

PREFACE

Our Man Godfrey

R. Scott Clark

IN THE 1936 COMEDY “My Man Godfrey,” William Powell starred with Carole Lombard playing an unlikely household servant. A son of privilege, he walked away from a world of opportunity and found himself, quite unexpectedly, serving others. Down on his luck, a colorful family took him in and found that they needed him as much as he needed them.

In this analogy, Bob Godfrey has the William Powell role. The scion of an influential family in Alameda, California, his father was mayor of Alameda and his grandfather was a political reformer. Godfrey Park in Alameda is named after Bob’s grandfather.¹

Bob has never been “down on his luck,” but the parallel holds in other ways. Having studied with some of the most elite scholars in his field, Bob could easily have turned his back on the Reformed churches in favor of a prestigious academic post. He did not. He took a position teaching history at Westminster Theological Seminary and when the seminary established an outpost for Reformed orthodoxy in Southern California, they called on Bob to become the first Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary California.

In the first fifteen years of his teaching career in California, Bob’s work was not purely historical. He also served as Associate Pastor of the Escondido Christian Reformed Church, the denomination in which he came to faith and which had first taught him the Reformed theology, piety, and practice. He returned the favor by entering into a lengthy struggle to call his denomination back to its confessional roots.

Near the climax of that controversy, in 1993, the Board of Trustees of Westminster Seminary California called upon Bob to become the third president of the seminary and he took on the burden with characteristic grace. Like Powell’s tenure as a valet, Bob’s presidency was somewhat unexpected. Better known for his scholarship, wit and charm than for a bent for administration, Bob might have been a surprising choice as president. More than once I have watched him looking for a sheaf of handwritten

1. See W. Robert Godfrey, *An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004).

class notes amidst the clutter that is his office. When the board appointed Bob as president, however, they were not appointing a tidy organizer but a courageous leader with a vision for the future of the seminary and of Reformed Christianity and its place in our time.

In his inaugural address,² he set forth his plan for the seminary. In short, the mission of the seminary was to fulfill its unique calling: prepare ministers to be faithful to God's Word as understood by the Reformed confessions. In the years since his inauguration, the seminary has grown numerically and physically. The student population is roughly twice what it was in the early 1980s. The library has expanded and we have a chapel building which serves as a lecture hall and conference center. We have grown in less tangible ways too. Like other teen-agers, the seminary found its own identity.

In 1993, however, no one knew exactly what challenges awaited our new president. Tensions which had long existed in the CRC came to a head in 1995, and Bob was thrust to the center of the formation of a new federation, the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Throughout his career, Bob has been a central figure in other important discussions in our time, such as the defense of the orthodox Protestant doctrine of justification. In the providence of God, Bob found himself in the center of the so-called "Shepherd Controversy," at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, which erupted in 1974, the same year in which Bob was appointed there.³ During that controversy and in the years since, Bob has promoted among the evangelical and Reformed churches a return to the Biblical and Reformation doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Thus, it was not entirely surprising when, in 1998, as the Evangelical Theological Society held a plenary session to discuss the Evangelicals and Catholics Together statement, they turned to Bob Godfrey to represent the Reformation view.

There were more challenges to come. Between 1998 and 2001 the seminary would undergo the most significant change in faculty since its founding. In that period, several senior faculty retired and others moved to other fields of service. The most severe crisis occurred in the early morning of August 15, 2000 when Bob received a call telling him that his colleague, friend, and long-time Vice-President for Development, Keith Vander Pol,

2. See chapter 14 in this volume.

3. On this see R. Scott Clark, ed. *Covenant, Justification and Pastoral Ministry: Essays By the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 16–19, 48–52, 291–92, 327–28; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2003); A. Donald MacLeod, *W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy*, McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), ch. 15; Guy Prentiss Waters, "The Theology of Norman Shepherd: A Study in Development, 1963–2006," in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. Robert L. Penny (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 207–31.

had died unexpectedly. In the months that followed, the seminary and its president would be tested severely.

In these episodes and others, however, we have seen abundant evidence of God's mercies. Under Bob's leadership, our Lord has provided us with several outstanding new members of our faculty and staff. We are now reaching thousands more readers with seminary publications and recordings.

In this collection of essays, several of Bob's friends, colleagues, and former students have contributed essays as a way of acknowledging his work as a historian, theologian, and churchman. Each of the contributions relates to some theme on which Bob has made a contribution either in the academy or in the church. The volume is in three parts: historical, theological, and ecclesiastical, reflecting the range of Bob's interests and work.

In section one, Sinclair Ferguson studies John Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Darryl Hart reflects on the fate of J. Gresham Machen amongst those who might have been expected to be sympathetic to his vision for Reformed theology. Richard Muller explores some of the more difficult aspects of the seventeenth-century doctrine of God and provides more evidence that the popular caricature of Reformed theology is unsustainable. R. Scott Clark considers the significance of Sister Aimee Semple McPherson for understanding the nature of American religion and the place of the Reformed churches in it. Ryan Glomsrud concludes the section by re-considering the work of arguably the most significant theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth.

The second section begins with Mike Horton's essay which reckons with implications of the Reformed approach to piety (Word and Spirit) as distinct from the approach of the Anabaptists (and their modern successors). David VanDrunen raises the question of where we should seek to create a Christian culture. In his study on the history of the interpretation of Romans chapter 7, Joel Kim surveys four important sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpretations of Romans 7. Finally, in this section, John Muether grapples with Bob Godfrey's long-time fascination with the literature and theology of the American author, John Updike.

In the third and final section, R. C. Sproul contributes a meditation on the contemporary significance of Martin Luther's struggle for the gospel. Kim Riddlebarger's essay surveys some of the more significant arguments in favor of frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. Hywel Jones reflects on the necessity and practice of preaching the doctrine of regeneration, and Cornel Venema takes account of a case in which Reformed confessionalists have struggled to bring about a modern day Reformation. Because it captures and communicates so succinctly, clearly, and powerfully the great themes of Bob's work at Westminster and his hope for Reformed theology, piety, and practice this section concludes with his remarks given on the occasion of his inauguration as president of Westminster Seminary California in 1993.

Bob Godfrey has spent a career thinking about the topics and questions discussed in this volume. His work and teaching has informed, stimulated our research and teaching. We offer these essays in the hope that others will be moved, as we have been, to carry on Bob's work as a scholar and churchman in the confessional Reformed tradition.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank several people who helped to make this project possible, beginning with our contributors for their willingness to honor Bob, Young-Mi Cha who designed the graphics, Dawn Doorn who saw the value of the project, Barb Van Solkema for keeping it under her hat, Chris Coldwell for lending his publishing expertise, Wes Bredenhof for proofreading the text, and John Bales and Zachary Purvis for putting together the bibliography. Finally, we wish to thank the entire staff at Westminster Seminary California who usually labor quietly in the background but who are nonetheless valiant for truth.