

THE REQUIREMENTS OF A CANDIDATE FOR BISHOP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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Abstract. The author in this article describes what appropriate requirements a candidate for bishop in the early church should have. These requirements are defined in Holy Scripture in the catalogue of behaviour and also derived from the writings of the early church writers and the decisions of some councils. The author divided the requirements of a candidate for bishop into those derived from *ius divinum*, *ius positivum*, *ius non scriptum*, human, spiritual, intellectual, pastoral, and requirements *sentire cum Ecclesia*.

Keywords: bishop; candidate for bishop; election of bishop; requirements; early Church.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2018, in accordance with Can. 401 § 1 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law,¹ Cardinal Dominik Duka OP resigned from the office of Archbishop of Prague. The pope accepted his resignation, but still kept him as the head of this office *donec aliter provideatur*.² The new Archbishop of Prague was appointed by Pope Francis on 13 May 2022. He appointed the former Archbishop of Olomouc, Jan Graubner (1948),³ who took office on 2 July 2022. Due to his age, he is sometimes pejoratively referred to as the “winter bishop” [Zeeden 2006, 152-52].⁴

However, the process of finding and appointing new bishops in the Czech Republic does not end with Jan Graubner, quite the opposite. In the near future it will be necessary to appoint a new Greek Catholic exarch in Prague, an archbishop in Olomouc, a bishop in Litoměřice and an archbishop in Prague.⁵ Also the auxiliary bishops will be subject to generational change.

¹ *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), pars II, pp. 1-317 [hereinafter: CIC/83].

² Apostolic Nunciature Prague, N. 1833/18 of 7 May 2018.

³ “L’Osservatore Romano” CLXII no. 109, 13 May 2022, p. 2.

⁴ Frederick V (Elector Palatine of the Rhine) known as the “Winter King” because his reign lasted only one year (1619-1620).

⁵ Apostolic Nunciature Prague, N. 785/23 of 28 August 2023.

News emerges regularly about a non-public or even secret process of finding a suitable candidate for diocesan bishop. There have been some criticisms from both the clergy and the laity of the Vatican's alleged covert proceedings [Jadrný 2017]. Voices have also been raised calling for the faithful to be listened to more, as they once were in the early centuries of the Church, and for the pope to make appropriate decisions. The people of God have legitimate expectations and ideas about their new bishop. The most important thing for them is not whether he has a doctorate in theology (Can. 378 CIC/83), but above all whether they know him, whether he comes from their diocese and what views he represents. Finally, the faithful want to assess his past actions, successes and failures.

This article will not focus on the process of electing a new bishop, but rather on the requirements that a candidate for bishop had to possess in the early Church.

1. BISHOPS IN THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the title of bishop (*episcopus*) did not belong to one who possessed a certain charism and exercised a specific ministry, permanent or temporary, in the community of believers since originally there was no difference between a bishop and a presbyter – either in hierarchical position or in the performance of ministries and tasks in the community [Beyer 1967, 771-82; Vopřada 2018, 14-19].⁶ However, the ministry of the bishop must be distinguished from the heads of Christian communities, who were also called bishops. The life and governance of the Christian community was very similar to that of the Jewish community, as many Christians came from Judaism, from the Pharisaic current. In the early days, the offices of bishops and deacons were combined. Jesus chose the apostles, whom he sent out while he was still on his earthly journey, to preach (Mk 3:14). By the command of Jesus Christ, the apostleship is directly linked to the preaching of the Gospel (Mk 16:15). In addition to the apostles, there were other groups of authoritative prophets and teachers, led by the Holy Spirit (Mk 9:38-40). After Christ's resurrection, the apostles and other preachers of the Gospel travelled from place to place, establishing communities of believers that had to be led and held accountable. This was especially the case when the apostles, prophets or other recognised preachers had already left a place. At that point, their appointees had to responsibly lead the community, provide community discipline, spiritual accompaniment, teaching and charity (Acts 6). Without such leadership, the Christian community would not have survived (1 Cor 12:28).

⁶ Cf. Acts 14:23; 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1; Titus 1:5-9.

From the very beginning of the first Christian communities, an internal organisational structure had to be established. The apostles Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters as superiors. These superiors were called bishops and deacons in Philippi (1 Thess 5:12; Rom 12:8; Gal 6:6-10; Phil 1:1).

In the Christian community originating from Judaism, the superiors were presbyters. The community deriving from paganism, from ancient Greece, referred to its superiors as bishops and deacons. These two offices were known even before the birth of Christianity. With its rise, offices, ministries, functions and those exercising them took on a new meaning. It was logical that bishops and deacons took over the leadership of the community of believers. The apostles, prophets and possibly other teachers, who founded the first communities of Christians and temporarily led them, chose their successors while they went elsewhere to evangelise.

2. *MUNUS* OF THE BISHOP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The episcopal state (*episcopatus*) comes from a person who, as a superior, was called to care for and supervise his subordinates. The Greek verb *σκοπέω* [Tichý 2001, 156]⁷ is translated in *LXX* into Latin as *intendere* [Pražák, Novotný, Sedláček 1937, 682].⁸ The Greek noun *ἐπίσκοποι* is translated into Latin as *speculatores* [Pražák, Novotný, and Sedláček 1937, 1144].⁹ The bishop, therefore, observes, watches over and, by virtue of his office, oversees the morals and life of the people under his jurisdiction, and intervenes when necessary.¹⁰

The term bishop also referred to: a provincial administrator, a community superior, a senior official, a construction manager and an overseer [Weiser 2006, 481-82]. A bishop was thus a person who was entrusted with responsible tasks that benefited the whole society or a particular community.

On the basis of the surviving testimonies of Christian communities from the early centuries of the Church's life, it is known that there were two types of hierarchical episcopal office. In the eastern Antiochian tradition, we encounter the monarchical-type bishop. His task was to lead and teach the faithful the proper doctrine of the Church (*munus regendi, munus docendi*), organise and preside over liturgical assemblies (*munus sanctificandi*)

⁷ To watch, observe, be mindful of something.

⁸ To measure, multiply, magnify, aim, measure, direct, take something to heart, consider, consider somebody, care about something, pay attention to, attend to something, look at, turn eyes to, care about something, intend.

⁹ A scout, spy, eyewitness, researcher, watchman, guardian; those who are looking for something, investigating something.

¹⁰ See *Isidor ze Sevilly. Etymologie VI-VII*, Oikoymenh, Praha 2004, p. 313.

(1 Cor 2:15). The Western tradition gave rise to the collegial-type bishop office, exercised by presbyters or presbyter-bishops [Dupuy 1973, 500-1]. The exact definition of the episcopal ministry in the early Church is unknown. A bishop may have been appointed as one of the presbyters who presided over the eucharistic assembly or oversaw the unity of the faith in several communities where he coordinated cooperation.¹¹ However, the title of bishop could also be given to one who presided over a presbyteral assembly or had apostolic succession [Cattaneo 1997, 93-103]. The Apostle Paul recognised the ministries of apostles, prophets and teachers as the most important for the growth of the Church (1 Cor 12:28). However, these are not ministries with precisely defined tasks in a hierarchical order (Acts 13:1-2). If Paul was called an 'apostle', it is clear from the Scripture that he also exercised the ministry of prophet and teacher.

The author of the ancient Christian treatise *Didache*¹² (80-130) described the liturgical practice and disciplinary customs in Christian communities at the time. He also mentioned bishops and deacons, whose spiritual rank was lower than that of prophets. Nevertheless, they could not be overlooked in the community because they exercised the ministry of prophets and teachers in and for the benefit of that community. The itinerant apostles, who continued the work of the twelve apostles, were also preachers of Christian doctrine, proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified, who lives because he rose from the dead (1 Cor 9:2). The itinerant prophets taught and led the congregations in Eucharistic celebrations. By proclaiming the word of God, interpreting revelations, mystical experiences and incarnated knowledge, they built up the community into the Church of God (1 Cor 14:4.30), exhorting and encouraging its members (1 Cor 14:3). They also recognised God's will and then revealed the future to the community or to individuals (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14). The ministry of teachers was considered a charismatic ministry and was closely linked to the prophetic and pastoral ministry (Acts 13:1; Eph 4:11).

It is clear from the *Didache* that the elected bishops and deacons formed a permanent element of the Christian communities for which they were also responsible. However, it is not clear whether they were chosen from among the laity, presbyters or deacons [Quasten 2000, 38]. The author of the treatise

¹¹ See E. Hieronymus, *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Titum*, in: *Patrologiae cursus completus, sive bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, oeconomica, omnium SS. Patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum*, XXVI, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1845, p. 597; Idem, *Epistola CXLVI, Ad Euangelum presbyterum*, in: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vol. LVI, Epistularum Pars III: Epistulae CXXI-CLIV*, ed. F. Tempisky, G. Freytag (g.m.b.h.), Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1918, p. 308.

¹² See *Učení dvanácti apoštolů /Didaché*, in: *Spisy apoštolských otců*, ed. L. Varcl, D. Drápal, J. Sokol, Kalich, Praha 2004, pp. 11-28.

emphasised that bishops and deacons had to be cared for just as carefully as itinerant prophets, teachers and apostles, because they also taught and led the Christian community. They had to be respected because they led the Christian community according to the order of the Gospel, which served to preserve the unity of the Church (IV, X, XI, XIII-XV) [Cattaneo 1997, 63-92; Vopřada 2018, 43-46].

Pope Clement of Rome (d. 97/101), in his letter to the Corinthians, which is one of the most important Christian writings of the post-apostolic era, reminded his addressees that the apostles were called by Jesus Christ to teach and proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. The apostles appointed bishops and deacons at all their stops on the evangelistic journey. However, the later appointment of bishops was accompanied by disputes, machinations and often their unlawful removal. The task of the bishops was to lead the community and fulfil their duties, including making offerings without blemish in piety. Bishops presided over specific communities. Clement advocated the idea of a mono-episcopate in the apostolic succession¹³ [Pottmeyer 2006, 482-83]. However, it is not clear from the letter whether any of the presbyters or deacons were bishops in Corinth. As Bishop of Rome, he also felt responsible for the situation in Corinth because, as he claimed, his instructions for the Corinthians came from the Holy Spirit. However, it is not clear from the letter whether any of the presbyters or deacons were bishops in Corinth¹⁴ [Quasten 2000, 49-51].

According to St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107), the bishop stands at the head of the Christian community, which was an image of the heavenly hierarchy. He believed that looking upon the bishop was equivalent to looking upon the Lord himself.¹⁵ The bishop was to supervise everyone – deacons, priests and laity. The bishop was to be the intense bond of unity, both among ministers and among the rest of the people. He was also to preside over the true Eucharist and the community of love.¹⁶ Ignatius considered unity and unanimity under the leadership of the bishop to be the characteristic feature of the Christian community, since there is only one Eucharist, one Body of Jesus Christ, one faith in Jesus Christ and one altar. The bishop, together with the presbyters and deacons, were therefore to form one

¹³ See Klement Římský, První list Klementův, in: *Spisy apoštolských...*, pp. 49-51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84, 92.

¹⁵ See Ignác Antiochijský, *Ignatios Efezským*, in: *Spisy apoštolských...*, p. 119; *Idem*, *Ignatios Magneským*, in: *Spisy apoštolských...*, p. 124; *Idem*, *Ignatios Tralleským*, in: *Spisy apoštolských...*, pp. 126-27.

¹⁶ See Ignác Antiochijský, *Ignatios Efezským*, pp. 118-19; *Idem*, *Ignatios Magneským*, p. 123; *Idem*, *Ignatios Smyrenským*, in: *Spisy apoštolských...*, p. 137.

body.¹⁷ For Ignatius, the unity of the faithful people, deacons and presbyters with their bishop was sacramental [Pottmeyer 2006, 483].

The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) demonstrates clearly the mono-episcopal leadership of the Christian community in the Western tradition. All members of the community participated in the election of its own bishop. He was consecrated on the Lord's Day, with the participation of the whole community, the presbyters and the local bishops. His task was to direct the faithful that were entrusted to him, to exercise the archpriestly ministry day and night, to reconcile the people to God, to bring to God the gifts of the community and to perform other ministries necessary for the life of the Christian community. For the bishop has been gifted to perform these tasks by the same Holy Spirit who was given to Jesus Christ and who gives superiors the perfect grace to constantly learn, transmit and guard the authentic faith. The laying on of hands by other bishops on the head of the elect was considered a visible sign of the bestowal of the Spirit of Christ.¹⁸

3. REQUIREMENTS OF A CANDIDATE FOR BISHOP

Over the course of the development of the Church, the requirements of a candidate for bishop have changed. Initially, a pure moral profile was primarily emphasised, according to the ideals taken from Scripture (*ius divinum*) or according to local custom and current circumstances (*ius positivum*). There were no lists of requirements that a suitable candidate should possess.

Local priests, deacons and the people of God were present at the election of a new bishop. The presentation and evaluation of candidates took place in public meetings. The subsequent election of the bishop and his installation on the episcopal seat were public so that only a person who possess the appropriate requirements could become a hierarch [Cattaneo 1997, 111-12].

3.1. Requirements mentioned in the New Testament

After Judas' death, the remaining apostles decided to fill his place with a suitable candidate. It had to be a man who had travelled with them since John's baptism and had witnessed the resurrection of Christ. The choice, preceded by a common prayer, fell on Matthias (Acts 1:20-26).

The first precise enumeration of the requirements of a candidate for bishop was summarised by the author of the Epistle to Titus, St. Paul's helper,

¹⁷ See Ignác Antiochijský, Ignatios Efezským, p. 122; Idem, Ignatios Filadelfským, in: Spisy apoštolských..., p. ¹³³.

¹⁸ See Hippolyt Římský, *Apoštolská tradice*, Refugium, Velehrad 2000, pp. 17-19.

whom the latter had left in Crete to continue the apostolic work there. “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:5-9).

According to the author of the epistle, the presbyters were to oversee the development of Christianity in small communities in different parts of the island. However, they did not have the charism of leadership because they were not called to the ministry by Paul himself. The author states that the steward of the house of God is the bishop. He is the superior of the entire Christian community on the island. Among other things, his task was to appoint presbyters to the ministry. In this catalogue, the author outlined the requirements that Titus should have possessed as bishop. He concluded with an exhortation to be sure in his words of teaching, to support others in sound doctrine and to convince opponents. He was not only supposed to be a teacher, but he had to actually know how to teach (1 Tim 3:1-13; 2 Tim 3:1-5) [Biancalani and Rossi 2019, 1533-543].

3.2. Requirements according to the Church Fathers

There is no official systematic catalogue of the requirements that a candidate for bishop should fulfil. The ecclesiastical writers in the first centuries of the Church had clear ideas about the requirements of a candidate for bishop. They derived their ideals from Scripture and from the life of individual Christian communities. They professed their faith both in times of peace and affluence and in periods of war, systematic persecution of Christians, plagues and other social or natural disasters. The bishop was supposed to respond appropriately to all these situations.

3.2.1. Requirements according to the author of the *Didache*

The unknown author of the *Didache* treatise adopted the requirements for a bishop from the Gospel (1 Tim 3:2-3). He emphasised that a bishop and a candidate for bishop, was supposed to be above all worthy of the Lord. He was also expected to be courteous, not money-loving, devoted and proven (XV).

3.2.2. Requirements according to St. Cyprian

St. Cyprian (d. 258) was convinced that a bishop is freely chosen by God (*iudicium Dei*). He should therefore be respected by all, and thus the consensus of the clergy and the entire community of the faithful reinforces this choice.¹⁹ The people really know the candidate best. They also know his behaviour because they live together.²⁰ The bishop is expected to be courageous and fearless in defending true doctrine and demanding discipline from the clergy and laity under his authority. Cyprian wrote to Pope Stephen I (d. 257) that in times of persecution of Christians the bishop was expected to be courageous, not to deny the faith. The bishop, but also every clergyman, should be able to welcome, protect and care for all those who seek rescue in the Church. He must be able to provide care, concern and protection to all the wounded according to the model of mercy and goodness found in the Gospel. The unity of the Christian community should be at his heart.²¹ Furthermore, he is expected to have the courage to accept exile in times of persecution or to undergo martyrdom for his faith in Christ.²²

In his writings, Cyprian portrayed the bishop and every clergyman as one who is not concerned only with multiplying his wealth, but devotes himself to the service of God, is generous to the poor and has mercy for them, maintains discipline in his life, does not despise authority, does not curse using his tongue, does not use venomous speech, does not live in hatred and does not spread unrest among the people. The bishop must not leave his people and his cathedral to go to the market, engage in trade, buy land and earn money through usury.²³ The bishop is supposed to be a master of the word and be able to persuade and debate in unity with other bishops using strong speech, but he must not abuse his power and authority to achieve personal goals²⁴ [Myszor 2001, 109-14; Petriglieri 2009, 46-59].

¹⁹ Saint Cyprian, 43. *Cyprian to all the people, greeting*, in: *The Fathers of the Church, Saint Cyprian, Letters (1-81)*. Translated by Sister Rose Bernard Donna, C.S.J., The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C, p. 108; Idem, 55. *Cyprian to Antonian, his brother, greeting*, in: *The Fathers of the Church...*, p. 138; Idem, 59. *Cyprian to Cornelius, his brother, greeting*, in: *The Fathers of the Church...*, p. 177; Idem, 66. *Cyprian, also known as Thascius, to Florentius, his brother, also known as Puppian, greeting*, in: *The Fathers of the Church...*, p. 224; Idem, 68. *Cyprian to Stephen, his brother, greeting*, in: *The Fathers of the Church...*, p. 240.

²⁰ Idem, *Cypriani Cecil, Primus, Polycarp, Nicomedes*, in: *The Fathers of the Church...*, p. 235.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 241-43.

²² Idem, 60th *Cyprian to Cornelius, his brother, greeting*, in: *The Fathers of the Church...*, pp. 195-96.

²³ Idem, *De lapsis and De Ecclesiae Catholicae unitate*. Text and Translation by Maurice Bévenot, S.J., Oxford at The Clarendon Press, London 1971, pp. 8-11.

²⁴ Idem, 57. *Cyprian, Liberalis, Caldonius, Nicomedes, Cecil, Marrutius, Felix, Successus, Faustinus, Fortunatus, Victor, Saturninus, another Saturninus*, in: *The Fathers of the*

3.2.3. Requirements according to St. Jerome

St. Jerome (d. 420) reflected on the requirements of a candidate for bishop in a letter to the dignified and very zealous Roman aristocrat Oceanus.²⁵ In the letter, he compiled a catalogue of requirements known from the apostle Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. If anyone aspires to the episcopacy, he desires a good task (1 Tim 3:1). But this involves hardship, effort and humiliation for oneself. To be a bishop does not mean to live ostentatiously, to be liked and to reach the pinnacle of one's career and social life. According to Jerome, a bishop should be characterised by a impeccable life, even before receiving the sacrament of baptism (1 Tim 3:2.6; Titus 1:6). A blameless life includes all the virtues; this is not mutually exclusive with sin. Jerome reminds us that there was only one without sin on earth.

A candidate for bishop was to possess such requirements or characteristics as were needed in that community, that is, the one which was to be entrusted to him in the future to govern, which wanted a particular candidate as its bishop.

St. Jerome also enumerated other requirements: excelling in the art of the word, having the authority of a master who edifies with words and language; being sufficiently learned (Titus 1:9); married once (1 Tim 3:2); keeping one's house in order and taking care of one's family (1 Tim 3:4); being sober, wise, noble and hospitable (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7-8); being able to teach and preside over the liturgical assembly with dignity. According to St. Jerome, a bishop's thought should always be fresh, alert and clear. The candidate must not be identified with silliness, foolishness, a ridiculous manner of walking, dress, or anything that might arouse ridicule. He should be dignified both externally and internally so that he is accepted even by people who are outside the Church (1 Tim 3:7).

Jerome stressed that this list of requirements must be adhered to while electing a bishop because they derive from Christ's command. If these preliminary requirements were not observed, rivalry and hatred would arise between the candidates [Girolamo 1974, 98-101].

Church..., pp. 156-62.

²⁵ E. Hieronymus, *Epistola LXIX, Ad Oceanum*, in: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Vol. LIV, *Epistularum Pars I: Epistulae I-LXX*, ed. F. Tempisky, G. Freytag (g.m.b.h.), Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1910, pp. 678-700; St. Jerome, *To Oceanus*, in: *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. VI., *Letters and Select Works*, ed. P. Schaff, H. Wace, The Christian Literature Company, London-New York 1893, p. 141.

3.2.4. Requirements according to St. Hilary

St. Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367) emphasised education. In his work *De Trinitate*, at the beginning of Book Eighth, he reflected on why a bishop should not only be pious and good, but also educated. He came to the conviction that teaching and transmitting erroneous doctrine of the faith harms people similarly to a fatal disease. As a model of virtue, St. Hilary cited the Apostle Paul, who was capable of teaching and encouraging in true doctrine, convincing opponents rather than making vain speeches. It is thus not enough for a candidate to be good, but he must be capable of teaching and defending the faith. If he lives impeccably, his teaching is more authentic. The candidate's life is to be adorned with education, and education with a concrete life. He is expected to be a good example in order to be credible. In this way, his opponents would not be able to shame and criticise him (Titus 2:7-8).

Following the example of St. Paul, Hilary reminded us that a bishop should be educated because education is very important for sound preaching, an informed faith, mastering the art of encouragement and combating erroneous teachings. Education and wisdom also help not only in seeking and fulfilling one's own will, but also in acting in ways that are not pleasing to man. If he acts only according to his will, the result will be idle talk, foolishness and thoughtless preaching.²⁶

3.2.5. Requirements according to John Chrysostom

In his dialogical treatise *On the Priesthood*, St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) divided the hierarchical structure of the Church into bishops, presbyters and deacons. He used the term "priesthood" to describe both the episcopal and presbyteral ministries. According to him, bishops and presbyters should possess the same requirements.

He pointed out that craftsmen, professionals and soldiers should stick to their craft because they understand it. If they do something they do not understand, they will cause considerable damage, sometimes ending in death. Eternal death threatens priestly ministers who do not know how to perform their ministry. God does not accept their excuses about their weakness, lack of understanding of the situation or deficient knowledge on the subject. Those who are to be entrusted with the care of Christ's Church, which is his body, must take care of its full health, so that it is immaculate, holy and impeccable (Eph 5:27).

²⁶ Hilarius, *De Trinitate*, in: *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, sive bibliotheca universalis ... omnium S.S. Patrum, Doctorum, Scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum qui ab aevo apostolico ad Innocentii III tempora floruerunt*, X, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1845, pp. 234-37.

According to John, those who are to fulfil the priestly ministry, both presbyteral and episcopal, should possess the following requirements: be able to direct souls, have the virtues of the soul formed by the spiritual life; be free, good, kind, kind-hearted and live simply; live uncompromisingly; be hard-working; be able to discern appropriate situations and understand what they should do and what is expected of them. Candidates who meet these criteria can be expected to serve for the glory of God and building up of His Church²⁷ [Petriglieri 2009, 104-107].

4. MIRACULOUS ELECTION OF A BISHOP

According to the Church historian Eusebius (d. 339), sometimes a man was elected bishop without any ambition to become one. This was the case of Pope Fabian (d. 250). He was a peasant who moved to Rome and, as a devout Christian, took part in the election of the new bishop in the city after the death of Pope Anteros (d. 236). During the election, a dove descended on his head. This was taken as a manifestation of God's grace, as a heavenly sign, on the basis of which Fabian was elected bishop without being known in ecclesiastical or urban circles [Eusebio 2001, 51-52].

A similar thing happened to Alexander (d. 251), bishop of Cappadocia. In a night vision it was revealed to him that he was to head the bishopric together with Narcissus (d. 213), bishop of Jerusalem. Thus, Alexander went on a journey to Jerusalem to pray in the holy places. The people of the city welcomed him very warmly, but did not allow him to return home, because some of them also had visions in which it was revealed to them to go out in front of the gate and receive the bishop chosen by God. Alexander, with the consent of the surrounding bishops, was forced to remain in Jerusalem and accept the episcopal ministry [ibid., 24-26].

5. REQUIREMENTS MENTIONED IN THE NORMATIVE ACTS OF THE 4TH-8TH CENTURY

The episcopal office has always been regarded as the highest in the hierarchical structure of the ecclesiastical community. The process of electing a bishop began to take legislative form at councils and synods from the 4th century onwards. Canons were adopted then concerning the requirements that a candidate usually had to possess, but they also specified those which prevented one from assuming the office.

²⁷ Jan svatý Chrysostomos, *O kněžství*, Krystal OP, Praha 2022, pp. 118-21, 139-40.

In the first centuries of the Church's life, it was not required to receive the sacrament of baptism before being elected to the office of bishop, but it was required to assume this office in a solemn and liturgical manner [Mi-hai 2014, 73-74]. The process of selecting candidates was diverse, non-uniform, locally and culturally determined. Various anonymous (pseudo-apostolic) disciplinary, liturgical, moral and confessional collections indicating the requirements of a candidate for episcopacy were written down during this period.

5.1. Requirements according to *Constitutiones apostolorum*

The collection of legal and liturgical books *Constitutiones apostolorum* was written in the 4th century, before the First Council of Constantinople (381). The author summarised the requirements of a candidate for bishop in the second book. The basic requirement was that the attributes mentioned in Scripture should be fulfilled – that the elders in the Church should be immaculate and once married. They should not be angry, haughty, drunkards, adventurers, speculators and neophytes. They should be characterised by a peaceful disposition, charity and a good conscience.²⁸

The author set the minimum age for a candidate for bishop at fifty, because at that age he should already be humane to others, mature and kind. These requirements mature in a person over time and evolve from previous youth and unkindness. The candidate should also be educated. If he is uneducated, he should be skilful in speech. If no one of the required age can be found in a small parish, a younger person may be ordained. Before doing so, however, his reputation among his neighbours should be examined to see whether they consider him worthy of the episcopal office. It should also be investigated whether he is respectable, faithful, decent; whether he has a respectable and faithful wife or has previously had one; whether he raises his children piously; whether he is respected by his household and whether they are subject to him (II, Can. 1-3; VIII, Can. 14-18).²⁹

5.2. Requirements according to *Canones apostolorum*

The final Book Eight in the *Constitutiones apostolorum* contains a set of 85 canons called *Canones apostolorum*. This book posits that a bishop cannot be one who after his baptism has been married twice or has had

²⁸ Cf. Titus 1:6-7; 1 Tim 3:2-6; 2 Cor 11:26; Gal 2:4; Mt 5:5-8; 12:36-37; Lk 14:11; 18:14; Eph 6:4.

²⁹ See *Constitutiones apostolorum*, in: *Konstytucje apostołskie oraz Kanony Pamfilosa z apostołskiego synodu w Antiochii, Prawo kanoniczne św. Apostołów, Kary świętych Apostołów dla upadłych*, Euchologion Serapiona, ed. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2007.

a concubine; who has married a widow, a divorced woman, a harlot, a slave or any woman of the theatre; who has married his sister-in-law or niece; who has been accused of adultery or other forbidden acts and has subsequently been condemned; who has deliberately mutilated his genitals; who is totally blind, deaf, possessed by demons, a neophyte; who is a slave and his master has not consented to it (Can. 17-19, 21-22, 61, 78-79, 80, 82).

5.3. Requirements according to the consecration prayer

In the 4th century, the liturgical regulations were still in the process of being formed, but an established local form of rites and prayers had already been achieved. Book Eight of the *Constitutiones apostolorum* contains the doctrine on the appointment of new bishops, followed by the consecration prayer. According to this doctrine, a bishop was expected to be a man of irreproachable character, elected by the people and the presbyters for his merits; a man of noble and great spiritual strength; of perfect piety and righteousness before the people; having his family and domestic affairs in order and leading an exemplary life (VIII, Can. 4,1-6).

From the text of the consecration prayer, which is literarily, theologically and biblically sublime, it is possible to deduce what requirements a candidate for bishop should possess. The human expectations included: the ability to care for the people of God entrusted to him; the performance of the archpriesthood services; the fulfilment of one's ministry diligently day and night; the presentation of requests before God; the multiplication of the number of people saved and offering the gifts of the Church to God. The spiritual requirements required included: openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins; openness to the will of God and the responsible administration of other ecclesiastical offices; the ability to properly dispose of the authority delegated to the apostles; the desire to please God; humility, purity of heart, sinlessness and peace of conscience in offering the bloodless sacrifice (VIII, 5.1-7).

5.4. Requirements according to *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*

The *Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua* (476-485) is an ecclesiastical disciplinary collection consisting of 102 canons. The author of the collection is unknown. It could probably have been a Greek monk living in the monastery of St. Victor in Marseilles [Lichner 2020, 5-9].

The very first sentence of the introduction to the *Statuta* reads: "He who is to be ordained bishop is first to be examined". It had to be examined whether the candidate for bishop fulfilled the following criteria: he was prudent by nature, capable of learning, temperate in his manners, kind, humble,

charitable, led a life of chastity, dealt properly with personal affairs, did not drink alcohol and recognised marriage.

The following were considered essential: an education in the law of the Lord; the ability to understand Scripture; an orientation in the ecclesiastical truths of the faith; and, above all, a confession of pure faith and the ability to interpret it in simple words. In addition, he was to be publicly questioned on the Christian faith, i.e. whether he believed: that God is the sole author of the New and Old Testaments; in the resurrection of an earthly body; in God's judgment and atonement for deeds. If the candidate was sufficiently examined and deemed suitable by the clergy and the people, he received episcopal ordination.³⁰

5.5. Requirements in civil law

From the time of the Edict of Milan (313), when Christians gained religious freedom and Christianity became the state religion, ecclesiastical and secular power influenced each other.

The Western Roman Emperor Valentinian III (d. 455) worked closely with Pope Leo I the Great (d. 431). He issued a decree bringing all the provinces of the empire under his jurisdiction. According to this decree, every candidate for bishop in the Western Roman Empire was to be approved by the Holy See before consecration (XVII).³¹

The Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian I (d. 565) linked secular authority to ecclesiastical authority in his legislation. The state religion was Orthodox Christianity, so Justinian established many duties, rights and privileges for bishops, clerics, monks and other consecrated persons.

In *Codex Iustinianus* (529), the requirements of a candidate for bishop were defined as follows: the choice of a candidate to be ordained was considered sacramental and thus he had to be unblemished; in a given city, three candidates had to be chosen who were virtuous and distinguished by justice and honesty. The one elected to the office was the most suitable of the three, one with the most sincere motivation to become a bishop, who was able to dedicate his life to Christ and His teaching and did not boast of his possessions. The candidate could not live with a woman, have children or grandchildren, as he was to be a faithful and spiritual husband and father to all people. The legally required minimum age was set at thirty-five.

³⁰ See *Statuta Ecclesiae antiqua*, in: Anonym (= Gennadius Masilliensis?), ed. M. Lichner, *Dobrá kniha*, Trnava 2020, pp. 89-111.

³¹ See *The Novels of the Sainted Valentinian Augustus*, in: *Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions. A Translation with Commentary, Glossary, and Bibliography* by Clyde Phar, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1952, pp. 515-50.

However, a monk who had lived in a monastery since childhood could also be ordained, even if he had not yet reached the age of maturity. However, his suitability had to be confirmed. A bishop could not be a civil servant, unless he had already worked as a priest, or someone known to have been negligent in the fulfilment of his duties (I. 3.9, 42 § 1, 48, 53).³²

5.6. Requirements in the councils' resolutions

Synods and councils in the first centuries of the Church's life were locally and culturally determined. Decisions, however, usually did not bring about major changes. They usually solemnly confirmed what was already subject to customary law (*ius non scriptum*) and was known from the writings of previous Church authorities.

At the synod of Ancyra (314), it was enacted that those who, after being baptised, offered sacrifices to pagan gods and those who in some way denied the faith during the persecution of Christians and did not implement an improvement in their lives afterwards could not be ordained (Can. 3, 12).³³ At the Council of Neocaesarea in Pontus (314), it was enacted that a man under the age of 30 could not become a presbyter. In addition, he was to be sufficiently examined beforehand as to whether he was leading a worthy life. This age was chosen after the example of Jesus Christ, who was baptised at the age of thirty and only then began his teaching (Can. 11).³⁴ At the Council of Chalcedon (451) it was established by the council fathers that no one could be ordained without a designated church in a city or village or a monastery (Can. 6).³⁵

At the synod of Laodicea (the second half of the 4th century), the synodal fathers decided that neophytes could not be ordained (Can. 3, 57).³⁶ At the Council of Rome (465) it was decided that illiterates could not aspire to ordination (Can. 3).³⁷ At the Second Council of Nicaea (787), it was determined that one who did not know the entire Book of Psalms could not become a bishop. The candidate was to be thoroughly examined by the metropolitan on the entire Psalter, on his knowledge of the sacred canons,

³² Codex Iustinianus, in: Corpus Iuris Civilis, Historia Chronologica Iuris Civilis Romani, Editio Novissima, Juxta Parisiensem An. M.DCCC.XXX.

³³ See Synod of Ancyre, in: Acta Synodalia ab anno 50 ad annum 381, vol. I, ed. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2006, pp. 62-68.

³⁴ See Neocaesareense Concilium, in: Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, II, ed. J.D. Mansi, Florentiae MDCCLIX, pp. 539-42.

³⁵ See Sobór Chalcedoński, in: Dokumenty Soborów Powszechnych, Tekst grecki, łaciński, polski, vol. 1, ed. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2001, pp. 224-57.

³⁶ See Sinodo di Laodicea, in Concili Greci, Roma 2006, pp. 336-51.

³⁷ See Concilium Romanum XLVIII, in: Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio, VII, ed. J.D. Mansi, Florentiae MDCCLXII, pp. 959-62.

the sacred Gospels, the Epistles and all Scripture. The Metropolitan was also to check whether the candidate had observed God's commandments in his life and whether he had taught them to the faithful (Can. 2).³⁸

The canonical requirements for a candidate for the episcopal ministry were summarised and adopted at councils and synods in the first centuries of the Church, with the exception of liturgical prayers. However, they were not systematised. At the beginning, the moral profile of the candidate was examined and assessed. Originally, no emphasis was put on the candidate's education or possible illiteracy, which did not correspond to the requirements mentioned in Scripture (Titus 1:5-9).

CONCLUSION

Episcopal appointments have always aroused the interest of the faithful. The curiosity of the people concerned mainly the "familiarity" of the candidate, whether it would be a person from their area or a stranger. In the case of a figure known to them, the community could more easily anticipate the nature of the episcopal ministry. On the other hand, if a priest unknown to them was nominated, they tended to approach him with a degree of suspicion, not knowing what position he would represent.

The catalogue of requirements that a candidate for bishop or an elder entrusted with the leadership of a community of believers should possess were recorded by St. Paul in his Epistle to Titus. It was this catalogue that was intended to predestine leaders in the newly established Christian communities. Early Christian church writers were also guided by this catalogue. In later studies, they commented in more detail on the requirements that a candidate for bishop should possess in relation to the particular community of believers entrusted to him. The requirements of the episcopal candidate contained in Scripture and in the writings of recognised authors also permeated the rulings of the various councils. These included above all attributes that made it possible or, on the contrary, impossible for a candidate to be a bishop.

The requirements of a candidate for bishop in the early Church can be divided into eight categories:

- 1) those derived from *ius divinum*: requirements set out in the New Testament;

³⁸ See Synodus Nicaena II, in: *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XIII, ed. J.D. Mansi, Florentiae MDCCLXVII, pp. 747-58.

- 2) those derived from *ius positivum*: requirements according to local custom and current circumstances as specified in council resolutions and civil legislation;
- 3) those derived from *ius non scriptum*: requirements from customary law, locally and culturally determined;
- 4) human: male; close and known to the people around him, accepted by the majority of the laity and presbyters; having orderly relations; humanly mature and wise; not necessarily celibate or married once; just, temperate, has his family and property affairs in order; knows how to manage the Church's property; enjoys a healthy respect among clergy, consecrated persons and laity;
- 5) spiritual: a man with a deep spiritual life whose model is the Good Shepherd; his spiritual life is based on Scripture; open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; capable of discerning the charisms of the community and of individuals; capable of living and making sacrifices for the community which has itself chosen him;
- 6) intellectual: the ability to read and write was not necessary; familiar with Scripture; an able rhetor; educated in true science; able to teach and defend the pure doctrine of the Church against error;
- 7) *sentire cum Ecclesia*: awareness that he is at the service of the whole Church and of a particular community; he has the ability to observe ecclesiastical discipline, to maintain collegial relations with presbyters, deacons and local bishops;
- 8) pastoral: he does not necessarily have to be a presbyter or deacon; must be willing, committed and able to take responsibility for the community; knows the needs of the community; able to find collaborators.

Each of these categories can be developed in more detail, and the list can be expanded to include requirements defined both as positive and negative. In conclusion, it must be added that an ideal, flawless candidate for bishop did not exist in the early Church just as he does not exist today. As St. Jerome reminded us, only Jesus Christ was sinless and perfect here on earth.

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