



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

CONTENTS

3 MEDITATION
The Holy Anointing Oil

4 FROM THE EDITOR

6 THE ALCOVE
All For Good

11 FROM THE RAMPARTS
Revisiting COVID

17 HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S BANNER ARTICLES
Article 157: The New King and His Kingdom: The Fulness of Time
(continued)



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Moreover the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, and of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: and thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy. And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations. Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you. Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people.

—Exodus 30:22–33

The Holy Anointing Oil

How precious was the holy anointing oil among the children of Israel. It was an oil that made God's weary, wandering, wilderness people glad. For the holy anointing oil was a symbol of the Holy Ghost, who brings to his weary people the refreshing and soul-gladdening knowledge that they belong to God in Jesus Christ. And the anointing of the tabernacle, the furniture, and the priests was a symbol of the Holy Ghost's sanctifying the entire service of God to God. By this the people would be assured that it was God's will and good pleasure that his lowly people dwell with him. Let us consider the holy anointing oil and wonder at the mercy of our God to us.

God delivered to Moses the exact recipe for compounding the holy anointing oil. The costly spices—myrrh, cinnamon, sweet calamus, and cassia—would give the oil a warm and pleasing fragrance that would perfume everything it touched. “All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia” (Ps. 45:8). Every part of the service of God must be anointed with the holy

anointing oil: the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, the table of showbread and all its vessels, the candlestick and all its vessels, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its vessels, the laver and its base, Aaron the high priest, and Aaron's sons the priests. The recipe was sacred—this exact blend was to be used only for anointing that which belonged to the service of God. The anointing was sacred—no one other than the priests was to be anointed with the holy anointing oil.

The anointing oil was so precious because it was a symbol of the Holy Ghost. Just as the Spirit is the *Holy Spirit*, so the anointing oil was the *holy oil*. In the Old Testament “my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” is represented by the “golden oil” (Zech. 4:6, 12). And how the Holy Ghost makes God's mourning and sinful people glad! For Jesus is anointed with the Holy Ghost to save his sinful people from their sin and death. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was

with him” (Acts 10:38). “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Ps. 45:7). “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn” (Isa. 61:1–2).

In Jesus’ anointing with the Holy Ghost, the weary church in the wilderness beholds God’s will

to save her and to dwell with her. While sojourning in the world, she loses her life every day anew. But behold! The tabernacle and all its service were anointed with the holy anointing oil of gladness. And Jesus Christ, who is God’s tabernacle with men, is anointed with the Holy Ghost. By this God declared to his church that she has an eternal dwelling with him through Jesus Christ. How encouraging for the church. In Christ she is given “the oil of joy for mourning” (Isa. 61:3).

Weary church, behold the holy anointing oil. Behold the Spirit of Christ. Behold your salvation and your comfort.

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

With this issue *Reformed Pavilion* begins its fourth volume year. The beginning of a new volume year at *Reformed Pavilion* is a small thing. It is a small thing by the standards of the world, which has no idea that the magazine even exists and which would laugh us to scorn if it ever did find it. It is a small thing even by the standards of religious publications, most of which can offer man a heaping dose of the religion of man, which is the one religion that it pleases man to hear. But *Reformed Pavilion* is a small thing, and the beginning of a new volume year is a small thing.

It is fitting that *Reformed Pavilion* be a small thing, for it stands in the service of the church and truth of Jesus Christ, which are small things in the world. According to all earthly appearances, the kingdom of man is grand and glorious. Man’s cause has universal approval, is endlessly fascinating, and enjoys constant acclaim. But the church of Jesus Christ, with such despised members and an even more despised head? All men join in dismissing, ignoring, and persecuting her as small and irrelevant. It is in the service of this small church, this small head, and this small truth that *Reformed Pavilion* stands.

Yes, *Reformed Pavilion*, as she begins her fourth volume year, is a small thing beginning a small thing in the service of a small thing. And we who write and we who read might be tempted to become discouraged and to despise this day of small things.

But who hath despised the day of small things?

The Lord God, the great creator of the heaven and earth and all that is in them, has not despised such a day. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords and King of kings, has not despised such a day. Listen to the word of God concerning the building of his house in the days of Zerubbabel and therefore God’s word concerning the victory of his cause in this world in all ages:

The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth. (Zech. 4:9–10)

What a precious promise for us whose flesh can only see defeat! Let us, who according to our flesh despise the day of small things, look by faith. Whom do we see? Why, there is Zerubbabel, prince of Judah, in the line of the promised seed, builder of God's house, and type of Jesus Christ! And what do we see by faith? Why, Jesus Christ building his house! His hands have laid the foundation, and his hands shall also finish it. The cause of his truth shall not fail but always proceeds from victory to victory without the slightest setback, much less defeat. Oh yes, the church shall always be small, and her members shall die every day anew in this world. But her smallness and her dying is not her defeat. Far from it! Her smallness and her dying only mean that the strength of man can avail nothing in this cause. But who needs the strength of man? For the Lord of hosts hath sent his word, and his seven eyes—the Spirit of the Lord, who sees and knows all things—have swiftly carried his word through the whole earth. And the house of God—his beloved church—is built.

Have you despised the day of small things? Have I? Seeing our prince building his house by his truth, we shall be glad. “For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel” (Zech 4:10).

And so the small thing *Reformed Pavilion* begins the small thing of its fourth volume year in the service of the small thing that is the truth. How spiritually grand! And how gracious is our God to give us to see it!

Not only has God given us to see by faith that his truth goes forth, but God has given us several articles in this issue for our edification. In *From*

the Ramparts Dewey Engelsma evaluates Prof. Cory Griess' re-evaluation of how the churches handled COVID. Dewey's article not only exposes the emptiness of Griess' *Standard Bearer* article, but it also instructs God's people in the true lesson that we must learn from the COVID years. Hint: the lesson is not flattering to man, but it does greatly glorify God.

Elsewhere in this issue, Henry De Jong presents his reworked English translation of Herman Hoeksema's Dutch meditation on Romans 8:28. Upon what higher peak of faith could we begin volume 4 than with knowing that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose?

Finally, those who retrieved this issue of *Reformed Pavilion* from reformedpavilion.com may have noticed an update to the website. The main goal of the update was to better organize the past issues of *Reformed Pavilion* and make them more accessible. A goal that we continue to work on is making the past issues searchable. At present, there is a simple search function that will return all the issues where a particular word or phrase is found. The reader will then have to open each indicated issue and perform a search within the issue for the word. It is not perfect, but it is better than what we had before, which was nothing. We will be working on a better search function in the months to come, Lord willing. Beyond that, the updated design gives the website a much-needed boost to its usability. And be sure to check out the blog, where from time to time we will be able to post individual articles from past issues.

With that, may the Lord bless this new issue and this new volume for his glory and for his people's profit.

—AL



The following is a meditation by Herman Hoeksema on Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” The meditation was originally published in Dutch in the September 1, 1928, issue of the *Standard Bearer*.¹ The meditation first appeared in English translation in the May 15, 2016, issue of the *Standard Bearer*.² Over the last few months the English translator, Mr. Henry De Jong, revisited his 2016 translation and updated it. Nearly ten years after it first appeared in English, and nearly ninety-eight years after it first appeared at all, Hoeksema’s meditation on Romans 8:28 is now presented here for the edification of a new generation of readers. What a joyful way for volume 4 of *Reformed Pavilion* to begin!

The text upon which Hoeksema meditates is marvelous. All things work together for our good! And by faith we know it! It would be impossible for us to glimpse (but the Lord sees) all the circumstances of God’s people in which this passage has been read and recited for comfort. In the hospital bed, all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. In poverty, in prison, in affliction, in persecution, on the battlefield, on the deathbed, at the graveside, in loneliness, in grief, in loss—all things work together for good! From the day the Holy Spirit first inspired Paul to write it until the Lord returns on the clouds of glory, Romans 8:28 has been and will be a foundation-stone of the believer’s comfort. In the midst of all things’ appearing to be against him, the believer knows that all things work together for his good.

Just as the text is marvelous, so Hoeksema’s meditation on it is marvelous. Hoeksema carries the sound doctrine of the text to the reader, as Joshua and Caleb once carried the abundant fruit

of Canaan to the children of Israel. By apt illustration, by masterful turn of phrase, and by faithful exposition, Hoeksema expounds the text. May the Lord—whose text it is and whose Spirit alone can carry the text to our hearts—bless the meditation for his people’s comfort yet today.

A couple of notes yet to whet the reader’s appetite. First, Hoeksema often used ellipses (...) in his devotional writings as a mirror of his own meditation and as an aid to the reader’s meditation. The ellipses that appear in this translation are from the original. As a man’s soul is filled with the wonder of his God as revealed in the scriptures, it becomes almost too much for him to take in. He must pause, reflect, exhale, rejoice, or even sob as he anticipates what must come next. The reader will find Hoeksema’s ellipses altogether appropriate for those moments, lending the meditation an air of reflection and a cadence of devotion.

Second, readers of *Reformed Pavilion* will undoubtedly find the last few lines of Hoeksema’s meditation to be intriguing. Hoeksema writes of enjoying the knowledge that all things work together for our good *in the way of...of what? In the way of God’s love alone.*

And what does “God’s love” mean? Does it mean our love for God? Someone might try to make the case that Hoeksema meant in the way of our love for God. After all, Hoeksema speaks in the context of our fighting the good fight and of our keeping God’s commandments. But if Hoeksema meant our love for God, it would simply be one of the many times that our Protestant Reformed fathers used the phrase *in the way of* to describe good works as the inevitable fruit of faith. However, if Hoeksema meant our love for God, it certainly would not carry the meaning that the Protestant Reformed Churches give to the phrase *in the way of* today. Today that phrase is used to add the works of man as a means of

¹ Herman Hoeksema, “*Alles ten Goede*,” *Standard Bearer* 4, no. 23 (September 1, 1928): 529–31.

² Herman Hoeksema, “All for Good,” trans. Henry De Jong, *Standard Bearer* 92, no. 16 (May 5, 2016): 362–65.

salvation alongside faith. No one may appeal to Hoeksema's meditation as justification for today's abomination.

But there is better evidence in Hoeksema's meditation that by "God's love" he meant God's love for us, not our love for God. The reader will see this as he meditates on the text alongside Hoeksema, for the emphasis of the entire meditation is on what God has done and does, not what man has done or is doing. And knowing by faith the love of God for him, the believer knows that all things must work together for his good! What tremendous heights of faith there are in this text for the child of God!

Our thanks to Mr. Henry De Jong for his labor of love in revisiting the translation of Hoeksema's

meditation. The undersigned can attest that our translator grappled with the translation during his breaks at work and his evenings at home and even on his vacation. The undersigned can also attest that our translator would quickly deflect any thanks, preferring that it go to others who offered feedback on the translation but especially insisting that any thanks go to our covenant God, whose truth it is.

With that, may the Lord use the following meditation to cause us to "know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

—AL

All for Good

by Rev. Herman Hoeksema, meditation in the *Standard Bearer*, September 1, 1928

Translated by Henry De Jong

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.—Rom. 8:28

Wondrous knowledge!
We know, we are assured in our minds, that all things work together for good for us—for us who love God, whom he has called according to his purpose!

We know that beforehand!

We are convicted of it, without taking into consideration things as they present themselves to us; yea, even when it seems to be in conflict with all our experience...

What wonderful conviction, rising above all earthly things!

Who, in relation to earthly things, would ever dare to elevate himself so boldly—who would have the courage, who would own the power to boast like that, though he be never so capable? Who now ever undertakes anything, setting himself to execute a plan, to realize a goal, who is himself not aware that the achievement of the goal set before him depends on many things over which he has

no control, so that he could never boast that they must all work together for good to him?

No, the presentation is even bolder here.

Place yourself before a ship at sea in the midst of a violent storm. The storm howls savagely and wildly; the sea rages high and rough, whipped up by a raging hurricane, whose violent waves break everything apart before them as they roll over the ship's deck. Everything creaks and groans as piece after piece of the vessel is carried away by the powerful waves into the dark depths, until little more than a miserable wreck remains. Ahead of the bow, not far away, are the approaching menacing cliffs of the rocky coast, upon which the ship that can no more be steered by the crew—a plaything of wind and waves—will in a few moments be dashed to pieces. The crew is desperate. But in the midst of all this, the captain stands calmly, and his men hear his steady and strong voice crying out to them above the roaring storm, "All this—storm and seething sea and menacing

cliffs—all is for us and must work together to bring us safely into the harbor!”...

So bold here is the jubilation, the faith-triumph of God’s people!

All things!

Without any qualification!

There is not a single exception to it.

Things in heaven and things on the earth and things in the depths beneath.

Living and non-living things, rational and irrational creatures. Angels, who are sent out for the service of those who shall inherit salvation, but also devils and evil spirits, who go about as roaring lions to devour what is to be devoured; brothers in Christ but also the ungodly and enemies of God and his covenant. The course of the sun and the circuit of the stars in the lofty firmament; the shapes and forms of the clouds; the falling of the rain; the eruption of the volcano; the jolting and shaking of the earthquake; fire and water; heat and cold; the roaring storm and the gentle wind; good and evil things; love and sorrow; the sweet and the sour; joy but also sadness; gladness but also grief; God’s word, which is a lamp for our feet and a light upon our path, but also stake and scaffold, spear and sword; peace but also war; health but also sickness; riches but also poverty; the rumbling of the thunder and the flashing of the lightning; abundance but also scarcity; life but also death...

All things work...

And all things also have their influence on us and on the course and direction of our lives.

They work together, they cooperate, they combine in the final product of their labors; they run and push, they toil and trot, they twist and turn themselves around and around, they roll and revolve, they seethe and burn; or they think and ponder, deliberate together and form their plans, they creep and crawl, they flatter or threaten or bless...

But always so, that the total fruit of all the labor of the whole creation must be for our good. Whether consciously or unconsciously, willingly or

unwillingly, all things must work together in order to bring us to the Father’s house and to place us in possession of the everlasting good!

We know that. In our hearts we are assured of it!

Upon the wings of faith, we may soar far above all the swarming mass of every creature and—in the light of God’s countenance—understand by faith that whatever moves or stirs works together for our good!

What wondrous knowledge!

For good to whom?

To men? To all? To me and to you?

No. Not to all is this knowledge; not to all is this glorying of faith; not all have the right so to boast.

For all things can also work together for evil. The ungodly, saith my God, never have any peace. Certainly all workers of unrighteousness grow and flourish. They spring up as the green herb. There are no bands in their death. They are not in trouble, as other men are. They are not vexed. They walk in broad, smooth ways. They enjoy more than the heart can desire. Prosperity appears their lot. And all that, in order that they would be destroyed everlastingly...

They do not know this.

Of this working of all things they have no awareness.

As the brute beast they are fattened up for the day of slaughter, yet they continue hastening to ruin, walking in their ungodliness.

Though they exalt themselves in their wickedness over against the righteous, all things still work together for their destruction!

But it is not so with them that love God.

Not as though they would boast in having that love of God or would seek in it a meritorious ground for why all things must work together for their good. God forbid! Also, not as though they had been transformed into lovers of God by the choice of their own will. If that were the case, then all this glorying and boasting of faith would

necessarily have to die on their lips. No, by nature, of themselves, they were just like the others: enemies of God, children of wrath, dead in and dead by sins and misdeeds, being hateful, hating God and each other. Nor could any call from a mere human voice bring about conversion in them. Should a voice ever try to call them to God, they would smother that voice; should a hand ever seek to draw them out of darkness into the light of God's presence, they would knock that hand off themselves, in order to stay in perdition. Filled with dreadful resentment against the living God, by nature they too would walk toward destruction...

No human work—precisely therein lies the power of the glorying of their faith—brought conversion in them.

But God called them!

Called them according to his purpose.

And that purpose lay rooted in the eternal love of the divine Father's heart!

For God had first loved them, and their love is but the fruit of God's eternal love. That is why they stand so firm. That is why they know such jubilation. Ere the mountains were brought forth or the earth revolved around its axis, in the timeless depth of eternity, God loved them with a love the depth and the height, the length and the breadth of which is to be measured only by the fearful cross of the Only-Begotten; the wondrous power of which is grasped—though never fully—only by him who, at that accursed tree, found redemption for his soul. That love, that incomprehensibly free, that unfathomably deep love, is the fountain of all things and the ground of the Christian's boast of faith. Out of the wondrous depth of that love arises God's eternally immutable purpose to glorify that people whom he loves with the very highest glory, to press them as children to his heart, as brothers of his Son to give them a place in the Father's home, as friends of God to have them live and dwell in his tabernacle eternally...

Out of that great love, according to that immutable purpose, he called them out of the darkness into his marvelous light!

He called them not with a human voice but by divinely irresistible persuasion. Called them by his all-powerful grace, by his Spirit and Word, laying hold of them in the heart, opening their blind eyes, piercing their deaf ears, pouring into their hearts the wondrous love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Thus they received God's love.

Therefore, they know that all things work together for their good.

For in that same purpose according to which he called his people, not only does their final destiny (the destiny of them that love God) stand eternally and unchangeably firm, but in it also the course and development of all things stand firm. Nothing stirs or moves, no angel goes out, no devil lies in wait for our destruction, no drop of rain ever falls, no drought burns, no star shoots in space, no little sparrow falls from the roof, except it all goes according to that same purpose. And everything, in its nature and development, place and destiny and working, stands so firm in that purpose that, in connection with the great whole, it must work together for the good, for the salvation, for the everlasting blessedness of them that love God!

Therefore, to the consciousness of faith, everything stands so firm.

Therefore, the love of God knows itself—amidst all the storms of life, amidst every disaster and pain and sorrow, in the midst of mishap and suffering—to be so secure.

Because that love did not arise out of ourselves, is not the fruit of our own choice of will, but of eternal mercy...

And because by that same eternal mercy all things have been ordained from before the foundation of the world...

Therefore, faith shouts joyously: we know that all things must work together for good to them that love God, whom he has called according to his purpose!

Therefore, that same faith does not hesitate to include all things, both good and evil, under God's purpose.

All things for good! To whom?
To them that love God!
His called ones!

We know!

Wondrous knowledge!

Glorious, blessed conviction! Blessed, glorious assurance!

Joyous triumph of faith over all things!

Oh, if our hearts would but continuously participate in that jubilation, and this exultant, victorious cry would but be heard from our lips in all the circumstances of life!

Ah, how frequently it is otherwise with God's child!

No, if all things go according to the flesh—if the heaven is cloudless above us and no storms are threatening; if the way is smooth and goes not through the depths; if there is no enemy in sight, and there is peace and no danger; if prosperity upon prosperity waits for us each morning anew, and there is no misery grimacing at us—then it is not difficult, then there is no point, then it requires no struggle, then it does not sound strange for us to exclaim that all things work together for good!

But when the way changes—when the path goes steeply into the heights or descends threateningly toward the depths; when in the distance the thunder already rumbles; when in body and soul, pain and grief become our lot; sadness, sorrow, and affliction fill the heart; sufferings lacerate our flesh and tear it up; the enemy gathers himself for battle; the sword is sharpened against us, and against us the bow is stretched

for Christ's sake; the scaffold is made ready, and fires are stoked at the stakes; when it is night and things seem hopeless...

Then to exclaim that all things work together for good, that is faith! That is the language of triumph! That is God-glorifying!

And then, ah, then so often we stand perplexed at first! Then, in place of joyful jubilation, so often fearful complaint comes over our lips! Then the despairing cry so readily escapes the anguished breast: all these things are against me!

And yet also then is it eternally true: all things work together for good!

And precisely then, there is the greatest need for that courage of faith.

Precisely then is our faithful, covenant God most glorified by that jubilation of love!

O may the Lord, the source of all good, the fountain of all grace, constantly and overflowing-ly pour that love of God into our souls, whereby in the greatest griefs we are able to rest assured in the Lord! For, is it not so, as all things only work together for good to them that love God, so also the knowledge, the joyous assurance of this fact, is to be enjoyed in the way of God's love alone...

He holds us closely to himself! And we fight the good fight, keeping his commandments!

For there is no fear in love! And walking in love, we shall also be able to speak the language of love, of faith, of hearty confidence:

All things work together for our good!

Glorious knowledge!

Joyful glory!

—HH



Revisiting COVID

Introduction

An article in the April 2026 issue of the *Standard Bearer* caught my eye. It was written by Cory Griess, a professor in the Protestant Reformed seminary, and titled “Revisiting COVID and Worship Services.”¹ It caught my eye because during COVID I served as an elder at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. The pressure we faced from the rest of the denomination when we were the only congregation to decide to worship in spite of the governor’s order not to was strong, to put it mildly (as we shall see). Of course, the decision to suspend worship for many weeks and even months has not aged well, and many in the church world have come to see that the church did not acquit herself well. So I was very interested to read what Professor Griess’ recollection of those events was and to see what, if anything, we could learn from those events.

Any hope I had of reading a reflection on those days was soon dashed. Griess deliberately avoids going back to analyze the Protestant Reformed Churches’ response to COVID, saying, “The last thing I want to do is reignite that firestorm” (229). I found that statement to be curious. Discussing how we responded to COVID will reignite a firestorm of controversy? Why? Either we handled things well or we handled them poorly or some combination of both, but are there not things we can learn?

Instead, Professor Griess gives a list of five principles—“assertions,” as he calls them (229)—that should govern the church during such times. He says that following these assertions would be a “simpler approach to the questions that swirled within and around us” (229). That too is curious. Thinking back to the time of COVID, the question the church faced was simple. It could not have

been simpler. Should the church worship in the face of a government edict forbidding it or not?

What is odd about Professor Griess’ article is that the five assertions that he sets forth were not at all followed by the denomination in 2020, as we shall see. For Professor Griess to studiously avoid discussing, or even mentioning, what the denomination actually did during the time of COVID is, in my judgment, to do a disservice to his denomination and to the reader. The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), and any church for that matter, do not need a man’s telling them, or leaving the impression with them, that they did everything just fine. Our flesh never stops telling us that. We *know* we are doing everything correctly. Just ask us.

It is striking that Jesus, after he arose, met his disciples and—what? Affirmed them? Told them how well they were doing? No, he appeared to his eleven disciples and “upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart” because they did not believe those who had seen Jesus after he arose (Mark 16:14). Professor Griess, no doubt, believes he is doing his job when he studiously avoids saying anything that might be controversial. Still, he does not show love to his reader or his denomination by leaving the impression that all was well in the PRC during the COVID period. It was not. We stumbled and stumbled badly.

This is what the child of God needs to hear: You are not doing everything well. In fact, you must be rebuked for your unbelief and hardness of heart. According to your flesh, this is all you ever bring: unbelief and hardness of heart. Therefore, do not look to yourself, or to any other man, for help. Look instead to the one who was never unbelieving or hard of heart; and find all your righteousness, past, present, and future, in him alone.

¹ Cory Griess, “Revisiting COVID and Worship Services,” *Standard Bearer* 102, no. 8 (April 2026): 229–32. Page numbers for quotations from this article are given in text.

I believe that Professor Griess fails his readership in certain key ways. First, it is too late. Second, the article is shallow. I do not say this to be demeaning (as I am no stranger to shallow writing myself). Given how events actually transpired, Professor Griess owed his readers a better explanation and defense of his assertions. Third, for Professor Griess to characterize that time as a “controversy” over worship does not do justice to what actually happened in the year of our Lord 2020. Fourth, the problem is deeper than just Professor Griess’ not applying a remedy that the disease of the PRC demands. Worse, he speaks peace to a people about a time when there was no peace; and he leaves them unprepared for the next attack of the devil, whenever that attack will appear. He applies “untempered mortar” to a wall that has no strength and leaves his people with only the illusion of safety.

Too Late

Professor Griess lays out five principles—or “assertions,” as he calls them—that he believes the churches could use as they consider the question of worship in the face of a magistrate’s order forbidding it. The principles can be summarized this way: the church is commanded to physically assemble for worship, except when God in his providence has made it impossible; although the consistory has the right to decide for the entire congregation whether to gather or not, it may be wiser at times to leave that to the individual judgment of the congregant; and finally, the consistory and church members should comply with government regulations that do not bring them into conflict with the word of God.

Those are fine assertions, but the problem is that they come five years too late. Although it can be fitting to offer reflections on a controversy after it has passed, it is much more fitting for a pastor to offer leadership in the very heat of the battle.

Professor Griess informs the reader that he began developing these assertions as a guide to help his congregation during that fraught time.

Why did he sit on those assertions for five years? He did not find one opportunity during the COVID period to say a word about how terribly—and contrary to his assertions—the church was behaving? Was he afraid? That would not speak well of Professor Griess.

It is more likely that his views on these things have evolved since the COVID era. I say that because had then-Reverend Griess and his church followed the principles laid out in his article, his congregation would have disobeyed the government and worshiped; but that is not what happened. They closed up shop like everybody else. It is one thing to lay out these principles now, but it would have been appropriate and intellectually honest for Professor Griess to explain when his convictions changed. If they have not changed, then where was he when his brethren in the denomination were facing tremendous pressure for following the very principles that he espoused?

Too Shallow

Given the history during the COVID period, it was incumbent on Professor Griess to put more work into his article. It is far too shallow. The reason a deeper analysis is demanded is that during the COVID period, men offered views that ran contrary to the assertions now set forth by Professor Griess. For example, it is not enough for Griess to state that the church should disobey the magistrate when the magistrate orders churches to shut down. He writes, “The government does not itself have the right to cancel any worship service of the church” (231), and that is undoubtedly true; but it was not the received wisdom of the PRC during the time of COVID. Professor Griess knows this because he was on the receiving end of an email that denied this very point.

On March 23, 2020, Professor Cammenga sent an email to all of the Protestant Reformed clergy.² The occasion for his writing and distributing this email was the fact that Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church had decided to worship, despite the magistrates’ order to the contrary. In his email, in which he characterized the decision of

² For Professor Cammenga’s email and related documents, see Dewey Engelsma, “COVID,” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), April 19, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixtwo.com/2021/04/19/covid/>.

Byron Center to worship as “extreme and inconsistent,” Professor Cammenga made the case that the magistrate *did* have the authority to restrict the church’s worship and based that not on the relationship that exists between church and state but on the state’s motive. “The governor’s order takes into account exceptional circumstances, and is a precaution aimed, not at silencing the church, but at halting the progress of a deadly virus. The motivation and reason for the governor’s decision must be taken into account.”

This was also the view of Zion Protestant Reformed Church, as it was the majority view in the denomination. In the letter Zion’s consistory sent to Byron Center’s consistory, asking Byron’s elders to change their decision and stop worshipping, Zion wrote that because the civil magistrates had spoken, the decision had been taken out of the consistories’ hands.

But regardless of what we personally may think about the actual threat posed by the coronavirus, or what precautions we think might mitigate its spread, that decision has been taken out of our hands by the civil rulers. *They* have decided the threat is sufficient to warrant such a temporary restriction, and it is our obligation according to the fifth commandment to submit “to their good instruction and correction with due obedience.”³

Zion’s consistory went on to say that even if the civil magistrate was mistaken in forbidding worship, it would still be the duty of consistories to cancel worship services, as doing so would belong to patiently bearing with the magistrates’ weaknesses and infirmities (see Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 39).

Well, who is right? Here it would have helped the reader if Professor Griess had gone a bit deeper and explained that the state has no say over the worship of the church because the church is entirely a spiritual and heavenly institution. Here Professor Griess could have quoted the footnote

to article 36 of the Belgic Confession, which states that the church is “an independent territory alongside and altogether independent of the state, that it may be governed and edified by its officebearers, and with spiritual weapons only.” Or perhaps he could have referred to article 28 of the Church Order, which instructs consistories to make use of the protection of the magistrates; however, the consistories should take the utmost care “that for the sake of peace and material possession they may never suffer the royal government of Christ over his church to be in the least infringed upon.” This would have been especially helpful to the Protestant Reformed clergy who read the *Standard Bearer*, because the last statement they received from a professor on this subject was instruction that explicitly denied the truth that the church is a spiritual institution, claiming instead that it is very much an earthly institution.

It is incorrect to insist that the church “is not an earthly institution, but a spiritual and heavenly institution.” (Rev. Lanning’s letter.) That “[t]he church’s assembling for worship is a holy and heavenly meeting with God himself.” (Rev. Lanning’s letter.) This is patently false.⁴

There is no reason to believe that Professor Cammenga, Zion Protestant Reformed Church, or the rest of the denomination have changed their views on the subject since that time.

Another assertion of Professor Griess that demanded more thought is that it would be wise if the default position of the consistory were to hold worship services and then leave it to the consciences of the individual members whether they could attend. Professor Griess would have helped the reader if he had explained why this was the case, rather than just asserting it. I say that because that was not Professor Cammenga’s position. In his email, which he distributed to all the clergy of the PRC, taking Byron’s consistory to task, he wrote this about the decision of Byron

³ See Engelsma, “COVID,” for the letter sent by Zion’s consistory. Emphasis is theirs.

⁴ Professor Cammenga’s email to Protestant Reformed clergy.

Center's consistory to leave attendance at worship services up to the consciences of individual members:

If BC's consistory issues a *call to worship*, those who are healthy and able *must* come, or they are in neglect of the means of grace. If this is truly a principle matter, as BC's consistory contends, no one is left to individual judgment. They are obligated to submit to the authority of the church and attend the public worship services. (The emphasis is Cammenga's.)

I imagine that Professor Cammenga was left unconvinced by Professor Griess' assertion, as well he should be. Professor Griess does not prove his assertions; he merely states them as facts. Say what you will about Professor Cammenga's letter, but at least he attempted to prove his assertions.

It was incumbent on Professor Griess to prove his assertions, as many of them were not the received wisdom in the PRC back in 2020. In fact, a decision to worship based on the principles that Professor Griess lays out was characterized as "extreme and inconsistent." Well, which is it? There has been nothing to suggest that those views have changed. In this regard Professor Griess fails his readers.

What Controversy?

For Professor Griess to avoid discussing the controversy that took place in the PRC in 2020 over whether the church should worship is, at best, a cop-out. He leads the reader on by saying that, just as it can be healthy and helpful to revisit a disagreement between spouses after the heat of the argument has passed, it can also be helpful to revisit the question that faced the church in 2020: Do we worship or not? Yet he completely passes over that controversy and goes directly to his assertions, none of which the PRC followed in 2020.

There was a controversy in the PRC, but it was entirely one-sided. All the ire of the denomination was focused on one church: Byron Center PRC. The reason for that ire was that the consistory, under

the leadership of her pastor, Reverend Lanning, had taken the principles about which Professor Griess now writes and made the judgment that, based on those principles, the church should gather for worship.⁵ There was a "firestorm of controversy" (229) in the PRC, but it was all directed against Byron Center PRC.

In addition to the public tongue-lashing that the consistory received from Professor Cammenga, the then professor of dogmatics, the consistory of Byron Center PRC received another letter from a prominent and influential member of the denomination, in which he said that our decision to worship was "foolish" and a "bad witness" to our community. He went on to say that our decision to worship was a "blot" on God's name. Another influential member of the denomination wrote that what we were doing was "ignoble rebellion." Add the letter from Zion PRC and the pressure individual members of the consistory were receiving from within and outside our congregation, and it is no exaggeration to say that the whole period felt like being in a pressure cooker.

It is not intellectually honest for Professor Griess in any way to write or to leave the impression as if there were some noble controversy going on in the PRC in the year 2020. There was not. There was Byron Center PRC, which had decided to worship, and the rest of the denomination, united in their scorn, derision, and anger against her for doing so. I understand that over time our memory of events can become hazy. Still, certainly, only five years removed, Professor Griess has not forgotten what transpired in his denomination during the time of COVID, has he?

Untempered Mortar

In Ezekiel 13 the prophet is commanded by God to preach against those who seduce the people of Israel by saying, "Peace" when there is no peace and who have "daubed" a wall with "untempered mortar" (v. 10). It is a striking illustration. You can picture a wall that has been shoddily constructed, full of cracks, and that even the untrained eye can

⁵ You can find those documents in the blog post referenced earlier. They are worth rereading. Based as they are on scripture and the creeds, they have stood the test of time.

see will not stand under pressure. The wall will not offer much protection. Then a man comes to the wall and, instead of pointing out its weaknesses and addressing them, takes a bucket and begins applying thick coats of crumbly, unprepared mortar to give it the appearance of strength.

Professor Griess' article is more than just a cop-out. Rather, Professor Griess has come to the wall in the PRC with a bucket of ill-prepared mortar. There was no strength, no honor, in the PRC's behavior. The denomination was left defenseless by her leaders during that time. From the least member of the PRC to her greatest theologians, the PRC bowed their necks to Caesar and shut down the worship of Christ's church. And make no mistake, the government was functioning as Caesar. As one theologian put it, "when the civil magistrate does not own the truth and recognize it as a friend, then he will view it and treat it as an enemy. The state cannot be neutral; if it is not professedly Christian, it will, directly or indirectly, be the persecutor of Christianity."⁶ And behind all of it was the great persecutor of the church, Satan, who delighted to see the liquor store open and bustling while the parking lot of the church of Jesus Christ sat empty week after week, month after month.

Perhaps it was different in other states, but here in Michigan, when the governor decided to close certain businesses, she made a distinction between essential and non-essential businesses. So what happened was that Ace Hardware could stay open to sell some nuts and bolts, and the cannabis shop Bud Lightyear could remain open to sell its gummies, but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ was told to shut its doors. It shouldn't take a constitutional attorney, or even a very astute pastor, to realize something was dreadfully amiss with that.

What Professor Griess should have done out of love for his church was say, "Look, fellow believers! Look at what we did! We disobeyed God and instead bowed the knee to the civil state. And the one church that chose to worship we harassed and tormented!" Professor Griess should have

issued a call to repentance, but he didn't, and therefore no member of the PRC will repent of his sin after reading Griess' article. Not the theologian who came out against the pastor of Byron Center PRC, nor the elders of Zion PRC, who, instead of supporting their sister who was standing for the truth, weakened her hand. Neither will the men at Byron Center PRC who kept their families home during those weeks to stage a silent protest against the minister and consistory that dared to go against all of the other congregations in the denomination, which men all the while made sure that they didn't miss an hour of work or any time at the hardware store.

Instead, Professor Griess comes to that cracked, weakened wall, and he slathers on a thick coat of poorly-prepared mortar—his assertions—and speaks peace to people who are in great danger. He writes, "At such a time we believers felt the need more than ever to be gathered in the house of God for worship" (229). If that was true, we did a wretched job of expressing it. There was a noise, but it wasn't the people and elders clamoring to keep the church open; it was the sound of the church doors being slammed shut in obedience to the magistrates' order. Men made sure to go to work on Monday, and they made just as sure to keep their families home on Sunday. Griess' smooth words are judgment on a denomination that has already decided it will not hear a rebuke.

Not only does Professor Griess fail his readers by not calling them to repentance, but he makes sure they will not be prepared for the next attack of the evil one, should the devil again level such an attack against the PRC. What will defend them? Some poorly-argued assertions that do not even square with what the denomination actually believes? When the wall in the PRC falls again, as fall it shall, the question to Professor Griess will be, "Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?" (Ezek. 13:12).

What Then?

Okay, then, what can we learn from looking back at the church's experience during COVID? This:

⁶ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 151–52.

man is utterly and hopelessly vain in himself. When will we ever learn that truly “every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Ps. 39:5)? From the least of us to the greatest of us, we failed. Miserably. The pressure came on us, and we folded. The government said a cannabis dispensary could stay open, but the church had to close, and we said, “Okay.” We were content with it.

To speak personally, as I have written elsewhere, the only decision I made as an elder during that whole period that brought me any level of peace was the decision to close our church doors for three weeks because we had heard second-hand that an employee of one of our members might have COVID. For three weeks we would be like every other church in the denomination, with our doors closed, and we would not have to face hard looks and even harder words, and I loved it. At every vote I later cast to keep the church open, my heart was filled with fear. I quailed. *Craven* might be the best word to describe the condition of my heart. Some leader.

There are words to describe us during that time period. One of those words is *disobedient*. God’s word is clear about the worship of his church and the preaching of his word. He teaches that by the preaching of his word, he gives faith and that by the administration of the sacraments, he confirms it. We were content without either. But you can be sure we were at work on Monday and at the hardware store and big-box store throughout the week to make sure we did not go without our earthly bread.

Another word to describe us would be *unbelieving*. God promises to preserve his church so the gates of hell cannot prevail against her, but

when the order of the magistrate came down, we buckled. We were going to make sure that we did not get any untoward attention and certainly not any persecution! Although men cast in the teeth of Byron’s consistory the charge that we were making ourselves reprehensible in the eyes of the world (the wicked world!), you can be sure that the hearts of every member of that consistory were already feeling that keenly.

Behold the church of God in the world! Disobedient and unbelieving.

But behold our God! Faithful and only faithful to preserve his church against the rage of the whole world (Belgic Confession 27).

There is hope for the child of God and for the church of God in this world, but that hope is not found in men or in their assertions that show up five years too late. That hope is in God and in Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the church. It is not found in looking back and trying to find something good that we as men did during that time. You won’t find it; and if you do, you are lying to yourself and others.

The hope is that the righteousness of one who never quailed, who was never craven, who was never disobedient, who was never unbelieving, and whose zeal for God’s house consumed him is imputed to us, so that we stand today, and forever, righteous and holy and pure. And it is he, and he alone, who will preserve his bride, the church.

What are we? Unfaithful. What is God? Only and ever faithful. And that is our comfort.

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”—Psalm 127:1



Article CLVII: The New King and His Kingdom: The Fulness of Time (continued)

“For he is our peace, who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.”

With the advent of the Son of God in the flesh the time had come that the middle wall of partition should be broken down, and both Jew and Gentile should be united into one in the kingdom of heaven. And this implied that all that was distinctly and peculiarly Jewish and old dispensational with regard to the form and manifestation of the kingdom and covenant of God was to be removed to make room for the new manifestation in the new dispensation. The land of Canaan in the old dispensation was distinctly the holy land, where alone Jehovah could be known and served in the true sense of the word. Church and state were united and closely intertwined in Israel's theocracy, so that the earthly king on Israel's throne was king in the kingdom of God. Jerusalem was the holy city, where was the throne of God, and in the temple made with hands he dwelled among his people. Israel was the distinctive people of God, separated from the nations, and Jehovah was their God in distinction from the gods of the other nations. All this was to be changed with the advent of the Messiah. He would break down the middle wall of partition. Canaan would soon cease to be the holy land, and the time would be inaugurated by the Lord that God would be worshipped no more in Jerusalem or Samaria, but in spirit and truth. And all that belonged to the old dispensation of shadows and bondage was to be fulfilled in Christ and removed after he had fulfilled it. Church and state were no longer to be united in one. The kingdom of God was no longer to be confined to a single nation. God was to be served no more in a temple made with hands.

Sacrifices and ceremonies would come to an end in Immanuel. A new dispensation of the kingdom and covenant was to be ushered in. And the minds and hearts of the people of God had to be divorced from the old and passing forms and become accustomed to the truth that with the passing of all these forms the kingdom was not destroyed and the covenant of God still stood firm.

The fulness of time reveals that middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile weak and crumbling and nigh unto ruin.

True, in the minds of many among Israel, especially among the leaders of Israel, the line of demarcation between Israel and the nations was still very marked and definite. The attempt was made, particularly by the Pharisees of Jesus' time, to maintain the distinction and even emphasize it by precept upon precept and rule upon rule. It is a striking phenomenon that Israel, before the captivity always so inclined to cast its spiritual nobility and distinction as a nation to the winds and to amalgamate with the nations round about them, at the time of Christ, when the middle wall of partition was to be broken down and was actually nigh to destruction, made a desperate attempt to maintain it by all sorts of artificial methods and rules. In the mind of the Pharisee the distinction between Jew and Gentile, between clean and unclean, was still very clear and marked. “Readers of the New Testament know what separation Pharisaical Jews made between themselves and heathens. It will be readily understood that every contact with heathenism and all aid to its rites should have been forbidden and that in social intercourse any Levitical defilement arising from the use of what was common or unclean was avoided. But Pharisaism went a great deal further

than this. Three days before a heathen festival all transactions with Gentiles were forbidden, so as to afford them neither direct nor indirect help towards their rites; and this prohibition extended even to private festivities, such as a birthday, the day of return from a journey, etc. On heathen festive occasions a pious Jew should avoid, if possible, passing through a heathen city, certainly all dealings in shops that were festively decorated. It was unlawful for Jewish workmen to assist in anything that might be subservient either to heathen worship or heathen rule, including in the latter the erection of courthouses and similar buildings. It need not be explained to what lengths or into what details Pharisaical punctiliousness carried all these ordinances. From the New Testament we know that to enter the house of a heathen defiled till the evening (John 18:28), and that all familiar intercourse with Gentiles was forbidden (Acts 10:28). So terrible was the intolerance that a Jewess was actually forbidden to give help to her heathen neighbor when about to become a mother! It was not a new question to St. Paul when the Corinthians inquired about the lawfulness of meat sold in the shambles or served up at a feast (1 Cor. 10:25, 27, 28). Evidently he had the rabbinical law on the subject in mind while, on the one hand, he avoided the Pharisaical bondage of the letter and, on the other, guarded against either injuring one's own conscience or offending that of an onlooker. For according to Rabbi Akiba, 'Meat which is about to be brought in heathen worship is lawful, but that which comes out from it is forbidden, because it is like the sacrifices of the dead.' But the separation went much beyond what ordinary minds might be prepared for. Milk drawn from a cow by heathen hands, bread and oil prepared by them, might, indeed, be sold to strangers, but not used by the Israelites. No pious Jew would, of course, have sat down at the table of a Gentile (Acts 11:3; Gal. 2:12). If a heathen were invited to a Jewish house, he might not be left alone in the room, else every article of food or drink on the table was henceforth to be regarded as unclean. If cooking utensils were bought of them, they had to be purified by fire or by water; knives to be ground anew, spits to be made redhot

before use, etc. It was not lawful to let either house or field, nor to sell cattle to a heathen; any article, however distantly connected with heathenism, was to be destroyed. Thus, if a weaving-shuttle had been made of wood grown in a grove devoted to idols, every web of cloth made by it was to be destroyed; nay, if such pieces had been mixed with others, to the manufacture of which no possible objection could have been taken, these all became unclean and had to be destroyed" (Ederheim, "In the Days of Christ," pp. 26–28). And the same extreme conception was held about the land and the people. The very dust of Canaan was holy. An Israelite coming from a foreign country into the holy land was literally required to shake the dust from off his feet. And it was held that if accidentally some dust from foreign soil should have been carried into Canaan, it would never mingle with the holy land's soil. Israel was Israel only in the land of promise. Outside of the holy land they were regarded as Israel no more. Such views were current at the time of Christ, and even many years after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus they were advocated.

But all these attempts by the leaders of Israel at Jesus' time to desperately maintain and strengthen the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile could not possibly alter the facts. That wall was, in actual fact, crumbling and nigh unto ruin.

This is evident if we consider, first of all, Israel's political condition at this time. But a few, comparatively speaking, of the exiles had returned from captivity. The former division into twelve tribes no longer was to be maintained, even though the names of some of the tribes still were given to various districts in Palestine. In that dark period between the captivity and the birth of the Savior, Israel had enjoyed but a brief period of national independence, for the rest being subject now to one, now to another of the world-powers about them. At the time of Christ the scepter had actually departed from Judah, though nominally Israel still had its own king. Of course, in the sense of Israel's prophecy, the scepter of Judah was still there. And it was to manifest its powerful sway with new glory in Christ Jesus, the Lion of Judah's

tribe. But politically Israel was dependent upon the Roman power. When Christ was born, the nation was only nominally independent under cruel Herod the Great as their king. In actual fact he was king only under the sovereignty of Rome. After his death the will of Herod, as it had been altered many times and for the last time shortly before his death, and according to which Archelaus was to be his successor in the kingdom, with Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptist, as tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and Philip as tetrarch of the northeastern provinces of Gaulonites, Trachonitis, Batanaea and Pania—this will of Herod was at first approved by Caesar Augustus. But soon after this, Archelaus was deposed and Judea was joined as a Roman province to Syria,

however, with a procurator or governor of its own that was directly responsible to the emperor. So that at the time of Jesus' sojourn we find Judah governed by the Roman procurator, Galilee and Perea by Herod Antipas, "that fox" whom Jesus would not answer one word, and the northeast by Philip, after whom also Caesarea Philippi, a city in his domain, was named.

The theocratic form of the kingdom had practically disappeared. The outward glory of the kingdom had waned. And it is in that "fulness of time" that he who was to break down the middle wall of partition, so ancient and venerable, was sent with the message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near!"

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

