

MAN IN SEARCH OF GOD:  
AN INTERPRETATION  
OF NIETZSCHE'S *GOD IS DEAD*

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Presented to the  
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University of San Carlos  
Cebu City, Philippines

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Philosophy

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by

RYAN C. URBANO

March 1998

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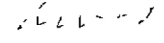
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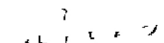
  
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## THESIS ABSTRACT

### Statement of the Problem:

The study aims to help address the problem of religious indifference in a world that has *come of age* by drawing insights from Nietzsche's proclamation of the *death of God*. Religious indifference is the lack of interest or feeling about God and the religious dimension of existence. It is a more serious problem than atheism because the latter implicitly "conceals a deeply religious attitude" while the former "reaches for the first time a total godlessness."

### Methodology:

The thesis interprets Nietzsche's *God is dead* in the light of John D. Caputo's radical hermeneutics. Caputo's radical hermeneutics does not impose fixed and rigid metaphysics in the interpretation of reality. It avoids any final claim to the understanding of truth. In radical hermeneutics, reality is restored to its sense of mystery.

### Findings:

Nietzsche's proclamation of the *death of God* implies three things: the god of metaphysics is dead, the god of morality is dead and the christian god is dead. The *death of God* in these three areas is brought about by nihilism. Nihilism is the dissolution of man's values and ideals. In a world of becoming man cannot hold long to his values. Sooner or later his values will be swept away by nihilism.

The only way to overcome nihilism is to accept it as it is. To affirm the world in all its tragedies and absurdities is the only way to a meaningful life.

**Conclusion:**

The death of God reveals the utter absurdity and meaninglessness of the world. Man is confronted with an ineffable nothingness that leaves him helpless and confused. There is no permanent value which he could hold on to. It is in this experience of nothingness where man is closest to himself because his very existence is threatened by meaninglessness. But the experience of nothingness can be a source of value where man commits himself to the *unknown* by being ultimately concerned with the meaning of life in spite of nihilism. If the world in its meaninglessness is beyond man's grasp and comprehension, man can always create meaning out of absurdity. The creation of meaning is only possible because there is a source from which this meaning comes. In the event of God's death, it is the *unknown* that inspires man to create meaning in his life. Hence, the *unknown* is the source and ground of all meanings in the world.

This *unknown* is a mystery. The mystery shows itself in the chasm that lies between man's desire for a meaningful life and the absurdity of the world. It is only when man restores the sense of mystery to his existence will he find once again the meaning of life.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**Rationale of the Study**

The advent of science and technology has brought security and confidence in man's life. Man no longer points to the dimension beyond in order to explain the meaning of his existence and the world. His reason, to a certain extent, has broadened his "dominion over time: over the past by means of historical knowledge; over the future, by the art of projecting and planning."<sup>1</sup> He has learned to trust only his reason as his sole guide in his journey through life.

Reason has overthrown God from His long-held throne. God, it seems, has no more place in man's life. The reason for this is partly due to the phenomenon of the process of secularization whereby man turns away from the world beyond and where all his religious beliefs and values become unimportant and irrelevant.<sup>2</sup>

Scientific discoveries and breakthroughs provided man an impetus to reach greater heights never before imagined by the human mind. (Or if they were imagined, they were considered as fictions.) For example, cure has been found for diseases that once have been incurable; the space above and beyond has been explored; the power of the atom has been harnessed; some plant and animal species have been cloned to produce a more improved variety; there has been organ



transplants in human beings; and many other scientific and technological achievements. It seems that there is no limit to man's desire to uncover the secrets of mother nature. These seemingly limitless achievements of man render faith in God meaningless.

At present, the christian world is threatened by religious indifference. It is the lack of interest in or feeling about God and the religious dimension of existence.<sup>3</sup> Man, especially in the Western world, is suffering from a crisis of meaning. His religious ideals have fallen short in meeting the demands of his existence in a complex and fast-changing world. His beliefs and values have become irrelevant. Now, where would he go? Where would he take refuge?

However, despite the scientific and technological advancements, man remains dissatisfied and unhappy. "He painstakingly searches for a better world without a corresponding spiritual advancement."<sup>4</sup> His scientific knowledge and skills could not fill the emptiness he feels deep within. The secularized world has kept him restless. He begins to lose confidence in the technology he once relied on for security. Now, in his great despair, he has nothing to cling to.

Ruth Nanda Anshen has the following words to say in describing man's situation today:

Modern man is threatened by a world created by himself. He is faced with the conversion of mind

to naturalism, dogmatic secularism and an opposition to a belief in a transcendent.<sup>3</sup>

Anthony Padovano, in his book The Estranged God, also expresses a parallel opinion about man's plight in today's world. He writes:

Modern man is the product of a world that has moved too quickly for him to assimilate, a lonely creature who wants so much to communicate and to have someone understand him... He is perplexed by his world, paralyzed with doubt, filled with fear, alienated from a God grown, it seems, silent.<sup>6</sup>

Man's awareness of his finiteness and the apparently hopeless world he lives in prompts him to look "elsewhere and beyond," compelling him to embark on a search for a profound love, greater freedom and a fuller life somewhere.<sup>7</sup> He realizes that this beyond is the infinite, the limitless, and it points necessarily to a divine being-- God.<sup>8</sup>

The need for the *Holy*, that divine presence which is the source of all meaning, is strongly felt at the end of this century. This is evident in man's attempt to liberate himself from the crisis of meaning. It dawns upon man that he cannot organize the world and find meaning in it in the absence of God, and that without God he can only organize against himself.<sup>9</sup> God for him is so important that life would be unlivable if God does not really exist. It must be pointed out clearly that God's existence is not an outgrowth of man's need. God exists not because man needs Him; rather