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

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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

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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

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[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 universal-geschichtliche Konzeption Verzicht geleistet wird, oder ob die Total-anschauung der Wirklichkeit als Geschichte, die von Verheißungen her auf Erfüllung ausgerichtet ist, gleichsam von innen her aufgebrochen wird: zunächst durch die unerwartete Weise, in der Gott seine Verheißungen erfüllt, sodann aber dadurch, daß 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

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

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.