

CLERICAL INSTRUCTION

Education of the [clergy](#) of the Coptic [church](#) at a church college is a modern arrangement. In antiquity, every [bishop](#) had to provide for the education and installation of the [clergy](#) of his diocese (see ORDINATION, CLERICAL). The demands made of priests and deacons are known from the [church](#) canons (see CANONS, ECCLESIASTICAL), and from texts relating to the [ordination of clergy](#) from the correspondence of Bishop ABRAHAM of Hermonthis about 600.

These texts presuppose definite attainments that the candidate was to pursue, or in accordance with which he was to act. He therefore had to be instructed about them or to acquire specific knowledge on his own. Among the latter were knowledge of the canons of the [church](#) and “professional knowledge.” Sometimes the latter is more exactly described as “knowledge of the office of deacon” or “knowledge of the office of priest.”

The candidate was carefully instructed in the actions of his office that should be carried out in the [church](#) and at the altar. There must also have been instructed about the prayers to be spoken by him. Since only a few [clergy](#) could read, the candidates had to learn their professional knowledge by heart. To this must be added memorization of certain biblical texts, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John being named. This task had a time limit, often of two months.

An examination on the memorized material took place in the presence of the bishop. It is striking that the evidence given by sources indicates that this trial did not always come before the ordination, but could occur afterward. If the text could not be recited, there was no ordination. We are not told, however, what happened when a candidate who had already been ordained failed his test.

After the punishment, such as exclusion from communion (see

EXCOMMUNICATION), the candidate, on being readmitted to communion, might be required to memorize further Bible texts.

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