

COMMITTEE ON THE REVISION OF THE CHURCH ORDER

1974

15^a

To the General Synod 1974.

Dear Brethren,

(9 pages)

Our Committee has the mandate to prepare a revision of the Church Order. Our mandate can be found in Art. 82 of the Acts of the General Synod of New Westminster 1971.

We present what we have finalized. For this part the Rev. H. Scholten cooperated. For health reasons he had to withdraw from the work of the Committee. We submit to you those changes which we have formulated in the following articles, giving also the reasons why we propose the redaction found below.

We have not checked the proposed revision with language experts. It is our intention to do so before the final draft is presented.

We have adopted the following guidelines for our proposed revision.

- I. If there is no urgent need to change the set-up of the Church Order, this set-up should remain the same. We have found no urgent need to change it.
- II. With the revision we seek to go in the line of the practice as it has grown among us, taking into account relevant synodical decisions. Thus we eliminate such practices from the Church Order which are no longer found with us. If in the original provision a principle was expressed, we endeavour to formulate it in other words.
- III. The following words always begin with a Capital letter :
Church, Classis, Congregation, Consistory, Deacon, Elder, General Synod, Minister, Ministry, Regional Synod.

PROPOSED REVISION OF THE CHURCH ORDER

ARTICLE 1. PURPOSE

For the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ it is necessary that there should be : offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Church discipline.

These matters will be dealt with in the following articles in due order.

ARTICLE 2. THE OFFICES

There are three kinds of offices in the Church : those of the Ministers of the Word, of the Elders, and of the Deacons.

The word "office" is used here in a pregnant sense and not in the general sense of "task", "duty".

Some of the Reformers, e.g. Calvin and Beza, were of the opinion that the "teachers" whom the Apostle mentions in Eph. 4:11, formed a special group of office-bearers. Thus the term "Doctors" was introduced and also found its way into the Church Order.

It is now generally acknowledged that "pastors and teachers" in Eph. 4:11, refers to the Ministers of the Word, and that two aspects of their work are thereby described.

Although we acknowledge the importance of the place and work of the Professors of Theology, and shall deal with it further on, it is not an office as that of the Ministers, the Elders, and the Deacons.

ARTICLE 3. CALLING NECESSARY

No one shall be permitted to enter upon the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments without having been lawfully called thereunto.

We are convinced that the old Article 3 can be greatly simplified. The "no one" includes everyone and it is not necessary to single out Professors of Theology, Elders, or Deacons.

ARTICLE 4. CALLING TO THE MINISTRY

The lawful calling of those who have not been previously admitted into the Ministry, and, upon a preparatory examination, have been declared eligible for call by a Classis of the district in which they live, consists:

First, in the Election by the Consistory and the Deacons, in cooperation with the Congregation, after preceding prayers, with due observance of the regulations established by the Consistory for this purpose; and in Churches with no more than one Minister also with the advice of Classis or of the Counsellor appointed for this purpose by the Classis;

Secondly, in the Peremptory Examination which shall be conducted by the Classis of the district in which the calling Church is situate, with the concurring advice of the Deputies ad Art. 49;

Thirdly, in the Approbation by the members of the calling Church, which consists in this that no lawful objection has been brought forward after the name of the Candidate has been announced to the Church for at least two consecutive Sundays;

Fourthly, in the public Ordination before the Congregation, which shall take place with appropriate stipulations and interrogations, admonitions and prayers, and the imposition of hands agreeably to the Form for this purpose.

Instead of requiring separate "ecclesiastical ordinances", the provision which we propose in the introductory paragraph describes who can be called : those who have been declared eligible upon preparatory examination by their "home-Classis".

It is the regular practice among us that the calling is undertaken "in cooperation with the Congregation". Yet, we deemed it advisable to insert this provision in this Article.

The "with due observance of the regulations established by the Consistory" includes the obligation of the Consistory to make such regulations. To prevent arbitrariness and difficulties, it is advisable that each Consistory does make such ordinances. It does not diminish the authority of the Consistory in the least, since each Consistory remains free to follow their own judgment.

We left out "where such practice has been in use up till now", and advise to make the advice of Classis or Counsellor a constant part of the procedure of extending a call.

In the "Secondly" we inserted "peremptory", a term which is already being used for this second examination.

We also left out the "doctrine and life". Since a Classical examination is about someone's doctrine, it is superfluous to mention that. Further, a Classis cannot examine someone's "life". A Classis can, at the most, examine documents which testify about someone's conduct. That, however, is no "examination of life".

This peremptory examination is not just to take place "in the presence of the Deputies of the Regional Synod", but those Deputies have to agree that the result is favourable. Hence the proposed change.

Since the one who has been called is not yet a Minister of the Word, we changed that into "Candidate", and further rephrased the sentence somewhat.

In the "fourthly", we deleted that the imposition of hands shall be done by Ministers. More and more the conviction grows that the "Body of Elders" shall take part. However, we did not deem it necessary to advise in the one direction or the other.

ARTICLE 5. CALLING A MINISTER

With the calling of those who are already in the Ministry of the Word, the following shall be observed.

a. No Minister shall be called repeatedly in the same vacancy except with the advice of Classis.

b. No one who is serving or has served outside the Canadian Reformed Churches shall be called unless he be eligible for call according to the general ecclesiastical ordinances in this regard.

c. No Minister shall be installed except Classis has approved the call, to which the Minister shall show good ecclesiastical testimonials regarding his doctrine and conduct.

The lawful calling consists:

First, in the Election by the Consistory and the Deacons, in cooperation with the Congregation, after preceding prayers, with due observance of the regulations established by the Consistory for this purpose; and in Churches with no more than one Minister also with the advice of Classis or of the Counsellor appointed for this purpose by the Classis;

Secondly, in the Approbation by the members of the calling Church, which consists in this that no lawful objection has been brought forward after the name of the Minister has been announced to the Church for at least two consecutive Sundays;

Thirdly, in the public Installation before the Congregation, which shall take place with appropriate stipulations and interrogations, admonitions and prayers, agreeably to the Form for this purpose.

We deemed it advisable to insert in the article itself the provision which is being kept in most instances, although the Canadian Reformed Churches have never made any general ecclesiastical ordinances regarding it, that for a repeated calling in the same vacancy the advice of Classis is required.

Further, instead of leaving it between other provisions, we deemed it advisable to have the above provision and the one about the eligibility of "foreigners" precede the provision about the lawful calling itself.

ARTICLE 6. BOUND TO A CHURCH

No one shall serve in the Ministry unless he is bound to a particular Church.

The proposed change is simply cutting out antiquated parts with retention of the basic contents of the Article. We do not deem it necessary to repeat what has already been provided in previous Articles.

ARTICLE 7. STATIONED IN A PLACE

No one shall be called to the Ministry of the Word without his being stationed in a particular place, except he be sent to work as a Missionary.

No comment necessary.

ARTICLE 8. EXCEPTIONAL GIFTS

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of study, shall not be admitted to the Ministry unless there is assurance of their exceptional gifts, namely, godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect and discretion, as also gifts of public address.

When such persons present themselves for the Ministry, the Classis, after the approval of the Regional Synod, shall examine them in a preparatory examination and allow them to speak a word of edification in the Churches of the Classis, and further deal with them as it shall deem edifying, with observance of the general ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

We deemed it advisable to delete the first words, and simply to state that this article applies to all who have not pursued the regular course of study required by the Churches.

We inserted the word "namely", since exceptional is an adjective with "gifts", not an adverb which would indicate that the gifts should be there in an exceptional measure.

It has been retained that the action must start from the persons themselves. Further, that the Regional Synod shall judge whether the exceptional gifts are present, indeed, and that the subsequent examination by Classis is of the same level as the Preparatory Examination to which Candidates have to submit to be declared eligible for call.

ARTICLE 9. ADMISSION OF NOVICES ETC.

Novices, or preachers who have left some church or sect, shall not be declared eligible for call within the Churches unless they have been carefully examined by the Classis, with the concurring advice of the Deputies of the Regional Synod, and have been well tested for some time.

We deem it advisable to insert that the examination shall be done by a Classis with the concurring advice of the Deputies of the Regional Synod. No fewer safeguards shall be required in these cases than with a preparatory examination of Candidates from within the Churches, rather more.

ARTICLE 10. FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER

A Minister, once lawfully called, shall not leave the Congregation with which he is connected to take up the Ministry elsewhere, without the consent of the Consistory and the Deacons, and the approval of the Classis.

On the other hand, no other Church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of dismissal from the Church and the Classis where he served.

We pondered the question whether the word "knowledge" on the part of the Classis would express adequately what is meant. The Dutch "voorweten" is difficult to render in English. We therefore propose "approval".

ARTICLE 11. PROPER SUPPORT AND DISMISSAL OF MINISTERS

The Consistory, as representing the Congregation, shall be bound to provide for the proper support of its Ministers and shall not dismiss them without the approbation of the Classis and the concurring advice of the Deputies of the Regional Synod.

We left out the "knowledge" of Classis as being superfluous.

ARTICLE 12. BOUND FOR LIFE

Inasmuch as a Minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the Church for life, he is not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and weighty reasons of which the Consistory and the Deacons shall judge, and which shall receive the approval of Classis with the concurring advice of the Deputies of the Regional Synod.

The word "secular" has been deleted. It reminds us too much of a sort of dualism. Further : the Ecclesiastical Assemblies would then have to decide whether another vocation is to be called "secular" or not.

The Consistory and the Deacons are the first ones to judge the question whether the reasons adduced are sufficient. Hence the insertion of this body. For Classis plus Deputies of the Regional Synod nothing is left but either to approve or disapprove of the decision of the Consistory with the Deacons. That appears to be the proper procedure.

ARTICLE 13. SUPERANNUATION

If a Minister of the Word reaches retirement age or if he is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office, according to the judgment of the Consistory and the Deacons, with the concurring advice of the Classis and the Deputies of the Regional Synod, he shall retain the honour and title of the Minister of the Word. He shall also retain his official connection with the Church which he served last, and this Church shall provide honourably for his support and for that of his widow and/or other dependents.

The present Article 13 says nothing about a retirement age. We deemed it necessary to insert this provision. It has been customary that Ministers of the Word are allowed to retire at the same age at which everyone else has the right to retire.

The Consistory and the Deacons, again, are the first ones to judge the situation if, for other reasons than reaching the retirement age, a Minister has to be relieved of his work. It is only in this case (not when a Minister reaches retirement age) that, as a safeguard, the concurring advice of Classis and Deputies Regional Synod is required.

It appeared advisable to expressly state that the retired Minister remains a Minister of that Church.

It appeared equally advisable to expressly state that THAT Church is under obligation to provide for his support. Whether that Church wishes to cooperate with other Churches is up to her.

ARTICLE 14. TEMPORARY RELEASE

If any Minister, because of illness or for other weighty reasons desires a temporary release from his service to the Congregation, he can receive the same only with the approval of the Consistory and the Deacons, and shall at all times be and remain subject to the call of the Congregation.

The "advice" has been changed into "approval".

"And the Deacons" has been added.

ARTICLE 15. PREACHING IN OTHER PLACES

No one shall be permitted to preach or administer the Sacraments in another Church without the consent and authority of the Consistory of that Church. Likewise, no one shall be permitted to preach in places where no Church is found without the consent and cooperation of the nearest Church or Classis.

The first part deals with places where a Church exists.

The second part deals with places and regions where no Church exists.

It was deemed advisable to reverse the order and mention part 1 first, in distinction from the original article.

ARTICLE 16. THE OFFICE OF MINISTERS

The specific duties of the office of the Ministers of the Word are: to continue in the Ministry of the Word and in prayer, to administer the Sacraments, to expound the Holy Scriptures, to vindicate the sound doctrine against heresies and errors, and to exhort also others to the Christian Religion -- which behooves also all other members of the Congregation -- further, to catechize the youth of the Church, together with the Elders to take heed of the flock, and especially in days of illness and distress to visit the members of the Church as times and occasions may require; and finally, with the Elders, to exercise Church discipline and to see to it that everything is done honourably and in good order.

1. The order of Ministry and prayer has been changed.
2. To vindicate sound doctrine against false doctrines is not just or primarily the task of the Professors of Theology, but of all Ministers.
3. To exhort others to the Christian Religion is not just a task of the Elders or even of the Ministers alone.
4. The word of catechizing has been inserted.

ARTICLE 17. EQUALITY OF OFFICE-BEARERS

Among the Ministers of the Word equality shall be maintained with respect to the rights and duties of their office and also in other matters as far as possible according to the judgment of the Consistory and, if necessary, of the Classis. This equality shall also be maintained among the Elders and the Deacons.

ARTICLE 18. PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

The task of the Professors of Theology is to instruct the students of theology in those disciplines which have been entrusted to them so that the Churches may be provided with Ministers of the Word who are able to expound the Holy Scriptures, to vindicate the sound doctrine against heresies and errors, and further also to fulfil all other duties of their office.

1. It was not deemed necessary to insert a provision that the Churches shall maintain a Theological College. That is implied in Article 18.
2. The duty to expound the Scriptures and to vindicate the sound doctrine is not only the Professors' of Theology. In the proposed redaction it is implied that they who teach must do the same as what they teach others to do.

ARTICLE 19. STUDENTS OF THEOLOGY

The Churches shall exert themselves that there be students of theology. They shall extend financial aid to those who are in need of it.

The "as far as necessary" has been deleted. There was always the uncertainty to which part of Article 19 it belonged. The proposed redaction is clear and not liable to be misunderstood.

ARTICLE 20. AN EDIFYING WORD

In Churches in which persons have been judged competent, according to Article 8, to be prepared for the Ministry of the Word, or where others have received this right in harmony with general ecclesiastical regulations, it may be arranged that, for their own training, and in order that they may become known to the Congregations, they be allowed to speak a word of edification in the meetings of public worship.

1. Others are mentioned besides the persons meant in Article 8. We think of Candidates.
2. We did, however, not wish to mention Candidates expressly since
 - a. Synods gave this right also to students at one time or another. Whatever one may think of such practice, it would not be wise to exclude that possibility by the text of the Church Order.
 - b. Those mentioned in Article 9 may receive the same right.
3. That it is mentioned here is the reason why we did not add it to Article 8.

ARTICLE 21. INSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN

The Consistories shall exhort the parents to have their children instructed in all subjects in harmony with the Word of God as the Church has summarized it in her Confessions.

1. The article in its present form is antiquated and no longer fits our situation.
2. We retained the obligation of the Consistories to exhort the parents to fulfil their obligations.
3. We did not mention schools expressly, for there is also a possibility that parents instruct their children or have them instructed without the means of a school. If we should mention schools expressly, we would thereby declare that parents are not allowed to make use of this possibility.

ARTICLE 22. ELECTION OF ELDERS

The Elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the Consistory and the Deacons, with the cooperation of the Congregation, according to the regulations established by the Consistory.

The Consistory shall be at liberty to give the members of the Congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons, and shall either appoint as many Elders as are needed or present to the Congregation a double number and appoint the one-half chosen by it.

The Approbation consists in this, that, the names of the appointed persons having been announced from the pulpit for at least two consecutive Sundays, no lawful objection arises.

The Ordination shall take place with public prayers and stipulations, agreeably to the Form for that purpose.

The article has not been changed basically. It is mostly a rewording of the old article and more in harmony with that about the election of Ministers.

ARTICLE 23. THE OFFICE OF ELDERS

The Elders shall have supervision over the Congregation and shall do the work of visiting as times and circumstances may demand. They shall take heed that their fellow office-bearers faithfully discharge the duties of their office, Their task is especially to have regard to the doctrine and conversation of the Ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church, and that no strange doctrine be taught.

"Before and after the Holy Supper" has been deleted.

"Exhort also others" has already been mentioned before.

ARTICLE 24. ELECTION OF DEACONS

The Deacons shall be elected, approved, and ordained in the same manner as was stated concerning the Elders.

ARTICLE 25. THE OFFICE OF DEACONS

The task peculiar to the Deacons is diligently to collect moneys and other gifts for the needy, and after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the indigent, as their need may require; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the gifts are not misused. The Deacons shall regularly render an account of their activities in the Consistory and also, if desired, before the Congregation at such a time and in such a manner as the Consistory shall see fit.

1. The word "alms" has been replaced by "gifts".
2. We left out "members of the Congregation and strangers" since "strangers" were most likely not non-Churchmembers, but members of other Churches who came as refugees. Leaving it out, we still retain the possibility that Deacons extend aid to non-Churchmembers.

ARTICLE 26. CONTACT WITH OTHERS

In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the needy, the Deacons shall seek mutual understanding with them -- if deemed necessary -- to the end that the gifts may all the better be distributed among those who have greatest need.

ARTICLE 27. TERM OF OFFICE

The Elders and Deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The retiring office-bearers shall be succeeded by others unless the Consistory and the Deacons judge that the circumstances and the profit of the Church render it advisable to have them serve another term, or to extend their term, or to declare them immediately eligible for re-election.

We deemed it advisable to insert the provision that not only re-election is possible but also the other two ways of assuring the continued service of specific brethren.

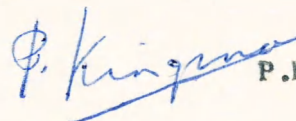
ARTICLE 28. OF CIVIL AUTHORITIES

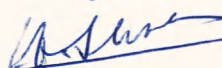
The Consistories shall see to it that good relations be maintained with the Civil Authorities and that by due respect and communication they secure and retain their favour towards the Church. They shall also impress upon the whole Congregation the obedience, love, and honour which is due to them, that the Church of Christ may have a tranquil life in all godliness and peace and honesty.

REMARK

If we succeed in having another part ready in time, we shall send also that as yet.

Respectfully Yours


P. Kingma


H. Scholten


W.W.J. VanOene