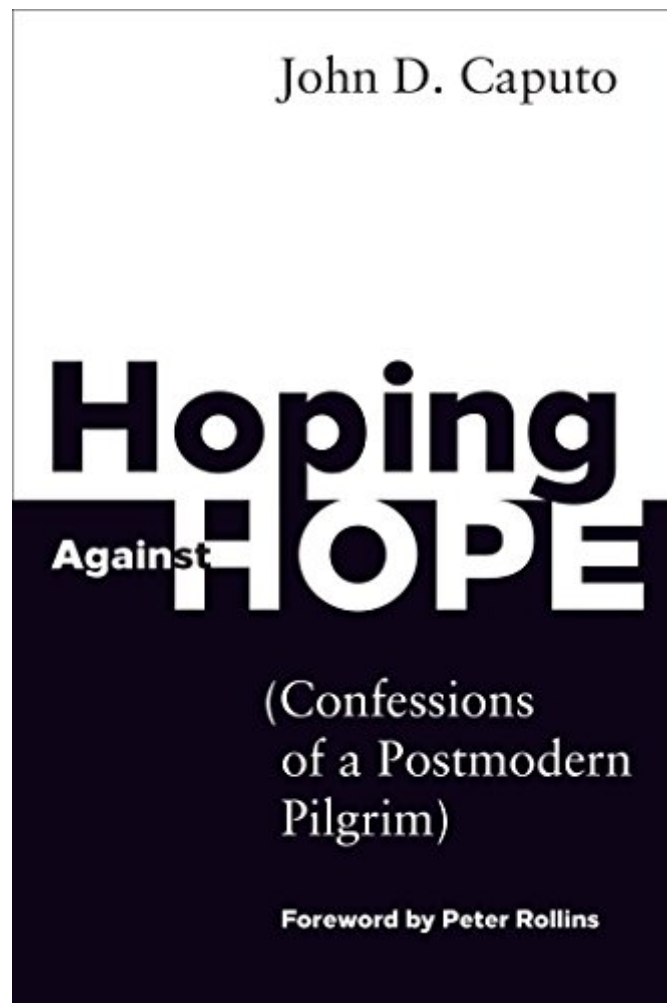




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Hoping Against Hope: Confessions Of A Postmodern Pilgrim



Synopsis

John D. Caputo has a long career as one of the preeminent postmodern philosophers in America. The author of such books as *Radical Hermeneutics*, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, and *The Weakness of God*, Caputo now reflects on his spiritual journey from a Catholic altar boy in 1950s Philadelphia to a philosopher after the death of God. Part spiritual autobiography, part homily on what he calls the "nihilism of grace," *Hoping Against Hope* calls believers and nonbelievers alike to participate in the "praxis of the kingdom of God," which Caputo says we must pursue "without why." Caputo's conversation partners in this volume include Lyotard, Derrida, and Hegel, but also earlier versions of himself: Jackie, a young altar boy, and Brother Paul, a novice in a religious order. Caputo traces his own journey from faith through skepticism to hope, after the death of God. In the end, Caputo doesn't want to do away with religion; he wants to redeem religion and to reinvent religion for a postmodern time.

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Customer Reviews

Does God exist? Is there a heaven beyond the skies? Does religion offer an escape hatch from the

temporality and finitude of human existence? To these Big Questions, John Caputo offers answers that are emphatically, if not dogmatically, in the negative. Nevertheless, Caputo's philosophically textured and deeply personal memoir, *Hoping Against Hope*, in which he presents a radically unorthodox interpretation of the Christian (Roman Catholic) tradition that formed him, is no amicus brief on behalf of the warrior atheists in their case against God and religion. Caputo has always been and remains convinced that the question of God is, in the words of Paul Tillich, a matter of ultimate concern. Moreover, he does not simply equate religion with superstition, but rather sees it as a "form of life", a way of being-in-the world, without which, despite its dubious history, the world would be a less hopeful place. On the surface, Caputo's idea of God, which will not be entirely new to those familiar with his ongoing work in hermeneutical-deconstructive philosophy and so-called "radical theology", appears to be purely and simply atheistic. He rejects out of hand any notion of God as a Supreme Being, Eternal Father, Unmoved First Mover, Ultimate Ground, or the like. Does God exist? Caputo says no, and as far as that goes, Caputo agrees with the New Atheists. Yet where Atheism (with a big A) new and old ends, Caputo's postmodern religious project is just getting started. "God does not exist," Caputo asserts, then, with a greater insistence, in the same breath, affirms, "God insists." The complex and difficult notion of God's spectral yet compelling insistence, as opposed to metaphysical existence, is the subject of Caputo's longer and more densely philosophical study, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, and is not developed in *Hoping Against Hope*. Instead, Caputo focuses our attention on a subtle and evocative concept drawn from the work of the French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida: the unconditional. The unconditional signifies for Caputo an affirmation of life and the world without strings attached, a gift given, received, and enjoyed outside the economies of exchange. In theological terms, the unconditional is God emptying himself into the world and disappearing without remainder, and without expectation of thanks, much less worship. Caputo acknowledges that the theology of the unconditional will cause pious brows to furrow, a furrowing in which he clearly takes an impish delight. Yet those "long robes", as Caputo calls the guardians of orthodoxy, are not his primary audience. Caputo writes for those of us who are willing to put our piety at risk, who still care deeply about God and his future, and yet might find it difficult to fully embrace the notion of a God as mortal as the world into which he has vanished. C. S. Lewis would be aghast, but I'm tempted to call John D. Caputo a "joyful Christian". To be sure, Caputo's is a joy more Nietzschean than "properly" Christian, yet one cannot read *Hoping Against Hope* without becoming infected by Jack Caputo's joy of life, a

joy that is surely not unlike the joy of the one whom Caputo calls, with deep affection, Yeshua the Earthman.

I cannot overstate the profound impact Jack Caputo's writing has had upon my faith and my life. His earlier "Insistence of God" helped provide me with the language to articulate in a big picture sense of a God of insistence rather than existence, and a theology centered on the possibility of the event. With "Hoping Against Hope," he has done this for me once again, this time particularly regarding heaven and its implications for life here on Earth. His description of the beauty and value of life not based on the economy of heaven is beautiful and moving. I highly recommend this book for fans of Caputo and others interested in wrestling with orthodox Christian understanding.

Being a non-academic, I have been reluctant to read John Caputo's other books, so I pre-ordered and eagerly awaited this more personal "vulgarized" account of his theology. When it arrived I began reading immediately. On nearly every page, something in me said, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" Let me say here that I was also afraid to read this book. Up until now, I had read only quotes by Caputo, or about Caputo, or against Caputo -- tastes, if you will. This book would be the real meal. I was prepared, should I feel my faith in God to be threatened, to close it and not finish reading it, to leave the table. This never happened. Although I did many times close the book in an effort to chew over a proposition before swallowing. How can one not like a story that begins with a young boy looking out at the vast night sky full of stars thinking, "No one knows we are here." I too was such a child, a wonderer and wanderer. And then the adults come along and tell you what to believe about it, imposing over that endless darkness a grid called religious belief. Young Jackie learned early on that questions about the validity of this grid were not welcome. Throughout the book, Caputo lets us in on the ongoing lifelong conversations between the young Jackie, Brother Paul (his Catholic religious name), the professor (of philosophy theology) and himself. A fascinating approach, as you get inside Caputo's head on a personal level as he struggles with what to make of his child's intuitive understanding, the religiously indoctrinated (well, they tried) person, the academic and the "real" Jack, the ground of his being. Add to this the occasional contributions from the philosopher Jack Derrida and you have some mighty fascinating conversations. The crux of Caputo's argument or point or revelation hangs on a rose. Not the name of the rose or the rose by any other name, but this verse from The Cherubic Wanderer by Angelus Silesius. The rose is without why; it blossoms because it blossoms; it cares not for itself, asks not if it's seen. "Challenging both common

sense and sophisticated logic alike, which tells us that everything has a reason, the mystical poet paradoxically says the rose does not have a reason," writes Caputo. This also challenges my sense of *raison d'être*, upon which I have leaned all my life. Yet when I encountered this, rather than feeling threatened, I felt freed. Freed from the shackles of "God's will" and the search for meaning and missing the boat. "The glory of the rose is the glory of living without why, untroubled by all the whys and wherefores of the philosophers and theologians that beset their restless minds." All this searching and groping for meaning does make us -- or has made me -- restless. It is downright distracting. Distracting me from living in the here and now. And now. And now. Caputo goes on to speak of faith and love, of "the gift" and hospitality, and most of all, of hope, a hope of what is coming. "Hope," he writes, "is the risky business of calling for the coming of what we cannot see coming, of saying yes to the future, where nothing is guaranteed." It is a joyful message. I highly recommend this book to seekers of all types.

A beautiful mix of theology, philosophy, and autobiography. Highly recommended for anyone searching, seeking, hoping for a faith for today's world--a faith full of longing and passion for what is happening in the name of God. This is a book that you read and then think of several people you want to share it with. I hope it's widely read and shared.

A very compelling and lucid theological discussion. A little tedious at time, and difficult to follow, but overall, very good.

Wonderful, hopeful book.

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