

THE WEAKNESS OF GOD

The Challenge of John D. Caputo's Theology of the Event

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Abstract

This thesis explores the theme of weakness in a theological setting. Proceeding from a broad presentation of John D. Caputo's theology of the event, the concepts of God as the weak force of a call and the kingdom as a sacred anarchy are discussed in relation to the contemporary discussion of John D. Caputo, as well as introducing Luther's twin concept of the revealed and hidden God. It is argued, against Caputo, that God can be conceived as weak even though interacting, even as the kingdom is taken to be not only in time but also eschatological. The power of God is constituted by the overcoming of death and destruction, which at the same time marks the coming of Messiah and the inauguration of the eschatological kingdom. Throughout, language is developed as a metaphor for faith, a metaphor which is further explored in the last chapter, together with a brief discussion of how to construct a church (in the shape of church development methods) while being a church in deconstruction.

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Introduction

Weakness

The topic of this thesis is *weakness*, and since it is written in the discipline of systematic theology we are to be concerned with weakness as it relates to God. Further, since it is written in the context of *Christian* theology, it is also to be concerned with weakness as it pertains to the interpretive community sustaining and sustained by the Christian witness and tradition, namely the church. The particular perspective of the church also indicates my point of departure, my situatedness, even as it does not hinder a creative reformulation and rethinking of this heritage. Indeed, an attempt at reinterpreting the Christian tradition is the very intention of the scholar primarily to be studied in the present work. For John D. Caputo, an American philosopher of religion, the Christian faith he has inherited and within which he finds himself has to be kept open to the future in order not to close in on itself. With this in mind he has formulated his theology of the even, which could be called ‘weak theology,’ in the mould of Gianni Vattimo’s ‘weak thought’ or ‘weak philosophy.’

Caputo’s weak theology plays itself out as a change of tracks, of going back to a reconception of God which proceeds from weakness rather than from strength. Traditionally, both the Christian God and the concept of God in general (at least in the west) has been associated with supreme power, omnipotence, with being the final cause or first mover, with eternal life and perfect health, with complete freedom and sovereignty. When such a view of God is questioned, when evil happens, or we suffer, or God is silent, some reject faith while others – as is Derrida’s ample description of a believer – forgive God, excuse God,¹ sometimes introducing ‘mystery’ as an easy exit rather than considering changing their concept of God. For we *cannot* change it, God cannot be imagined as anything but the strongest and the most powerful, can he? We might view Caputo’s weak theology as an attempt to think differently, of lending his

¹ “[T]he believers are those who think that they do not have the right to judge, that a priori they forgive God for whatever God does.” Jacques Derrida, “To Forgive,” in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 61.

voice to a *Stimmung* which seems to indicate otherwise, to the Christ in Gethsemane and on the cross, the God-forsaken God, the suffering God, the Old Testament picture of a God who rages when things do not go according to his plan, even as God sometimes seems not to be in full control, the God who in creation takes a chance and makes living a risky business, even for Godself.

With a purely strong God in mind, the life of faith and the life of the church might easily be conceived as a lasting exercise in fall from strength, in fall from the theoretically possible perfection that we continually strive towards, rather than a fall in the sense of no longer hearing nor heeding the call of God. Some churches, for example, simply do not have a vocabulary and a language for handling regress or decline, loss of institutional power, other than to label it wholly unwanted and viewing it as a failure on behalf of the believers with the message being: we have to try harder and do more! I am not out to advocate decline, but rather to highlight the importance for our view of God in the life of faith and church, and welcoming Caputo's attempt at re-imagining God as weak. In Caputo's view, the concept of God which has no room for weakness, or only weakness as a seeming weakness ('docketism'), a voluntary restraining (which is supreme power), is a misconception. To Caputo, God should be thought from below being rather than from on high. God is located more in the cracks and blind spots of the system, among the weak and frail, among the outcasts, the *ta me onta*, than at the head of it, as its sovereign ruler, as the guarantor of a system in which the strong and mighty, the supreme, the healthy, well-fed people with successful lives rule. The system is associated with the way of the world, with economy, with exchange, in which we all strive towards moving to the top of the chain. We buy – or exchange – our way to the top, and in Caputo's view, simply putting the kingdom of God at the very top does not change much. Dealing in celestial wares is still economy. That is not the way God operates, for he knows even the smallest among us and he counts the hairs on the head of all humans, not just the Christians. God is rather the one who confounds the system by leaving the 99 behind (at risk!) and searching for the one.

Therefore, Caputo puts more distance between the church (or whatever institutionalized religion) and the kingdom. The kingdom is the reign of God in time, which could happen to anybody anywhere in any religious tradition or lack thereof. We

all move in and out of the kingdom, courtesy of our heeding or non-heeding of the event of the call. The church is left as one institutionalized religion among many, whose claim to truth and revelation is based on faith, not knowledge. Caputo therefore sees it as an important theological task to keep religious institutions humble and open, open for the possibility that they might be wrong, willing to consider the alternatives, and at all times – not waiting for which alternative turns out to be true, not waiting for the results of the system, which, according to Kierkegaard, will never be in - remembering to let justice flow. As Caputo says, paraphrasing a certain Old Testament prophet, if we let justice flow we can check our theologies at the door.

The distance that Caputo puts between church and kingdom makes possible a stronger critique of institutionalized religion while yet elevating the passion for the kingdom. This twofold move might function as a reply to the two challenges directed at the church: to the modern, secularist mind the church might seem ‘fideistic’ or fundamentalist, while to the post-modern, post-secular mind the church might seem ‘rationalistic’ and devoid of spiritual sensitivity. Caputo’s answer is to deconstruct the concrete religious traditions, making sure faith remains faith (not knowledge) and keeping it from becoming ‘rouged theology,’ – theology selling its soul out of desire for whatever discourse of power is available –, while at the same time stirring a passion for the kingdom of God, for making the weak force of God become stronger than the way of the world.

To take a concrete example, let us look at the church of Norway. We might agree that the church has considerable institutional power. The Church of Norway is, though probably only for a matter of time, anchored in the constitution of the state; the king has to be a member, and the priests are still employed by the state. The church owns 1650 church buildings, many of them richly ornamented. Add to that the Opplysningsvesenets fond, which administers close to 1 billion dollar of property value and 300 million dollar of monetary value and we see an impressive institution emerging. Every year the church receives 800 million dollars from the state in support, in addition to the (mere) 50 million dollars it raises by itself.² The church has a firmly established structure and organization,

² Both figures are 2006 numbers, taken from Kirkerådet, *Tilstandsrapport for Den norske kirke 2006* (Kirkerådet 2006), <http://www.kirken.no> (accessed October 13, 2008).

and the leaders of the church (including the priests) generally enjoy a high standing. The leaders regularly enjoy the companionship of the most influential people in Norway, meeting at cultural, social or political events. And whether willingly or unwillingly the leaders of the church get their fair share of media's attention. In short, in many ways the church is a strong church and a powerful institution.

However, the church is more than an institution, it is an interpretive community, a community of *faith*, and the question of what kind of power the church is to have is an important one. Based on the wording of 1.Cor 1:25 Caputo suggests that we back the church up with the weak force of a call, at most a power of powerlessness. This is not to say that the institution should be leveled with the ground, but rather that the institution must at all times let itself be deconstructed in order to let the *event* within it be released. Once the church as an institution 'freezes over,' halts the (auto-)deconstruction, becomes a tradition sustained by force rather than by love, the event, the dream and the passion of Christian faith is blocked by the very community which is supposed to sustain it. Caputo's view of theology, therefore, is as a deconstruction of the name of God, of a tracing of the event *in* the name of God.

One of the later ideas to hit our shores has been that of church development or church growth. These concepts center around developing strategies and tools for consciously building the local congregation into a living, growing community, filled by people of a living faith serving with their various gifts. The churches are to become strong in the spiritual sense, which often takes the shape of a retrieval of the essence of the church leading to the formulation of a vision. This vision is in turn to serve as a signpost for the plans and strategies by which the church is to reach its designated target. On the upshot, many will undoubtedly find their place in a community focusing on the gifts and importance of the individual while at the same time nurturing a sense of caring and a life of faith among its members. On the downside, even a well-run vision-led church lives on the basis of its conception of Christ, and it is my contention that much of the literature is built on an unbalanced 'strong theology.' Retrieving an 'essence' without room for, or talk about weakness at a fundamental level, is a misconception. In this regard I welcome Caputo's weak theology.

Statement of Intent

I am inscribing weakness at the center of Christian faith, in God. However, quoting Heidegger, "[i]t is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what *one says* about the matter."³ So thinking of God as weak – and by extension the life of faith and the church, is conditioned by having learned the word 'weakness,' enabling the phenomenon to be seen *as weakness*. I have learned about the weakness of God from Caputo, and that is why I cannot come to grips with weakness without considering his teaching of it, which has given me words to see what I formerly could only barely sense. That is not to say that I am required to agree in all respects, which is why I will have to go beyond mere presentation to a response and discussion. Beyond that I would like for the present thesis to end up closer to the factual life of faith and church than in the house of academic scholarship. I hope to draw from the discussion of Caputo a perspective which can be of use to people of faith with whatever scholarly background they have.

Caputo's notion of weakness is clothed in his extended theology, which in turn is informed by his 'prolegomena' of derridean deconstruction and continental philosophy of religion. Caputo, like the church, comes with a tradition and a culture, and it is therefore my intent to let the voice of Caputo speak for long enough to get a good understanding of where his theology comes from and where it is heading. The presentation of Caputo's theology will make up the first chapter. Thereafter, in order to make this thesis polyphonic, I will let other voices have their say. I will in other words subject Caputo's theology of the event to a deconstruction (which would be in the spirit of Caputo himself) by some of his academic fellows, letting them express their critique and perspective. Toward this end I receive help from two essay collections about Caputo's work which have been published. The contributors present their different opinions over the gains and losses in Caputo's translation (*hermeneuein*) of theology into the post-modern and post-secular. This will make up chapter two. It is then time to return to some proper weakness

³ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, § 6, 56. Quoted from Dermot Moran, *Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2004), 234.

and see how the theology of the weakness of God plays itself out in the life of faith and the life of the church. This will make up the third and final chapter.

As a preparation to the reader, I would like to say up ahead that it is neither within the intention of this thesis nor within the reach of my competence to do a guided diachronic tour of the rich and yielding tradition(s) from which Caputo the theologian has emerged. This tour is to be more of a synchronal endeavor, taking the most recent works of Caputo as its point of departure and merely gazing at the beautiful scenery of the past and its achievements from a distance. No sooner have I said that, I break my own rule and move back in history, if only for a few pages. For, as a second piece of preparation I would like to briefly sketch the background of John D. Caputo the scholar, supposing that he is largely an unknown figure on the Scandinavian theological scene.

A Brief Academic Biography of John D. Caputo

John D. Caputo was born in 1940 in the USA to second-generation Italian immigrants. He was raised in the Catholic church and tradition and received his initial philosophical and theological training in the Catholic masters, like Jacques Maritain and Pierre Rousselot. In his early adulthood Caputo was even a De La Salle-brother! His first serious academic works were on Aquinas and Heidegger, and were in Caputo's own words "absolutely straight academic exercises."⁴ Caputo worked himself up the university ladder, achieving tenure and a philosophy chair, gaining a reputation mainly as an Aquinas and Heidegger scholar, all the while keeping his ear close to the continental philosophical tradition to which Heidegger was so important. Throughout this first phase of his academic career Caputo appeared more in the role of an analyst, a philosophical herald and interpreter, than a voice on his own.

That was to change with what Caputo calls his 'conversion,' albeit an academic one. In 1984, while putting the finishing touches to his book *Radical Hermeneutics*, Caputo realized, in his own words, "that what was missing was what *I* wanted to say."⁵ The reborn Caputo proceeded to write *Against Ethics* and *More Radical Hermeneutics*, exploring his newfound freedom. To stay within the metaphor of conversion, we might say that Caputo's baptism took a long time coming, for not until well into the 1990's did

⁴ John D. Caputo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 135.

⁵ Caputo, *After the death of God*, 136.

Caputo undertake the project which was to be his public statement of intent, his baptism of passionate fire. While he had started interacting with the writings of Derrida during the 1980's it was not until reading Derrida's lamentation in *Circonfession* concerning "my [Derrida's] religion about which nobody understands anything," resulting in Derrida seeing himself being "read less and less well over almost twenty years,"⁶ that Caputo resolved to write the book that has since catapulted him onto a newfound scene, theology. Caputo now has a wider (and much enlarged) audience, resulting in an elevated standing as one of the foremost in the field of continental philosophy of religion. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* – a book about Derrida's religion, a stumbling block to secular deconstructors and pious theologians alike – managed to save a space in the midst of derridean philosophy for the name of God, in the process highlighting the semblance between deconstruction and the kingdom of God.

This book created the storm Caputo was hoping for, but maybe to his surprise it turned out to be received more like longed-for showers of rain than the destructive inferno of a hurricane, even striking a cord with Derrida himself. Having been born-again and baptized, Caputo was now ready for the role attributed to him of high priest in the church of postmodern philosophy. With Derrida being credited with loosening his tongue and breaking the spell of Heidegger, Caputo has published extensively over the last 10 years in the field of deconstruction and religion. It is from this latest wave of publications that I take my point of departure, and primarily *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* published in 2006. There has also been published three essay collections about the work of Caputo, two of which will be considered here.⁷ These each have Caputo responding to each essay, making them commendable examples of respectful and well-intentional academic conversations. These are "*Religion with/out religion: The Prayers and tears of John D. Caputo*" published in 2002 and edited by James H. Olthuis, and "*A Passion for the impossible: John D. Caputo in focus*" published in 2003 and edited by Mark Dooley, each of which makes up an important part of the backdrop for the second chapter. Caputo's voice has not turned silent yet, and he continues to speak and publish.

⁶ John D. Caputo, "A Game of Jacks: A Response to Derrida," in *A Passion for the Impossible: John D. Caputo in Focus*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 34.

⁷ The first one which is not considered here was published in 1997 before the emergence of *Prayers and Tears* and is therefore concerned with the first phase of Caputo's authorship.

In 2004 he moved from Villanova University, his academic home since 1968, to Syracuse University, where he holds the chair as Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Humanities.

Caputo's Theology of the Event

Name and Event

In the Desert

Caputo approaches the task of theology with Derrida's apparatus of concepts, and I would like to begin with the word *différance*, a neologism coined by Derrida. This word combines the French words for *differ* and *defer*, encompassing both the structuralist notion of all meaning arising from the difference *between* signs - not the signs themselves, and the endless deferral of meaning resulting from the interdependence of texts and the constantly changing corpus to which they belong, i.e. their constantly changing con-text. This means that until everything is said and done – and it never is – we cannot be absolute sure what anything is or means. Deep down there is a radical unknowing; if hard pressed we would have to concede that we *really* do not know. This makes theology restless, interim, temporary and revisable, i.e. *deconstructible*. Whatever is, like our knowledge of ourselves and God, is contingent. Rather than try to elicit absolute knowledge from our contingent existence, we are to choose wisely between differing hypotheses, remembering that *that* is what they are, and not the Secret. For the secret, says Caputo, is that there is no Secret: "The stress is not upon nonknowing in the classical mystical sense, where that implies an ever deeper, 'learned' nonknowing, but rather nonknowing in the sense that we really don't know!"⁸

Now some might from the preceding sense a certain affiliation with negative theology and not be totally off the mark. For indeed, Derrida, and by extension Caputo, has been in close encounter with apophatic theology and not rejected it. Not wholly. Yes and no. Yes to the 'wounded language,' to the passion, to the impossibility of speaking while we cannot but speak, yes to the *tout autre*. But no to the inherent search for the

⁸ John D. Caputo, "The Power of the Powerless," in John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press), 115.

hyper-essentiality which is known to be there, to the God already identified beyond being, to the master name, to the even higher ground, to the pure presence which remains though the representation always leaves it short. Derrida, and Caputo, wants to keep apophatic theology, but as inscribed within the trace, a theology lost in the desert of *khora*,⁹ a little more lost than the prayer to the God beyond being which safe-guards our journey and keeps us on track. We are not lost within the gates of Eden, but lost in the desert of which we know nothing. Rather than searching for a closer identification of the transcendental signified Derrida emphasizes the passion, the woundedness and the excess that beset us all, constituting what he calls a generalized apophatics. *Khora*, the desert place from where apophatic theology as well as everything else springs forth, is a pre-essential place, *before* being, not beyond being, and we wander about in the desert without being assured that our prayers are received, not knowing who or what we are praying to nor what we are praying for. This is our radical predicament, which means that apophatic theology according to Derrida is inscribed within the trace of undecidability and made *faith*; for it is precisely when we do not *know* that faith is all the more called for. As Johannes Climacus says, “the passion of faith is directly proportionate to its objective uncertainty.”¹⁰

The Event

Proceeding with a passion for the impossible, with an unknown prayer to the unknown ‘God,’ firmly situated in a ‘wounded language,’ hard on the heels of the trace, Caputo begins with ‘God,’ not as a master name but as a name that carries a certain promise, perhaps more than most words. This name, he says, we learn at our mother’s breast, it follows us, or haunts us, throughout life, is associated with the deepest and the dearest in life, capable of silencing a crowd or bringing tears to flow, in both a good and a bad way. Caputo takes the name of God to be his starting point, or rather, what is happening *in* the name of God, the *event* in the name: “[The name of God] *harbors* an event, and theology is the hermeneutics of that event, its task being to release what is happening in that

⁹ Caputo describes *khora* in this way: “*Khora* is a surname for *différance*, for the originary or quasi-originary, quasi-transcendental ‘spacing’ called the play of differences, which supplies the time and the place (the possibility of spatial and temporal grids) for things in time and place, and it is given to us in a ‘figure’ in Plato’s *Timaeus*.” Caputo, *A Game of Jacks*, 44-45.

¹⁰ John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 11.

name.”¹¹ By the event Caputo does not mean any occurrence, any happening, but what is simmering in the name, what the name is ‘getting at.’ Events cannot be contained in specific words (literalized) but are uncontainable; names are rather temporary shelters. Events are what the name tries to grasp, and as such the event is what the name *means*.¹² But still the name is not disposable, because “the event is the offspring of the body of the name and [...] without names there would be no events. The event is conceived and born within the body of the name. But names outstrip themselves and come undone [...] which gives rise to the event they themselves nurture.”¹³

These events, however, could come under other names, the event being endlessly nameable, which indicates a certain fluctuation and translatability. The promise and call inscribed in the word ‘democracy,’ for example, the dream of a just society in which everybody gets their say, could in the future very well come under a name other than ‘democracy.’ Still, the word ‘democracy’ is not arbitrarily chosen, it is rather the *least* bad word, the word that carries the bigger promise. That is why we hope for democracy to come, not National Socialism to come. But we are never to take the word ‘democracy’ with too much literal force, thinking of all the flaws there are in actual democracies, we are rather called to *deliteralize* the name. We need to keep the distance between the name and the event; if we take them as too identical we block the event, prevent it from coming since we have already in the present tied it to a name, a name which is never capable of fulfilling the expectations we have, the very expectation of something future which is what we call the event. Again taking the example of democracy, we can easily see that the existing democracies are a long cry from the dreams and hopes contained *within* the name ‘democracy.’ To literalize the name of democracy would mean taking the existing democracies with too much force, expect too much of them, and in worst case, fighting for something not worth fighting for against something which might possibly have been more true to the expectation and dreams contained within the name of democracy than the existing democracy itself.

Deliteralization is therefore paramount in keeping the name and the event apart, thereby preserving them both in their own right. A name shatters under our expectations,

¹¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 2.

¹² Caputo, *Weakness*, 3.

¹³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 3.

whereas the event is structurally always not present, it is always to come, either from the future or the past, and cannot be identified with a name or entity in the present. So deliteralization and de-ontologization is required in order to release the event within the name: "To exist would mean to exhaust the event, which means the event that is named in or under the name of God can never take final form, can never exist and exhaust itself on the ontical or ontological plane."¹⁴

Since the name is always a reduction of the event, the event is excessive. The event overflows us, our language, and our expectations; events "overtake us and outstrip the reach of the subject or the ego, [...] an event is also an advent. The event is visited upon me, presenting itself as something I must deal with, like it or not."¹⁵ Being excessive means that the event is beyond my reach, I cannot control it. Rather than being the master, the subject speaking in the nominative, I am being addressed, put in the accusative. That is because the event happens against a horizon of expectation which it breaches, shatters and overflows. The expectations that I have are concerned with the possible, so that the advent of the event constitutes an experience of the impossible, of *the* impossible. So the excessiveness of the event means we have both an uncontainable incoming (the 'objective') and a solicited subject (the 'subjective'). This is Caputo's way of explaining what most people assert, namely that objectivity is not in our hands, even as Caputo emphasizes the existentially engaged and addressed subject. In dealing with the event we are not simply observing, calculating, but we are flooded out, taken by something or someone we do not know. This 'solicitation' by the event does not take place on the plane of what Caputo calls economy. Rather, the event tears open the closed circles of economy, of calculation and mutual retribution. So being solicited is not like being visited by money collectors, expecting a return on a loan or an investment. The event puts us in the accusative and requires a response, but this demand is made by a *weak* force, a weak but unconditional force. This weak but unconditional force is what Derrida calls 'the undeconstructible,' to which we will return later.

The excess of the event leaves an effect. This effect is not necessarily good news, it could mean bad news. As Caputo says, "an event is not an inner essence [...] but it is

¹⁴ John D. Caputo, "Spectral Hermeneutics," in John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 56.

¹⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 4.

the endless possibilities of linking of which the name is capable [...] Accordingly, an event can result in a disintegrating destabilization [...] just as well as it can create an opening to the future.”¹⁶ These endless possibilities of linking, of the event emerging under a different name, turning itself against the names used before, is not assured of success, does not follow a pattern which leads safe and sound to a better place. ”Every promise is also a threat, and the event to come can be either for better or for worse.”¹⁷ The promise of the event does not have any guarantee whatsoever that it will be fulfilled, it does not have the possibility of making itself come true, it is ”not an essence unfolding but a promise to be kept, a call or a solicitation to be responded to, a prayer to be answered, a hope to be fulfilled.”¹⁸ The event does not possess the possibility to make itself come true, but is quite to the contrary ”subject to all the contingencies of time and tide, of chance and circumstance, of history and power – in short, to all the forces of the world that conspire to prevent the event, to contain its disruption, to hold in check its bottomless disseminative disturbance, to betray its promise.”¹⁹ So even as it does not come into being by itself, but simply calls us from below being, even so when its promise is being responded to, there are forces at play to keep it from becoming. Caputo is here pointing out the responsibility on our behalf to respond to the event of the call and to clear the way for the releasing of the event, i.e., deconstruct, deliteralize, and deontologize, all in order to release the event within the name.

The event can be for better or for worse, and is no essence unfolding in history, like Hegel’s *Weltgeist*, because it is *below* being and has no essence or core. There is no one name for it and there is no entity or being with which it can be equated, ”the event overflows any entity.”²⁰ Rather, ”an event refers to an impulse or aspiration simmering within both the names of entities and the name of being, something that groans to be born, something that cannot be constricted to either the ontic or ontological order at all.”²¹ The event moves in and out of being, and as such Caputo’s quest and re-quest for the event is constituted by imagination, dream, hope, promise and future more than the

¹⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 5.

¹⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 5.

¹⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 5.

¹⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 5.

²⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 5.

²¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 5.

entities and Being that Heidegger was after. Since it is beyond being, the event is, when sought grasped by language, endlessly nameable and translatable. In this naming and translation the event represents the *truth* of a name, the truth being the capabilities of the event which are the unforeseeable future and the uncontainable possibilities it brings. Caputo thereby aligns truth with deed, making truth a *facere veritatem*. The truth of the event is also unforeseeable and uncontainable since the event is always to come. Truth overflows us, overtakes us, and is therefore "more like a night than a light,"²² even as the truth might be bad news and is something we must have the heart for. That is why, for Caputo, truth has more to do with prayer than epistemology.²³ The event is structurally always not present, it is always to come whether from the future or from 'dangerous memories,' for "[a]s a 'call' or solicitation, the event is no less a memory, a call back, a re-call to the past that has given us this name."²⁴

The event is thus connected to time and temporality. The temporality of the event is not the tick-tock of the watch. Rather, the temporality of the event is the existential time of the subject. Says Caputo, "the movement of the event cannot be clocked by the ticktock of ordinary time but has to do with a transforming moment that releases us from the grip of the present and opens up the future in a way that makes possible a new birth, a new beginning, a new invention of ourselves, even as it awakens dangerous memories."²⁵ Even though Caputo is all along talking about the event, we must remember that the question is of the event astir in the particular name of 'God.' Upon situating the event within existential time we could describe God as a *how* in the currency of time rather than a *what* in the currency of being.

The Trace

A second word associated with Derrida and taken up by Caputo is 'deconstruction,' which in Caputo's view is the hermeneutics of the kingdom of God. In addition to the term 'deconstruction' Derrida has since 1984 been talking of the 'undeconstructible,' adding, 'if there is such a thing.' This, according to Derrida, would be a weak but unconditional force which would have to be non-present since whatever is present is

²² Caputo, *Weakness*, 6.

²³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 286.

²⁴ John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 61.

²⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 6.

contingent, conditioned, and thereby deconstructible. The issue is how we can at all speak about the event if it is always not present. How is it at all related to our lives in the present? This is where Caputo, and Derrida before him, introduces the term 'trace.' Derrida came up with this term "while struggling to articulate how *différance* can be responsible for the production of differences, and yet not a cause in the classic sense (because it has no being in itself, no fullness, no presence)."²⁶ This problem is symmetric to how the event, which is without being, fullness or presence, can produce a difference in our present predicament. The notion of a 'trace,' in order to accomplish the linking of the event to come and the present, indicates "something absent that has never actually been present," and which "indeed constitutes the present by its very relation to what is absent."²⁷ This description fits the event nicely, as it could be described as a felt absence, the absence that makes us hear the call and the promise. And, of course, the absence is constituted by deliteralization and deontologization. If there is no absence, no trace is found. So deconstruction is meant to follow the trace of the event. Derrida might even contribute to this endeavor when he speaks of the promise inscribed in language, and says that *that* is what is called God in theology.²⁸

Even as the trace makes it possible in the present to speak of the event, it is the bridgehead to a criterion for distinguishing the most promising names from the less promising ones. Thereby Caputo is able to point in the direction of (always keeping in mind that it cannot be identified) the undeconstructible as what he with a common name calls 'weak messianic forces' and 'something unconditional without force.' The trace of the event remains as, we could call it, a unifying perspective that makes sure that deconstruction does not fall into complete difference, complete nihilism, even as it remains as a haunting specter; we cannot deny that *that* is also a possibility.

The Scriptures

We have so far seen how Caputo situates his theology in a radical unknowing, but also that this unknowing contains a trace of the event which we pursue by means of deconstruction. This quest will lead somewhere, namely to the weak force of God and the

²⁶ Moran, *Phenomenology*, 469.

²⁷ Moran, *Phenomenology*, 469. In addition to Derrida both Merleau-Ponty and Levinas discusses the 'trace,' and Derrida draws particularly on Levinas' use of the term.

²⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 93.

sacred anarchy of the kingdom. But allow me before I begin that presentation to do a short sidestep and look at how Caputo treats the Scriptures. The Scriptures are central to the Christian faith and any theological 'system' must have a clear way of handling them. Caputo begins by saying that in his way of reading,

”[t]he Word of God, the Scriptures, undergo what we might entitle a methodological transformation into an event. That represents a leading-back (reductio) of the sacred text from its status as either (a) a document to be studied in a historical or comparative Religionswissenschaft, which does not as such engage my existence or passion, or (b) as a divine revelation to be meditated upon by a scientia divina (a strong scriptural theology), which engages me but also definitively identifies its provenance, to (c) its pure hermeneutic-phenomenological content, to the event of appeal or claim or call that issues from it.”²⁹

Caputo wants to get away from readings that are not existentially engaged and readings which ”identifies its provenance.” In Caputo’s view, we bring authority to the text and cannot a priori accept any text’s claim to authority. The hermeneutic-phenomenological reading that he proposes is similar to the method of Heidegger in *Being and Time*, in which the text reveals itself. ’Revelation’ is the text’s self-revealing, a disclosing of itself to an ’authentic’ reader, which in Caputo’s paradigm would mean the event’s self-revealing, and ’transcendence’ is the call that issues from the text and addresses me. Connecting back to what I said about the trace, in Heidegger’s system the forgetting of Being belongs to Being itself in such a way that the trace, the absence, is a feature of the thing that is absent. The trace in language which we follow by means of deconstruction, is a feature of the event which is not there (yet).

All this being said, Caputo sums it up by saying that “[a]s a cognitive matter, [the Scripture’s] truth is symbolic and not the truth of correspondence or the correctness of propositions.”³⁰ On that background he states that “[t]he crucifixion and the resurrection are deep and overarching symbols of the rhythmic birth and death and rebirth that we call our lives.”³¹ Underlying is the notion, inherited from Derrida, that there are no *archés*, only *archives*. We cannot get back to the beginning of a text, because the first edition was not an arché either. The only arché there is is the event. But the event cannot be caught in

²⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 117.

³⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 118.

³¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 119.

words. What Caputo is after in the Scriptures, therefore, is not authorial intent or original 'meaning,' but rather the event of the call. But as we recall, the truth of the name is the event and its *capabilities*, its unforeseeable future and uncontainable possibility. Caputo states, "I treat the New Testament as an 'archive,' a depository of memories, which present a certain way to be, a certain 'poetics' – not a politics or an ethics or a church dogmatics – that I like to call a 'poetics of the kingdom,' which lays claim to us and which calls for a 'transformation into existence.'"³²

Therefore, the text must be 'reduced' to a call, and that call 'reduced' into existence. This is the twofold reduction of Caputo with regards to any text, also the Scriptures. The 'reduction' that Caputo undertakes is, however, not really a reduction: "my ontological reduction is an existential magnification [...] and 'realism' is the really reductive force that reduces the name of God to magic."³³ God is in Caputo's paradigm not reduced to a human projection or a metaphor; rather, God is raised up from below being and entity to what Caputo calls the hyper-event, "the inner heart or driving force in things."³⁴ And in the same way that the 'reduction' of the Scriptures releases the event within the name, the 'reduction' releases the truth of the Scriptures. Releasing the call stirring in the name of God and Scriptures is an ontological reduction that turns into an existential magnification. Caputo calls it a promissory reduction, "from presence to promise, suspending the oppressive presence of the present and taking up the name of God as a promissory note."³⁵

The Weakness of God

We have shown how Caputo follows the trace by means of deconstruction, in chase of the event within the name of God. Caputo describes himself as crawling on the ground, moving below the "firepower of metaphysics," listening closely to the poetry of the Scriptures, and there finding that what is astir in the name of God, which "rings true to experience," are the twin ideas of the "weak force of God" and the "sacred anarchy" called the kingdom. We begin with the weakness of God, an idea which is actually two ideas: "First, the name of God is the name of an event rather than of an entity, of a call

³² Caputo, *WWJD*, 33.

³³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 121.

³⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 123.

³⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 122.

rather than of a cause, of a provocation or a promise rather than of a presence. Secondly, and this follows from the first, we will do better to think of God in terms of weakness rather than of outright strength.”³⁶ I follow suit and first present God as an event and a call, before proceeding with the notion of God as weak rather than strong.

Call and Caller

The event is, according to Caputo, closely tied to the event, “[t]he event that is going on *in* the name is the event of a *call*, of something calling and of something being called for *by* the name.”³⁷ Maybe we can say that the call is aligned with the trace, making them interchangeable, so that the call is the call of what is absent which was never present. But beyond being in tune with the philosophical heritage of the trace, Caputo’s model of God as a call has another heritage:

”the name of God is to be thought in terms of the Hebraic model of the call calling rather than the Hellenistic model of a cause causing, of covenant rather than of causality, of undying loyalty to his word rather than of eternal being, of a primordial promise rather than a prime mover – or if a mover, then one who moves by a motivating call or a provocation or a promise rather than by the strong force of an efficient cause.”³⁸

This experience of the call, again harking back to the radical unknowing we are all veiled in, is an experience basic to human life. Caputo takes as “[t]he basic presupposition of [his study] the experience of the promise or the call.” We are, he says, “always already on the receiving end of an address, overtaken by the event of a promise.”³⁹ The call does not issue only to the believers or the fidels, it issues to everybody.

There are two things which constitute the call. First of all, on the side of the ‘called,’ “[t]he call is itself constituted by being heard, and its being heard is in turn constituted by our responding, by our heeding and not simply hearing, or by our hearing as heeding.”⁴⁰ The call is not a call until we experience it as a call, and the order of the call is not only to be heard, but to be heeded. The second side, of the side of the ‘caller,’ “[t]he hiddenness of the source is actually *constitutive* of the call.”⁴¹ That is, in order for

³⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 12.

³⁷ Caputo, *WWJD*, 59

³⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 94.

³⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 113.

⁴⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 114.

⁴¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 114.

the call to be a call we cannot know who or what is calling. It is a condition for the call to be heard as a call that we do not know who is calling. For if we knew who was calling and precisely what the call was, we would master it, get out of the accusative into the nominative and thereby stop being existentially called by it. The call would not be excessive but containable. "But to the extent that one actually knows or can identify the caller, the sender of this mail, one gets *on top of* the call and can judge *for oneself* about the validity of what is called for. And to that extent one is less under the call and more in possession of one's own faculties, more autonomous."⁴² Caputo likens this to the 'caller ID' functions on telephones, whereby the called can see who is calling before picking up the phone, and thereby overtaking and mastering the call. The structural non-knowledge of the caller is an *epoche*, a suspension, of the question "whether this call issues from someone identifiable or something entitative; whether the call has an ontological footing in some real being, power, or entity."⁴³ Rather than treating the call as issuing from an identified someone with an identifiable content, Caputo treats the call as a "trace of a voice," a faint voice, which we are unable to tie to an identifiable entity or being.

Power and Weakness

Theology, says Caputo, is bipolar, "vacillating wildly between the heights of power and the depths of weakness."⁴⁴ Caputo believes this is due to the unrecognized distinction between the name and the event, where the name can amass power and a swelling bank account, gather an army and a following, but the event is at most a power of powerlessness, a call without an army to enforce it, a weak but unconditional force. What Caputo wants to pursue further is the weak side of theology, the weak force of God, "which is, if not the centerpiece, at least the crucially decentering and disruptive short circuit of a theology of the event."⁴⁵ The event astir in the name of God, contends Caputo, is the event of a weak force, at most a power of powerlessness which is quite different from the traditional image of the sovereign ever-present omnipotent highest being representing the ontological power source for all there is. Rather, the event astir in the name of God is what disturbs the present order, the order of the world, not what

⁴² Caputo, *WWJD*, 49

⁴³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 96-97.

⁴⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 8.

⁴⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 56.

finds it. Rather than thinking of God from on high we should think of God from below, for God chose what is lowly in this world, “*ta me onta*,”⁴⁶ to confound the powerful and mighty: “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing things that are.”⁴⁷ Following this re-thinking of God’s power, we would say that it is “the power of a call, a word/Word, of an affirmation or promise.”⁴⁸ The name God which Caputo takes as his object of study, does not *a priori* have any more power than a word. The word God is limited by the power of language, a power, it should be added, which can be quite significant, but only as a weak but unconditional force, at most a power of powerlessness. Religion and theology all too easily forget this and instead offer themselves and their ‘object’ to whatever “discourse of power” is available. According to Kierkegaard, Christianity should be “in permanent structural opposition to this world.”⁴⁹ It is rouged theology, a decadence on part of Christianity, to sit down to make peace with the world, with the powers that might be. Then Christianity turns into *Christendom*, a worldly kingdom. Sitting down to strike a deal with the powers that may be, theology betrays its call, betrays the event within.

Caputo’s concept of God as a weak force changes the concept of God’s transcendence. According to Caputo, the sovereign God sitting on top of the food chain, the “transcendent super-essential hyper-being, towering over other beings” is an idol image. This image blocks the event simmering in the name of God. Rather, “God’s transcendence is that of a call, of an address that, while arising from the hinter regions below being, lays us low.”⁵⁰ God’s transcendence is found in the existential encounter, an encounter which like the epiphanies recorded in the Bible leaves us praying on our knees. This way of perceiving God’s transcendence is radically different from metaphysical theology’s casting of God as the highest being, the all-powerful and sovereign being.

⁴⁶ 1. Cor 1:28. All Bible quotations taken from Today’s New International Version.

⁴⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 46. Caputo is citing 1. Cor. 1:27-28. The notion of “things that are not,” *ta me onta*, was the supreme foolishness to the Greeks, searching as they were for true being and *ousia*. Further, in the context of this passage from 1. Cor, Paul quotes Isaiah 1:19 in which God says he will destroy the wisdom of the wise. Caputo here mentions, based on John van Buren, that this verse might be what Luther had in mind when he talked of the necessary *destructio* of medieval scholasticism. Van Buren further proposes that Luther’s use of the term *destructio* is the source for Heidegger’s *destruktion*, which in turn is the background for Derrida’s *deconstruction*.

⁴⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 91.

⁴⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 48.

⁵⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 38.

Caputo points to the danger imminent in this view that the sovereignty of God might be, and in fact is, translated by some into a God-given mandate for worldly sovereignty. What is not worth doing if the almighty sovereign God has commanded it? Though many religious traditions relativize worldly sovereignty and power in relation to the absolute sovereignty of God, the remnant talk about God's sovereignty alone is dangerous: "The model of sovereignty is contagious. It spreads from roughed theology to blood in the streets. The sovereignty of God is readily extended to the sovereignty of men over other men, over women and animals, over all creation."⁵¹

Another point to consider is that if we keep to the concept of God as almighty we might, though we intend to exalt God by not compromising God's power, end up compromising God's *goodness*. Caputo suggests moving away from the Hellenistic image of God to the Hebrew image of God, a model which Caputo thinks more truthful, closer to the event.⁵² According to the Hebrew religious paradigm, "God is not the one who is utterly responsible for everything because there is an element of indeterminacy in things that frustrates us all, God, human, and beast."⁵³ God is not the almighty power source for everything that is. God is rather the one who pronounces the verdict 'good' on the things that are. God calls and promises rather than causes and moves.

A related question is who is responsible for evil. In Caputo's view, investing omnipotence in God makes God responsible for everything that happens and everything that is not avoided, so that

"the massive omnipresence of natural destruction in this world as well as of unjust death and innocent suffering – violence too often committed in the name of God, or in the name of someone else's God, or lamented to have transpired 'in the absence of God' – is testimony against this omnipotence. It is not a mystery but a mystification and a conceptual mistake."⁵⁴

In Caputo's view, God is not responsible for evil, but is constantly calling forth the good and calling us to countersign Elohim's 'good' with our 'good,' even in the midst of the presence of evil. Thinking of God as a transcendent protector, capable of intervening for the safety of ourselves and our loved ones is considered "an unworthy way to treat God;

⁵¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 78-79.

⁵² Caputo, *Weakness*, 94.

⁵³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 75.

⁵⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 79.

it is unworthy to think of God in terms of his power to deliver the goods, which is like loving a cow for its milk, as Meister Eckhart says.”⁵⁵ Even more,

”beyond obfuscation and mystification, it is in the end an outright blasphemy to say that God has some mysterious divine purpose when an innocent child is abducted, raped, and murdered. That is not a mystery but a misconception about God and about the power of God. [...] That murder is not part of a long-term good, a more mysterious good that we just can’t understand. The murder is a violation of the ‘good,’ a contradiction of God’s benediction, which strains and stresses God’s word, puts it to the test, puts us to the test.”⁵⁶

God is completely on the side of the good, asking us to join in by countersigning God’s fundamental inscription on creation; ‘good, good, very good.’

Theology of Creation

The most obvious argument against the weakness of God might be the creator God. If God is not omnipotent, did he then not create the world? Caputo goes to Genesis chapters one to three, and finds the story of how Elohim fashioned what was already there, the co-eternal matter of the earth and the deep waters; Elohim fashioned the *tohu wa-bohu* into meaning, into goodness. God is not the reason things are there, but the reason things are *good*. Elohim inscribes a fundamental goodness in creation, even as Yahwe in the next chapter takes a more realistic view as to the danger and the evil which is also present. But nonetheless, God’s inscription of the good is what we hope for and believe in, even in the midst of evil. God is calling us to countersign his ‘yes’ with our ‘yes,’ God’s verdict being at the same time a call and a promise, a verdict we are called to countersign even in the midst of evil, when we hope against hope. God is continually out to re-create, that is, continually *make* things good, evoke goodness, remind us of and call us back to the primary intention: “the creation narratives tell of the ‘inscription’ [...] of a fundamental goodness in things [...] Creation is not a finished deed but an ongoing process of re-creation. The originary act inserts things within the call, within the word ‘good,’ letting the word *good* embrace and encompass them, but it does not hold things absolutely fast.”⁵⁷ This ongoing act of recreation in which God calls forth the ‘good’ inscribed in

⁵⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 79.

⁵⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 91.

⁵⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 176-177.

things is not the omnipotent pantocrator God who must take responsibility for both good and evil, but the God who is not responsible for things being there in the first place; God is rather the one who made things *good*: “Elohim thus is the reason that things are *good*. Creation is not a movement from non-being to being, which makes the heart of the metaphysician skip a beat, but from being to the good, beyond the muteness of being to the speaking of the good, which is the heart of Hebrew poetry.”⁵⁸ It is this process which Jesus takes part in, assisting in “the reversal of death into life.” He is sent by his father (Abba) to do so, and this reversal of death into life “is what constitutes coming of the kingdom.”⁵⁹

A Weak Theology of the Cross

Having shown how the notion of God as a weak but unconditional force plays itself out, Caputo recasts the question in terms of a theology of the cross. The question is: could Jesus have come down from the cross had he so wanted? Or was he really nailed to the cross against his will and with no possibility of wrestling lose? Was Jesus holding back his power so that his weakness was a voluntary weakness, a camouflaged strength?⁶⁰

Caputo’s answer is to see Jesus’ divinity not in a divine holding back of his infinite power, but rather in his helpless cry and his forgiveness. Jesus does not operate with brute power, but with the power of powerlessness, the power of the call, “the call that cries out from Calvary,”⁶¹ the protest against innocent suffering and the power to suffer with this innocent suffering; the cry of “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus is crucified, not because of the will of the Father, “but against his will, against the will of everything that is good and just, human or divine.”⁶² As Caputo points out,

”[h]is suffering was not a coin of the realm in the economy of the kingdom. The kingdom is not an economy, and God is not in attendance at this scene as an accountant of divine debts or as a higher power watching the whole thing from up there and freely holding in check his infinite power to intervene. That is more rouged theology, weakness fantasizing about an orgasm of power – if not power now, then power later.”⁶³

⁵⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 178.

⁵⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 238.

⁶⁰ Caputo suggests labeling such theology ‘docketism.’

⁶¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 44.

⁶² Caputo, *After the death of God*, 63

⁶³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 44.

But for Paul, as Caputo rightly observes, the weakness of God is cast in a larger economy of power where the weakness of God is stronger than human strength, and God's foolishness in the long run turns out to be the supreme wisdom. Paul's notions of weakness and foolishness are good long-term investments; all we need is to know the secret as to which alternative will lead to the most pay-off in the long run, much like the inside knowledge of a stock broker. Paul thinks that ultimately God is all-powerful and sovereign. Against Paul's view, Caputo argues that as long as we think of God as sovereign and almighty, the top-down authority all too easily transfers onto the use of the name of God on earth. It is not enough to relativize human sovereignty and power in relation to the ultimate sovereignty and power of God, we must rather rethink our view of the power of God. This we do, according to Caputo by emphasizing the event of a call without sovereign power: "[n]ot all 'power and authority' (*exousia*), but every unconditional appeal is from God, and no authority may be rightfully exercised except in response to the call for justice for the least among us."⁶⁴ The focus should be on the structure of the call and the response to it, a response to the call to goodness, "beyond or below or without being. God is an event, not in the order of power or being, but in the order of the good."⁶⁵ Therefore, concerning the cross-event, "the power of God is embodied in the helpless body whose flesh is nailed to the cross."⁶⁶ Concerning the cross event Caputo concludes that "[i]t was the 'world' that made Jesus pay – not God – for contradicting the world. It is the world that thinks in terms of paybacks. In this sense Jesus died because of the sinfulness of the world, not in sacrificial exchange for wiping out the debt of sin or to offer the devil a ransom."⁶⁷

The Kingdom of God

I now turn to the second part of Caputo's theology of the event, namely, the sacred anarchy called the kingdom of God, what Caputo calls "the phenomenal field in which the name of God gets filled in and acquires a phenomenal but weak force."⁶⁸ Theology is "the logos of our passion for God," and this passion for the name of God directs us to the

⁶⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 53.

⁶⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 53.

⁶⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 54.

⁶⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 233.

⁶⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 116-117.

kingdom of God, which is where the name of God gets its flesh and blood.⁶⁹ But like God is God in a weak mode, so the kingdom is also a kingdom in a weak mode. It is not governed by "a 'logic of omnipotence,' which has to do with entities, but by [...] a *poetics of the impossible*, which has to do with events."⁷⁰ The kingdom is not the way of the world, of economy and power, but is seen in the interruption and contradiction of the world, whatever calls the world and its ways beyond itself.

The world is constructed so that whatever *is* could have been otherwise and might become otherwise, even as things come undone, break down and wither away, or become alive, are transformed, born again. This radical flux and indeterminacy does not represent a loss but a gain, because rather than being self-dependent we are now continually dependent on God as our giver of being, time and meaning. These we do not 'possess,' but long for them to be there also in the future:

"In ousiology, presence means a kind of subsistence that offers resistance to God, that stands on its own, that is opposed to the radical createdness of things, of a world that arises as an answer to God's call. Ousiology is foundationalism, a philosophy of self-security [...] In the kingdom, things do not have their own independent subsistence, their own ability to fend for themselves, but they remain deeply created, fashioned fresh from the *tohu wa-bohu*. [...] Their being and time are from God."⁷¹ God is continually out to re-create the world, to fill it with life and meaning. The kingdom is intimately associated with this dynamic of re-creation: "[e]ven as the creative act of Genesis is a movement from a lifeless wild to a world teeming with life, the work of Jesus is to assist in the reversal of death into life. That is what he has been sent by his *Abba* to do; that is what constitutes the coming of the kingdom."⁷²

The kingdom is described by Caputo as slightly anarchic, a holy hell, because it stands in opposition to the world and its structures: "the kingdom comes to loosen the grip of the world, to dislodge the rule of being, to release the event that the world would prevent, which is the whole idea behind what I am calling a sacred anarchy."⁷³ The world and its economy, its system of exchange, is inescapable. We cannot but live in it, but it must continually be interrupted by the kingdom.⁷⁴ We see that the kingdom is treated,

⁶⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 101.

⁷⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 102.

⁷¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 173-174.

⁷² Caputo, *Weakness*, 238.

⁷³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 107.

⁷⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 157.

like ‘God,’ more as a ‘how’ in time than a ‘what’ or ‘where’ on the plane of being, “[t]he kingdom of God is a certain excess in the world, not an immaterial world hidden behind the material one. God is a temporal recess, not a spatial transcendence.”⁷⁵ There is no afterlife, rather, “[t]he ‘kingdom of God’ [refers] to a way of reigning or ruling, a way of being in time when God holds sway rather than the human will or even Satan.”⁷⁶ As a ‘how’ in time, the kingdom of God means a re-interpretation of our situation, “it gives us faith in the face of evil.”⁷⁷ Our lives, therefore, consist in moving in and out of the kingdom, moving between the world and the kingdom remembering that “[t]he kingdom comes to contradict the world and contest the world’s ways, and it always looks like foolishness to the world’s good sense, moving as it does between logic and passion, truth and justice, concepts and desire, strategies and prayers, astute points and mad stories, for it can never be merely or simply the one or the other.”⁷⁸ In this tension we all live and as a consequence “[w]e are enjoined both to work for our bread and to trust God to give us our bread, to plan for the future and to realize that the future is in God’s hand.”⁷⁹

By proceeding with a poetics instead of a logic Caputo is emphasizing the “symbolic discourse of the kingdom” over the “literal discourse of the world.”⁸⁰ Caputo’s poetics deals with the ‘poor perhaps’ that has no being (*ousia*) nor authority (*exousia*).⁸¹ This poetics is a poetics of the impossible, not of omnipotence. The experience of the impossible, which Derrida thinks is the least bad definition of deconstruction,⁸² does not denote the intervention of an omnipotent being upon nature and its laws, but rather “the possibility of something life-transforming.”⁸³ Caputo reaches to Derrida’s explanation of the impossible as not simply “any wild or crazy eventuality, however bizarre, mean, or violent. The event begins *by* the impossible.” What Derrida means by this is that “the event is moved and driven by a desire for the *gift* beyond economy, for the *justice* beyond the law, for the *hospitality* beyond proprietorship, for *forgiveness* beyond getting even, for the coming of the *tout autre* beyond the presence of the same, for [...] the *good*

⁷⁵ Caputo, *Weakness*, 270.

⁷⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 163.

⁷⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 181.

⁷⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 108.

⁷⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 173.

⁸⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 104.

⁸¹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 104.

⁸² Caputo, *Weakness*, 103.

⁸³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 104.

beyond being.”⁸⁴ In a poetics of the impossible as opposed to a logic of omnipotence “the natural/supernatural distinction also comes apart. To distinguish a natural order into which is injected some supernatural influx, some supernatural empowerment of our natural faculties, is, I think, to believe in magic.” Caputo really wants to get away from thaumaturgy and asserts that “[t]o think clearly about religion you have to clear your head of supernaturalism and magic. That is our permanent debt to Tillich.”⁸⁵ The rule of God, the kingdom where God rules, is governed not by the logic of omnipotence but by the poetics of foolishness. It is a kingdom in which the shepherd risks the safety of the 99 in search for the lost one, where the first are the last and the weak are blessed; it is a kingdom full of reversals and paradoxes. The world loves its own, but “[i]n the kingdom, the mark of God is on the face of the stranger, on the ‘other,’ not the ‘same.’”⁸⁶

According to Caputo, “[t]he idea of one true religion or religious discourse or body of religious narratives makes no more sense than the idea of one true poem or one true language or one true culture.”⁸⁷ Treating the distinction between the kingdom and the world in this way enables Caputo to draw the line between them right across the borders between theists and atheists, Christians and other-believers: “[t]he project of a theology of the event [...] is to describe an event that cuts across the distinction between confessional beliefs and unbelief, this life and the next life, and goes to the heart of a life worth living, a life of passion, which is structured like a religion without religion.”⁸⁸ In this religion,

“whether one is a Jew or a non-Jew, master or slave, male or female, none of that makes any difference. The kingdom is everybody’s. [...] The kingdom is in the midst of all of us, and we are all in the midst of the kingdom – *all* of us – and it is just a question of saying yes to it. [...] Indeed, one can even go further: when it comes to getting into the kingdom, there is actually a certain privileging of the outsider, a strategic reversal meant to make a point about the kingdom.”⁸⁹

Whether Christian or other-believing, the point is to remain true to the call of the event and let the kingdom come. Letting the kingdom come is not hardwired to religious

⁸⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 111.

⁸⁵ Caputo, *On the Power of the Powerless*, 143-144.

⁸⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 263.

⁸⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 118.

⁸⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 108-109.

⁸⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 261-262.

affiliation. Nothing is safe. Even priest craft, “thinking in terms of rigorous sacrificial exchange, is sheer and utter worldliness (economics), even though it is engaged in celestial commerce in the exchange of heavenly wares.”⁹⁰ That is, ‘selling’ eternal blessedness, a future reward for obedience now, is economics.

Called to be a Translator

We are all situated in the radical unknowing that Caputo describes, left with only a trace of the event. Caputo performs a quest for the event in the name of God and finds that the events astir in that name is the weak but unconditional force of God as a call and of the kingdom in which God gets flesh and blood. Caputo now goes on to describe the response and responsibility on our side, as the called. He says,

”[w]e must, as Deleuze says, make ourselves worthy of the events that befall us. [...] [I]n the theory of the event, ‘truth’ means what is trying to come true, which points to our responsibility to make it actually come true – let us say, to give it a Pauline twist, to fill up what is missing in the body of this name.”⁹¹

And further, “[i]t is *we* who have to make the weakness of God stronger than the power of the world.”⁹² We could say that “[the name of God] is the name more of a potency than a power [...] while the actuality or the realization is assigned *to us*, as Bonhoeffer claimed.”⁹³ We are “to make *God* happen, to give God body and embodiment, force and actuality.” The word ‘God’ must be translated, not as a semantic translation but as a pragmatic translation. The name of God must be translated into a deed, into *facere veritatem*. As Caputo says, “the name of God must be *translated into hospitality*, but this translation takes place in an entirely *pragmatic* order, not a *semantic* one [...] The name of God must be translated into an event, and the event must be translated into a deed.” This translation does not imply a loss of original content, because there is no original content:

“Translation is downgraded by hierarchists (like Heidegger) who make a profitable living out of degrading the derivative vis-à-vis the original. But that is not the case with Derrida, who thinks that the origin is always deferred, that the *arche* has always already slipped away in favor of the

⁹⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 234.

⁹¹ Caputo, *WWJD*, 61

⁹² Caputo, *WWJD*, 88

⁹³ Caputo, *Spectral Hermeneutics*, 64.

archive, so that everything is a translation of an original that was never present and is possessed by no one. For Derrida, translation is an elemental demand of hospitality, requiring us to adopt a new idiom, to speak in a new tongue that can be understood by the stranger [...] We cannot translate – something idiomatic is always lost – but still we must; and furthermore, it is no loss, because a translation is an expansion and the incoming of something new.”⁹⁴

Response

The Messianic

Différance, Positivism, and Reason

Allow me to begin this section called response with a brief sketch of the grid within which Caputo’s thought takes place. The main guiding concept is that of *différance*, the spacing of signs. In a poststructural philosophy like Caputo’s (Derrida’s) the spacing of signs takes place in a changing system (vis-a-vis the structuralist closed system), meaning that the context of the sign is always changing, which in turn leads to any meaning being a temporary unit. Unknowing therefore emerges as the fundamental epistemological feature; like Caputo says, repeating Foucault, we are those who do not know who they are. Any sign is a sign by the separating space from other signs, and this separation is constituted by another sign. This other sign, which is the necessary structurally other of any sign, once we get down to the ‘primordial’ ‘first’ sign, goes by the name of *khora*. That is why, Caputo says, when we enter the abyss, there is not only the possibility of God there, but also the possibility of *khora*. *Khora* is always there as a specter which haunts whatever name we give the abyss, whatever we name as the utmost. This utmost goes by the name of God in Christianity, and by the name of justice in deconstruction. The utmost is what Derrida calls the undeconstructible, the impossible, the event, what is structurally never present but always to come, the object of our passion, our prayers and tears. That is because whatever is (present) is conditional and hence deconstructible. The haunting specter of *khora* means that we can never settle for a determined name as the absolute ‘beginning,’ ‘abyss,’ etc. This leads to a radical undecidability; where we to identify the abyss as God, this would be an identification taking place *after* the fact of an

⁹⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 266-267.

undecidability between God and khora, i.e., it is an identification by *faith*. Caputo here builds on Kierkegaard's notion that undecidability is the condition of faith, which in turn is the condition of making a decision. The undecidability of God, khora, justice, or whatever name one would like to elevate, issues in what Caputo labels 'exemplarism,' meaning that we do not know if God is the name of what we love, or if what we love is the name of God.

This all amounts to what Derrida calls his (and Caputo's) quasi-transcendental. Rejecting "hard or full-blown transcendentals," Caputo says that

"we always need *some* account of why we cannot have a *Final* account of things are, otherwise non-foundationalism is just a caprice of someone having a bad day. Such an account is what Derrida calls a 'quasi-transcendental.' [...] If challenged, Derrida can always point to the differential play of traces and the constitution of provisional unities of meaning through the endless process of iterability."⁹⁵

The quasi-transcendental works in two directions; on the one hand it elevates the transcendent to such an altitude as to become unknown. On such an account it could be called a transcendence of the transcendent. On the other hand, since this unknowing is to be embraced – "we know that we should not know" – Caputo does not mind being associated with Foucault's 'happy positivism.' Caputo, with Foucault, is both a nominalist and rejects the hermeneutical circle as legitimizing absolute knowledge. Hermeneutics is hermeneutics all the way down, and as Foucault points out, there is therefore no necessary need to go all the way down. Instead, "what you see is what you get." In Caputo's view, following Derrida, we are thus situated in the here and the now, here below with broken bodies, without any metaphysical back-up, none that we know of. In this situation they both follow Levinas in placing justice over truth, and sees us as released to 'praxis,' to the call issuing from the face of the other. As Kierkegaard says, the results of the system will never be in, and in the meantime we should let justice flow.

Separating our situatedness here below in which justice is to reign from the transcendent 'up above' in which unknowability reigns, Derrida (and Caputo) retain the distinction between faith and reason. 'Solving' the play of traces, halting the play, identifying the abyss with a determinate name, remains the business of faith, even as faith

⁹⁵ John D. Caputo, "Achieving the Impossible – Rorty's Religion: A Response to Dooley," in *A Passion for the Impossible*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 230.

does not extinguish the haunting perspective of khora. It is precisely *because of* the undecidability introduced by khora that faith remains faith. Reason, on the other hand, is understood as a deep structural faith. Faith and reason, therefore, share a somewhat fuzzy boarder in which they color each other. With regards to religion, Derrida has introduced the distinction between the messianic and messianisms. It seems Derrida intended the messianic to correspond to reason whereas the different messianisms where the matter of faith. However, Caputo has convincingly shown how Derrida's concept of the messianic is not without content, does not remain pure, and as such is another messianism.⁹⁶ Caputo's move is to inscribe the messianic as a structural role embedded within any messianism, as the representative of khora making the messianic a haunting perspective for the messianism from which is 'originates.' The messianic keeps the determinate religions open to the possibility that they could be otherwise. Inscribing the messianic in khora also means that the messianic, as khora, is a non-place, is not a place that can be inhabited, and that the pure messianic remains an impossibility (ergo placing Derrida's messianic with the messianisms): "[t]he pure messianic is a formal indication of a concrete structure which deconstruction is trying to formalize, but which it is also at the very same time concretizing in an account of radical democracy."⁹⁷ The grid that I have sketched out thus does not, in Caputo's mind, represent the pure messianic; it contains at least what Heidegger called 'formal indicators,' if not outright material content. It is not a pure structure, if ever there was such a thing. Nonetheless, as an attempt to describe the pure structure of the messianic (within the domain of reason), it points in the direction beyond itself to the pure messianic which would always haunt any messianism (any faith).

Preference for Khora?

Now, there have been some questions raised to the schemata that Caputo presents. The first is concerned with the role of khora. "[I]s it not possible," Shane Cudney asks, "to think otherwise than of *khora* as the condition for im/possibility?"⁹⁸ Why do we have to

⁹⁶ Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p.

⁹⁷ Caputo, speaking in B. Keith Putt, "What do I love when I love my God? An interview with John D. Caputo," in *Religion with/out religion*, ed. James H. Olthuis (London: Routledge, 2002), 165.

⁹⁸ Shane Cudney, "'Religion without religion:' Caputo, Derrida, and the violence of particularity," in *Religion with/out religion*, ed. James H. Olthuis (London: Routledge, 2002), 42.

be haunted by something as faceless as the khora? Why not think of what haunts us as a loving countenance seeking a personal relation with us? The context of Cudney's question is the association Caputo and Derrida see between the concrete messianisms and violence. Cudney points out, as Caputo has admitted, that Derrida's messianic is yet another messianism and therefore caught in the same structural (possibility of) violence as the other messianisms. But Cudney goes one step further and asks whether we have to keep the khora at all, for when a messianism is "[s]tripped of its aggressive, violent tendencies, the problem is that this docile, more manageable messianic is also stripped of certain very human, gonadian features, which also strikes me as violent."⁹⁹

In retracing Caputo's answer, let me begin with his confirmation of

"the truly dangerous idea that religious people allow to get inside their heads, viz. that God has singled out a particular people, in a particular time and place, and given them (well, in all modesty, usually 'us') a privileged access to a divinely revealed truth to which other people, who do not or did not live in that time or place, or share that language, who may have never so much as heard of that religion, are denied. God has pitched his tent among 'us,' while the others, the Canaanites, are just going to have to learn to deal with that. Or else! In support of their privilege, the believers offer their belief – and their swords."¹⁰⁰

Whereas Derrida tackles this idea by means of a reduction of messianisms to the pure messianic, which he notes "smacks of Kant, and the universal ethical content," Caputo argues that the messianic "is simply a finger pointing at the moon, what Heidegger called a formal indication, not a universal."¹⁰¹ Turning to the role of khora, and the possibility of making it a friendly face, "already primed toward the good"¹⁰² like Olthuis proposes, Caputo points out, first of all, that khora is not evil. It is rather the name of what Caputo would call an irreducible experience of human life, that of emptiness, being unsure, etc. This perspective is made particularly haunting by elevating it to Nietzschean heights, that we are but speck in a universe that simply yawns when we invent words like 'truth' or 'justice.' In Caputo's view, if Cudney and Olthuis want to replace khora and

⁹⁹ Cudney, *Religion without religion*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ John D. Caputo, "Hoping in hope, hoping against hope: a response," in *Religion with/out religion*, ed. James H. Olthuis (London: Routledge, 2002), 128-129.

¹⁰¹ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 129.

¹⁰² James H. Olthuis, "The test of *khôra*: *grâce à Dieu*," in *Religion with/out religion*, ed. James H. Olthuis (London: Routledge, 2002), 117.

undecidability with a loving countenance, then they take undecidability out of the equation and deprive faith of one of its constituting features.

Conceding that *khora* has a rightful place in the messianic, another question emerges. In his piece entitled "*Khora* or God?" Richard Kearney sets out his assertion that deconstruction "appears to express a marked preference for *khora*, and its allies, over its opponents."¹⁰³ This assertion rests on the premise, as Kearney makes explicit, that "[t]here is, after all, and in spite of what Jack Caputo sometimes seems to suggest, a fundamental choice to be made between *khora* and God."¹⁰⁴ Kearney does not argue against the mere presence of *khora* in the messianic, but rather that deconstruction (and by extension Caputo) is not able to maintain the tension and undecidability, but rather chooses in favor of *khora*.

Caputo's answer is that *khora* is a surname for *différance*, which again "is that condition in virtue of which whatever meaning we constitute is made possible." *Khora* has the mark of a condition, it is the differential sign in lack of any other signs, itself having no being at all, neither non-being, not pointing to any signified or signifier beyond itself. It is the co-abyss, the abyss of the below mirroring the excess of the beyond, "the mirror-image effect of the Platonic *agathon* and *khora*, in the way that the beyond-being and below-being mirror each other,"¹⁰⁵ to the extent that as a phenomenological matter (as opposed to a conceptual) we experience "a certain confusion (Levinas), a kind of bedazzlement (Marion), or what Derrida and I would call an 'undecidability,' which I think can only be resolved by *faith*."¹⁰⁶ Caputo thinks Kearney mistakes undecidability for indecision, whereas undecidability is the condition for any decision, thus leaving undecidability on the 'reason' side of the fence, whereas any decision belongs to faith *without extinguishing khora*: "Without *khora* there is no *faith*, because then God would have plainly and unambiguously revealed Godself, without any possible confusion."¹⁰⁷

I side with Caputo in keeping *khora* in the system as the silent companion to whatever we call the abyss, *even if* we say that God is the one who spread tings out.

¹⁰³ Richard Kearney, "*Khora* or God?" in *A Passion for the Impossible*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 112.

¹⁰⁴ Kearney, *Khora* or God, 119.

¹⁰⁵ John D. Caputo, "Abyssus Abyssum Invocat: A Response to Kearney," in *A Passion for the Impossible*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 124.

¹⁰⁶ Caputo, *Abyssus Abyssum Invocat*, 125.

¹⁰⁷ Caputo, *Abyssus Abyssum Invocat*, 126.

Khora remains as the very condition for the meaningfulness of such a sentence. Inscribing *khora* in the 'system, as a condition, places *khora* on the side of *reason*, taking the faith-reason distinction as a graded scale in which reason is more permanent, and plays with the stakes not so quite so high. Faith and reason are interconnected, they are both trying equally hard to stay away from fideism (faith proves). Cudney asks if we cannot be haunted by something else than *khora*, and indeed we could be. In fact, if we say that *khora* is always there as the emptiness surrounding the conceptual pyramid, there is always another name there, naming the abyss. This name could be 'nothing,' 'emptiness,' 'abyss,' 'God,' whatever. It could even be *khora*. We could have the explicit - the named - *khora* as the counterpart to the silent *khora*, which in effect is what Kearney is attributing to deconstruction; *khora* against *khora*, and no place for the living God. To the contrary, what I see Caputo accomplishing, is making explicit the possibility in deconstruction for allowing God at the top of the pyramid, not just as an aporia on the way to the khoral desert.

However, once *khora*, the silent *khora*, is taken as more than a structural role, as a name which cannot be translated, we have broken the circle of undecidability. Therefore, *khora* also has to be translatable, to go under other names. Ecclesiastes, for example, has a good way of describing what could otherwise be named *khora*. Even understanding the figure of the devil as the opposing counterpart to God might be a proper translation of *khora*. *Khora* cannot be as hard as a master name, only as soft as a perspective, though a founding perspective. There is no metaphysical grounding for this perspective - hence the description of it as quasi-transcendental - which is why we are inevitably brought to *experience*, making Caputo's theology a form of phenomenology, a quasi-phenomenology, or, as Caputo says, a phenomenology with an extended reach, pushed to its limits and beyond.

Inferior to Apophatic Theology?

Another question, which in many ways is a repetition of the question directed at Derrida's *différance* in the 1960's, is whether the "the irreducible tension and undecidability between the determinate, concrete messianisms and the indeterminate, decertifying structure of the messianic in Caputo's approach to religion without religion [is] a repetition, translation, or example of the oscillation between the kataphatic and the

apophatic modes of theological discourse in a mystical thinking and writing like that of Dionysius and his heirs.”¹⁰⁸ This is what Thomas Carlson thinks, but he has, of course, read *The Prayers and Tears of Derrida* in which Caputo argues for the difference between deconstruction and negative theology. However, Carlson thinks Caputo has missed an important point which would put negative theology in a much better light: ”The weakness of this [Caputo’s] reading is that it does not acknowledge the sense in which a theological tradition like that of Dionysius in fact insists, with some complexity, that negation is finally no more adequate than affirmation; both are equally insufficient, and neither ever ’drops anchor’ or ’touches bottom.’”¹⁰⁹

Caputo owns up to his critique of negative theology as ’high ousiology,’ ”that throughout the darkest nights of negative theology, throughout all its profound renunciation of concepts, judgments and argumentation – ’God is neither this nor that’ – there persists a still more profound movement of unity with God.”¹¹⁰ The core of the issue is that ”mystical writers in their *first* or dominant voice, precisely insofar as they write from out of an experience of divine things, *pati divina*, are not ’lost,’ however long, wide and deep the string of renunciations they profess. [...] That is how the mystical economy works. We are lost for words, but we are not lost.”¹¹¹ Again Caputo ends up with pointing to the necessary inscription of *khora* for the sake of faith. As he says, ”I would have the mystical theologians treat this khoral night not as a provisional renunciation, a station on the way of the cross of mystical union, but as an inescapable aporia.”¹¹² In the end, the charge of ’high ousiology’ remains standing, because ”the things that Neoplatonic mystics say about the First Cause or the Godhead are meant to transcend *both* apophatic and kataphatic discourse. That is exactly what I think high ousiology is and what it always does: it transcends the sphere of propositional discourse, both affirmative *and* negative.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Thomas A. Carlson, ”Caputo’s Example,” in *A Passion for the Impossible*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 268.

¹⁰⁹ Carlson, *Caputo’s Example*, 267.

¹¹⁰ John D. Caputo, ”On being left without a prayer: A response to Carlson,” in *A Passion for the Impossible*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 276.

¹¹¹ Caputo, *On being left without a prayer*, 277-278.

¹¹² Caputo, *On being left without a prayer*, 279.

¹¹³ Caputo, *On being left without a prayer*, 280.

Caputo charges the mystics with the task of being lost as a demand of khora. He reminds us that the only thing 'transcending' – or rather situated in between – the apophatic and the kataphatic is undecidability, which in turn faith is not able to transcend. However, I do not think (I hope) that Caputo sees 'lost' as anything but a perspective, level with 'found.' Lost and found are equally valid as long as the possibility of the other is not extinguished. That is, being completely lost is no more possible than being completely found. Différance makes sure that there is always a difference, a glitch, even between the silent khora and explicit khora (if that is the preferred choice), and through this glitch we do not know what might shine.

Maybe what is bothering Caputo is not so much that the mystical theologians talk about the First Cause or the Godhead transcending all discourse, but their *reasons* for doing so, which ultimately goes back to the incarnation in Christ and the biblical testimony associated with it. Caputo accepts that kataphatic theology is biblical, not just an Hellenistic import,¹¹⁴ but nevertheless remains critical of a strong view of revelation and incarnation to the extent that Smith labels Caputo's theology an Augustinianism without revelation and incarnation.¹¹⁵ Here, in the domain of biblical criticism, which Caputo would willingly say is a domain to be retained from modernism, Caputo seems to side with John Dominic Crossan and the Jesus Seminar, a choice which should be up for discussion. As Kevin Hart says, after biblical criticism the *assensus* of faith cannot be left out of the equation (pace Bultmann). Bar the inscription and fine tuning of khora, the disagreement between Caputo/Derrida and the mystic theologians is likely to revolve more around the way to read the biblical testimony.

Unable to Differentiate Good from Evil?

Some, like Cudney, have voiced the fear that Caputo's messianic is left unable to tell good from evil. Cudney asks, "if justice is always to come, always 'impossible,' how is it that evil and violence are not conflated with goodness and thereby put on equal footing?"¹¹⁶ Kearns raises the same concern when she points out that

¹¹⁴ Caputo, *On being left without a prayer*, 277.

¹¹⁵ James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 112-113.

¹¹⁶ Cudney, *Religion without religion*, 44.

”there are encounters with darkness as well as encounters with light. The emphasis on the complete newness, the total unpredictability and extra-schematic singularity of the apocalyptic moment in Derrida and Caputo, and on the futility of attempts to anticipate or domesticate it, tends to discount the schooling effects of cultural tradition, ethical structure and religious observance as aids to discernment.”¹¹⁷

Beyond that, the stakes are so high, she says, that accepting and dealing with the indeterminacy of 'exemplarity' is too much to leave at the lap of an individual.¹¹⁸ Kearns while raising the question simultaneously points to a possible 'solution,' namely 'cultural tradition.' By doing so she aligns herself (in this particular issue) with Ward as he points out that ”for Job and Augustine, the other is neither just otherness nor, in being alterior, ever wholly other. For the relationship to be a relationship, a history of practiced believing is required, the memory of past engagement, past epiphany, past revelations.”¹¹⁹ In other words, Caputo is being criticized for depriving himself of the very tradition which is his teacher in matters of good and evil, right and wrong.

The answer I construe on behalf of Caputo, is his assertion (in which he distances himself slightly from Derrida) that there is no 'messianic' without the messianisms, that there is no such thing as the pure messianic except as a formal indication. Situatedness is a given, which shows up in his description of the twofold moment of deconstruction in which ”[t]he first moment [is] *historical association*. Deconstruction should be viewed, first, as a work of *associating* ourselves with, or of being already associated with, of being lodged and installed within, the powerful and compelling words that have been handed down to us.”¹²⁰ As he says, ”[w]e do not begin randomly, indifferently, because that would not be to begin at all.”¹²¹ But, Caputo points out, tradition can become violent, it can lose the love that originally set the tradition in motion and become 'empty' tradition, ”sustained by violence.” Therefore, in order to keep the 'first love,' the second moment of deconstruction ”[is] *messianic dissociation*, which thus prevents these names

¹¹⁷ Cleo McNelly Kearns, “*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Esoteric Comedy and the poetics of Obligation*,” in *A Passion for the Impossible*, ed. Mark Dooley (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 285.

¹¹⁸ Kearns, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 283.

¹¹⁹ Graham Ward, “Questioning God,” in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 276.

¹²⁰ John D. Caputo. “What Do I Love When I Love My God? Deconstruction and Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 303-304.

¹²¹ Caputo, *What Do I Love When I Love My God?*, 304

from freezing over, from hardening and contracting themselves within their present limits.”¹²² The distinction between good and evil is taken from tradition, which portrays Caputo’s nominalism. The named abyss with its associated cultural tradition supplies a guideline, whereas khora is silently there as the ‘neutralizing’ possibility that it is possible to think otherwise. One’s tradition, which could have clear pictures of what is right and wrong, will inescapably at some point be haunted by the silent khora under whatever name it might emerge.

Dissolving Pluralism?

Ronald Kuipers has a question to Caputo concerning the relation between identity and plurality. “[H]ow,” he asks, “[can] deconstruction affirm cultural and religious pluralism without at the same time allowing determinate communities to retain a certain sense of unique identity.”¹²³ The question is raised on the background of Derrida’s dream of “a community without identity, of a non-identical community that cannot say I or we, for, after all, the very idea of a community is to fortify (*munis, muneris*) ourselves in common against the other.”¹²⁴ In Kuipers view, this attitude is taken up in Caputo’s treatment of the concrete messianisms, seeing them as somehow inherently violent. Kuipers points out that “[i]t is in the name of peace that deconstruction wishes to think the structural possibility of the religious without getting too close to any particular religion.”¹²⁵ In short, Kuipers asks how there can be true pluralism after all, if there is not a way of having a unique identity, having something which the others does *not* have.

Caputo begins his answer by pointing to deconstruction’s emphasis on the *tension* between the messianic and the messianisms. There is no ‘Aufhebung,’ no happy synthesis. As he says, “[o]ne the one hand, a concrete but too determined and local faith; on the other hand, an open but too empty formalism. And it will never be possible to choose between them.”¹²⁶ The messianic is based on the premise that “[w]hatever we

¹²² Caputo, *What Do I Love When I Love My God?*, 304

¹²³ Ronald A. Kuipers, “Dangerous safety, safe danger,” in *Religion with/out religion*, ed. James H. Olthuis (London: Routledge, 2002), 23.

¹²⁴ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 231.

¹²⁵ Kuipers, *Dangerous safety, safe danger*, 26.

¹²⁶ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 126-127.

hope for, we are always hoping in hope itself.”¹²⁷ The tension between hope itself and hope with a content must be kept, for, as Caputo says,

”I do not see how anything is safe, how any body of beliefs or practices, how any institution, of any sort or whatever sort, is safe, unless it exposes itself to the danger of deconstruction. For [...] the madness that drives ‘people of God’ to kill in the name of God, the giver of life [...] is a far greater danger than deconstruction or dissent.”¹²⁸

Further, “[t]he messianic in the messianisms is the pronouncement that our credo, the several credos of the many faiths, are never the definitive word, the last word, that we are all more or less children of the cosmic moment in which we have been born and are unable to lift ourselves up and out of that cosmic constraint.”¹²⁹ The messianic is the “‘it could be otherwise’ in any specific messianism.”¹³⁰ However, Caputo concedes that in *Prayers and Tears* he has failed rhetorically to keep the tension. For, he ends, “even as the community must take the risk of hospitality, must put itself at risk by opening its doors to the other, so deconstruction, if there were such a thing, must take the risk of community.”¹³¹

The Messianism – Caputo’s God

A New Song to the Lord

Moving from the messianic, the structure or the ‘grammar’ of the languages of faith (remembering that each grammar is unique and comes embedded, exists, only in actual languages, even as it is a haunting perspective, suggesting the reasonable and more universal dynamics at play behind the surface appearance of contingent and singular forms), to the surface structure of Caputo’s messianism, we hear Caputo singing a song to the Lord which might raise a few eyebrows in the pews. Caputo’s reimagining of God as having at most the power of powerlessness, of being a call rather than a cause, a *how* in time rather than a *what* on the plane of being, means that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is opposed, the interpretation of Lazarus’ resurrection as a body being resuscitated

¹²⁷ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 127.

¹²⁸ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 127.

¹²⁹ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 128.

¹³⁰ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 128.

¹³¹ Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 128.

rejected,¹³² and there is little, and at most in the shape of a reinterpretation, talk of incarnation, revelation, and transcendence. And the image of a God who halts a landslide or heals a cancerous tumor is rejected, even as the phrase 'this is the word of God' is assessed as far too bold. The recognizable interaction of God in the dual sense of talk and act, is not part of Caputo's theology. We are rather left with the trace in language, with the dream, the passion, and the prayer for the event always to come, and there is always a great 'unknown' placed next to our beliefs, making sure they remain faith and not knowledge.

What are we to make of this? If we think of religions and languages, and denominations as dialects, does Caputo's particular idiolect portray such a heavy accent that he belongs with the Unitarians (Heltzel's proposal¹³³), with the deconstructors in need of *metanoia* from nihilism (Radical Orthodoxy's suggestion), or are we to accept Caputo's self-identification with the Catholics? And beyond placing the right tag on Caputo's forehead, to what extent are we to incorporate Caputo's theology as a contribution to the life of faith and the church?

Let us begin with understanding Caputo's own religious localization. In order to do so, I stick to the imagery of religions as languages, intending later on to expand the notion to a full-fledged metaphor, in other words, treating language as a metaphor for faith. This also, I believe, goes along with Caputo's understanding of his self-identification. For, for all Caputo's rejection or suspicion of the traditional creeds and dogmas, the fact remains that he keeps the vocabulary he once learned, he still speaks as someone who grew up speaking 'Catholicism,' which indeed he did, and he even learned it from the Catholic masters, like Aquinas, for whom he still keeps a place in his heart (he even has a spacious place for a *Lutheran* there in the shape of his 'first (academic) love,' Kierkegaard). Along the way he has learned from 'bilinguals' like Heidegger, who with time left his Catholic speech as a silent memory, and Levinas, the great translator of Judaism into philosophy (the Greek dialect), and he even found Derrida speaking words

¹³² "In the kingdom, death turns into life, but that amazing transformation should not be confused with a strong theology of magical resuscitations or supernatural interventions upon natural processes. For that would rivet the kingdom to the order of being instead of releasing the event that invites – and an invitation is a weak force." Caputo, *Weakness*, 15.

¹³³ "The conspicuous lack of reference to the Trinity throughout the volume exposes a Unitarian tendency in Caputo's doctrine of God." Peter Goodwin Heltzel, "The Weakness of God," review of *The Weakness of God*, by John D. Caputo, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 6 no. 3, Fall 2005, 98.

he could understand (very well!), but Caputo has done so without forgetting his mother tongue. We all have our tradition, our inheritance, Caputo says, and his is the language and culture of Catholic faith. He sticks with its vocabulary and gestures, but of course in a very conscious way, always receiving tradition with suspicion and always thinking consciously before he speaks, his question being: what is the most truthful way to speak this language and to act out this culture that I have inherited?

Like an inner city teenager (a hip-hop'er maybe), Caputo speaks in a new way unrecognizable to some within the same language community. The question is where we are to draw the line between one language and another. The question is important because if Caputo does not speak Christian faith, why should we take him as a point of reference for the church? Continuing with the notion of faiths as languages, we might say that *Christian* faith is associated with Christ in some way, giving name to the faith in question. And this association must take the form of repeating forwards the words of Christ, entering some form of 'dialogue' with Christ in the language of Christ. Caputo's language, his faith, is clearly associated with Christ, based on a 'conversation' and negotiation, identifying the language of Christ as thoroughly Jewish, and taking up the words of Christ, like forgiveness, metanoia, kingdom, hospitality, and repeating them. However, Caputo speaks mostly with the historical Christ of biblical criticism (which is why he leaves some words out, and reinterprets others), not so much the 'living Christ' of today nor the Christ who is coming to judge the living and the dead. Though if we take this dialogue to take place in the mode of prayer, Caputo is right there with us, on his knees, except injecting a whole lot more unknowing in his address than most would. In fact, Caputo says that his whole interest in theology is based on his interest in prayer. All in all I would count Caputo among the speakers of Christian faith, he is there with those that believe "that we are not alone," repeating the words of Christ, looking forward to the coming of Messiah, even as I recognize that Caputo's speech would sound like nonsense (quite literally) to some Christians.

Ultimately, languages function in relations, and faith languages function mainly in our relation to what is *beyond* everyday life. That is, with the inherited vocabulary, structure (grammar), and culture associated with our language, we interpret, express ourselves, and act, in the case of religion with the part of existence which goes beyond

the everyday language, making the languages of faith some kind of 'metalanguage.' This is not to say that the language of faith does not have anything to do with everyday life and languaculture; faith might perfectly well translate itself ('incarnate') into everyday language, even as everyday language might translate itself into faith language. Caputo's 'beyond' is a whole lot more unknown and wholly other than the 'other' of the creeds and dogmas, which is associated with historical acts and particular words. There is a strong sense of unity associated with the creeds and dogmas, portrayed in the perception of their relatively unproblematic translation into other languages: the words are vehicles of *meaning*, expressing truths about reality (the really real reality). Caputo would, in the name of *différance* emphasize the lack of unmediated experiences and the lack of any pure *arché*, the lack of any safe harbor for meaning, making the creeds and dogmas themselves, and their translations, exposed to gains and losses which does not leave them untouched, in virtue of their lack of an unmediated origin. Meaning is, in Caputo's view, a temporary unity which might disperse in time to come, which is why Caputo introduces the event as the 'truth' of the name, indicating a temporal concept of truth in which only the eschatological end of history might halt the play of traces.¹³⁴ When I now turn to Caputo's reconceiving of God as the weak force of a call, I therefore turn first to the question of Caputo's relating of *différance* to unity, and with that asking for the possibility of a non-violent manifestation and consequent identification (at least partly) of the unknown, the beyond, the wholly other.

God Confounding God?

Going back to Plato's *Timaeus* dialogue, the question is whether there is fundamentally a *unity* in which all things participate, differentiation being a virtue of partaking more or less in the unity, or whether there is fundamentally *difference*, unity being violently imposed from outside onto matters which are wholly separated (wholly other).¹³⁵ Now,

¹³⁴ Similar to Pannenberg's eschatological understanding of reason, but with less of a belief in the possibility of historically authenticating the sayings of Jesus about the eschaton on the basis of his resurrection. Caputo would leave a whole lot more room for doubt in that regard, which is why he believes the future is more open than Pannenberg would say.

¹³⁵ Caputo would say that "the inevitability of spacing [...] constitutes an archi-violence, a structural condition. [...] indeed, being on the alert to the constructibility and contingency of our beliefs and practices, which is the reminder that 'archi-violence' serves on us, is just what can best protect the peace." (Caputo, *Hoping in hope*, 146-147). The structural archi-violence should be a reminder to think twice before we commit "violence toward dissent," (Caputo,

for all its talk of difference, I do not take *différance* to imply a radical metaphysical difference, effacing or rejecting unity *wholly*. If nothing else, there must be, as Deleuze says, that things have a unity in the singularity of their difference.¹³⁶ Rather, in their post-structuralist attitude, deconstructors want to move *beyond* the closed system of structuralism with its strong emphasis on a determinable unity (hardwired to the *system*) to the radical openness of a quasi-system which is constantly being constructed and deconstructed in virtue of the play of traces, which would not halt until time ends. An open system works as an infinite regress (defer, differ, *différance*) and the unity, if there is one, is thus elevated to a very transcendent transcendental, the wholly other so other that of it we can only say that we do not know a thing. There is, to be sure, emphasis on difference at the expense of unity, but some concept of unity is allowed. The point of Derrida and Caputo, however, is that we cannot be sure of this fundamental unity, it slips away from us, moves out of reach. This assertion it shares with negative theology. The difference is that in negative theology the unity is thought of as God – whereas Derrida and Caputo want to keep the unknown even when the unity is identified (in faith!) as God. Unity has no metaphysical back-up. The point is that difference and unknowing plays a bigger role for Derrida and Caputo without erasing unity and knowledge. We all participate in some unity, for example our *common situatedness* in unknowing. We are, all of us, those who do not know who they are. In practical life, however, once the voice of these philosophical musings fade, we are left with facing *différance*, lacking a strong epistemology, facing up to undecidability which is the condition of making a decision.

At the beginning of this theology, Caputo puts brackets around the question whether God exists or not in order to get to the structure of the event, closing in on the messianic in relation to which he believes every messianism needs to be held in tension. Caputo therefore proceeds from language itself, from something accessible to anybody, the *name* of God, rather than the speaker, the *entity* of God, whose existence is not obvious to everybody. Working his way on the heels of the trace in language, Caputo suggests that we are better off thinking of God as a call rather than a cause, that what he

Hoping in hope, 130) of which the religious institutions have a history. In that regard we should respect *différance* so that we do not commit violence in the name of unity, which is not an unlikely possibility but happens all the time.

¹³⁶ "I mean something like Deleuze's univocity of being: what all things have in common is the singularity of their difference." Caputo, *After the death of God*, 129.

finds itself in the name of God is the event of weak but unconditional forces like *forgiveness, hospitality, and the gift*, seeing in these weak messianic forces the ability to break the circle of economics and confound the powers that might be. A question which emerges when we locate in God the ability to confound the powerful is what we are to make of *real* power and strong forces, then. Where do they come from? Since they are not God's, are we then in the hands of strong (stronger?) forces other than God, forces which, unlike God, *cause* and not only *call*, forces which threaten to make the concept of the weak God uninteresting? Is it not inherent in the very concept of God to be a cut above the rest, to be the *most* powerful?

Caputo's answer is to say that there are powers and forces which are *there* and which are not God, like the *tohu wa-bohu* at the beginning of Genesis, but that these forces are *confounded*, and in that sense 'ruled' by the weakness of God. However, someone might ask back; if God does not found but only confound the powers that may be, is not God only a response, always caught in a cosmic dance in which God might be a step behind, up against something unknown which might potentially overcome God? This is a question that Caputo neither has been asked nor answered as far as I know, but I think it is possible to give an answer which is largely Caputoan, but with an addition.

I begin with the addition, which is to introduce the Luther's twin concept of the 'hidden God' and the 'revealed God.' Relating this to Caputo's theology we could say that the hidden God corresponds to the *event*, to the answer to the question put in brackets. The revealed God would correspond to the *name* of God, to what is present and contingent, a hermeneutical key, conditional and particular. Of the 'hidden God' we do not know a thing, it might not even be God; as Luther says, it could be God or the devil; more precisely we could call it 'hidden x' or simply 'hidden.' Among the things hidden, in Caputo's system, is the origin of the world and the cause of everything there is. Thus the powers that God confounds, and which might potentially overcome God, have an unknown origin. Indeed, their possibility of unsettling God might justify the inclusion of 'God' behind 'hidden,' since whatever 'beats' God surely has earned the title 'God.' In Caputo's view, since we cannot know a thing about the hidden God – the hidden God is structurally always *beyond* knowing or unknowing – we can say that the only God that we know of is God as the weak force of a call without thereby necessarily subordinating

our God to an unknown stronger power. God confounds the powers that might be, we hope! We hope and pray that God's 'good' wins out in the end, for of the outcome nobody knows, not even God.

So in a similar move to Luther's theology, Caputo turns away from the question of the hidden God, leaves the question in the brackets and thinks we *should* leave it that way, and turns from this transcendent transcendence to life as it is here and now. The difference, and the main question in the current section, is that for Luther we flee from the hidden God to the God revealed in Jesus Christ; and Jesus heals, prophecies and is raised from the dead. The revealed God of Luther is both an identifiable somebody and a causal agent. This would surely break with Caputo's notions of the unknown caller and the weak force of a call, not a cause?

The answer to this question has two parts, both based on the relation between the revealed and the hidden God. The first is concerned with the *possibility* of God's interaction, both in terms of identifiable speech and action. It seems, based on Caputo's rejection of the 'miraculous' in the New Testament including the incarnation and the resurrection, and in line with his understanding of God as one who is not responsible for evil because God *cannot* intervene, that Caputo argues in favor of a God who not only does not interact, but who *cannot* do so. This, in my mind, is underestimating the hidden God, and moving beyond the structural undecidability and asserts that God did not raise Christ from the dead, and that neither does God interact today. Not only *does not*, but *cannot*. It is not possible. Faith in an interactive God is made impossible. That, to Caputo, would again make God the strong, causal God, who might just as well have created ex nihilo and be the sovereign power plug for all there is, the God who now is responsible for all that happens, for better and for worse. God is back as a cause rather than a call, and violence in the name of God is at hand; God is powerful and sovereign and I through my knowledge and association with this God is also powerful and sovereign.

My response would be that even if something happens, let us say someone is healed in a 'supernatural' way, and attribute this healing to God's action, or, to take another example, if someone takes the story of the resurrected Christ to be a true story in the sense that Christ was actually risen from the dead, if something happens which seems to counter the notion of God as simply the weak force of a call, nevertheless the structure

of the hidden God, the hidden x, the glitch between our named abyss (for example the revealed God, or justice) and the silent khora, the eternal recess, remains. Even if the revealed God seems to be both an identifiable somebody (e.g., Jesus Christ) and in possession of real power, the hidden x is still there, and there is no way we can identify it with the revealed God. If we did, the hidden God would cease to exist.

Rather, even if, and I say *if*, God were to interact, what would then remain hidden is why there would still be suffering, death, evil, and silence from God. All these ‘events,’ which on the face of it should not take place after we have gotten to know a good and powerful God, these ‘events’ which now are cast in the role of ‘impossible,’ are now the ones who confound the image of the good and powerful God we know. We could say that the revealed God is unhorsed by the hidden God, the hidden x.¹³⁷ If, after having conceived of God as a strong God able to interact, my expectation, the ‘possible,’ is that God will interact in the future in a similar way. This is, however, flooded out by the impossible, which is that God will *not* interact. For, how could God *not* interact? But this is *exactly* what happens; if (*if!*) in the one moment someone is healed, in the next many are not; if in the one moment God speaks, in the next God does not. And even the one who had been healed will eventually die, even as the one who heard the word of God might forget it. Therefore, even the interaction of God could be said to be ‘docketism,’ an interaction which is not followed up on and which might even lead us with time to doubt whether what happened was God interacting at all. Maybe it was something else? In that sense the weakness of God reoccurs. The revealed God, therefore, even if in some moments perceived as a personal and powerful God, would retain a certain weakness. Thus, though structurally God does not *have* to interact, it is a possibility. And further, the weakness of God can be maintained even with the possibility that God might interact, *if* God were to interact.

There is another perspective which sheds light on the same problematic. To begin with, related to the messianic, Caputo is on a quest for the structure of the event, which in turn supports his quest for the event taking place in the name of God, which makes up his

¹³⁷ “We expose the name of God, not to the coming of a new god, but to the coming of something otherwise than God, something new in which the name of God may be displaced, and this just in virtue of the event harbored by the name of God. That is what the deconstruction of the name of God would come down to. That is what the weakness of theology would come down to. Nothing is safe.” Caputo, *Weakness*, 293.

messianism. As such Caputo is out to establish the 'grammatical features' of faith which he in turn uses *both* to show how deconstruction shares the same traits, i.e., that deconstruction can be thought of as a religious language among others, *and* as a specter in his analysis of the name of God.

Now, part of Caputo's analysis of the name of God is to treat it as a word, not as an entity, and since it is a word, with an interpretive power. In that sense, God is a weak force, what Caputo calls the weak but unconditional force of a call. In other words, the trace of the event is that of a call, a passion, a dream, and the trace takes place in language. From the weak force of a call *we* are called to *make* God strong; we are to give God flesh and bones in the sense that we are to *translate* the name of God into deed, a translation which marks the constitution of the kingdom of God.

Caputo is very much focused on the side of the 'signifier,' focused on the sign, pointing out that the very achievement of the sign is to point to something which is not there, and which might not be at all. This is how the word 'God' functions for Caputo, as a sign, and a very important sign indeed (not to be lost, save the name!). Signs might be both written and spoken, we could even make a case for signs functioning as thoughts, and therefore God might be a word that fundamentally shapes our lives. It might function as the most foundational 'perspective,' the most fundamental hermeneutic of all.

What I would like to challenge Caputo on, is on the possibility of *acts* functioning as signs. Let me give an example. If somebody asks me to shut the door and I subsequently do so, could we not think of the act of closing the door as a linguistic sign? This would of course presuppose the power of our conversation partner to do so, but the question of an identifiable entity would not have to be settled anymore than in the case of hearing a call. Based on this I would ask if we could not think the possibility of the sign of 'God' as an *act*. Could we not, just as we might identify the trace in language, identify the trace in acts? Could there be acts which have 'God' spelled all over them?

Based on this we might say that the translation that Caputo suggests of the name of God into deed might work both ways, that deeds might also function as signs which could be translated into words. This could in turn be the basis for a less critical attitude towards the Scriptures, not only looking in their language for the trace of God, looking for the symbolic truth, the event within, but also looking at the *acts* the Scriptures

describe and taking these as traces of God. Let me point out, again, that throughout all of this there is no problem of keeping the brackets around the question of the existence of God. God may perfectly well exist or not, I am not hereby deciding that issue. All I am doing is inscribing the possibility of acts of God, the deeds of God, the interactions of God, within the 'grammar' of faith.

I said there would be two parts to the answer to the question of how to relate Luther's concept of the revealed God as an identifiable somebody and a causal agent to Caputo's concept of the unknown caller and the weak force of a call, not a cause. In the first part I criticize Caputo for not even allowing for the *possibility* that God might interact, that there might be interactions ascribed to God. In this second part I wish to highlight the fact that even *if* we were to identify the revealed God as a certain somebody with a certain power, and even if the revealed God were to say that the hidden God is such and such, in other words, if the revealed God is revealing to us who the hidden God is, the structure of the hidden God would *still* be there. For, taking God's word for it, believing God, is a move made in *faith*, being made on the background that *we cannot know*, that it is undecidable whether God is speaking the truth or not. If we think that identifying the revealed God in, for example, Jesus Christ, and allowing that God interacts, settles the question of who the hidden God is, we are mistaken. That would also amount, in my view, to an underestimation of the hidden God. In that respect I believe Caputo has a very good point in requiring *khora* to always remain next to God as a *possibility*, as a haunting specter, without ever letting the one or the other get such an authority as to break the tension. We are all invited to make a move in favor of one or the other, but that move can only be made in *faith*, and without canceling out the other option! Therefore, even to those who believe God exists, *khora* remains in place as the very condition for that faith in the first place.

The Messianism – Caputo's Kingdom

At the Boarder

If Caputo is something of an unorthodox composer of songs to the Lord, his reputation as a boarder patrol officer raises eyebrows in equal measure. For, says Caputo, the kingdom

is everybody's, regardless of religious tradition,¹³⁸ even as it is nobody's and is not a kingdom in which one might file for citizenship, is not to be inhabited, but only to be visited on day-trips (or probably more on night-trips). We all move in and out of the kingdom, regardless of our theology and our religious affiliation, courtesy of our hearing, our hearing as heeding (or non-hearing/heeding), of the event of the call.¹³⁹ And this call, says Caputo, does not issue from an identifiable someone, but is constituted by the caller being unknown, leaving the call to stand on its own shaky legs without the force of a metaphysical backup. In other words, the kingdom is without a king giving New Year speeches to the people. If there is a king in it, it is more like the unknown heir to the throne being dressed in rags and living on the street. And what is more, neither is the kingdom in possession of treasures of the valuable kind of an eternal blessed state. Salvation is here and now, the kingdom is here and now, and of what awaits beyond death nobody knows. Such is Caputo's 'minimalist' position, acting like a postmodern version of the apostle Thomas - the prototype positivist, sticking to what he sees with his own eyes. Again the question is whether Caputo is too assured in rejecting the afterlife, in rejecting the possibility of a salvation *then*, not only now.

An Eschatological Kingdom?

To try to file an answer, let me go back to the dialectic of the revealed God being confounded by the hidden x and the reoccurrence of God as the weak force of a call. Let me this time add one more notion, namely *time* as the horizon for this dialectic. There is an inherent temporal dimension to any dialectic, including this one. To halt the dialectic there cannot be anything less than the end of history, the end of time. Now, add to the horizon of time the dialectic (which to be sure is set in motion only by perceiving God as an identifiable someone interacting, and if not, never begins but remains with the notion of God as a weak force), and we see that if time is to end, the dialectic is to be halted in the notion *either* of God as weak or strong. In order for God to remain strong beyond eschaton, which is the possibility explored here, means that there must be an end to all

¹³⁸ "The idea of one true religion or religious discourse or body of religious narratives makes no more sense than the idea of one true poem or one true language or one true culture." Caputo, *Weakness*, 118.

¹³⁹ "My hypothesis is that making the truth happen, *doing* hospitality, is what *constitutes* membership in the kingdom." Caputo, *Weakness*, 268.

tears, to all suffering, to all evil, all death, in short to everything which confounds God's strength.

In such a perspective we might note two things. First, this all falls in line with the Messianic structure in which the coming of Messiah means the end of history; even Caputo admits this much. Messiah is the figure which inaugurates the new era in which "death will be no more." Second, by allowing for God to remain strong *beyond* the end of time, we have identified the power of the strong God *specifically* in overcoming death, evil, suffering and anything else which might be associated with confounding the revealed God who interacts. In this way we see powerfully that *real* power is not 'neutral,' 'cold' power, but rather that power and strength is associated with a fight against evil and everything that counters Elohim's verdict of 'good.' In that sense the power of God does not represent an *overcoming* of the weakness of God, but an *affirmation* of it. We could say with the words of Caputo that "[t]he transcendence of God is not at odds with the weak force of God; it *is* the weak force of God."¹⁴⁰

Now, if God at the end of time turns out to be strong, does that mean that God through history has been a bipolar figure in which the revealed God has been confounded by Godself? First of all, all this talk of the revealed and the hidden God is a *conceptual* way of interpreting reality from the viewpoint of man; it is more than anything a hermeneutic, a way of interpreting. Second, and since we have not yet explained where evil comes from, we must remember that the hidden God can be *many*, that it can be *both* God and the devil. In that sense, it is possible to keep the distinction between the revealed God and the hidden 'God' here in time, while not denying the possibility that the hidden God *may* turn out to be a strong God inaugurating a kingdom beyond time.

A Kingdom Now?

The *possibility* of an eschatological kingdom affects the perception of the kingdom now. First of all, we have to consider the relation between kingdom and salvation. If salvation is not only now but also then we would all want to make sure we are saved for eternity, and salvation is easily associated with being *in* the kingdom. Caputo, however, does not handle out citizenship in this kingdom but rather asks us to embody it by heeding the call.

¹⁴⁰ Caputo, *Weakness*, 38.

For, in Caputo's view we do not need to be in the kingdom at all to be saved, we *all* get saved. Many believers and churches, however, think differently, and truly, as Caputo points out, this is one of *the* most important questions to be settled.¹⁴¹

It is not the intention to discuss this dogma in detail, but let me briefly sketch a possible response. Taking Christian faith as a language and culture we can say that its tradition and its Scriptures clearly has a concept of being eternally lost, of eternal damnation away from God's presence, courtesy of being unjust, unholy, unforgiven or unbelieving.. At the same time, Scripture explicitly states that God wants everybody to be saved. Taking up the distinction between the revealed and the hidden God we could say that to the extent that Christ is the incarnation of God, we see his mission as one of salvation, seeking what was lost and redeeming it. In that sense we could associate the redeeming intention indicated in Scripture with the revealed God. Other texts and streams indicating otherwise, which would be a serious contradiction to a good, redeemer God, we could leave with the hidden God, hoping against hope that there will turn out to be no eternal damnation for anyone. However, this would all be a particular *faith*, and with faith comes the possibility of faith's negation being true. It might be otherwise. In that sense, we are not to treat easily texts which seem to contradict the revealed God, the concept we carry of God. The possibility of the eternal damnation of the lost is a specter that haunts us, just like Nietzsche's terrifying vision of humans being small animals inhabiting a planet without anyone watching or caring, humankind invention words like 'morals' and 'God,' while eventually the planet will fall back into the sun while the universe yawns.

Second, the possibility of identifying a revealed and interacting God in time means the possibility of having God among us, here and now, not only among the speakers of the language of faith, but among all of us, along the lines of Luther's panentheism. In that sense, God could be the tramp dressed in rags, asleep on the sidewalk, maybe God could *especially* be the tramp, since most of us tend to hear a stronger call issuing from a tramp than a well-off stock market broker living in a nice house in a settled neighborhood. Beyond seeing the world through the interpretive filter of 'God,' translating the name of God into deed, which is Caputo's suggestion, we would be open

¹⁴¹ "Who is in and who is out? That is one of humankind's most pointed, poignant, and painful questions." Caputo, *Weakness*, 266.

to consider the presence of God among us such that *God* might be there giving God flesh and blood, and that *God* might be there translating the name of God into deed (or vice versa). In this sense, we might say that our language of faith is open to change, like any language, through the lived experience of God.

I would like to make a sidestep for a second and consider the word ‘translation.’ There are many theories as to what is actually translated in translation, even as there are many who would sign on the impossibility of theorizing it; it simply happens. The question could be phrased like this: with what does the translator cross the borders between languages? Meaning? No, meaning is not a thing, a determinable object. The ‘dynamic equivalent’ or Heidegger’s original phenomenon? No, those are impossible to reconstruct. The event? Well, that is maybe the best suggestion so far, but the event is not (yet) and is therefore difficult to carry across. So what crosses the border? I would suggest that what crosses the border in translation is first and foremost the *translator*. The act of translating is a relational act whereby a relation is established or extended. I would therefore argue that to the extent that God is counted among the language community of Christian faith, God is there offering a relationship (we could add, through his Word which was indeed a translation of sorts!). Indeed, Kearns seems to suggest a similar move when she points out that what Caputo accomplishes throughout all his ‘translations’ of Derrida into theology is to “direct his affirmation to his friend and colleague, Jacques Derrida himself.”¹⁴²

The kingdom of God, thus, might not only be a kingdom in which we are called by the event of a call issuing from, among other names, the name of God. It *might* include the interacting God among the speakers of its language. If God were to identify himself through his interaction, this might mark the shift from thinking of ‘the word of God’ as ‘the latest rumor of God’ to thinking of it as the word spoken by Godself.

¹⁴² Kearns, *Impossible*, 294.

Weakness

In the introduction I set myself the goal of looking for a perspective which could be helpful to people of faith, both in an individual and a communal perspective. Throughout the last chapter I have repeatedly reached for the metaphor of thinking of faith as a language, a metaphor Caputo himself mentions in the context of his theology of religions. I intend, however, to expand on this particular metaphor to see if it might function as a rather holistic and concrete way of approaching the often abstract and theoretical theological arguments, thereby hopefully offering itself as a model which might function among a wider audience. This makes up the first part of this chapter.

The second part will be an attempt to gather on the basis of Caputo's theology some thoughts for how we can do 'church development.' I mentioned the growing interest in the field among churches in Norway, and this is my small contribution to this field, presenting itself as a friendly critique in that it affirms much of the passion within the movement yet sees a need to balance the books. Caputo's theology of weakness should be a useful challenge in that regard.

Language As Metaphor for Faith

First of all, since using language as a metaphor for faith is intended to function in a wider audience, I would like to point out that I think it works well as a common ground accepted by people with differing beliefs and theologies. This might especially be so with people who do not attend church often, but still consider themselves believers or are members of a church. The church's vocabulary and language, the name it keeps, the heritage it guards, the tradition it keeps alive, all of this, for all the talk of decline in numbers, is still very much a part of the common heritage of the people in Norway. Of course identifying the common ground in the language of faith is not in opposition to identifying 'the Gospel' or 'Jesus,' or whatever else would be filed missing in my assertion, as the common ground; the Gospel is more a way of living, a culture, than a book, and Jesus is the most fundamental word, *the* word/Word, of the vocabulary of the Christian church. In that sense this particular metaphor is able to downplay theological differences, even as it shows that our heritage is of the weak kind; as with language

death, it only takes a few generations for our language, our faith to be lost; every generation must learn it anew.

Though not primarily a vehicle for negotiating theological differences, but rather emphasizing the relational and prayerful aspect of faith, language as metaphor for faith necessarily conveys certain theological affiliations, and Caputo supplies much material for such a metaphor. The relational aspect is highlighted by Caputo when he asserts that “‘God’ is not an object but the other end of prayer.”¹⁴³ Faith as language might thus be associated with our address to God, faith is the language we speak to God, even as faith as language gives us the eyes to see God; “God is only given in prayer.”¹⁴⁴ Another aspect of Caputo’s theology relevant for language as metaphor for faith, is Caputo’s awareness of our situatedness, working our way from wherever we are, hard on the heels of the trace, even as with the notion of the trace Caputo has already inscribed *language* as a fundamental part of his theology. He says, “[w]e begin *with* the trace, *within* the trace, within a set of traces, in the text of a context which has us before we have it [...]. We being wherever we are – in the midst of a language, of a tradition, a heritage.”¹⁴⁵ The same notion is reflected in his discussion of the messianic, of the archi-messianic, of the archi-promise in language:

”The other promised to us in and by language always remains out-standing, still to come, still promised, structurally, for as long as we are speaking, rather like a Messiah who does not show up. To speak is to succumb to messianic longing, or rather to embrace and affirm it. How does the promise issued in and by language arise? Who is making it? How is it authorized? What authority does it have? Why should we believe it? ‘Our language’ is not ours, not if that means our private possession or invention. If our language is ours, it is not because it belongs to us but because we belong to it. We are delivered over to our language and its mode of disclosing things. We grow up within it, inherit its presuppositions.”¹⁴⁶

This text might be a basis for speaking of faith as a gift, ultimately originating from God who is behind the language - “God is responsible for the ‘word,’ the work of language, meaning, *sens* in the dual sense of both sense and direction -”¹⁴⁷ and handed over to us

¹⁴³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 285.

¹⁴⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 286.

¹⁴⁵ Caputo. *Questioning*. 301

¹⁴⁶ Caputo. *Questioning*. 200.

¹⁴⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 177.

through our community and our tradition. The language of faith in turn shapes the way we see the world, and hear, for as Caputo suggests, “[t]hink of faith, like creation, as an acoustical event. It gives us the ears to hear an ancient voice.”¹⁴⁸ In that sense the faith that we inherit tunes us in to the voice of God, setting us up for a relation to God, even as language carries us in the felt absence of God: “[l]anguage is the promise of things which also slip away from its grip, their absence being constitutive of a sign or a trace. Language is the memory and hope of things that are not now present.”¹⁴⁹

Further, what Caputo brings to the language of Christian faith is the vocabulary of the weakness of God, Caputo extends the vocabulary as is in a way ‘filling out what is missing on the body of Christ;’ he is in many ways extending the fullness of the Church’s life. Not only strength but weakness also has to be talked about in a conscious way, maybe that is the best way of understanding strength after all. The hermeneutics that a language is, in this case Christian faith, supplies a hermeneutics that gives a vocabulary in the face of whatever life has in store for us. This language has its origin in its association with the God to whom we direct our speech. For example, Elohim pronounces the word ‘good’ on creation, and this is the basis of our interpretation as long as we have learned the language of Elohim. Quoting Robert W. Jenson, we could say that “it would not occur to creatures to call things ‘good’ unless God had antecedently done so in our hearing.”¹⁵⁰ What Caputo has done, is listening in on other voices, Jesus in Gethsemane and on the cross, and learned some new words that might fit in our language of faith.

The Church As a Language Community

I now turn to the question of how we are to think of the church when using language as a metaphor for faith. First of all, we can say that the Church is a language community, gathered around the language of Christian faith. The different denominations can be taken, to pursue the metaphor, as dialects, and the faith of individuals as idiolects. No one idiolect will be exactly the same if examined closely. Still, there is enough similarity among the speakers of Christian faith to say that it is a visible community gathered

¹⁴⁸ Caputo, *Weakness*, 181.

¹⁴⁹ Caputo, *Questioning*, 300.

¹⁵⁰ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1: The Triune God*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57.

around a specific name, that of Christ Jesus. We keep the name alive by both remembering its past and keeping its future open. Following the hermeneutics of Caputo, the name of Jesus loses its meaning, its event, if it is not kept open in order to release the promise or call within. The Church is thus living under two imperatives: save the name, and look for the event everywhere save the name. This word-play, originating in Derrida, plays with the ambiguity of the word 'save.' The Church is to live to save the name, keep it, while at the same time living as if does not have a name, thereby keeping its senses open for the event coming under whatever other name except the name it has been entrusted. The Church does its task of keeping the name of God even as it keeps the 'divine dialogue' going through the use of the language of faith in prayer, testimony, and witness, always listening for God in the dual sense of the revealed God associated with the name and the hidden God associated with the event.

The Church can further be seen as a language council, publishing 'grammar books,' and deciding in matters of orthography and incorporation of new words, another way of saying *theology*. Let me point out that language councils tend to settle matters *after* they have arisen, and oftentimes simply confirms what is already in use among people. In this way, young people with fresh eyes or people capable of finding new words for extraordinary events help keep the language alive. Each new generation and each new lived experience must make its mark on language, if not, it is in danger of dying out. New events and changing surroundings call for new words and new ways of expression. Closely associated with the notion of language council the Church is also a language school in which the language taught gives a 'filter' through which God can be 'seen' or 'heard.' The grammar of faith, theology, is worked out and taught. Another perspective from language learning is that in order to learn a language properly we must 'become like children,' we must be 'born again' and explore the world like a child. Maybe we could do catechetics as we teach language, in other words, learn methods from linguistics?

Lastly, the Church is to act as a translation agent, a place where people can come and get their lives translated into 'faith' through preaching and pastoral care. This conforms nicely with the notion of persons as 'a living human documents.' Another focus of translation is the welcoming of the other, the hospitality of translation that Derrida talks about. Translation is a way of letting the stranger in on what is happening, making

the other feel welcome. Both ways of translation can be seen as a form of 'incarnational translation' in as far as the language of 'faith' and the language of, say, Norwegian, temporarily becomes one, making the human speaker embody the kingdom (and thereby God) such that what is spoken is not only human words but at the same time the word of God. We have to keep in mind that translation is not only a translation of words, but also a culture in which acts and deeds have their rightful place. To translate the languaculture of faith into everyday languaculture involves non-verbal linguistic signs, like sharing with those who are in need.

I now turn to the issue of language and salvation, that is, can we be 'bilinguals' of faith and identify God in both languages; does God speak more than one faith-language? From a human point of view, similar to languages, they convey communal norms, whatever people actually speak. We could on this basis argue that it belongs to Christian 'grammar' that Christ is the only way (though some dialects would disagree). However, the language community of Christianity does not only involve humans, it also involves God. If we are to locate a linguistic center of Christian faith, like conducting a socio-linguistic survey of a particular language group, we would locate it in the Trinity, both in their inner dialogue and their dialogue with creation. We humans listen in on an ongoing conversation, like listening (and copying) our parents. What we hear is not normative in the sense that we are forced, it is rather what we automatically copy, and how we naturally speak when we speak to God. Listening in on God's language is, following Derrida's notion of language, like listening to God's *promises*. Indeed, God has given his word (Word). We are listening with interest, for we are all living at the hands of Messiah. Further, the Bible, tradition and church history is like the history of a language; it is the etymological well that we can go to in order to understand the richness of the language of today. Another yielding perspective stems from Derrida's difference/indifference distinction, meaning that precisely because he is not indifferent to the other, he must be indifferent (at least that is the obligation of conscience) in treating 'his own' and the stranger. That is, why feed only his cat if the cat next door is also hungry? I am heading in the direction of Hegel, when he says that whenever there are two persons – which we could recast as a conversation between two people, or two communities – there is always the danger of becoming a master/slave relationship, or a struggle for lordship. We are

always in need of a third-person liberating us, this liberation also taking the shape of demanding the preferential treatment already given to the other. The other and the another other. When we speak of faith as a language and the Church as a language community, in order not to make the Church lord and the rest of the world slaves, we can say that God is always present by a third person, the Spirit, liberating us from the master-slave struggle, even as the Spirit 'speaks' to our conscience by presenting itself as another other.

Deconstruction and the Construction of the Church

How are we to relate deconstruction to the church, especially if we conceive of the church as wanting to be 'constructed,' as in church development methods? We can begin with Caputo's distinction between name and event. We might think of the church as having been entrusted the name; the task of the church is to keep the name safe. The event, however, represents the 'truth' of the name, even as the event represents the kingdom, so that "the church is 'deconstructible,' but the kingdom of God, if there is such a thing, is not. [...] [T]he kingdom of God is that in virtue of which the church is deconstructible."¹⁵¹ The kingdom is the event of the church, and deconstruction happens in order to release the kingdom. But the event is dependent on the name the church keeps. In that regard the church is concerned with memory, with the past, with past events now sheltered within the name. The Church is a mnemonic community ("do this in remembrance of me"); as Caputo says, "the concrete religions are attached to the specificity and propriety of their own proper name, the name transmitted to them by their traditions."¹⁵²

Deconstruction plays itself out as the constant negotiation between the name and the event simmering in the name.¹⁵³ Deconstruction, therefore emerges as a name for what the church is, or should be, doing already, namely, keeping what it has been entrusted even as it keeps it alive and at work, while always awaiting the future eagerly, making sure it does not close in on itself. According to Caputo, "[a] theology of the event is inevitably a work in progress, an interim theology, a theology for the interregnum

¹⁵¹ Caputo, *WWJD*, 35.

¹⁵² Caputo, *Passion*, 46.

¹⁵³ Caputo, *Weakness*, 27.

between what has been called God in theology and what is coming, for which, of course, we have no name beyond saying that it is ‘to come.’”¹⁵⁴ This could be a good description of all theology, not only Caputo’s theology of the event.

The church is, for all the talk of the kingdom, situated in the world with its ways. How is the church to deal with that when its dream and passion is of the kingdom come? First of all, the church must not act segregationistic. God created the world and God sustains it, and God is visible also in the way of the world. As Caputo says, “we are never simply going to walk away from economy. [...] Indeed, as Derrida says, it is the gift that creates economies to begin with and keeps them going.”¹⁵⁵ But still, we are not to forget what is most important:

“We require economy, and there is no simple standing outside economy, no simple exterior to economy. We are enjoined both to work for our bread and to trust God to give us our bread, to plan for the future and to realize that the future is in God’s hand. Both together, not one without the other. But *God first*. We trust God *first*. Seek *first* the kingdom of God and then these daily supplements will be added to you.”¹⁵⁶

The church is therefore to put the kingdom first, but also to remember to do its economic tasks, and do them well, to plan ahead, make budgets and investments, all the while not forgetting that what the church is about is *not* economics.

If we want to help in ‘constructing’ a church, to build it up as a community of believers, how are we to reconcile that with the dynamic of deconstruction which is at play? First it must be said that deconstruction is not out to “level institutions [but] to open them up, to keep them just, to let justice reign,”¹⁵⁷ meaning that for all its suspicion and search for weak points, deconstruction has a *constructive* aim. Deconstruction has much in common with the part of church development literature which emphasizes the necessity of understanding the context of the church before proceeding to build it up. The difference is that deconstruction does not proceed from a retrieval of the ‘essence’¹⁵⁸ of the church, but rather proceeds with caution, letting weakness and *différance* right into the center of things. If not, church development might work with theories which has “the

¹⁵⁴ Caputo, *Weakness*, 292.

¹⁵⁵ Caputo, *With/out*, 135.

¹⁵⁶ Caputo, *Weakness*, 173.

¹⁵⁷ Caputo, *Weakness*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Craig van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

fundamental mark of idealizing, epistemological, and psychoanalytic fantasy, that is, the removal of all the limits imposed by reality, carrying out an action in an ideal space where there is absolutely perfect control and not a trace of resistance from the real.”¹⁵⁹ Weakness is going to be with us right until the end, and we better understand it and account for it in our theories if we want them to last. Another feature of deconstruction is to lift justice, hospitality and forgiveness up as an ever-present demand, regardless of time and place. Even when working on a church for the future, we are never to forget that we are *here, now*, and that this moment demands justice, a justice which can not be sacrificed in the name of a future achievement.

Caputo locates a certain ‘weakness’ and unknowing at the heart of human existence, that is, Caputo’s appropriation of Derrida’s generalized apophatics calls for faith to be precisely faith, which structurally includes a non-knowing. This locates an ‘epistemological weakness’ at the heart also of Christian faith, which in turn calls for humility; we could be wrong. The event which is the truth of the name is unavailable in its purity, the only version of it available to us being a conditioned and interpreted (and therefore deconstructible) one. Caputo’s eventics calls for deliteralization, which in a messianism like Christianity means leaving a space between the potentially dangerous Secret which nobody knows and the secret that we *believe*. We need to remember that next to the abyss of God is the abyss of khora, and there is a holy undecidability between them. Deconstruction inscribes a humbleness in the heart of each and every one of us.

Caputo distinguishes the future present (which is imply an extension of the present) from an absolute future of which we can only hope and pray, and the inherent weakness portrayed by the church consists of its constant attempt to do the impossible, namely to flesh out the kingdom in a world where there is no outside economy. Again, the church cannot escape having to plan for the future with budgets and long-term plans while at the same time relying solely on God as their provider. The task is impossible and the church can be forgiven for never finding a state of perfect handling of the issue, because there is none, only the constant tension and negotiation.

Another structural weakness which haunts the church is Caputo’s notion of ‘all is hermeneutics,’ of there being no unmediated experience. This complicates finding a

¹⁵⁹ Caputo, *Weakness*, 80.

'core' or 'essence,' a safe foundation upon which a mighty church can be erected. Caputo is countering this by inscribing weakness not first and foremost in our out-working of a plan or a 'vision' which is without weakness in itself (it is perfect in an idealistic sense) but rather inscribing weakness within God. This is, of course, in itself a hermeneutic, but one which consequence is a respect for 'non-believers,' since they are not simply the ones on whom God has obviously not acted, but that the unknowing that haunts us all leaves us with a great deal in common, though they might talk of trace and event instead of incarnation and the personal God. Further, Caputo's hermeneutics of the weakness of God puts emphasis on the inscription of Elohim of his 'good' and 'yes' in all things, leaving God as the one responsible not first and foremost for things being there, but for things being good. We are thus called to countersign God's yes, which leaves us with looking for the positive in our fellow human beings rather than drawing the line between us.

Putting emphasis on the weakness of God leaves us responsible for making the power of God and God's kingdom stronger than the power of the world. This responsible remains even if we identify the possibility of God to intervene directly. We are to draw our power and strength towards making the kingdom come. We are called to translate the name of God into deed, which makes our faith both political and social, in other words, makes faith embrace our whole life.

Inherent in this is the possible agreement with other-believers about the *messianic*, which should be followed by humility as to one's particular *messianism*, without giving up one's particularity. Again, the Church should not too boldly claim to embody the kingdom; there is more to the kingdom than the Church. Rather, the Church should institutionally seek to become one with the kingdom, become the body of God, all the while knowing that this would exceed the merely possible. Caputo lays out nicely the anarchic nature of the kingdom, which should perpetually disturb the Church with its settled institution from within; the Church should be aware of its deconstructibility.

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