

John D. Caputo. *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. 214 pages. \$14.99.

Once again philosopher John Caputo has ventured into the world of theology, but not just as he did in *The Weakness of God* (2006) and *The Insistence of God* (2014) or even his provocative *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* (2007). In those earlier works Caputo establishes his interest particularly in a radical notion of divine weakness not far from some of the more daring theologies of the cross in the Christian tradition. However, in *Hoping Against Hope* he takes a more autobiographical tack to explore a wide range of theological loci. In this book, we get a more far-reaching vision of what it means to be a hybrid philosopher/theologian and, therefore, to envision a more daring deconstructive postmodern theology.

The autobiographical component, related through the voices of three of John Caputo's selves, already begins to loosen the grip of any overly settled sense of self, world, or God. The first voice, Jackie, is that of Caputo as a young boy whose wonder at the stars in the sky already begins to push back against the fixities of the Baltimore Catechism of his youth. The second voice, Brother Paul, is that of Caputo as a novice, who had tried to hold together the questioning he wished to do as a scholar and the vocational life he envisioned within the Catholic Church. The third is the Professor who lives through his own contradictions of recognizing the intrinsic gift that is his academic life, but still wishing to be paid for it at the university. It is through his conversation with these three voices that Caputo describes his postmodern pilgrimage that is the subtitle of the book.

Along the way, Caputo has his lover's quarrel with theology. As a deconstructive postmodernist he pushes back against the classical theistic notions of God—omnipotence, in particular. This move is in kind with his earlier work in radical theology that embraces God's weakness and argues for God's insistence rather than God's existence. Notwithstanding, Caputo wants to relate the conditional and the Unconditional in a different way than does the tradition of the Omni-God with its dichotomized view of time and eternity. Indeed, it is this desire to see the Unconditional irrupting into the conditional and a refusal to turn the present into a kind of transactional trade-off for a neo-Platonist eternity that drives Caputo to rethink what hope itself is. Along the way, Caputo also embraces what he calls the nihilism of grace, the strangeness of gift over against the so-called "economy of salvation," the demise of heaven along with its largely transactional scheme in the name of the gift, and a revisioning of eschatology as "life before death." What Caputo offers through his nihilistic grace is his vision of the rose, whose blooming is without why or wherefore—a strange kind of cosmic smile that the universe offers on its way to utter extinction. This smile is a harbinger of the very irruption of the Unconditional into the conditional, which, like God, does not so much exist but insists.

The book is written in a passionate style and is full of the kind of wry recognition that you would expect from a hybrid philosopher/theologian who thinks both with the Catholic Church of his youth and the other "Jackie," the Jewish Algerian French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. I say passionate not just for the reasons you would expect, but also for the high place Caputo affords praying, hoping, and tears.

This book may seem like an odd one to recommend to homileticians, but I do in fact do so. From time to time, Caputo winks at preachers and tries to help theology see the mystery it desires to name in all its complexity and unknowability. There is a Lyotardian incredulity to what we preach that goes beyond mere unsettled epistemologies and a loss of metanarratives. This incredulity itself requires a humility in the pulpit that goes far beyond a mere chastening of

authority or a democratizing of the pulpit. Yet for homileticians, in particular, this book is important for the way in which it calls into question the kinds of limited projects with which we have engaged postmodernism generally and deconstruction particularly, thus far. This work of theology, without God, without heaven, and without any transcendental form of hope does far more than simply drive homiletic theories that wish to be intellectually plausible spaces for faith (Lose) or offer ethical and responsible practices for preaching in the face of others (Rose, McClure, Allen). Instead, it presses us further to a more daring *and weaker* homiletical theology itself.

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