

BISHOP

A clergyman of the highest order, senior in rank to priests and deacons. The Coptic term (*episkopos*) and the Arabic (*usquf*) are derived from the [Greek](#) and Latin versions (*episkopos*, *episcopus*), which, etymologically, mean “overseer.”

Bishops are successors to the apostles, and, from the historical point of view, the episcopate is a continuation of the apostolate. The Pastoral Epistles lay down in some detail the requisite qualities of a person worthy of being a good bishop (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Ti. 1:7-10), which can be summarized as follows. (1) As God’s steward, a bishop must be above reproach. (2) As Saint Paul’s successor, he must be a competent teacher, able to expound the true Christian doctrine, having a twofold duty: to fill the faithful with zeal, and to refute the arguments of those who hold unorthodox views. (3) As Christ’s follower, he must be no lover of wealth. (4) He must be courteous, hospitable, and well thought of by Christians and non-Christians alike.

In addition to these Pauline qualifications, two further conditions were later imposed. (1) According to the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, candidates for the bishopric should be at least fifty years of age, to ensure wisdom and sagacity. This rule, however, was sometimes waived in the case of outstanding persons who had special merits justifying their eligibility, as, for example, Saint ATHANASIUS, who was consecrated bishop of Alexandria at the age of twenty-three. (2) A candidate should already be ordained priest and protopriest (Connolly, 1929, chap. 3, p. 24).

Selection of Bishops

The DIDASCALIA stipulates the unanimous approval of the congregation of the chosen person. The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* also stresses that the person to be ordained bishop “is to be chosen by the whole

people, who, when he is named and approved, let the people assemble with the presbytery and bishops that are present, on the Lord's day, and let them give their consent."

Some church authorities (Ibn Sabba' and al-Safi ibn al-'Assal) add that the candidate had to be paraded before the congregation, so that if any person held anything against him he could publicly object to the candidate's eligibility, giving reasons for so doing. In that event, ordination was to be postponed for three months during which the matter would be thoroughly investigated in the presence of the said person and the candidate.

Canon 4 of the Council of NICAEA (325) insists upon the approval of the metropolitan and other bishops of the province: "It is most fitting that a bishop should be installed by all the bishops in his province. But if such a thing is difficult either because of the urgency of circumstances or because of the distance to be traveled, at least three should meet together somewhere and by their votes combined with those of the ones absent and joining in the election by letter they should carry out the ordination thereafter. But as for the ratification of the proceedings, let it be entrusted in each province to the metropolitan" (Cummings, 1957, p. 168).

Consecration of Bishops

According to the *Didascalia*, the consecration of a bishop should take place on a Sunday at the cathedral, in the presence of the clergy and the congregation, with at least two or three bishops officiating. Canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea attaches special importance to the consent of the pope, patriarch, or metropolitan: "Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis prevail, that the bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these, since the like is customary for the bishop of [Rome](#) also. Likewise in Antioch and the other provinces, let the churches retain their privileges. And this is to be universally understood, that if anyone be

made bishop without the consent of the metropolitan, the great synod has declared that such a man ought not to be bishop . . ." (Cummings, 1957, p. 170).

Before the service of the consecration starts, the candidate is asked to publicly affirm his adherence to the orthodox faith, the church laws, the canons of the councils of Nicaea, CONSTANTINOPLE, and EPHESUS, as well as the other councils. He should also declare his constant readiness to safeguard the doctrines and [rites](#) of the Coptic orthodox church, to care for and protect the congregation, and submit to the church and her laws.

Then, following the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the elaborate ceremony continues, including the following features: laying-on of hands; holding the divine Gospels open upon his head; making the sign of the cross thrice and giving him his ecclesiastical name; clothing him with the episcopal vestments; partaking of Holy Communion; removing the new bishop's white vestments, and clothing him with his black ones; and entrusting the episcopal staff and cross to him, while the congregation chants "Worthy, worthy, worthy."

Before the newly consecrated bishop is installed in his own diocese, he passes a certain period of time in prayer and fasting, celebrating the Divine Liturgy and communicating daily. Meanwhile his official credentials as bishop are to be drawn and preparations made for his enthronement in his own diocese. A number of bishops (three at least) accompany him on the journey. When they arrive at their destination, the clergy and congregation of the diocese usually receive them with religious chants.

Preceded by the deacons holding crosses and clergy carrying censers, the new bishop joins in a procession around the church. He then stands outside the sanctuary bowing his head, while the other bishops stand inside, and begin the proceedings, saying:

“We hereby enthrone him who has by divine grace been consecrated Abba [Name], bishop of the holy church in the Christ-loving city of [Name], in the name of the Holy Inseparable Trinity.” The congregation respond saying “*axios*” (worthy). Then standing at the synthronos (see ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS), he reads the Gospel (Jn. 10:1-16), and every time he utters the words, “I am the good shepherd,” a Gospel is held over his head and the deacons chant “*axios*” thrice. At the end of the liturgy the new bishop distributes the *eulogia* (blessed bread) to the people. Finally, the bishops who have attended the consecration sign their names on his credentials, recording the time and place of his enthronement.

Functions and Duties

As the main spiritual leader of the diocese, the bishop assumes the responsibility of teaching and preaching in conformity with the [exhortation](#) of Saint Paul (1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11, 13, 15, 16), and in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.” The *Didascalia* also urges the bishop to pay particular attention to the interpretation of the scriptures and the teaching of his people (chap. 3).

The bishop ordains priests and deacons in accordance with the needs of the church after careful consideration: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (1 Tim. 5:22). Canon 9 of the Council of Antioch (341) states the following: “. . . For each bishop has authority over his own parish, both to manage it with the piety which is incumbent on every one, and to make provision for the whole district which is dependent on his city; to ordain presbyters and deacons; and to settle everything with judgment.”

The bishop supervises and controls the clergy and administers discipline. “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

. . . Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. In the presence of God and of [Christ](#) Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favor, doing nothing from partiality” (1 Tim. 5:17, 19, 21).

The *Didascalia* specifies Monday for the hearing of grievances and passing judgments in diocesan disputes (chap. 8). The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* makes similar provisions: “Let your judicatures be held on the second day of the week, that if any controversy arise about your sentence, having an interval till the sabbath, you may be able to set the controversy right, and to reduce those to peace who have the contests one with another against the Lord’s day.”

The bishop consecrates churches, altars, vessels needed for the liturgy, and the Holy Chrism.

The bishop provides for the needs of the clergy and the deacons, as well as of the poor, the widows, and the orphans in his diocese.

The bishop manages church finances: “Let the bishop have the care of ecclesiastical revenues and let him administer them as in the presence of God.” Likewise, “We ordain that the bishop have authority over the goods of the church; for if he is to be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more ought he to give directions about goods, that they all be distributed to those in want, according to his authority, by the presbyters and deacons, and be used for their support with reverence.”

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ARCHBISHOP BASILIOS

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