

## Article

# Do Radical Theologians Pray?: A Spirituality of the Event

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**Abstract:** Radical theology is not only an academic inquiry but also a radical spirituality. This point is confirmed in the phenomenology of radical prayer found in Derrida's "Circumfession". Derrida's prayer takes place in a theopoetic space opened by a theopoetic *epoche*, which suspends both the supernatural signified (supernaturalism, praying to a Supreme Being) and the transcendental signified (rationalism, reducing prayer to a subjective fantasy). Radical prayer is compared to Augustine's prayer in the *Confessions*, taken here as a paradigm of classical prayer. The difference is not that Augustine is really praying and Derrida's prayer is a literary conceit, but that Augustine's prayer takes place within a determined set of "beliefs", of material symbols in which to incarnate his prayer, of which Derrida is deprived, from which he is circum-cut. But this very deprivation or de-materialization renders Derrida's prayer an even more radical one, belonging to a more spectral "faith", to the spirituality of a radical theology, to a theology of the event, by which traditional spirituality is both nourished and inwardly disturbed.

**Keywords:** prayer; event radical theology; radical spirituality; spectrality; Augustine; Derrida; confession; circumfession; theopoetic epoche



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## 1. Introduction

It has not gone unnoticed that my own style as an author—beginning with *Radical Hermeneutics* (Caputo 1987)—has not disdained a certain playfulness, a metaphoricality, and at times a rhetorical and even homiletic ring that risks scandalizing the academy. That is because I consider what I have variously called radical hermeneutics, weak theology, a theology of the perhaps, or lately, radical theology (Caputo 2006, 2013, 2016, 2019a). to be the business of an existentially engaged participant, not an object for a pure disinterested onlooker. The voice of indirection in Kierkegaard's pseudonyms has never been far from my ears. To elaborate this point I will, in what follows, take the word "spirituality" to mean the combined forces—conceptual and imaginative, cognitive and affective, theoretical and practical—that organize and galvanize a form of life in which the name (of) "God" is in play, for which "phenomenology" supplies the most suitable discursive form. My thesis is that radical theology is a spirituality, a radical spirituality, and that, contrary to a common misperception, it is not a strictly academic undertaking or theoretical debate with no consequence for or correlate in our "spiritual lives". Radical theology addresses a matter of ultimate concern, which is a matter that concerns us all; it does not only address the concerns of the annual program of the American Academy Religion, which I also do not disdain. It is not a question of choosing between the two. Intellectual inquiry and real life should reflect each other, not be at war.

The reason for this is that the name (of) "God" is not the name of a theoretical object but of a form of life (Wittgenstein), a lifeworld (Husserl), a mode of being-in-the-world (Heidegger), of "existential" import (Kierkegaard). That poses the problem of how to theorize it without turning it into a theoretical object, how to catch the pre-philosophical in the act without turning it into more philosophy. This quandary explains the excessive oddity of the language Heidegger used in the early "hermeneutics of facticity" lectures (1919–1923), compared to which *Being and Time*, as shocking as it was, was something of

an academic domestication. The name (of) “God” is not like the name of a distant galaxy about which there is confusing data and continuing debate because of a lack of sufficient information. It is not a term of art coined in an academic seminar, like the “transcendental reduction” or Kant’s “schematism”. It is a name that pays its own way, that is forged and sustained by existing historical material bodies, around which the lives of individuals, communities, and nations are galvanized. It is neither proven nor disproven in a logical argument. It is either a living force, in which case a logical argument against it is futile, or it dies away because people can no longer recognize their lives in it, in which case a logical argument which attempts to save it is equally futile. When we are talking about God, religion, and theology, we are talking about existential life of which we are not merely speculative observers but players in the game. As of this writing, the only method I know of that is equipped to deal with matters of such elemental concreteness is phenomenology, not a Husserlian phenomenology of pure consciousness, but one of a distinctly post-Husserlian and impure variety, variously modified and inflected by hermeneutics and deconstruction, which I have taken to calling theopoetics.

Today, the name of God is most threatened, not by the “new atheists”, who make uncomprehending and ham-fisted reductionistic arguments against it (either originating in or reflecting their Islamophobia), but by the religious right, which is daily defacing this name by using it as a cover for an odious white Christian nationalism and patriarchy, thereby rendering it more and more unbelievable with each passing day. See (Du Mez 2020). The main problem facing God, religion, and theology today is whether they have not become more trouble than they are worth, more destructive than constructive, more dangerous and reactionary than saving, and whether the cause of wisdom and justice is not better served under other names. That is increasingly the attitude of the young, the urban, the educated, of women, of people of color, of anyone interested in a genuinely egalitarian and democratic world. The “nones” are waxing; the nuns are waning. God has fallen into the wrong hands. If we are to lead a spiritual life, religion is looking less and less like the place to turn.

Rather than examining the spirituality of radical theology, the form of life embedded in radical discourse, in a general or abstract way, I want to focus on a specific element of spiritual life, one which could not be more basic, which is *prayer*. Do radical theologians pray? To this my response will be simple—they pray like mad and, if anything, in keeping with my thesis about a radical spirituality, even more “radically” than the prayers that are prayed in the confessional or denominational religious bodies. When it comes to prayer, I hold the most conservative of conservative views, that religion, theology, and the name of God are a ruse without prayer. Where there is religion, God, and theology, there is prayer, and vice versa. Otherwise, religion, God, and theology are abstractions, conceptual ghosts, words belonging to a dead language, patients etherized upon a table, their analysis an autopsy, and theologians are reduced to medical examiners issuing a postmortem report. Without prayer, theologians are, as Hegel says, nothing more than bank cashiers counting other people’s money.

When I analyzed the “prayers and tears” of Jacques Derrida, that was not (only) a literary trope inspired by a Derridean riff on Augustine’s *Confessions*.<sup>1</sup> It was a jest meant in deadly earnest. While I do not deny the playfulness of a literary figure, it was a figure offered in the spirit of my heroes, Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, for whom humor is the incognito of the religious. I argue that Derrida was in earnest about his religion and that his prayers and tears are made possible, not merely in spite of his atheism, but precisely in virtue of it. I think his “*Circonfession*”, neatly and nicely translated as “Circumfession”, fusing Augustine’s *Confessiones* with “circumcision”, the Christian-Latin word for the Hebrew *berit* (Yiddish *bris*) is a paradigmatic case in point. Prayer is possible in radical theology because in “Circumfession” Derrida actually is praying, offering a radical prayer—*ab esse ad posse valet*. The only question is to see how.

## 2. A Theology of the Event

I have frequently cited Derrida's observation that he "rightly passes for an atheist" (*à juste titre*). When I asked him why he did not say "*je suis*", "*c'est moi*", I am an atheist, he said two things. First, once these words are written down and published in a book, this "I" is no longer Jacques Derrida, which is in fact a literary pseudonym; that is not his proper name. It is anyone who repeats these words, anyone who stands in his shoes while reading these words. It is anyone, everyone. "I am always speaking about myself without speaking about myself". (Derrida 1995, p. 144n4). Second, he said he cannot be sure that he *is* an atheist, sure about this chain of meaning, *theos, deus, Dieu*, sure enough to exclude it and take a firm stand against it, which indicates only one of the things Martin Hägglund gets wrong about Derrida's atheism. See (Caputo 2020b). Nor can Derrida be sure of what he really thinks, knows, believes, in his heart of hearts, sure that in denying that he believes in God he is not in denial, sure that this is not what he believes with a still deeper faith that has not yet made its way to the surface of his day-to-day beliefs. There are many voices within me, he says, and they gave me no rest. See (Caputo 2005, 1997b).

The key to understanding this point is that Derrida is distinguishing between belief (*croissance*) and faith (*foi*). A belief is an historical-material construction. It is the sort of thing we have in our heads because of all the accumulated accidents of birth, the language, the customs, the culture, the background knowledge, the total constellation of presuppositions that we inherit, which would have been markedly different had we been born in another place and time.<sup>2</sup> When Augustine said, *tolle, lege*, all the historical conditions and accidents of birth were in place so that when he "randomly" reached out for a book and opened it up, it just happened to be, by chance, by divine grace, a Latin translation (he says his Greek was poor) of the New Testament and not an ancient Chinese manuscript, as might have happened had he been born elsewhere or switched at birth. Faith, by contrast, is of a deeper, underlying orientation of our lives that not only tolerates but requires the ongoing exposure to and visitation of other beliefs and of revisiting and revising our current beliefs. Beliefs are correct or incorrect; faith is living or dead. Beliefs are in our head; faith is in our heart. We may hold the right beliefs, perform the right practices, while our real faith is dead. We may alter our beliefs in the name of maintaining our faith, but if we lose faith we suffer the sickness unto death, and the form of life becomes a living death. This distinction has its correlates outside religion; it crosses disciplinary borders. When Einstein shook the foundation of the Newtonian beliefs of the scientists of his day to the roots, he did not destroy their faith in physics. The point of this distinction in theology is to see that the name (of) "God" belongs to a system of beliefs. As historical constructions, beliefs are deconstructible, while faith is concerned with what is undeconstructible, which is what Derrida calls the event, which in the New Testament belongs to the sphere of the heart.

What is the event? Take the examples of "democracy" and the "law", which are historical constructions, whereas justice in itself, if there is such a thing (*s'il y en a*), is not deconstructible. (Derrida 2002b). Our belief in democracy is driven by an underlying faith in *what is going on in* the name (of) "democracy", which cannot be shut up within anything that currently bears that name. That is the event. What is going on in this word is an open-ended dream or expectation of a democracy-to-come, something presently unforeseeable, which eye has not seen nor ear heard, a realm in which justice rules. But if it is unforeseeable, then what is to say that what is coming will even bear the name (of) "democracy"? Nothing. Something new and unforeseen may come under another, presently unknown name. Our faith in the "democracy to come" means the "to-come" is more important than the "democracy". (Derrida 2002a, p. 182). What is to-come is undeconstructible because it has never been constructed in the first place. Faith concerns the event, which is not what is happening but what is going on in what happens, which is the coming of what we cannot see coming.

To say the event is undeconstructible is not to say it is a pure Platonic *eidos* or a Kantian Ideal, a pure essence uncontaminated by the empirical, of which we have a pure intuition, a *Wesensanschauung*. On the contrary, the to-come is precisely *unforeseeable*, and when it

comes it will have taken us by surprise. With an ideal essence, we can see it coming, and where we are going, but we have not gotten there yet. We can mark asymptotic empirical progress, the way we can track the progress toward herd immunity. An ideal essence is like a north star, whereas the event could be a disaster (*dis + astrum*). Nor is the event undeconstructible because it is an eternal, indestructible presence. On the contrary, it does not exist, not yet, maybe never (*s'il y en a*). The event does not rest in eternal peace but belongs to the future, not the future present, but the absolute, unforeseeable future, which makes the present restless with the future, making being restless with time, embedded deeply in the heart of time and contingency. Nothing says it will arrive and nothing says that, were it to arrive, it would not be a catastrophe. Radical theology is not a theology of the good; it is a theology of the event. The event is the promise of the future, and the promise is a promise/threat. The promise must expose itself to the threat if it is to hold any promise.<sup>3</sup>

In radical theology, “religion” and “God” are historical-material constructions, which are deconstructible, but the event is what is going on *in* “religion” and “God”, which is not deconstructible, which is the subject matter (*Sache*) of radical theology. The confessional theologies have to do with historical material beliefs and practices—with the doctrines and dogmas, texts and institutions, rites and traditions—constitutive of their confessional or denominational communities. I am not saying these are two entirely different things, running on two different tracks. I am not trying to erect a rigorous divide between these two. Any micrological investigation into a given historical tradition would find it rife with radical disturbances. As soon as radical theology is set in motion, it is only a matter of time before it reveals its historical-confessional point of departure, of which it is the radicalization. Radical theology is not setting itself up in business as a new religion to compete with the existing ones we already have. On the contrary, radical theology is to be found *in* the confessional theologies, which are disturbed *from within* by the event, made restless by the radicality of the open-ended events that are going on within the settled beliefs which have been catalogued and canonized under the name of orthodoxy.

Radical theology is always the radicalization of *something*, of which it is the inflection, the deflection, the modulation, the modification. There would be no such thing as a radical Jesus were not the figure of Jesus handed down to us by the tradition which transmitted it. There are as many versions of radical theology as there are traditions to radicalize, and it does not take much to detect the pedigree of a radical theologian, to identify what is being radicalized. Very often, when confessional theologians lose their job, it is not because they have lost their faith but because they have hit the radical ground by which their beliefs are inwardly disturbed, thereby making contact with the event, but then they choose to announce these results to their superiors. See (Caputo 2020a). So one of the first places to look for a radical theologian is the confessional traditions themselves, where they are the ones getting into trouble. Nor am I saying that the radical in radical theology is confined to religion or theology. Outside theology, radical theology is simply radical thinking, a new Enlightenment, a thinking that really does dare to think, which is not afraid to hit theological ground (unlike the old Enlightenment), just as radical theological thinking is not afraid to hit radical ground (unlike confessional theology). The radicality I am seeking is found in religion and outside religion, with or without religion. Religion is just a good place to start digging.

### 3. Do Radical Theologians Pray?

Radical theology differs from confessional theology as faith differs from belief, and not, as we might be tempted to think, as an academic construction called radical theology differs from the concrete historical material confessions where we find the real believers who claim a religious affiliation on the census. It is not the case that the believers actually pray while the radical theologians talk about God and prayer at the A.A.R. under the name of *Religionswissenschaft*. On the contrary, to the distinction between radical and

confessional theology, there corresponds a distinction between radical and confessional prayer. How so?

In radical theology, the name (of) “God” is not the name of a being, not even the Supreme Being (theism), nor of the ground of being (as in panentheism), nor of the beyond-being of Neoplatonic mysticism, but of the event, which is a kind of may-being, a perhaps, a dangerous perhaps. In radical theology the name of God is like what Tillich would call a “symbol” of the “unconditional”. Unlike Tillich, however, in radical theology it is taken as a symbol of an unconditional *without* power, without the power not only of the Supreme Being but also of ground of being—or of the state or “religion”—to back it up. It is a symbol, an icon, a *Vorstellung* (Hegel), an imaginative construction, a poem engendered by a theopoetic imagination, none of which should be understood to mean it is a subjective fantasy or a projection. On the contrary, if it is the product of our imagination, this is a creative imagination that has *first* been seized by the unconditional, by something of unconditional import, to which it is struggling to give word and image, form and figure, story and saying, song and dance. If it is a projection, it is a projection of something by which we have always already been injected, an expression of something by which we have always already been impressed, by which we are always already held in advance. Prayer is an answer before it is an address.<sup>4</sup> If it is a song or a dance, not possible before the God of ontotheology, it is first the music that being plays on us to which we seek to give words.

Then, *of what* is it a symbol, an image, an icon, a *Vorstellung*? Of the event, of course, which means the deepest currents and forces of our lives, of our deepest desires and restlessness, all of which, I think, are perhaps most efficiently summarized under the name of the “possibility of the impossible”, the possibility of the inbreaking transformation, the unforeseeable advent of the event which shatters our horizon of expectation and makes all things new. That is the sense in which radical theology can make its own (radicalize) the scriptural notion that “with God, all things are possible”, up to and including the impossible. Of course, this takes the form of a call, an invitation, a solicitation, which is not a matter of ontological omnipotent force overpowering us or, God help us, of actual political power, which would pose the mortal threat of the theocracy fomenting now in the dark recesses and poisonous pools of conspiracy theories which corrupt and deface the word “evangelical”.

This talk of *the impossible* does not mean supernatural suspension of the laws of nature but the suspension of supernaturalism. Here we see the recourse we have to phenomenology. The possibility of the impossible turns, on its theological side, on the *suspension* of the *supernatural* signified, and, on its philosophical side, on the suspension of the *transcendental* signified (pure reason). This double suspension or *theopoetic epoche* (Caputo 2019b). makes the impossible possible, makes radical theology possible, protecting it from the inflated authoritarian claims of both Supernaturalism and Rationalism. So the impossible is neither a theological miracle nor a logical contradiction, both of which suffer the illusion of literalizing the symbol, the one mystifying it, the other demystifying it, both misunderstanding it. The event is not logically but *phenomenologically* impossible, shattering our horizon of expectation and making all things new. The event is made possible by the dual epoche, which opens up the phenomenological field, the theopoetic space, in which wondrous things are on display, risen bodies and healings, water-walking and divided seas, which are neither rational nor irrational, but theopoetic. The possibility of the impossible describes the most fundamental open-endedness of our being, our very being-toward an open future, an absolute future, which eye has not seen nor ear heard—for *which we pray and weep* in the manner of Augustine’s *Confessions*.

We should not fail to notice the delicate hermeneutic touch, the *subtilitas explicandi*, reflected in the title of Derrida’s take on Augustine’s *Confessions*, which he calls “Circumfession”.<sup>5</sup> This coinage is neither comic nor a critique but an inflection; it represents not a rejection but a repetition, not a *contra* but an *intra* which situates itself within the *Confessions* and redeploys it—in short, not a destruction but a deconstruction. Derrida

does not attack Augustine's Neoplatonic dualism or disparage the religiosity of Augustine. Instead, he undertakes to reimagine, *reinvent what is going on in the Confessions*, the event that takes place there, the *faith* in the impossible that is enacted there, the sole difference being that—on the level of *beliefs*—Derrida rightly passes for an atheist. To slightly adapt a famous sentence from Tillich, to the God of theism and panentheism, the right *religious and theological response* is atheism, but this atheism does not spell the end of theology, but the beginning of a radical theology, a theology of the event, a circumfession of faith in the event, of the coming of what we cannot see coming, not a confession of a belief, all of which leave Derrida hanging on by a prayer.

The pivotal point here is this. If we sought to identify the literary genre of Augustine's *Confessions* we would find that it is neither a straightforward theological or philosophical treatise nor is it exactly an autobiography in the modern sense, although it belongs to the prehistory of the autobiography. Then what? It is a prayer! Augustine is praying, the book is addressed to "you", *te*, a pronoun that appears over five hundred times. It is addressed to God and its readers are overhearing a man at his *prie-Dieu*, making the truth, making a confession, confessing the truth, which he has written down. Why does he write it down? Not because God demands all confessions be in writing, and not because he is telling God something that God does not already know. It is written down for *our* benefit so that we may learn to pray as Augustine prays. Derrida is praying right along with Augustine, writing as he reads, reading as he writes, praying as he reads and writes. The text is written on the occasion of the death-watch over his mother, Georgette, just as Augustine records the death of Monica, both dying on the northern shores of the Mediterranean, across the sea from their native Algeria/Numidia, from which these two "compatriots" have emigrated to make their way in the big city (Rome/Paris). Derrida has chosen to repeat or reimagine this prayer, to reenact this prayer, to offer this prayer anew, up to and including the "you" (*tu*) to whom he addresses his prayer.

But to whom is he praying if he does not believe in God? Who is this "you"? This is open-ended; it is variously addressed to Geoffrey Bennington in the theological position up above the dotted line across the page, his mother, himself, anyone, everyone. The orthodox believers cannot believe this. They protest: *seriously*, how could Derrida be *really* praying? Is this not a literary conceit and nothing more than that? My answer is that prayer cannot be shut up within orthodox confessional limits, no more than the unconditional can be shut up within a being, however supreme. Prayer is a prior or deeper structure over which the religious confessions have no proprietary rights. The event that takes place in prayer, what is going on in prayer, belongs to a region that is prior to the arrival of what we call in Christian-Latin religion, to the beliefs (or symbol sets) that constitute the several religions, to the disputes among the various religious communities and the resulting excommunications, to the orthodoxies and the heresies, the creeds and rituals, the whole structure of power and authority upon which they depend in order to make themselves important in the world. It belongs to the event, to a deeper faith and hope, to the heart, to our *cor inquietum*.

"Circumfession" is a *radical prayer*, a prayer in a more elemental sense, one that takes place in a space that has been opened by an *epoche* that suspends both the supernaturalism and the rationalism, that belongs to a region of radical life and thinking, taking place beneath the radar of both the rational force of concepts, propositions and arguments and the authoritarian force of religious doctrine, in an "open" in Heidegger's sense, in a kind of Eckhartian "ground" prior to the onto-theological relationship that emerges between creator and creature, between "God" as a supreme being and the "soul" as a finite created spirit, in what I am calling theopoetic space.

The radical spirituality that is unfolding, the truth that is being *performed* in "Circumfession", its *facere veritatem*, is not a theoretical discourse, not a propositional truth, but, like the *Confessions* themselves, an auto-bio-prayer, the prayer of the one to whom Derrida is speaking in *Circumfession* (himself, anyone, everyone) when he writes (Derrida 1993, p. 314):

... you have spent your whole life  
 inviting calling promising,  
 hoping sighing dreaming,  
 convoking invoking provoking,  
 constituting engendering producing,  
 naming assigning demanding,  
 prescribing commanding sacrificing

To this string we can add “praying weeping seeking”, where eyes are made for weeping and having faith means being blinded by tears. But these are prayers and tears not of confession but of a circumfession, not the prayers of a confessional community, with its book of prayers, which knows what it is praying for and to whom it is praying and how to pray and is never lost for words, but the prayers of one circum-cut from all this, one who is praying for the coming of what he cannot see coming, for something, I know not what.

On the radical plane of the event, the very things that make prayer possible in confessional theology are impossible, but that impossibility does not block or prohibit the prayer but makes it possible. In a radical theology of the event, prayer, like everything else which takes place on this level, is made possible just in virtue of its impossibility. On the plane of the event, things begin *by* the impossible (Derrida 1991, p. 6). The confessional religions have made things easy for themselves by making everything possible, by putting in place all the things they need, like someone packing for a trip into the wild making sure they bring along all the comforts of home. But a radical prayer, a circum-fessional prayer, is circum-cut off from the Truth, *sevrée de la vérité*, Truth in capital letters, proceeding *sans voir, sans avoir, sans savoir*.<sup>6</sup> The truthfulness of this prayer—it is not a ruse, a riff—is found in this very Truth-lessness which impassions the prayer, which reduces us to prayers and tears. The *sens* in the sense of the direction or orientation of Derrida’s prayer is the to-come, the absolute futuricity, the unforeseeability of hope and expectation, which is why these are the tears of blinded eyes, the prayers of someone reduced to tears. Derrida is praying from his heart, and if we think of the heart, of faith and trust, as the center of the self from which everything else issues, then his is a decentered self, an eccentric, or, better, a poly-centered self, having many centers, none of which give the other any rest. It is not that Derrida does not have a heart; he has too many hearts.

The difference between Augustine’s confessional prayer and Derrida’s circumfessional prayer is not that Augustine is really praying and Derrida, a clever fellow, is offering a literary conceit, a philosophical stratagem, that offends the gravity of prayer. The difference is that Augustine has a name for everything he is doing, for the one to whom he prays and for the community with whom he prays in common; he has words to read and recite and an assurance of someone to hear his prayers. That is to say that Augustine’s prayer takes place within a determined set of material symbols in which to incarnate his prayer, an inherited complex of images and figures, narratives and liturgical practices, doctrines and books of prayer, all of which support his prayer. Of all this, Derrida is deprived, deserted, desertified, de-materialized, *destinerrant*. If, for his compatriot Saint Augustine, God is Truth, for him the truth is living *sans vérité*, from which Derrida is circum-cut. If as Jean-Louis Chrétien says, prayer is a wounded word (*parole blessée*) (Chrétien 2001), then Derrida’s circum-cut word is still more wounded, more abandoned to a prayer, barely hanging on by a prayer. He makes a “pure” confession, without Truth, the circum-fession and profession of a future that is not fettered to Truth, with a capital letter, offering his prayer like a pure gift made without expectation of a return.

To the question posed by the orthodox, who ask, in disbelief, how can Jacques Derrida, who rightly passes for an atheist, be praying, the right religious and theological reply is, how could he *not*? He has been reduced to tears, to prayers and tears. Prayer in this sense is such an elemental human aspiration, such a fundamental matter of the heart, such a basic hope or expectancy, that it cannot be preempted by those who claim for themselves that they have been given “revealed” or divinely inspired access to that primordial, pre-

propositional sphere of human life. The plane of the event lies beneath the radar of their beliefs and summarily repels those who presume to stake claim to it. Be not puffed up!

#### 4. The Spectrality of a Radical Spirituality

My larger point is that what holds of prayer holds of human life itself, which requires what we are here calling a spirituality, which is not an ethics or an ethos but a more elemental form of life. There is a parallel or deeper proto-prayer, prior to the claims that religion stakes to such a profoundly important matter, a matter of ultimate concern, as Tillich called it, which reveals something important about the very structure of our being-in-the-world. What is at issue here is a more general form of life, a *Lebenswelt*, over which no one has authority, and least of all those who suffer from the dangerous illusion of divine inspiration and privileged access to matters of which the rest of us poor mortals are deprived. I go back to what the German Idealists called the unconditional, that ultimate condition under which everything we think and desire and do takes place, of which there is no prior condition. But I go back not to Hegel's version of it, for whom we have a Concept which purports to comprehend it, but to Schelling's, where the unconditional is a wall against which thinking bounces. That in turn means that everything we say and do, think and desire about the unconditional can only take place under the constraints of the concrete conditions in which we always already find ourselves (*Befindlichkeit*). That does not make it impossible to say anything about the unconditional; it simply makes it impossible to say anything which is not mediated by these conditions. That is what Tillich calls a symbol and what I am calling a poetics, a theopoetics, a set of images and figures, metaphors and metonyms, narratives and striking sayings, one of which, but not the only one, is the set of symbols organized around the name (of) "God".

To the unconditional in the metaphysical sense there corresponds its deconstructed sense, which Derrida calls the unconditional "without sovereignty", meaning the event which addresses us unconditionally, like the justice-to-come, or the democracy-to-come, or the university-to-come, but in each case without the omnipotence of the Supreme Being or the power of the ground of being, without a theology or an ontology, a church or a state, a heavenly host or an earthly one to back it up. It is in virtue of the event that ontology becomes hauntology, and the Spirit becomes a specter. At this point we need to qualify the word Spirit, and hence "spirituality". Spirit is not a word with which Derrida associates himself. When he does analyze it, it is in connection with Heidegger's National Socialism (Derrida 1989). Otherwise he taunts it and says that for him spirit becomes a specter, which is not to say that he does not believe in ghosts. By a specter or a ghost (*fantôme*) he means a spirit come back from the dead, a *revenant* calling upon us to make right the wrongs done to them, or coming from the future, an *arrivant*, calling for a justice to come. Viewed spectrally, the name (of) "God" is a creatively imagined focal point, a *focus imaginarius*, which galvanizes or organizes or structures a form of life. That does not imply that it produces an orderly result, or gives us any determinate instructions for life, for it does not, and this because of the spectrality, of the open-endedness of the absolute future. Everyone calls for justice but everyone is not calling for the same thing. For the panicked and reactionary Christian right, justice means theocracy, patriarchy, white Christian nationalism, Jesus as John Wayne, while for the Christian left it means to serve the poor and oppressed, the lame and the imprisoned, which was the mission Jesus announced he had been given. If we call this form of life a "spirituality", then we mean a kind of spectral or proto-spirituality, one that is divested of all the comforts and security that comes of confessional spiritualities, which is what we mean by a radical spirituality, which can be found *in* the confessional spiritualities themselves, if they would only listen.

Viewed thus, a radical spirituality means to live our lives by coming to grips, without illusion, with the unconditional. In search of a name for a nameless unconditional, Schelling calls it, in a wonderful word, *das Unvordenkliche*, literally, the un-pre-thinkable, meaning that by the time thought arrives on the scene, being is already there (Schelling 2008, pp. 43, 203; Schelling 2020). This means we must live with an acute sense of the "facticity" of

life, a phenomenon famously analyzed by Heidegger which goes back to Schelling and Kierkegaard. Here we make contact with the question that Leibniz raised, upon which Heidegger made a memorable commentary, “why is there something rather than nothing at all”? To this question we, today, having heard about the heat death of the universe, of the increasingly accelerating expansion of the universe into the cold, dark death of entropic dissipation, can add the further question, “why will there be nothing at all rather than something”? Together they make up the “mystery of Being”, to which, Heidegger said, the right response is what he called “openness to the mystery”. Life lived in radical terms, living life radically, having a radical spirituality, means to live in openness to the unconditional, whatever it may be, openness to the absolute future, openness to the coming of what we cannot see coming, openness to the event, hoping, dreaming, sighing, praying, weeping, all categories of a wounded and decentered heart, all so many wounded words.

In all that, it seems to me, there lies an elemental, an irreducible, a radical spirituality, a spirituality of the event, by which what passes for spirituality and spiritual life in the confessional traditions is nourished and by which likewise—if they are willing to admit it—it is inwardly disturbed. As so many of the great spiritual masters themselves testify, this spirituality of a more spectral sort haunts the assurances the confessional traditions give themselves, insuring that their beliefs cannot be protected from doubt and likewise insuring that the dangerous illusion they entertain about their supernatural provenance and corresponding authority is—or should be—dispelled. The spirit in this spirituality has nothing to do with the classical theological distinction between the natural and the supernatural, nor with the classical metaphysical distinction between spirit and matter, which are part and parcel of a metaphysical dualism inherited from Neoplatonism with which Christian theology has struggled ever since Augustine installed it in the heart of Christianity.

The spectral spirit I have in mind has to do both with the aspiration of this wounded heart, its hope for the future, and with inspiration, which moves us to make all things new. If this is a radical structure, it is one with a clear biblical provenance in the theo-poetics of the “kingdom” to come, in the coming rule or reign or holding sway of God, of what is going on in the name of God. It is a radicalization of a structure of patently biblical provenance, that of messianic hope. Spirit in this sense turns on the distinction not between matter and spirit, but between a presence which pretends to be fixed and steady, everlasting and irrefrangible, as if it dropped from the sky, and a future which hovers over the present, which portends what can be otherwise than the present, whispering secret thoughts in the ears of the present, the issue of a haunting hope that is embedded in our lives in virtue of the very temporality of existence.

The spirit I have in mind is bound up with the very structure of the to-come, which pries the present open to the future, making being restless with time. We see this every time that, faced with seemingly insuperable setbacks, we say that the human spirit is indomitable. The indomitability of hope means that hope is merely a good bet when the prospects are good, but hope is most truly hope when it looks impossible, when hope is hoping against hope.

The spirit I have in mind is the one that is always praying and weeping, “hoping sighing dreaming” of what is to-come. While this may seem dispiriting, leaving us hopeless and in despair, its effect is exactly the opposite, to inspire hope. Hope is not a strategy; it is the spirit which inspires us to formulate a strategy. By shining a punishing white light on the present, exposing all its faults, the dream of the to-come inspires us to make all things new. This dream is a Martin Luther King, Jr. dream; it hits the streets, galvanizes demonstrations, holds up traffic, gets tear-gassed by the police. Hope exposes good conscience as hypocrisy. Those who are the most resolute about the good, who are the most sensitive to the evils of the world, who have the most right to claim a good conscience, they would be the last to do so. Saints are the last ones to say they are not sinners.

The spirit I have in mind does not seek to transcend our materiality but to transform it; it is made restless by the future, impatient with the present, open to the coming of what we

cannot see coming, pressing forward down a path which we know is fraught with danger, open to the promise/threat of the future. This spirit is what Tillich calls the courage to be, the courage to hope that the promise will subdue the threat, that the saving will conquer the danger, that the forces of God will vanquish the powers and principalities.

Radical theology not only dares to think; it dares to hope. It not only dares to hope; it dares to pray. Radical theology is a prayer. Its first, last, and constant prayer is to say yes to what is to-come: yes, yes, *viens, oui, oui*, Amen.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> (Caputo 1997b). In this book the reader will find closer and more fine-grained analyses of Augustine's prayers and tears, and, elsewhere (Caputo 2006), of the kingdom of God sayings in the New Testament; these books give specificity to what here, given the limits of a journal article, can sometimes look like sweeping generalities. A great deal of my work is an elaboration of 1 Cor 1, from which the titles of two of my books (Caputo 2013, 2016) are drawn. Another (Caputo 2019a) is an extended dialogue with Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, in which Luther articulates his *theologia crucis*. There I argue that Heidegger's whole project of *Destruction* and therefore Derrida's *déconstruction* can be traced back to Luther's text, which is likewise inspired by the logos of the cross in 1 Cor 1. Everything I have to say about "radical" theology is the radicalization of something, which it both inhabits and inwardly disturbs. Radical theology does not "exist". It insists *inside* the concrete material historical confessional traditions which time and again testify to these internal disturbances—all too often, however, by condemning them as "heresies", a tendency which is, alas, quite pronounced in Augustine himself, who is my candidate for the author who has written the most books beginning with the word *Contra*. Somebody should do a survey.
- <sup>2</sup> Do not hypostasize this distinction. Faith insists; it only exists inside concrete beliefs, where it creates an inner disturbance about the stability of the beliefs; just so, beliefs exist and they give materiality and historical actuality to faith. They are inseparable, just as with Heidegger's ontological difference: Being is always the being of beings and beings are beings only *in* their being. Dig deep enough into one and you will hit the other. In my view (Caputo 2019a), Luther's *deus absconditus* belongs to a system of beliefs that is inwardly disturbed by an "event" Luther would want otherwise to contain.
- <sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account of a "theology of the event", see (Caputo 2020c).
- <sup>4</sup> As William Desmond writes, in a setting more metaphysical than is to be found here, "One can knock and knock on the door, but the knock does not open the door, for the door is opened from the other side, hence the opening comes to one, even though one has roused the night into noise that the gods themselves seem unable to ignore (Desmond 2018, p. 363)
- <sup>5</sup> For a more detailed commentary, see (Caputo 1997a, pp. 281–307).
- <sup>6</sup> (Derrida 1993, p. 314). Just so, as follows from my thesis, this more radical prayer shows up time and time again in the spiritualities of the historical confessions—most famously, perhaps, in John of the Cross, who spoke of the "dark night of the soul". My point is not to deny this; quite the contrary. My point is that people like John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, or Marguerite Porete are regarded as dangerous figures by the confessional authorities, and they are kept under surveillance and regularly condemned. The reason? They have hit radical ground.

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