

# CLASSICAL EXAMINATIONS

In the Protestant Reformed Churches, candidates for the ministry undergo two examinations. The first takes place at the end of their seminary training and is conducted the meeting of Synod following the completion of their training. The second takes place after they have received a call from a congregation is conducted by the classis in which the calling church is found.

In Article 4 of our Church Order we learn that the "lawful calling of those who have not been previously in office consists" among other things "in the examination both of doctrine and life which shall be conducted by the classis, to which the call must be submitted for approval, and which shall take place in the presence of three delegates of synod from the nearest classis."

To this Article of the Church Order our churches have added the following decision concerning what is called the "Peremptoir examination," that is, the *decisive* examination which determines whether or not a man will be ordained (my comments are in italics):

## C. Peremptoir examination of candidates:

### 1. Examination shall be conducted in:

- a. Dogmatics.
- b. Practical qualifications, among which the following:
  - 1) Personal spirituality.
  - 2) Motives for seeking the office of minister.
  - 3) Evidence of insight into pastoral practical labors.
- c. Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, treating specifically of:
  - 1) The nature of Holy Scripture.
  - 2) The contents of Holy Scripture.
- d. Knowledge of the confessions:
  - 1) Meaning and purpose of the confessions.
  - 2) The contents of the confessions.
  - 3) The application of the confessions to our life.
- e. Controversy. *This has to do with the Candidate's knowledge of various errors, especially those that are currently troubling the church world.*
- f. Specimen of preaching:
  - 1) Preaching before the congregation in the presence of Classis. *Each Candidate preaches a sermon the night before Classis at a worship service in the church where the meeting of Classis is held.*
  - 2) Critical discussion of the sermon preached. *Two sermon critics are appointed who have to submit a report to classis concerning the sermon he preaches. Only if the sermon is judged acceptable does the rest of the examination follow the next day.*

### 2. Further usage prevailing is as follows:

- a. Voting by secret ballot regarding his admittance. *When the examination is completed Classis votes to determine whether or not he will be admitted to the ministry.*
- b. In case of a favorable outcome the applicant shall sign the formula of subscription. *This is done in the presence of Classis.*
- c. Finally, that he be provided with written proof signed by president and clerk wherein classis declares that it judges him qualified for the ministry of the

Word. *The reference here is to the classical diploma he receives if he passes his examination.*

Normally the examination proper takes more than half the day. It is different from the Synodical examination in that not the Seminary professors but the ministers ask the questions, each of them being assigned a part of the examination. After each minister concludes his questions, any of the other delegates may ask questions as well. The whole examination, therefore, is conducted orally, while the candidate sits at a table in the front of Classis.

The most important difference between this examination and the Synodical exam is that the Synodical exam focuses on the man's intellectual abilities and is deigned to show that he has done his work well in the Seminary. This exam focuses much more on his spiritual qualifications as is evident from the outline above. Thus, he will be asked not only if he understands various doctrines but if he beliefs them and will preach them. Thus, too, he is examined regarding "personal spirituality, motives for seeking the office of minister, and evidence of insight in pastoral practical labors."

These classical exams are worth attending if ever anyone has opportunity to do so. The only part of them that is not open to the public is the voting at the conclusion of the examination. Obviously, this examination is of great importance both for the candidate and for the churches and should not be excluded.

Rev. R. Hanko