

REVIEWS

THE PRAYERS AND TEARS OF JACQUES DERRIDA: RELIGION WITHOUT RELIGION by John D. Caputo. Bloomington & Indianapolis, *Indiana University Press*, 1997. xxix + 379 pp. £16.50. Pbk).

John Caputo's engagement with Derrida is less an exercise in cautious appraisal than an impassioned journey into the heart of one of the most elusive thinkers. Stylistically, Caputo reveals the deep influence of Derrida in a playful rhetoric that includes 'organ interludes' alongside the customary scholarly analysis. Caputo has absorbed rather than simply observed Derrida. So much so, that his analysis is parasitic in the same way that deconstruction is itself parasitic. Nevertheless, Caputo retains a clarity that belies the notion that deconstruction is simply an exercise in deliberate obfuscation.

Caputo is careful not to subordinate Derrida to particular preconceptions. Derrida is no homogeneous subject, but rather shares the heterogeneity that is the hallmark of deconstruction. The Derrida we meet is often Derrida at his most 'autobiographical' (although Caputo notes that the very concept of the autobiographical is a 'slippery affair'). Here Caputo builds as much of his picture from Derrida's recollections in *Circumfession* as from his more obviously philosophical writings. However, this attention to the particularity of Derrida 'the man' is not a way of claiming privileged access to a Derrida beyond the text. By concentrating on Derrida's hybrid biography (his 'origin' is Jewish-Arab yet his 'mother' tongue is neither Hebrew nor Arabic) Caputo highlights the utter irreducibility of particularity and difference. Just as deconstruction queries the unity and stability of concepts, so Caputo tries to engage with the fact that both deconstruction and Derrida are always already fractured. You simply cannot describe them in the normal way. In this sense, to write about either deconstruction or Derrida becomes a question of presenting that fracturing activity. It is one of the great merits of Caputo's book that he grapples with the breadth of this deconstructive fracturing.

Part of the key to this adept juggling of theological insight and the irrepressible ruptures of deconstructive thought is rooted in Caputo's use of Kierkegaard. Derrida himself has also written about Kierkegaard, and it is partly through the lens of *Fear and Trembling* that Caputo considers Derrida. Caputo draws out the kinship not only

between Derrida's thought of the impossible and Kierkegaard's desire for paradox, but also between the question of authorship in Johannes de Silentio and Derrida's own elliptical identity. For Caputo, both describe 'the movement of an unrestricted giving without reserve, of the gift, the *qualitative* leap, the leap into something *tout autre*, the leap into the impossible, the transformation, the motion of the event, of a new time, of time simpliciter, of *l'invention de l'autre*, the oncoming, the in-coming so something *tout autre*.' (p. 49-50). In this way, Caputo juxtaposes Derrida with an existing tradition of theological discourse. This Derrida harbours a secret Jewish-Augustinianism that cannot name itself, just as Johannes de Silentio's knight of faith must remain silent.

Some readers will certainly disagree with Caputo's wholehearted endorsement of Derrida. Caputo is so breathtakingly attentive to Derrida that he is open to the charge of not engaging with other theological treatments of deconstruction. He analyses Mark C. Taylor's assessment of deconstruction in *Erring* as 'insufficiently aporetic', illustrating just how sympathetic Caputo is to Derrida. However, there is no real discussion of the theologically 'orthodox' postmodernist reaction to Derrida. In Caputo this is a particularly surprising omission, since some comparisons could only strengthen the lines of his argument. He holds a unique theological position in regard to Derrida, and it is a shame that he has not comprehensively argued his corner against rival interpretations.

This reluctance to draw lines between his own interpretation and that of others is perhaps partly to do with his wariness of closure. Caputo is almost alone in letting Derrida's deconstruction stand unadulterated by the need for theological closure. In this avowal of the indecidable and fragmentary Caputo manages to locate a natural affinity between theological and deconstructive praxis. Textual indeterminacy accords well with the eschatological uncertainty of faith. Unlike Taylor, or more recently Catherine Pickstock from a quite different angle, Caputo finds that the unceasing deferral of deconstruction does not support a nihilistic reading of Derrida. Caputo affirms that the relationship of deconstruction to theology is similar to that of negative theology. Agreeing with Kevin Hart and John Crossan, he sees that the resemblance between the two discourses is one in which negative theology replicates deconstructive movements. Caputo is not worried about merging the boundary between theology and deconstruction, precisely because he sees that they share a common 'passion' for the impossible, the paradox and the *tout autre*.

This bold attempt at integration certainly risks upsetting interpreters on all sides of debates over Derrida. Caputo's work will offend the secular academic community just as much as it will incur the wrath of theologians on both radical and conservative postmodernist wings. He straddles an impossible tightrope in

revealing Derrida as a continuation of emancipatory Enlightenment values ('by other means') whilst also opening up space for the possibility of a religious imagination. This is not an orthodox position in any field, but it is one that tries to stay loyal to the impossibilities that form the heart of both theology and deconstruction. As such it should be read and re-read as a classic example of theology as a public and integrating discourse.

GUY COLLINS

**CHRISTIAN UNITY AN ECUMENICAL SECOND SPRING?
by Michael Hurley SJ. *Veritas* 1998 (Dublin). 420 pages. NP.**

Michael Hurley is a Jesuit of great initiative. He founded the Irish School of Ecumenics in 1970 and the Columbanus Community of Reconciliation in 1983. These achievements have sown many seeds and continue to flourish. Now in retirement, he has published this highly readable survey of ecumenism and the future of the churches.

Ireland, north and south, is the main focus, but a chapter covers visits to Mount Athos and to China. Theologians will enjoy the sections on the Church of Ireland and on Calvin and Wesley. Buckley brings out the catholicity of Calvin and his reference to the Church as "the mother of all the faithful". In Wesley's "prevenient grace" he sees a key to ecumenism and to inter-faith prayer and dialogue.

Chapter 3 concludes that the ministry of forgiveness is the prime role of the church in conflict situations. It examines mutuality, apology, repentance and reconciliation. By contrast, chapter 15 points to the moderating functions of the churches in Northern Ireland. I was left wondering whether the full force of the gospel may have been muted by long-standing customs and traditions. It is largely religious fears that have produced the partition of the heart and separate development in Northern Ireland.

Ecumenists, who need every available encouragement, will find in this book real food for thought, spurring them to hope and to action. I hope all readers will ponder the concept of "uniting churches" as the remedy for division.

LORD HYLTON