

BOOK NOTE

John Caputo. *The insistence of God: A theology of perhaps*

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With a breath of fresh air, John Caputo continues to trailblaze and amaze his readers with his thought-provoking theological theses. His outstanding radical hermeneutics of religion has resulted in publications that reflect our present struggles with the place of religion in our lives. More importantly, Caputo's is a voice that never fails to call out to present situations, where what it means to be a Christian in an increasingly secularized society is the issue.

For example, in his latest achievement, *The insistence of God*, Caputo develops an understanding of radical theology with an open "perhaps." The radicality of such a theology comes from the freedom to think of God on the basis of a creative ground upon which to build a meaningful theological discourse. *The insistence of God* "seek(s) another way to think about theology, about what is insisting within theology, which is God, perhaps" (63).

Caputo's theological rhetoric is admirably consistent with the novel examples of enigmatic religious thinkers like Augustine, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida. From Augustine's "What do I love when I love my God?" to Jacques Derrida's "Religion without religion" through Emmanuel Levinas's "Of God who comes to mind," Caputo wonderfully reframes and rearticulates an enduring approach to the question of God, which is a humble surrender to an event that surpasses the range of our familiar religious vocabulary. As he writes, thus: "I am engaged in a radical phenomenological and hermeneutic rumination on this name, on what insists in this name, on what is trying to come true there, whether we like it or not" (109).

"Perhaps" here is indeed a courageous naming of God, since one's concept of God may be mistaken. It is risking our interpretations of God. "The name of God is the name of a promise, but promises are only promises if they threaten not to be kept" (135). So, in spite of the lack of guarantees in attempting to name what is otherwise unnamable, God insists on being named! This can be boldly extrapolated in the sense that the question of God is bound up with the human condition. The extent of the sense of God is measured according to its capacity to give sense to human existence! After all, naming God or making sense of his name should be taken "as a response to the deepest promptings of our life" (168).

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's forthright formulation likewise puts in perspective Caputo's own insistence, thus: "God, the name of the name, is beyond all names." That is why Caputo's latest engagement in the entire "God-talk" genre brings him to the

suggestion that a meaningful discourse of God should be done outside the realm of existence but of insistence. While no adequate interpretation of God's existence is clear, what is clear is the persistence of the God question that continues to haunt our consciousness.

Unlike Kant's refusal to acknowledge the possibility of a significant philosophy of God, Caputo sees in Hegel the integral place of God to a philosophy of totality. *The insistence of God* further captures the revival of Hegelian religious thinking which he shares with some of today's postmodern thinkers, like Catherine Malabou who positively writes on the future of Hegelian studies.

Postmodern theology is promisingly Hegelian not Kantian. That is, no genuine philosophizing can prosper without admitting to the challenge of religious thinking today as audaciously proclaimed by postmodern theology. For one, the audacity that characterizes postmodern theology is one of an honest engagement with and response to the challenge of keeping the ways of speaking of God ever relevant. For if God is to become meaningful to people's lives, then he should be at least spoken in ways that people can understand.

That is why postmodern theology can be described as today's effort to translate the question of God and all its presuppositions into meaningful experiences. The terrorism that is committed by invoking religion cannot go on; postmodern theology appeals to the end of the blasphemy of using God's name in vain!

Postmodern theology provides the synthesis of the mystical element and the rational element of religion. Mysticism is not a blind adherence to doctrines; it is a humble openness to where the rationality of one's faith can lead one. That is why, in practice, "Amen" profoundly expresses the unity between the mystical and the rational aspects of religion which define our lives. "Amen" affirms then "the condition of our lives, the condition of being created, and the chance of future creativity" (261).

"Amen" in the Judeo-Christian language means self-surrender to the will of God. Plato in the *Apology* expresses the same: "Let the event be as God wills it." Uttering "Amen" is fundamentally about affirming God's name. God is a name; yet, it is one among others! There is no master name. Thus, to name God as one identifies a thing is a false assumption. "Naming" God paradoxically involves opening one's language to what cannot be named! Caputo's deconstruction maintains that the plurivocity of *God* indicates the inadequacy of any attempt to formulate any concept to capture who or what God is. *God* is beyond our concepts. That is, the name "God" exceeds and resists all human constructs of God, yet naming God is reflexively human; it goes back to the universal human experience of framing and understanding what is otherwise unintelligible. With Caputo we can develop the insight that religious wars are, arguably, issues manifesting the fundamentalist tendencies of institutional religions, which, in effect, eclipse and manipulate "God." This implies that no institutionalized religion has a monopoly of the name of God. God is not a bargaining chip that a religion dangles to win over individuals. There is no grand religion, so there is no grand name. There only are peculiarly particular names. Hence, "save his name," to follow Derrida's influential injunction to which Caputo's deconstruction of religion is fiercely devoted. Postmodern theology is sympathetic towards observation. Even translations, which are designed to achieve a sense of meaning of foreign words, pose a fundamental paradox. Translations

remain hermeneutical modes of human reality that approximate and appropriate the meanings of reality. In other words, our hermeneutical capabilities greatly influence our perceptions of reality. That is how human affairs are governed, including that of the question of God.

Translations then are essentially linguistic moments of openness to a God who is to come. The use of translations actually brings us to a series of hermeneutical questions which guide us to the source of all meanings and that which exceeds all interpretations. This takes us too to the field of religions understood as grand interpretations of God. But what inspires our interpretations of God is our passion for God that Caputo himself has long intimated in his overall radical hermeneutics of religion. Caputo concludes, as follows: "Perhaps what we mean by God, the event that insists in the name of God, is the 'perhaps' itself" (262).

Caputo's hermeneutics of the "perhaps," of that unforeseeable event, is a deconstruction of God, of that name called "God." Its trajectory is to make God, whoever or whatever he may be to us, truly a creative ground of human existence. That is, that God is above all names, as he presents us an opportunity to constantly reflect and act on the challenges it poses to human life. If at all, God seeks its own name by affirmatively de-naming itself, in a creative silence. It is a silence of profound reverence. But, more importantly, the deconstruction of God is not a wholesale pitch for of an insoluble problem. Rather, it implies a courageous appeal to the integrity of thinking of God that is sustained by humility of the heart. The deconstruction of God calls for an inclusion of the Other, including God's other names as borne by peoples' meaningful and unique experiences. Perhaps, that is what God insists on our language.

So, the quest for the name of God continues, with the hope of passing through a more liberating one on the way to a future characterized by the inclusion of the Other in justice. *Perhaps*.

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