

## THE OFFICE AND TASKS OF THE DEAN IN THE FIRST SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF TARNÓW

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**Abstract.** Deans, in the organisation of the Church, are to assist the diocesan bishop in the exercise of governance in the territory that is part of the diocese. This area is called a deanery. In the history of the Church, deans have been seen as assistants to bishops. This article discusses the attributes of the office and deans' obligations as set out in the 1928 Synod of Bishop Leon Wałęga. The First Synod of the Diocese of Tarnów was a transmission belt that made the provisions of the 1917 Code of Canon Law a reality in the Diocese of Tarnów. The particular legislator, Bishop Leon Wałęga, encouraged the clergy to surround deans with the reverence and trust due to them, considering them as elder brothers who, on behalf of the authorities, performed demanding duties for the common good. To date, no comprehensive study of this topic has appeared. As a starting point for the reflection on the office of dean, the etymology of the word is discussed, followed by a brief look at its archetypes: chorepiscopi, visitors and archdeacons.

**Keywords:** archdeacon; *chorepiscopus*; dean; dean's visitation; visitor

### INTRODUCTION

Many studies have appeared on the institution of a dean, especially in dictionaries and encyclopaedias.<sup>1</sup> Deans play an important role in the organisation of the Church and their primary task is to assist the diocesan bishop in exercising his governance in the territory that is part of the diocese called a deanery. This article aims to present the office and tasks of the dean contained in the First Synod of Bishop Leon Wałęga.<sup>2</sup> To date, no comprehensive study on this subject has been published. As a starting point for the reflection on the office of dean, the etymology of the word *dean* will be used first, followed by its archetypes: chorepiscopi, visitors or archdeacons.

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<sup>1</sup> The following publications can be mentioned, among others: Gręźlikowski 2009, 255-319; Wysocki 1906; Padacz 1937, 280-93, 385-93; Pawluk 1995, 586-88; Sitarz 2019, 654-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Pierwszy Synod Diecezji Tarnowskiej* (04.11.1923), Nakładem Kleru Diecezjalnego, Drukiem Zygmunta Jelenia, Tarnów 1928 [hereinafter: First Synod].

Against this background, the office of dean in the statutes of the First Synod will be presented as well as his tasks, with particular reference to dean visitation.

## 1. THE ETYMOLOGY AND ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE OF DEAN

The word *dean* is found in languages derived from the Mediterranean culture.<sup>3</sup> This is because it is derived from the Latin word *decanus* formed from *decem* which in turn comes from the Greek word *deka* and means the number ten. Originally, this word meant an elderly man with some authority over ten people. In the Eastern Roman Empire, the title of dean was held by a supervisor of ten lower officials of the imperial court. In Roman law, this title was given to supervisors of ten soldiers or magistrates, or to members of the municipal council [Bobrowski 1903, 1025]. As noted by M. Przybyłko, the name dean was adopted by the Church from Roman offices, receiving different meanings throughout history. When monastic life began to be organised, in those monasteries we find deans elected by the prior and senior monks to supervise ten monks in the bedrooms and refectories. From its monastic significance, the institution of deanery passed to the lay clergy. Canonical colleges were formed, from which, in time, cathedral and collegiate chapters emerged. The members of these chapters began to elect deans to preside at meetings and represent the chapter externally. In imitation of the life of these chapters, the rest of the lay clergy, when deliberating on pastoral matters, gathered in the so-called district chapters, into which the dioceses were divided. At such a conference, a chairman was elected, usually the archpresbyter, i.e. the most senior and respected priest in the given district, who was entrusted by the bishop with supervision of the lifestyle of the local clergy. He was also given the title of dean. Sometimes deans were referred to directly as priests, vicars forane meaning rural vicars, or episcopal commissioners [Przybyłko 1960, 200].

In the history of the Church, the dean has been seen as an assistant to the bishop. Throughout history, various forms of such assistants have emerged, whose office shows great similarity to that of the modern dean. Such assistance was provided by, for example, chorepiscopi.<sup>4</sup> This word is derived from the Greek word *chora* and means province or village and was originally used to designate rural bishops. They can be found as early as the middle of the 2nd century and in the 4th century the office

<sup>3</sup> In French, it is *doyen*, in German *dean* and in English *dean*.

<sup>4</sup> The following items can be consulted on this office: Gillmann 1903; Amadou 1959, 233-40; Sardes 1975; Parisot 1901, 157-71; Leclef 1937, 1935; Kirsten 1941, 1105-114; Scholten 1876, 149-70; Höfer and Rahner 1957, 1080-1081; Gottlob 1928, 712-23; Moroni 1842, 122-35.

of chorepiscopi was flourishing. These bishops had full pastoral authority and ordinary titular authority of the office, making them in no way different from urban bishops.<sup>5</sup>

The powers of chorepiscopi are enumerated by M. Przybyłko: 1) they had oversight of the clergy and subordinate churches which they visited as vicars of the ordinary; 2) in their church and, with the permission of the diocesan bishop, they could confer minor ordination including the subdiaconate; 3) they had the right to issue letters of recommendation called letters of peace; 4) they accepted the vows of ladies consecrated to God; 5) they had the right and duty to care for the poor of their district; 6) they were allowed to celebrate Mass, even in the presence of the bishop; 7) they sat on councils; 8) they had the right to impose and lift public penances; 9) in the West, at least for a certain time in Gaul, they confirmed neophytes; 10) on receiving their office, they had the right to a special ordination rite which was conferred on them by the ordinary by the laying on of hands [ibid., 215-16]. The above powers, of course in a modified form and to the extent that the development of ecclesiastical law required, passed essentially to later deans.

The bishop's assistants also included visitators. When the office of chorepiscopi began to decline, in order to speed up this process, the Synod of Laodicea in the middle of the 4th century decreed that bishops should appoint *periodeutai*, i.e. visitators, in their place. They were given the right to visit designated churches, but without being able to announce any decisions. They were to report their findings at the next synod [ibid., 217-18].

However, the office most closely resembling today's function of dean was that of archdeacon. Archdeacons emerged from the ranks of deacons. The latter, in turn appointed by the apostles to care for the poor, soon became inseparable companions of the apostolic work and versatile assistants of the bishops. They received gifts from the faithful and handed them over to the bishop, read the gospel to those gathered in church, sometimes preached in the bishops' stead, assisted in the administration of Holy Communion, prepared catechumens, administered baptism, visited those in prison, took down the records of martyrdoms and cared for cemeteries [Silnicki 1927, 31]. For a long time, until the 9th century, an archdeacon could not be a priest. This office was so honourable that many preferred to be without

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<sup>5</sup> According to Rostworowski, this remarkable increase in the number of rural bishops changed in peacetime. The question arose as to whether, according to past practice, to establish bishops in every settlement, so that their numbers would increase excessively and their authority would diminish or to continue with the establishment of episcopal capitals only in larger urban centres. The question arose as to what to do with the existing rural pastors. Gradually, the powers of these rural bishops were reduced until finally they were made assistants and vicars of the rural bishop [Rostworowski 1925, 188].

ordination, so as not to lose this dignity, which, by the extent of its power and influence over the life of the diocese, surpassed that of the priesthood.<sup>6</sup>

The archdeacon originally had the duty to watch over the other deacons and guide them in the fulfilment of their tasks. In addition, he supervised the lower clergy. However, the essential nature of his tasks was economic in nature. In time, the canons forbade bishops to deal with property matters. Archdeacons soon concentrated in their hands almost all the authority for the administration of church property in the diocese. However, these were not the only activities of the archdeacon. From the 5th century onwards, they have been entrusted with the care for the proper education and nurture of candidates for the clerical state. In the 6th century, the archdeacon had the right to try and punish clerics in the first instance, which could be appealed to the bishop. The archdeacon could appear in state trials, where cases of clergy in dispute with the laity, and even cases of widows and orphans or poor people in general, were tried. During the bishop's illness, the archdeacon completely replaced him in the administration of the diocese [ibid., 76].

In the 9th and 10th centuries, the so-called district archdeacons occurred. Bishops began to divide dioceses into smaller districts and appointed archdeacons to head them. Their powers were as follows: 1) he had the right to take part in the solemn episcopal services during which he sang the gospel, oversaw the proper conduct of the liturgy in the cathedral church; 2) he administered the property and income of the cathedral church; 3) he cared for the education and nurture of candidates for the clerical state; 4) he oversaw the morals of both urban and rural clergy; 5) he annually visited the parishes of his archidiaconate; 6) he had the right to convene archdeacons' synods; 7) he examined the qualifications of candidates for ecclesiastical benefices and, after appointment by the bishop, their introduction; 8) together with the bishop, he appointed and removed deans, with whom the archdeacon shared the hardships of church governance; 9) he had a criminal jurisdiction that allowed him to impose the most severe punishments: suspend, impose excommunication and interdict. He could also impose fines; 10) he had its own judicial tribunal headed by an official, whose verdicts could be appealed to the bishop; 11) he had the right to material remuneration; 12) since the 12th century, they could appoint vicars for themselves [ibid., 76-77].

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<sup>6</sup> The bishop, wishing to get rid of an archdeacon who was inconvenient for him, would ordain him to the presbyterate, thus virtually demoting him. This was done, for example, in 450 by the Patriarch of Constantinople Anatolius, dissatisfied with his archdeacon Aetius [Silnicki 1927, 5; Idem 1953, 351].

From the 13th century, synods began to limit the power of archdeacons. The Council of Trent stipulated that ordinaries should examine the aptitude of candidates for clerical ordination, pass judgements in matrimonial matters, try and punish clergy, impose excommunications and impose other ecclesiastical penalties. Over time, the office of archdeacon began to disappear. In some localities, it survived until the 17th and 18th centuries, but with very limited authority, often retaining only the title without any powers [Przybyłko 1960, 233].

The office of dean and his tasks were dealt with by the 1917 Code of Canon Law.<sup>7</sup> CIC/17 gives the following definition of a dean: he is a priest placed at the head of a deanery by the bishop (Canon 445). From the common law, a dean has a certain amount of administrative authority, while from the particular law, on the basis of synodal laws or a bishop's order, a dean may have the power of jurisdiction. From the common law, a dean has the right and duty to see to it that the clergy live according to ecclesiastical regulations, performing their duties diligently, that they observe their residences, preach the word of God and implement the bishop's decrees after visitation. In addition, according to canon law, deans should see to it that in parishes regulations are observed with regard to the decoration of the church, the storage of the Blessed Sacrament, that church property is properly managed and that parish books are properly kept (Canon 447 para. 1) [Bączkowicz, Baron, and Stawinoga 1957, 571-72].

## 2. THE TASKS OF THE DEAN IN THE STATUTES OF THE FIRST SYNOD

The First Synod addressed the issue of the office of dean in Title III. At the outset, the legislator provides a definition of the office of dean, which virtually echoes the definition in CIC/17. It states that deans are *ex officio* assistants to the bishop in the administration of the diocese and share with the bishop the responsibility for discipline among the clergy and people. Statute 43 encourages deans to perform their duties diligently, even if they were to face various annoyances because of it. "As the faithful are more offended by impunity than by the failings of priests: they lose trust and begin to waver in their faith whenever they see that the failings of priests, reported to the dean or the bishop, go unpunished" (Statute 43 para. 2).

The particular legislator encourages the clergy to surround deans with the reverence and trust due to them, considering them as elder brothers who, on behalf of the authorities, perform a difficult duty for the common

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<sup>7</sup> *Codex Iuris Canonici Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus Benedicti Papae XV auctoritate promulgatus* (27.05.1917), AAS 9 (1917), pars II, p. 1-593 [hereinafter: CIC/17].

good (Statute 44). The dean, as an intermediary between the diocesan authority and the clergy of the deanery, should first and foremost oversee the life, morals and work of the clergy in the deanery, give encouragement and fraternal admonition to the priests and notify the bishop without delay of those who do not follow the law. In particular, the dean: 1) informs the curia of the assumption of office and the death of each priest; 2) submits to the curia all requests concerning the headcount of the clergy entrusted to him, attaching his opinion to the request; 3) visits the priests in the deanery who are seriously ill, in order to offer assistance if necessary and above all to try to give the sick person the last rites. On this occasion, the dean should ensure that the sick person puts his property affairs in order and, in particular, secures the celebration of Mass intentions; 4) is responsible for the funeral of deceased priests in the deanery (Statute 45).

Statute 46, on the other hand, enumerates the tasks of the dean as deanery administrator. In this area, the dean: 1) notifies the bishop of all major events that have taken place in the deanery; 2) accompanies the bishop during the canonical visitation, having arranged its order with the deanery clergy; 3) convenes and arranges the deanery congregation<sup>8</sup> and submits its records to the curia; 4) is ex-officio visitor of the schools in the deanery and sends his own reports, as well as those of the assistant visitors, to the curia; 5) keeps records of his activities, holds the seal and keeps the archive of the deanery.

Another group of tasks that the First Synod imposes on the dean are his duties towards churches and parishes. In this matter, the dean: 1) introduces the new parish priests into office, giving them possession of the church and the benefice according to Statute 68; 2) collects the holy oils for the deanery from the cathedral church and distributes them between individual churches; 3) controls the management of individual church institutions; 4) sends annually, in the month of January, copies of the certificates from each parish for the previous year and in October material for the schema for the following year (Statute 47).

In describing the office of dean, Bishop Leon Wałęga also took care to mention his rights and privileges. Among these, the First Synod lists the following: 1) right to *absolvendi a casibus reservatis in dioecesi et a censura propter procuracionem abortus* within the diocese; 2) it authorises the priests from a foreign diocese, equipped by their ordinaries with the authority to hear confessions and preach the word of God, to hear confessions, preach the word of God within the deanery for eight days, during missions, retreats and indulgences also to absolve from sins reserved in the diocese; 3) in cases of emergency, it grants priests the authority to binate, notifying

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<sup>8</sup> On this subject, consult: Lewandowski 2020, 93-109.

the bishop of this fact; 4) it grants permission to deliver a funeral eulogy or commemorative sermon under Statute 6;<sup>9</sup> 5) it allows weddings to take place in the afternoon under Statute 169;<sup>10</sup> 6) it grants permission to parish priests and vicars to leave the parish for a period of one week, provided that spiritual care in the parish is provided; 7) has the right to authorise the holding of extraordinary public processions; 8) blesses bells for non-consecrated churches and chapels; 9) examines whether the conditions required to open a semi-public chapel exist. An expression of the significance of the office of dean is also the provision stating that on the day of the funeral of an active or former dean, the bells should be rung in all the churches of the deanery (Statute 48).

### 3. DEAN'S VISITATION AS ONE OF THE IMPORTANT DUTIES OF THE DEAN

Among the numerous tasks of the dean, the First Synod emphasises the importance of dean's visitation. The dean, according to the synodal statutes, was obliged to personally visit the parishes in his deanery every year, except in the year when a canonical visitation of the bishop was scheduled in the given deanery. The Instruction for Dean's Visitation of the First Synod reads: "The dean should notify the parish priest of the day of the visitation 2 weeks in advance. The parish priest, notified of the day of the visitation, is to invite the patron and members of the parish committee to the parish office on that day and on the Sunday preceding the dean's arrival, announce from the pulpit that anyone wishing to see the dean in person may come to the parish office at the appointed hour on that day. The parish priest is to send horses to collect the dean from the railway station and take him to the station or to the next clergy house; and if the dean arrives with his own horses, he is to give maintenance for them and for the servant during the visitation."<sup>11</sup> In order to make it easier for the visitor to give an accurate

<sup>9</sup> "Para. 1. Deans may grant permission to deliver a funeral eulogy or commemorative sermon insofar as it is not possible to refer to the Curia due to lack of time or other legitimate obstacles. Para. 2. Lay people may speak at funerals with the knowledge of the parish priest, provided their religiousness is not questionable, once the priest has completed the sacred rites and put on the liturgical vestments. In the case of speeches that are unforeseen, or for legitimate reasons that do not inspire confidence, the priest is to remove himself under protest if he sees fit."

<sup>10</sup> "Para. 1. The conclusion of marriage late at night is always forbidden; in the afternoon it is possible for just reasons and with the separate permission of the Episcopal Curia or the competent dean who should easily permit it when it comes to weddings in cities and towns. Para. 2. The governors of churches shall take care to prevent, by prudent regulations, any possible disrespect for the Lord's sanctuary in such cases."

<sup>11</sup> *Instrukcja o wizytacji dziekańskiej* (04.11.1923), in: *Pierwszy Synod Diecezji Tarnowskiej*

and detailed account of the state of the parish and the activities of the clergy, the Instruction gives in detail the points according to which the visitor, on the basis of personal observations and on the basis of conversations with the clergy and the parish committee, will form an opinion of the overall parish life.

The visitation issues concerned several thematic blocks. The first referred to the religious and moral state of the parish. The following topics were addressed here: 1) the state of faith and morals in the parish; 2) celebration of Sundays and holidays: attending morning and afternoon services, attending sermons, abstaining from heavy work, public games, festivities; 3) observance of prescribed fasts; whether they are announced in advance from the pulpit; 4) receiving the Holy Sacraments: frequent and daily Holy Communion, attendance at weekday services; whether everyone complies with the obligation of Easter Confession and Communion, whether there is a card check for Easter Confession, whether infant baptisms are delayed; 5) family life in the parish: children upbringing, praying together, reading in families. Whether parents and employers are willing to send children and servants to services and catechisation; 6) adolescent youth: what their behaviour and piety are, whether there are youth associations in the parish; 7) bad magazines, books, libraries, shows; 8) drunkenness: saloons, weddings, parties. Whether and how the Temperance Society is developing in the parish; 9) public depravity, concubinage, "wild marriages," illicit friendships, illegitimate births, arbitrary separations, hatreds, rowdiness; 10) migration among parishioners: abroad, to cities or to factories. What is being done for their spiritual welfare; 11) negative influence of political parties, dissenters: how this is prevented (*Instruction*, 155-56).

The second block of issues subject to the dean's visitation was pastoral work. The dean paid attention to, among other things: 1) whether the service starts punctually and follows the prescribed order, at what time the service is held on weekdays; 2) whether homilies are always preached during the first morning mass on Sundays and holidays, sermons at mass and passion sermons at Bitter Lamentations, whether sermons are not extensively long, whether personal matters are not touched upon in sermons; 3) whether catechisation takes place regularly; 4) how children, young people and adults behave in church, whether men stand separately from women in church, whether church singing is developing properly; 5) whether May and October services are held, what other services are held during the year, how the Patron Saint of the church, parish is celebrated; 6) whether the faithful always have an easy opportunity to receive the Holy Sacraments, whether priests sit in the confessionals every day, whether foreign confessors

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[hereinafter: *Instruction*], p. 155.



are also invited; 7) when, how the preparation of children for their first Confession and Holy Communion takes place; 8) whether the sick are given the last rites as soon as a priest is called to them, whether anyone died without having received the last rites, whether and how often the bedridden are visited; 9) how the existing fraternities in the parish are developing: care for the orphans, the disabled, those called up for military service, the servants and above all the poor, whether there are charitable social associations such as homes for the poor, orphanages; 10) whether the parish priest makes an annual visitation of the parish, in what order, whether he admonishes the wicked, whether he carries out a careful preparation of the newlyweds to receive the sacrament of marriage in a worthy manner; 11) how the Parish Council is developing (*Instruction*, 156-57).

Another subject of the dean's visitation, according to the Instruction, was issues concerning buildings and the management of parish property. The dean paid attention to whether the church met the needs of the parishioners and whether it was properly secured. He also visited the cemetery, checking that there was proper order. Economic matters included whether the parish priest was running the farm, the state of the livestock and deadstock. The visitation also included office matters, whether the canonical and diocesan laws are observed in this respect, whether the organist and the church servants are hired on a contract basis and whether they are paid properly (*Instruction*, 157-59).

Finally, the Instruction contains a group of issues concerning the clergy. Among these, the following can be highlighted: 1) whether the dwellings of the parish clergy are in good condition, whether all priests wear tonsure and soutane, whether they give no reason for suspicion in their dealings with women, whether there are good relations between the clergy; 2) the dean was obliged to interview separately each diocesan priest residing within the parish about the life and duties of the priestly state: whether he keeps the order of his priestly life; how often he goes to confession; whether he devotes himself to the study of theology; whether he has in his library the Holy Scriptures, the Code of Canon Law, the Diocesan Statutes; when and where he has made a retreat; whether he has a will ready; whether he keeps the book of offerings diligently (*Instruction*, 159-61).

After the visitation, the dean drew up a visitation report in which he included his observations and indications. He signed it together with the parish priest. In turn, he presented a detailed report to the diocesan curia, noting the differences between the present state of the parish and its state during the previous visitation. In addition to the annual visitation, the dean could make an extraordinary visitation, if he considered it necessary, bearing in mind that he is an intermediary between the diocesan authority

and the clergy of the deanery and has the right to verify at any time any reports of irregularities in the parish of his deanery (Statute 60).

### CONCLUSIONS

1. The office of dean in the organisation of the Church was seen as one to assist the diocesan bishop in the exercise of governance over the territory that is part of the diocese bearing the name of a deanery.
2. In the history of the Church, the dean has been seen as an assistant to the bishop. Throughout history, there have been various forms of assistants to the bishop, whose office shows great similarity to that of the modern dean. These included chorepiscopi, visitators and archdeacons.
3. CIC/17 stipulated that the dean had the right and duty to see to it that the clergy lived according to ecclesiastical regulations, performing their duties diligently, that they observed their residences, preached the word of God and implemented the bishop's decrees after the visitation. In addition, in accordance with canon law, deans should ensure that in parishes the regulations are observed with regard to the decoration of the church, the storage of the Blessed Sacrament, that church property is properly managed and that parish books are properly kept.
4. The First Synod is somewhat a transmission belt that transfers the provisions of CIC/17 to the reality of the Diocese of Tarnów. The particular legislator, Bishop Leon Wałęga, encourages the clergy to surround deans with the reverence and trust due to them, considering them as elder brothers who, on behalf of the authorities, perform a difficult duty for the common good. The dean, as an intermediary between the diocesan authorities and the clergy of the deanery, should above all oversee the life, morals and work of the clergy in the deanery, give encouragement and fraternal admonitions to the priests and notify the bishop immediately of those who do not follow the law.
5. The dean's special task is dean's visitation. The First Synod offers the dean an extremely important aid to this duty, which is the Instruction for Dean's Visitation. It contains a series of issues that deal with the religious and moral state of the parish, pastoral work, buildings, property management, running of the office and the clergy.
6. The issue of the office and tasks of the dean in the First Synod, discussed in this article, has not been addressed in the literature on the subject so far. It is important and it is worth recalling the beginnings of the particular legislation of the Diocese of Tarnów on this subject. This is all the more so because later synods, as well as current legislation related to this issue, are largely based on the provisions of 1928, which should

be evaluated positively, especially the *Instruction* for Dean's Visitation. Deans, as representatives of the particular Church, in the light of the discussed statutes of the First Synod, belonged to the closest and most trusted associates of the diocesan bishop and played a very important role in the structure of the Church of Tarnów.

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