

Religious Rhetoric in Responses to Atrocity

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The paper examines the uses of religious language in responses to atrocity. Arguing that the wholesale rejection of all religious language leaves us stuttering as we seek to respond to atrocity, I will suggest ways in which religious language draws our attention to the extremity of the events of atrocity, the necessity for response, and the proper stance to take as listeners to the testimonies of those who have suffered. Arguing that the unreflective use of religious language can obfuscate (and even participate in) the atrocity to which it seeks to respond, I will explore the ways religious language has been used to relegate perpetrators to a realm safely far away from us, to mystify the stark realities of suffering, and to gloss over or justify atrocity.

Jennifer Geddes focuses on religion and literature, particularly 20th century literature, religion and culture, evil and suffering, hermeneutics, Holocaust studies, literary theory, philosophy of religion, ethics, and postmodern thought. She is currently working on the book projects *The Rhetorics of Evil* and *Hermeneutical Tyranny: Interpretation, Power, and Violence in Kafka* (manuscript in final revision). Geddes publications include: "Banal Evil and Useless Knowledge: Hannah Arendt and Charlotte Delbo on Evil after the Holocaust." *Hypatia*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 104-115. Editor, *Evil After Postmodernism: Histories, Narratives, Ethics* (Routledge, 2001). Co-editor with John K. Roth and Julius Simon of *Salvaging the Fragments: Moral Thinking and Action Post-Holocaust* (to be submitted to Oxford University Press for review in Spring 2006). Editor of *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture* (incl. special issue on religion and violence).