

## EDITORS' PREFACE

### Paul L. Holmer and the Religious Address

Paul L. Holmer (1916–2004) served as Professor of Philosophy, University of Minnesota, from 1946–1960, before becoming Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology, Yale Divinity School, from 1960–1987. Following his death in 2004, the Holmer family gave The Paul L. Holmer Papers, comprising thirty-eight archival boxes, to the Yale University Library, Divinity Library Special Collections.

In surveying this wide expanse of Holmer's papers, the editors seek in the three volumes of *The Paul L. Holmer Papers* to illuminate three important aspects of Holmer's contributions to theology. In volume 1, we have painstakingly reconstructed Holmer's unpublished, and much-rumored, book-length manuscript on Kierkegaard, under the title *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*. In volume 2, *Thinking the Faith with Passion: Selected Essays*, we present a selection of seminal essays surveying the wide scope of Holmer's thought on Kierkegaard; Wittgenstein; theology, understanding, and faith; and emotions, passions, and virtues.

In this the third volume of *The Paul L. Holmer Papers*, *Communicating the Faith Indirectly: Selected Sermons, Addresses, and Prayers*, we present another aspect of Holmer's thought and work as philosopher and theologian: his reflections upon, and practice of, the sermon or religious address. This volume seeks, first of all, to show how Holmer was not only a philosopher and theologian but also (in the best sense) a rhetorician of religious and Christian concerns, witnessed by the fact that he was much in demand as a public speaker.

Part One of this volume, "Holmer on the Sermon, Liturgy, Ministry, and Spirituality," focuses upon Holmer's reflections on the sermon, the functions of liturgy, and the tasks and challenges of Christian ministry. Part Two turns to Holmer's own practice of the religious address, in selected sermons, addresses, and prayers. Taken

together, both parts illuminate the close connection between, first, Holmer's philosophical and theological reflections on the sermon or religious address in the context of the practice of ministry, and second, his own concrete practice as a Christian communicator.

This book is intended for both academic and general readers. It should be of interest to philosophers, theologians, pastors (especially preachers), and college and seminary students. Academically, this volume hopes to contribute to our understanding of the broad topic of "religion at Yale" in the late twentieth century, complementing, for example, the recent publication of William Sloane Coffin's sermons from his "Riverside Years" (admittedly, after Coffin left Yale). Holmer represents another dimension of religious life at Yale, also of great influence. In particular, generations of Holmer's students at Yale Divinity School will be interested in this volume, remembering that many of these "remarks" and "addresses" circulated in typescript at Yale Divinity School.

This book is intended also for general readers with an interest in the challenges of religious and especially Christian communication, including homiletics, liturgy, Christian spirituality, and the tasks of ministry, as well as readers interested in the recent history of American religious thought and life. Yet one must hasten to add that Holmer himself would insist that just as Kierkegaard spoke of "my reader," the one who is "built up" in faith, hope, and love, so too Holmer would wish that these essays and religious addresses would speak first of all to one's own self-concern and "upbuilding."

As is clear too in volumes 1 and 2 of *The Paul L. Holmer Papers*, Søren Kierkegaard and Ludwig Wittgenstein stood at the heart of Holmer's own thought on these matters of communication and upbuilding. It was in particular Kierkegaard's reflections on "indirect communication" and Ludwig Wittgenstein's concerns for the distinction between what can be said and what can be shown that stimulated Holmer's own reflections on the challenges of the religious address. At the heart of the sermon or religious address is the challenge not only to communicate information directly, but also to elicit capacities in the hearer or reader. For Holmer, the challenge but also the glory of the sermon or religious address is to communicate not so much the "language *about* faith" as the "language *of* faith." Indeed,

Holmer insists that the sermon or religious address is in no wise inferior to formal theology, the latter often falsely thought to be the “real understanding.” Rather, the sermon is itself the understanding of the Christian faith, insofar as it displays the “logic” of Christian faith, showing the shape of Christian faith not only in its beliefs, but in the way that it shapes our human capacities and challenges too our “emotions, passions, and feelings.” And for Holmer, the sermon or religious address, if at all Christian, first of all challenges.

We have used the phrase “sermon or religious address.” Just as Søren Kierkegaard insisted that his own non-pseudonymous writings be seen as “upbuilding discourses” rather than “sermons,” since Kierkegaard said that he wrote “without authority,” so too Holmer, while sometimes referring to his addresses as “sermons” if they were delivered in the context of Sunday worship, just as easily calls them “remarks” or “meditations,” perhaps too in the spirit of one who himself, not being ordained, lacked “authority.” Yet perhaps too, if heard rightly by the sermonizer duly ordained, there is shrewd irony in Holmer’s self-abnegation.

Some of these essays and addresses have been previously published. A number of previously unpublished writings appear here in print for the first time, and are from the Paul L. Holmer Papers in the Special Collections of the Yale Divinity School Library.

Many of these essays and addresses date from before concerns arose about inclusive language. The editors have not attempted to conform Holmer’s writings to current practice, but beg the reader’s indulgence and understanding, and note that Holmer’s own practice on this shifted in later years, as evidenced in these selections.

Brief comments may be offered on the background of each of these writings.

Part One, “Holmer on the Sermon, Liturgy, Ministry, and Spirituality,” opens with Holmer’s “Indirect Communication: Something about the Sermon (With References to Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein),” originally published in the *Perkins Journal* in Spring 1971, based upon Professor Holmer’s lecture on the campus of Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, sponsored by the Willis M. Tate-Willson Lectureship.

“About Liturgy and Its Logic” appeared in the journal *Worship* in January 1976.

“The Minister, a Reconsideration: *Meditatio, Oratio, Tentatio*” appeared in *Reflection*, published by Yale Divinity School, in March 1975.

“Spirituality and Self-Deception,” 1980, is previously unpublished.

Part Two, “Sermons, Addresses, and Prayers,” opens with three addresses, “Remarks on the Occasion of a Baptism,” “Remarks on the Occasion of a Marriage,” “On Speaking the Truth in Love: Remarks on the Occasion of an Ordination.” All are undated, written in the 1970s, and are previously unpublished.

“An Advent Sermon: The Gospel According to Luke 1:26–38,” undated, is previously unpublished.

“On Worshipping God: A Meditation on Psalm 73,” written in the 1970s, is previously unpublished.

“On Receiving Mercy” was a sermon preached at the Church of Christ at Yale, in Yale University’s Battell Chapel, Palm Sunday, 1977, and is previously unpublished.

“On Being Steadfast: Jesus Christ, the Same . . .” appeared in *Reflection*, published by Yale Divinity School, in November 1973.

“Making Sense Christianly: Baccalaureate Sermon,” appeared in *The Princeton Theological Seminary Bulletin*, 1977.

“The Transforming Power of Otherworldliness” was a sermon preached at Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, on June 9, 1985, and is previously unpublished.

“On Believing in Heaven” appeared in *Pietisten*, Spring 1990.

Part Two concludes with a selection of Holmer’s public prayers, previously unpublished, offered at Yale Divinity School (December 1972; December 11, 1973; and at the Baccalaureate Service, May 19, 1974).