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John D. Caputo

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On Religion is a thrilling and accessible exploration of religion faith today. If God is dead, why is religion back? Digging up the roots of all things religious, John D. Caputo inspects them with clarity and style. Along the way, some fascinating questions crop up: What do I love when I love my God? What can the film Star Wars tell us about religion and what does "may the force be with you" really mean? What are people doing when they preform an act "in the name of God?"

On Religion Details

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From Reader Review On Religion for online ebook

Frankie Della Torre says

A Post-Secular Augustinian Religion of affections:

Caputo re-envision religion as a religion without religion, a religion with a lot of "how" and not so much "what," a religion in which we continually ask ourselves, What do I love when I love my God?, and are inevitably thrown around by our undecidability, our lack of certainty, about how to answer that question. Caputo's project is positioned against Fundamentalism which insists on epistemic presence, on the "what" of religion, thinking it has all of the answers, convinced it Knows God, certain it is speaking for God, on behalf of God, with the authority of God. Caputo, instead, opts for a much less self-assured understanding of religion, God, and the love of God. He begins with the assessment that nobody REALLY knows who they're praying to, who they believe in, who God is, if God is even there, what we are, where we're going. We don't have that kind of certainty (do you see the post-foundationalist epistemology here?). We're inside the flux, and all things flow (Heraclitus).

But, this is okay, Caputo thinks, because a post-secular religion is more concerned with "how" we live and believe than what we live and believe. True religion is not about assimilating propositions about (the object) "God" into a systematic treatise (a project which over-emphasizes the "what") but about "how" we love God. And what is God? "God is love." Perhaps, "love is God." Caputo loves the substitutability of these two statements, how they seamlessly flow into one another. "Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). What is God? What is love? Is God love? Is love God? Oh, the theologians are in an uproar! The metaphysicians are left scratching their heads (maybe even sharpening their weapons) over the travesty of Caputo's project! Caputo insists, however, that we keep this tension open, that we let the tension remain, bouncing us around, continually uncertain about whether God is love or love is God. When we pray to God for justice, are we praying for justice for God? Do we really know? Like REALLY, REALLY know? Some say, yes, we know. Caputo says, no, we don't. Thus spoke Zarathustra.

It is in this undecidability that true religion comes. Think about it... What if we really don't *Know* (for certain) everything that we think we know about God. What does that do to us? What if we remove certainty from the equation? What if we remain in the tension of believing, but praying that thou help us in our unbelief? Oh, the tension! The madness of it all! Perhaps this is truly faith, continually to hope, to pray, to pray like hell, for God to come, for the impossible, for that which lies outside of our epistemic rights, for justice to cover us all like the waters cover the earth, without certainty that it will happen, without assurance? What we're left with are prayers and tears, our hopes and fears. What if we remove the certainty of divine reward? What if we're not sure that God will reward us for helping people? Will we still help people? Does our lack of certainty necessitate that we stop loving if we're not promised a perfect result? Is this the end of faith? Or is this where faith begins, where we continue to love even when we don't know what will happen?

As Detective Rust Cohle said in the show True Detective: "If the only thing keeping a person decent, is the expectation of divine reward, then, brother, that person is a piece of shit." Love without certainty, love that abounds without reserve, without pretense, without certainty, without confidence, love that wants to love for love's sake, for God's sake, for the sake of the other, is true love.

Caputo's heavily apophatic (negative) theology leaves God deflecting our metaphysical, propositional arrows and reflecting them to the face of the other, the neighbor, the stranger, orphan, and widow, those all around us who we CAN SEE. When did we see you naked, Lord, and clothe you? When did we see you hungry,

Lord, and feed you?

Luke Echo says

Caputo argues for a conception of religion based on the ocean (Freud's oceanic feeling) rather than the "raft" of institutional religion, for doing / acting / the love of God as a "truth". It's interesting enough but not entirely unlike other anti-institutional images of religious experience that focus on the personal "experience" of religion.

But the problem is then what to do about the whole history of the church, ritual, and institution? It all is relegated to a kind of historical mistake or misinterpretation.

Caputo's alternative, an ambiguous god of "what do I Love when I love my God" is just a feeling, with no content. He seems to want to conserve the idea that there might be different "forms-of-life" as in multiculturalism, but in a way the particular content of any such life would also be merely part of the "raft".

There is just something wholly inadequate about this story of religion. I mean what if the "oceanic feeling" only really comes after years of ritual.

Joel says

A good philosophical essay for the person religious by temperament but not by conviction. Caputo argues that religion is, at best, life-affirming action. Such religion is characterized by epistemological humility, existential affirmation of life and compassion, and the risky preference for noble improbabilities over nihilism and moral paralysis. Can faith eschew certainty and claims of exclusivity and remain vibrant? I hope so.

Steve Wiggins says

Religion is not as easy to understand as it seems. This little book by John Caputo explores the question in conjunction with popular culture. It may seem unconventional, but stick with it to get the full impact. See more: [Sects and Violence in the Ancient World](#).

Nissa Rachmidwiati says

"Fundamentalisme adalah gairah gila kepada Tuhan, suatu cara membalikkan nama Allah menjadi nama teror. Suatu keadaan yang sungguh keterlaluan. Yang diidap sejak dini dalam agama fundamentalis adalah, saya pikir, kembalinya apa yang selama ini ditekan pada unconscious mind, atau suatu aksi dan usaha memadatkan kasih Allah yang tak terbatas itu dan hal tadi dipaksakan masuk ke dalam mentalnya yang sempit. Fundamentalisme adalah suatu usaha untuk menciutkan kasih Allah ke dalam sebetuk kepercayaan dan praktik, membuat berhala dari sesuatu yang sebenarnya dirajut dari kain keberhinggaan, membuat sesuatu yang terbuat dalam sejarah dengan stempel keabadian; satu lagi kasus seperti Harun dan anak lembu

emasnya, satu lagi pencampuradukan antara 'rakit' dan 'samudera'".

Duh, rasanya ingin deh menghadiahkan buku ini untuk para fundamentalis anarkis yang semena-mena mementingkan kepentingan agamanya semata di atas segalanya. Menghalalkan tindakan yang disebutnya sebagai hal religius yang membabi buta atas nama Tuhan. Pertanyaan yang terus diajukan oleh Caputo di buku ini sungguhlah sangat cocok untuk mereka, "Apakah yang sebenarnya aku cintai ketika aku mencintai Tuhanku?". Cinta kasih Tuhan terlalu penting dan berharga untuk diserahkan atau diatasnamakan oleh golongan yang mengaku religius namun dimotori oleh kepentingan politik yang terselubung. Mungkin ini ya jadinya kalau kita terlalu mengedepankan kepentingan kelompok di atas segalanya. Sudah saatnya kita berpikir untuk jauh lebih mementingkan Tuhan dan cinta kasihnya daripada agama.

Seperti yang ditulis Caputo:

"Agama dalam pengertian cinta-kasih Allah tidak dapat memuat yang termuat padanya. Kita telah mendefinisikan agama dalam istilah cinta-kasih Allah, tetapi kasih Allah tidak dapat didefinisikan --atau dimuat-- oleh agama. Cinta-kasih Allah terlalu penting untuk diserahkan kepada agama atau kaum teolog."

Daripada membicarakan perbedaan cara pandang (dalam konteks ini cara pandang religius), lebih baik kita berterima kasih pada cinta kasih Tuhan yang begitu luas dan tidak membedakan penerimanya. Walau aku dan kamu berbeda Tuhan dan keyakinan, kita sama-sama mendapatkan dan merasakan cinta kasih itu, bukan? Itu mengapa saya selalu nyinyir kepada orang-orang baik di pemberitaan media maupun yang saya kenal yang kerap memperbincangkan agama (atau saya lebih suka menyebutnya *religious view*) orang lain dan bersikap judgmental terhadap cara pandang orang lain dan menganggap agamanya dan cara pandangnya lah yang paling benar. Jujur deh, kalian pasti tahu segelintir orang yang seperti itu kan? Saya menulis ini bukan menempatkan diri saya sebagai pemeluk agama tertentu, tapi sebagai orang yang tidak ingin berpikiran sempit. Terlebih lagi mereka yang mendeskripsikan seseorang dengan pertanyaan, "yang *non-I* itu ya?". Duh, sudahlah. Gerah dengernya. Gak adakah pendeskripsian lain yang lebih baik dan lebih bersifat general dari itu? Para filosof sudah berpikiran maju dengan mengembangkan filsafat posmodern, sementara masih saja banyak orang yang pemikirannya prehistorik hahaha. Kata Lyndon B. Johnson : "A book is the most effective weapon against intolerance and ignorance." Hey kalian semua yang masih intoleran, membacalah!

Nah kan, kesannya saya ngedumel sendiri jadinya. Tapi intinya, pandanglah sesama manusia sebagai individu yang sama dengan kita yang sama-sama ingin mencoba memaknai hidup. Janganlah kita mengkotak-kotakan orang berdasarkan cara pandang religius dan kehidupan spiritual semata. Mungkin memang benar apa yang di-propose Caputo, "Agama Cinta adalah Agama Masa Depan."

Sebenarnya buku ini maknanya terlalu indah dan terlalu luas untuk di-review. Yang jelas buku ini bagus sekali. Terimakasih mas-mas di toko buku yang merekomendasikan buku ini buat saya. Tinggal hunting Jacques Derrida nih sekarang. :3

Ashley says

ohhh how I wrestled with this!

I wasn't familiar with John Caputo but I bought this book on the recommendation of a writer I highly respect (Peter Rollins) so I was quite excited to dig in. It didn't really amaze me right off the bat, but it certainly wasn't bad.

...but I found myself kind of sloughing through. and then I found myself just outright disliking the writer. I feel like I probably have a few cracked ribs from all the times the writer would have jabbed me in the side with his elbow with a wink and a nudge saying "see what I did there?! did you get it?!"

The "wink/nudge" effect took on many forms, and it was absolutely exhausting. This is a pretty thin piece of text, but there were times where I could only read 4-5 pages at a time before being completely burned out. It didn't help that he made a handful of references to movies that I'd never seen before and went in to SO much detail about them...but not really the kind of detail that helped me- more of the whole "inside joke" kind of language he'd been using before.

That probably doesn't really make sense. It's quite difficult to describe my experience with this book, because I'm not sure I've ever really encountered anything like this before. The whole thing felt like he was just wanting me to be in on this inside joke so he could jab me in the ribs with "did you catch that?!" and it honestly seems as though the book could have been half...maybe even a third as long as it was. He expounds on everything to such an insane level...and then he goes just a little further for good measure.

All of that being said, but the time I hit the last chapter I was over it. ...and then he kind of blew my mind. Everything came together and it became quite beautiful. Maybe it was the month-long break I took somewhere around 2/3 of the way through the book. Maybe that allowed me to approach it with fresh eyes. Maybe I would have a TOTALLY different experience with the first chunk of the book if I read it now? It's hard to say. ...and I can't say I'm too eager to hop back on and figure it out right now. The ending was good, but I'm still pretty exhausted (and my poor, poor ribs desperately need a break from all the nudges!)

The final section of the book bumped my rating from a weak 2-star to a solid 3.5. I can't justify giving it 4 stars, just because it was such a frustrating process in the beginning. I'll definitely come back to this book at some point to see if maybe I was just missing something as I read the first half of the book, but that probably won't happen for a while.

...but seriously- as short as the book was, I'm really thinking it could stand to be about 1/3 as long. ((though the same could be said for this review!))

Drew says

In short, I had a strong love-hate relationship with this book (and, perhaps by reflection, with post-modernity itself). If Goodreads allowed it, I might give it 2.5 stars.

Dr Caputo's work here is insightful in two ways. First, *On Religion* actually speaks to the emerging overall sense of the 'postmodern condition' and how it does (and will) interact with religion(s). He presents a strong grasp on the religious 'nones,' the 'spiritual-but-not-religious' seekers. Following his lead, we must rightly focus on this phenomenon to understand our times.

Second, he articulates and carries along the real significance and implications of the postmodern movement(s) in our world today, insofar as it critiques modernity (c. late 1600s to the early 1900s). Chapter 2 ("How the Secular World Became Post-Secular") is the best in the book for this reason. At the same time, he does a better job of making this focused point in his other book, *Philosophy and Theology*.

The greatest weakness may well be **sloppiness**. While reading this book and cheering it along here and there, I was wincing and facepalming at other times. His discussion of religion in general as "the love of God," for instance, is as much simplistic as it is sometimes insightful. The treatment of cultural/historical religious "particularities" and proverbial "bishops" comes off as patronizing, and I believe also reflects some cognitive dissonance that shows the risk of shapelessness and aimlessness coming from an indefinable definition. The exact same goes for his discussion of 'fundamentalism,' where he unfairly lumps figures and groups together.

Rev. Linda says

A text for a Fall 2017 Brite class ---a very interesting read -----From the publisher: On Religion is a thrilling and accessible exploration of religion faith today. If God is dead, why is religion back? Digging up the roots of all things religious, John D. Caputo inspects them with clarity and style. Along the way, some fascinating questions crop up: What do I love when I love my God? What can the film Star Wars tell us about religion and what does "may the force be with you" really mean? What are people doing when they perform an act "in the name of God?"

Josef says

In my opinion this is the best book on post modern religion. This is the second time I have read it and with each read I understand a bit more. There is a treasure trove of thoughtful reflection locked up in this book. Each time I put it down I kept thinking of what I have just read. Will definitely read it in a year's time again.

Coryke says

This is a hard book for me to rate. Caputo offers some very compelling thoughts and engages the reader with a familiar tone. Yet, I found myself wishing that he would just say what he wanted to say. What I found instead was Caputo slowly talking around the topic and then suggesting later that he had covered his explanation earlier. Well, I suppose he had. But there never was any ah-ha moment for many of these points.

Of course the theology itself is very challenging to traditional Protestant theology once you dig beneath the surface. For some this will be a major concern regarding this book. To me, this does not affect my rating particularly. I enjoy reading widely, and Caputo should not be criticized on this book for presenting the theology he intended to present. If someone doesn't like his book because of the theology, it doesn't mean the book is not good. I know I've written on this for other reviews, but I feel strongly that book reviews should not also contain a critique of the theology itself. Was the book presented clearly? Did the author convey what he or she wanted to convey? Did the author provide support for the statements made? If all of those things were done successfully, then the book was good. If you still do not like the theology, that's a different matter. How to separate the two, I admit, is not as easy as I'd like to believe.

Corey Hampton says

whilst i don't agree with all of caputo's suggestions, i very much enjoyed this theo-poetic offering.

dehorsmaisedans says

Piacere, davvero piacere, Caputo. Ho il sospetto che ti chiamerò presto per nome.

Alex says

Caputo's On Religion is a beautiful testament to faith, powerful in its conviction and compelling in its wisdom. Or rather, it *might* be. I found myself so continually eluded by Caputo's use of language that I'm not sure I grasped his true meaning, or if his meaning is coherent enough to be grasped. In the end, this problem was my chief complaint with this book. "More matter with less art!" as Queen Gertrude might say. Once you peel away the lovely, silken layers of linguistic music and artful metaphor (no trivial mental exercise), what is left? The one thing I can definitively say is that it *is* pretty.

Above all, Caputo supports the emotionally powerful faith experience. Humility and love are important recurring themes. St. Augustine's self-addressed question from his Confessions provides the thematic basis for On Religion: "What do I love when I love God?" Ultimately, the important part to Caputo is "I love God." Caputo takes that as a religious given (and I'll explore what that means in a moment). Since love seeks to question, doubt, and understand what it loves, according to Caputo, Augustine's question is not one of theological detail, but the fullest expression of love.

But for someone not already in the choir to which Caputo preaches, proclaiming "I love God" is a *big* given: What is meant by God? What is meant by love? Caputo addresses this through his verbal gymnastics:

Proclaiming a love for God is more generally an expression of passion. It is *not* a religious expression, unless religion isn't religion. Religion is a human's saltiness. Salt is a metaphor for passion. So religion is about passion. Religion is also the love of the impossible.

The "impossible" doesn't necessarily mean a *literal* impossible, but sometimes it does. It means forgiveness of one's enemies, for example. Forgiveness is not, of course, *literally* impossible, but it can be so difficult to the point of *feeling* impossible. We are drawn toward forgiveness, and yet we cannot approach it. All this is poetically wrapped up in that word, the "impossible". So the impossible is everything untouchably virtuous about religion. And *that's* God: love, or the impossible? Either or both.

You may think Caputo has redefined God or redefined love. Has he, and which one? It doesn't matter, and it turns out that anyone who offers an answer to that question is a dried up rationalist who wants to limit God. Just focus on acting out your passion, Caputo asserts, and try to keep your rational head out of it.

There's a reason Caputo's ideas are difficult to articulate. His verbal gymnastics are stunning in their flexibility. They're also stunning in their length, so by paraphrasing I not only risk pulling a mental ligament, but also in distilling away the poetry of Caputo's writing. Once the art is distilled away, what's left?

"Exactly," Caputo might then answer. Religion, he says, is more about art than it is about theology. Which then begs the question, why bother with theology at all? There's lots of art, lots of passion about — why not let that suffice? Caputo so waters down Christianity in favor of his definition of religion, God, etc., that, when considering the gamut of world religions, what's the point of espousing any one of their creeds over the other, or *any at all*?

The answer seems to be a healthy grounding — an anchor, perhaps even a structure. Caputo advocates living in two worlds. Just as we must explore the uncharted territories of our own faithlessness and unknowing (which he presents as a healthy thing for faith), we must also remain grounded in traditional, "determinate" faith one would find in a mainstream church.

He draws this compelling image: "We might think of ourselves as desert wanderers, *homines viatores*, on the way we know not where, but continually finding respite and hospitality in the determinate faiths, even as the safety of these shelters is haunted by the unsettling thought of the searing desert sun and numbing desert nights that lie outside their sheltering circles."

While I find this image and the idea behind it emotionally satisfying, I also find it an oversimplification that glosses over potential hypocrisy.

When I am in church, I appear to be a wholehearted churchgoer. But what do my fellow worshipers believe *I* worship? Would they welcome my "faithless" wandering or feel betrayed by it? (Is that *their* problem?)

When I am in the desert, I appear to be a wanderer. But how far can I really be wandering if I can always make it back to church by Sunday (metaphorically speaking)?

Ultimately, we find that we must cater to the common denominator of those who would anachronistically shun us if they knew the edgy secrets of our faith, or else cater to the opposite extreme. It's not a problem of personal theology — it's a *social* problem of convention and propriety. One could make a strong case that our religious communities have yet to figure out how to candidly cater to both the xenophobic common denominator and the indeterminate wanderer *simultaneously*. The two can't (yet) coexist without *pretending* something. Caputo should have addressed complications of honest forthrightness such as this. Cloistered theological thought experiments are one thing; acting in faith with other people is an entirely different thing.

So what kind of God does Caputo love, and invite us to love? Certainly not the God of Jesus. Certainly not the God of mainstream American Christianity. Certainly not a supernatural God of any kind. Certainly not a God subject to rational exploration. So what are we talking about? Is the word "God" even meaningful anymore?

My problem with Caputo's re-appropriation of words like "God", "religion", and so on is that he destroys whatever *usefulness* they had when communicating with other human beings. He tears down bridges. Reading his works to discern his redefinitions is prerequisite to the simplest conversation with him about God being intelligible. In order to follow Caputo down the path of his ideas, one must also follow him through the labyrinth of a co-opted language. Artful, yes. But this love of redefinition is anything *but* communicative. Instead, it muddles the message and hinders cooperation and mutual understanding.

Carl Sagan articulates the problem with this kind of linguistic hijacking: "The subject is more confused by the fact that prominent theologians such as Paul Tillich, for example, who gave the Gifford Lectures many years ago, explicitly denied God's existence, at least as a supernatural power. Well, if an esteemed theologian (and he's by no means the only one) denies that God is a supernatural being, the subject seems to me to be

somewhat confused. The range of hypotheses that are seriously covered under the rubric 'God' is immense."

I imagine Caputo would be irked I brought a rationalist like Sagan into the conversation, as Caputo repeatedly expresses contempt for rational, scientific thought. I was never able to reconcile Caputo's apparent contempt for rationality on the one hand with his surprisingly scientific mindsets on the other. One moment he's lambasting modernity with all its soul-sucking deduction, but the next minute he's offering up such precepts as "Truth is the best interpretation so far". What is scientific truth, but the best rationally expressed interpretation of the universe we have so far? What's so *wrong* with that? Why all the venom?

While decrying rationality, Caputo celebrates St. Anselm's rational argument for the existence God. Or rather, more precisely, Caputo celebrates its context of heartfelt, humble praise. For what Caputo really condemns is a rational *evaluation* of Anselm's arguments: "Whether Anselm's argument is defended or rebutted in modernity, the choreography is ignored, all the candles are blown out, and the animating religious spirit has been drained out of it. The prayers and tears of St. Anselm are replaced by dry-eyed, bare bones logic."

Caputo seems to be telling us to ignore the substance of Anselm's message, and to focus on the font its printed in, the lovely calligraphic loops. No matter that Anselm was consciously offering up a rational argument — what *really* matters is the timbre of the voice offering it.

Though Caputo says his book makes an argument toward something, it doesn't. An argument is grounded in rationality. An argument is what Anselm offered (feeble though it was). A rational argument can be held to a rational yardstick — a process which clearly repels Caputo. What Caputo offers is a sermon, or even demagoguery. It may be beautiful poetry that celebrates all of the loveliness of "God," but it is no argument.

Do not look to Caputo for convincing: since he does not actually offer an *argument* (except in the sense of John Cleese's character in the famous Python sketch), he cannot sway the intellect.

Instead, Caputo addresses a purely emotional level. Your heart will either follow where he wants to take you, or it won't. You will either feel what he feels, or you won't.

Or, if you're like me, you'll feel what he feels, but lament the intellectual sacrifice so deeply that the feeling comes across only as a broken promise. If only I could cleave my intellect from my heart so easily, I imagine I would embrace On Religion. Failing to do so, I can only celebrate the language of the poetry, but not its ephemeral meaning. I deeply wish I could chalk this up to a failing of imagination or understanding on my part. But when the language itself is targeted for theft, and every social idea subject to personal rewriting, interpersonal common ground is impossible to find indeed.

Tim says

Finished Caputo's *On Religion* and in the end found it disappointing. Yes, he was trying to be provocative and his self-referential tone was humorous, but only to a point. He begins well, taking religion back from its cultured despisers, both among the modern and the post-modern - in this way he does seem to echo Schleiermacher. He defines religion as belief in the impossible (not absolute dependence as in S) and quotes Augustine's question, "what do we love when we love our God." You would think asking such a question would lead to some sort of relational understanding of action with the deity, but he is not interested in that. Faith for him is not about belief, but about action (not what, but how). Religion can be true, but that is

discerned by actions and not by propositions of capital k Knowledge.

So despite his relativistic outstretched hands to all religious beliefs for their truths, he is positing his own unknowing as the best kind of knowledge of the truth and his own existential-like risk taking as the "hyper-real" beyond any Knowledge of the really real. Like so many academics before him, and like S, he has created his own religion that no existing religion would embrace fully. Yes, some participants might want to use his ideas to flog their authority systems (he pokes at the bishops). Yes, there are things that are worthy of poking at - I appreciate the emphasis on action, but why does it have to be in conflict with the truth of creeds and Scripture?

It is true that creeds and Scripture need to be interpreted and tradition can be conservative, but his arguments against interpretation and tradition are shallow name calling. And what he seems to miss in the Christian tradition is that its revelation is not first in creed or Scripture, but in God's action, whether towards Israel or in Christ. The text is there, but it is part of a relationship between God and believer. Faith is not first either what or how, but who. And for that we can get some answers to his too often repeated question about who is the God we love. It does not stay murky in relationship. Despite the need for interpretation the Christian church has answered pretty consistently about the nature of the God we claim to follow after. Not that there have not been disputes, but in the daily piety of most believers there is a reliance (to do the impossible) and a trust and a love that Caputo's high-minded windiness seems to miss. Read the first few chapters and think about what he has to say about God and history - the last couple are fairly worthless as he attempts to use popular culture to support his claims. His generalizations about fundamentalism(s) are both laughable and offensive to a historical student of these movements in both Christianity and Islam. Since when are they monolithic (one thing - just like the uniformity of academic professors studying religion?)? They are creations of modernity, so I suppose the post-modern must frown on them, but I am tired of the constant defamation.

Darius says

John Caputo absolutely blew my mind with this little book. I read *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* a few months ago and really liked it, but it had me a little lost at some points because I was unfamiliar with his general philosophical stance. In contrast, *On Religion* is clear, short, and a kind of treatise on theology. As a result, it's the ideal intro to Caputo's form of radical theology.

To be honest, I think this should be required reading for everyone, especially students of religion or philosophy - it's that good. *On Religion* is an honest, challenging, and liberating book that transcends the usual bounds of theology, and ultimately leaves the reader at the crossroad of choosing either a path of radical love or selfish indifference toward the world & those in our lives, irrespective of one's theological stance.
