

Foreword

WHEN PAUL HOLMER CAME from the University of Minnesota to join the faculty of Yale Divinity School, his impact upon students and colleagues was both immediate and long lasting. He brought a rare combination of Socratic style, a new form of philosophical theology, and a deep brand of Lutheran piety to his teaching and writing. He had been used to pugnacious repartee with philosophers such as May Brodbeck, Herbert Feigl, and Wilfrid Sellars, and with the aftermath of Wittgenstein in so-called “linguistic” or “analytic” philosophy. His concern for conceptual clarity, fused with genuine religious earnestness, was arresting. These qualities are discernible in the pages that follow.

Students came to understand that theology was not a “subject matter” so much as it was a passion, an activity that was required by faith, but an intellectual activity that could also generate and sustain faith. Yet Paul Holmer never mistook theological discourse for God, nor for living faith. Thus we can fasten Anselm’s famous dictum *fides quaerens intellectum* as well as Augustine’s “I believe in order to understand” over the doorpost of these essays. Holmer did not suffer empty-headed comments and questions gladly. He could spot, as Kierkegaard might say, academic and religious “twaddle.” What piqued him was the thoughtless or casual theological remark that led nowhere because it had no process of thought behind it. Clichés were to be avoided. Paul Holmer was unhappy with philosophical and religious pretense. His desire was to get readers and hearers to “think for yourselves.”

The reciprocity between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein in Holmer’s essays becomes more palpable the more one reads. Both figures demand a certain austerity of thought—one luring readers into the task of existing and to the possibility of becoming a Christian, the other requiring strenuous, if disconcerting, conceptual labyrinths of inquiry in order to avoid philosophical misunderstandings. Yet both

reveal how taking thought requires more than intellectual finesse. Holmer's teaching took students and colleagues into the depths of this reciprocity. I once used I. A. Richards' term "interanimation" for this feature of his work. He grudgingly observed that it was too elegant a term for the hard work involved. Clarity that makes a difference for the life of faith, and for the integrity of speaking, and for the practice of the moral life—that is what Paul Holmer was after.

These essays were often first heard *viva voce* in his lectures, in seminar discussions, and in "common room conversations." It was my good fortune to have jointly taught for several years with him at Yale a now famous course entitled "Emotions, Passions, and Feelings." During those years we heard him working live in the classroom on ideas that appear in several essays, published and unpublished, especially those essays found here in Part Four ("Theology and Emotions," "The Human Heart—The Logic of a Metaphor," and "About Emotions and Passions").

The publication of this collection gives us a sense of how this uncommon teacher has made a lasting impact on students and, indeed, on a distinctive way of thinking theologically.

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