



Reforming Our Expectations

The Credentialing
Process in the
**ORTHODOX
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MINISTERIAL TRAINING

Reforming Our Expectations:

Overseeing the Credentialing Process
in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Subcommittee on Ministerial Training
of the Committee on Christian Education

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Introduction

Ever since he was a teenager, a certain young man has felt called to the ministry. His family is not wealthy, so even his studies at a local university were not easily financed. Since his graduation, he has been employed as a private tutor; but after much diligence, he has also become licensed by his overseeing presbytery. His preaching has begun to gain the attention of those who have invited him to preach. There is something vivacious about this young man, whose strong communion with God and love for Scripture saturate his preaching with grace and seriousness. Yet he has not received a call to a church. Several churches have expressed interest, but it has been two years, and still no call has come. This season has become difficult, if not bewildering, for the young licentiate, as he wonders if he will have any useful service to God in the future. Finally a call comes from a small, isolated congregation, and their small numbers are reflected in the small salary. Perhaps he should simply go back to tutoring. But his heart will not let the matter rest. It is now becoming plain to him that he must, under God, accept this call. The time has arrived for him to enter the ministry.

This is no imaginary scenario. It was the experience of Thomas Boston (1676–1732), and it was roughly the same as the experience of many young candidates for the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church today. The credentialing process in our denomination—coming under care, licensure, and ordination—is a course that involves particular requirements: interviews, examinations, papers, testimonials, and experience, which are necessary to satisfy our charge to be faithful stewards of the gospel. But it is also helpful if these requirements can work smoothly and with as little confusion and complication as possible. The trials of Thomas Boston show that even the most talented candidate will meet with a normal course of challenges, discouragements, and puzzling obstacles. The most conscientious presbytery or committee should not try to remove these important trials that God uses to solidify his call on a young man’s life. Nevertheless, if the candidate, the church, and the presbytery’s committee on candidates and credentials can work with similar expectations, so much the better.

This small booklet is meant to help us as we implement our church’s time-honored course of credentialing. Although each of us has distinct ideas about how our church ought to credential and oversee candidates for

the ministry, our collective wisdom over the years enables us to realize the wisdom that accompanies a multitude of counselors (an important element of Presbyterianism). This booklet is a resource offered to you by your denomination's Committee on Christian Education. It seeks to take account of both our church's wide-ranging experiences and our singular goal to entrust the gospel to faithful men. To that end, as a Reformed church, we eagerly embrace *semper reformanda* ("always being reformed"), so that we can improve in our ministry. As we seek to be always reformed by God's Spirit and truth, perhaps some of our ways and expectations will be reformed as well.

May the Lord richly bless you and our church as we seek constantly to be reformed by the Head of the church for the good of the people whom we serve and love and for the glory of Christ, whom we also serve and love.

Coming under Care

1. The Recommendation

If the church is to retain its rightful place of encouraging and endorsing a man's calling, then the session's letter of recommendation plays a vital role at this early stage. It may be the first and sole voice that the presbytery hears about the candidate.

The letter represents a balance. On the one hand, it commends the genuineness of the candidate's faith and confirms the presence of his potential gifts that indicate future ministerial usefulness, even if they are modest in their present form. On the other hand, it does not seek to overstate the candidate's giftedness or try to guarantee his future place in the ministry. Consequently, this letter should steer between becoming merely *pro forma* on the one side and excessively praising the candidate on the other.

"The presbytery shall receive a written recommendation from the session of the local congregation of which the candidate is a member, certifying that in its judgment his Christian faith and potential gifts qualify him to be taken under the care of the presbytery with a view to ordination to the gospel ministry." —FG 2I.2

2. The Examination

This is the beginning of a new relationship. Although it is one that presbyters have seen forged many times before, for the candidate it is an altogether new experience. He may have just begun his formal training, and he probably knows only a few of the members of the presbytery. This brief exam should provide a moment of encouragement for the presbytery and the potential candidate.

"It is of particular importance, at this time, that the presbytery inquire as to the grace of God in him and whether he be of such holiness of life as is requisite in a minister of the gospel. It is therefore the duty of a presbytery, in taking a candidate under its care, to examine him respecting his Christian faith, life, service, and the motives influencing him to desire the sacred office." —FG 2I.2

In this interview, the presbytery gains familiarity with the grace of God in the candidate's life, and so it asks questions about his faith, his life, his past and present service, and the reasons why he wants to pursue the gospel ministry.

At this stage, the presbytery should not expect to hear the candidate speak about his sense of call with the same level of conviction and certainty as a candidate for ordination. For example, it is inappropriate to ask a man who is coming under care whether he can say with the apostle, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel."

Neither is this interview an inquiry into the candidate's theological views. A presbytery might inquire whether he has read our church's doctrinal standards, but it would be inappropriate to ask him if he disagrees with anything taught in those standards. This would put him at a terrible disadvantage (for many reasons), and it could prejudice the presbytery against him before he ever has a chance to answer in a studied and careful way.

3. The Assistance of Presbytery

A candidate is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and he is right to expect the presbytery's ongoing care through its guidance, its counsel, and various types of assistance.

Such care could include pastoral counsel on the Christian life, his sense of call, his theology, and the ongoing development of his God-given gifts. Some presbyteries assign a mentor to work with the candidate.

It is crucial for a candidate to have opportunities to exercise his gifts for ministry. He should be encouraged to serve in his local church in the ways that he can. Otherwise, how will he gain experience, improve upon his gifts, and garner credible testimonials for licensure? Form of Government 21.5 assumes that when a candidate appears before presbytery to preach his sermon, he has already gained sufficient proficiency in preaching that his sermon can be approved by them.

Nevertheless, helping our young candidates must be balanced with watching our pulpits. Employing a candidate under care for the regular or stated supply of a pulpit over a long period of time runs at cross-purposes

"The presbytery must show its continuing concern for the progress of all the candidates under its care, and shall continually guide, counsel, and help them as they further prepare themselves for the work of the ministry." —FG 21.2

to our church's desire to guard the integrity of the ministry of the Word. Ordinarily the regular supply of the pulpit is reserved only for ministers and licentiates (FG 17.3)—that is, those whom the church has approved as ordained stewards of the gospel or those who are serving an approved time of probation and trial of gifts for the ministry. A candidate under care should be encouraged to minister the Word, but he ought not to be so employed in regular supply of the same pulpit.

Becoming Licensed

I. The Training

The scholarly nature of the ministerial calling demands significant competency, literacy, and facility with language. This is reflected in the more fundamental requirement of a bachelors of arts degree. The standard is telling. It indicates that noble strain in the Reformed tradition of upholding a “learned ministry”—men who are skillful in their public sphere of ministry because they are capable in their private study. Interdisciplinary studies in the liberal arts are particularly conducive to a man’s training for the ministry.

Our church assumes that candidates for the ministry will be eager to begin the process of licensure as soon as possible. The fact that our standards set a minimum of a year and a half of seminary study before a man can be licensed would appear to suggest that he will commence upon his licensure requirements amidst his studies and, ideally, complete those requirements before he graduates from seminary. It is far from ideal for a candidate to postpone his licensure exams until after he graduates from seminary or until he gains a yearlong internship (when it will distract him from his practical training).

“It is highly reproachful to religion and dangerous to the church to entrust the preaching of the gospel to weak and ignorant men. The presbytery shall therefore license a candidate only if he has received a bachelor of arts degree, or its academic equivalent, from a college or university of reputable academic standing, and has completed an adequate course of study lasting at least one year and a half in a theological seminary.” —FG 21.3

2. The Testimonials

“Testimonials” are given by those who have observed the candidate’s life and gifts. Most often they are past or present mentors: pastors, elders, professors, and church members.

“The presbytery shall also satisfy itself, by receiving testimonials or by other means, of the candidate’s piety and exemplary life and his personal zeal for and experience in presenting the gospel to others.” —FG 21.4

They are not ordinarily peers. Collectively, they should describe one who is growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as in his personal relationship with God, his brothers and sisters in Christ, and especially with his spouse.

Presbytery is not restricted to written testimonials. The phrase “by other means” reminds us that the presbytery ought to seek out those who are most reliable. For example, nothing prohibits a presbytery or its credentials committee from soliciting the opinion of seminary professors, who can provide beneficial insights into a candidate’s scholarly aptitude, ability, and character. Moreover, those professors who are ordained as OPC ministers are charged to give “pastoral oversight” to their students (FG 9.2).

3. The Examinations

a. English Bible

The goal of the English Bible exam is to show that the candidate has “a thorough knowledge of the content of the English Bible and an ability to communicate it.”¹ The candidate must have read through and studied the English Bible in its entirety, and now be able to prove that he has a comprehensive knowledge of it and can navigate its contents—even frequently reciting suitable passages from memory.

This exam should cover Scripture’s major themes and high points, and test whether the candidate can adequately defend the tenets of our faith from the Word of God. Some questions should test whether the candidate has grasped the flow of events or thought in

“The candidate for licensure shall be examined by the presbytery, or by a committee appointed for that purpose, in the English Bible, ecclesiastical history, theology, and the original languages of the Scriptures.” —FG 2I.4

“In order to make trial of his gifts to explain and vindicate and practically to enforce the doctrines of the gospel, the presbytery shall further require that the candidate prepare (1) a sermon, which the presbytery may ask to be delivered in its presence, (2) an essay on a theological theme, and (3) an exegesis of the Hebrew or Greek text of a passage of Scripture.” —FG 2I.5

¹ See “The Recommended Curriculum for Ministerial Preparation in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,” in *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (2011), 213–20.

historical or didactic books, respectively. Some questions should assess how well the candidate can find principal events in Scripture, or whether he can cite the location of our Lord's major teachings, sayings, and parables. Several questions could sound out the candidates' acquaintance with well-known passages in the Psalms.

In one sense, most of the questions on this exam should be anticipated. Candidates should assume that they will be asked to cite scriptural support for doctrines like the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, the deity of Christ, total depravity, substitutionary atonement, regeneration, adoption, and the resurrection of the believer.

But the Bible exam should not become one of random trivia. A question like "What is the color of the third horse in the book of Revelation?" will baffle any candidate for its relevance and will do little to measure whether this candidate should be entrusted with the preaching of the gospel.

Certainly this exam contains different layers, and questions will have relative importance. Whether a candidate can list all ten plagues pales in comparison to whether he can list all ten commandments. The plagues are not tedious trivia, but such questions really serve only to uncover a grasp of particular facts and do not shed light on the candidate's ability to defend doctrine from Scripture.

b. Church History

A licensed man should be able to answer most questions that touch upon the flow of the church's history and the development of Christian theology during that history, including its important figures, eras, and traditions. In addition, he should be able to articulate the unique heritage of the OPC.

Usually seminary courses will equip a student with more than enough knowledge to sustain this exam, and simply reviewing course notes should suffice in his preparing for this exam. If the candidate is new to the Reformed faith and to the OPC, he may need to read additional materials in his preparation, such as *The Presbyterian Conflict*, by Edwin H. Rian, *J. Gresham Machen*, by Ned B. Stonehouse, and *History for a Pilgrim People*, by Charles G. Dennison.

This exam is vulnerable to the same maladies as the Bible exam. In the hands of a history buff, this exam can easily descend into all sorts of trivia and cover what are only minor characters in the church's history.

c. Theology

The theology exam is meant to discover the candidate's grasp of the system of doctrine that is revealed in Scripture—and, more specifically, the Reformed faith as it is taught in the doctrinal standards of the OPC, the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms. The candidate should be expected to replicate the teaching and vocabulary of these doctrinal standards, explain them in his own words, and supply adequate scriptural passages to substantiate his answers.

Nevertheless, the theology exam of a candidate for licensure should be distinguished from the same exam for ordination. The two exams should not look identical; they serve two distinct purposes. Their differences could be described in terms of breadth and depth.

As for breadth, the theology exam for licensure should not range as widely as it does for ordination. For example, the exam for licensure should avoid focusing on contemporary and controversial issues. The candidate for licensure may not yet have sufficient expertise in these matters to offer a mature critique, and he may naively land on the “wrong” side of a question that may not even pertain to his suitability for licensure. The presbytery should be interested in whether he believes what the church believes, not in knowing what he may think about various issues.

As for depth, the candidate for licensure should not be expected to answer with the same level of penetration and conviction as an ordinand. In the case of licensure, the presbytery's expectations of the candidate are moderated by the reminder that he is a man who is along the way and not one who has arrived. He is not being examined as one who is about to take a pastoral charge, but as one who is continuing in his training and hopes to commence a time of probation of his ministerial gifts. For example, the presbytery should avoid asking questions on complex pastoral issues; such questions are premature. Nor should there be detailed inquiries on the sacraments and their administration; these are inappropriate. Nor should the candidate be posed with hypothetical questions about how he would work with others of differing opinions on “in-house” issues; these are irrelevant for his situation (although such questions may arise, more plausibly, as part of his ordination exams).

As for the Christian etiquette that should govern this exam, it is helpful to remember the godly counsel of our Westminster forefathers, who said that the first “rule” for the examination of a candidate is, “That the party examined be dealt withal in a brotherly way, with mildness of spirit,

and with special respect to the gravity, modesty, and quality of every one.”² Presbyters must be more than reasonable—they must show the compassion, reserve, and dignity that becomes their office.

d. Greek and Hebrew

The original languages provide the building blocks for solid preaching and teaching from Scripture. Candidates for the ministry must show sufficient skill in laying these blocks to win the presbytery’s confidence that he can ably construct sermons and lessons, and develop sturdy theological foundations for his lifelong calling.

The skills in view are those that involve the candidate’s ability to recognize grammatical forms and syntax, using lexical tools with proficiency, and employing sound exegetical method and principles of interpretation.

Learning these languages is also of importance because Scripture was “immediately inspired by God” in the Hebrew and Greek languages and received his “singular care and providence,” and it is to them that the church appeals in “all controversies of religion” (Confession of Faith 1.8, 10).

e. Sermon

The sermon is meant to display the candidate’s aptitude in expounding a given passage of Scripture for its meaning and significance. Naturally, giving a sermon before presbytery represents a considerable challenge and it is ordinarily an early effort by a young and inexperienced man. Even ministers would find this to be unnerving, and some would find it nearly impossible if asked to preach for less than twenty minutes. Thus, the presbyters must exercise modesty in their evaluation and expectations of this sermon.

The licentiate’s sermon should be clear, a plain explanation of the text that draws its hearers into the meaning of the text. The text’s main point, along with its subsidiary support, should be evidently accessible. Although a man at this stage would not ordinarily be able to weave into the sermon the theological themes of wider biblical texts, he ought to show some consciousness of the text’s relationship to the sweep of redemptive history. The sermon should offer evidence that the candidate has given thought to the significance of the text to his hearers. It ought to be further evident that the text has impacted its expositor, so that there is life in him and his presenta-

² See “The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government” (1645), in *The Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, issued by The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1966), 413.

tion. This is important because the sermon *must* contain, in some fashion, the gospel of grace. And how can anyone preach the gospel without some zeal?

The licensed seminarian will enjoy several opportunities to preach and hone his ministerial gifts before he graduates. This puts him at a great advantage over his peers who wait until graduation to finish licensure requirements. This provides an important incentive for the presbytery to encourage men to become licensed during their seminary studies.

f. Theology Essay

In the theology paper, the candidate seeks to explain or defend a particular issue, subject, or theme in theology. Its purpose is to test whether the candidate can clearly explain a topic of theology and show its relationship to pertinent passages in the doctrinal standards of the OPC.

Although the paper should reflect upon relevant biblical texts and follow the development of its theme in redemptive history, this is not an assignment in exegesis. The paper is fundamentally an exercise in systematic theology.

Although the candidate may wish to develop the implications of his findings as they pertain to historic Christian movements or interact with significant theologians, this is not an exercise in historical theology or church history.

The presbytery (or its committee) must be careful to assign an appropriate subject for this paper. For example, asking him to write on a topic that is too controversial puts the candidate in a difficult position and at a disadvantage. Such topics as the days of creation, the offices of the church, and the millennium of Revelation 20 might place him in an impossible position, where he is not being assessed on his ability in theology, but on his ability to defend his position.

g. Exegesis

In the exegesis assignment, the candidate shows his facility with the biblical languages and his competency using sound interpretive principles (with the assistance of appropriate lexical resources), in order to translate and thoroughly explain a particular text of Scripture.

The candidate should explain the main point of the assigned passage, its meaning in the immediate context, and its significance within the scope of Scripture's organic unity and the biblical narrative of God's redemptive acts, which lead climactically to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The presbytery must take care that the candidate does not pick an overly intricate passage. Also, if it is the practice of the presbytery to ask the candidate to preach on the same passage that he exegetes, the presbytery must show foresight by ruling out scriptural texts that are far too challenging for a young candidate to handle in an abbreviated sermon. Studying a genealogy may prove interesting, but preaching a genealogy may not prove equally interesting.

The Form of Government does not stipulate that this is necessarily a paper or even a written assignment. Although it is customary in most presbyteries to require a paper, nothing mandates it. The standard could also be met by an oral examination on an agreed-upon text, in which the candidate proves his ability to translate, parse, answer basic syntactical questions, and explain the meaning of the text.

4. The Probation

Licensure is not so much an action or a one-time decision of presbytery, as it is a period of probation, or a trial period, in which the candidate is to be observed for his development in character and gifts. It is also a time when he gains clarity with regard to his sense of call.

When a church decides to call a licentiate, the presbytery must determine whether he has “satisfactorily completed his probation for the gospel ministry” (FG 22.12.d). Only then can a presbytery give him permission to accept the call. This is no mere tacit approval of the man called, but represents the presbytery’s confirmation that the candidate has matured since he was first licensed. His character is sweetening, and his gifts are ripening. This determination by the church assumes that licensure is a stretch of time over which the candidate is growing, being tested, and under scrutiny. A man who is freshly licensed is technically eligible to be called, but in the eyes of the church it is neither wise nor suitable to call a man who has not yet had adequate time to prove himself and try his gifts before the church (e.g., in an internship).

Becoming Ordained

I. The training

The gospel ministry is unabashedly scholarly in nature, and it demands significant competency and literacy. Faithful proclamation and teaching require disciplined study, as well as uncommon facility with written and verbal communication. This explains the long-standing expectation in the Reformed church that its ministers will be properly educated and trained. As for the education of ordinands, a “regular three-year theological degree,” or, in contemporary terms, the master of divinity (M.Div.) degree, fulfills the minimum academic requirements of our church.

There are exceptions. The Form of Government details the procedure that a presbytery must follow when it wishes to pursue the ordination of a candidate who is deficient in the formal requirements of ordination (FG 23). If the presbytery has followed this prescribed course and is still satisfied that the candidate is duly qualified for the ministry, then it may proceed. It should be kept in mind that this candidate must demonstrate such outstanding ability or seasoned experience that three-fourths of the presbytery will be persuaded by the “sufficient evidence.” Such exceptions are not meant to excuse men from pursuing the necessary training that is available to them but appears to them as a hardship. It is certainly not the case that any such candidate should hope to find sufficient training informally—by personal study or tutoring—in less time than it takes most ministers to be trained formally.

The Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (MTIOPC) provides courses that are designed to assist ministerial candidates with instruction, which supplements their seminary training and

“That the most effectual measures may be taken to guard against the admission of unqualified men into the sacred office the presbytery shall ordain a licentiate, or receive a minister from another denomination, if he has satisfactorily completed the academic requirements set forth in Chapter XXI, Section 3, and an adequate course of study in a theological seminary equivalent to that required for a regular three-year theological degree.”
—FG 23.3

further equips them to serve in the OPC. The courses offered by MTIOPC are: Book of Discipline, Covenant Nurture, Defending the Faith, Ecclesiology, The Form of Government, Homiletics, OPC History, Pastoral Theology, Reformed Worship, and The Westminster Standards.

2. The Testimonials

Like the testimonials (or letters of recommendation) for licensure, those for ordination are garnered from past or present mentors to assist the presbytery in its overall evaluation of the candidate.

These letters or speeches

from pastors, elders, church members, and professors offer evidence of the candidate's godly character and behavior. Moreover, these testimonials bear witness to "the candidate's satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the gospel ministry" (FG 23.6). Such testimonies help the presbytery to assess whether the church has given its approbation to the candidate's calling and to determine that he has indeed "satisfactorily completed his probation for the gospel ministry" (FG 22.12.d). Thus, the presbytery weighs these letters with the sobriety they deserve. And the candidate hears these letters with the encouragement they bring.

"Trials for ordination shall consist of the following: (1) the evaluation of written and oral testimonials as to the candidate's satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the gospel ministry ..." —FG 23.6

3. The Examinations

a. Theology

As stated above (p. 13), the theology exams for licensure and ordination should be distinguished in terms of breadth and depth.

The breadth of the theology exam for ordination assumes that questions will be asked on the fundamental tenets of our confessional standards, with a view to hearing answers of ample clarity to reassure the presbytery that the candidate can ably exposit, explain, and defend our denomination's commitments. This exam should also occasion the candidate's competency in the traditional loci of theology (prolegomena, theology proper, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology).

Moreover, the exam often reaches beyond these subject areas in order to gauge whether the candidate can apply his confessional and theological competency to past or contemporary issues. Such questions measure the

maturity of his orthodoxy and his ability to critique heterodoxy. But the presbytery must also restrain its inquiry at this point in one particular way. To discover what the candidate believes on any confessional point is appropriate, but it is uncharitable to turn the candidate into a “whipping post” on controversial issues over which ordained brothers amicably disagree. Neither is this the occasion for a debate between the candidate and any presbyter.

Regarding depth, a well-prepared candidate can provide answers that reflect his growth in theological insight. His convictions have gained more light

and have taken deeper root, and it shows in his ability to provide full expositions beyond the concise rubrics of the Shorter Catechism. A man seeking ordination in our denomination will also be expected to speak thoroughly to the distinctive and unique commitments of the Reformed tradition (e.g., the sovereignty of God, the doctrines of grace, particular redemption, covenant theology, and the perseverance of the saints).

This is the time when it is also necessary to examine the candidate on the sacraments. Any Protestant minister would be expected to expound the theology and meaning of baptism, but a Reformed minister should also be expected to explain and defend infant baptism. Similarly, he not only knows the elementary truths of the Lord’s Supper, but can also defend Christ’s spiritual presence in the Supper. It is often the case that some presbyters will ask the candidate questions that probe his understanding of pastoral theology.

While this exam is taking place on the floor of presbytery, all presbyters must bear in mind what becomes their ordained office, namely, that they are “above reproach, ... sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, ... not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome” (1 Tim. 3:2–3).

“Trials for ordination shall consist of the following: (1) the evaluation of written and oral testimonials as to the candidate’s satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the gospel ministry; (2) an examination as to the candidate’s Christian faith and life; as to his knowledge of the Bible, theology, apologetics, ecclesiastical history, the Greek and Hebrew languages, and such other branches of learning as to the presbytery may appear requisite; and as to his knowledge of the confession, government, discipline, and worship of the Church; this examination may include such written discourses, founded on the Word of God, as shall seem proper to the presbytery.” —FG 23.6

b. Apologetics

The history of Christian theology and philosophy provides an important background of faithful witness that helps a minister appreciate his call to defend the gospel and helps him to shape the methodology he will utilize in this urgent task. Consequently, he should have a working knowledge of the history of his apologetic craft, as this history supplies him with a rich repository of wisdom and different approaches that have been held by those in the Reformed tradition. Particular attention should be given to ensure that he has a clear grasp of the workings of presuppositional apologetics.

His knowledge of the development of modern or liberal theology is not just for appreciating the birth pangs of the OPC, but also for understanding its ongoing opposition to the sound teaching of the gospel. As a watchman on the wall, a minister of the gospel must recognize, signal, and refute the winds of false teaching that appear both within and without the church, as well as in world religions. This duty assumes a growing mastery of God's revealed truth. But it also requires a general acquaintance with the history of human thought in its wider movements (e.g., Platonism, the Enlightenment, existentialism), its chief exponents (e.g., Aristotle, Kant, Sartre) and its impact upon culture (e.g., jazz, impressionism, evolutionism, postmodernism). The minister's knowledge of the surrounding society and its mores also enables him to equip God's people as they seek to engage the world as salt and light, and as they faithfully give a reason for the hope that they have.

c. *The Book of Church Order*

Every body, whether religious or civil, has its own polity, and those that operate within that body must know its constitution and principles. The OPC's government, discipline, and worship are presented in the respective portions of *The Book of Church Order (BCO)*—namely, the Form of Government (FG), the Book of Discipline (BD), and the Directory for the Public Worship of God (DPW).

In this exam, the candidate for ordination must show a level of understanding that is more than superficial, but less than expert. His expertise will come only after spending years in the church and as he learns how to apply the principles of the *BCO* to the specific cases it describes. Thus, much of the specific information (especially in the BD) will not seem obvious or clear to the candidate at this point in his calling. Nevertheless, the principles that are elucidated in the *BCO* ought to be apparent to him, and he should be able to clearly replicate them in this exam. For example, he should be familiar with the foundation of biblical ecclesiology (the headship of Christ) and

its guiding principles and practice (e.g., church power, church unity, and church visible and invisible).

Moreover, the presbytery has every right to examine the candidate to satisfy itself that these principles represent his heartfelt conviction of what Scripture teaches. In other words, here is the instance when the candidate declares his belief in the sufficiency of Scripture as it applies to the church's doctrine, worship, and government—and, more particularly, that he embraces Presbyterianism as the biblical form of church government.

d. Other Exams

In FG 23.6, examinations in faith and life, church history, Greek, Hebrew, and Bible, which are given at licensure, are also listed as ordination requirements. The presbytery may choose not to repeat these exams, and instead consider their successful completion at licensure to suffice for ordination as well. Since they are not significantly dissimilar in nature or degree, they do not warrant further explanation for the purposes of this booklet.

The presbytery may require exams in “other branches of learning” and assign “written discourses” that seem appropriate to the presbytery (FG 23.6). A presbytery could stipulate these additional requirements when a candidate lacks the academic requirements set forth in the Form of Government for ordination or when, even though the candidate has satisfied the formal requirements, it is discovered that his academic training is weak in a particular area. In such cases, the church seeks to exercise its best judgment in guarding the integrity of the gospel ministry.

Conclusion

According to Scripture, the goal of the credentialing process is not merely to ordain men to the gospel ministry, but to entrust the gospel to faithful men (2 Tim. 2:2). Such men will seek to uphold the integrity of both Christian doctrine and Christian living, which are inseparably linked. A faithful minister will keep a close watch on both—what he teaches and how he lives—so as to save both himself and those who hear him (1 Tim. 4:16).

In order to cultivate such faithful servants of Christ, the church must resist compromising her expectations of either doctrinal fidelity or personal holiness in her ministers. We dare not weaken the standards of the gospel truths we proclaim and ordain ministers who will build with wood, hay, and stubble. Nor can we afford to compromise the personal demands of the gospel, and withhold from the flock those godly, humble, and loving servants who are worthy of imitation. As J. Gresham Machen wrote, these are the ministers who will carefully preach “the doctrine that the Holy Scripture contains” and who will “fire the presentation of that doctrine with the devotion of the heart.”³

Our church’s experienced mentors are called to shape these young candidates for a learned and godly ministry: men who know well the good news that they preach and feel deeply the doctrines of grace that they love, men who take up the cross daily and seek God’s face in repentance, men who breathe in God’s mercies anew every morning in Christ, men who cry out for the help of God’s truth and Spirit, men who dedicate themselves to reforming their lives and improving in grace. Let us set apart such men for the ministry with our encouragement and counsel, and, ultimately, with the laying on of our hands.

³ J. Gresham Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Building Up of the Church,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 154.

