meant with his statement: "Gott ist todt [sic]! Gott bleibt todt [sic]! Und wir haben ihn getödtet [sic]!" What was he trying to say? Over the years, there has been a great deal of speculation regarding Nietzsche's statement and the meaning thereof. Reading Nietzsche one cannot help but think that he went to his grave with a secret (cf Porter 2000:i). Bergoffen (1983:35) admits: "This is not to suggest, however, that distance has rendered Nietzsche's thought clear to us; it has not; for though we are closer to understanding Nietzsche, we are still quite far from comprehending him."

When we study the writings of Nietzsche, it becomes clear that he most probably intended for his philosophical heritage never to be fully comprehensible and understandable as historical facts. As a philologian he deemed it important that his words should be interpreted as often as they were read. In this regard Schrift (1995:126) makes the following remarks:

> Over a century ago, Nietzsche noted the posthumous character of his work, predicting that a century hence, he would find his rightful heirs, the "philosophers of the future" to whom his works were addressed. To be the sort of reader Nietzsche himself sought, we must recall, means not to receive his words as truths or to follow him as a disciple, two situations he openly tried to forestall. Instead of an aesthetics of reception, Nietzsche's works call for a performative hermeneutics.

Nietzsche distanced himself from his own writings. In *Ecce Homo* (1888) he states that his person as an ordinary philosopher differs from his philosophical insights and works. "Aber es wäre ein vollkommner Widerspruch zu mir, wenn ich heute bereits Ohren und Hände für meine Wahrheiten erwartete: dass [sic] man heute nicht hört, dass [sic] man heute nicht von mir zu nehmen weiss, ist nicht nur begreiflich, es scheint mir selbst das Rechte. Ich will nicht verwechselt werden, – dazu gehört, dass [sic] ich mich selber nicht verwechsele" (Nietzsche 1969b:296).

No wonder Nietzsche's statements can be interpreted in so many ways! It is widely known that several different interpretations, with varying nuances of Nietzsche's philosophical heritage abound (cf Klein 1997:33-39). In our time it is the interpretations of Heidegger and Derrida that shaped the minds of philosophers. However, it is important to stress that the followers of Heidegger and Derrida have their own way of expressing and understanding the master models. Fraser (2002:14) notes that many influential theologians, such as Jüngel, read Nietzsche through the lenses of Heidegger's understanding. The issue of whether or not Fraser is right in his analysis of Jüngel's interpretation of Nietzsche, falls beyond the scope of this paper.

I agree with Schrift (1991) that Heidegger and Derrida interpret Nietzsche's sayings in a totally different manner than Nietzsche originally meant them to be interpreted (cf Vallega 2001:61, note 15). It seems as if Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's philosophy as being centred on the aspect of metaphysics and that the themes of his philosophy, such as the "Übermensch", nihilism, the "Wille zur Macht" and the "Umwertung aller Werte", need to be interpreted and understood in a metaphysical way (cf Heidegger 1950:200, 231-232; 1983:20, 42, 135, 212; 1990:5-9; 1996:2, 22, 64-65, 402-405, 417-423, 429-432; Stegmaier 1985:173; see Von der Luft 1984:272-276; Heidegger 1997:24-25, 45; 1999:44-47; Schmidt 2001:37; Hemming 2002:166; 170-177; 220-234). I agree with Schrift (1991:19) that Heidegger is wrong in his assumption that Nietzsche is *only* a metaphysical thinker.

Derrida (1979) reads the texts of Nietzsche in a deconstructive way (cf Michelfelder & Palmer 1989). He doesn't pretend to overcome the metaphysical, but rather attempts to get past the borders between the metaphysical in the present tradition and the tradition from the outside. When reading the texts of Derrida, it becomes clear that he uses the same themes that Nietzsche does and follows Nietzsche's criticism in his philosophy (cf Schrift 1995:9).

Both of these interpretation models pose some hermeneutical problems. On the one hand it seems as if the interpretation of Heidegger assertively goes beyond the meaning of the Nietzschean text, impounding Nietzsche's thought as being a discourse on ontology – the meaning and truth of being. On the other hand the deconstructive reading of Derrida can underscore the Nietzschean text. It seems that "more traditional interpreters…exhibit a relativistic tendency toward 'underdetermining' the same text, thereby walking that fine line between use and abuse, and making problematic any judgement as to the lack of fitness of certain interpretations" (Schrift 1991:119).

I agree with the solution Schrift (1991:123-143) offers to this problem, namely to interpret Nietzsche's philosophy in the light of his philosophical language (cf Klein 1997:50-55; see Van Tongeren 2000:51-103).[7] According to him, Nietzsche's critique of philosophical language has been directed at releasing the activity of interpretation from the dogmatic, life-negating constraints of divine and linguistic authority. Nietzsche's deconstruction of epistemology opens the text of becoming an unending, pluralistic play

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[7] Hart (1998:319) agrees when he adds that God is an effect of grammar as far as Nietzsche was concerned.

of interpretation. This insight helped me to understand Nietzsche's statement that God is dead.

I am of the opinion that Nietzsche's statement (that God is dead) should be seen as a reaction to his time (cf Nietzsche 1969a:168; Küng 1978:383-384; Pannenberg 1984:10; Maurer 1994:102-122; Ruprecht 1996:23-32; Heilke 1998:58; Kee 1999:37-38; Van Tongeren 2000:295; Hatab 2001:45-46;   Murphy 2001:12-13; Roodt 2001:319-347).[8] With this statement he announced the death of the god of modernity (Ward [1997] 1998:xxix; cf Macintyre & Ricœur 1969:67-68). Nietzsche did not share his fellow scholars' enthusiasm for "Fortschritt" (cf Lampert 1993:276, 283-286).[9] In his 1873 essay, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* and in his book *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (1873-1876) he deals with this issue of his time. The doctrine of "Fortschritt" states that history has proven that human beings develop to greater heights of their own accord and that the potential for progress is intrinsic to humankind. God's existence and providence could then be proven on account of this optimistic progress in the course of history. This potential to progress is both actual and necessary. Nietzsche was convinced that a crisis had developed in German culture as a result of the enormous and fast expanding influence of Hegelian philosophy.   This

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[8] "The term 'modernity', in Nietzsche's sense, refers both to a condition or self-conception on the one hand, and a philosophical response to this experience on the other. These two components inform and sustain one another within Nietzsche's critique of his age" (Roodt 2001:326). The transition from premodern tradition to modernity was experienced in theology as a crisis in history in the doctrine of historicism (cf Roberts 1998:192-193).

[9] Tassone (2002) explains that the idea of progress is underlain by a philosophy of history. According to him positive and negative philosophies of history can be found. The difference between the two does not lie in their different conceptions of time and history "but in the different value judgements they attach to the course of history" (Tassone 2002:340).

philosophy had led to a way of thinking, which had accustomed Germans to talk about the *Weltprozeß* and to justify their own age as the inevitable result of this world-process. Thus God became associated with this world-process. "Man hat diese Hegelisch verstandene Geschichte mit Hohn das Wandeln Gottes auf der Erde genannt, welcher Gott aber seinerseits erst durch die Geschichte gemacht wird" (Nietzsche 1972a:304; cf Tassone 2002:64-68).

Therefore, I would attempt to read and understand Nietzsche's prophecy that "Gott ist todt [sic]!" in the light of his rebellion against the modernistic period's belief in progress. The period from Descartes to Whitehead (with Nietzsche being included in this frame) is widely known as the modernistic period (cf Küng 1987:199-200). This period is characterised by the secular idea of progress, which was expanded to include every aspect of life as a temporary model of all history (cf Moltmann 1988:31). "Die Menschheit stellt nicht eine Entwicklung zum Besseren oder Stärkeren oder Höheren dar, in der Weise, wie dies heute geglaubt wird. Der 'Fortschritt' ist bloss eine moderne Idee, das heisst eine falsche Idee" (Nietzsche 1969a:169). I will attempt to indicate that Nietzsche did not, *per se,* affirm or deny the existence of God. He was reacting to the Christian concept of God of his day (cf Madelon-Wienand 1998:302, 306-309; Ward [1997] 1998:xxviii). Nietzsche's atheism must be seen relative to a particular definition of God (cf Haar 1998:157). He wanted to show the people of his time what the terrible consequences of the death of God, whom they had murdered, were (cf Haar 1998:158; Roberts 1998:187). He was in actual fact looking for a concept of God that transcends modern atheism and theism.

Der christliche Gottesbegriff – Gott als Krankengott, Gott als Spinne, Gott als Geist – ist einer der corruptesten Gottesbegriffe, die auf Erden erreicht worden sind; er stellt vielleicht selbst den Pegel des Tiefstands in der absteigenden Entwicklung des Götter-Typus dar. Gott zum Widerspruch des Lebens abgeartet, statt dessen Verklärung und ewiges Ja zu sein. In Gott dem Leben, der Natur, dem Willen zum Leben die Feindschaft angesagt! Gott die Formel für jede Verleumdung des "Diesseits", für jede Lüge vom "Jenseits"! In Gott das Nichts vergöttlicht, der Wille zum Nichts heilig gesprochen!

(Nietzsche 1969a:183)

Several reasons can be given for Nietzsche's quest for a concept of God that would be neither atheistic nor theistic. The confessional institution lost credibility during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when a change occurred in theological thought, brought on by the modern views of the *Aufklärung*, as embodied in German idealism and Romanticism. Modern theology had become integrated with the empirical world, which changed the general understanding of the human condition, the community, the world and even of God.

Modern theology found itself in a crisis because of modern scientific views, in particular as embodied in the philosophies of philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel,

Heidegger and Whitehead; modern democracy; modern critique against religion from Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud; modern anthropology and social science; modern exegeses such as the historical critique by De Spinoza, Semler and Strauss; and modern liberal movements (cf Küng 1987:199-200). Theology was in a crisis because humanity, rather than God, had become the centre of attraction. Modern theology became a human tool: for humankind, and in the service of humankind. The question whether there would still be any place for God on earth at all, arose.

By reading Nietzsche it becomes clear that he distanced himself from all the theologians of his time; from the German philosophy in its entirety; and from the superficial atheism of the natural scientists, which left them apathetic in the wake of issues of which they did not suffer the consequences.

> Ah diese Deutschen, was sie uns schon gekostet haben! Umsonst –
> das war immer das Werk der Deutschen. Die Reformation; Leibniz;
> Kant und die sogenannte deutsche Philosophie; die Freiheits-Kriege;
> das Reich – jedes Mal ein Umsonst für Etwas, das bereits da war, für
> etwas Unwiederbringliches...Es sind meine Feinde, ich bekenne es,
> diese Deutschen: ich verachte in ihnen jede Art von Begriffs- und
> Werth-Unsauberkeit [sic], von Feigheit vor jedem rechtschaffnen Ja
> und Nein.

(Nietzsche 1969a:249-250)

Nietzsche (1969a:169; 1972a:304) could not accept the views of Hegel in terms of which the existence of God was proven by human progress in history, as if the human race embodied the development of the better, the stronger and the highest good (cf Hegel [1970] 1979:234-235; [1971] 1979:408-410; [1969] 1980:280-281; [1971] 1980:456-457). According to Nietzsche, this belief was based on a false idea, because progress was not necessarily coupled with growth and development. Nietzsche pointed out that the Christian faith was based on the ideas of progress, growth and development. It is progress when an impious person, after having repented and confessed his or her guilt, is forgiven by God and is able to continue his or her life as a good and just person.

In paragraph 3.3.3 I will deal with the important influence Darwin had on the idea of progress in the nineteenth century. In 1859 Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle of life,* was published. As an exponent of modern science, Darwin argued that humans have a place in the cosmos and in the creation and evolution of the world, and that they form part of creation in such a way that they are both creator and participant in a unique way. Nietzsche opposed this optimism in modern science, but whether he had direct contact with Darwin remains uncertain (cf Nietzsche 1969c:153).[10]

Modern exegesis with historical criticism as method also came in for criticism by Nietzsche. Strauss, a well-known exponent of this approach, had significant influence on

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[10] Johnson (2001) says that it is not far from the truth to assume that Nietzsche did not actually read all of Darwin's work. He believes Nietzsche's contact with Darwin came through his study of Friedrich Albert Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (1876, vol 1; 1877, vol 2).

Nietzsche's ideas, as I will point out in paragraph 3.3.4. Strauss, author of *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (1836) and *Der Alte und der neue Glaube* (1873), was influenced by modern exegesis and orientated the Christian faith to reflect an optimistic, evolutionist and mechanistic philosophy. According to Strauss, the Christian faith developed scientifically to become a new faith – disbelief. Heaven was now on earth, with Jesus as an eccentric figure and eternal life as an illusion or mistake. Nietzsche saw Strauss's shameless, materialistic optimism as an insult. This optimism, moulded on progress, was dangerous. Nietzsche did not want to talk about the universe as a set of natural and developing laws. Neither did he want to understand it as a metaphysical reality and call it God. Strauss was therefore to Nietzsche a big heretic because he did not realise the consequences of his views. He robbed the modern human being of any hope for a life hereafter (cf Nietzsche 1972a:155-238).

3.2   WHO WAS NIETZSCHE?[11]

Nietzsche was born on 15 October 1844 in Röcken, near Lützen in Saxons. From his fifth year, when his father died, Nietzsche was at the mercy of women – his mother, a sister, a grandmother and two aunts (Kee 1999:11; cf Van Tongeren 2000:20). They presented him with a view of God that could not stand up to the realities of life. To the young Nietzsche, God was presented as a gentle, compassionate God who only forgives through love. To him such a God was not realistic and was not in touch with the world.

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[11] Nietzsche's biographical details are discussed in order to show the development in his thinking. I agree with Lackey (1999:739) that it is a misconception to treat Nietzsche as if there was no progress in his philosophical endeavor. Lackey distinguishes between Nietzsche's early (1869-1876), middle (1877-1886) and late (1886-1888) writings.

The world was full of anger and hatred. How could God then be the one who knew nothing of this? No one would understand such a God (Nietzsche 1969a:181; cf Fraser 2002:32-44).

He never learnt that the God who so easily forgave, was also just. This one-sided image of God which he was presented with, led to his misunderstanding of the depth of the Christian faith, and his inability to accept the evangelical appeal thereof. During his school years he came in contact with modern exegesis and the historical-critical method of interpretation of the New Testament. This method of interpretation questioned the supernatural truths of the Bible. The Bible had become a scientific object of study. This provoked a struggle of faith and disbelief. At the age of twenty, he started his studies at the University of Bonn. At first he was interested in theology, but Nietzsche said that it was the hermeneutical nature of theology that attracted him. He took an interest in theology for the philological aspect of gospel criticism and the study of New Testament sources. He was convinced then that history and historical research could provide a direct answer to certain religious and philosophical questions (Van Tongeren 2000:21-23).

During this time he read the book *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* (1836) by Strauss, which resulted in his final break with the Christian faith (Kee 1999:12-13; see Brobjer 2001:141). He turned to the philosophy of Schopenhauer, of which he said: "Der Atheismus war das, was mich zu Schopenhauer führte" (Nietzsche 1969b:316; cf Van Tongeren 2000:22; Fraser 2002:49-53). Schopenhauer did not share in the progress

optimism of his time. He was of the opinion that behind every event in history was the desire to live. The assumption that God was furthermore evident in the course of history was not true. Authentic philosophy did not ask about the origin (where from), or the purpose (where to), or the reason (why) of world history, but about the actual events. It is thus obvious where Nietzsche's pessimism with regard to the belief in progress stems from. Schopenhauer did not believe in the efficacy of history at all, but in the reality of the present, or otherwise, in the *what* thereof.

Despite all Hegel's arguments in favour of an optimistic and developing consideration of history, Schopenhauer was convinced that the course of history was without any efficacy or system. The course of history and the passage thereof were devoid of any hidden meaning. Schopenhauer saw in the study of art and music the deliverance of the educated person. According to him, Wagner's music could become the ideal replacement as the educated person's religion. Nietzsche strongly doubted whether this could be the case especially after ending his own friendship with Wagner. Schopenhauer had, of course, realised that this deliverance would be brief. He therefore recanted that the authentic, quality deliverance was not to be found in the arts, but in the ethics of the Good Samaritan – of compassion and self-denial. (This explains his later asceticism.)

It is against this ethic of self-denial and compassion in Christianity (which also exists in Buddhism) that Nietzsche directed a vigorous attack. "Schopenhauer war in seinem Rechte damit: durch das Mitleid wird das Leben verneint, verneinungswürdiger gemacht, – Mitleiden ist die Praxis des Nihilismus" (Nietzsche 1969a:171). According to

Schopenhauer, history does not have a purpose, nor does humankind have a heavenly goal. All that is left for people are their insignificance.

In Wagner, Nietzsche found a good replacement for Schopenhauer, even though this friendship was not to last very long (Van Tongeren 2000:25-26). In 1869 Nietzsche, without a doctorate, was appointed as professor in Greek at the University of Basel on the recommendation of Ritschl, his mentor (Van Tongeren 2000:26; Leiter 2002:31). Here he befriended the historicists Burckhardt and Overbeck. After taking part in the French-Prussian war, Nietzsche's interest shifted from philology to philosophy. Pre-Socratic Greece replaced primitive Christianity as his model and norm for true humanity. It was during this period that Nietzsche completely distanced himself from Schopenhauer. He felt that no religion had ever uttered a truth. Reality and access to the truth could not be gained through religion, neither as allegory nor as dogma. During 1876 he ended his friendship with Wagner because Wagner, the disciple of Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, the revolutionary activist of the uprisings in 1839 and 1849, had converted to the Christian faith.

After his break with Wagner, Nietzsche's health deteriorated rapidly. This forced him to resign from the University of Basel in 1879 (Van Tongeren 2000:31). Nietzsche became even more negative about the cultural optimism of his time – for him, heaven on earth was unacceptable. His faith in the modern era was shattered to the extent that he described it as the era of decay (Nietzsche 1969a:169; 1969c:99-100). In 1881 his book *Morgenröte* was published. In this book he sharply and severely criticises the morals that

stem from the Christian faith. According to Nietzsche, Christian morals, as a type of morals in itself, are the consequence of a particular view of reality. Nietzsche sees this type of morals as the slaughter of life.

Nietzsche in his fifth book *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, written in 1882, declared that God was dead and that the effect thereof was casting a shadow over the whole of Europe. The faith in the Christian God changed to scepticism and disbelief (cf Nietzsche 1973:255). It became a problem that threatened culture, Socratic philosophy and the Christianity of Europe. It was for this reason that Nietzsche needed to spell out the real consequences of the death of God. He said that the only atheism that existed in this world is the belief in the God of reality, because this God does not exist. The consequences of reality are thus not necessarily divine.

God cannot be the prisoner of history. The question that follows naturally from this is: does reality have any meaning and can there be any talk of progress in history? Nietzsche tries to show the consequences of such atheism by means of the story about the madman with the lantern looking for God in the market square. He aims the words of the madman not only at theologians, but also at the superficial atheists who do not realise the reality of the death of God. They do not realise the meaning thereof. Humanity is not apathetic towards these happenings either.   The people, especially Nietzsche's contemporaries, have murdered God with their false assumptions. Furthermore, nobody realises the outcome of these happenings.

We must understand Nietzsche's statement, "Gott ist todt! [sic]!" theologically.[12] Nietzsche rejects any god, but more specifically the Christian God. "Wir leugnen Gott als Gott...Wenn man uns diesen Gott der Christen bewiese, wir würden ihn noch weniger zu glauben wissen" (Nietzsche 1969:223). This statement is not part of word play, but part of a reality where everything is plunged into nothingness. Nihilism is the only reality that is left. That is why the deprived reality of godliness, as also in the case for Schopenhauer, becomes Nietzsche's target for divesting. People have to realise what truth really is. The death of God means the complete collapse of everything that exists, or a living emptiness of which the horizon is wiped away. Nietzsche (1973:159) rightly asks questions such as: Where are we moving to? Are we moving away from all suns? Are we continually plunging into a landscape without horizons?

All that is left is the darkness of nihilism, the empty nothingness and chaos. Nietzsche is prepared to accept the consequences of the death of God and to take them upon himself. He wants to make people aware of the murder of God. The belief in God and the implications of this belief have to be overcome. God is dead, leaving a shadow that stretches across the whole world. This shadow has to disappear. Therefore, for Nietzsche, there is no finality in and of creation. The course of history will not unfold to greater heights. The whole character of world history is forever chaos.

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[12] Thiede (2001:464-500) states that Nietzsche's theology is the secret of his philosophy. He believes Nietzsche was destined to become a theologian like his father and grandfather who were Lutheran pastors. His critique was anti-Christian and not anti-religious or anti-theological. He must be seen as an atheistic theologian, who sought the true God, the God that is between good and bad. He came to the theological conclusion that all gods are dead (cf Maurer 1994:102-122). With his philosophy he wanted to find a new God (cf Esterhuyse 1998:254-255; see Figl 2000:82-101).

The shadow of the belief in God can only disappear by virtue of a human exalting himself or herself to a greater and higher humanity, that is the "Übermensch", who will surpass the ape, and thus also humankind. The goal of development and progress in history is not God and his kingdom, but the "Übermensch" and his reign. After the death of God he will take God's place. He will also be able to handle the consequences of this death. He will be the new type of person, the strong and the wise, the destroyer and the loving. "Einst sagte man Gott, wenn man auf ferne Meere blickte; nun aber lehrte ich euch sagen: Übermensch. Gott ist eine Muthmaassung [sic]; aber ich will, dass [sic] euer Muthmaassen [sic] nicht weiter reiche, als euer schaffender Wille" (Nietzsche 1968a:105). There is, however, also a negative task for humankind: a Dionysian task that entails the hardness of a hammer and the urge to destroy.

Nietzsche is against any kind of morality that forsakes and denies life. If one says that God looks into the hearts of people, one is denying the freedom of the human will and is thus suppressing the human heartbeat for life. Nietzsche is looking for a healthy morality that is dominated by the vital urge. The Christian concept of God as the God of the sick and God as Spirit is, in his view, unacceptable. God has become the excuse or alibi for everything that happened in the world and in history. God is also the lie of the world; now and hereafter. In God, insignificance and nothingness are deified and the aspiration to nothingness is exalted and sanctified (cf Nietzsche 1969a:183). The morality of life of the "Übermensch" is acceptable to Nietzsche. This view is the alternative that Nietzsche offers with regard to the problem of morality.

Nietzsche's beliefs in civilization, culture, progress and modernity were violated. He did not believe in anything anymore. He was convinced that he was living in a time of uncertainty, decay, destruction and insignificance. Behind each of his statements were the interrogations of nihilism. Nihilism is the denial of everything that exists and the rejection of all systems (Flew 1984:249; cf Küng 1978:454-455). According to Nietzsche, there was no goal at all.

Nihilism questions the belief in progress, because this belief strives for a goal, which does not exist in the conceptual hardware of nihilism. In the place of moral values there have to be natural urges and instincts; in other words, natural values based on vital urges. Religion and metaphysics have to be replaced by the doctrine of the "Ewige Wiederkehr" as the philosophy of the future. "Prinzipielle Neuerungen: An Stelle der 'moralischen Werte' lauter naturalistische Werte. Vernatürlichung der Moral….An Stelle von 'Metaphysik' und Religion die Ewige Wiederkunftslehre (diese als Mittel der Züchtung und Auswahl" (Nietzsche 1930:323-324).

Nietzsche's nihilism was the result of his experience and observation. As a result of his circumstances he lived without God or any kind of morality. Küng (1978:436-437) shows us that we should take the challenges of nihilism seriously and that we have to be prepared to deal with the consequences. "Denken wir diesen Gedanken in seiner furchtbarsten Form: das Dasein, so wie es ist, ohne Sinn und Ziel, aber unvermeidlich wiederkehrend, ohne ein Finale ins Nichts: 'die Ewige Wiederkehr'. Das ist die extremste Form des Nihilismus: das Nichts (das 'Sinnlose') ewig!" (Nietzsche 1930:44).

On January 3, 1889, at the early age of 45, Nietzsche became mentally ill. After he had spent some time in an asylum, his mother looked after him at home (Van Tongeren 2000:44-45). His sister took over after the death of their mother. On August 25, 1900, Nietzsche died, and was buried beside his father. His memory will live on through his writings:

- *Die Geburt der Tragödie,* 1872

- *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen,*1873-1876

- *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches,* 1878

- *Morgenröte,* 1881

- *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* 1882

- *Also Sprach Zarathustra,* 1883-1884

- *Jenseits von Gut und Böse,* 1885

- *Zur Genealogie der Moral,* 1887

- *Der Fall Wagner,* 1888

- *Götzendämmerung,* 1888

- *Der Antichrist,* 1888

- *Ecce Homo,* 1888

- *Der Wille zur Macht,* 1889

- *Nietzsche contra Wagner,* published in 1901

3.3   AGAINST WHOM WAS NIETZSCHE REACTING

3.3.1 Introduction

It is clear that Nietzsche reacted against all the theologians of his time; the entire German

philosophy; as well as against the shallow atheism of the natural scientists, because they remained apathetic towards issues under which they did not suffer.

> Ich sprach vom deutschen Geiste: dass [sic] er gröber wird, dass [sic] er sich verflacht. Ist das genug? – Im Grunde ist es etwas ganz Anderes, das mich erschreckt: wie es immer mehr mit dem deutschen Ernste, der deutschen Tiefe, der deutschen Leidenschaft in geistigen Dingen abwärts geht. Das Pathos hat sich verändert, nicht bloss die Intellektualität. – Ich berühre hier und da deutsche Universitäten: was für eine Luft herrscht unter deren Gelehrten, welche öde, welche genügsam und lau gewordne Geistigkeit!

(Nietzsche 1969c:99)

I will illustrate how Nietzsche reacted by focusing on three themes or ideas in his work, namely:

- his reaction against the idea of the subject that knows himself or herself, God and his or her world, as propagated by the German philosophy of his time (although Descartes and Hume were not Germans, their influence on German philosophy will become apparent);

- his reaction against the idea of progress in history,[13] as propagated by the philosophy of Hegel[14] and used in the evolution theory of Darwin;

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[13] "Mit seiner theologisch-moralisch-politischen Chiliasmuskritik will Nietzsche die ganze eurogene Fortschrittsgeschichte treffen" (Maurer 1994:111).

- his reaction against the ideas of theologians who did not practice what they proclaimed such as Strauss, who caused Nietzsche's break with Christianity.

3.3.2   Nietzsche as reacting against the idea of the subject[15] that knows himself or herself, God and the world

"Aber mein Gefühl schlägt um, bricht heraus, sobald ich in die neuere Zeit, in unsre Zeit eintrete. Unsre Zeit ist wissend.…" (Nietzsche 1969a:208). With these words, Nietzsche summarised his feelings about his time.

During the Enlightenment period the individual or the centered subject was discovered and found expression in the words: "Cogito, ergo sum" (Descartes [1911] 1984:92, 150; cf Milovanovic 1997:www.soci.niu.edu/critcrim/papers/drag-pomo.html). Descartes, the father of modern intellectual knowledge, gave the subject knowing abilities on which many truths could be founded (cf Pippin 1991:23). Descartes occupied himself with the problem of his time, namely how to turn philosophy into a science that would work with

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[14] Nietzsche reacted against the conception of history as teleology, which results from a certain reading of Hegel's philosophy of history. The central problem here relates to the emphasis on teleology and the achievement of goals (cf Roodt 2001:327). It however remains an open question whether Nietzsche himself studied Hegel intensively (cf Stegmaier 1990:99).

[15] Nietzsche tried to create with his philosophy a new subject, one to overcome the old constructed subject. But as long as God existed, such a subject could not come into being. By killing God, he made it possible for human beings to construct a new subject. Lackey (1999:754) says "…for in killing God and metaphysics, he has set into motion the creative self-overcoming of 'self' which will empower individuals to expand the borders of what was once known as humans." Nietzsche wanted to free the subject from humans, so that individuals could achieve something more dignified and more improved. Nietzsche had a problem as far as the subjectification of knowledge and the subjectification of *praxis* was concerned. There is a general scepticism in history concerning the "value of an objective reality that bears no relation to subjective experiences" (Roodt 2001:329). The problem is that subjective experiences are used, above the objective reality, to acquire sure knowledge. Instead of "cogito ergo sum" Nietzsche prefers the reference of "vivo ergo cogito" (Nietzsche 1972b:325).

provable facts and truths, such as those that were discovered by Copernicus, Kepler and Galilei (cf Küng 1978:47).

It therefore became important that philosophy should also work with provable certainties. Descartes ([1911] 1984:92) designed a method, consisting of four rules, whereby it could be indicated how a human being can acquire knowledge. The first rule he applied was to accept everything which, when perceived, can be recognised as true. The second was to divide the problem into smaller fragments and to solve each part separately. "The third was to carry on my reflections in due order, commencing with objects that were the most simple and easy to understand, in order to rise little by little, or by degrees, to knowledge of the most complex, assuming an order, even if a fictitious one, among those which do not follow a natural sequence relatively to one another" (Descartes [1911] 1984:92). The fourth rule was to look at the whole of the problem so as to see whether all the arguments had been taken into consideration. Descartes moved from the unknown to the known, from doubt to knowledge. It is therefore rather apt that Descartes' method is called the method of methodological doubt.

Descartes made it possible for human beings (as subjects) to know. The human race no longer depends on the object to know. Humans have rational abilities, which help them in the process of knowing.

> But immediately afterwards I noticed that whilst I thus wished to
> think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the "I" who

thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth "I

think, therefore I am" was so certain and so assured that all the most

extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were

incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive

it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I

was seeking.

(Descartes [1911] 1984:101; cf Descartes 1993:18)

Descartes does not mean to suggest that the human being knows and understands his or

her being completely. The only certainty with regard to the human being's existence is

his or her existence (cf Descartes [1911] 1984:150; 1993:18). From this self-certainty,

Descartes then sets out to prove the existence of God based on the idea that everything

the human being may think of, must be certain and truthful. He concludes that because

God is perfect, he cannot be the cause of any error. Descartes thus argues that, from the

certainty of the thinkable abilities of the human being, God definitely exists. If one

thinks of God, one must conclude that God exists (cf Descartes [1911] 1984:178;

1993:25; Cahoone 1988:45).

Another reason Descartes offers to prove the existence of God is that God is the creator to

whom everything belongs. He realises that all things depend upon God. Descartes

([1911] 1984:184; 1993:25) comes to the conclusion that his perception of God cannot be

untrue and that nothing causes him to doubt this truth. This certainty of the existence of

God opens the doors to other modes of being in the external world (cf Flew 1984:91). It was important for Descartes and his time to have certainty about the existence of God. God alone could make the subjectivist world coherent. Without God or without concepts equally as transcendent, the definitively modern notion of the thinking subject tends to lose the grounds of its relation to the rest of reality (cf Cahoone 1988:69). It was also important that this certainty begins within the rational powers of human beings; that the existence of God is dependent on the rationality of human beings. European history reached a turning point with the philosophy of Descartes when basic certainty was no longer centered on God, but on humans (cf Küng 1978:36).

Nietzsche (1968b:23) did not share the same enthusiasm for and certainty of the human being as subject. He called Descartes and his following "harmlose Selbst-Beobachter" who believed in things such as "unmittelbare Gewissheit", "absolute Erkenntniss" and "Ding an sich" which were contradictions in terms (cf Madelon-Wienand 1998:303). To him the event expressed in the word *cogito* (I think) attained a series of statements which were difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove. When Nietzsche spoke of knowledge and the certainty thereof, he came to the conclusion that this certainty of knowledge could not exist.

What was certain to Nietzsche was the needlessness of rational proof of the existence of God. To him an intuitive feeling could not prove God. Nietzsche realised that in the knowing subject the idea of knowledge outside the borders of the subject was not possible; that no truth, no certainty and no knowledge existed outside the knowing

subject. Humanity could not decide upon the truth or untruth of certain questions. All problems relating to values and morals were beyond human reason. True philosophy to him was to understand the limits of reason. Nietzsche distanced himself from the system-based thinking of his time (the modernistic period). The universal whole was not the only reality that existed. He found it problematic that the philosophers, the scientists and the theologians obtained their truths and thoughts within certain systems. He claimed that truths could also lie behind and outside certain systems. Derrida agreed with Nietzsche that the subject was not the only given and certain existence within any and every context. In dispersing the subject within a system of textual relations, Derrida adopted a Nietzschean strategy of refusing to hypostasise the subject. For Nietzsche, this refusal was grounded in the affirmation of a multiplicity of perspectives, of seeing the world with new and different eyes, that animated his philosophy of will to power as active force within the infinite play of becoming (cf Schrift 1995:30). The only way to escape systems was through creativity as we find in art (see Beukes 1995:24).

Nietzsche agreed with Kant in rejecting the claims of the knowing subject. Kant focused on the importance of the limits of reason (cf Plaisier 1996:234). Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God can be viewed as a result of the speculative process of thought made possible by the limits imposed on reason by Kant's critique of this human faculty (cf Lawler 1986:1).

Kant replaced Descartes' idea of the infinite as the *primum cognitum* with the transcendental ideal of reason. He (Kant) set up certain criteria on the grounds of which

the rational could know. Kant agreed with the empiricists that knowledge is possible from experience, but he was not prepared to say that all knowledge must be derived from experience (cf Flew 1984:190). For Kant there are two types or categories of knowing, namely theoretical and practical knowing. Theoretical knowledge is knowledge that can be obtained empirically through that which we can see. Practical knowledge is obtained on another level. It pertains to knowledge of the unknown (that which cannot be seen), such as faith and God. He rejects any notion of knowledge of God in the theoretical sphere.

To Kant, knowledge of God from his revelation is not possible, because God cannot be empirically seen as an object amongst others. To know faith, he set up a second category of knowing, namely to know the unknowable by practical reason. Kant believed that the imagination ("Einbildungskraft"), is in a sense the root of all objective knowledge, a claim it shares with the transcendental unity of apperception (cf Cahoone 1988:62). Faith is not knowledge, but a useful function of rationality in its practical capacity. "Ich kann also Gott, Freiheit und Unsterblichkeit zum Behuf des notwendigen praktischen Gebrauchs meiner Vernunft nicht einmal annehmen, wenn ich nicht der spekulativen Vernunft zugleich ihre Anmaβung überschwenglicher Einsichten benehme….Ich muβte also das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen…." (Kant [1899] 1976:28). It is a function all humans must fulfil. The idea of God originates from rationality and is based upon the human acceptance of moral laws. God becomes something of a protector and guarantor of the moral order of the world (cf Maimela 1990:23).

Nietzsche (1969a:176-177) rejected Kant's idea of the practical reason, which included knowledge of God and faith. He blamed Kant for inventing a type of reason for something such as morality, that one was not supposed to reason about. Nietzsche (1969a:193) also rejected the "sittliche Weltordnung" of Kant as a lie of the philosophers and the church. To Kant humans were moral beings that had to perform certain moral duties. God was not an object, but an idea of the rational mind. The idea of God rested on moral grounds, that is, on practical reason's willing of the good and its acknowledgement of moral law. Moral considerations must lead us to suppose that such a God did in fact exist (cf Schacht 1984:257). Any reference to God was grounded in morality. However, Nietzsche did not agree with this.[16] Nietzsche accused Kant of escaping his rational conscience by inventing a scientific method of reasoning to accommodate morality such as practical reason (Nietzsche 1969a:176-177).

For Kant, Jesus was the example of the ideal moral man. Jesus was the ideal man that satisfied God. Similarly, every human must strive for morality. Nietzsche did not agree with Kant, because to Nietzsche, morality meant danger. "Eine Tugend muss [sic] unsre Erfindung sein, unsre persönlichste Nothwehr [sic] und Nothdurft [sic]: in jedem andren Sinne ist sie bloss eine Gefahr" (Nietzsche 1969a:175). For Kant, morality served as humankind's redemption. Kant reinterpreted religion in terms of rational morality (cf Maimela 1990:26).

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[16] To Nietzsche there is no transcendent source of values. God is not the true source of legitimation of values. The source is to be found in the "Wille zur Macht" for which those values are real values (cf Ibanez-Noé 2001:9).

Kant rejected metaphysics, because knowledge could not be derived from the metaphysical world as a project of the empirical sensing of the order of things in the world. Sensing could never become a (false) deed. A metaphysical world that did not exist, could not be supposed. Nietzsche pointed to another reality, one that refused to invent ideal worlds, to visualise false abstract schemas, or to interpret the world in terms of reality, certainty and appearance. This was in opposition to the ideal world of Kant and of theology (cf Wilson 1994:17). In his book *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878), Nietzsche rejected any notion of a Christian metaphysical worldview. Such a worldview had no value since it could not help resolve the questions of life. If such a world existed, the knowledge thereof would be irrelevant like the knowledge of the chemical analysis of water to the sailor in danger in a storm (cf Nietzsche 1967:25-26).

But why did Nietzsche accuse Kant of metaphysics, when Kant was supposed to have rejected metaphysics? "In particular…it is Immanuel Kant whom Nietzsche castigates for continuing the agenda of metaphysics. This castigation is tinged with irony because Kant was supposed to have rejected metaphysics" (Wilson 1994:16). Von Schelling (1994:95) solves this problem by explaining that: "…Kant's critique was initially directed against the metaphysics accepted in the schools, but that from another side and, as it were, unintentionally, it also again became a defence of precisely this metaphysics."

Pascal (1966:150)[17] was the first person in the history of modernity to show that it was rationally acceptable to speak and reason of God without having to prove it with reason (cf Martin 1990:229-232). The question of the existence of God is a wager. He is or he is not. Reason cannot help in deciding between the choices. Reason is always limited. The choice lies in the hands of human beings and not in reason (Pascal 1966:151). Faith exists of more than reason. Faith exists within the hearts of people (Pascal 1966:154). To prove the existence of God logically is impossible. It is interesting to note that Pascal does not give much thought to arguments about proving the existence of God. God is a neutral possibility, which everybody must take into consideration. With this, he rejects atheism in principle (cf Rohrmoser 1969:220).

Nietzsche agreed with Pascal that morality provides no answers. It draws the human race away from its absolute basis (Plaisier 1996:36; cf Voegelin 1996:153-171). However, they differed on the issues concerning anthropology (Plaisier 1996). Pascal wanted to help humans understand themselves from the perspective of the crucified God. According to Pascal, meaning in the lives of human beings is only possible through a godly revelation (Plaisier 1996:233). Nietzsche saw humans as prisoners of their time, as the result of the constructions that they had built, which was why it was important for Nietzsche to create another stronger form of human being, the "Übermensch".

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[17] Voegelin (1996:145-171) states that Nietzsche adapted his "Wille zur Macht" from Pascal's concept of "libido dominandi". Parallels are also to be found between Pascal's concepts of "ennu", "ressentiment", "divertissement" and the "moi haissable" and Nietzsche's "ressentiment" and nihilism.

Throughout most of his works, Nietzsche (1968b:64-65) used Pascal as an example of being a Christian,[18] although he thought that Pascal had lost his reason. Nietzsche criticised Pascal for believing in God for the wrong reasons. Nietzsche (1971:81) said that no one was more expressive than Pascal was in talking of and providing reasons for the hidden God. Nietzsche was certain that although Pascal convinced himself of God's hiddenness, it seemed as if this were a false façade. Only someone who is afraid, speaks loudly. Pascal spoke as loudly as he could because he was afraid to admit that this hidden God carried the traces of immorality.

Hume (1993:14-24, 29-89) was the first thinker of his time to doubt the theology of nature. To him the God of Descartes, of De Spinoza and of Leibniz is nothing more than a psyche, that is in contact with the universe. God is a being of the outer space, which the human race cannot get to know (cf Molnar 1980:79). God, who cannot be known, cannot be an object of study. Anxiety and hope are the grounds for religion. Hume pointed out that the foundation of religion was to be found in primordial humanity's yearning for happiness, the fear of future misery, shock of death, desire for revenge, hunger for food and the other necessities. The human race prefered these necessities rather than love for truth (cf Maimela 1990:19). There is for Hume no ground for a rational, universal, natural and acceptable religion which would be open to all human beings. Hume had several theories on the origin of religion. He also rejected any notion of proving the existence of God on the grounds of cosmology and world order. Hence one could not

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[18] Voegelin (1996:144) says that when Nietzsche refers to "the Christian", he means Pascal.

proceed from observation of nature to the conclusion that our universe was the work of a loving Creator and not of some demon (cf Hume 1993:14-24, 29-89).

Nietzsche agreed with Hume on the origin of religion.[19] This becomes evident in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* where Nietzsche (1973:271-272) says that the founders of religion are those who select a certain way of living and interpret their way of life to justify all their actions.

3.3.3   Nietzsche as reacting against the ideas of progress in the philosophy of Hegel[20] and the science of Darwin

Hegel exerted much influence in Europe, especially in the sphere of historical research. "Hegel is our only thinker who has made the forward movement of advance the very center [sic] and ground of pure thinking itself, and that advance is inseparable from the dark mystery of *Trieb*" (Altizer 1993:15). He expanded the Kantian categories of rationality and knowledge, which were related only to nature, to the sphere of history. Everything that happens in creation is purposeful and part of the duration of history. There is progress in the duration of history, because everything in history points to a teleological development. To Hegel this history is found in the divine idea where God as Spirit is part of a process of revealing himself in the world. He is bound to his revelation (Hegel [1969] 1980:194-195; [1970] 1980:32-33; cf Walker 1989:89-96).

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[19] It is important to note that Nietzsche criticised the English as not being a philosophical race. In his writings he merely said that Hume was the English philosopher whom Kant reacted to.

[20] Although Hegel and Nietzsche differed on many accounts, it is not to suggest that there are no common ground in their thinking. After having discussed Nietzsche's and Hegel's different opinions on their critique of methaphysics, Horstmann (1993:301) concludes that in the end both ask the same question, namely: "wieviel Objektivität braucht der Mensch?"

Hegel rejected the anthromorphic and naive idea of God above the world. He also rejected the idea of a rational deistic God who created the world but then left it to its own devices. However, this does not mean he rejected God. To him (Hegel [1971] 1980:456-457; [1971] 1979:408-409) God existed in the sphere of thinking in general, in the form of representation and for experience, for subjectivity and in the subjectivity of Spirit, in the innermost being of subjective Spirit.

He places the existence of God in another sphere, that of relational relatedness with God. God is transcended above any reason or rational activity. Hegel differed from Kant in the sense that Kant made a distinction between God and humans. God stands opposite human reason. Hegel interpreted God, truth and the rational as events in the history of the human race. God is Spirit; he is the unconditional motion (Hegel [1969] 1980:221, 280).[21] In his religious philosophical thought De Spinoza influenced Hegel. For De Spinoza, God is the one who did not live apart from the world. He said that God is in the world and the world in God.

An otherworldly (transcendent) God was no longer acceptable. Humans wanted a God who was close to them and in whom they could trust. This becomes evident in Hegel's definition of religion. To him religion is objective with regard to the content of religious consciousness and subjective in the fact that God as Spirit is manifesting himself in the religious self-consciousness.

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[21] Nietzsche attached another meaning for "Geist". To him it meant life, which is not necessarily associated with God (cf Stegmaier 1997/8:300-318).

To Hegel the death of God is a historical event and a reality. This suffering and death of God mean that the human race shares in the divine history, that they are part of God himself. It is the nature of the divine to die a sacrificial death. With this philosophy Hegel ([1969] 1980:291-293) tried to reconcile the finite human with the infinite God. God reconciled himself eternally in his death with the world and himself.

The death of Christ must not be seen in a moral light, but as the forsakenness and hopelessness of the absolute, godly Self. It is not just the death of an individual but also the death of God himself, which says something of his nature. He had to die in order for human beings to live. This task of satisfying God lies only in the hands of God. No human can ever achieve this. But Hegel does not see the death of God as the end. The god-forsakenness of the world is captured in the forsakenness of God himself. God identified himself with the world. He overpowered death. Three days after Jesus was crucified and buried, he was resurrected. "Auf die Auferstehung folgt die Verklärung Christi, und der Triumph der Erhebung zur Rechten Gottes schließt diese Geschichte, welche in diesem Bewußtsein die Explikation der göttlichen Natur selbst ist" (Hegel [1969] 1980:291).

In his philosophy Hegel tried to put God at the top of the order of all things, as the only principle for knowledge. To do this, he created a system (cf Küng 1978:171). Hegel called the way in which the "absolute Geist" manifested itself in history, phenomenology. "Die Geschichte des göttlichen Geistes selbst: beschrieben vom Philosophen getreu nach der Stunde, wie sie ihm schlug. Insofern ist die Phänomenologie eine theologische

Geschichtsphilosophie und eine philosophische Geschichtstheologie" (Küng 1978:176). With his phenomenology Hegel tries to show how God is related to the world. God is part of the world in development and in history. He leads the world as Creator and as Spirit to himself and to his infinity and divinity (cf Küng 1978:177). This development of God in the world is a mighty, self-moving circle, where God turns from outside himself to within himself. There is a continuous dialectical movement in God. Hegel prefers to speak of God as Spirit, because Spirit is the expression of a God who comes to himself out of forsakenness and suffering. To Hegel, God is the ultimate reality in the world, in humans and in world history. Hegel was convinced that world history was driven on by an unknowable force, which he called a "Weltprozess" (Hegel [1969] 1980; cf Marlaud 1982:26; Hespe 1991:177-179). He saw the history of the world as the realisation of the kingdom of God on earth (Hegel [1969] 1980:280-281).

After Hegel, it would have been impossible to return to the old concept of a deistic God. Hegel paved the way for a new concept of God, namely God as the immanent in the transcendent, the God which is here and now. Hegel called it *bestimmte Religion* (Hegel [1969] 1980). To him God is no longer a being above and beyond this world, an unknown being whom the human race does not know. Humanity knows God because he has revealed himself in the process of history as the "absolute Geist" (see Hegel [1971] 1979:408-409).

Nietzsche (1972a:305), however, distanced himself from any notion of humans being trapped in the manifestation of historical events, which he called "Macht der Geschichte".

Nietzsche rejected the idea of human beings as the authors of the progress of history as it would eliminate the future of humanity and would lead to stagnation. Nietzsche (1972a:304) was of the opinion that the philosophy of Hegel was dangerous in its views. Nietzsche could not commit himself to accept the idea that God could be derived from history.

Hegel, according to Nietzsche, did not realise the consequences of his philosophy of history as a world-process. His philosophy of history as a self-moving force is the beginning of nihilism.

> Anfang und Ziel des Weltprozesses, vom ersten Stutzen des Bewusstseins [sic] bis zum Zurückgeschleudert-Werden in's [sic] Nichts, sammt der genau bestimmten Aufgabe unserer Generation für den Weltprozess, alles dargestellt aus dem so witzig erfundenen Inspirations-Borne des Unbewussten und im apokalyptischen Lichte leuchtend, alles so täuschend und zu so biederem Ernste nachgemacht, als ob es wirkliche Ernst-Philosophie und nicht nur Spass-Philosophie wäre: – ein solches Ganze stellt seinen Schöpfer als einen der ersten philosophischen Parodisten aller Zeiten hin: opfern wir also auf seinem Altar, opfern wir ihm, dem Erfindereiner wahren Universal-Medizin, eine Locke – um einen

Schleiermacherischen Bewunderungs-Ausdruck zu stehlen.

(Nietzsche 1972a:310)

Nietzsche (1973:280) believed Darwin owed much of his ideas to Hegel.[22] He was convinced that were it not for Hegel, there would have been no Darwin. In his book, *On the Origin of Species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle of life* (1859), Darwin demonstrated that organisms had evolved from a simple beginning into new forms by means of natural selection (cf Brooke 1991:275). Through this theory of evolution he explained several phenomena in nature. All species on earth try to increase their replicate to ensure their own survival. "In one respect, Darwin's theory, no less than Genesis, implied one ultimate origin; in another, however, it could be used to underwrite the notion that different races were incipiently distinct species, the 'fittest' of which had their superiority demonstrated by the very fact of their power and success" (Brooke 1991:280).

In his second book, *Descent of man* (1871), Darwin deals with the evolutionary processes of the human race. Many scientists welcomed the evolution theory, because it brought new insights into science. Furthermore, it opened doors to other scientific fields of study. But it also brought about theological reaction. There were the "creationists" who believed either in God, in the evolution theory, or in the "big bang" (cf Drees 1993:20).

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[22] However, Nietzsche was "suspicious and highly critical of the projection of Hegelian philosophical notions into Darwin" (Johnson 2001:71). Johnson (2001:65-69) pays attention to Nietzsche's critique of Strauss, whom he castigates for using Darwin's theories to attack "established religion, superstitions, and

The evolution theory can be classified as positive (optimistic) or negative (pessimistic). "…[O]ptimistic in that natural selection invariably worked for the good of the species, pessimistic in that nature was riven with struggle and strife" (Brooke 1991:289).

Nietzsche (1930:460-461) sees in evolution a form of finality, which he rejecs. He rejects any idea of humans progressing to a greater species. Human beings do not exhibit any sort of progress. Instead, the ideal cases of evolution are exposed to every form of decadence (Nietzsche 1930:461). Nietzsche (1930:674) sees in humans a combination of the "Untier" and the "Übertier", "Unmensch" and the "Übermensch" with the opposites belonging together. Nietzsche (1968c:329-332) argues that it is important to know that whenever there is growth within humans towards greatness, there is also another side that needs to be considered; a side that conveys their growth into their own desires – desires, which would eventually destroy them. Decadence is a vital necessity and there is no progress without constant regress.

This evolution in species is the product of natural processes, with no sign of progress. It is humanity's will to survive. Nietzsche (1930:462-463) perceives the ultimate reason and character of all change in the will to power, which is part of nature. The principle of the will to power entails "wie man wird" (Nietzsche 1969b:291), where identity, and not change, plays a decisive role (cf Marlaud 1982:30). For Nietzsche the dogma of evolution is nothing but faith in the universal goal of human beings. In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche (1968a:10-11) said that the greatness of a human being resided in the fact that

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discredited theological doctrine." Johnson (2001:65-69) states that as far as Nietzsche was concerned, Strauss did not fully understand the theories of Darwin.

he or she is a bridge and not a goal. Nietzsche did not contest the scientific facts of evolution (cf Johnson 2001:70-79). He questioned the idea that the human race developed as an ideal, perfect utopia. Nietzsche argued that if this were true, humans would already have attained such a stage. He dismissed the idea of infinite progress as an unreasonable assertion (cf Marlaud 1982:30).

Nietzsche accepted progress only on the grounds of the growth of power. Evolution is nothing but the will to live. "Der Kampf um's [sic] Dasein ist nur eine Ausnahme, eine zeitweilige Restriktion des Lebenswillens; der grosse [sic] und kleine Kampf dreht sich allenthalben um's [sic] Uebergewicht [sic], um Wachsthum [sic] und Ausbreitung, um Macht, gemäss dem Willen zur Macht, der eben der Wille des Lebens ist" (Nietzsche1973:267-268).

Nietzsche was of the opinion that the reality of his world differed from the one Darwin and the philosophers claimed to know. "Ich sehe alle Philosophen, ich sehe die Wissenschaft auf den Knien vor der Realität vom umgekehrten Kampf ums Dasein, als ihn die Schule Darwins lehrt, – nämlich ich sehe überall Die [sic] obenauf, Die [sic] übrigbleibend, die das Leben, den Wert des Lebens kompromittieren" (Nietzsche 1930:463).

3.3.4   Nietzsche's contact with Strauss and his break with Christianity

Strauss was a student of Hegel. In 1835 he published *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*. He was one of the nineteenth century thinkers who prepared the ground for

Nietzsche's conclusion (cf Lawler 1986:1). The rationalists and the naturalists removed all the supernatural elements from the Bible and turned Jesus into a figure that everyone could follow. His sayings could be obeyed because they related to reality. Strauss claimed that the Gospels were the interpretations of the disciples of Jesus, who lived in a world filled by myth and legend. Strauss and Nietzsche agreed that the biblical writers clad Jesus in some unhistorical ideas. The statement that Jesus was the Messiah gave rise to many heresies, such as that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and was the prototype of Old Testament prophets such as Elijah and Elisha.

> Jene seltsame und kranke Welt, in die uns die Evangelien einführen
> – eine Welt, wie aus einem russischen Romane, in der sich Auswurf
> der Gesellschaft, Nervenleiden und "kindliches" Idiotenthum [sic]
> ein Stelldichein zu geben scheinen – muss [sic] unter allen
> Umständen den Typus vergröbert haben: die ersten Jünger in
> Sonderheit übersetzten [sic] ein ganz in Symbolen und
> Unfasslichkeiten [sic] schwimmendes Sein erst in die eigne Crudität,
> um überhaupt Etwas davon zu verstehn, für sie war der Typus erst
> nach einer Einformung in bekanntere Formen vorhanden….

(Nietzsche 1969a:199-200)

Strauss ([1836] 1984:273) found similar examples throughout the Bible. He distinguishes between two tendencies in the myth of the incarnation of Jesus. The first is

the desire to see Jesus as the incarnation of Moses in a higher form. The second is to bring Jesus as the Messiah in contact with his predecessors, so that he could be exemplified as fulfilling the kingdom of God.

Strauss and Nietzsche tried as philological scientists and with the help of modern science, to reveal the real facts about Jesus because these facts were hidden behind unhistorical myths and legends that were retold by the disciples in their interpreting of Jesus. Strauss and Nietzsche could not find anything of the life of Jesus in the Gospels. To them the Gospels are nothing but the opinions of his disciples, for they are filled with contradictions. "At this point the similarity of outlook stops, for each critic has different arguments as to just how obscured the life [sic] and religion [sic] of Jesus are and as to just how much of this can be recovered from the Gospels" (Wilson 1994:28).

Nietzsche (1969a:197), unlike Strauss, was not concerned with the contradictions in the various traditions in the Gospels. He was more concerned with the "psychologische Typus des Erlösers" (Nietzsche 1969a:197). He was not concerned about the authenticity of the deeds and sayings of Jesus or the real facts about his death, but whether Jesus as a type of redeemer was still credible at all. He was not sure whether this type of redeemer was delivered by tradition.

Strauss admitted that Jesus was a historical person who acted in public and who gave the impression that he was the Messiah. He denied the claims of Jesus as the incarnate God on the basis of historical criticism and on the basis of speculative philosophy (Lawler

1986:45).   To him it was part of the dogmas promoted by the church.   The dogmatic statements of Jesus could, according to Strauss, be neither traced nor proved.

According to Strauss the history of Jesus had to be dogmatically reconstructed.   He attempted to do so through a Hegelian understanding of the history of Jesus (cf Sandberger 1972).   Strauss agreed with Hegel that the dogmatic statements about Jesus originated from conversations the disciples had after Jesus' death.   The fact that the disciples believed in the resurrection is not enough reason for us to believe in it too (cf Brooke 1991:269).   Nietzsche distanced himself from any human-made image of Jesus, such as Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus as the Christ.   He tried to find the historical Jesus to free him from all the dogmas and interpretations surrounding his life.   Nietzsche wanted to do away with the "man mache Jesu".

Nietzsche (1972a:155-238) called Strauss a "Philister" and a poor writer.   He felt that Strauss did not practice what he had proclaimed (Nietzsche 1972a:196).   Nietzsche accused Strauss of ignorance.   Strauss proclaimed that he (Strauss) was no longer a Christian and that he did not want to influence anyone.   He nevertheless still did.   His views led others to also break with Christianity.   Furthermore, he was not wholly honest with the readers of his book *Der Alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis* (1873). Nietzsche did not hold this book of Strauss's in high regard.

> In der That [sic] diese Vereinigung von Dreistigkeit und Schwäche,
>
> tollkühnen Worten und feigem Sich – Anbequemen, dieses feine

Abwägen, wie und mit welchen Sätzen man einmal dem Philister
imponieren, mit welchen man ihn streicheln kann, dieser Mangel an
Charakter und Kraft bei dem Anschein von Kraft und Charakter,
dieser Defekt an Weisheit bei aller Affektation der Ueberlegenheit
[sic] und Reife der Erfahrung – das alles ist es, was ich an diesem
Buche hasse.

(Nietzsche 1972a:196)

According to Nietzsche (1972a:206) the themes in this book were not logical. Strauss
assumed, for instance (in his first chapter) that all humans were Christians, as if "alter
Glaube" simply and solely refer to Christianity. Nietzsche said that this reflected
Strauss's true nature – he remained a Christian theologian. He was not a philosopher
either, because he could not distinguish between faith and knowledge and he constantly
referred to his so-called new faith and the new science in the same breath (Nietzsche
1972a:206). Nietzsche questioned the goal of Strauss's work, which presumably was to
expound a "neuer Glaube". To Nietzsche (1972a:207) this new religion propounded by
Strauss was neither new faith nor modern science. It was actually no religion at all. He
concealed to his followers what he actually did with God, and instead turned to
metaphysics. "Er wagt es nämlich nicht, ihnen ehrlich zu sagen: von einem helfenden
und sich erbarmenden Gott habe ich euch befreit, das 'Universum' ist nur ein starres
Räderwerk, seht zu, dass [sic] seine Räder euch nicht zermalmen!" (Nietzsche
1972a:195).

3.4   IMPLICATIONS OF NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

Now that we have heard Nietzsche's voice, it is evident that he indeed had a message for the people of his time (and for ours). The whole idea of progress and historicism is nihilistic. The idea that humans can *know* – and know everything – is going to destroy humankind.

> Ueberstolzer [sic] Europäer des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, du rasest!
> Dein Wissen vollendet nicht die Natur, sondern tödtet [sic] nur deine
> eigene. Miss [sic] nur einmal deine Höhe als Wissender an deiner
> Tiefe als Könnender. Freilich kletterst du an den Sonnenstrahlen des
> Wissens aufwärts zum Himmel, aber auch abwärts zum Chaos.
> Deine Art zu gehen, nämlich als Wissender zu klettern, ist dein
> Verhängniss [sic]; Grund und Boden weichen in's [sic] Ungewisse
> für dich zurück; für dein Leben giebt [sic] es keine Stützen mehr, nur
> noch Spinnefäden, die jeder neue Griff deiner Erkenntniss [sic]
> auseinanderreisst [sic].

(Nietzsche 1972a:309)

To Nietzsche, the "Ewige Wiederkehr", as a myth, is the replacement for all religions (cf Van Tongeren 2000:294-296). It is ironic that Nietzsche, who himself suffered so much because of the onslaughts of life, propagates this theory and as a consequence, a love for life. Nietzsche never justified atheism. To him, it was a datum. He did not want to

either affirm or deny the existence of God. He wanted to show the psychological reasons for belief in God. Humans believe in God because they strive for power and cannot bear the feeling of powerlessness. It is these psychological reasons explaining the Christians' belief in God that make the Christian faith unacceptable to him (see Nietzsche 1969a:223).

If Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is correct, then, we have to concede Nietzsche his anti-Christianity. His critique was aimed at a church estranged from life (the tomb of God); at the priests who thrived on people's feelings of guilt; and at the contemporary view of God. Contemporary society saw God as the Santa Claus of the weak, the sick and the poor, and as the enemy of life.

Küng (1978:452) therefore asks:

> Wird man nicht zugeben müssen, daß diese Kritik an Gott um des Menschen willen geübt wird: um gegen einlähmendes Wissen, eine kleinliche moralische Beaufsichtigung, eine erdrückende Liebe Gottes die menschliche Identität zu bewahren? Entledigte sich Nietzsche also nicht Gottes um des Menschen willen: Gottlosigkeit nicht als Selbstzweck, sondern als Vorkehrung gegen die das Menschsein abwertende Gottgläubigkeit?

To Nietzsche the God of his time, that is the God created by the Christians (the God of progress in history, the God of morality and proven by rationality), was dead. The consequence of this death (atheism) is nihilism. The death of God means the death of everything that exists. Nietzsche's statement "Gott ist todt [sic]!" challenged theology to have a rethink of God. If God is dead, there is only one alternative, namely that of a "dancing God", which is both useful and harmful, friend and foe, admired by good and bad, and a contrast to the Christian concept of God (Nietzsche1968a:45; see Lampert 1986:46; Haar 1998:158; Madelon-Wienand 1998:301-312).

3.5   SUMMARY

In this chapter I assumed that Nietzsche did not, *per se,* deny or acknowledge the existence of God. He was reacting to the concept of God that prevailed in his time, that is to say the modernistic period's belief in progress, as propagated by the philosophy of Hegel and which was used in the evolution theory of Darwin and the anti-Christianity of Strauss (whom Nietzsche accused of ignoring the consequences of his critique on Christianity). Nietzsche did not agree with the idea of the subject that knows himself or herself, God and his or her world, as propagated by the philosophy of his time. To Nietzsche the god of his time, the god that is tied to world history, the god of morality and the god proven by rationality was dead. He spelled out the consequences of this death of God. To him the only consequence was nihilism, which means the death of everything that exists. He challenged theologians to have a rethink of God and his relation to morality, history and rationality.

Chapter 4

MODERN ATHEISM AND THEISM CHALLENGED?

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche's prophecy challenged Christian theology to respond to the nihilistic consequences of the death of God. [23] I intend to discuss the reactions of a few theologians who, in my view, responded to the problem Nietzsche had with the concept of God, as it was propagated in the modern period (cf Küng 1987:157). I will thus focus on Christian theologians such as Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters who confronted these challenges. They all responded to Nietzsche's impulse towards the development of a concept of God that can neither lead to atheism nor to theism. There are specific reasons for having chosen these theologians. Barth paved the way of talking about God by defining him as the communicative God who came in Jesus Christ to reconcile God with the human race (cf Berkhof [1982] 1991:87; Fraser 2002:8-10).[24] Moltmann focused on the problem Nietzsche had with the concept of God as propagated by the modern period. God is not only the transcendent God who judges and scorns, but he is also the loving God who understands the suffering and pain of the world. Pannenberg is the theologian who rose to the challenge of Nietzsche by using the philosophy of Hegel, the philosopher with whom Nietzsche had

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[23] The theological response to Nietzsche's philosophy was immense after his death (cf Köster 1982:615-685; Aschheim 1988:218-249; Booth 1992:290-307; Fleischer 1991:17-19).

[24] "Barths >>Theologie der Krise<<, dann >>dialektische Theologie<< genannt, forderte angesichts des Zusammenbruchs von Gesellschaft und Kultur, der Institutionen, Traditionen und Autoritäten, eine paradigmatische Wende: weg von der subjectiven Erfahrung und dem frommen Gefühl, hin zur Bibel; weg von der Historie, hin zur Offenbarung Gottes; weg von der religiösen Rede über den Gottesbegriff, hin zur Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes; weg von Religion und Religiosität, hin zum christlichen Glauben; weg von den religiösen Bedürfnissen des Menschen, hin zu Gott, der der >>ganz Andere<< ist, offenbar allein in Jesus Christus" (Küng 1987:229).

serious problems. Peters' theology shows close similarities to the theology of Pannenberg, but goes further by taking us past the dilemmas of theism and atheism.

These theologians have much in common. All of them, except Peters, experienced the consequences of the ideology Nietzsche warned against, namely the idea of the power of history moving to greater heights. All of them reacted to the historicism of Hegel. Barth experienced the consequences of World War I and II, having been expelled from his teaching position in Bonn for speaking out against the regime of Hitler. Moltmann and Pannenberg were forced to join the Nazi army, and Moltmann was imprisoned for three years (cf Moltmann 1991b:222). They all made use of Nietzsche's view and prophesies as a point of reference. Barth, while agreeing with Nietzsche that the god of the nineteenth century was a "Nicht-Gott" (Barth [1922] 1924:96), also reacted to the god of Natural theology and later also to the god of Schleiermacher. Moltmann agreed with Nietzsche that humankind had constructed its own god, which did not exist, and corrected Nietzsche by saying that God had died, but on the cross. But instead of remaining in the grave, Jesus was resurrected. He is therefore the living God. God is the God of the future. Pannenberg agreed that Nietzsche was a prophet of his time, and that his critique must be viewed as a reaction against the concept of God as understood in his time (cf Pannenberg 1975:72). Pannenberg tried to correct Nietzsche's critique of Hegel's idea of the "absolute Geist" by stating that God could reveal himself, but that it was not, as Nietzsche had said, a teleological necessity. Peters developed a theology of this future God, that would in my view, meet the challenges of atheism and theism.

4.2   KARL BARTH'S CHALLENGE TO ATHEISM AND THEISM

4.2.1   Introduction[25]

Barth ([1919] 1985:164) agreed with Nietzsche's view of the nineteenth century as the era of progress.[26]

I will attempt to show that Barth was a theologian, along with others such as Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and Pannenberg, who experienced the consequences of the philosophy of progress in history and teleological development, namely World War I (in the case of Barth) and later World War II – consequences that Nietzsche prophetically warned about.[27]

To Barth the important issue of his time was not the ideas of progress and teleological development, but the fact that the kingdom of God had come near. The real promises were not those created by ideas of progress, but the new possibilities that the new life in Christ brought about. "Das Reich Gottes ist nahe herbeigekommen [Mk.1, 15]. *Das* ist der Grund, darauf wir uns gründen. Nicht der Fortschritt und die Entwicklung innerhalb der bisherigen Möglichkeiten, sondern die neue Lebensmöglichkeit, die im Christus geschaffen ist, die neue Kreatur in ihm" (Barth [1919] 1985:164-165). He agreed with Nietzsche that God could not be a prisoner of history (Barth [1924/25] 1990:68-70). Therefore he attempted

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[25] For more biographical details of Barth, I recommend the book by Busch (1976).

[26] Barth agreed with Nietzsche that God is not in history, nor in nature, nor in a human being (cf Ten Kate 1999:9-31).

[27] Barth (1951:446) credits Nietzsche for his prophecy, which had been fulfilled to the letter. According to Nietzsche the "Wille zur Macht" would be the content of the new commandment, which will dissolve Christian morality and achieve dominance in the twentieth century.

(with his Eschatological theology) to provide an answer to the challenge of Nietzsche's quest for a living God (see Barth [1924/25] 1990:68-70). Like Nietzsche, he realised that the god of teleology in history (progress in history) was dead. For Barth the god of teleology in history was nothing more than the projection of people's own injustice. Such a god is nothing but an idol. In the face of such a god, we must become sceptics and atheists (Barth 1924:9-14).

4.2.2   Atheism and theism challenged

When one reads the works of Barth, it becomes evident that his student days at Marburg played a decisive role in his theology. His thinking was influenced by the likes of Ritschl, Herrmann, Cohen and Natorp. Herrmann was an ethical theologian. He in turn was deeply influenced by Kant, interpreting and criticising Kant's work in his quest to solve the problem of religion. Ritschl stressed the importance of the self-revelation of God in the historical Jesus who became the Christ. According to the Marburg philosophers three valid spheres of knowledge were to be found. The question was to which of these, the logico-scientific, ethical, or aesthetic, if any, religion belong to. These philosophers could not accept a God who stood outside the thinking rationale of human beings. Natorp tried to solve this problem by modifying Schleiermacher's understanding of religion as a "Gefühl" (Fisher 1988:73). It was evident that no God existed for Natorp. Religion was only possible in the sphere of aesthetic feeling. Cohen put religion in the sphere of ethics. The relation between God and the world rested on logical and not personal

reasons.   These insights influenced Barth's thinking later on when he was a pastor in Safenwil.[28]

Barth (1911] 1993:387) stated that the social movement was the will of God in their time. He believed that Jesus taught humankind a way of life and not merely a number of ideas. One can be an atheist and still be a follower of Jesus (see Barth [1911] 1993:390-391). Barth added that the way of life, which Jesus propagated, was to care for the poor, to establish the kingdom of God on this earth, to renounce any idea of self-enrichment and to make one's fellow men and women one's brothers and sisters in faith. Political theology and the questions it raises in the form of Liberation theology challenges modern atheism that deals not with faith as such, but with the practices of faith. These theologies see modern atheism as a practical and political problem that can be solved by a new practice, which Barth propagated.

When World War I broke out, Barth was convinced that it was the judgement of God (cf Fähler 1979). It was God's judgement for the sins of the human race. He did not realise the consequences of such a statement – that he was interpreting the events in history as the ways of God. Nietzsche reacted against this notion of depicting God as a prisoner of history, for it could only lead to atheism. Later Barth rejected, as Nietzsche, the idea of interpreting world events as the way of God.   This was evident in his questioning of the Germans' "Kriegstheologie", according to which God was on the side of the Germans (Barth, in

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[28] The book by Fisher (1988) provides a detailed description of this time in Barth's life.

McCormack 1997:113).   Barth eventually came to the conclusion that God alone could make this decision.

To challenge modern atheism, Barth stressed the importance of God as the self-revealing subject, as the wholly other. Barth would never again return to idealism.[29] He believed that the only certainty, above and beyond history, was the kingdom of God. Barth realised that the kingdom of God was a present and a future (already and not yet) reality. Barth believed that socialism was the most important sign of the coming of the kingdom of God. God, as the righteous one, had to decide what the position of the unrighteous human beings should be. Human beings could never be righteous. To be righteous means to be God. At this stage of his life, Barth agreed with Nietzsche that Christianity, as a following of Christ, was an illusion (cf Barth 1924:12).   God is God in opposition to the humans, who are the unrighteous. He also stressed the coming of the kingdom of God and that human beings did not have the capacity or the means to know God. God is not a possession of the human race. In his book *Der Römerbrief* (1919) much criticism is levelled at liberal historicism, idealism, Christian religion and religious socialism.[30]

In order to maintain the dualism between God and humankind, Barth applied the terminology of eschatology and history. This theme of the eschatological reality of God

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[29] Pannenberg (1988b:244-245) says that Hegel influenced Barth and although Barth said that he would never return to idealism, Barth could not fully escape it as is evidenced in his discussion of Hegel (cf Barth 1960). Price (2002:55-60) says that although Hegel's "dialectical idealism" shaped Barth's theology, Barth rejected Hegel's idea of God as a "dialectical method".

[30] In his book, *Der Römerbrief* ([1919] 1985:53) Barth makes use of Nietzsche's "Umwertung aller Werte" as a heading for his interpretation of Romans 2:14-29. Like Nietzsche Barth ([1919] 1985:164-165) also criticises the belief of progress in history.

became more important in his later works (cf Dalferth 1989:20-27). He distinguished between two kinds of history: the "eigentliche Geschichte" and the "sogenannte Geschichte" (cf Barth [1919] 1985:46). The "sogenannte Geschichte" is our history of this world, our history of unrighteousness and sin. Then there is the "eigentliche Geschichte", which is the history of God. Barth's main problem was reconciling these two histories. This he tried to achieve by stating that the "eigentliche Geschichte" entered the "sogenannte Geschichte" in Jesus Christ. "Eine *neue Weltzeit* ist angebrochen: das Ende aller Zeiten" (Barth [1919] 1985:86). Another way of referring to these histories is by means of the relation between eschatology and history. What Barth wanted to achieve with this dialectical relating of "eigentliche Geschichte" and "sogenannte Geschichte", is clear. He wanted to put the movement and action of God in history beyond the reach of historical investigation. To say that an event has occurred in space and time, which does not belong to space and time, is the same as an event of which the source lies outside the space-time continuum. This becomes especially clear when Barth speaks of the history of God as "verborgene Gottesgeschichte".[31]

In *Der Römerbrief* (1919) Barth stresses the necessity to speak of God as the one who possesses us through his Spirit. There is by no means a way by which we as humans can know God. "Unsre Sache ist unsre im Christus realisierte Erkenntnis Gottes, in der uns Gott nicht gegenständlich, sondern unmittelbar und schöpferisch nahetritt, in der wir nicht nur schauen, sondern geschaut *werden*, nicht nur verstehen, sondern verstanden

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[31] To Smith (1983:27) "verborgene Gottesgeschichte" means that God's kingdom, although it is not part of our history, becomes active and actual in our history. Barth tried with his *Der Römerbrief* (1919 and 1922) to speak of the presence of God in history in such a way that it is unmistakenly clear that he is not of history (cf Mueller 1972:25).

sind, nicht nur begreifen, sondern *ergriffen* sind" (Barth [1919] 1985:158).   Barth believed God revealed himself to us in the life, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He gave us a new life in Jesus. "Wir wurden mit ihm begraben durch die Taufe auf seinen Tod, damit, wie der Christus von den Toten erweckt wurde durch die Herrlichkeit des Vaters, so auch wir in einem neuen Leben wandeln sollten.…Wir haben *ein* Reich verlassen, indem wir in ein *anderes* übergegangen sind. Unser Nein kommt aus einem Ja heraus" (Barth [1919] 1985:214).   In the resurrection the revelation of God becomes apparent. Faith is not an experience or a psychological reaction of human beings. It comes only from God.

The postwar time in Germany was chaotic, and the effect it had on Barth's theology, especially as expressed in the second commentary on Romans, was somewhat problematic. It should be noted that whenever he referred to "Kampf" in *Der Römerbrief* (1922), he did not mean the struggle of postwar Germany. The "Kampf" he was referring to was the judgement of God as it pertained to all people, as well as the crisis resulting from the fact that we did not know this loving God. "Der Kampf der Guten mit den Bösen ist aus. Die Menschen treten in eine Linie. Ihr Verborgenes steht im Gericht vor Gott, aber vor Gott allein. Aber das Gericht Gottes ist das Ende der Geschichte, nicht der Anfang einer neuen zweiten Geschichte" (Barth [1922] 1924:51). This is indeed a "Kampf", as no one will escape the judgement of God. To Barth, this "Kampf" is also embedded in a christological understanding, namely in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Christus ist "für uns gestorben". "Für uns", sofern dieses Sterben

Erkenntnisprinzip unsres Sterbens ist, sofern in diesem Sterben der

unanschauliche Gott für uns anschaulich wird, sofern dieses Sterben

der Ort ist, wo die Versöhnung mit Gott stattfindet (3, 25 5, 9): wo wir,

das vom Schöpfer abgewandte Geschöpf, ihm liebend wieder

zugekehrt werden, sofern in diesem Sterben das Paradox der

Gerechtigkeit Gottes (die Identität zwischen seiner zürnenden

Heiligkeit und seiner freisprechenden Barmherzigkeit) für uns

Wahrheit wird.

(Barth [1922] 1924:137)

It is the struggle that occurs when we realise that we do not know this God, the God who is

totally different from all other gods that we may know, which, referring to this uncertainty,

in the end, may lead to atheism. Through Kierkegaard[32] Barth gained some insight into

the problematic understanding of the incarnation of God. The incarnation of God comes

only from him and can never be a human possibility. It was also from Kierkegaard that

he got to know the style of indirect communication and developed a critical

understanding of Christianity as a religion. According to Barth, God as the unknowable

must become knowable to the human race. This can only happen where human beings

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[32] Upon receiving the Danish Sonning Award in Copenhagen in 1963, Barth made mention of Kierkegaard in his acceptance, saying: "In light of these later insights, I am and remain thankful as before to Kierkegaard for the immunization [sic] he gave me in those days. I am and remain filled with deep respect for the genuinely tragic nature of his life and for the extraordinary intellectual luster [sic] of his work. I consider him a teacher into whose school every theologian must go once. Woe to the one who has missed it! So long as one does not remain in or return to it" (Zellweger-Barth 1986:22)!

receive God's revelation, presence and reality. But the knowledge that human beings have of God is always dependent upon God's sanction and enterprise (cf Mueller 1972:29).

Barth ([1922] 1924:78-79) tried to deal with the revelation of God in history without mentioning that it came from history. He said that Jesus was a historical figure who lived with and like other people on earth. Although the knowledge of God in *Der Römerbrief* (1922) stands in the shadow of Kant, Barth was not speaking of God in metaphysical terms, or of the god of his time, which as he states in *Der Römerbrief* (1922) is "Nicht-Gott". Rather, he was speaking of a humanly constructed idol. He again agreed with Nietzsche that the God of their time indeed was *dead* or "Nicht-Gott" (Barth [1922] 1924:96).[33]

Barth stated the importance of the concept of God. God could not be used as a predicate to describe the infinite or to describe that, which is not human. Humans must admit that it is actually impossible to adequately describe or speak of God.

> Immer ist Gott dem Menschen jenseitig, neu, fern, fremd, überlegen,
>
> nie in seinem Bereich, nie in seinem Besitz, immer sagt Wunder, wer
>
> Gott sagt.…Sofern es menschlicherseits zu einem Bejahen und
>
> Verstehen Gottes kommt, sofern das seelische Geschehen die Richtung
>
> auf Gott, die Bestimmtheit von Gott her empfängt, die Form des

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[33] When Barth ([1922] 1924:112-113) deals with Nietzsche's critique of Christianity, he says that Nietzsche as well as the other protesters against Christianity cannot provide a counter religion with the same anchor. To Barth to destroy temples are not better than building them. He calls Nietzsche a "Prediger des Todes" (Barth [1922] 1924:75-76).

Glaubens annimmt, geschieht das Unmögliche, das Wunder, das

Paradox.

(Barth [1922] 1924:96)

If it is impossible for humans to know God, how then can God be known? Barth's polite answer to this is that God can only be known through God self. Therefore, in the act of revelation God remains God. He did not surrender himself to human beings. If he were to be fully known by human beings, he would not be God anymore. Barth says that his godly nature does not depend on his revelation. He is God before, during and after the act of revealing himself. But how is such a revelation possible? Barth ([1922] 1924:260) answers that we must see Jesus as the "Mittelbarkeiten" through which God revealed himself. We can know God only indirectly.

Barth (1947:338-339) would later explicitly state that God is free to reveal himself or not to do so. When God reveals himself in a form, it is important to remember that this form does not take God's place. It is God in the form that reveals, speaks, comforts, works and aids. Although God reveals himself, he stays the unknowable God (cf Barth [1924/25] 1990:18-20). It is clear that Barth wanted God to remain God, even in his act of revelation. But he realised that by treating the revelation only as "Mittelbarkeiten", that is to say in an indirect way, it could lead to the notion that the veil and the mediation function without any critical distance. Therefore, the deed of revelation had to be made more concrete. In *Der Römerbrief* (1922) he states that the resurrection of Jesus is *the* revelation. In this deed

Jesus becomes the Christ. Barth believed that the event of Jesus' resurrection was bodily, corporeal and personal. Revelation is always *in* history, but not *of* history (cf Landgraf 1994:14).[34]   God revealed himself through his Word that became Scripture and Proclamation, from where he communicated with the human race, for example through nature and history. He adopted this idea from Calvin.

> Calvin kennt keinen Stufenunterschied etwa zwischen natürlicher und übernatürlicher Offenbarung, keinen Weg, der von hier nach dort führte, sondern wenn er später tatsächlich beide unterscheidet, so ist die letztere doch eigentlich nur die *Explikation,* mann könnte auch sagen: die *Aktualisierung* der ersteren, die Bibel z.B. die *Brille,* um das Wort Gottes in Natur und Geschichte zu lesen, wie er später ausdrücklich sagen wird.

(Barth 1993:217)

He stressed the fact that God made himself known in Christ. The god-forsakenness of Jesus on the cross was a negative experience, which God turned into a positive experience by lifting the veil that divided him from the human race. It is interesting to note that Barth concludes his contemplation of the resurrection with the statement that we can indeed know God. "Die kraft der Auferstehung aber ist die Erkenntnis dieses neuen Menschen, in der wir Gott erkennen, ja vielmehr von ihm erkannt werden (Gal. 4, 1 Cor. 8, 13). Die Gnade ist die

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[34] It was important for Barth, in his attempt to escape the historicism of Hegel, to clearly state this.

Kraft der Auferstehung" (Barth [1922] 1924:187). In Jesus' death our own death becomes visible, and in his resurrection our new life in him becomes a probability (cf Fergusson 2003:69).

When we consider Barth's understanding of revelation, it becomes obvious that his interpretation is coloured with trinitarian notions. It was only later that he would speak in a totally trinitarian manner about God. To him, God as Father reveals himself in his Son Jesus Christ through the power of his Holy Spirit. Barth's ethical viewpoint was rooted in his christology. It is in the event of Christ's death on the cross that humans realise their sinfulness and hopelessness. God was the only one who could bring the human race into a relationship with him. Without his grace and love, humans would be condemned and lost forever. For Barth this constitutes ethics. It is not about what we can do, but about realising what God has done for us. Barth ([1922] 1924:416-417) distinguishes between two ethical activities, namely "primäre ethische Handelns" and "sekundäre ethische Handelns". Primary ethics are all those deeds of humans undertaken in carrying out the will of God, such as worshipping and sacrificing everything for God. "Opfer bedeuted Preisgabe, Verzichtleistung des Menschen zugunsten der Gottheit, bedingungslos gemachtes Geschenk" (Barth [1922] 1924:416). Secondary ethics are those actions, of which the evaluation takes place according to the will of God.

> Wobei folgendes wohl zu beachten ist: Ein Opfer ist nich etwa eine
> menschliche Handlung, in der sich der Wille Gottes vollstreckte in
> dem Sinn, daβ der Opfernde durch sein Handeln ein Organ Gottes

würde. Ein Opfer ist vielmehr eine Demonstration zur Ehre Gottes,
von Gott gefordert (denn Gott will geehrt sein), aber an sich eine
menschliche Handlung so gut oder so schlecht wie irgendeine Andere.
Gott bleibt allein Gott auch dem größten Opfer gegenüber, und sein
Wille geht nach wie vor seinen eigenen Weg.

(Barth [1922] 1924:417)

It is noteworthy that *Der Römerbrief* (1922) contains a critique against religion, a theme also explored by Nietzsche in his book *Der Antichrist* (1888). Neither Barth nor Nietzsche criticised religion, *per se,* but every religion that seeks selfish goals (cf Landgraf 1994:48). Barth however also recognises positive qualities in religion. It teaches humans that they can never be God, for their own unrighteousness is exposed in every deed of human behaviour. It can never be a method of self-justification. It is merely a roadsign, a way to enter into a relationship with God. When Barth speaks of the church, he regards it as the place of God's judgement. It is not to be understood in a negative way. God's judgement is an act through which he shows his grace towards humankind. Therefore, the church must be understood as the place where God shows us his grace, in the same way that he has done in the salvation of Jesus Christ. The church's main task is to proclaim this salvation to all humankind. When the church stops proclaiming the salvation of Christ, it stops being church. Should this happen, atheism is the result.

To Barth theology is an act of daring. Theology cannot be seen as a doctrine of the subject matter, which functions as a traditional handing down from generation to generation. Theology must always be an act of rethinking, reformulating and restating the truths about God and his relationship towards humankind (cf Barth 1924:158).[35] This is what Barth has in mind when he speaks of theology. Barth distinguishes between three ways of speaking about God, namely the dogmatic, the critical and the dialectical way (cf Barth 1924:166).

This can be done firstly by attributing dogmas, doctrines and characteristics to God. However, this method fails because it speaks *about* a God and not *of* God. The second way of speaking about God is by "negating humanity" (McCormack 1997:309). But this method is not effective, because it achieves only the negation of humanity. The dialectical way is the third way, which Barth sees as the best way to speak of God.

> Daβ Gott (aber wirklich Gott!) Mensch (aber wirklich Mensch!) wird, das ist da gleichmäβig gesehen als jenes Lebendige, als der entscheidende Inhalt eines wirklichen von Gott Redens. Wie aber soll nun die notwendige Beziehung von beiden Seiten auf diese lebendige Mitte hergestellt werden? Der echte Dialektiker weiβ, daβ diese Mitte unfaβlich und unanschaulich ist, er wird sich also möglichst selten zu direkten Mitteilungen darüber hinreiβen lassen, wissend, daβ alle direkten Mitteilungen darüber, ob sie nun positiv oder negativ seien,

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[35] This line of thinking can also be found in Peters' theology, which will be dealt with later in this chapter.

nicht Mitteilungen darüber, sondern eben immer entweder Dogmatik

oder Kritik sind. Auf diesem schmalen Felsengrat kann man nur

gehen, nicht stehen, sonst fällt man herunter, entweder zur Rechten

oder zur Linken, aber sicher herunter.…Ja am Nein zu verdeutlichen

und Nein am Ja, ohne länger als einem Moment in einem starren Ja

oder Nein zu verharren.…

(Barth 1924:171-172)

Barth's aim with theology was to speak about God as if God himself spoke *(Deus dixit)* (cf Barth [1924] 1985:68-75). It is in this regard that we find the different meanings Barth attributed to the Word of God. He distinguished between three meanings, namely the revealed Word of God, Jesus Christ; the spoken Word of God, as we find it in Scripture; and the *kerygmatic* Word of God, as it is preached (cf Barth [1924] 1985:18-19). We can also call it the Word in eternal, historical and present form.

These thoughts enabled Barth to speak of the Christ event as the subject of the *Deus dixit* (cf Barth [1924] 1985:18) in history, which must be proclaimed continuously. Barth saw the true nature of God in the revelation event. It is after God has revealed himself in Christ, that it becomes clear who he really is. Therefore, all reflections on the revelation of God must be of a posterior nature (cf Barth [1924] 1985:185-186). The revelation becomes visible in the process of God's incarnation (cf Barth [1924] 1985:189-190). The Son becomes human, but not identical to the human flesh. Barth did not agree with the

old concept of God having elected people long before time. He did not want to divide people into two classes. He did not see this election by God as static. It can change according to the situation. It vests totally with God to decide what he wants to do in each and every situation. There cannot be any certainties for human beings in the deed of election. The only thing that is certain is that God elects. Barth came to a new understanding of God's judgement and election, after having contemplated God's love and grace (cf Barth 1940:266). God elects everyone who accepts his revelation in Christ.

Barth wrote a book with the title *Fides quaerens intellectum* (1931)*,* referring to Anselm's definition of theology. Anselm wanted to prove the existence of God by means of a certain method. The method Anselm used, greatly coincided with Barth's own thinking about God. According to Anselm, knowledge of God begins with faith (cf Barth 1982:131). It is through prayer that we gain faith. And in every moment of faith we come to realise who God really is. Hence this faith leads to knowledge of God (*Credo ut intelligam).* Therefore, the theologian cannot know God without faith. And even if he or she has faith, they must wait for God to reveal himself, as he has done in Jesus Christ.

> Erkenntnis heißt hier prinzipiell *An*-Erkenntnis. Denken heißt *Nach-*Denken, cogitare kommt von dem cogere der göttlichen Offenbarung. Der Geist Jesu Christi, der in seiner Kirche ist, hat und ist das christliche Wissen. Und nun handelt es sich darum, daß der menschliche Geist dem sich als Subjekt zeigenden göttlichen Geist

gehorche und gelassen sei. Wort Gottes ist eben die Position Gottes in
der Vernunft.

(Barth 1982:136)

There were important goals in Barth's theological agenda. The most important one was his ultimate aim, namely to state that God is God – that he exists. To be able to state it explicitly, he adopted the principle of infinite qualitative difference. Through this principle Barth stated the difference between God and humankind, the total otherness of God in comparison to humankind, and the infinite God in opposition to the finiteness of humankind (Barth 1947:321).

But God bridged this gap between him and human beings by revealing himself (cf Barth 1947:338). Barth emphasised the importance of understanding the revelation of God as his self-revelation, as a self-offering and self-manifestation – as a mystery. God is always a mystery (see Barth 1947:339). God decided to reveal himself to humankind. He did not have to do it. He deliberately decided to come to the humans. This does not mean that God surrendered his existence. He is God and can reveal himself without giving himself, his existence, away. He is the almighty and is sovereign in his decisions. Revealing himself is his and only his prerogative. And that is what the revelation of God means. Otherwise it would not have been revelation, but rather the exposed God as a possession of humankind. God veils himself as the unveiling God to human beings through his Word.

Es bedarf der Offenbarung selbst zu der Erkenntnis, daβ Gott verborgen und der Mensch blind ist. Die Offenbarung und nur sie rückt Gott und Mensch wirklich und endgültig auseinander, indem sie sie zusammenbringt. Denn indem sie sie zusammenbringt, sagt sie dem Menschen Bescheid über Gott und über sich selbst, offenbart sie Gott als den Herrn von Ewigkeit, als Schöpfer, Versöhner und Erlöser und qualifiziert sie den Menschen als Geschöpf, als Sünder, als Todgeweihten.

(Barth 1938:32)

God speaks to humankind through his Word in three different ways, namely:

- as the *kerygmatic* Word in sermons (Barth 1947:89-101);

- as the spoken/written Word in Scripture (Barth 1947:101-113);

- as the revealed Word in Jesus Christ (Barth 1947:114-124).

But the Word of God is not a static, historical event of the past, upon which we can merely reflect by looking back. His Word is an everyday reality for humans where or when they accept it in faith (see Barth 1947:136). The Word of God means that God speaks. This speaking of God is true and known in and through the event that he himself says it, that he is present in person in and with what is said by him (Barth 1947:141).

Deus dixit does not imply that God must speak to humans. He is free to speak to us when and wherever and however he wants to. God's actions must be understood in the sense of his compassion and love. He decided to speak to us in our world, in all the forms that Barth mentions. This, the notion of the *Deus dixit,* is a very important key for understanding Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. He sees the triune God as one God with three modes of being. Barth does not want to speak of persons in the Trinity. Barth (1947:379-381) prefers to speak of the "drei Seinsweisen Gottes". Jesus is the reality of the revelation of God. Jesus is the one who has come and is yet to come again. This reality is the fulfilment of time. On the question of what Scripture says of Jesus, Barth says that Scripture does not say the same as the christological dogma that the Christian church confesses. The christological dogma and the doctrine of the Trinity are not explicitly found in Scripture. Barth says that we must interpret the dogmas of the Trinity and of Jesus as a commentary on the church's understanding of Scripture. We can also say that the revelation of God leads to the doctrine of the Trinity.

To Barth God is the eschatological God, the new creator of the new world without sin and suffering. In this God lies the future of humankind. This is atheism's biggest challenge.

4.2.3   Reflecting on the challenges that Barth offered to modern atheism and theism

Barth was trying to recover the concept of God in the light of modern atheism and theism. He agreed with Nietzsche that the god of their time, the god of history and progress, was an idol. He was a "Nicht-Gott". Barth's aim was to free God from the views of the modern period – by saying that God could not be a prisoner of the human race. He

wanted God to be God again. But to say that Barth would agree with all of Nietzsche's views would be a misconception. And the opposite is also true. If Nietzsche could have read Barth, he would have appreciated Barth's attempts at saving the concept of God, but would also criticise Barth's methods of thinking anew of God. In the thinking of Nietzsche this would again produce idols. But we must credit Barth for the attempt that he made to answer to the challenges of Nietzsche's prophecy about the death of God.

> Wir können, auch indem wir jetzt fragen: Was ist Gott? sein göttliches und also ihn als Gott Unterscheidendes? nur noch einmal fragen: Wer ist Gott? Denn er hat, was er ist, nicht nur in sich, an sich, bei sich, sondern indem Er ist, ist Alles, was er ist. Es gibt genau genommen kein gottheitliches Prädikat, keinen Gottesbegriff, der im besonderen das zum Inhalt haben könnte, was Gott ist, es gibt genau genommen nur das göttlichen Subjekt als solches und in ihm die Fülle seines gottheitlichen Prädikates.

(Barth 1940:337)

To Barth it was important that God as the unknowable must become knowable to the human race. It can only happen when humans have an idea of God's revelation, presence and reality. He is the wholly other who decided to reveal himself to humankind in Jesus Christ. He lifted the veil that divided him from the human race. In Jesus' resurrection he became the knowable God. Faith leads to knowledge of God *(Credo ut intelligam).*

Barth believed in the eschatological God who would create a new world. Human beings must realise that this world will make way for a new world without pain, suffering and sin.

4.2.4   Summary

To Barth God can never be tied to any human encounter or history. God is the wholly other, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. To him, the kingdom of God appeared in Jesus Christ. It was important for him to stress the fact that God is a mystery, even in his act of revelation. But he stressed the importance of Scripture as the first principle of God's revelation, like the Reformers did. In the light of God's love, Barth came to a new understanding of God's judgement and election. God elects everyone who accepts his revelation in Christ. To Barth God spoke *(Deus dixit)* to humankind through his Word in three different ways, namely through the proclaimed Word in sermons, through the spoken Word in Scripture and through the revealed Word in Jesus Christ. To him this God is also the *God of the future*, the creator of the new world without sin and suffering.

4.3   JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S CHALLENGE TO ATHEISM AND THEISM

4.3.1   Introduction

Moltmann in his book, *In der Geschichte des dreieinigen Gottes: Beiträge zur trinitärischen Theologie* (1991b:222), makes mention of the fact that he came from a liberal Protestant home where he knew more about Nietzsche, Lessing and Goethe, than he did of the Bible (cf Moltmann 1995:14). According to Moltmann (1999:28) Nietzsche's book *Der Antichrist* (1888) can teach Christians much about true Christianity.   He agrees that

Nietzsche did not mean that God*, per se,* was dead. He says that Nietzsche was focusing on those who were responsible for the killing, us, and not on the victim, in this case, God.[36]

> "God is dead – we have killed him", Nietzsche maintained. Unfortunately he did not say *when* we kill God. We kill God when we make God's image the victim of our violence, for God is in God's image. We kill God when we shut out and drive away strangers, for God is in the stranger. We kill God when we choose death instead of life and secure our own lives at the price of the death of many other living things, for God is the living God. Anyone who infringes life infringes God. Anyone who does not love life does not love God. God is a God of the whole of life, of every life and of the shared life of us all.

(Moltmann 1998:18)

He agrees with Nietzsche as far as the consequences of the death of God are concerned (Moltmann 1998:14). He calls it a terrible loss of the assurance of God and the self. He

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[36] In a footnote in his book *Theologie der Hoffnung* Moltmann (1965:152-155) explains the origin and meaning of the expression: "Gott ist tot" and also compares the different interpretations of the different philosophers. He interprets Nietzsche's "Gott ist tot" in this footnote as a critique of modern culture and on page 243 as a protest against historicism in the name of life. He also quotes Nietzsche in a footnote of his book *Der gekreuzigte Gott: Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* ([1972] 1976:274) saying: "Kurz gesagt, man hätte im Grunde genommen niemals damit aufgehört, Gott zu töten, und der Schrei Nietzsches: 'Gott ist tot, und wir haben ihn getötet!' müβte in jeder Generation von neuem aufgegriffen werden….Wer kann diesen Gott töten, den der Mensch zur Welt bringt, und wer kann ihn so entscheidend töten, daβ er nicht wieder aufersteht?"

is convinced that the consequences thereof could be experienced in events of World War I and II (Moltmann 1995:20-22; 1998:14). Moltmann agrees that what Nietzsche meant by his statement is that the god of progress is dead, because hope in the nineteenth century was associated with history and history with the future (Moltmann 1989:249; 250). Progress was a given fact, which was taken for granted in all the movements of science and culture (Moltmann 1995:19-30). World War I and II shattered all hopes of this secular faith in progress. Moltmann (1999:138) says that Germany also had a "Wille zur Macht" like that of Nietzsche's, but the German "Wille zur Macht" ended up in World War I and II, in Verdun, Stalingrad and Auschwitz. Instead of the secular faith in progress, the world felt that it was coming to an abrupt end. Moltmann (1988:31) sees the task of theology to formulate liberating hope without giving way to ideas such as belief in progress or apocalyptic anxiety about the future.

Moltmann argues that the idea of progress started two hundred years ago with the French Revolution. The people of France decided they wanted change. And when they eventually succeeded, the whole world looked at them in amasement – especially the Germans. Germany responded to the political revolution in France by an intellectual one (cf Moltmann 1995:20). Kant, with his transcendental philosophy of subjectivity, started the intellectual revolution in Germany. Kant, Fichte and Hegel are the philosophers of German idealism, which can be interpreted as the German theory of the French Revolution. The impact it had on the world was just as powerful as the French Revolution (Moltmann, in Metz & Moltmann 1995:160). This leads to the inevitable conclusion that a human being can write his or her own history. But as Moltmann says,

this human being can then also become the victim thereof. Moltmann (in Metz & Moltmann 1995:161) argues that all the great thinkers in the nineteenth century thought in the paradigm of history. To him history is just another word for crisis, which to him is just another word for revolution.[37]

Moltmann therefore reinterprets Nietzsche's statement "Gott is todt [sic]!" christologically. The suffering of Christ is the suffering of God himself (Moltmann 1991b:74). This he does after two World Wars, and in an attempt to give hope to humankind after all hope for progress was shattered (cf Moltmann 1988:87). Moltmann reinterprets this statement of Nietzsche's christologically by anchoring it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Moltmann (1980:52-53; cf Moltmann 1965:155), in this regard, closely links up with Hegel. Hegel approached the statement "Gott is todt [sic]!" philosophically, to draw humankind's attention to the nothingness without God.[38] He does so by giving Good Friday a deeper meaning. The historical Good Friday is not just a representation of the god-forsakenness of Jesus Christ. It is also a representation of the god-forsakenness of everything that exists (cf Moltmann 1965:153). When the modern world, which rebels against an autocratic theistic God, stands before the reality of the shadow cast over Good Friday by the omnipresent nothingness, it becomes a theological necessity to see this world as part of a process of God's revelation on the cross, and to see

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[37] Moltmann (1965:216-217) uses Nietzsche as an example of someone who tried to solve the crisis of history in the second half of the nineteenth century.

[38] Moltmann (1980:29; 1985:141) describes the feeling of humans in the infinite reality of space as the feeling Nietzsche experienced with the death of God and the loss in orientation, when Nietzsche said in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1973:159): "Wohin bewegt sie sich nun? Wohin bewegen wir uns? Fort von allen Sonnen? Stürzen wir nicht fortwährend? Und rückwärts, seitwärts, vorwärts, nach allen Seiten? Gibt es noch ein Oben und ein Unten? Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts?"

the resurrection as a reality. For Hegel the resurrection and the future of God must manifest themselves not only in the case of the god-forsakenness of the crucified Jesus, but also in that of the god-forsakenness of the world (cf Moltmann 1965:153).

4.3.2   Atheism and theism challenged

Moltmann believes Christians today face a new problem – that of uncertainty. Many Christians feel uncertain about God and their faith in him. They are divided between the debates of the existence and non-existence of God. And many Christians experience pain and suffering. They ask themselves time and again: who is this God who allows us to suffer? According to Moltmann this question can only be answered after having contemplated Jesus' suffering. The full meaning of God's love for those who suffer and feel abandoned in the world can only be understood in the light of what really happened between the dying Jesus and *his* God (Moltmann, in Metz & Moltmann 1995:90). He argues that we can see it in the cry of Jesus on the cross (Mk 15:34): "Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen?" Jesus knew the meaning of rejection. On the cross God his Father abandoned him. What happened there, happened between Jesus and his God or better still between God and God (Moltmann 1970:145; Moltmann, in Metz & Moltmann 1995:92). "Wenn dieser Gottverlassene, wie der Osterglaube bezeugt, von Gott auferweckt wurde, dann entsteht für die christliche Theologie ein Prozeß zwischen Gott und Gott, zwischen dem gekreuzigten Gott und dem kommenden Gott, zwischen dem verlassenden Gott und dem annehmenden Gott, zwischen der Erfahrung des vernichtenden Nichts und der Hoffnung auf den Schöpfer aus Nichts" (Moltmann 1970:138). Christology is the basis of all theology. The essence of christology lies in the

cross of Christ. Moltmann (1977:68) says that the cross of Christ is the beginning of a theology that is specifically Christian. The history of Jesus ended with his death on the cross but eschatologically seen, that is where it starts. Moltmann (1977:61) quotes Nietzsche as saying that modern man lost the meaning that was inherent in the paradox of "Gott am Kreuz". To Nietzsche it was a loss, because it promised an "Umwertung aller antiken Werte" (Nietzsche, in Moltmann 1977:70).

The only hope for humankind thus lies in the crucified and resurrected God. "Durch die Kunde von der Auferstehung des gekreuzigten Christus und in der Erfahrung seiner Geistesgegenwart kommt die Hoffnung auf universale Antwort in diesen Schrei nach Gott und damit auch die Hoffnung in die Welt, dass [sic] nicht die Tränen das Letzte sind" (Moltmann 1989:234; see Moltmann 1970:72). The God in the statement "Gott ist todt [sic]!" is also the crucified and resurrected God whom we know from history as the God of the promise in which we can hope and trust. "Das Kreuz Christi ist das Kreuz des von Gott auferweckten und zu Gott erhöhten Hernn" (Moltmann 1989:235). Moltmann (1995:156) admits that progress and hope exist in history, but says that God cannot be deduced from it. He adds that "[d]ie Offenbarung Gottes, von der das Neue Testament spricht, wenn es von der Offenbarung des gekreuzigten und auferweckten Christus kündet, ist keine historische Offenbarung Gottes *in* der Geschichte, die eschatologische Offenbarung Gottes ist vielmehr das >>Ende der Geschichte<<" (Moltmann 1995:156). When one thinks of *God in history,* it always leads to atheism or theism, while in the case of the converse, *history in God,* one is led past the dilemmas of atheism and theism. History in God means to understand all of humanity with its pain, misery and suffering in

the suffering and dying of Christ (Moltmann [1972] 1976:233). This view of Moltmann's closely links with Berdyaev's philosophy of history, as we find it in Moltmann's book *Trinität und Reich Gottes: zur Gotteslehre* (1980). The issue against which Nietzsche rebelled, namely a theistic uninvolved god, does not exist any more. The history in God proves it. As Father, God suffered *with his Son,* and also suffered the *loss of his Son* (see Moltmann 1980:97). Jesus' death is not the death of God but the beginning of his life-giving Spirit of love, which appears from the sorrow of the Father and the death of Jesus (Moltmann [1972] 1976:239). The grief of the Father, the suffering of the Son and the living hope of the Holy Spirit were part of Auschwitz.

History repeated itself in God because God again had to bear suffering and grief because of the atrocities of Auschwitz (cf Moltmann 1991a:96-99; see Moltmann 1975b:80). The life of God within the Trinity cannot be seen as a closed circle (Moltmann 1975b:71-72). In comparison to Barth's "monarchische Trinitätslehre" (so described by Moltmann), Moltmann (1991b:179-182) subscribes to, what he calls a "soziale Trinitätslehre". To him Barth's doctrine of the Trinity does not give expression to the loving relationship between God the Father who loves the Son and the Son, who prays to the Father and the Holy Spirit. For this very reason Moltmann constructs his whole theology around this movement inside the triune God. He describes creation as an act of God the Father that sends forth the Son and the Holy Spirit, where the Son redeems the world of its sins and the Holy Spirit gives life to the world and allows it to be part in God's eternal life (Moltmann 1985:109). Moltmann (1991b:180-181; see Moltmann 1999:277-283) says that the term *perichoresis* best describes the unity of the triune God. "Es folgt aus dem

Ansatz der perichoretischen Trinitätslehre, daβ nicht die innertrinitarische Konstitutionsebene, sondern die innertrinitarische Beziehungsebene der *Perichoresis* und der Mutualität für das Schöpfungsverhältnis Gottes und alle gottentsprechenden Verhältnisse in der Schöpfung maβgeblich wird" (Moltmann 1991b:180-181). In a footnote Moltmann (1991b:181) quotes Nietzsche's disagreement with the concept of mutuality. To Nietzsche "Gegenseitigkeit" is a "groβe Gemeinheit" which was a concept of early Christianity. Moltmann concedes that Nietzsche has a point in this regard, all be it in a cynical way. Moltmann (1991c:323-324) therefore does not interpret *perichoresis* according to Nietzsche's understanding thereof.

The triune God is also involved with his church on earth. People are included into the history of the Trinity through the experience of the life-giving Spirit in faith, in baptism, and in the fellowship of believers (Moltmann 1980:106). The church to Moltmann's mind is the church which Jesus proclaimed. "Die Kirche Jesu Christi ist die eine, heilige, katholische und apostolische Kirche. Einheit in Freiheit, Heiligkeit in Armut, Katholizität in Parteinahme für die Schwachen und Apostolat im Leiden sind ihre Kennzeichen in der Welt" (Moltmann 1975b:388).

After the horror of two World Wars, Moltmann gives people hope by reassuring them that God's presence is not outside the world, but in the world. And he is not just God, he is also human, not just autocratic and cruel, but also the victim of suffering and love. Not only is he God with us and for us, but we are also united with God through his suffering and death (cf Moltmann 1988:202). Not only is God the crucified, he is also the

resurrected Lord who ensured our future forever with God. "Das Kreuz Christi steht in dieser Weltzeit von Gewalttat und Sünde – der Auferstandene lebt in der kommenden Weltzeit der neuen Schöpfung in Gerechtigkeit" (Moltmann 1989:236).

Our hope lies not only in the crucified and resurrected Lord, but also in the expectation of the coming Lord, when he will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and to take those with him who believe in him. Our hope thus lies in the past (crucifixion), in the present (resurrection) and in the future *(parousia)* by the crucified, risen and coming God. In this coming expectation that has already started with the resurrection of Christ, our hope and eternal future are ensured. "Aus der Auferstehung Christi entfaltet die Freude kosmische und eschatologische Perspektiven auf die Erlösung des ganzen Kosmos. Eine Erlösung wozu? Im Fest der Ewigen Freude sollen alle Geschöpfe und die ganze Schöpfungsgemeinschaft Gott ihre Hymnen und Lobgesänge singen" (Moltmann 1995:367).

Moltmann (1965:74) maintains that the only way of challenging modern atheism and the philosophy of Hegel is through a theology of the resurrection, in terms of an eschatology of the resurrection in the sense of the future of the crucified Lord. "Eine solche Theologie muβ das 'Kreuz der Gegenwart' (Hegel), ihre Gottlosigkeit und Gottverlassenheit, annehmen und daran den 'Geist der Auferstehung' theoretisch und praktisch beweisen" (Moltmann 1965:74). Then revelation would not prove or manifest itself as history of our present society, but would reveal to this society and this age the eschatological process of history. Whenever the reality of the resurrection is defined in

historical or existentialist or utopian terms, then the origin of this reality lies in the atheistic form of the historian's view of history, of people's view about themselves and of their utopian view of the future. We must therefore think of *God* as the God of the resurrection, as the God of the future (Moltmann 1965:152).

4.3.3   Reflecting on the challenges that Moltmann offered to modern atheism and theism

Moltmann (1988:235) avoids patripassianism by saying that Christ died in God. He balances the death of God and the death of Christ (see Moltmann 1970:138; 1977:80). But we must remember that he does this only when he speaks of Jesus' crucifixion (see Moltmann, in Metz & Moltmann 1995:96). He constructs his whole Trinitarian theology consistently around the risen, crucified, coming Christ who proceeds from the Father and who is, through the Spirit, the hope of a new creation and who is for ever with God in absolute peace, joy and glory. To Moltmann (in Metz & Moltmann 1995:96) the death of Jesus is not an incident between God and humankind, but an event within the triune God between Jesus and his Father, an event from which God's Holy Spirit goes out to the world (see Moltmann 1991b:182-184).

Küng and Pannenberg do not agree. Küng (1993:117) says that we need to be cautious when speaking of the death of God or the suffering God, because those are mere speculations, not inspired by the Bible, but by Hegel. Pannenberg says that we must see Jesus' suffering and death in the light of his human nature.

Dennoch kann es nicht anders sein, als daβ Jesus in der Person, also in der Person des ewigen Sohnes durch das Leiden und Sterben am Kreuz betroffen wurde, freilich so, daβ Jesus in seiner äuβersten Erniedrigung und in der Annahme dieses Sterbens die äuβerste Konsequenz seiner Selbstunterscheidung vom Vater auf sich nahm und sich gerade darin als der Sohn des Vaters bewährte. Auch der Vater kann nicht als unberührt vom Leiden seines Sohnes gedacht werden, wenn gelten soll, daβ Gott Liebe ist.

(Pannenberg 1988b:341-342)

In Küng's (1993:119-121) opinion the whole New Testament stands witness to the fact that it was not God himself as Father who hung on the cross, but God's Image, Word and Son. He says that Paul in particular speaks of Christ who was crucified in weakness, and not of God. Through his resurrection Christ became part of the triune God through whom we acquired eternal life.

Ja, nur so, durch die Aufnahme dieses Sohnes in Gottes ewiges Leben, erweist sich Gott für die Glaubenden als der diesem einzigartigen Sohn (und damit allen seinen Söhnen und Töchtern) sogar in äuβerstem Leid, in Verlassenheit und Sterben solidarisch nahe: als der auch mit unserem Schmerz verbundene und an unserem Leid (verschuldetem oder unverschuldetem) teilhabende, als der von

unserem Elend und all der Ungerechtigkeit mitbetroffene, verborgen

mit-leidende und doch gerade so zuguterletz unendlich gütige und

mächtige Gott.

(Küng 1993:121)

Moltmann was convinced that God could never be tied to any progress in history. The

god of progress as a creation of humankind according to both Nietzsche and Moltmann, is

indeed *dead*. The only God that exists is the coming triune God of the future. God as the

triune God, who is transcendent as the Father and immanent as the Son and the Spirit in

history, reveals the future. When we understand God as revealing the future, we will

comprehend our history of pain, suffering and hope as the history of God. To Moltmann

(in Metz & Moltmann 1995:98) the history of life and the future of God go beyond

atheistic objection and theistic acceptance. "In dem modernen Streit zwischen dem

Theismus, der behauptet: Gott ist, und dem Atheismus, der behauptet: Gott ist nicht, kann

eschatologische Theologie sagen: Gottes sein, das Reich seiner vollen Identität, ist im

Kommen" (Moltmann 1970:155).

The future awaits everyone who has faith in God. "Faith finds the consolation of God in

all suffering, but hope looks to the future of a new creation in which there will be no

more mourning, crying, or pain. To put it simply: anyone who believes in God hopes for

this earth and does not despair. He looks beyond the horizon of apocalyptic terrors to

God's new world, and what he does will be attuned to that world" (Moltmann, in Metz & Moltmann 1995:170).

4.3.4   Summary

Moltmann agrees with Nietzsche that the concept of God in the nineteenth century, as the god who is associated with progress in history, is wrong. That god is dead. He offers a solution to this problem (God being associated with the progress in history) by stating that we can never talk of *God in history*. He postulates that talking of God in history, inevitably leads to atheism or theism. He prefers to talk of the *history in God*. He describes creation as an act of God the Father, who sends forth the Son and the Holy Spirit – the Son to redeem the world of its sins and the Holy Spirit to give us the hope and faith of the new creation. To him, God is the triune God of the future. His whole theology is an attempt to tell the people who suffered in World War I and II that God knows suffering. The *history in God* tells us that God the Father grieved the loss of his Son, while the Son suffered on the cross the grievance of god-forsakenness. For this reason, God understands the suffering of his children. The only hope that we have is the hope of God's future.

4.4   WOLFHART PANNENBERG'S CHALLENGE TO ATHEISM AND THEISM

4.4.1   Introduction

For the purpose of this chapter, I shall, as far as Pannenberg is concerned, focus primarily on the question of atheism and his view on how to challenge it. Pannenberg (1988b:73-

83) says one of the greatest problems of Christian belief in God is to relate the concept of God to nature, history and the world (present reality). What is even more difficult to explain is that the world is dependent on God.

Pannenberg (1972:202) agrees that Nietzsche was a prophet of his time and that his critique must be viewed as a reaction against the concept of God that was prevalent in his time. "Nietzsches bekanntes Wort 'Gott ist tot' hat zunächst diesen Sinn, daβ der überlieferte Gottesgedanke des metaphysischen Weltbildes unglaubwürdig geworden ist" (Pannenberg 1975:72).[39]

Pannenberg therefore wants to offer a response to the question Nietzsche posed regarding the concept of God. To him (Pannenberg 1988b:73-83) the concept of God is very important. It cannot be exchanged for other concepts. But the concept of God always needs interpretation.

4.4.2   Atheism and theism challenged

In order to understand the theology of Pannenberg, a few parameters have to be taken into consideration. There is the influence of Barth, who was his professor at the University of Basel in 1950. At the same time Pannenberg was also strongly influenced by the great philosopher Hegel. His theology has often been called a "theology of reason", as the title of Van Huyssteen's book (1970) suggests. This becomes evident when Pannenberg (in Peters, T 1998:24-25) refers to theology as the science of God.

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[39] Pannenberg (1996:316-325) provides a brief description of the philosophy and the meaning of Nietzsche's statement: "Gott ist todt [sic]!"

Pannenberg, although influenced by many other great thinkers, made theology his own enterprise. He agrees with Barth that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. He postulates that revelation is only revelation because it is the self-revelation of God (cf McCormack 1997:359, note; see Price 2002:99). It comes from God and is the only ground for human beings to talk of God. He agrees with Barth that the revelation in Jesus Christ is a unique revelation. In any theological enterprise this centeredness on the work and person of Jesus must be taken into account. Jesus' divinity and the universal validity of his mission are closely related.[40]

Pannenberg also differs from Barth. Barth thought that this revelation of God comes to humankind in a veiled form. This revelation of God is by God's grace and freedom. It enters the human world on the grounds of God's will and grace. Humans, as finite beings, cannot fully grasp or understand this reality. Calvin (1931:293-317) said that the finite is not capable of the infinite. Pannenberg disagrees. He says that for humankind to understand the revelation of God, revelation cannot lie outside human reality or existence. If human beings cannot understand this revelation and make it their own, it cannot be revelation. Pannenberg placed greater emphasis on the philosophical and historical-critical understanding of reality than Barth did. For Pannenberg God revealed himself indirectly in history.

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[40] Pannenberg (1976:242) is of the opinion that the most far-reaching denial of Jesus' universal validity was by Nietzsche in his book *Der Antichrist* (1888). Nietzsche denied the man Jesus as the point of orientation for Christian piety. This piety focused on sin as a condition of faith in redemption. In the end it led to spiritual suffering and oppression, which made human beings break with the source of their guilt feelings namely Christianity. Pannenberg (1988b:75, 117, 168; 1991:267) uses Nietzsche as an example. He mentions that Nietzsche viewed Christian morality as life denying (Pannenberg 1991:270). He says that it is incorrect to talk of the death of God on the cross, since it has been done from Hegel's and Nietzsche's time. To him Jesus died according to his human and not his divine nature (Pannenberg 1988b:341).

The influence of Hegel can be seen throughout Pannenberg's books and articles. Perhaps this is why so many believe that his theology is a mere re-statement of the philosophy of Hegel. This is however not true. Pannenberg used the philosophy of Hegel to form his own theology. He agrees with Hegel that the revelation of God is universal history, but he differs from Hegel as far as the concept of the "absolute Geist", which definitely or necessarily reveals itself in history, is concerned. For Pannenberg there is no absolute idea in the present. Everything within history is provisional. God reveals himself indirectly in history whenever he wills to do it.

According to Pannenberg (1988b:244-245) Hegel had also influenced Barth. We must understand the revelation of God in the strict sense that Barth does. God reveals himself to humankind through his Word in three different ways, namely as the *kerygmatic* Word in sermons, as the spoken or written Word in Scripture and as the revealed Word in Jesus Christ. However, it needs to be stressed that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is a unique one. Pannenberg (1988b:280-281) says that this revelation happens through his Word, as long as his Word is the same as his divine nature.

Pannenberg believes it is better to talk of the revelation of God through history in an indirect way. It is only through history that God reveals himself – indirectly (see Pannenberg 1982:16-20). History is the indirect self-disclosure of God. Therefore history, the history of God, lies open to us, because it is only at the end, in future, that we will understand our present and our past.

In diesem besonderen Sinne kann von der antizipatorischen Offenbarung der in der Zukunft des Reiches Gottes vor aller Augen offenbart werdenden Gottheit Gottes in Person und Geschichte Jesu gesprochen werden. Diese Aussage geht über das neutestamentliche "Revelationsschema" insofern hinaus, als dort "nur" von der Offenbarung des göttlichen Heilsplans in Jesus Christus die Rede ist.

(Pannenberg 1988b:270-271)

Pannenberg (1988b:244-245; cf Pannenberg 1982:18) states that the idea of the indirect self-revelation of God through history has its source in German idealism with Hegel as the great exponent.

History, for Pannenberg (1975:24), is reality.[41] The biblical idea of history lies in the reporting of the events in a chronological form. The early Christian writers adopted this concept of history. In modern times, humanity replaced God as the sole author of history. But it was soon realised that the unity of history lies with God. "Und damit droht das Geschichtsbewuβtsein zu schwinden. So ist also das Verständnis der Wirklichkeit als Geschichte nicht nur aus dem biblischen Gottesgedanken erwachsen, sondern es bleibt auch *gebunden* an den biblischen Gottesglauben, dessen Ausdruck es ist" (Pannenberg 1975:27).

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[41] Pannenberg confirmed this statement at a seminar held on 5 October 1999 (which I attended) at the University of California at Berkeley, USA, which was hosted by the Centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences.

According to Pannenberg Rahner has sharpened the understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Rahner stated that the immanent Trinity is also the economic Trinity ("Rahner's rule"). It means that God's act in history is the same as it is in eternity. This does not mean that they absorb each other. Pannenberg sees the resurrection of Christ as a historical event – an event that actually took place in history. In this historical fact God shows us the meaning of creating the heaven and the earth out of nothing. God has shown us his love through this event. When he talks of life and the Christian concept of the evolution of life, he sees it as the process which began with the divine Spirit that brought the creatures of God into life as a dynamic activity. This creativity was first recognised in the resurrection of Jesus (Pannenberg 1991:120; Pannenberg, in Peters, T 1998:145). The resurrection becomes our hope for the future, when Jesus will again make the old new. "Durch die Auferweckung Jesu ist der Gott Israels als der über alles Geschehen mächtige Gott offenbart; denn wer das Ende aller Dinge in der Hand hält, der ist auch ihrer selbst mächtig. Vom Ende der Auferstehung her ist er als der Gott auch des Anfangs offenbart, als der, der 'die Toten lebendig macht und das, was nicht ist, ins Dasein ruft' (Röm 4, 17)" (Pannenberg 1975:81). He extensively deals with this theme in his book *Theologie und Reich Gottes* (1971). Pannenberg (1971:9-29) does not use this as an escape from the critical claims of the atheists.

In his book *Gottesgedanke und menschliche Freiheit* (1972), Pannenberg deals with the criticism of the atheists. They claim that belief in God deprives them of their human freedom. Pannenberg gives them credit for helping us define the very reality of God: to

think about God as a non-existent being. But how would that be possible? According to Pannenberg (1972:47) the alternative lies in the future. The idea of God as future derives from his understanding of Jesus' message of the coming kingdom of God. "In Jesu Botschaft wurde die eschatologische Hoffnung zur einzigen Quelle für die Erkenntnis des Gotteswillens und daher auch zur einzigen Anweisung für das Leben der Menschen" (Pannenberg 1971:12). For him this is the only legitimate way of speaking of God (cf Van Huyssteen 1970:71). He states that it gives concreteness to the word *God*. "Wenn wir in der so angedeuteten Weise Gott als die Macht der Zukunft verstehen, gewinnt das Wort Gott eine neue Konkretheit. Wenn von der Macht der Zukunft die Rede ist, sollte man nicht an den leeren Formalbegriff der Zukunft als Zeitmodus im Gegensatz zu Vergangenheit und Gegenwart denken" (Pannenberg 1971:14).

4.4.3   Reflecting on the challenges that Pannenberg offered to modern atheism and theism

Pannenberg changed the paradigm of Hegel in the sense that God reveals himself indirectly in history, but when he wills. God is not a prisoner of history or the process of history. He changed history in Jesus Christ when he made a new future possible. It is in the future of God that we as human beings understand our infinite position. In Jesus' life and death we become part of God's future, which already appeared in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In this coming of God lies our hope and future.[42] "Die Trinitätslehre beschreibt den kommenden Gott als den Gott der Liebe, dessen Zukunft schon angekommen ist, und der die vergangene und gegenwärtige Welt durch sich selbst

integriert und so verwandelnd bejaht zur Teilhabe an seinem eigenen unsterblichen Leben" (Pannenberg 1971:29).

To Pannenberg (1979:359) the transcendence of the hidden God, as a characteristic of modern atheism, puts atheism in question. It comes to the fore in the form of the negation of the traditional concept of God. How to think of the alternative of God without this concept or depiction, remains an open question. "Daβ die 'leere Transzendenz' als Person, als Gott begegnet, das vollzieht sich in der Geschichte der Religionen; und deren Wahrheit zu prüfen, bleibt der Untersuchung der besonderen Gestalt der einzelnen Religionen vorbehalten" (Pannenberg 1979:360).

4.4.4   Summary

Pannenberg agrees with Nietzsche that the concept of God cannot be exchanged for other concepts. We need to *interpret* the concept of God. His theology is an attempt to recover the meaning of the concept of God. To him God is the triune God who revealed himself indirectly in history through Jesus Christ. This revelation says something about the position of Jesus in relation to the Father. Pannenberg understands the Trinity as consisting of three self-distinct persons who constitute each other in their different distinctions. These different persons are an expression of the unity of the divine essence. The resurrection of Jesus becomes our hope for the future, when in eternity God will make the old new. Pannenberg sees God as the triune God of the future.

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[42] Pannenberg (1993:206-208) says that believers can now, through love, share in God's nature. Love can unite the believers with God. He says that Nietzsche did not understand the biblical word *agape* as God's

4.5   TED PETERS' CHALLENGE TO ATHEISM AND THEISM

4.5.1   Introduction

Peters postulates that theology is the rethinking of our faith in the triune God. This rethinking of our faith in the triune God must be contextual, acceptable and open to all people. "It must confront the world in and around the church and interpret the fundamental symbols of our faith in light of the contemporary context. This contemporary context is feeling the impact of an emerging postmodern mind accompanied by a global future consciousness – the consciousness of a potential avalanche of disasters about to thunder down upon us. We need a faith that can face the future" (Peters 1992:376). This is the faith that is needed in the light of modern atheism.[43] Peters (1992:12) says that "critical consciousness" led to atheism in the modern mind. What is hereby meant is that the modern mind has become critical of the concept and language about God. Who can prove that any talk about God is true or false? A range of interpretations regarding any statement about God is possible and there are no definite objective criteria to test these interpretations. Modern consciousness can help us to distance ourselves from the sources of religious life that are found in the ancient Christian symbols. We can use the tools of suspicion to doubt, objectify, criticise, analyse and depersonalise our faith in God. Peters' challenge to modern atheism and theism lies within hermeneutics as a theological response, which I will explain in the next paragraph.

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love for his creatures. To him it served as an opposing concept to that of Christian love.

4.5.2   Atheism and theism challenged

Peters wants to answer the hermeneutical question: how can the pre-modern symbols of our faith speak meaningfully to us today as modern Christians who struggle with modern atheism? He agrees with Küng (1993) that the symbols of the Creeds of Faith do not speak to modern Christians. We live in a different world with different issues and concerns than those prevalent in biblical or Medieval times. These idioms and expressions have to be examined. What they said about God must be reformulated in a new idiom and context. Peters (1992:30) says that in answering the hermeneutical question, we must consider two principles, namely the notion of hypothetical reconstruction and that of holism.

Christian theology's main aim must always be the explication of the basic symbols that we find in Scripture. The rational character of theology is not grounded in pure reason, but consists rather of rational reflection on something pious, namely the symbols. Theology is second order discourse, while symbols are primary discourse. Theology is the activity of the church thinking about what it believes in. But the church must always do so critically and in a way that is open to the future (see Peters 1992:41-43).

Any theological method must consist of certain criteria, such as sources, norms, presuppositions and procedures (cf Peters 1992:32). There are theologians who choose to use the Bible, tradition, experience and reason as their criteria. When Peters uses the Bible as criterion, he regards the "biblical symbols" as a primary source.

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[43] Peters (1992:12) is of the opinion that Descartes' principle of doubt has become the cutting edge of modern critical thinking, which led Nietzsche to doubt subjectivity and God.

I employ this term [biblical symbols] because it does double duty: it gives primacy to scripture while reflecting the delicate interdependence of the four sources through history. This interdependence is reflected in two assumptions that I make. First, there is a tradition of symbolic speech about God that precedes scripture [sic] as well as follows it. Second, these symbols are associated with an originary experience that is tied to God's self-revelation, and internal to symbolic experience there is an inherent thrust toward [sic] reasoning, toward [sic] the process of interpretation.

(Peters 1992:33)

Theology is the act of explaining the biblical symbols.

Peters designates two functional levels of symbolic speech, namely the primal level, which includes literal and metaphoric understanding, and the secondary level, which is the result of primal understanding. This understanding leads to theological concepts and doctrines. It is important, however, to remember that, while defining these symbols, we should not take our own symbols and make them applicable to God or biblical material. Peters criticises the feminist theologians for being guilty of such practice. The task of theology is to interpret and not to create.

We are responding to God, not creating God. That event to which we

are responding comes to us already packaged in the Bible. It comes

wrapped in the language and symbols of those that experienced the

revelation and then wrote about it the best they knew how. We have

no access to the God revealed here except through the symbols in

which the testimony is enshrined. What we have to learn about God

comes from the interpretation of this first testimony.

(Peters 1992:43)

Christian theology must always be Hermeneutical theology. It means that we must submit

ourselves to the symbols, so that they can help us to understand the deeper meaning that lies

beneath it (Peters 1992:43). It does not mean that we interpret it in the light of our own

experiences and our own ideologies. There is a norm to which the hermeneutical process

must submit. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be the material norm and the Bible must be

the formal norm (see Peters 1992:68). We can only speak responsibly of God when we take

these norms into account.

Once these norms have been set, certain conditions for the interpretation of biblical symbols

also apply. Peters mentions five. In the first place, the theological model must follow the

same order as the Confessions of Faith. It is important to note that Küng, in his book *Credo:*

Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis – Zeitgenossen erklärt (1993), also applies this

condition. Secondly, it must be systematic. In the third place, it must be ecumenical. In the

fourth place, it must take the context of the text into consideration. In the fifth place it must be in touch with the reality that is part of the modern and emerging postmodern mind of the West (Peters 1992:73). It must be critical. We need to ask ourselves: is it true? On what account is it true? It must answer contemporary questions.

Only when all of these conditions have been met can the process of interpretation begin. It is a responsible way of interpreting the biblical symbols in order to come to an understanding of God. Theology always occupies itself with the question of who God is. Christians look for the meaning of the life of Jesus to come to an understanding of God. One often gets the impression that humans know precisely who the God is of whom we speak. But on closer examination, one has to admit that more meanings are attached to the term *God*. "On the one hand, God can refer to the first person of the Trinity, the Father. On the other hand, God can refer to the Trinity as a whole, inclusive of Son and Spirit" (Peters 1992:82). When we consider all the references to God in the Bible, several means of reference, such as: El Shaddai, the God of power and mountains, the God of the covenant, the God of Israel, God as Father, Jesus as the Son of God, God as Lord, as lamb and as king, come to the attention. These are symbols that give us a picture by which to better understand the reality of God.

> God is not literally a king or a father or a lamb. Nor are symbols
> paradigms, depicting a divine model to which humans should conform
> their behaviour. Rather than images or paradigms, symbols are
> markers that identify the experience of revelation. Symbols lie at the

metaxy, at the edge, where mundane reality intersects with the transcendent reality of God. The theological task is to explicate these symbols so they construct a world of meaning that orients human life toward God.

(Peters 1992:83)

We are aware of a reality that exists beyond us. We know a reality exists which we cannot fully see, understand or comprehend. Very often we ask ourselves the question: if there were no transcendental reality, where would everything go? To a reality of nihilism, nothingness with no future, like Nietzsche's madman who finds no God? "The question arising from the experience of brute thereness [sic] is the question of God. It is not the answer. It is the question. The answer comes initially by an act of God that is a revelation of God" (Peters 1992:84). This revelation of God is communicated to the believers through symbols. But the church fathers also made use of symbols to construct Christian structures. Therefore, we have the task of interpreting these symbols in their contextual settings to see if the understanding of the church fathers is still in accordance with the original meanings of the texts. If we find that their understanding is not in accordance with the original meaning of Scripture, we must break it off and build anew, albeit in a constructive manner.

Luther interpreted the first statement of the Apostles' Creed as the tension between the earthly and heavenly reality of God – God who is in heaven and on earth at the same time.

In the Old Testament God is referred to as Yahweh, who reveals himself in a physical and metaphysical manner. "The oneness of Israel's God was explicated with great conceptual force as the Hebrew language gave way to Greek formulations during the Hellenistic period. This gave rise to what we now call classical theism, the formative influence on orthodox Christian theology.   The heart of the synthesis between the Hebrew and Greek conceptualities is the identification of God with the source of being" (Peters 1992:88). This means of reference in analogy to human characteristics can be divided into two main groups, namely the negative and the positive. We must study these analogous human characteristics of God in their original contextual settings.

> To illustrate the process of moving from the historical experience of Israel to casting the divine attributes in Greek conceptuality, I will examine three in the long list of attributes: first, ineffability as it derives from the experience of God's holiness; second, eternity as it derives from the experience of God's faithfulness; and third, omnipotence as it derives from the experience of God's power. We might think of divine holiness, faithfulness, and power as metaphorical symbols found in scripture; and we might think of ineffability, eternity, and omnipotence as reflections upon these symbols leading to theological concepts.

(Peters 1992:89)

In the Bible *holiness* refers to God's action and name. Humankind's experience of God cannot be put into words. The *faithfulness* of God refers to his nature as the unchangeable, to stay the same for ever and ever. The *power* of God refers to his omnipotence to create everything and keep it in good order. It does not refer to him as a tyrannical despot who allows no chance or choice. It refers to him as a loving, caring God who looks after his creation and creatures.

When Peters discusses God as Trinity, he states that we must "go behind these classical formulations…to explicate the originary biblical symbols…." (Peters 1992:94).   The doctrine of the Trinity was developed in a time that can be called "classical theism". Today there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the understanding of the Trinity (Peters 1992:95).   We cannot describe the "incomprehensibility" of God as his mystery.   The problem of understanding the Trinity is not about the numbers three in one. "What is at issue is whether or not God can define the Godself by becoming human, whether the Beyond can become Intimate, whether the infinite can become finite, and whether all of creation can be redeemed and taken up into the divine life" (Peters 1992:95). The idea of the Trinity is a theological construction. The key to understanding it lies in the relationship between God as the Father and his Son. The symbol of God as Father developed because Jesus was called God's Son. When we examine references in the Bible to God as Father, we see that in the Old Testament there are fourteen occurrences and in the New Testament one hundred and seventy. But in all these cases the references appear in the context of adoption. When Christ mentions God as Father, he does it in the light of the faithful who have become God's children through their faith. He has now become their Father through the working of

his Holy Spirit. In the New Testament there are four different ways in which God is referred to as the Father of Jesus, namely by indicating that Jesus was adopted by God, by identifying Jesus with the Father, by distinguishing Jesus from God, and by referring to Jesus as the extension of God.

During the first four centuries of Christian belief different theological reflections on the Trinity can be distinguished. There was the doctrine of modalism and subordinationism, which attempted to understand the relationship between Jesus and God. This doctrine became problematic when the church fathers tried to interpret this relationship with regard to the Trinity's immanence and transcendence. It is interesting to note that this tension can be resolved by distinguishing between the immanence and economy of the Trinity. "On the one hand, to affirm the immanent-economic distinction risks subordinating the economic Trinity and hence protecting transcendent absoluteness at the cost of genuine relatedness to the world. On the other hand, to collapse the two together risks producing a God so dependent upon the world for self-definition that divine freedom and independence are lost" (Peters 1992:109). Peters is of the opinion that the only way to resolve this dilemma is to think of the identity of the immanent and economical Trinity as eschatological. "God's trinitarian activity in temporal history becomes constitutive of the divine eternity. The redeemed creation is drawn up into the eternal life of God through the eschatological consummation" (Peters 1992:109). In this regard, he agrees with Moltmann, who regards the economical Trinity as the fulfilment of the immanent Trinity when the history and the experience of salvation are fulfilled.

In speaking of the creation, one must logically mention the Creator. The question we have to answer for ourselves is: is this creation a deed that just happened in the past or is this creation still, as a process, continuing? Peters postulates that this process will continue until the time that God will complete everything eschatologically. How God is related to the world, still remains a question today. Many doctrines attempt to provide an answer thereto, namely:

- pantheism, where God and his world are the same;

- deism, where God is distanced from his creation;

- theism, where God is involved in his creation from a distance;

- panentheism is a reconciliation of the insights of both deism and pantheism, by combining ontological immanence and transcendence. It is therefore possible to "affirm the presence of God in all things while affirming the freedom of all things to operate independently"(Peters 1992:124).

Peters chooses for a proleptical theism. "It is a proleptic view in that it depicts God as constantly engaged in drawing the world out of nonbeing and into existence with the aim of consummating this creative work in the future. God's present work in and for the world anticipates the final work. This view is also theistic in that it affirms that God is active in, yet transcendent to, the work" (Peters 1992:125). There are the atheists and the naturalists who deny a God who is active in his creation. To understand creation as God's work, we have to see it as a special revelation of God. We must look at it through the new deed of creation by God. We must look at it in the light of Jesus' coming to earth, and his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. It is important to note the relatedness of the

redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the creation of God. The creation of God is better understood in the light of his new creation, which took place in Jesus Christ.

It is not difficult to notice that our contemporary context differs from that of the Bible. Today, we are aware of several theories that explain the origin of creation, such as: the theories of evolution, ecology, enthropy and the initial singularity. God is active in his creation in a proleptical way. God created the world in an extraordinary act and he has the power to change it whenever and however he wants to. "This leads us to the next principle of a proleptic theory of creation: God's creative activity within nature and history derives from God's redemptive work of drawing free and contingent beings into a harmonious whole" (Peters 1992:136). The whole is better than its parts. This theory of holism rules out two reductionist mistakes, namely archonical and atomic reductionism. Holism can thus be understood in the sense that God is active in nature and history. The reductionism of the modern mind forced us into a deterministic model of a world in which God's actions are not quite clear. All events are seen as inextricably linked together by a single chain of cause and effect (Peters 1992:137). But we must remember that the whole has not yet arrived. In Jesus Christ we see the intentions of God with regard to his whole creation. In Jesus Christ we can see what his goals with the creation were, from beginning to end. But the end has not yet come. Creation awaits the future for fulfilment (cf Peters 1992:139).

A new life began when God blew his Holy Spirit into the deceased Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is the eschatological deed of the Holy Spirit where God fulfilled his promises in Jesus Christ and renewed them for the rest of creation. The coming of the

Holy Spirit characterises the arrival of a new time. The task of the Spirit is to reconcile and construct the creation of God as a whole, after it having been torn apart by sin. "The Holy Spirit proceeds from this work of the Father through the Son to effect this ministry of reconciliation within the world. Reconciliation is a process leading eventually to its consummate fulfilment in the unity of all things in their creative and redemptive ground, God" (Peters 1992:233). In faith, the Holy Spirit makes Jesus Christ alive and present. We are looking forward to the new future that is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. And in love the Holy Spirit makes reconciliation with God possible.

In postmodern times there is a growing need to see a spiritual and unifying power working in our world and lives. This working power is designated to a kind of cosmic power or spirit. This type of thinking is not new to Christian theology. It is widely accepted that it is wrong to see God the Father as the sole Creator of creation. "Not only is the Son, the Logos, the principle of order in creation, but the Spirit is the life-giving power of original as well as continuing creation" (Peters 1992:253). Moltmann also expounded this theme in his theology. His doctrine of creation is part of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit who proceeds from the Father and shines forth in the Son is the very spirit of the universe, its cohesive structure, its source of energy. The Spirit is the principle of creativity operating at all levels of matter and life" (Peters 1992:253). The Holy Spirit is not the private possession of the historical, Christian churches. It is also part of all the cosmic processes that are still going on in our world. The Holy Spirit is working in and outside the church.

There is also a growing need for a unified type of understanding of the Spirit that is ecumenical and the same all over the universe. This leads to the idea that the reality of all things is alike. However, when looking at the universe, we get the impression that not everything is in unity. An infinite number of stars and planets in the galaxy still remain unknown to humanity. We therefore have to acknowledge that we still do not have the whole picture. The only time that we can and will experience the whole picture is (when we are) in heaven. What we experience now is merely a shadow of what is yet to come. What we experience now is a proleptical unity of that which lies ahead in future. "The Spirit of God is the spirit of unity and truth because it is the work of God to bring the creation to a consummate unity in the eschatological kingdom" (Peters 1992:255).

"Salvation is already present to us in faith. It is present in faith but not in experience, at least not in uninterrupted, continual, plenary, uncontradictable experience" (Peters 1992:306). We already share in the new future of God, although not yet in full. When we refer to the last things ever to happen, we call it *eschatology,* which is derived from the Greek words τ ὰ ἔ σ χ α τ α . Eschatology originates from the Easter event. The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation on which we base our thoughts about the future. But it has its limits. We do not exactly know how the new future in Christ will be. Bultmann (1948:15-53; 1964:21-36) said that eschatology had to be interpreted in the light of the mythological worldview of the Bible. He saw eschatology not as part of a historically given setting, but as something that belongs to the sphere of faith. "Based on the earlier discussion on the significance of Jesus' resurrection, it would seem clear that Easter cannot be understood rightly except as

prolepsis, except as an anticipation in Jesus' person of what God will do to transform and renew the whole of creation" (Peters 1992:307; see Peters 2002:304).

Peters (2003:69) distinguishes between three words that describe this prolepsis, namely *futurum, adventus* and *venturum.* Our modern ideas presuppose *futurum* when we think of the future as the result of the causal happenings in the past. With *adventus* is indicated that it is something totally new. It does not stem from any past experience that explains or determines the present or the future. In this regard he refers to the example of the kingdom of God, which is a totally new concept that does not come from this world. "The kingdom of God must then come as an advent, as an act of divine grace whereby the creation undergoes genuine renewal. The future renewal of all things that the advent of the divine kingdom will bring has already appeared ahead of time in the person of Jesus from Nazareth, the proleptic advent of the ultimate rule of God" (Peters 1992:309). With the word *venturum* he means that the present is taken up by the power of what is yet to come. When we participate in the Easter event it is not only by means of memory, but also by participation in the bigger reality, which it denotes.

To refer to the new in the sense of *adventus,* means the old has to die. The future always has an element of new life and death. These elements appear in even the earliest symbolism. We find it in the paradise events where Adam and Eve ate from the tree of good and evil. God banned them from paradise, because he did not want them to eat from the tree of life and death. If they became part of sin after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, eating from the tree of life and death would then be a death sentence for them. "Death

is the door that God slams shut on evil and suffering within creation" (Peters 1992:310). According to the law of Moses, death is the result of sin, while according to the gospel it is a gift which opens the door to a life with God, forever and ever, without any suffering and sin. God made it possible through the resurrection of Jesus as a new glorified reality.

What our resurrected bodies will look like cannot be determined with certainty. No one knows. The only thing that we know for certain is that the resurrection of our spiritual bodies can only take place at the final *eschaton* (cf Peters 2002:301, 320-321). "If there is no cosmic transformation, then there is no resurrection; and if there is no resurrection, then Christian faith is in vain and of all people believers are most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:14, 19)" (Peters 1992:315; see Peters 2002:301-303). There are certain symbols in the Bible that depict life after death, with issues such as the last judgement of God and the doctrine of heaven and hell being examples thereof. The believers will be judged according to their faith, which is reflected in their deeds. Heaven is symbolically depicted as the place where God will be glorified, as the revelation of God, as the paradise, the Garden of Eden and as the new Jerusalem. Heaven actually means to be with God in all eternity. Hell is the opposite thereof. Today, more and more people believe that the biblical picture of hell does not correspond with the love of God. This has given rise to doctrines that propagate universal salvation and redemption. "In short, the affirmation of human freedom seems to require the affirmation of a possible realm that eternally rejects the love and grace of God" (Peters 1992:325).

The problem with the doctrine of predestination is that it is grounded on the idea that God is temporarily not present in the history of life, that God is not a living God and that he is bound to a mechanistic creation over which he has no power. This is wrong. God is free and can never be bound by human ideas and decisions.

> I believe we need to start with destiny. What is our destiny? It is ultimately to live with God in the new creation. The meaning of all events and the definition of all actualities will be determined by the context of the whole of history, a whole that will be established only at the advent of God's kingdom. That destiny will determine who we will be. Retroactively, it determines who we are today. We are now on the way, becoming who we will be. Hence we know who we are proleptically – that is, in anticipation of our final reality yet to be established by God.

> (Peters 1992:331)

Today we are confronted with the brokenness of our existence. We do not have the slightest idea of what wholeness or totality means. Therefore, the theology of the twenty-first century must provide humankind with vision and direction through ecumenical unity and ethical deeds, which are orientated towards the future. We can no longer hold on to our ideas and forget about the world's ideas. There are other ideas and opinions, which we have to take into account. Peters (1992:334) pleads for ecumenical pluralism instead of radical

pluralism. According to him, "[r]adical pluralism is an ideological stance that tends to lose sight of the whole while advocating an inviolate plurality of parts. I will recommend that the better vision is that of 'ecumenical pluralism,' which affirms the unity of the human race as an article of faith even though empirical differences and divisions seem so strong."

If one subscribes to this vision, your point of departure in any discussion will not be to differ, but to seek common ground for mutuality. We can use the example of God as common ground for all the different religions. All religions have something of the universal human being before his or her God. Therefore theology and the people of the church must proclaim that the coming kingdom of God will reveal the whole of the human race, that which cannot be seen yet. Peters (1992:336) calls for "ecumenical pluralism", which I will explain in chapter 5. In the postmodern mind there is a tendency to seek the religious. Interests have changed. There is a tendency to return to the ancient traditions, to learn mystical techniques and esoteric symbolism. Conversations between different religions have become a necessity. Peters (1992:338-340) is in favour of what he calls a "confessional universalistic position", in terms of which people share their and their church's confessional doctrines of faith and religious characteristics with other parties that differ from them and at the same listen to their opinions. To ensure a sober-minded conversation, Peters suggest four rules of conduct, namely:

- the openness to listen properly to the other party; there cannot be any confessional exclusiveness;

- each party has to have an opinion about the issues being discussed;

- an atmosphere of mutual respect, love and goodwill must prevail;

- there must be enough time and energy for the conversation.

Peters (1992:342) does not agree with theologians such as Hick, Küng, Knitter and Smith, who assume a critical position with regard to the belief that Jesus Christ is the criterion for Christian unity. They choose to speak of a theosentrical model in the universal picture of all the religions. The problem with such thinking is that people tend to forget their own confessional uniqueness.

> The confessional universalistic position is also more honest regarding the fundamental claims of the Christian faith; and it is better able on this count to understand sympathetically the normative if not exclusivist claims of other traditions such as Islam. On the one hand, it grants the realistic possibility that dialogue just might end with a standoff, with a set of claims and counterclaims with no resolution, and with no pretense of an invisible higher unity of agreement. On the other hand, this is by no means inevitable.

<p style="text-align:right">(Peters 1992:348)</p>

Peters believes in universal salvation for all people on the grounds of the love of God and the fact that he is our only future. He says that Barth and Rahner, although they agree on the principle that God's grace is universal, differ from him on the principle that God's salvation and redemption are only for those whom God elects. He believes they are not consistent in

their thoughts. "Now one could sharply criticize [sic] Barth and Rahner on systematic grounds for lack of consistency and coherence, for the inability to bring universal grace and double destiny together" (Peters 1992:356). This, however, is not the mistake of these two theologians, but can be traced back to the difficulty of interpreting the biblical symbols that portray salvation and redemption.

Christians ought to live within the postmodern paradigm, environmentally friendly, creative, holistic and futuristic. We ought to live as redeemed creatures in Jesus Christ with freedom and love. We must see love as the process of creation. Love can lead to numerous relationships. Love can mend the brokenness of our existence and make everything and everyone whole again. Love can bring people together. Love can also lead to radical improvement. Love can be the reason for revolutions and change. Our trust must be in the God of the future, which is present to us through faith. "Divine love ties us to the ultimate future and gives us the security we need; that love has been liberated within our souls by the power of the gospel to create new life amid the present aeon of death" (Peters 1992:360).

Theology as theology of the coming kingdom of God must ensure that governments know their limits. They must know that God will also judge them. "Although, on the one hand, we want to affirm a positive continuity between the future of God's justice and its political embodiment in the present time, on the other hand, we need to keep them sufficiently distinct so as to be able to render critical judgment [sic] against failures in the present" (Peters 1992:362). We must set the guidelines to help us focus on the idea that our ethical thoughts must be grounded on the eschatological kingdom of God. We must stand firm on

the promises of the kingdom of God and the fulfilment thereof for the whole of creation. We must focus on heaven and live on earth. We ought to do deeds of faith from the certainty of our future in God. We must strive for the whole of the future in the present (see Peters 1992:365).

We ought to live our lives according to the faith we confess in the triune God. This is part of the true nature of theology. We need faith to handle our future, faith that is grounded in Jesus Christ who is the future of God. We can share this truth and certainty with Christians all over the world.

> The destiny of Jesus is a microcosm of what we can expect for ourselves and for the macrocosmic order, namely, passing through destruction to resurrection and new creation. The present aeon is experiencing the brokenness and fragmentation of a fallen world, of a world yearning for a wholeness that it does not yet have. In Jesus Christ, God has given us a promise that the present yearning for wholeness is not in vain. Actually, God has given us more than a mere promise. In the Easter resurrection of Jesus, God has given us a prolepsis of what is to come, a preactualization [sic] of the eschatological wholeness that will imbue all things.

(Peters 1992:376-377)

According to Peters (1993:146) the doctrine of the Trinity "consists of an explication of the biblical symbols that tries to do justice to the paradox of the beyond and intimate dimensions of God's being, to what the philosophers of religion call God's absoluteness and God's relatedness." He feels that Rahner's rule does justice to the absoluteness and the relatedness of God. God is indeed, as Trinity, open to the future. "The value of engaging in Trinity talk is that it offers an opportunity to remind ourselves that the God of the beyond has become intimate, that the God of creation has entered our world as its redeemer and sanctifier, and that we have good reason to hope for resurrection into the new creation" (Peters 1993:187).

4.5.3 Reflecting on the challenges that Peters offered to modern atheism and theism

The Christian faith must always be an ecumenical faith. It is the faith that God will make the whole of creation new and that he will include everyone in this new creation. We, as believers, already live in the certainty of this future. Therefore we ought to share our faith with our world, react with hope to all the problems of our broken world and submit to the love of God to make us new people. He chooses for proleptic theism instead of modern theism. According to Peters, God is the one who already made the future of believers possible through the resurrection of Jesus and in this way already started the coming of the new kingdom. God can only be thought of from the certainty of the future. God is the God of the future who has the prospect, with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, of a whole new future for the whole of creation (see Peters 2003:63, 76-77).

4.5.4   Summary

I have focused on Peters' concept of God, the dogma, and the practice of the church. Peters is of the opinion that the concept of God is mainly derived from biblical symbols. His theology is an attempt to study the biblical symbols, which bear witness to the mystery of God's being. He is of the opinion that the symbols of God in the Bible need interpretation. We as theologians should define these symbols. We need to surrender ourselves to these symbols. The doctrine of the Trinity consists of an interpretation of the biblical symbols that tries to explain the paradox of the transcendent and immanent dimensions of God's being. Peters admits that the Trinity is a theological construct. He agrees with Pannenberg that the key to understand the Trinity lies in the relationship between God as the Father and his Son. In the early church the doctrine of the Trinity became problematic when the church fathers tried to interpret this relationship with regard to the Trinity's immanence and transcendence. Peters says the only way to resolve this dilemma is to think of the identity of the immanent and economical Trinity as eschatological. He agrees with Moltmann that the economical Trinity is the fulfilment of the immanent Trinity. This will happen when the history and the experience of salvation are fulfilled. The resurrection of Jesus Christ already made the future of believers possible. We can only think of God out of the certainty of this future. He is our *only* future.

Chapter 5

BEYOND MODERN ATHEISM AND THEISM

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Nietzsche's prophecy about the "death of God" as a result of modernity's belief in a certain concept of God, plunged modern theology in a crisis. In this last chapter my aim will be to return to the specific problems Nietzsche encountered with the concept of God. He had a problem with the concept of God in relation to history, rationality and morality. In this chapter I will therefore focus on these problems by:

- describing Nietzsche's views on the concept of God and its relation to history, rationality and morality;

- evaluating in this regard the views of the four theologians Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters by means of proposals;

- comparing and incorporating the insights from other theologians and postmodern philosophers by means of proposals, as an aid to the views of the above-mentioned theologians.

At the outset allow me a couple of preliminary remarks. I do not intend to overshadow or lessen the insights of Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters by bringing other scholars into the debate with Nietzsche. Their views can be seen as supportive to the views of the four theologians who, apart from Nietzsche, are the focal point of this dissertation. I chose the other theological and philosophical scholars for either their own position with regard to Nietzsche or for their particular interest with regard to those problems Nietzsche

sought to address concerning the concept of God. For instance, I chose Bultmann because his theology provides some answers to the problems Nietzsche had with the concept of God in relation to history. I made use of Van Huyssteen's views regarding the concept of God in relation to rationality and relied on Tracy to reveal some new ways of speaking of God beyond atheism and theism. I will also include the views of other postmodern philosophers, namely Levinas, Derrida and Foucault, since they, in a philsophical way, provide other solutions to Nietzsche's critique of the concept of God in relation to rationality, history and morality.

It will be my goal to come to a postmodern understanding of the concept of God, a concept that Nietzsche developed in his critique against modernity's vision of God. *Postmodern* is understood not only as a strong reaction against modernity, but a "project of refiguring rationality as an exploration of rationality between modernity and postmodernity" (Van Huyssteen 1999:31; cf Schrag 1992:7). I see postmodernity as a paradigm, the era in which we live that does not have a proper name (cf Tracy 1981:339-364). Postmodernity to me, means a selective farewell to the self centred subject, the unhistorical object and the cultural self-orientation of the modern era (cf Palmer 1975:319). I do not wish to equate postmodernity with postmodernism. Postmodernistic theology can go overboard and depart from Dialectical theology by assimilating in a pantheistic way two exclusive types of beings – God and humankind – so that it becomes contrary to the Christian views of reality and Christian worldviews (cf Solomon 1990:289-293; Van Aarde 1995a:28). I see in postmodernity the chance to broaden the rationality of the modern period to emphasise the pragmatic and affective with the

cognitive (rational), in such a manner that deeds and feelings do not replace the rational. Postmodernity is not to be seen as an absolute replacement of modernity, but should be seen in a critical continuum with modernity.

I agree with Tracy's (1981:351) description of the time we are living in when he says:

> We now seem to find ourselves in a situation where all the traditions and all the classics have become porous, where there is no "windowless monad", no language game where anyone can find refuge from the conflict of the radically pluralistic present. The necessity for all the interpreters of the classics in the situation to expose themselves as themselves to the genuinely other, the need to discern when and how a systematically distorted communication moment is upon us, where dialogue and conversation are possible – or, if not now possible, how they can be rendered possible again – the need to reformulate fundamental questions that are worth our asking in this pluralistic, conflictual, often chaotic present.

5.2   THE CONCEPT OF GOD

5.2.1   Nietzsche's critique of the concept of God

Nietzsche reacted to the concept of God that prevailed in his time (Ward [1997] 1998:xxix). The modernistic period linked the concept of God with history and progress

in history.[44] God was seen as a product of history and culture. This led to optimism in every sphere of life. Nietzsche refused to share this view of God. This was the God that according to Nietzsche was dead and it was modern humanity who was responsible for killing him (cf Nietzsche 1969a:168; 1973:159).

To Nietzsche (1969a:169) faith in the progress of history is a modern and a false idea. The doctrine of "Fortschritt" stated that it had been proven by history that human beings developed to greater heights of their own accord and that they intrinsically had the potential for progress (Nietzsche 1930:40). God's existence and providence could then be proven on account of the optimistic progress during the course of history. Nietzsche regarded Hegel as the father of these ideas. Nietzsche warned the people of his time against the nihilistic and fatal consequences of these ideas. He was of the opinion that the growing influence of these ideas would in the foreseeable future lead to a crisis in German culture, because God was considered to be part of the progress in history, which was actual and necessary. He was part of the "Weltprozeß" that justified the modern age as moving forward to even greater heights (Nietzsche 1972a:304).

Nietzsche was looking for God without the metaphysical, moral and historical claims of modernity (cf chapter 3; Haar 1998:157). With the death of God, Nietzsche proclaimed the end of modernity. In my view it is evident that Nietzsche's problem was not with God as such, but with the concept of *God*. His prophecy regarding the death of God is

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[44] According to Derrida (2001:6) it was Nietzsche "who begin(s) by putting into question the interpretation of history as development, in which something that is contemporary to itself – self-contemporary – can succeed something that is past."

relative to a particular definition of God (cf Bergoffen 1990:64-66; Haar 1998:157; Ward [1997] 1998:xxvii). The God of modernity is dead. That is the God that was killed. It is a murder, a crime against humanity (see Lüdemann 1998:108-109). The death of God means the death of everything that exists (cf Bergoffen 1990:64; see Roberts 1998:187). As was previously pointed out, and as is evidenced by his reaction against Hegel and Darwin, Nietzsche had a problem with the idea of God's existence that is bound to history, a history which necessarily develops into greater heights. It was important for Nietzsche that God exists without the objective claims of history. To Nietzsche such a view of God is fatal and nihilistic. He had a problem with the idea of the subject that knows God, which culminated in his reaction against the philosophy of Descartes (Van Tongeren 2000:135). In rejecting the claims of the knowing subject, he agreed with Kant, but he rejected Kant's idea of practical reason, which included the possibility of knowing God (Van Tongeren 2000:123). Kant invented a new method of speaking and reasoning about God based on moral grounds, a method which Nietzsche rejected (Nietzsche 1969a:176-177; cf Kant [1899] 1976:739-766; see Wilkerson 1976:153). He criticised Strauss for not bearing the consequences of his statements about Christianity. To him the moral and metaphysical God of Christianity does not exist (cf Pannenberg 1991:270-271; Haar 1998:158-159; Marion [1997] 1998:282).

Nietzsche (1969c:79) believes that in the past God was used to force the people to feel guilty. He (1969a:192-195) denied a "sittliche Weltordnung", in terms of which everyone is bound to obey the all-encompassing will of God. He is of the opinion that

the concept of God is falsified. He is looking for a God that helps instead of one that demands (cf Nietzsche 1969a:192).

He criticises the Christian concept of God since this God has become the contradiction of life, the God of the sick, the physiologically retarded and the God of sinners (cf Nietzsche 1969a:181-183). According to Nietzsche (1969a:183) this God has become the lie of an imminently new world and is the formula for every calamity that happens in this world. He is looking for a "dancing God", which is both useful and harmful, friend and foe and admired by good and bad (Nietzsche1968a:45; cf Haar 1998:158; Madelon-Wienand 1998:301-312). Nietzsche wants the Christian God to be universally accepted. He was looking for a concept of God that transcends the dangers of modern atheism and theism.

5.2.2　A theological assessment of Nietzsche's critique of the concept of God

- ***Proposal 1: God being defined as the triune God of the future***

The theologians Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters, among others, tried to respond to Nietzsche's problem with the concept of *God* (as outlined in chapter 4). Naturally, the above-mentioned theologians do hold different views on *God*. By mentioning them in the same breath, does not signify that they necessarily agree on every aspect in the field of theological discourse. What they do have in common is that they try to speak of God without attaching his being to the processes of world history and morality.

They all agree for example that God is monotheistic. They however do have certain objections to one another's ideas. Barth says that God is the single divine subject who

reveals himself in three different modes of being (cf Taylor 2003:33-46).   Moltmann

rejects Barth's monotheism.   However, judged by a remark of Pannenberg's, it would

appear as if Moltmann was not against trinitarian monotheism as expressed by Barth.

Rather, he was reacting to a kind of non-trinitarian monotheism of an "altreformierte

Lehre von den ewigen Dekreten Gottes" (Pannenberg 1991:35).   Moltmann has a

problem with Barth's monotheistic emphasis on divine unity and lordship.   He chooses

for an open divinity in which there is already a differentiated mutuality, one in which the

creatures of creation are welcome to participate.   Instead of seeing the Trinity as one

subject with three modes of being, he holds the view that the Trinity consists of three

subjects with differentiated relations and mutuality.   Pannenberg thinks of one God with

three different persons, each of whom relies on the others and each of whom gives

identity to the others (cf Pannenberg 1991:43).

Pannenberg (1988a:11) says that with the statement "das Ende der Metaphysik"

Nietzsche meant that the Platonic view of two worlds, namely a hidden world beyond the

world of experience and the real world, had become invalid.   He is of the opinion that a

theological doctrine of God that lacks metaphysics falls into subjectivism and/or

demythologisation (Pannenberg 1988a:9).   Talk about God implies a concept of the

world, which can only be established through metaphysical reflection.   In the light of the

insights of Hegel, Pannenberg says that a monotheistic concept of God perceives God as

beyond and at the same time immanent.   The monotheistic God is the one that not only

transcends the world, but is at the same time also immanent in the world.   The God of the

beyond is also the God of the here and now.   God revealed himself indirectly in history

through Jesus Christ. Our final destination is not this world with all its pain and suffering, but the new creation that has already dawned in Jesus' resurrection. The end of history is not nothingness, but eternity (Pannenberg 1988a:109). "Es ist als das Ende der Geschichte zugleich ihre Vollendung, insofern die Geschichte eine Geschichte der Taten Gottes ist, aber auch im Hinblick auf die Bestimmung des Menschen als Thema der Geschichte" (Pannenberg 1993:632). He criticises Barth for interpreting the imminent eschatological expectations of early Christianity regarding the eternity of God as being the end of time which can be at any moment in time. To Barth the end of the world in the New Testament is the end. It does not refer to a temporal event or a historic or cosmic disaster. Pannenberg is of the opinion that such a view leads to a depreciation of a future end of the world. Later on Barth rejected his own earlier view, although he never did full justice to the priority given to the eschatological future in primitive Christianity (cf Pannenberg 1993:640-641). In the history of Jesus Christ the eschatological future and the eternity of God entered the historical present. According to Peters (1993:146) the doctrine of the Trinity is derived from biblical symbols that describe God's being as immanent and transcendent.

To Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters, God is the triune God of the future. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ the promise of a new future becomes a certainty. They challenged Nietzsche's critique of the concept of God by stating that God is the eschatological triune God of the future. He is the one who overpowered death. He has made a future possible for everyone who believes in him. The future of the coming God

is a reality through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. History ended with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Humans have become part of a new history, God's history.

5.2.3   A postmodern philosophical assessment of Nietzsche's critique of the concept of God

- *Proposal 2: God as the Other*

To the postmodern mind it would be unthinkable to perceive God as a being tied to history, rationality or morality. Postmodern thinkers focus on a concept of God that would express something of his mysterious presence. Derrida (2001:71) considers God as the "absolute third" who is *"there* where he is not there, he is there; *there* where he is not there, is his place." Tracy (1994:43) again, states that it is time that God enter history again as the "hope-beyond-hope", as God who reveals himself in hiddenness, in cross and negativity, in the suffering of all those others who were ignored in the modernistic narrative as non-peoples, non-events and non-history. "God returns to remove the *'theos'* at once grounding and domesticated, in modernity's onto-theo-logy" (Tracy 1994:44). Yes, God returns to command modernity to forget about its provisional ambitions to control his divine reality so that he can be God again.

Levinas (2000:223) thinks of God as "the desirable" who is separated through longing, who is near but also different (see Levinas 1998:68). God's absence and transcendence is visible in humankind's responsibility for the other. God is not "the first other but other than the other [*autre qu'autrui*], other otherwise, other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other person, prior to the ethical compulsion to the neighbor" (Levinas 2000:224;

cf Levinas 1998:69). He sees the otherness of the Other (God) in other. He thinks of

God not as a being but as the Other, as a "God beyond being" (Levinas 2000:136-139; cf

Levinas 1998:77-78; see Wyschogrod 2000:xi). Ethics makes it possible to think of God

other than in ontology (cf Levinas 1998:167; 1999:26-37; Levinas, in Robbins 2001:171).

It is in the presence of the Other that one is confronted with the fact that something exists

outside of oneself. It is this love from the Other who cares for the poor, the sick and the

sinner that captivates the attention of the human race. It places the human race under an

obligation to do the same (cf Levinas 1998:159-163, 165-166; 1999:16-26; Wyschogrod

2000:xiii; see Levinas, in Robbins 2001:108).

Derrida (1978b:79-153) also thinks of God as the Other, but tries to do so in a non-

conceptual manner. Derrida (1989:40) acknowledges the fact that there are two different

ways of experiencing the Other, namely the *via negativa* (Apophatic theology) in its

Christian form and the Greek experience. He wants to find the law that determines the

exchange between the Greek experience and Apophatic theology. He is not interested in

relating the question of God and humankind's relation to such an entity, but to relate

them to structures of reference, in which all discourses on the Other are already fixed and

continue to engender. He wants to link God to a network of quasi-transcendental

structures of referral so that the possibility of God is not exhausted by the Heideggerian

notion of being, where God is the opening in which he as being comes to the fore as a

supreme being (Derrida 1989:40-42). Derrida (1978b:138) explains what he means by

the notion of being as follows:

The Thought of Being is what permits us to say, without naiveté, reduction, or blasphemy, "God, for example." That is, to *think* God as what he is without making him an object. This is what Levinas, here in agreement with all the most classical infinitist metaphysics, would judge to be impossible, absurd, or purely verbal: how to think what one says when one proposes the expression, *God* – or *the infinite – for example?* But the notion of examplariness [sic] would, undoubtedly, offers [sic] more than one piece of resistance to this objection.

We must think of God as the figure of the unthought of being. God is different, the unthought of being and the unthought of thought. It is because of the "classical difficulties in language" that the name or concept of God is the name of indifference itself (Derrida 1978b:115-116). In the line of Levinas' thinking, God as the non-trace and absolute origin is the origin of all traces or "différance" (Derrida 1974:70-73; cf Leahy 2003:107). God is the exemplary revelation. He is as the absolute Other, the self-presentation of the structure of the trace or "différance" of "the divisible *envoi* for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination" (Derrida 1993:157). God's name is the exemplary presentation of a transcendental "différance" that has no name at all.

Postmodern thinkers wanted to emphasise that God's being is a mystery, which cannot be properly explained by words or concepts. To them the only concept of God that is neither

atheistic nor theistic is a concept that exemplifies the different and otherly mystery, which is God.

5.3   THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN RELATION TO HISTORY

5.3.1   Nietzsche's critique of God's relation to history

Nietzsche rejected the Hegelian belief of God as the absolute truth which is revealed in history. Hegel was convinced that God reveals himself directly in history and is bound to his revelation (cf Hegel [1969] 1980:194-195; Walker 1989:89-96). To Hegel (1955) this God is part of world history as the "absolute Geist" (cf Hegel [1969] 1980:221). He is active in the whole process of history that is moving forward. He is the one who ensures that everything that happens in creation is purposeful and part of the duration of history. Hegel altered the old concept of God as being deistic. Hegel preferred to think of God as the immanent in the transcendent, the God which is here and now (cf Hegel [1969] 1980). God is no longer a theistic, unconcerned being outside creation, but a being in creation, in history itself as the "absolute Geist".

According to Nietzsche, Hegel did not realise the consequences of his philosophy in terms of which God's relation to history is seen as a world-process. As far as Nietzsche was concerned such a view of God in relation to world history could only lead to nihilism. According to Nietzsche it was mainly Christianity that portrayed God in the history of world events, which would lead to a triumphant end in the future. To him the future could not be determined by the "Wissenschaft des universalen Werdens" (Nietzsche 1972a:267-268).   The notion of "universalen Werdens" draws a sharp

opposition between history, as a theoretical process of development, and life, which is the place of accidental human activity. To Nietzsche this is an anticipated and life-retracting teleology, which deprives human beings of the creativity, aliveness and actuality of their deeds, which forms the basis of history (Heilke 1998:61). History, according to the modernistic notion, is the valuation of all events and actions in the light of the world-process that determines the course of all things. The modern idea of history, as a world-process, leads to a destruction of human *praxis* and the substitution of human majority. This subjectivication and massification demolish the active collective life, which is held by culture (Nietzsche 1972a:269-270, 304-306). Nietzsche was reacting to modernity's notion of experiencing time and history as events, which can only happen in the present, and in which it is impossible to relate the past to this present (Heilke 1998:60; cf Porter 2000:293, note 35). The consequence of this notion is that one is constantly trapped in an interim state, detached from the authority of past traditions which gave meaning to formerly secured collective life and without access to new morals and values to control and legitimise one's communion with others. This leads to a break between understanding and experience that can also be described as incompetence to judge the meaning of the world in which one is compelled to live. To Nietzsche this eventually leads to a withdrawal from life or the world or from a belief in a God, who is estranged from life (cf Roodt 2001:326-335). God cannot be tied to progress in history. This God, according to Nietzsche, is dead (atheism).

Nietzsche offers another different conception of history, which is anti-teleological and anti-chiliastic (cf Maurer 1994:111; see Hillard 2002:40, 45-48). In his view history is

the commemoration of action, which captures and upholds the memory of the action long after it actually occurred (cf Tassone 2002:71). However, this commemoration of action is not a static object with a predetermined meaning. Human actions are determined by "unpredictability, phenomenality and plurality" (Roodt 2001:336). Human life cannot be determined by previous events (cf Tassone 2002:74).

Human beings have three dominant perspectives of the past, namely to observe it "unhistorisch", "historisch" and "überhistorisch" (Nietzsche 1972a:245-251; cf Higgins 1990:200). When human beings observe the past unhistorically they are like animals with no remembrance of a past and that only live in the present. It is indeed "ein nie zu vollendendes Imperfektum" (Nietzsche 1972a:245). Humans can also observe the past historically, since they are historical beings who know themselves by remembering their past. It is in this remembrance that they create for themselves a space in which to live (Heilke 1998:62). Both forms of observance are important to Nietzsche (1972a:248). To observe the past "überhistorisch" means to view the world as complete with no reference to a past, where the present and future reach its finality at each and every moment (Nietzsche 1972a:250-251). To Nietzsche the "Überhistorischen" has no value in our present individual life, since it "transcend[s] the present, intermediate constancy of the human form" (Heilke 1998:66).

Human actions are always in a transitory state of becoming, always in interaction (cf Lampert 1993:276, 288). Action produces stories and not objects, which are not bound to the intentions of the author of the deed. He or she has no power over its worldly

importance.   History is therefore the recollection of stories or narratives, which communicate meaning (cf Tassone 2002:78). This understanding of history differs from the modernistic idea of history on the following accounts:

- the meaning of an action comes to the fore when it becomes part of a story. It is not empowered by the one who is carrying out the action and therefore cannot be predicted (cf Nietzsche in his book *Ecce Homo* (1888) where he is both narrator and audience);

- narrative history does not compose meaning from general laws or processes, but maintains the individuality of every deed or action. In the end this does not lead to universal, general and constant truths about us, God and our world (cf Nietzsche1972a:285-291);

- narrative history is not interested in giving objective accounts of past events. Human beings create and support the world through stories. Thus, narrative history always takes the narrator into account (cf Nietzsche 1972a:290-291);

- the nature of narrative history implies an unforeseen future, with no assurance of a meaningful existence or any promise of salvation (Nietzsche 1973:261-263).

The problem Nietzsche (1972a:304-306) initially had with the modernistic idea of history pertained to judgement. The idea of history as the science of processes wanted to interpret the meaning of all world events in advance, which reduced judgement to the iron laws of historical necessity (cf Roodt 2001:345).

To Nietzsche life is in need of the services of history (Nietzsche 1972a:254-261; cf Higgins 1990:194). Three types of history can be of service to life, namely:

- "monumentalische Art der Historie", in terms of which human beings can, in the present, learn from the narritives of the past (Nietzsche 1972a:254-261);

- "antiquärische Art der Historie", in terms of which the past is linked to the present (Nietzsche 1972a:261-266);

- "kritische Art der Historie", in terms of which human beings can decide whether the past is annihilating their present will to live (Nietzsche 1972a:267-274).

5.3.2   Theological assessments of Nietzsche's critique of God's relation to history

- *Proposal 3: God's history versus world history*

To Barth *eschaton* does not mean end-time but eternity. In *Der Römerbrief* (1922) he states that the resurrection of Jesus is the revelation. In this deed Jesus becomes the Christ. Barth ([1922] 1924) believed that the event of Jesus' resurrection was *bodily, corporeal* and *personal* (cf Grieb 2003:49). Revelation is always *in* history, but not *of* history. "Barth denies that the resurrection is something that happened in historical time (though it had effects in historical time), but places it in God's time, eternity. In these ways God who is revealed in Jesus Christ continues to be the hidden God, thus always demanding faith of those who believe in him" (Landgraf 1994:14). If this is true, then eschatology no longer has anything to do with the future. Then the tension is no longer between present and future, the now and the not yet, but between eternity and past time (cf Barth [1922] 1924:117, 219). When Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God as a present reality, he is not looking into the future in the temporal sense, but is looking into the

heaven of the present.   Barth's eschatology in 1922 can be called a transcendental eschatology of eternity.   At one stage he believed that any history that is compared to God's history, is unhistorical.   He calls this history "Urgeschichte", a term he adopted from the historian Overbeck.[45]   According to Barth ([1922] 1924:117) the "Urgeschichte" conditions all history.   In 1922 he put the supra-temporality of God at the centre and not his post-temporality too, a stance regretted in 1948.   Barth, according to Moltmann (1977:30-31) has firm views about the presence of Jesus Christ in his future, but not about his future in the present.   However, he can also term the anticipation of the *parousia* in Christ as the already completed and real present salvation.   According to Barth's interpretation, Paul viewed the resurrection from the dead as a paraphrase of the word God.[46]   In this way he transposes apocalyptic language about the end of time into metaphysical language about the finitude of time. The Easter message is none other than God is the Lord. The Lord God is the eternal boundary of time.   Resurrection is an act of God with the world, not in the world. It belongs to the category of God's history and not

[45] McCormack (1997:226-235), Van Aarde (1995b:56-57) and Van Niftrik (1949:77-83) explain what Barth means with the term "Urgeschichte".   To Barth the resurrection of Jesus is unhistorical ("Urgeschichte") in the sense that it cannot be compared to any other historical event. It is the reality of God in history but not from history (cf Barth [1922] 1924:5-6, 117, 149, 219, 231; Willis 1987:157-161; Price 2002:119-124). Jüngel (1982:63) is of the opinion that Barth's interpretation of Overbeck rests upon a misunderstanding. To Overbeck "Urgeschichte" is a "geschichtliche" philosophical term to demonstrate the hermeneutical limits that direct any historical enquiry. "Urgeschichte" does not function in his works as an eschatological concept to determine an unhistorical/timeless historical category.

[46] Bultmann and Barth differed on the resurrection of the dead (cf Barth [1922] 1924:5-6, 117, 149, 219, 231; Pelser 1997:455-475; Busch 1998:272-297; see Barth 1926; Bultmann 1958b:38-64). To Bultmann the resurrection of the dead in 1 Cor 15 means the resurrection, in the present, of everyone that believes in Christ and lives as new people. To him it is not a historical reality but a reality that is accepted in faith. To Barth the resurrection of the dead in 1 Cor 15 means that, although it is totally different from any resurrection we know, it is still real. "Urgeschichte" to him started with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Barth [1922] 1924:5-6, 117, 149, 219, 23; cf McCormack 1997:226-235; see Van Niftrik 1949:77-83; Moltmann 1995:13-16; Van Aarde 1995b:56-57). It is a known fact that Barth parted with his former friends Bultmann, Brunner, Gogarten and Schumann in 1933. Although Busch (1976:194-196) and Mueller (1990:113-116) give a brief description of the parting, McCormack (1997:409) provides a good summary of it.

to the history of the world. Christ's cross and resurrection are two acts of God that with one another are the two basic events of the one history of God with the sinful and corrupt world.

- *Proposal 4: History in God versus God in history*

Moltmann differs from Nietzsche to the extent that he admits to there being progress and hope in history, but he agrees with Nietzsche insofar as God cannot be deduced from it. When thinking of *God in history,* it always leads to atheism or theism, conversely, by thinking of *history in God*, the dilemmas of atheism and theism are avoided. What history in God means, is that all of humanity with its pain, misery and suffering is understood in the suffering and dying of Christ (Moltmann [1972] 1976:233). In this way the issue of a theistic, uninvolved God with which Nietzsche had such a major problem, falls away. The history in God proves it. As Father, God suffered *with his Son*, and also suffered the *loss of his Son* (cf Moltmann 1980:97). Jesus' death is not the death of God, but the beginning of his life-giving Spirit of love, which appears from the sorrow of the Father and the death of Jesus (Moltmann [1972] 1976:239).

- *Proposal 5: History of God*

Moltmann (1995:21-22) states that to replace world history by the historicity of existence, does not make world history disappear; to perceive the future as individual futurity, does not dissolve the future; and to replace the last day by his own death, does not provide any answer to the question about the future of everyone that has died. To Moltmann

(1995:22) the *eschaton* is neither timeless eternity nor the future of time, but God's coming and arrival.

Moltmann (1977:9) defines the future of God in terms of a new paradigm. He says there is a difference between the world here and now and that which exists outside our present reality. He refers to the reality outside our present reality as "Transzendenz" and describes the present reality and world as "Immanenz". But these two terms belong together. They define each other and are related to one another. The difference between them is a distinction and a relationship in the experience of the "Grenze". In history this boundary has been experienced in different ways. However, the transcendence and immanence of God have changed this boundary in history. "Untersuchen wir diese Geschichte, so treffen wir auf die 'Wandlung Gottes' (Rudolf Bultmann)" (Moltmann 1977:10). History is the experience of reality in conflicts. If it is not referring to a historical future, the future on the other hand, has nothing to do with "Transzendenz". It is only a future that transcends the experiment of history that can become a paradigm of "Transzendenz". When this happens, it gives the experiment of history meaning. The future of history cannot be quantitatively new, but is a qualitatively new one. The future can only be identified with "Transzendenz" when we transform and alter the conditions of history. When all the wrong that causes us to experience our present reality as history, is eliminated, then we can think of the future as "Transzendenz". In the Christian faith, history and the future come together in Jesus Christ in whom the qualitatively new future is already present under the conditions of history (Moltmann 1977:23). In the past, the Christian faith thought of "Transzendenz" metaphysically, then existentially. Today, it is

important that faith is present where the "Grenze" of "Immanenz" and "Transzendenz" is experienced in situations of suffering and discrimination, and is transcended in hope. "Je mehr er aber diese eschatologische Transzendenz christlich, d.h. im Blick auf den Gekreuzigten, interpretiert, um so mehr wird ihm bewuβt werden, daβ die qualitive neue Zukunft Gottes sich mit den gegenwärtig Verdrängten, Verneinten und Unterdrückten verbunden hat und also diese Zukunft nicht oben an den Spitzen des Fortschritts einer 'fortschrittlichen Gesellschaft', sondern unten bei ihren Opfern beginnt" (Moltmann 1977:23). Hope for the eschatological future should be linked to a loving solidarity with everyone that suffers in this world. The power of God, which transcends history, can be experienced through faith, in the midst of history. Moltmann (1995:22) calls the historical category which characterises the eschatological event in history, *novum.*

The origin of Christian eschatology is the anticipation, the prolepsis, the sending ahead of God's "Zukunft" in the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf Moltmann 1999:61-62; see Moltmann 1995:25-26). "Ist diese Zukunft in Christus vergegenwärtigt, so wird dann und daraufhin die durch ihn bestimmte Gegenwart zum Keim des Kommenden und gewinnt ein Futur, das dieser Zukunft entspricht….Die Erlösung und die letzte Überwindung der Feindschaft wird zum Futur dieser Gegenwart. Ihre Zukunft 'gründet' in dieser Gegenwart, weil sie gegenwart des Kommenden ist" (Moltmann 1977:36-37). In modern philosophy Kant emphasised the term anticipation. Prolepsis is anticipated fulfilment, which is completed. In the New Testament we find interplay between human and divine prolepsis. Although the kingdom of God has not yet arrived, human beings ought to repent and hope for the future it brings. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus has a

proleptic structure. We know the future in the sense that we will also be resurrected from the dead because it was given to us in an anticipatory form through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We should therefore anticipate the future of the coming God in knowledge and in deed (cf Moltmann 1965:299-304).   Human beings can then be part of the eschatological and liberating history of God.

To Moltmann (1977:94-96), the history of Christ in the light of its beginning and its end, encompasses two aspects, namely "protologisch" and "eschatologisch" (cf Moltmann 1989:276). Seen from a protological perspective, we would speak of God the Father who sent his Son to the world. Eschatologically, we would speak of God the Father who raised his Son from the dead. Eschatology begins with the end and from there arrives at the beginning. Historically we evaluate any event in the light of its origin, beginnings and its grounds. Eschatologically we grasp any event in the light of its future and ask about its goal, its end and its meaning. Both represent different ways of looking at the history of Christ. These perspectives do not exclude each other, but are complementary and belong together to achieve the full understanding of history. In order to understand the history of Christ we have to grasp his death on the cross in the light of the life that he lived and the mission that he had to accomplish, in the light of his resurrection and his eschatological future (Moltmann 1999:44-46; cf Moltmann 1995:194-196).   When we speak historically about Jesus Christ, we would speak of Jesus of Nazareth and eschatologically confess Jesus as the Lord. We should therefore understand Jesus' mission on earth in the light of his resurrection. "Vom protologishen Ursprung der Geschichte Christi *aus Gott* kommen wir zum eschatologischen Ziel der Geschichte

Christi *in Gott*" (Moltmann 1977:96). We can therefore no longer speak of God in history, but the history of Christ in God. Eschatology and history do not go together. When put together, eschatology is overtaken by history and history dissolved into eternity (Moltmann 1989:236). "Beide lassen sich nur konfrontieren. Um diese Konfrontation geht es in der Rede von der 'Auferweckung des gekreuzigten Christus'"(Moltmann 1989:236).

To Pannenberg (1979:22) all theological questions and answers are significant only within the frame of the history of God. The history of God is the history that God has with humanity and through humanity with his whole creation, one that is moving towards a future that is still hidden from the world, but already revealed in Jesus Christ. He is of the opinion that this is a presupposition of Christian theology that must be defended on two sides, namely against Bultmann's Existential theology which dissolves history into the historicity of existence and against Barth's position of viewing the incarnation as "Urgeschichte". Pannenberg also makes a definite distinction between "Historie" and "Geschichte". To him "Historie" is not the events that happened as such, but that which made it history "im Sinne des 'Kennenlernens und In-Erfahrung-Bringens und Berichtens über das Erfahrene'"(Pannenberg 1979:27). "Geschichte" on the other hand, refers to the events which happened as such in the past. He agrees with Bultmann that the end of history is a reality through Jesus Christ, but this end is provisionally only anticipated within history. He differs from Barth and Bultmann on their view of removing Christian eschatology from time. He furthermore accuses Moltmann of not validating the word of promise in terms of the reality of human experience (cf Pannenberg 1993:580).

Pannenberg (1993:580) says that Moltmann viewed the promise as a contradiction to our present reality. Pannenberg (1993:573) is certain that the *eschaton* has already appeared in Christ. To him, the resurrection of Christ is a historical event – an event that actually took place in history. It is a historical fact which focuses our attention on God's creating power. As he has created heaven and earth out of nothing, so he has once again created a new future in Jesus Christ. The resurrection is our hope for the future, when Jesus will make the old new (cf Pannenberg 1975:81). The resurrection of Jesus signifies that God is from all eternity the one Jesus proclaimed him to be. The message and history of Jesus contain the eschatological revelation of the Father and his returning love towards creation. The relation between Jesus and his Father goes back to the time preceding his earthly birth. Pannenberg (1979:44) is of the opinion that a theology of history is possible. He says:

> Es ist etwas ganz anderes, ob von vornherein auf jede universalgeschichtliche Konzeption Verzicht geleistet wird, oder ob die Totalanschauung der Wirklichkeit als Geschichte, die von Verheiβungen her auf Erfüllung ausgerichtet ist, gleichsam von innen her aufgebrochen wird: zunächst durch die unerwartete Weise, in der Gott seine Verheiβungen erfüllt, sodann aber dadurch, daβ die Erfüllung, das Ende der Geschichte in Jesus Christus vorweggegeben und doch eben darin allem Begreifen entzogen ist.

He however agrees with Nietzsche that an interpretation of the whole of history by means of the idea of progress or development or any idea of an underlying teleology is in conflict with the eventuality of individual actions. It is therefore unacceptable on theological and historical grounds. The history of God is the history of the triune God who is still the coming God, the God of Jesus that is already at work as the God of reconciling love, faith and hope (Pannenberg 1980:127-128).

- *Proposal 6: Eschatology as an end to history*

Although the theologians Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters stand in the centre of this discussion, the work of the theologian Bultmann also needs to be taken in consideration, since he is known for his work on the topic of eschatology and history. He was responsible for producing a reflection on the problem of time and history. Bultmann challenged modern atheism by addressing the very problem Nietzsche had with history as a world-process and progress in history.

After World War I a totally new view of eschatology, known as the theology of crisis, developed. Barth and Bultmann were the main proponents of this new view. It is not history that continues to run its inevitable course that throws every eschatological expectation of the future into a crisis, it is the transcendent breaking-in of eternity that plunges human history into its final crisis. It is not history that ends eschatology, but eschatology that puts an end to history (cf Bultmann 1960:106). The *eschaton* that comes to the fore in eschatology is not the temporal end of our historical days, but the presence of eternity in every moment of this present history. The end of history cannot be

experienced in future history, but only at the edge of time, which is eternity. Christ's *parousia* takes place in the eternal moment, in the presence of Christ.

Bultmann shows us in his book *Geschichte und Eschatologie* (1958a) that the whole idea of faith in progress, cultural optimism and the philosophy that history has meaning, to which Nietzsche reacted, came from the secularisation of eschatology (Bultmann 1958a:84-101). It all began with the inclusion of the history of the church in world history. At the time it was appropriate to ask about the meaning of history, especially in terms of the Jewish-Christian view of history. The Jewish-Christian understanding of history was dependent on eschatology (cf Maurer 1994:102-122). This view enabled people to know the end of history and the world. It was the beginning of a certain philosophy of history in the Christian thinking. "Die christliche Eschatologie ist sowohl von Hegel wie von Marx säkularisiert worden; beide glaubten, jeder in seiner Weise, das Ziel der Geschichte zu kennen, und interpretierten den geschichtsverlauf im Lichte des vorausgesetzten Zieles" (Bultmann 1958a:135). For Bultmann (1958a:135) there is no sense in asking about the meaning of history, because we do not know the answers. We are part of history. We give meaning to it. It is impossible to be removed from our current historical situation by looking at it in a retrospective way (cf Bultmann 1958a:164). He makes use of two words to describe history, namely "historisch" and "geschichtlich". To Bultmann (1951:7; 1958a:41) "historisch" means historical inquiry into the facts of something that happened in the past and "geschichtlich" is the meaning that comes to the fore in the historical experience thereof. The crucifixion of Jesus is "historisch" in the sense that it reflects a historical event in the past and the cross

"geschichtlich" in the sense that the crucifixion of Jesus gives meaning to faith (cf Pelser 1989:828). Although the resurrection of Jesus is not a historical event, the faith of the first disciples is such an event. After the crucifixion the disciples were forced to come to a new understanding of their faith in Jesus. How they overcame the dilemma of the cross, and how they came to a moment of faith, we do not know. We do not know, partially because tradition and legends overshadowed it (cf Bultmann 1953:47-49; Pelser 1997:465-473).

Historical happenings in the present can only have meaning in the future as historical phenomena (cf Bultmann 1958a:135). How we see the past is clarified by the present (see Bultmann 1958a:136). The meaning of history is immanent in history itself (cf Bultmann 1965:103). Every present moment in history is an eschatological moment, which makes history and eschatology identical (Bultmann 1958a:161). The meaning of history always lies in the present. History's meaning should therefore always be interpreted for the present by humankind. If it happens, one would be able to grasp the full meaning of history (see Bultmann 1965:103). Self-knowledge of meaning in the present is not only a theoretical act, but also an act of decision. "Wenn das richtig ist, dann ist die Geschichtlichkeit des menslichen Seins erst vollständig verstandene, wenn das mensliche Sein verstandene ist als Leben in Verantwortung gegenüber der Zukunft und darum als Leben in Entscheidung" (Bultmann 1958a:162). To humankind life is a constant endeavour. It never achieves its ultimate goal and is never fully satisfied with the present. Life stands at the door of humans. Humans should open themselves to life every moment. Every present is questioned by its future and expected to accordingly act

in a responsible way (cf Bultmann 1958a:167-168; 1958b:145). Humans are always *en route* to their destiny, which is also their responsibility being on the way. Future to Bultmann is not something that is yet to happen. We do not know the future, nor what it holds. It is only God who knows that. God made an end to the old world through Jesus Christ as the eschatological "Ereignis" (Bultmann 1965:135-136). The eschatological "Ereignis" becomes an event in the present through faith. It becomes present every time the believer accepts it in faith. The old world ended when the believer became a new and free being. This to Bultmann (1958a:180-181) is a paradox, which he explains as follows:

> Es ist *die Paradoxie* der Christlichen Verkündigung bzw. des christlichen Glaubens, daβ *das eschatologische Geschehen* nicht echt in seinem eigentlichen Sinne verstandene ist – jedenfalls nach Paulus und Johannes-, wenn es als ein Geschehen aufgefaβt wird, das der sichtbaren Welt ihr Ende setzt in einer kosmischen Katastrophe, sondern daβ es *ein Geschehen innerhalb der Geschichte* ist, anhebend mit dem Auftreten Jesu von Nazareth, sich weiter vollziehend im Lauf der Geschichte, – aber nicht als eine historisch festzustellende Entwicklung, sondern jeweils Ereignis werdend in Verkündigung und Glaube.

To Bultmann it is important that the eschatological moment is one that constantly repeats itself in the *kerygma* and faith. Every moment is important to human beings. It is the

moment when the *kerygma* and faith confronts him or her to come to a self-understanding that he or she exists eschatologically. The believer is in the position to exist apart from history and the world, while still living in the world. "Die paradoxie der christlichen Existenz ist die, daβ der Glaubende der Welt entnommen ist, als gleichsam Entweltlicher existiert, und daβ er zugleich innerhalb der Welt, innerhalb seiner Geschichtlichkeit bleibt" (Bultmann 1958a:181). To Bultmann (1963:227) the future can never be conceived in fantastic cosmic terms like that of Gnosticism. The future can only be understood as "das ständige Voraussein Gottes", which always precedes humankind, even in death. Humans have the ability through faith to be free from the world and history. They can overcome their world through faith, even in times of pain and suffering by tolerating and enduring it, for they do not belong to this world. We must look for God's present *kairos*, which is the eschatological moment.

5.3.3 A postmodern philosophical assessment of Nietzsche's critique of God's relation to history

- *Proposal 7: A new vision of history – history that is ambiguous, discontinuous and anti-teleological*

History, according to modernity, is a continuous, linear, teleological plan with a single *telos*. God is part of this scheme, sometimes a very important part as in the case of panentheism and theism and sometimes a missing part, as is the case in agnosticism and atheism (cf Tracy 1994:42). Derrida (2001:20-21) is of the opinion that teleology, the modernity's concept of history, "is at bottom, the negation of the future, a way of knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come." No

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future can have a determinate outline as to what will happen. It has to have the shape of the other, which defies anticipation, reappropriation and calculation (Derrida 2001:20). A future without drastic otherness and respect for it, does not exist (Derrida 2001:21).

Modernity's sense of development in history, teleology and continuity has been shattered by two disruptive elements, namely the presence of massive global suffering and the ignorance of all the marginalised, the others who do not fit into the modern paradigm. The realities of suffering and the meaning thereof, of the marginalised and those who are different, can and will wipe out the teleological account of modern history. This annihilation of the teleological development in history can and will allow for the eschatological God to return, while "disrupting all continuity and confidence" (Tracy 1994: 43).

Foucault (in Horrocks & Jevtic [1999] 2001:62; cf Foucault 1977:152-164; see Foucault 1970:219) agrees with Nietzsche that "it was inconceivable to imagine that history will move towards a whole or reveal a total truth." Foucault uses three different historical approaches, namely that of archaeology, genealogy and problematisation (cf Flynn 1994: 280). However, these approaches do not exclude each other. They seem to be intertwined and are present in all of his works.

The first historical approach according to Foucault, is what he calls *archaeology.* He defines archaeology as a "description of the record" (Foucault 1972:234). According to this approach (Foucault [1972] 2002:7-8) history is no longer a remembrance of the

monuments of the past, transforming them into documents, but a transformation of documents into monuments (Foucault 1972:235; see Foucault 1973:51-52; Poster 1992:305). Today, we are more interested in the intrinsic description of the monument itself (Foucault [1972] 2002:8; see Foucault 1973:xvii-xix). Such a notion of history has several consequences.

In the first place, history was mostly concerned with the question of totalising historical facts and events (cf Foucault 1977:139, 148; see Foucault 1972:227; 1973:56). Its prime concern is the definition of relations between facts or events, which could be derived from the processes of history itself (see Foucault 1999:92). The result of such a notion of history "has broken up the long series formed by the progress of consciousness, or the teleology of reason, or the evolution of human thought; it has questioned the themes of convergence and culmination; it has doubted the possibility of creating totalities" (Foucault ([1972] 2002:9). It is therefore important in postmodern history to recognise the distinct scales in the chronology of events, scales that bear their own history without being reducible to a single law (see Foucault 1972:228).

Secondly, it was inevitable to even assume a discontinuity in the continuous chronology of the historical process (Foucault 1973:57; [1972] 2002:230). Discontinuity was the unthinkable and the avoidable. It was every historian's work to remove any discontinuity in the historical process of events. In a new vision of history discontinuity should be displaced as an obstacle and transferred into the work itself (cf Foucault 1972:229-233). It must be integrated into the discourse of the historian, where it does not play the role of

an external condition that must be reduced, but one of a working concept (cf Racevskis 1994:29; see Poster 1992:303). It must be seen for what it is. It is no longer the negative of the historical reading "but the positive element that determines its object and validates its analysis" (Foucault [1972] 2002:10; see Foucault 1973:4-5, 197).

A third consequence of this approach to history was the emergence of a general history in the place of a total history (Foucault 1972:239-240; cf Grumley 1987:186-187; see Gillan 1994:35; Foucault [1972] 2002:10). The notion of a total history has the implication of a universal truth that underlies each and every historical event, which in the end, can be traced to an absolute origin or principle. The notion of a general history implies that history itself is divided in stages or phases, which contain within themselves their own principle of unity (cf Foucault 1972:367-368; see Foucault 1979:26-28). The problem and task of a general history is to indicate the divergence, the relations, the interplay of correlation and supremacy between the different series or stages in the process of historical events. "A total description draws all phenomena around a single centre − a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion" (Foucault [1972] 2002:11).

The second historical approach that Foucault follows is that of *genealogy,* which completely ignores the ideas of totality, causality and continuity (Foucault 2003:241; cf Flynn 1994:33-37; see Chartier 1994:170; Procacci 1994:216-217).   In his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (2003) he explains the term genealogy by saying that it is "grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary" and works on documents that never

reaches finalisation (Foucault 2003:241). Genealogy must be on the lookout for extraordinary events that occur outside the boundaries of any finality, even those which we tend to regard as usually being without history, such as emotions, feelings, instincts, love and conscience. Genealogy must not only focus on the development of these feelings and emotions, but also on the different levels where they appear in their different roles (Foucault 2003:242). To Foucault genealogy is all about erudition (Foucault 2003:242). His genealogical studies are found in his analysis of punishment and of sexuality (Foucault 1979). In all his genealogical approaches a strong appearance of power relations features, which is of great significance to Foucault (1979:139; 1980a:116; 1997:283; cf Flynn 1994:34). In his book, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (1979), he admits that power "is intended as a correlative history of the modern soul and of a new power to judge; a genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justification and rules, from which it extends its effects and by which it masks its exorbitant singularity" (Foucault 1979:23). It is also true of the Victorian era in its confinement on sexuality (Foucault 1978:48; cf Foucault 1985:6). Foucault (1980b:114) goes on by saying that the "history which bears and determines us, has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning."

The third historical mode that Foucault exploits is that of *problematisation* (Foucault 1985:10, 14-24; 1986:239). Problematisation is history that "define[s] the conditions in which human beings 'problematise' what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live" (Foucault 1985:10). Foucault uses this type of approach to indicate how

sexuality was problematised in classical antiquity. From the earliest times in the history of humankind, sexual pleasures and activities were problematised by doctors and philosophers. They invented rules and regulations which influenced the way human beings felt about sex, sexual desires and sexual pleasures. Through the method of problematisation, Foucault exposes the orgins of human feelings and prejudice towards sexuality (Foucault 1985:12-13; see Castel 1994:241).

The new vision of history is confronted by a number of methodological problems, which include the strengthening of logical and consistent groups of documents, the establishment of a norm, the definition of the level of analysis, the design of a method of analysis, the restriction of groups and sub-groups that articulate the material and the determination of relations to characterise a group (Foucault [1972] 2002:12). These methodological problems now form part of the methodological field of history. This field needs to be considered, because it has freed itself from what constituted the philosophy of history and from the questions it posed, such as the rationality or the teleology of historical development. It also shares and meets at certain points with the problems experienced in other fields of study.

Foucault ([1972] 2002:13) wants to move away from the conception of history as a continuous endeavour (cf Chartier 1994:170-172; see Ansell-Pearson 1995:15). Continuous history is the crucial correlative of the original function of the subject, which is the certainty that everything that has avoided it may be restored to it, the certainty that time will dissolve nothing without restoring it in a reconstructed unity or totality. It is the promise that the subject will again one day be united with everything that is kept at a

distance by "différance" and find in them what may be called home (cf Foucault 1972:369-370; 1999:92-93, 160-169; see Racevskis 1994:21, 23, 29).

5.4   THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN RELATION TO RATIONALITY

5.4.1   Nietzsche's critique of rationality

In the line of Nietzsche's thinking, postmodern thinkers see the modernistic quest for epistemic certainty and the accompanying program of laying foundations for our knowledge as an impossible dream (Van Huyssteen 1999:32). To Nietzsche (1974:258-260) epistemology centres on the proposition that there are no facts, only interpretations (cf Shapiro 2003:392; see Derrida 1979:103; Mahon 1992:91-92). It is the life enhancing value of these propositions, which determines their acceptability. There is no distinction between theory and practice. Metaphysics, epistemology and ethics all consist of interpretations of which the value lies in their practicality in making one's life like a work of art (Nietzsche 1974:264-266). Moral facts do not exist (cf Mahon 1992:91-92). The acceptability of a moral proposition depends only on its relevance to our life (cf Nietzsche 1968b:92).

The modernistic view of science was mostly positivistic, in the sense that all knowledge could be derived from universal or empirical facts, that objective knowledge and truth was possible and that theories could be obtained from facts by means of deduction and induction (cf Nietzsche 1974:274-276; Foucault 2000:5-14; Van Tongeren 2000:141). Facts could also be rejected on the grounds of not succeeding objective experimentation.

According to Nietzsche, it was not possible for the subject to know or prove the existence of God on rational or moral grounds.

5.4.2   A theological assessment of Nietzsche's critique of rationality

- *Proposal 8: Knowledge of God possible through faith*

Barth has shown that God is the self-revealing subject. He is the wholly other. It is only in faith and by the grace of God self that God can be known. He has the prerogative to reveal himself whenever he wants to. Even in his revelation, God remains himself. He is God, before and after he reveals himself, as well as while doing so. The human mind is not capable of understanding the greatness of God's being. It is only in the resurrection event of Jesus Christ that human minds get a glimpse of this greatness. Barth agrees with Nietzsche that the human subject is not capable of knowing God, in the sense of being able to manipulate God. Pannenberg agrees with Barth on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In contrast to Barth, it is however important to Pannenberg that this revelation of God does lie within the boundaries of human rationality, reality and existence.   God reveals himself indirectly in history, whenever he wants to. It is in the reality of history and in an indirect way, that the human mind can grasp the being of God.

5.4.3   Postmodern philosophical assessments of Nietzsche's critique of rationality

- *Proposal 9: A postfoundationalist rationality*

In the postmodern view, human beings are no longer objective spectators in scientific inquiry, but partakers in the scientific process. Postmodern thinkers challenged the modernistic notion of epistemology and rationality in different ways. Van Huyssteen

(1999:33) opts for a vision of rationality that takes the critical concerns of postmodernity serious, without falling prey to relativism and nihilism. He calls it "a postfoundationalist rationality" (Van Huyssteen 1999:33). He also refers to it as a third epistemological option, one that "enables us to identify the shared resources of human rationality in different modes of knowledge, and then reach beyond the boundaries of our own traditional communities in cross-contextual, cross-disciplinary conversation" (Van Huyssteen 1999: 243).

A postfoundationalist notion of rationality acknowledges contextuality and a cultural embeddedness in our theological reflection. All experience is seen as interpreted experience or experiential understanding. It acknowledges the fact that tradition shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic principles that help us to reflect on God and his presence in the world. It points beyond boundaries of group, tradition and culture towards interdisciplinary dialogue. In this notion of rationality time, space and history are no longer viewed as *a priori* abstract forms of perception, but concrete dwellings for our diverse discourses (cf Van Huyssteen 1999:249). In a postfoundationalist notion of rationality it is possible to hold on to epistemological language by combining it with hermeneutics.

The subject in a postfoundationalist notion of rationality is altered from the aim of certainty to a place in communicative *praxis*. However, the knowing subject is not abandoned but "refigured in a praxial performance of critique, articulation, and disclosure" (Van Huyssteen 1999:250). A postfoundationalist notion of rationality

creates a space between different scientific disciplines, discourses and actions. Tracy (1992:19) describes this space as "an authentic public realm: a shared rational space where all participants whatever their other particular differences can meet to discuss any claim that is rationally redeemable." In a postfoundationalist notion of rationality it is rational to disagree with other opinions, experiences, epistemic situations, values and methodologies. Consensus does not play the same important role as "a healthy pluralism", which tries to accommodate the other in cross-cultural dialogue. There are no absolute truths in history, culture, moral values, traditions or scientific disciplines. It is rational to consider our choices by providing the best available reasons for our beliefs, choices and actions. It is fitting in a postfoundationalist notion of rationality to take a firm and definite standpoint of one's beliefs and values.

- *Proposal 10: Deconstruction as an option*

Another postmodern notion of rationality is Derrida's method of "déconstituer" (Derrida 2001:8-9; cf Silverman 1989). Derrida gives credit to Nietzsche for his opinion that a subject is not able to know God and his or her world. To him it is clear that the subject, the author, cannot be trusted in the act of knowing or understanding any text or event. It will be wise for every individual to acknowledge Derrida's insight of knowledge as "différance" in any act of understanding and interpreting. He denied the notion of modernism to seek for an ultimate, familiar reality that is accessible to the subject. For him reality is text – a text that has in it meaning and which does not refer to a world outside or which is lurking behind (cf Derrida 1974:97-99; 158). In summary, it is meaning without describing meaning. Meaning cannot be derived from reason (see

Derrida 1978a:149, 164-165).   Humans must not try to legitimise meaning (cf Derrida 1978b:292-293).   Meaning should be deconstructed (Derrida 2001:30-31).   A text should be seen as it is.   The meaning of the text should not correspond with meaning itself. There is a "différance" between the meaning of a text and meaning itself (cf Derrida 2001:10-11; see Derrida 1981b:63-64).   He explains the term "différance" as follows:

> *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other.   This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive (the *a* of *différance* indicates this indecision as concerns activity and passivity…) production of the intervals without which the "full" term would not signify….It is also the becoming-space of the spoken chain – which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming-space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from the one to the other.

(Derrida 1981a:27)

Each text has its own history and does not apply to other texts (Derrida 1974:163).   A universal history is thus not possible.   Each text has its own reality (Derrida 1981b:233). A universal human reason is also out of the question.   It is acceptable in the postmodern paradigm to work with the differences of each text (see Van Peursen 1995:41-48). Humans should not seek their certainty and identity in the subject because the subject

suggests something of an invariable nature (see Derrida 2001:60-61). Humans would know that at each moment of time they are different to themselves and the world (see Derrida 1973:78). Derrida (1981b:231) doubts the author of any text, because manipulation of meaning can occur.

I am convinced that these insights of Derrida can help us to assume a critical stance with regard to the power of the subject that claims to be rationally capable of knowing God. Instead, the subject must realise the differences which exist in every act of knowing, even in the act of knowing God. God's being is a mystery that cannot be fully grasped through reason.

5.5   THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN RELATION TO MORALITY

5.5.1   Nietzsche's critique of morality

Nietzsche (1969c:95-96) objected to the claim of morality based on an absolutist foundation (cf Large 2000:342; see Ruprecht 1997:577-578). Nietzsche (1930:50) criticised the notion that acceptance of God included a moral code. To Nietzsche it is belief in the Christian God that makes the morality of the herd possible, something he deplores (cf Van Tongeren 2000:206). He is therefore concerned with the status of morals, once this belief in God is lost (Nietzsche 1969a:180-181). To him, morals have faded away with the death of God (Nietzsche 1930:122). Morality has no foundation to hold on to. The task of the philosophers is not the continuation of Christian ethics without a divine foundation or the rationalisation of values, but the re-evaluation of all values (Nietzsche 1969c:83-84; 89-91; cf Cameron 2002:169-173; see Leiter 2002:26-

28). There is no absolute truth, no ultimate court of appeal by which any value can be justified (Nietzsche 1930:33-34). Nietzsche's (1930:176) philosophy is a search for values, for the reconstruction of morality. He is however not interested in the formulation of an entirely new set of values. The values he proposes, such as honesty, courage, generosity and politeness, are not that unfamiliar (Nietzsche 1971:329; cf Van Tongeren 2000:218-220; see Ruprecht 1997:582). The re-evaluation is all about questioning the concepts of morality and values, rather than challenging any particular moral principle or value. He wants to re-establish values on a new foundation, which must be naturalistic in such a way that it would justify morality (see Nietzsche 1930:83, 176). The first naturalistic standard is an aesthetic standard, which permits humans to live their life as a work of art (Nietzsche 1972b:264-266; cf Leiter 2002:250-252, 263). To Nietzsche (1969a:180-182) it is the "Wille zur Macht" which dictates the value of all values (cf Leiter 2002:173, 191; see Provan 1999:20).

5.5.2   Theological assessments of Nietzsche's critique of morality

- *Proposal 11: Ecumenical pluralism*

To reiterate, Peters (1992:31-33) says that theology is the rethinking of our faith in the triune God, which must be contextual, acceptable and open to all people. Christian faith must always be ecumenical in the assurance that God will make the whole of creation new and include everyone in this new creation. He made a new future possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. An everlasting kingdom is within the reach of every believer. Believers in the triune God should therefore always live in the certainty of this future, share this faith with their world, react with hope in the face of all the problems of

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their broken world and submit to the love of God to make them new. In this regard Barth, Pannenberg and Moltmann agree with Peters. As theologians we should let our faith in God be missionary and ecumenical. We must strive to be living examples of this faith to all God's creatures.

Peters (1992:334-356) says that by accepting the fact that we are newborn creatures of God's coming future, ecumenical pluralism is the implication. Ecumenical pluralism is the knowledge that all believers are a unity in the body of Christ. The differences are mere outlines of the parts that constitute the whole. It is the acknowledgement of the fact that we as human beings share creation as a gift of God. Ecumenical in the body of Christ, we are and must be a unity. Peters (1992:336-338) says the fact that the Christian church is one in the body of Christ, must bring us to dialogue.

- *Proposal 12: Dialogue*

In the light of Moltmann's suggestion that the church should be conscious about taking action in future, Peters (1992:365-376) mentions seven pro-active strategies which we, as believers, must follow:

- we must project a vision of the coming new order which must include the promises of one cosmic world community, a universal goal to do the will of God, a universal attitude to respect the biological capacity of our planet, right and righteousness, economic certainty, prosperity for all, social human rights and an attitude to maintain the quality of life so that it can be preserved for future generations;

- we must motivate people to develop a sensitivity for a global community;

- we must see to it that all things on earth be preserved for future generations;

- we must treat people around us with dignity and respect;

- we must teach people to distinguish between what is necessary for survival and what is not;

- we must become active in other organisations of our world with the same goals as we have, in order to form a group of power;

- our faith that the new world, the realised kingdom of God, is a reality through the power of God, must be confessed more and more.

Faith is required to handle our future, a faith that is grounded in Jesus Christ who is the future of God. We can share this truth and certainty with Christians all over the world. Our history ended with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In faith we are part of the history of God where boundaries between people no longer exist.

Peters and Moltmann emphasised the importance of dialogue between religions, races, sexes and theologies. As new creatures we are bound to dialogue. All the boundaries between human beings have been broken down through the possibility of God's future. In following this God, human beings have been liberated from their present *status quo* for a lifestyle in the way of God's future. God's future is not undefined, but is given reality and content by its actual appearance in Jesus who identified with and proclaimed the liberation of the outcast, the marginal, the poor, the sick and the oppressed (see Willis 1987:149-191).

Atheism leads to nihilism. The death of God leads to the death of humanity. Humans suffer from nihilism, racism, capitalism, dictatorships and sexual discrimination. Humanity is destroying creation. Humankind cries out to God for liberation, but the opposite is also true. It is God's cry as well. To Moltmann (1977:106) the challenge to theism, atheism and nihilism lies in the God who knows suffering. Christianity and Judaism do not speak of an apathetic God. He suffers with his forsaken creation because he is love. He suffers with his people in exile, he suffers with humanity that has become inhuman and he suffers with his creation that is enslaved and living under the threat of death. He suffers with them, he suffers because of them and he suffers for them (Moltmann 1977:106). "Über den Protestatheismus führt erst eine Kreuzestheologie hinaus, die Gott im Leiden Christi als den leidenden Gott begreift und mit dem gottverlassenen Gott schreit: Mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen? Denn für sie sind Gott und Leiden nicht mehr Widersprüche wie im Theismus und Atheismus, sondern Gottes Sein ist im Leiden, und das Leiden ist in Gottes Sein selbst, weil Gott liebe ist" (Moltmann [1972] 1976:214).

Moltmann (1977:113) argues that the church must become part of the liberating process of God. The church cannot be liberated from the outside, but from the inside. Jesus Christ must be the criterion within the church. The church must again become that which Jesus originally intended it to be. The risen Jesus liberated the church. In Jesus Christ God overpowered death. Jesus Christ, as the risen liberator, must possess the church, because it is only then that the church will experience a new life of living hope. "Die Gemeinschaft der Armen, die in Christus reich gemacht werden, die Gemeinschaft der

Gefangenen, die in Christus befreit werden, zeigt ihre Hoffnung im Leben ihrer liturgischen Feste, in ihrem festlichen Leben in der alltäglichen Welt, in der Vorwegnahme der vollkommenen Freude des neuen Himmels und der neuen Erde" (Moltmann 1975a:47). In the resurrection event God in Jesus Christ broke down the last restriction of freedom, namely the boundary of death. "Eine Kirche, die von diesem Durchbruch lebt, wird darum die kleinen Grenzen der Todesherrschaft im ökonomischen, politischen und kulturellen Leben nicht mehr achten können, sondern die tötenden Mächte des Negativen auf diesen Lebensgebieten zu überwinden suchen" (Moltmann 1977:114). The church of the risen Lord looks with hope beyond the terrors of this world to the new world of God's coming future (cf Moltmann 1965:312). The coming of God means the coming of a being that cannot die and a time that no longer passes (Moltmann 1995:23). In the eschatological coming, God and time are linked in such way that God's being in the world has to be thought of eschatologically and the future of time theologically. The eschatological doctrine about the restoration of all things has two sides, namely the judgement of God, which makes all wrongs right and the kingdom of God, which awakens believers to new life (Moltmann 1995:255).

Moltmann (1989:268-286; 1995:260) broadens Christian eschatology into cosmic eschatology in order to stress that the creator God and the redeemer God are one. He defines cosmic eschatology as the transformation of creation into a new creation. There can be no eternal life for human beings without any change in the cosmic conditions of life (Moltmann 1995:260). History and nature cannot be redefined in opposition to each other. Theology must look beyond the world of history to the ecological conditions of

history in nature. The eschatological act in the history of God, that is to say his resurrection, is not the important thing when we are considering the natural conditions of history. It is rather the importance of the bodily character of the Christ who dies and overpowers death by his resurrection. "An der Leiblichlichkeit seines Sterbens und seiner Auferstehung entsteht die kritische Frage nach der Auferstehung in der Perspektive der Natur und die konstruktive Frage nach der Natur in der Perspektive der Auferstehung" (Moltmann 1989:269-270). He died an unnatural death, a death by violence. He was killed and in solidarity died the death of all men and women who suffer violence. He died the violent death of human history and the tragic death of nature. His resurrection is the beginning of the eradication of death in history, but also the eradication of death in nature. It is the beginning of the resurrection of death and the beginning of the transformation of the mortal life of the first creation into the new creation. Christ is the first-born of the dead who are reborn from the eternal Spirit of life and the first-born of the whole reborn creation. "Die Überwindung der Todesmacht durch die Wiedergeburt Christi und die Ausgieβung des göttlichen Geistes auf 'alles Fleisch' müssen in diesem Kontext als das groβe Zeichen für den 'Frühling der Schöpfung', für die 'Auferstehung der Natur' und die 'Vergöttlichung des Kosmos' angesehen werden" (Moltmann 1989:276). The transition of Christ through his resurrection has historical and cosmic meaning. His resurrection has become the universal law of the whole of creation, meaning human beings, animals, plants, stones and all cosmic life systems as well.

5.5.3 A postmodern philosophical assessment of Nietzsche's critique of morality

- *Proposal 13: Responsibility for the other*

Bauman (in Lyon 1997:112) postulates that "postmodernity pushes us to moral responsibility as the first reality of the self which means being for the other before one can be with the Other. Here is no foundation for morality, but an *a priori* moral self that precedes the social self (which is the reverse of what modernity taught)." This kind of reasoning is in the line of Levinas, which sees the "other" as the responsibility of the subject. "Transcendence is ethical, and subjectivity – which, ultimately, is not the *I think* and which is not the unity of transcendental apperception – is subjection to the other person [*autrui*] in the guise of responsibility for the other [*autrui*]" (Levinas 2000:223; cf Levinas 1998:12-14; see Minister 2003:121-123).

To Derrida (1999; cf Gasché 1994:227-229; see Van Peursen 1995:46-47) every human being has a moral responsibility towards other people. The responsibility lies in a decision that must be made every time an opportunity arises. The time, the event, the opportunity, the decision and circumstances always differ. Derrida (1999) uses the concept of *hospitality* for Levinas' reassessment of ethics, politics and religion (see Plant 2003:436-450). Derrida (1999) shows by definition, qualification and "infinition of hospitality as absolute hospitality, a welcoming of the other as (the) totally Other, as the other in whose trace, transcendence, and dimension of height we find sole access to – indeed, the very desire for and fear of – God" (De Vries 2001:178). Postmodern ethics, in agreement with Peters and Moltmann, also emphasises the importance of dialogue (see Tracy 1990).

5.6 FINAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF MODERN ATHEISM AND THEISM

The postmodern paradigm, which I see in relation to the modern paradigm, enhanced my understanding of God and his relation to history. I agree with Kant[47] that it is not possible to speak of God other than in analogical terms. It was Kant who invented the rational category of "Analogien" to emphasise a perfect resemblance of two relations between totally dissimilar things (cf Allen 1985:217; Kant, in Friedrich [1949] 1977:106).

Van Huyssteen (1989:775) states that "the only way we can manage to say anything about God at all is through our extended concepts, that is through analogies and metaphors." According to Tracy (1981:408) analogy is a "language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference." Even Barth (1924:166; 172) spoke about God and his revelation in Jesus Christ in dialectical-analogical theological language (cf Rae 2003:48; see Tracy 1981:417; Küng 1987:229; Johnson 2003:209-210).[48] In postmodern terms it is thus sensible to speak of God by means of analogy. All the concepts of God are provisional. The being of God cannot be expressed fully by words or concepts or propositions or be limited to time and space (Sontag 2002:78). Kant

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[47] Although Kant is a thinker of the modern period, I see postmodernity as a continuation of modernity and not as a replacement thereof. To reiterate, postmodernity to me, means a selective farewell to the self-centred subject, the unhistorical object and the cultural self-orientation of the modern era (cf Palmer 1975:319). I part with modernity in a selective way by avoiding the unacceptable truths of the modern paradigm, which I mentioned in the previous sentence. It is therefore not unique that I use the philosophy of philosophers and the theologies of theologians from the modern period in dialogue with philosophers or theologians in the postmodern era.

[48] Cross (2001:210) says: "Dialectic continues to play a major methodological role in Barth's thought in the *Church Dogmatics* 11/1. It cooperates with analogy as limiter and helper for human apprehension of God. Therefore, Barth's doctrine of God would not succeed without it."

([1899] 1976:561-604) said that God couldn't be objectified. God cannot be measured in terms of space and time. God is not a prisoner of human history. He is free to act, to speak and to reveal himself whenever he chooses to do so. He is only knowable to human beings insofar as he is willing to be known (cf Dreyer 1990:590).

Peters says that the Bible is full of symbols and depictions of God. In order to understand these symbols we should necessarily surrender to it. Interpretation does not mean a reading in of the interpreter's vision or perception. The interpreter must always be open to any new insight that come from the text itself. The interpreter should be aware of the use of language in any text. I agree with Derrida (1973:146) when he says:

> The use of language or the employment of any code which implies a play of forms – with no determined or invariable substratum – also presupposes a retention and protention of differences, a spacing and temporalizing, a play of traces. This play must be a sort of inscription prior to writing, a protowriting without a present original, without an *arche.* From this comes the systematic crossing-out of the *arche* and the transformation of general semiology into a grammatology, the latter performing a critical work upon everything within semiology – right down to its matrical concept of signs – that retains any metaphysical presuppositions incompatible with the theme of *différance.*

It is in the light of this argument that we should listen to Nietzsche's voice. Nietzsche did not, *per se,* accept or deny the existence of God. In my view, he was using a metaphor to spell out the consequences of modern atheism, namely that the death of God also signifies the death of everything that exists. Nietzsche (1969b:338) himself spoke of metaphor ("des Gleichnisses") as the "Unfreiwilligkeit des Bildes". I agree with Van Huyssteen's (1989:773) point of view when he says:

> Metaphors certainly do not function only to "name" something: on the contrary, they provide epistemic access to that which is being referred to. As such they function to catch great strands of association, conscious and perhaps unconscious, for readers of a certain religious tradition. This does not mean that what metaphor gives epistemic access to and "catches" as meaningful, is not real: what the metaphor catches or opens up is closely connected to the overall narrative construction of the texts involved.

Nietzsche opened a new way of thinking about history and God's revelation in and through history. To Nietzsche history is the recollection of stories or narratives, which communicate significance or sense. Nietzsche opened our eyes to behold the scene of God's death, which is modernity's vision of God's revelation in history.

Opposing Hegel and modernity, he denies the existence of any absolute truths in history. Several other options, such as ambiguity, pluralism in history and "a postfoundationalist

rationality" (Van Huyssteen 1999:284) are to be considered in lieu of the vision of God's revelation in and through history as propagated by Hegel and the modern age. In line with Nietzsche's thinking, I suggest that history be regarded, not as a teleologically ordered event, but as an event full of surprise, ambiguity, narratives and "différance". We should heed his critique with regard to the concept of God (Nietzsche 1969a:180-181), the concept of God in relation to history (Nietzsche 1972a), rationality (Nietzsche 1969b:308) and morality (Nietzsche 1968c).

We should think of God in a new way that goes beyond theism and atheism. It is actually impossible to speak or reason adequately about this mystery, which is God. God cannot be imprisoned nor confined to our paradigms and ideologies. A theological paradigm must always contain this impossibility and respect the mystery, which surrounds the being of God.

The postmodern paradigm sees history not as a teleological process of determination, but an ambiguous and discontinuous process of events. The historical paradigm of modernism no longer holds any ground. Postmodernity emphasises a new historical consciousness, one of ambiguity, difference, dialogue, pluralism, discontinuity and inter-contextuality. Postmodernity tempers the rationality of human beings by also focusing on the aesthetical and the pragmatic. It helps to broaden the rationality of modernity by accommodating the pragmatic and aesthetical alongside the cognitive, in such a way that deeds and feelings do not replace reason (cf Malan 2001:631). Postmodernity is interested in the other, the different and the marginal. It focuses on the needs of other

people, those who in response to the ignorance of Christians who neglected them (as Moltmann emphasises in his theology), turned to atheism. Primarily, it is all about ethics, the responsibility for the other.

In this regard, Peters provided a theological paradigm to assist us in understanding the complex being of God in a postmodern world, taking into consideration the challenges of modern atheism. Bultmann warned us not to think of the end of history as a result of God bringing it to a triumphant end. Eschatology ends history for every believer who accepts the eschatological "Ereignis" of Jesus Christ in the present. We as Christians must make the most of the eschatological "Ereignis" of Jesus Christ in the present. We ought to live in the freedom of newborn creatures, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the light of the postmodern paradigm that we live in, we should focus on the other, the different, the marginal and our fellow human beings. "It is only in recognizing another in his/her utter difference that one can begin to relate to him/her" (Wills 2001:123). We must indeed look for the otherness of the Other (God) in others. Then God is not dead, but a reality in the present. I support Forte (1992:226) when he states that Christian eschatology sets up an "open historicity', which holds the human present and the divine future in an essentially asymmetrical relationship: it forgets neither the otherness on God's part nor the 'novum' which his promise opens out for history."

Nietzsche was looking for a God "der zu tanzen verstünde" (Nietzsche 1968a:45), a God "wenn man will, aber gewiss nur einen gänzlich unbedenklichen und unmoralischen Künstler-Gott, der im Bauen wie im Zerstören, im Guten wie im Schlimmen, seiner

gleichen Lust und Selbstherrlichkeit ninne werden will, der sich, Welten schaffend, von der Noth der Fülle und Ueberfülle, vom Leiden der in ihm gedrängten Gegensätze lost" (Nietzsche 1972b:11).

It is evident that Nietzsche's assessment that modernity *killed* God by relating him to world history, is an accurate one. The statement of Nietzsche's "Gott ist todt [sic]!" should not be taken literally, but should be seen as a metaphor that attempts to communicate meaning (cf Kofman 1993:108-109; Tanesini 1995:277, 285-289). In the case of Nietzsche, it conveys his diagnosis of his time. I agree with Nietzsche that history cannot reveal absolute and total knowledge of God. He had a message for his time (and us) to be careful with its (our) depictions of God. Nietzsche's critique can be seen as a preface to a postmodern vision of God, which views him not as a rational concept, but as the Other or according to Barth, Levinas and Derrida as the wholly Other, the One that is not tied to progress in history, the One that is not the "absolute Geist" that unfolds himself in world history and the One that is not a moral pitiful God. It is indeed possible to speak of God's revelation in history without saying that his being is derived from or tied to history. In the line of Nietzsche's thinking, it is only possible to speak of God in terms of metaphors and analogies. God's being can never be expressed in words or propositions. His being is not restricted to time and space. In the line of Pannenberg's thinking God can reveal himself in history, but only when he wants to. Nietzsche challenges theology of today to think and speak of God *beyond modern atheism and theism,* in such a way that God is acceptable to a plural, ambiguous and ecumenical world.

ABSTRACT

Nietzsche's impulse towards the development of a concept of God

that transcends modern atheism and theism:

a philosophical theological study

Nietzsche did not, *per se,* deny or acknowledge the existence of God with his statement: "Gott ist todt [sic]!" His was a reaction to the concept of God held in his time, namely the modernistic period's belief in a concept of God tied to the progress in history, rationality and morality. To Nietzsche the god of his time was dead (atheism). He spelt out an important consequence of this death, namely nihilism. His philosophy needs to be interpreted as an impulse towards the development of a concept of God that transcends modern atheism and theism. Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg and Peters responded to Nietzsche's problem with regard to the concept of God and its relation to history, rationality and morality. Other postmodern philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Levinas and theologians such as Bultmann, Tracy and Van Huyssteen also have a significant contribution to make with regard to the concept of God and its relation to history, rationality and morality. Their thinking assists the four theologians in formulating the concept of God that Nietzsche wanted to develop – a concept of God that transcends modern atheism and theism.

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