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John D. Caputo's Concept of Divinity

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present the concept of Divinity developed by American philosopher and theologian John D. Caputo. It is worth noting that, for Caputo, Divinity is not so much a personal God as a Mystery that appears as a spectre. Caputo emphasises the pluralism of approaches to the divine Mystery and encourages openness to its various manifestations. The path to understanding it is not through metaphysics, but through phenomenology and hermeneutics. In each case, it is narrowed down to the intra-world dimension. Divinity is thus considered in terms of event, the depth of being, call and promise. These four fundamental aspects are the subject of the analyses, determining also their structure. The specific object of the promise is a new moral order of the world. Its expression is an ideal social order, identified with perfect democracy. Divinity would be its symbol.

Keywords: Divinity, event, depth of being, call, promise

Introduction

Interest in religion and God remains alive, despite many declarations heralding the end of religion and the 'death of God.' According to German philosopher Hannah Arendt, we know as little about the death of God as we do about His existence. She also notes that traditional thinking about Him is dead (Arendt 2016, 19–20). The previous way of thinking about God has thus reached its end. Therefore, a new type of reflection on Him is needed, because He is still the centre of attention for many people as the meaning of their existence.

The issue of God is currently addressed in the reflections of, for example, the American philosopher and theologian John D. Caputo. He is an important figure associated with postmodern philosophy of religion, as well as the creator of so-called radical hermeneutics. It

is a consequence of his radical thinking, i.e., returning to the sources (Latin: *radix*). This is primarily the actual existence of the world and man, which is subjected to a new interpretation (Caputo 2019, 71). He also thinks about God from this perspective. Reflections on God are made, as it were, ‘from below’ reality, and not ‘from above’ any revelation.

Caputo’s work is influenced by ideas drawn from continental philosophy. He is particularly close to the thinking of French intellectual Jacques Derrida, who throughout his life was accompanied by the question posed by Augustine of Hippo: what/whom do I love when I love God? (Caputo 2006a, 86–87, 92–93). The search for an answer to this question also became the passion of the American thinker’s life (Caputo 2001, 2, 113; 2016, 9–11).

The purpose of the following considerations is to present Caputo’s concept of divinity. It is worth emphasising that, for him, God is not so much a person as a Mystery appearing like a spectre in various dimensions of reality. Therefore, it should be considered not as the most perfect, omnipotent and omniscient God, but rather as an undefined divinity (Absolute, *sacrum*), revealing itself as an event, the depth of being, or a call and promise addressed to man. These four fundamental aspects will be the subject of the following analyses, which will also determine their structure. The promise specifically concerns a new moral order. It is expressed in an ideal social order, identified with perfect democracy. Divinity would be its symbol.

1. Divinity as an Event

It should be emphasised that although Caputo does not accept the existence of supernatural reality, especially the existence of a personal God, he nevertheless wants to reach some kind of primordial reality. This is the Mystery, the content of which is not specified. It cannot be fully known but only interpreted in various ways. For if man knew it, it would no longer be a Mystery

(Caputo 2011a, 85–87).¹ It is always different, and the multitude of interpretations sometimes leads to conflict between them (Caputo 2022a, 339–40). Caputo echoes the conviction of Augustine of Hippo, who was close to him: if someone believes they know God, it means that what they know is not God. For He is always other for each person and cannot be objectified, because any attempt to do so leads to idolatry.

Influenced by the German mystic Meister Eckhart, Caputo therefore wants to free man from human concepts and images of the divine Mystery. He strives for liberation not only from the God of philosophers, but also from the God of theologians. He moves towards a ‘God beyond God’ (Caputo 2016, 11), that is, beyond all His conceptual and imaginative constructs.

A similar attitude is taken by Czech intellectual Tomáš Halík, who, criticising all attempts to objectify God in philosophy, defends His mystery. He rejects the God of philosophy, understood as the Supreme Being, and prefers the God of religion (mysticism), who manifests himself primarily as an inexpressible Mystery and the Partner in the dialogue with the man. Access to Him is possible within human existence through symbols, unless, of course, they are made absolute. In that case, a person may be in danger of idolatry (Halík 2004, 20–21, 61–62, 76–77, 109, 312; 2006, 85, 289–90; 2010, 11–12; 2017, 59). Caputo and Halík would therefore be close to the concept of atheism (‘God after God’) developed by the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney, who postulates the need to discover the presence of deity in ordinary existence and to move away from existing conceptions of God in favour of new ones. First and

¹ In his later works, he softens his position. He does not so much reject as suspend his belief in the existence of supernatural reality. However, as he himself points out, he does not want to succumb to naturalism (Caputo 2020, 16–17; 2021a, 679). He certainly has in mind metaphysical naturalism, i.e., a form of monism in which the only substance of reality is nature understood as an object of physics or biology. This raises the question of how consistent Caputo is in his thinking. Is he not succumbing to naturalism, or is his suspension of belief in the existence of supernatural reality merely an empty declaration? However, it is difficult to give a precise answer to this question due to Caputo’s ambiguous and metaphorical statements.

foremost, it must be abandoned the speculative God of metaphysics in favour of the God of living experience (Kearney 2012, 8, 16–17; 2024, 50, 66–69, 110–11). However, there is a difference among them. Caputo focuses on the theoretical aspect, i.e., beliefs about divinity. Kearney and Halík, on the other hand, are more interested in the practice of life, especially a new form of its experience. In their opinion, there is no return to the old forms of experiencing the sacred, but it can only be done in a new way.

Caputo therefore emphasises that divinity is greater than anything that exists. It is completely different and eludes human understanding (Caputo 1997b, 5; 2001, 117; 2007, 56, 73, 81). Its definitions are random and susceptible to deconstruction (Caputo 2007, 84). Caputo elsewhere notes that all constructs are subject to deconstruction. He refers to two principles: the Protestant (*semper reformanda*) and the Jewish (*semper deconstruenda*) (Caputo 2016, 18–20, 26–29). All human constructs are therefore susceptible to change or dismantling.

Caputo is thus close to the apophatic tradition, in which positive statements about God are considered to exceed human cognitive abilities. At this point, however, a fundamental question arises: is it possible to go beyond all concepts and ideas about God? It seems that humans cannot avoid creating and using them, despite the danger of anthropomorphising the divine and idolatry. Concepts and images are necessary not only for cognitive purposes, but also for communication. Caputo himself does not completely abandon a certain conceptualisation of the divine Mystery. He merely encourages openness to its various manifestations and pluralism of approaches. However, his reflections are based not so much on metaphysics as on phenomenology and hermeneutics.

With this in mind, it should be emphasised that Caputo understands divinity primarily in terms of event. In doing so, he performs a kind of theistic reduction, reducing divinity to an event (Caputo 2011b, 106; 2020, 18–19). Caputo draws his understanding from the thoughts of two French philosophers: Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. For Derrida, an event refers to the intrusion of something completely new, different, astonishing and unexpected into the familiar world of man. An event is therefore a form of movement coming from outside into the world. Deleuze, on the other hand,

understands an event as something unexpected, unforeseen and strange coming out from inside to outside reality (Caputo 2006b, 109). It is also worth adding that for Deleuze, an event is an irreducible reality and has an absolute character (Deleuze 1969, 34, 96–99). It cannot be reduced solely to a natural phenomenon.

However, it should not be forgotten that Caputo was also inspired by the ideas of German existentialist Martin Heidegger. He introduced not only a distinction between being and beings, but also between what causes this difference and opens it up. This was referred to as *Ereignis* (Caputo 1982, 149–53, 168), i.e., differentiation event.

Kearney also uses the category of event in his reflection. For him, it is an opportunity to open up to transcendence, which is beyond human control. It constitutes a boundary between immanence and transcendence. It is a form of surprise that man did not expect. Therefore, it may be subject to many competing interpretations (Kearney 2001, 40, 47, 57, 65, 76). The French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion treats the event, alongside the idol, the body and the icon, as one of the manifestations of the saturated phenomenon. Their culmination is revelation (Marion 2016, 59–60). This phenomenon exceeds the limits of human perception.

According to Marion, an example of an event is a specific historical phenomenon. Each event is unique, unpredictable, indefinable, impossible to constitute, irreducible to its constituent elements, and marked by an excess of knowable causes. It imposes itself on man and must be unconditionally accepted by him. An event transcends any horizon through which it could be grasped, described and constituted. A single horizon is not sufficient to understand it, because it can be viewed from many perspectives and against different horizons. Therefore, it demands endless hermeneutics (Marion 2002, 163–65, 168, 170–73, 197, 199–201, 209–11, 228–29). An event as a historical phenomenon can hold a person's attention or refer to some hidden dimensions. It seems that it can be understood as a form of revelation, and thus a way of opening oneself to divine transcendence.

Historical events are also for Halík, next to the world of nature, a trace of God's presence (Halík 2022, 211–12, 217–18, 314–15).

The immanent world of things and events thus becomes transparent to the divine reality.

On what basis does Caputo seem to understand divinity in terms of an event? He draws attention to one of its essential features, which is excess.

Caputo notes at one point that excess as a feature of the event points to divinity (Caputo 2013, 133–34; 2022b, 242). Elsewhere he emphasizes that it is excess that transcends everything (Caputo 2007, 54). The category of excess is also present in the thought of Kearney, who understands it as a gift and grace (Kearney 2001, 54) or the richness of meaning of a given being (Kearney 2024, 33, 361). Marion treats it as a surplus of potentiality existing in the world (Marion 2017, 88–91) or a plethora of content present in the phenomenon (Marion 2002, 201).

How can this excess be understood in Caputo? It seems that it can be considered in two fundamental aspects: ontic and hermeneutic. In the first, it would be related to a certain surplus of being, in the second, to a surplus of meanings. Caputo is more likely to favor the second understanding, as he distances himself from ontological considerations. However, it should be emphasized that he cannot completely ignore them.

The name “God,” therefore, in Caputo’s view, is the name of an event. It signifies both mystery and a certain excess (Caputo 2007, 53; 2011a, 88–89; 2016, 16).² Elsewhere, Caputo distinguishes a name from an event. A name, in his view, is a kind of temporary formula for an event, that is, a random expression used in natural language to describe it. An event, on the other hand, occurs in something that happens (a thing, a word, a person). It makes itself felt, is always dynamic, and expresses itself in new ways (Caputo 2006b,

² At this point, it’s worth referencing the distinction made by Polish philosopher Józef Maria Bocheński between a name and a description. The word “God” can be used as a name by someone who has a direct experience of His presence. However, this is extremely rare. According to Bocheński, it occurs only among the founders of religions or mystics. For religious people in general, the word is a description, because their knowledge of God is mediated (Bocheński 1993, 381). It seems, therefore, that the American philosopher’s reflections concern not so much a name, but rather a description, that is, a verbal description of divinity.

1–8; 2007, 47–48, 50; 2021a, 679). Because an event never takes on a definitive form, no name is adequate for it. God is reduced to it as its weak force, not its existential power (Caputo 2006b, 23–41; 2007, 56, 59, 62–64; 2011a, 92–94; 2016, 17, 46, 50–53, 89, 108).

The event, therefore, possesses divine qualities, but, in the words of Slovenian intellectual Slavoj Žižek, it is a “fragile absolute.” It is delicate, but through it we experience divine fire, holy sparks, and the pulsation of the sacred. The event, and thus divinity, is therefore the name for the dynamism present in things, the mysterious impulse and transcendental field through which the actualization of a given being’s potentiality would be possible (Caputo 2007, 48–49, 51, 65–66). The dynamism (impulse) present in being, subject to various interpretations, is therefore treated as a manifestation of divinity.

Caputo further emphasizes that an event is a conditioned expression of the action of the unconditioned Spirit, which animates the world and operates within it (Caputo 2020, 30–37, 41). In his view, Spirit takes on a spectral form (Caputo 2006b, 44; 2016, 100; 2020, 12; 2021a, 679). Therefore, it is not understood in the ontic order, but in the spectral order. It comes to man as an uncertain and undefined apparition, whose understanding and description depend on the historical and cultural context (Caputo 2019, 32–35, 37–42; 2022a, 249–58). Events are therefore an expression of something that is elusive and indeterminate (Caputo 2007, 84). Caputo thus performs not only an ontic but also a spectral reduction of God. The former deprives Him of existence, while the latter cuts Him off from the ground of being (Caputo 2022a, 9, 242–45).

For Caputo, the event is a moment of visitation (Caputo 2020, 43) and thus a form of revelation. It occurs many times and in various ways (Caputo 2013, 138–39). Revelation, however, is not a way of supernaturally communicating content, but a vision opening onto another way of being. Its grasp is not achieved through concepts and judgments, but through images and stories (Caputo 2019, 133–34; 2022a, 16, 166–67). It is dominated not by reason, but by imagination (Caputo 2013, 137–39; 2022a, 84–92). This approach brings Caputo closer to Kearney’s thought, for whom “micro-epiphanies” occurring through things are subject to imaginative processing.

Like the Irish philosopher, Caputo postulates the deconstruction of the God of onto-theology, who is, in his opinion, an idol (Caputo 2007, 66–70; 2016, 32).³ Thus, he continues the process begun by Eckhart and Heidegger, who wanted to free God from all the constructs of metaphysics and man from His idolatric image (Caputo 1986, XVII–XVIII, XX, 9–17, 118–27, 173–83). Caputo emphasizes, therefore, that his deconstruction concerns a certain concept of God, but not God himself. He wants to transcend the theism of a personal God and grasp Him in a different way (Caputo 2022a, 186–96, 199–203). According to some, Caputo’s criticism refers to a certain version of theism, but not Theos itself. Moreover, it is not only a criticism of theism, but also of atheism (Hart 1989, 27, 39). It seems that the American philosopher does not completely question, contrary to earlier declarations, the existence of God, but only a certain way of narrating about Him.

As a result of deconstruction, God becomes a weak being (Caputo 2019, 2–9, 17–32, 55–59, 142–50). We can therefore speak of His specific kenosis, which, according to Caputo, is a continuous historical process. Thanks to this, various aspects of divinity can be discovered in different dimensions of the world (Caputo 2007, 74–76). Instead of searching for its ultimate structures in metaphysics, he recommends its religious interpretation through hermeneutics.

An event occurring in the world therefore requires a specific interpretation, thanks to which it is understood in terms of the sacred. In this regard, Caputo mentions a certain ‘pre-interpretative structure’ which consists in ‘seeing-as’ different things. Thanks to this, humans are able to access the experience of divinity and faith, which consists in seeing something ‘as’ divine (Caputo 2006a, 75–78). For Caputo, faith is therefore a way of interpreting the world, which brings him closer to the thinking of the analytical philosopher of religion John Hick.

³ It is worth bearing in mind that Caputo distinguishes and undermines two types of onto-theology: narrow (formulating proofs for the existence of God) and broad (referring to some center, e.g., an existential, divine one) (Caputo 2022b, 237–42). It seems that the second type would be willing to accept.

According to Caputo, events occurring in the world are therefore an expression of the unconditional. However, schematising them according to some metaphysical idea can lead to idolatry. The American thinker is aware that unconditional events always occur conditionally in a specific place and time (Caputo 2007, 48–49, 53, 55–56, 65). An event is an expression of some transcendent instance that cannot be reduced to immanent dimensions. It transcends all experiences and deconstructs all constructs. It seems that an event takes place, as it were, beyond the boundaries of the existing world and destabilises its structures, but at the same time it is expressed in it and is captured in various cognitive patterns.

Caputo also connects the event not only with various things that exist in the world, but also with the phenomenon of human desire. Divinity is the name of the event that occurs in our specific desires and enlivens them. According to the American philosopher, a specific human desire can never be fully satisfied because it contains not only a certain insufficiency, but also an excess that cannot be eliminated. Desire therefore refers to an undefined divinity (Caputo 2007, 57–59, 70). Following Caputo, we can say that divinity is a second-order desire occurring within a first-order desire. It is a desire for something that lacks an appropriate name. This is because humans do not know exactly what they desire and are unable to describe it (Caputo 2005, 22; 2013, 131–32; 2020, 132–34). Elsewhere, Caputo emphasises that second-order desire usually refers to something new, unexpected and impossible (Caputo 2001, 11, 113). Every desire of the first order contains a certain dissatisfaction and a longing for something more. It refers to divinity, which can be described, using the language of French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, as a desire beyond all desire. It therefore enjoys a form of transcendence, which can also take the form of the existential depth of man and the world.

2. Divinity as the Depth of Being

As mentioned above, Caputo's intention is to deconstruct the concept of God. However, he emphasises that this applies only to the classical concept of God, not to God himself. He wants to transcend

the theism of a personal God and understand God in a different way. God would thus be understood primarily as the depth and foundation of the world, but also as the source of all being and the primordial element of reality (Caputo 2019, 150–51; 2022a, 186–96, 199–203). The pursuit of God in the depths of reality and human life is also familiar to Halík, who postulates the need to transcend the phenomenal sphere of existence and discover God's presence in its depths. Thanks to this, life will become a form of dialogue with the hidden within it divinity (Halík 2004, 166–67, 310; 2007, 32). The context of Halík's reflections, as well as Caputo's, is the phenomenon of the hiddenness of the divine being. This hiddenness is not only a way of its existence and revelation, but also a fundamental spiritual experience of man. It can have an ontic dimension (a different existence than natural beings) or a moral one (the concealment of God's will) (Jasiński 2023, 101–4). It seems that both thinkers emphasise the ontic aspect of hiddenness, which does not result in an atheistic position, as in the case of Canadian philosopher John L. Schellenberg.

Caputo also refers to depth as the noumenal sphere, divinity, or ontological excess (Caputo 2022a, 63–70). For Caputo, the place where the depth of being is experienced is not only the material world, but also man himself. He has a restless heart, tormented by doubts and tossed about by searches. He becomes a question to himself. This search opens up the depth of his being, allowing him to experience some hidden power or principle. He makes the transition from a superficial to a deeper existence, through which he experiences the beauty, passion and power of life (Caputo 2006a, 96–98; 2020, 95–97, 106–7; 2022a, 320–22). The world and man would thus be immersed in divinity as their deep foundation, thanks to which they could also feel divine power. This depth would also be an expression of divine transcendence.

According to the Polish philosopher of religion Karol Tarnowski, transcendence can be understood not only as a supernatural entity existing above the world, but also as the depth of reality, i.e., something existing below its phenomenal sphere (Tarnowski 2017, 388, 404–13, 431–39). This seems to be the direction Caputo is heading in with his understanding of transcendence.

Elsewhere, he emphasises that God is the name of the secret of being (Caputo 1997b, 284). God is the undefined and indefinable foundation of being, in which all phenomena occur. Talking about God always takes place in a symbolic way (Caputo 2016, 12–14, 72). The background for this perception of divinity as the foundation and emergent process of becoming is a bottom-up, rather than top-down, vision of the world. It is an invisible spirit that becomes visible nature (Caputo 2022a, 110–11). The American philosopher thus echoes the concept of the ‘hidden God’ (*Deus absconditus*), which appears in a slightly different version in the works of Meister Eckhart, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich, and Martin Buber.

Caputo notes that divinity emerges from the depths of reality, and that depth is in everything. At the same time, he notes that it appears like a spectre. For it is the most spectral of phenomena (Caputo 2016, 11; 2020, 57–58, 62–64, 68–69; 2022a, 3, 4, 7, 36, 167–68, 343). He emphasises that in the situation of a hidden God, the fundamental difficulty lies in the fact that humans do not really know in what form He will come. His various manifestations may also lack consistency (Caputo 2019, 267–68). Caputo’s reflections echo Kant’s idea of dividing reality into the noumenal (unknowable) and phenomenal (knowable) spheres. The hidden divine depth manifests itself as an ephemeral apparition that lacks ontological reality. It can only be grasped intuitively by humans and possibly imagined by them in some way.

Caputo notes that monotheistic religions are based on a personalistic vision of divinity, but in his opinion, it should be reconfigured in an apophatic direction. This would emphasise the existence of something more primordial and profound than the personal and impersonal, some untouched Mystery. It could be called by various names, such as chaos, sacred anarchy, or the abyss (Caputo 2022a, 299–303, 335–43). Elsewhere, he also calls it *hyper-realism*, *open-ended materialism*, *the Unconditional*, *the Undeconstructible*, *the Ultratranscendental* (Caputo 2020, 129–35). According to Caputo, divinity as the basis of existence is not a person, but it is also not less than a person. If it creates persons, it must have some

kind of protopersonal power (Caputo 2019, 254–55).⁴ However, it seems that divinity is primarily the existential depth of the world and a spectre that appears in human contact with it. Caputo would therefore be close to the concept of the British philosopher John Hick, who speaks of some undefined ultimate reality that is beyond any manifestation and definition due to its qualitative richness, and the intuition of Canadian intellectual John L. Schellenberg, for whom ultimate reality is deeper than the physical world, minimal in content and open to various descriptions (metaphysical, axiological and soteriological).

However, Caputo is aware that the depth of reality does not have to be divine, as it can also be demonic, satanic and dark (Caputo 2022a, 101–30). Divinity as the depth of being is also its darkness, but in his view, this darkness is not demonic. It is a key element of the world and can ultimately be overcome. However, there is no doubt that this darkness lacks clarity and requires proper interpretation (Caputo 2006a, 95–96; Caputo 2022a, 331–34).

⁴ Tomáš Halík also has a problem with the question of God's personality, according to whom the metaphor of 'person' is used in describing God to emphasise that He is not a thing. Describing God as a person is therefore not a statement about who He is, but rather who He is not. Moreover, Western culture knows no higher category than that of a person. However, God cannot be identified with it, because it would be a form of idolatry. It must always be remembered that He is more than a person. According to the Czech intellectual, the metaphor of 'person' expresses that God lives in relationship and that dialogue can be conducted with Him. A person is understood by him in terms of relationship rather than substance – the essence of personality is relationality. God as a person would therefore establish contact with other persons and build an existential relationship with them through created beings. Their 'divine depth' was emphasised. Humans could then establish a relationship with individual beings, reaching their depth and entering dialogue with God. As a result of this interaction, they could respond to the call they received from them, interpreting it as a call originating in the divine foundation of existence. Halík thus sees an analogy between the personality of God and that of man. However, it should be borne in mind that a person is understood in terms of a relation, not substance. Ultimately, he adopts a personalist vision of God as a depth of reality with which man can establish interpersonal relations through individual beings (Jasiński 2023, 106–8). Perhaps Caputo, who is close to the idea of a divine call coming from the world, would also be inclined to accept such a vision of the person and personality of the divine being.

In thought of Caputo, we are thus dealing with a certain phenomenology of depth and a transition from the metaphysical concept of transcendence to the imaginative phenomenology of “transascendence.” A person who is in contact with the world and the phenomena occurring in it imagines something that is unimaginable (Caputo 2019, 114–16, 119–20). Caputo calls this theopoetics. It constitutes a new form of theology. Its starting point is man’s contact with reality, the depth of which he discovers and captures through images (Caputo 2016, 6–9, 79–85). It is practiced in a new ‘hermeneutical situation,’ which source is reality and the possibility of imagining it in various ways (Caputo 2006b, 104, 113–16). The result is the imagination of divinity as something in which the world is subjectified. It seems that Caputo thus approaches the concept of panentheism, which emphasises both the presence of divinity in the world and its transcendence in relation to it. However, this transcendence cannot be understood in a spatial sense, but rather as an existential depth hidden in the observable components of the physical world. It reveals the presence of divinity but does not reduce it to its own dimension.⁵ Both its transcendence and the autonomy of the world are preserved. Caputo thus joins a long line of panentheism proponents, including Martin Buber, Alfred N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Nikolai Berdyaev, Philip Clayton, Tomáš Halík, and David R. Griffin.

For Caputo, panentheism is an example of cosmopoetics, i.e., a certain theological conception of the world. It is an expression of the reconciliation of the mystery of the world with the mystery of divinity, which are intertwined (Caputo 2016, 13; 2019, 188, 193,

⁵ Panentheism would be an alternative position to pantheism, which highlights the identity of God and the world. Proponents of panentheism point out that although the two realities interpenetrate, God transcends the world. He exists in a different way (absolute and necessary) than natural beings (relative and accidental). Reflection on His existence in panentheism takes place more on an existential level (the possibility of human experience) than on a metaphysical one (the existence and nature of God). The transcendence of the divine being refers to the depth of its existence, hidden and experienced in the immanence of the physical world. This emphasises another level of its existence and its ontological basis of natural reality (Jasiński 2023, 104–6).

203–6, 209–11, 218; 2022a, 26–27, 74–80). However, according to the American philosopher, panentheism is exposed to certain dangers. Firstly, its consequence is to reduce all beings to a fundamental unity, and thus to disregard their multiplicity (Caputo 2016, 56–61; 2019, 208, 220–24). Secondly, it contains speculative metaphysics that is impossible to verify. The only version of metaphysics acceptable to Caputo must be based on data from physics, which is subject to various interpretations. Their multiplicity leads to a pluralism of metaphysics, which is a weak way of understanding the world (Caputo 2019, 227–38, 267–68; 2022a, 307–8). Caputo therefore proposes replacing strong metaphysics with weak onto-hermeneutics.

In this situation, panentheism also becomes a weak thesis, as it is one of many possible interpretations of the world. Caputo also proposes understanding it in terms of axiology, i.e., as a form of unconditional affirmation of the world (Caputo 2022a, 14, 319–20). The task of human beings would therefore be to remain in contact with the things that exist in the world and to recognise their value.

Some therefore emphasise that Caputo has undergone a kind of ‘materialistic turn’ because he focuses on the material world as a place where divinity can be experienced. Furthermore, there has been a shift from theopoetics to theopraxis, because contact with the world has moral and political implications (Ullrich 2020, 164–65, 170–77). Man not only experiences the depth of reality but is also called upon to transform it.

3. Divinity as a Call and a Promise

Caputo also emphasizes that divinity is not only an event taking place in the world and its existential depth, but also a call demanding a response from man. Divinity does not so much exist in the world and in events, but rather calls, urges, and invites man to act through them (Caputo 2007, 54–57; 2016, 108). According to the American philosopher, divinity is therefore not a being, but a call to action. It is weak, but at the same time unconditional. It is mainly positive and affirmative in nature. Man is responsible for giving it an existential response (Caputo 2003, 17; 2006b, 113–24; 2011b, 65–69; 2016, 24–26, 29, 41–42, 62–65, 90; 2019, XI–XIV, 35, 65, 136–39; 2020,

14–15, 59–60; 2021b, 564). A similar idea is shared by Halík, who believes that God is not an existing being, but rather exists between existence and non-existence. He comes to human being as a call, a proposition, an opportunity (Halík 2006, 289–93; 2007, 17; 2010, 39–40). Therefore, He demands a response and a commitment from every man.

It is worth noting that every call and every response is according to Caputo subject to construction and deconstruction on the part of humans (Caruana and Cauchi 2016, 25). Each time, humans must interpret a given call in a certain way and then provide an appropriate response. Both the interpretation of a specific call and the manner of response are conditioned by specific circumstances and are binding only at a given moment for a given individual. By responding, humans contribute to the existence of divinity in the world.

Caputo also understands divinity as a call in the spectral order. It appears as a weak force of spectral haunting and unconditional insistence. The call is made in various ways, but its author is not always identifiable. Therefore, we are faced with many challenges and many ideas about its author. Their interpretation and understanding depend on a specific historical and cultural context. However, the call is always a form of haunting and inspiration from an undefined and elusive specter of divinity (Caputo 2016, 66–67; 2019, 32–35, 37–42; 2022a, 249–58).⁶ Caputo therefore emphasizes the need for a radical hermeneutics of the event and the gentle call to humanity contained within it (Caputo 2006b, 113–24; 2022a, 34–37). In this regard, divinity has become a specter haunting the world, and the source of the call is the immanence of being (Hanson 2015, 13–21). Divinity thus lacks reality. It becomes merely a phantom appearing in human contact with the world, taking the form of a mysterious call flowing to man. It is interpreted in supernatural terms because of its unconditionality.

In this context, Caputo also raises the issue of God's transcendence, which he understands as a weak force of call (Caputo 2006b,

⁶ It is worth noting that Caputo draws his idea of haunting from Derrida (Caputo 1997b, 118–22; Derrida 2006, 9–10, 63, 202).

38–41). It consists in an unconditional call for an event to respond and thus realize God (Caputo 2007, 64). Transcendence is therefore not opposed to immanence but takes the form of a call from it. For Caputo, it is linked to the immanence of the world, which contains various forces and qualities (Caputo 2011a, 90). It seems that Caputo would be close to the concept of “immanent transcendence” or “transcendence in immanence.” However, it is not ontological in nature, but rather moral (Caputo 2007, 66–70). Transcendence consists in an unconditional call that reaches man from individual events. It must be read and given an existential response.

What can a person be called upon to do? Caputo draws attention to several issues. First, events can call for the actualization of the potentialities inherent in beings (Caputo 2007, 48, 51). Second, humans are mobilized to remove all forms of suffering from the world. Suffering is understood broadly, as Caputo sees it in people suffering from various diseases and physical ailments, as well as in the poor and hungry. He emphasizes that God himself identifies with them. However, liberation from suffering depends on the activity of man himself (Caputo 2019, 77–92, 100–101, 126–27, 138–39). Caputo particularly emphasizes the need to respond to the call coming from the physically suffering man. In doing so, he distinguishes between the carnality in the proper sense (body) and the improper sense (flesh). In the Greek tradition, he argues, the carnality was always perceived as proper, i.e., active, healthy, and fit. In Jewish culture, on the other hand, it was considered improper, i.e., limited, corrupt, and painful. (Caputo 1993, 194–95, 203–6, 213–14, 258). The flesh of another person is therefore a kind of call addressed to a person who can respond with sensitivity to their suffering and contribute to changing the situation. What is more, for Halík human suffering and pains of the world take on a religious dimension. They are a space for experiencing the presence of God and a place for encountering Him as a compassionate being (Halík 2004, 37, 40; 2010, 18, 21, 25; 2022, 120, 193–95). This experience should lead people to adopt an attitude of compassion towards others and to provide them with concrete help.

According to Caputo, the call to liberation from suffering is even more important because the consequence of the dominance

of the previous, rather abstract version of metaphysics and religion was the detachment of man from a life marked by many difficulties (Caputo 1987, 1–3). Although humans were provided with a stable foundation for their existence and received explanations for all its ambiguities (Caputo 1997b, 5), they were at the same time removed from actual life and its real challenges.

For Caputo, events are therefore an expression of divinity calling for action (Caputo 2006b, 28–29; 2007, 49, 65). Each of them is a carrier of truth, which for Caputo is not some abstract construct, but rather a call to action. Its purpose is not information, but transformation (Caputo 2006b, 300; 2020, 70, 114–15, 161). Caputo thus emphasizes the importance not so much of orthodoxy as of orthopraxy, not so much of interpretation as of the metamorphosis of reality.

According to Caputo, each call should, on the one hand, shake the world (Caputo 2007, 82) and, on the other hand, provoke a change in thinking about God (Caputo 2006b, 42–45; 2011a, 83–84, 95). Caputo thus proposes a new idea of God. He is no longer a powerful sovereign, but a sensitive, suffering, and even mortal being (Caputo 2003, 12–16, 25–26; 2019, 220–22). For the powerful God was crucified (Caputo 2006b, 41–42, 54). In Caputo's view, however, it was not so much God himself who was killed, but rather a certain idea of God. In its place, a new idea emerged, one that should inspire sensitivity to reality and suffering, as well as inspire action and transformation of the world (Caputo 2016, 108). Caputo once again weakens the divinity of being. It was first reduced to an event, then to a specter, and finally to a call for the transformation of the world.

Even more so because, according to Caputo, events contain not only an element of summons, but also of promise. They have the structure of what Derrida calls the unpredictable “advent” (Caputo 2003, 18–20; 2007, 48, 50, 52; 2011a, 91). In this regard, the American philosopher describes divinity itself as a promise to which man must open himself in an attitude of hospitality (Caputo 2006b, 259–78; 2011a, 89; 2016, 99). People should be open to the otherness that comes with events (Caputo 2001, 4–6; 2022a, 258–61; 2022b, 244–45). For Caputo, otherness is synonymous with divinity. Therefore, he is not interested in God's

existence as an autonomous being but understands divine being in terms of otherness experienced in everyday events, challenges, and promises. Divinity would be only a symbolic representation of otherness.

According to Caputo, the object of the promise is primarily the mysterious Messiah who is to come. He is a special promise, the possibility of which is sustained by its impossibility, and he opens us up to the otherness that is coming in the event (Caputo 1997b, 162). The experience of divinity would therefore be understood by Caputo as the occurrence of something impossible, which shatters the horizon of possibilities and expectations. He called divinity the possibility of the impossible (Caputo 2005, 20–21, 24–25, 30–41; 2006b, 101–12) or something new and impossible (Caputo 2001, 5, 10–11). Caputo thus affirms both the possibility (Caputo 2022b, 244–45) and the impossibility (Caputo 1997b, 288–89) of divinity. In this way, he is close to the intuitions of Kearney, who believes that potentiality ranks higher than actuality (Caputo 2021b, 553–55) and emphasizes Derrida's sphere of impossibility. However, Caputo makes a kind of synthesis, as a result of which divine being is the possibility of the impossible (Caputo 2006b, 114; 2016, 68–69; 2019, 47). Caputo's plan of consideration of the Absolute is therefore not so much the sphere of actual being as various possibilities of being.

Caputo emphasizes elsewhere that his understanding of divinity is similar to Derrida's concept of *différance* or Plato's *khora* (Caputo 2020, 77–82). However, he notes that the God of revelation cannot be identified with them for at least two reasons. First, they do not have the same reality as God. Second, they cannot be the source of the existence of things, but only the principle of differentiation (Caputo 1997a, 87, 93, 96–97; 1997b, 2–3, 8–9, 12, 342–43). Their common feature, however, would be that they are a condition for the possibility of beings (Caputo 1997b, 2–3; 2022a, 27–36). Caputo thus emphasizes their transcendentalism and thus approaches the thinking of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. However, he attributes a different meaning to transcendentalism. For the philosopher from Königsberg, it was related to the conditions of the possibility of cognition, while for the American thinker, it refers to the conditions of the possibility of differentiating between beings.

The main subject of Caputo's promise is therefore the coming of Messiah. The background to his reflections on this subject is Derrida's concept of messianicity and Messianism. Messianicity appears to him as a sign of openness to the future, which is essentially unpredictable and beyond all calculation. It is not understood in religious terms, but as a primary and general structure of experiencing openness to the future and waiting for something else to appear. Messianism, on the other hand, is a specific way of realizing this openness to what has come in a specific space-time and in specific historical forms (Caputo 1997b, 117, 134–37; 2011b, 51–52; Derrida 1999, 27–30; 2006, 112, 211). Derrida understands this messianicity as openness to the advent of a model socio-political system, which he equates with ideal democracy (Derrida 2005, 110). It seems that the American philosopher is moving in a similar direction. He does not expect the arrival of a specific Messiah, but rather some vaguely defined other form of the world, especially social reality.

Caputo emphasizes that humans expect something undefined to arrive in the present and give it various names, including God, the kingdom of God, justice, and gift (Caputo 1993, 17; 1997b, 77, 79–80; 2006b, 158–61). In his opinion, we are dealing with a mysterious messianic promise, which relates to the prospect of the appearance of specters referred to by various names (Caputo 1997b, 79, 118; Caputo 2022b, 246). It seems that man expects something new and undefined that will never fully come to pass. It will take various forms, but none of them will be final.

Elsewhere, Caputo speaks of so-called “weak messianicity,” which is understood as a promise of justice and a call to bring it about (Caputo 2016, 48–50). The advent of messianicity is thus understood as the advent of justice (Caputo 1993, 15; 1997b, 80), and the advent of justice is linked to the advent of democracy (Caputo 1997a, 123). He therefore expects the emergence of a just social order, which for him is a new form of democracy symbolized by divinity. It seems that it will never take its final form but will always be in the process of becoming. According to Caputo, it is not enough to interpret the world, but it must also be changed. He articulates both the religious and political dimensions of transformation. In this way, he approaches the so-called theology of liberation. Thus, like

Derrida, he moves from a theological to a political understanding of messianicity. They are close to the ideas of the German philosopher Carl Schmidt, who pointed to the dependence of socio-political discourses on religious concepts.

This is clear in Caputo, who believes that the advent of a new democracy is linked to the prior emergence of a new idea of God. In his view, this idea always accompanies specific social systems. In the case of democracy, however, it is not the idea of God as a powerful sovereign, but as someone who is sensitive, suffering, and calling (Caputo 2003, 12–16, 24–26; 2019, 220–22). Messianicity is thus understood in terms of the expectation of a just democratic system, which embodies divinity and fulfills its promise. However, the establishment of such a system would be a kind of call that man himself would have to face. In this situation, the question also arises as to which form of democracy, given the multitude of types, would be appropriate.

Conclusions

The purpose of the above considerations was to present the concept of divinity developed by American philosopher John D. Caputo. His reflection on this topic is conducted from the level of specific phenomena, rather than from the perspective of any revelation. Therefore, he does not consider God as an omnipotent, omniscient, and most perfect person, but primarily as an absolute Mystery appearing as a specter in certain dimensions of reality. Caputo refers primarily to human experience, intuition, and imagination. It seems that he does not want to resolve the problem of the real existence and nature of divinity. Moreover, he suspends his belief in the existence of supernatural reality, especially the existence of a personal God. However, Caputo wants to reach some mysterious primordial reality, commonly referred to as God. It appears like a specter, is subject to various interpretations, and affects the existence of a particular person in the form of the dynamism of events, the experience of the depth of being, and the call and promise read in the world. Caputo emphasizes the pluralism of its approaches and draws attention to its various manifestations. Therefore, on the one hand, man

should deconstruct existing concepts of divinity, and on the other, open himself to experiencing it in immanent reality. The question of God's existence and nature is replaced by the more important question of how He is experienced in the world. Thus, he moves from the level of theory to the level of practice. The God of mystics becomes closer to him than the God of philosophers.

It is worth noting that Caputo bases his reflections not on metaphysics, but rather on phenomenology and hermeneutics. He does not focus on real being and does not seek to discover its ontological structures, but rather on phenomena and their interpretation. In Kant's terms, he is not interested in the noumenal sphere, but in the phenomenal one. In this situation, God is not a real being but is understood as an ephemeral apparition appearing in contact with the world. It has the character of a certain dynamism and a call coming from the depths of being. Its transcendence can be considered in ontological (depth of being) or moral (call to action) terms. Therefore, it is difficult to speak of a personal God, but rather of an undefined divinity. It also seems that Caputo, when speaking of it, does not mean some specific entity, but rather a new moral order of the world. This finds its expression especially in the form of a call to establish some kind of ideal social order. This order would be identified with a just democratic system that will emerge in the future. However, the form of this system has not been precisely defined. Divinity would only be its symbol, as it would be the result mainly of human activity.

Caputo remains under the influence of Eckhart's thinking. What prevails in him is not so much the need to know God as a person, but rather to experience some form of divinity. He is not interested in "God in himself," but only in "God for us." He also follows in the footsteps of those thinkers who moved the discourse on God from the realm of theory to the realm of practice – for divinity is another name for a new moral order that would require implementation as a result of the active attitude of all individuals. It would come into being in this world in the indefinite future. The time of its arrival would ultimately depend on man himself.

Koncepcja boskości według Johna D. Caputo

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest krytyczna analiza koncepcji boskości, której autorem jest amerykański filozof i teolog John D. Caputo. Warto podkreślić, że boskość jest dla niego nie tyle osobowym Bogiem, ile przede wszystkim Tajemnicą jawiącą się jako widmo. Caputo podkreśla pluralizm ujęć boskiej Tajemnicy i zachęca do otwarcia się na różne jej przejawy. Drogą do jej ujęcia nie jest metafizyka, lecz fenomenologia i hermeneutyka. W każdym przypadku zostaje ona zawężona do wymiaru wewnątrzświatowego. Boskość jest więc rozważana w kategoriach wydarzenia, głębi bytu, wezwania i obietnicy. Te cztery zasadnicze aspekty są przedmiotem analiz, wyznaczając jednocześnie ich strukturę. Szczególnym przedmiotem obietnicy jest nowy porządek moralny. Jego wyrazem jest idealny ład społeczny, utożsamiany z doskonałą demokracją. Boskość byłaby jej symbolem.

Słowa kluczowe: boskość, wydarzenie, głębia bytu, wezwanie, obietnica

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