

Editors' Preface

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.

Having carefully reviewed the Holmer Papers Special Collection at Yale Divinity School, the editors believe that the publication of these volumes of *The Paul L. Holmer Papers* will serve 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 In volume 1, we have painstakingly reconstructed Holmer's unpublished, and much-rumored, book-length manuscript on Kierkegaard, presented under the title *On Kierkegaard and the Truth*. In the present volume 2, *Thinking the Faith with Passion*, we have chosen some of the seminal essays that represent the wide scope of Holmer's thought and interests. In volume 3, *Communicating the Faith Indirectly*, we present another aspect of Holmer's thought and work as philosopher and theologian, including both his reflections upon, and his practice of, the sermon or religious address.

In volume 2, we have selected essays that represent four significant areas of Holmer's contributions as a scholar and teacher: his essays on Kierkegaard; Wittgenstein; Theology, Understanding, and Faith; and Emotions, Passions, and Virtues. Holmer was famed as a teacher at Yale Divinity School, with a range of courses that sum up well his extensive interests: "Readings in Kierkegaard," "Wittgenstein and Meaning," his two-semester course in "Philosophical Theology," "Classical Theism and Its Critics," "Emotions, Passions, and Feelings," and "Vices and Virtues."¹

1. On Holmer as a teacher, see David Cain's afterword, and our Appendix, the articles or book chapters by Stanley Hauerwas, Mark Horst, Robert C. Roberts, and William H. Willimon, as well as Phyllis Holmer's letter responding to Willimon.

In composing this volume of selected essays, we have chosen published and unpublished essays. Many of these essays, whether published and unpublished, circulated at Yale in typescript during Holmer's tenure at the Divinity School. As Holmer's colleague David H. Kelsey shared with us in personal correspondence, Holmer's essays represent "a piece of the recent history of American theology that has been remarkably influential on the current scene through Paul's students, but folk in the field generally have no sense of where it started and its context-of-origin."² This volume attempts to fill in that context-of-origin, allowing further appraisal of Holmer's thought, including his strenuous reflections on Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, as well as his influence on recent interest in emotion concepts and virtue ethics.

The intended audience for this volume is academic, and will include philosophers, theologians, ethicists, and literary scholars. Because Holmer wrote in a classical British essay style that avoids technical jargon, many of the essays will appeal also to a broad educated public.

These essays may also shed some light on the complex range of questions concerning how Holmer's work may relate to the "Yale School" of "postliberalism," especially in George Lindbeck's employment of Wittgenstein in *The Nature of Doctrine*. Early in his book, Lindbeck states, "I am particularly indebted to my colleague Paul Holmer for his understanding of what is theologically important about Wittgenstein. Some sense of the lessons he has tried to convey over the years is provided by his essay 'Wittgenstein and Theology.'"³ Holmer's essay, originally appearing in Yale Divinity School's *Reflection* in 1968, is reprinted in this volume. While many people are aware that Holmer contributed something to the "Yale School," they are unclear concerning exactly what it was; indeed, Holmer is often mentioned as an important but shadowy figure. We hope that these volumes might fill that lacuna, giving insight both into Holmer's contribution, but also the distinctiveness of his thought.⁴

2. David H. Kelsey, personal email correspondence, August 9, 2005.

3. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 14n28 (see Appendix).

4. Few have explored the connection between Holmer and Lindbeck. An exception is the recent, sympathetic account in Robert Andrew Cathey, *God in Postliberal Perspective*, 49–82 (see Appendix).

For indeed, Holmer's thought is distinctive. Holmer was careful to eschew labels and resisted being associated with any particular school of thought. As will be clear in these essays, Holmer did not advocate for a school of "Kierkegaardian theology" or "Wittgensteinian theology," or indeed a "theory" at all, this part of Holmer's strongly "anti-metaphysical" and "anti-theoretical" bent. Holmer's concerns were, rather, following Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, to foster close attention to the particularity, the "depth grammar" or "logic" of the concepts employed in "the language of faith," with a reminder that this language is "foundational" in the sense that the language of faith is "constituted by concepts that are capacities."⁵

Brief comments may be offered on the background of each of these writings. All previously unpublished materials are from Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library, Paul L. Holmer Papers; the sources of previously published essays are noted below.

Holmer's engagement with Kierkegaard, amply demonstrated in volume 1, is reflected in volume 2 as well. Striking about Holmer's approach to Kierkegaard is how Holmer eschewed popular "textbook" characterizations of Kierkegaard as an "existentialist." In addition to the book-length manuscript that we have constructed in volume 1 of *The Paul L. Holmer Papers*, Holmer wrote a great number of essays on Kierkegaard, and we have selected four essays on Kierkegaard for Part One of this volume that highlight several features of Holmer's understanding of Kierkegaard. We offer first Holmer's essay, "Kierkegaard and Philosophy," presented at the September 1966 University of Notre Dame conference on "Philosophy in an Age of Christian Renewal," and reprinted from Ralph M. McInerny, ed., *New Themes in Christian Philosophy* (1968). In the Holmer Papers collection, Holmer's handwritten note on the top of the first page of a typescript of this paper states: "read at Moral Sciences Club, Cambridge University, Feb. '65." The second essay, "Kierkegaard and Logic," is reprinted from *Kierkegardiana 2* (1957). Holmer had extended experience teaching logic at the University of Minnesota, and this significant essay highlights Holmer's own interests in Kierkegaard's deep concerns with logic. We then include "Kierkegaard and Theology," another important essay from 1957, reprinted from *Union Seminary Quarterly*

5. Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings*, 145 (see Appendix).

Review, that highlights Holmer's reading of Kierkegaard on meaning in religious discourse, the importance of passions and interests, "the pragmatic significance of the person of Jesus Christ," and "re-reading the human situation." Finally, we include Holmer's remarkable essay on Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, "About Being a Person," previously published in the volume edited by Robert L. Perkins, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals* (1981).

Part Two includes three essays on Ludwig Wittgenstein. The first essay, "Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard: The Subjective Thinker," undated and previously unpublished, links these two thinkers, particularly relating Wittgenstein's "forms of life" with Kierkegaard's "stages on life's way." The second essay, "Wittgenstein and the Self," is reprinted from Richard H. Bell and Ronald E. Hustwit, editors, *Essays on Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein: On Understanding the Self* (1978). The essay presents a close and detailed reading of Wittgenstein's writings, focusing on Wittgenstein's explorations of the concept of selfhood and personal identity. This is followed by "Wittgenstein and Theology," published in Yale Divinity School's *Reflection* in 1968, the essay that Lindbeck cites in *The Nature of Doctrine*, in which Holmer advocates not for a "Wittgensteinian" theology, but "something more modest," in untangling conceptual knots concerning theology, belief, and knowledge of God.

Part Three of this volume turns to "Theology, Understanding, and Faith." It begins with Holmer's polemical essay, "The Academic Game and Its Logic," undated and previously unpublished. This essay on the logic of "understanding" attacks the "logical morphology of scholarly writing and the lecturing style," including "comparing and contrasting, classifying and subsuming," rather than, more humanistically, letting "the imagination and thought of [an] author become our own." In the next essay, "About Linguisticity and Being Able to Talk," undated (but no earlier than 1974) and previously unpublished, Holmer engages the phenomenological tradition concerning "language," in Gerhard Ebeling, Martin Heidegger, and Professor Calvin O. Schrag. The next two essays, "About 'Understanding'" and "About Understanding and Religious Belief" are both previously unpublished, from around 1977, and show Holmer's attempt to explore the particular shape of "understanding" and "not understanding"

as complex first-order human capacities (or incapacities), logically distinct from second-order theological reflection. Finally, we include Holmer's "The Nature of Religious Propositions," reprinted from *The Review of Religion* (1955), wherein Holmer teases out the question of the cognitivity of "religious propositions," against both metaphysics and emotivism. This early essay may be fruitfully read in relation to Holmer's later reflections in *The Grammar of Faith* (1978).

In Part Four we conclude with some of Holmer's significant essays on "Emotions, Passions, and Virtues." Holmer was a pioneer in the philosophical and theological exploration of both emotion concepts and virtue ethics. Turning first to emotions, we include "Theology and Emotions" (1973) and "About Emotions and Passions" (ca. 1973), both previously unpublished. This is followed by another unpublished paper from ca. 1973, "The Human Heart—The Logic of a Metaphor." One of Holmer's great concerns in his own reflection and in his teaching centered on the logic of "happiness," and so we include "About Happiness and the Concept, 'Happiness,'" previously unpublished, and written around 1975.⁶ In "Something about What Makes It Funny," from *Soundings* (Summer 1974), Holmer explores laughter and humor too as eminently human capabilities. Finally, the last two essays present Holmer's reflections on "vices and virtues." In "The Case for the Virtues," an unpublished typescript from around 1976, Holmer investigates "virtue ethics" as an important corrective over against much ethical theorizing. "About Thankfulness," undated and unpublished, fittingly concludes this theme of emotions, passions, and virtues, as Holmer turns to a careful reflection upon the logic of a particular virtue, that of gratitude, seeing gratitude as an emotion, an attitude, a disposition, and nothing less than a virtue, one that, as the apostle Paul makes clear, can be commanded: "Let there be thanksgiving" (Eph 5:4).

Holmer wrote many of these essays 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 note that Holmer's own practice on this shifted in later years.

6. An earlier version of this essay appeared as "Theology and Happiness," in *Reflection* (March 1970).