A peculiar and fascinating aspect of many responses to mass atrocities is the creative and eclectic use of religious language and frameworks. Some crimes are so extreme that they “cry out to heaven,” drawing people to employ religious vocabulary to make meaning of and to judge what happened, to deal with questions of guilt and responsibility, and to reestablish hope and trust in their lives. Moreover, in recent years, religious actors have become increasingly influential in worldwide contexts of conflict-resolution and transitional justice. This collection offers a critical assessment of the possibilities and problems pertaining to attempts to bring religious – or semireligious – allegiances and perspectives to bear in responses to the mass atrocities of our time: When and how can religious language or religious beliefs and practices be either necessary or helpful? And what are the problems and reasons for caution or critique? In this book, a group of distinguished scholars explore these questions and offer a range of original explanatory and normative perspectives.

Thomas Brudholm is Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen and Consulting Researcher at the Danish Institute of International Studies. He has his Ph.D. in philosophy and his publications focus on conceptual and normative issues arising in the aftermath of mass violence. Brudholm has been visiting scholar at prestigious research institutes in Denmark and abroad, including CERI/Sciences Po (Paris). He has edited and contributed to several books, and, in 2008, he published Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive. He has contributed articles to the Journal of Human Rights, the Hedgehog Review, Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History, and Law & Contemporary Problems (forthcoming).

Thomas Cushman is Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Sociology at Wellesley College. He is the author and editor of many books on topics including counterculture in Russia, genocide, George Orwell, human rights, and the war in Iraq. He is the founder and was editor-in-chief of the Journal of Human Rights. He is an honorary Professor in the Social Sciences at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa and a Faculty Associate of the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale University and has been Visiting Professor at Brandeis University and Birkbeck College, University of London.
The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by

THOMAS BRUDHOLM
University of Copenhagen

THOMAS CUSHMAN
Wellesley College
This volume is dedicated to the memory of Eric Markusen, who brought us together.
Contents

List of Contributors ix
Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction: The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity
Thomas Brudholm and Thomas Cushman 1

Part I: Between Necessity and Impossibility:
The Role of Religion in the Face of Atrocity

1 Religious Rhetoric in Responses to Atrocity
Jennifer L. Geddes 21

2 The Limit of Ethics – The Ethics of the Limit
Arne Grøn 38

3 The Intolerability of Meaning: Myth, Faith, and Reason in Philosophical Responses to Moral Atrocity
Peter Dews 60

Part II: Does It Help to Import Religious Ideas:
Reflections on Punishment, War, and Forgiveness

4 Can We Punish the Perpetrators of Atrocities?
Antony Duff 79

5 The Ethics of Forgiveness and the Doctrine of Just War:
A Religious View of Righting Atrocious Wrongs
Nigel Biggar 105

6 On the Advocacy of Forgiveness after Mass Atrocities
Thomas Brudholm 124
Part III: Sociologies of the Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocities

7 Making Whole: The Ethics and Politics of “Coming to Terms with the Past” 157
   John Torpey

8 When Faith Meets History: The Influence of Religion on Transitional Justice 174
   Daniel Philpott

9 Genocidal Rupture and Performative Repair in Global Civil Society: Reconsidering the Discourse of Apology in the Face of Mass Atrocity 213
   Thomas Cushman

10 Violence, Human Rights, and Piety: Cosmopolitanism versus Virtuous Exclusion in Response to Atrocity 242
    Bryan S. Turner

Index  265
Contributors


**Thomas Brudholm** is Associate Professor in the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen. While editing this book he was Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies. He is author of *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008) and of several articles in international journals on responses to mass atrocities. He has coedited a special issue of the *Journal of Human Rights* on “negative” emotions (vol. 5, 2006) and two Danish books: on genocide commemoration and on the problems facing a variety of different disciplinary approaches to the aftermath of genocide.

**Thomas Cushman** is Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Sociology Department at Wellesley. He is the founding editor and editor-at-large of the *Journal of Human Rights* and the editor of the *Routledge International Handbook of Human Rights* (2009). He is currently at work on a book entitled *A Recovery of Liberal Internationalism: A League of Democracies*. 

© Cambridge University Press  
www.cambridge.org
List of Contributors

Peter Dews is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Essex. He has published widely on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy, with a focus on German Idealism, the Frankfurt School, and modern French philosophy. He has held numerous visiting positions, including at the University of Konstanz, at Columbia University, and at the New School for Social Research. He is the author of *Logics of Disintegration* (London: Verso, 1987, new edition 2007), *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1995), and *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

Antony Duff is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Stirling, where he has taught since 1970. He is the author of *Trials and Punishments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* (1990); *Criminal Attempts* (1996); *Punishment, Communication and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and *Answering for Crime* (2007); and coauthor of *The Trial on Trial III: Towards a Normative Theory of the Criminal Trial* (2007). With three colleagues, he is now working on a large research project on the issue of criminalization.

Jennifer L. Geddes is Research Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. She is the author of numerous articles and book chapters on evil and suffering, Holocaust testimony, and the ethics of interpretation, as well as the editor of the award-winning journal, the *Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture; Evil after Postmodernity: Histories, Narratives, Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and *The Double Binds of Ethics after the Holocaust*, with John K. Roth and Julius Simon (forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan).

Arne Gron is Professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at the University of Copenhagen, as well as Cofounder of the Danish National Research Foundation's Center for Subjectivity Research. He is the author of numerous publications on ethics, philosophy of religion, theory of subjectivity, and history of philosophy. He is the coeditor of *Subjectivity and Transcendence* (Tuebingnen, Germany Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

Daniel Philpott is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He specializes in religion and global politics and in the politics of transitional justice. He is the author of *Revolutions in*...
List of Contributors


John Torpey is Professor of Sociology at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Among other works, he is the author of Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: On Reparations Politics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) and editor of Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). His current work focuses on the idea of “American exceptionalism.”

Bryan S. Turner was Professor of Sociology at the University of Cambridge (1998–2005) and at the National University of Singapore (2005–2009) and is currently the Alona B. Evans Distinguished Visiting Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, United States. He edited the Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology (2006) and recently published Vulnerability and Human Rights (2006) and Rights and Virtues (2008). He is currently editing the Routledge Handbook of Globalization Studies and The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion.
The chapters in this volume were first presented at a conference on “The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity,” which was held in Copenhagen on May 12–13, 2006, and hosted by the Danish Institute for International Studies. The conference was made possible by the cooperation and generous support from several sources. The major source of funding came from the University of Copenhagen, which embarked on a university-wide research initiative from 2003 to 2007 on “Religion in the 21st Century.” The aim of this initiative was to bring together researchers from all of the University of Copenhagen’s six faculties in order to combine the study of separate themes into an overall picture of religion in the twenty-first century. The idea behind the present volume was developed on the basis of discussions in this research network, and we wish to thank its steering committee for its support of the conference and for its funding of the preparatory work. Additional funding was provided by the Danish Institute for International Studies, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, the Danish National Research Foundation’s Center for Subjectivity Research, and Wellesley College and the Journal of Human Rights. We would like to thank all of these institutions for their interest in the project. A special thanks goes to Nanna Hvidt and Arne Grøn for their enthusiastic and generous support of the entire project.

Thomas Brudholm also wishes to thank the Danish Research Council for the Humanities for its support of the editorial work.