

John D. Caputo. *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013. 307 pages. \$26.70.

John Caputo is a postmodern philosopher in love with theology, a unique vision Caputo calls in these pages a “radical theology.” In an earlier work, *The Weakness of God*, Caputo made a kind of apology for his unusual dalliance. He is aware that his work sends both the orthodox theologian and the atheist to the exits. He is not interested in the ways confessional theologians nor philosophical critics have talked about God, but in tandem with the “weak theology” (imagine a kind of theology of the cross with the foundations kicked out from under it) of his earlier book, wants to talk about God, perhaps.

This recurring “perhaps” is no mere dangling adverb for Caputo. It is at once the book’s subtitle and what passes for its subject matter. This is revealed in part by considering the title itself. For Caputo, the insistence of God is a claim, or better a call, that comes to us under the divine name, though it cannot be identified with it. As such it is an event, not “being.” Caputo, in postmodern, deconstructionist fashion, does not speak of God’s existence, but God’s *insistence*. This is not your father’s theology. It is rather an attempt to join Deleuzean language of the event with a kind of Derridean sensibility of an ever-deferred eschatology. God insists, but does not exist. God is not “Being,” but we still pray through tears “come, come.” Just as Derrida can speak not of justice or democracy as an entity, but can speak of its “promise,” so also Caputo can speak of a promise of God—a promise not guaranteed, a promise, perhaps.

That the insistence of God is central to this work is clear. Part I is devoted to that claim and the desire, through the story of Martha and Mary in the New Testament, to link that claim to life as lived and not some two-worlds Augustinian, neo-Platonist vision. Just as Martha perceives through worldliness and creaturely need (in contrast to the more contemplative Mary), so Caputo wants to be sure that his weak, radical theology of divine insistence remains tied to life. Yet in the same breath, he continues to talk of insistence in other ways. In Part II, the focus is on the insistence of *theology* itself in “theopoetics.” Something is astir in the name of God, but its connection to us is not through fixed and finished doctrine. In this section Caputo also wrestles with a philosophical tradition stuck in Kantian mode, challenging it with a “weak” reading of Hegel. In Part III, he speaks of the insistence of the *world*. The section features one of the most beautiful chapters in the book, “A Nihilism of Grace.” It is a rewarding read.

To the homiletician a book such as this may seem at first impression opaque. Yet homiletics has just come through its own period where the language of event reigned supreme, tied to a late Heideggerian ontology. What Caputo’s work may just do is to allow homiletics to revision its work in a postmodern mode, not as an event of Being’s self-disclosure, but as an event of promise impinging from the future. I suppose we could imagine our future is not so much in foundationalist ontologies, but in eschatological hope, perhaps.

Given that the book is written at the intersection of language theory, theology, and philosophy, homileticians will want to read it as way of both questioning and reinvigorating their own work. So much writing in deconstruction has seemed far too anti-theological to be of value. Some, contra Caputo, actually read Derrida himself this way. But Caputo’s book is worth the effort for imagining homiletical theory and theology beyond the new homiletic. In this sense, Caputo’s theology of perhaps may just be promising.

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