



What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church

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This provocative addition to The Church and Postmodern Culture series offers a lively rereading of Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* as a constructive way forward. John D. Caputo introduces the notion of why the church needs deconstruction, positively defines deconstruction's role in renewal, deconstructs idols of the church, and imagines the future of the church in addressing the practical implications of this for the church's life through liturgy, worship, preaching, and teaching. Students of philosophy, theology, religion, and ministry, as well as others interested in engaging postmodernism and the emerging church phenomenon, will welcome this provocative, non-technical work.

What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church **Details**

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From Reader Review What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church for online ebook

Terri Milstead says

Hard read to begin with but there were a couple of chapters at the end that I found myself vigorously nodding along with to be sure. I wonder what Caputo would write today. He was scathing about a former administration. What would he think of the state of the country now?

Dwight Davis says

This was a really helpful introduction to the theory of deconstruction and how it can be helpful for the Church. Although I disagree with some of what Caputo says re: feminism, homosexuality, universalism etc. I really enjoyed the work. His critique of the religious right is spot on and I thought his section on abortion was brilliant. A must-read for those interested in deconstruction, postmodernism, or politics.

Wilson Garrett says

Fantastic look at deconstruction and it's place in Christian theology.

Matt Johnston says

Applying Derrida's tradition of deconstruction to the Bible and the Christian church, Caputo casts a vision for creating a modern day personal and political ethic from the theo-poetics of Jesus.

Christian says

I tried to give this book a fair shake, but it's just abysmal. I read the first 40 pages or so and came across some helpful bits, like his definition of deconstruction as "uncontainable truth" that bursts forth under its own power. That makes more sense than some of what I was told in grad school.

I noticed things starting to get squirrely when Caputo said that Jesus had nothing to do with the founding of the church. If Jesus were around today, Caputo says (as though Jesus were absent), He would dismantle the whole darn thing. Hmm. I thumbed around a bit towards the end and came across this passage where Caputo elaborately shrugs over the question of homosexuality. Sure, the Bible is against it, but Jesus's message of love reaches beyond the Bible:

"An interpretation like this raises the question of the status of the Scriptures for me. My answer is that I am not an idolater. In deconstruction, the Scriptures are an archive, not the arche (which means they are not God). I take the second commandment very seriously and I do not put false gods - like books (biblical inerrantism) or the Vatican (papal infallibility) - before God, who is the 'wholly other.' I treat scriptural

literalism like papal infallibility, as idolatry."

Why on earth would Caputo take the second commandment seriously? It's in the Bible! I thought following Scripture was idolatry. And after throwing out the Bible, where does Caputo get his information about "what Jesus would deconstruct?" Apparently (skimming ahead), Caputo judges everything in Scripture by his own personal idea of good and bad. "It seems to me that Jesus would..." After all, God is too "wholly other" to be accurately represented by messy things like books and rituals. Thankfully we have Jesus's message of love to guide our hearts. A message, let's not forget, that we find in the pages of the Bible...

Yeesh. One-star as a reminder to myself and a warning to others.

Mzwandile says

Great and thought provoking book about postmodern theology and philosophy. Caputo's book is much easy to read, considering him being a continental philosopher, he wears his philosophical "cap" lightly, its a book I would recommend to many people interested in postmodern conversation about God(Jesus) and culture. Thank you John!!

Seth Pierce says

In all honesty it's a 3.5 for me, only because I felt like his critique of specific political administrations felt a little too biased, and almost like a commercial at times, though I don't necessarily disagree with him.

David says

Awesome little book. Caputo is brilliant, and funny, as he sets out to deconstruct some sacred cows of evangelical faith. For any who think that postmodern or deconstruction are enemies of the church, give Caputo a read. Some of his examples are already a bit dated, but for the most part the ideas in this book are helpful in any ministry context today.

Sarah says

Deconstruction is masterfully shown here to be an un/discipline, and like all un/disciplines, it can lead nowhere but where we had already decided we were going to end up.

This volume offers little in the way of fresh insight. There are a few really lovely bits toward the beginning: affirmations of scripture's delight in paradox and aphoria--none of which are any different than classic, creedal Christianity, which has always found life precisely in those paradoxes, but they are lovely nonetheless.

After the first few chapters, the author settles rather comfortably into his contempt for . . . I guess everyone? Everyone who doesn't love Derrida and quote him incessantly?

Give me medieval scholasticism any day. Thomas was not Thomas because he was too dull to be Derrida. He was not Derrida because he declined to take the intellectual shortcut of merely dismissing his interlocutors as idolatrous idiots. He gave them the gift of taking them seriously.

Scott says

The author gives you just enough theory of deconstruction for you to deconstruct the latter half of his book with a massive eye roll.

James R says

If one knows this book exists, and considers reading it, it suggests that person has some awareness of or interest in post-modern philosophical thought. No casual reader browsing book titles is likely to give it a second glance. So assuming the reader of this reaction falls into that category let me say I applaud this contribution to making extremely dense philosophical arguments approachable for the interested "average" reader. For me Caputo's successes in this endeavor exceed the necessary occasional lapses into the mysterious world of confounding philosophical jargon. Whether one agrees with his theological conclusions is another matter I suppose. I think Caputo also succeeds in his attempt to present a way to understand Christian ethics that makes Christianity relevant to the modern world, while being consistent with the teachings of the historical Jesus, and compatible with an ethical humanistic world view. Caputo is clear that his arguments run counter to literal, far right Christian extremism and makes no apologies for that. He presents his arguments based on French post-modern philosophical thought for how one might understand the radical teachings of Jesus and how he might react to the modern world and it's teachings made in his name and more importantly what that Jesus might actually do in response to what he finds in this modern world. To put it concisely he would likely not be pleased, nor would he be kind to those Church teachers and teachings who put the wealthy, the powerful and the comfortable over and above the poor, the marginalized, the perceived other. And although it might not seem compatible with such a serious topic, Caputo's humility and sense of humor shines throughout his work.

Bill says

I appreciated this quote near the conclusion of Caputo's book:

Idolatry comes in many forms. Literalizing the truth of the Scriptures is idolatrous in a way that parallels the idolatry of the church in Catholicism...Orthodoxy is idolatry if it means holding the "correct opinions about God"--"fundamentalism" is the most extreme and salient example of such idolatry--but not if it means holding faith in the right way, that is, not holding it at all but being held by God, in love and service. Theology is idolatry if it means what we say about God instead of letting ourselves be addressed by what God has to say to us (iconic). Faith is idolatrous if it is rigidly self-certain but not if it is softened in the waters of "doubt." (p. 131)

The gospel is not a set of doctrines, Caputo claims, but a way of life. The church, he says, should be about the business of making the truth happen. Wherever love is implemented, there is the church. (p. 124)

Too often we seem to get in the way of the gospel through our idolatrous activity. So Caputo calls for a "deconstruction," or a remaking of the church. Deconstruction is about affirming that the (seemingly) impossible--that God's truth is able to transform the world.

I personally enjoyed his comments about the power of God at work through politics. Yes, I agree, politics must be about love, mercy, generosity, forgiveness--the things of God. However, what I don't agree with is what I perceive to be a great deal of "right-bashing" without an adequate critique of the left as well. Our current political system is in need of complete deconstruction--the left as well as the right.

This aside, Caputo has written a very worthwhile book. Jesus would indeed ask us (the church) to rethink, rework, deconstruct, much of who we are, and what we do (and do not do).

Loyd says

This little volume sums up some things I think about post-modernism and the church, but the arguments are a little inconsistent, as if the author had written the book in pieces and then stitched them together. Definitely worth reading and thought-provoking, but Caputo should concentrate on making one coherent argument.

Cyvil B. says

It will challenge your faith to rethink how you live like Jesus ... or not.

Brantley says

(Adapted from a longer review submitted for class)

The question of how postmodernism will impact the church is one that has troubled theologians and laymen alike for several decades. Although many have rejected then ideas of postmodernism outright, some people, such as Dr. John Caputo, have begged the church to embrace this controversial rejection of modernism. In his work, Dr. Caputo not only advocates that Christians should conform to postmodern philosophy, but also that even Jesus embraced deconstruction in His actions and teachings.

Through relating postmodernism to the social gospel, Caputo advocates for the church to deconstruct how it operates in much the same way that he feels Christ did. Caputo instructs the reader to reject the conservative "right wing" Christian perspective through the process of deconstructing the church culture that has been built up and has choked out the radical love that should be intrinsic to those in the Kingdom of God.

Although Caputo expects the reader to take his work as an academic text, it falls far short of this goal until halfway through the work (at which point it becomes at best acceptable). Dr Caputo feels the insatiable urge to draw political lines in a way that not only fails to support his presuppositions but also that manages to bully a straw man of his opposition. In fact Dr Caputo cannot even get one page into the first chapter before he belittles the ambiguous "Right" (19). Although I even agree with Caputo on some of his ideas, his petty slander and rhetorical banter - which he considers critique - of the right wing position is obnoxious even to a moderate, surely swaying few outside of his own political camp. Quite honestly, if it had been a conservative writing the statements that Caputo makes in his first three chapters I would expect liberals to tear that author to shreds.

On top of the straw man arguments, Caputo's early chapters are riddled with informal logical fallacies.

Caputo makes numerous *tu quoque*, red herring, *ad populum*, *post hoc*, and appeal to authority arguments that I caught in my quick read-through of the text. For example, in one sentence Caputo attempts to demonstrate how letters can be corrupted by saying that the original text, "...may get lost...or altered or misquoted over several centuries (which has happened to the Scriptures)," (47). Where someone would expect justification for such an obscure parenthetical claim as this, Caputo gives no more than an endnote in which he cites not only a portion, but the entire book of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman as his infallible source for such a weighty assumption, leaving the reader with no more than an appeal to authority as justification for his statement (142). One of his most pointed arguments on the topic of abortion is that conservatives are just as wrong for preemptive strikes in battle and supporting capital punishment as liberals are for supporting abortion (113). In fairness to Dr Caputo he does present abortion as despicable – a necessary evil of sorts – and as a shade of gray instead of merely supporting it as acceptable, but one would expect such *tu quoque* arguments to be recognized as such in a philosophical work if presented at all. One interesting observation the text is that at one point the author even asserts that he is writing this book philosophically and proclaims himself to be a philosopher. Right after making this claim, he tacks on, "...you may have noticed!" (117). Dr. Caputo seems to be a brilliant and distinguished professor, and I desire not to question his intellect, his character, or his status as a philosopher. Ignoring this self-proclamation of status and critiquing his arguments alone for fairness to the author, Dr. Caputo's book fails to present an overall argument that is either logically valid or that even attempts to be objective or fair to his opposition.

I think that Dr. Caputo had something worth saying, but it did not come out well. Once he stopped attacking his opponents on nearly every page and started making actual arguments at around chapter four, the book proved valuable. Even though they still had numerous fallacious arguments, Caputo's last three chapters proved to be closer to the level one would expect in an academic text. Where Caputo feels that deconstruction is the answer, I think he goes too far in his conclusions, and I believe that his Gospel has been neutered by Schleiermacher. I personally feel that Caputo's idea of deconstruction in the context of Christianity has a lot in common with the idea of repentance from hardheartedness and hypocrisy, and that being the case, one could simply argue that the church just needs to repent of its blatant ignorance of social issues in the world around it and leave out the whole deconstruction idea altogether. But this surely would not support Caputo's political goals which seem so crucial to the text; therefore, we have received a work that leans heavily on a controversial philosophy in order to divisively oppose those who disagree with its political presuppositions. Nonetheless, many of his concerns on social justice issues are very legitimate concerns that should be addressed. If Dr. Caputo wants to convince his opposition, however, he must change his tactics, for even those on the fence find many of his statements to be nothing more than bitter and biased ramblings.
