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## PREFACE

The dialogues in this volume took place over a span of nearly four years and feature some of the leading thinkers of religion in our time. The idea for the book began in 2011, at a meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Francisco, following a discussion of my recently published *Anatheism: Returning to God After God*. After a particularly animated session, my colleague Jens Zimmermann suggested extending the exchange into a volume on the theme of God after God. The aim of the volume would be to show how the anatheist question attracts the keen attention of many of the best minds of our generation, from philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Jean-Luc Marion, Gianni Vattimo, and Jack Caputo to theologians such as David Tracy and Catherine Keller and cultural theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Simon Critchley, and James Wood.

As it happened, I was offered several occasions to engage with these thinkers at different conferences, round tables, and colloquies—hence the variation of tone and voice from one exchange to the next. Some bear the mark of official academic seminars (panels held at Harvard with Caputo and at Boston College with Tracy, Westphal, Wood, and Zimmermann). Others resemble more informal and casual encounters—Vattimo in a Vilnius café, Keller in a Manhattan tearoom, Critchley in a New School office, Marion in a Paris bureau. And others again—Taylor and Kristeva—have the impromptu character of conversations over a kitchen table, followed by epistolary clarifications. I mention these different

contexts simply to note, at the outset, the diversity and range of dialogical styles owing to the specific circumstances of each meeting. But in all exchanges, I think it is fair to say, one senses a drama and urgency about certain timely and topical questions: What is still sacred after the death of God? What can we continue to call holy after the disappearance of the Alpha God of triumphal might and metaphysical certitude? Might anatheism open an alternate way of dialogue beyond the sterile polarization of theism and atheism?

Each of my interlocutors rose to the challenge of debate, offering his or her own singular wisdom and perspective. Some migrate toward what I would call “atheist anatheism,” others more toward “theist anatheism,” while most cross over and back between the two in bold and adventurous journeying. For anatheism has many mansions, each with its antechambers, cellars, attics, and guesthouses. There is room for every traveler eager to engage the ultimate questions of meaning and value, immanence and transcendence, humanity and divinity.

It has been a real honor to host the ten guests in this volume, and I am immensely grateful for their generosity and seriousness of sojourn. I am also grateful to Jens Zimmermann for marshaling the various contributions into their present shape, and we both extend our thanks to Wendy Lochner and Christine Dunbar of Columbia University Press for their stalwart and unstinting support for the project from beginning to end.

Finally, a special thanks to my Boston assistants, Murray Littlejohn, Matthew Clemente, and Sarah Horton, for their vigilant attention and enthusiasm, and to Sheila Gallagher for her cover image, *Pneuma Hostis*, which I believe vividly captures the anatheist wager that divinity dwells in the least and the last of things.

Richard Kearney, Boston College, December 2014

## REIMAGINING THE SACRED

Richard Kearney Debates God