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Development of Bishop Qualifications and Age

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## BISHOP QUALIFICATION AND AGE

### **Development of Bishop Qualifications and Age**

In the Catholic Church, the office of Bishop is an office that a cleric is given who has been accorded fullness of the priesthood and power to rule their specific Diocese by the vicar of Christ in Rome, Our Holy Father the Pope.<sup>1</sup> In terms of a hierarchy of powers, the bishops' express authority over their Diocese in terms of operations, including the oversight of all priests and deacons. (see cc.129 and 391 §1) Concerning the hierarchy of jurisdiction, they form part of the government of the faithful of the Church under the authority of the sovereign pontiff who delegates some powers to bishops, though bishops have the power of governance by right.<sup>2</sup> Since Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Pope can reserve certain authority and decisions to himself, but the mutual understanding is that the bishop, by virtue of ordination, has powers not by mere concession of the pope. Bishops play a crucial role in the Catholic religion of maintaining the faith and teaching the Church's teachings.<sup>3</sup> This vital position, however, requires various qualification before one is appointed (or elected) to the post such as having strong faith, good morals and wisdom.<sup>4</sup> This paper shall, therefore, focus on the development of qualification and age of bishops in Catholicism.

### **Historical Origin**

The history and development of the Episcopate are very controversial and involves various hypotheses. For example, the Apostolic and Divine origin of monarchical Episcopate have

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<sup>1</sup> Lumen Gentium. 1964. "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church." In *Chapter III: On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate*, by Pope Paul VI. [www.vatican.va/archieve/hist\\_councils/ii\\_cvatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archieve/hist_councils/ii_cvatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed September 15, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "How Bishops are Appointed." 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Code of Canon Law. 2007. *Chapter II: Bishops C. 392*. [www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/\\_PIC.HTM](http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/_PIC.HTM) (accessed September 23, 2019)..

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid C. 378*.

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greatly been used to explain the origin of Christian priesthood and bishops.<sup>5</sup> During the second century, it is believed that presbyter-bishops (priest bishops) became the ruling bishops to create unity, especially among the primitive organizations of the Church such as the Jewish Synagogue. Other findings suggest that of the Episcopate originating from the organization of Greek religious associations into a centralized unity under the control of a single centralized authority figure.<sup>6</sup> Communities that were considered primitive such as the Jewish Synagogue was administered by the college of presbyters and the presbyters who had powers over financial and administration functions became the ruling bishops.<sup>7</sup> Harnack came up with another hypothesis claiming that only those who had unique gifts called *charismata* and gift of public speech had the authority to act as bishops in the primitive community.<sup>8</sup> Some bishops possessed no authority or disciplinary power but were assigned specific duties in administration and Divine worship. When these individuals with charismatic gifts died, they were replaced with several bishops.<sup>9</sup> Before the second century, bishops were appointed by the college of presbyters (class of elders) who accorded power and authority to the bishops. This college of presbyters had been established at Jerusalem and Palestine.

J.B Lightfoot, who is also known to be the authoritative representative of the Anglican Church, had a different version. He said that the primitive Church in its early years had no organization; however, they were conscious of having an organization. At first, Deacons were

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<sup>5</sup> Froehle, Bryan T. "Research on Catholic Priests in the United States, Since the Council: Modeling the Dialogue between Theology and Social Science." *US Catholic Historian* 29, no. 4 (2011): 1946.

<sup>6</sup> Hatch, Edwin. *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*. Leopold Classic Library, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Hatch, Edwin. *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*. Leopold Classic Library, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Catholic University of America. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Fifteenth-Century Edition. Vol. Vol 3. Washington D.C.: Gale Group, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Walsh, M. *Roman Catholicism: The Basics*. New York: Taylor Francis, 2005.

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appointed by the Apostles and later, they imitated what the Synagogue was doing. The appointed presbyters were also referred to as bishops in the Gentile churches and were given roles of acting as rulers and instructors of the congregation.

The earliest bishops had no position of independent supremacy compared to those that the later bishops were entrusted. This development is related to three great names: Irenaeus, Ignatius of Antioch, and Cyprian of Carthage, who represent the supremacy that follows the bishops. These three individuals had different views concerning the role and qualities of bishops. For instance, according to Ignatius, a bishop was regarded as the center of unity;<sup>10</sup> according to Irenaeus, a bishop was the depositary of primitive truth;<sup>11</sup> while Cyprian believed that, a bishop is the vicegerent of Christ in spiritual things.<sup>12</sup> During the first three centuries, the religious life of the Diocese revolved around the Bishop. The Bishop was assisted by priests and deacons who worked under his authority and directions. Priests and deacons were later given full powers and responsibilities in large cities such as Rome. The increased spread of Christianity also forced the Church to delegate more duties to the priests and deacons as bishops were required to focus on administrative functions of the Diocese.<sup>13</sup> In the East, for instance, positions of bishoprics were created in every district to help bishops administer their duties due to the increased number of Christians and the rapid conversions of those to the faith. This system, however, created a lot of controversies. Because of this, bishop representatives with limited functions given to them by other bishops (metropolitan sees) were sent to the rural districts. Such bishops had no powers to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Whelm & Thomas B. Scannel. *A Manual of Catholic Theology*. Aeterma Press, 2007.

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exercise some critical functions and were referred to as *Chorepiscopi*, but priests later replaced them. The formation of parishes then freed more of the duties of bishops as they were required to handle only the most critical matters.<sup>14</sup> Despite these changes, the bishops remained the supreme decision-makers on all matters affecting the Diocese.

The process of selecting qualified individuals to be bishops and their powers varied at different times and in different places. For instance, the Roman Empire, which is now a centralized Christian stronghold of the West, began to grant more powers to the bishops in not only sacred matters but also over that of secular civil matters. The powers granted to the bishops enabled them to handle all lawsuits concerning the property and clerical state of the Church, including the oversight and ultimate investigation and penal phase of wrongdoings of the clerics. Emperor Constantine ordered all Christians to take their lawsuits before bishop courts.<sup>15</sup> After this order of power given to the bishops was withdrawn at the end of the fourth century, bishops remained the leading arbitrators in church matters and to a degree in secular matters. The Roman law also gave bishops roles to act as the protectors of the weak and oppressed in society. Bishops were also allowed to visit prisoners and to assess then whether they were in good conditions. In Germany, most bishops became temporal rulers or sometimes referred to as Lords. Bishops later acquired far-reaching civil jurisdiction over the laity of their Diocese. This, however, brought challenges because members of the laity began to interfere in the election of bishops. The clergy and people were electing the bishops (normally those directly from the laity in the form of a rite of election) until the sixth century when the election of the Bishop had to be

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<sup>14</sup> Coriden, J.A. *The Parish in Catholic Tradition: History, Theology, and Canon Law*. 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Council of Constantinople. 869-870. *4th Council of Constantinople 869-870 Canons 5, 12, 14*. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum08.htm> (accessed October 2, 2019).

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approved by the neighboring Bishop. Christian Roman Emperors were also interfering with some elections when they realize that the elected person did not possess the required qualifications and were not suitable.<sup>16</sup> In some parts of the West such as Spain, the Kings interfered in elections of bishops and sometimes preferred a system of direct nomination. The process of nominating and appointing bishops was later handed to the Cathedral church (metropolitan see) after the eleventh century. Eventually, the Pope obtained the ability to appoint the bishops; however, he did not at the time appoint all the bishops. For instance, in 1516, he allowed the King of France to appoint Bishop of the nation.

The Council of Trent is responsible for setting the conditions that candidates for the Episcopate must fulfill. The principal conditions include; Birth in lawful wedlock, freedom from censure and other irregularities in mind, purity of personal morals, good reputation, fully thirty years of age, not less than six months in Holy orders, and have a theological degree of Doctor or license in theology or canon law.<sup>17</sup> The requirement for thirty years was also proposed by the Council of Neocaesarea 314-319 Turkey. Canon XI of the council states that “A minister should not be ordained before he is thirty years old. Even though he may be a worthy man in every way, he should wait because our Lord Jesus Christ was baptized and began to teach in his thirtieth year.”<sup>18</sup> These requirements are crucial for the role of a bishop and according to the teachings of the Catholic Church. For instance, the Doctorate level of education is necessary considering the responsibilities of a bishop, such as administrative functions of the Diocese. Additionally, a

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<sup>16</sup> Hove, Alphonse Van. *Bishop: The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. Vol 2. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907.

<sup>17</sup> Coughlin, J.J. "Canon Law and the Human Person." *Journal of Law and Religion*, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Percival, H.R. "The Ecumenical Councils: The Council of Neocaesarea 314-319 Turkey." *Canon XI*, n.d.

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bishop should have the ability to teach congregations about catholic teaching as well as guiding the priests in their various roles and functions within the Diocese. Having such a level of education enables the appointed Bishop-elect to have acquired the level of experience needed to manage the developing structure of the Diocese<sup>19</sup>. A good reputation is also crucial because bishops are acting as role models to the Christians; they are the successors of the original apostles of Christ. (see c. 375 §1)

The Holy Office was responsible for assessing the applicants with the exemption of those countries where the special laws govern the appointment of bishops. This process or procedure for electing and evaluating the candidates has, however, changed. The Pope is now the one with the authority to vet and appoint a candidate to be a bishop, however, he stills relies on the Congregation for Bishops, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Secretariat of State and Congregation for the Evangelization of People. There are some special laws that still allow governments to nominate a candidate and present him to the Sovereign Pontiff, for example, Austria, Portugal, and Peru. Other countries such as France and many countries in South America have lost the privilege of selecting a candidate after the denunciation of the concordats due to canon 377 §5.<sup>20</sup> In the states that can nominate the candidate, the process is still vigorous because the right candidate must meet all the qualifications required by the Church. In addition to this, a person selected must be in good terms with the government. In England, the candidates are voted by the canon of the Cathedral. The names of three candidates who receive majority votes in three consecutive voting are selected. The names are arranged in alphabetical order and

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<sup>19</sup> Council of Laodicea 363 Turkey. n.d. *Canon 12*.

<sup>20</sup> Code of Canon Law. 2007. *Chapter II: Bishops C. 377*. [www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/\\_PIC.HTM](http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/_PIC.HTM) (accessed September 21, 2019).

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taken to the metropolitan archbishop of the province for opinion. The metropolitan archbishop (it is possible to have multiple archbishops in a province, but only one of them is the metropolitan) and other bishops of the province then assess the candidates to ensure they have met all the requirements and then give their views to the Apostolic See. Their opinions usually are final because no second opinion is allowed. The final decision will, however, come from the Pope who will appoint one of the three candidates as a bishop. It is also not guaranteed because the three names on the *terna* list can be rejected and the process starts again. The vigorous processes are crucial in the Catholic Church because they ensure that qualified individuals are selected. These privileges are however expected to end in the future especially after the development of the canon law (e.g., c. 377 §5, yet the concordat with China recently put this in reverse). Canon law gives the Pope the supreme power to appoint all the bishops and that civil appointments shall not be allowed.

### **Requirements from Didache**

Chapter Five of Didache has also provided some requirements for electing the Bishop. For instance, 15:1 states that “Elect, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not covetous, and true and approved, for they perform for you the service of prophets and teachers.”<sup>21</sup> 15:2 “Do not, therefore, despise them, for they are those who are honored among you, together with the prophets and teachers.” 15:3 “Rebuke one another, not in wrath but peaceably, as ye have a commandment in the Gospel; and, but let no one speak to anyone who walketh disorderly with regard to his neighbor, neither let him be heard by you until he repents.” 15:4 “But your prayers and your thanks giving and all your deeds so do, as ye have a

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<sup>21</sup> The Didache. n.d. *The Didache (Chapter 15)*. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-hoole.html> (accessed September 25, 2019).

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commandment in the Gospel of our Lord”<sup>22</sup>. This chapter provides requirement such as an individual being meek and not covetous. The chapter also provides things that we should do and not do to support them; for example; we should not despise them because they are honored and we should pray for them.

### **Requirement according to the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome**

According to chapter two, verse 1 of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome, “the bishop chosen by people must be irreproachable.”<sup>23</sup> He must be a perfect guy, and during the anointment, he receives blessings from elders and other bishops.<sup>24</sup>

### **Requirements from the Scripture**

1 Timothy 3: 1-7 provides requirements for anyone aspiring to the office of Bishop. Although this Scripture provides general requirements, some are applicable to the Catholic faith. For instance, Verse 1 states that “whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.” Verse 6 and 7 are also a requirement in Catholic and states that “He should not be a recent convert, so that he may not become conceited and thus incur the devil’s punishment.”<sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, the devil’s trap.”

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<sup>22</sup> Bishop Ed Jansen. "DIDACHE: Teaching of the 12 Apostles." In *Chapter 15: Bishops and Deacons; Christian Reproof*. 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Hippolytus. *On The Apostolic Tradition*. Edited by Alistair Stewart-Sykes. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1934.

<sup>24</sup> Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus. n.d. "Section 2." [http://www.stjohnsarlingtonva.org/CustomerContent/saintjohnsarlington/CMS/files/EFM/Apostolic\\_Tradition\\_by\\_Hippolytus.pdf](http://www.stjohnsarlingtonva.org/CustomerContent/saintjohnsarlington/CMS/files/EFM/Apostolic_Tradition_by_Hippolytus.pdf) (accessed November 1, 2019).

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### Present Legislations

The requirements and age of bishops were not necessary during early periods and only came into effect during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, Kings or political leaders could choose anyone whom they consider suitable.<sup>25</sup> There was no thorough process for recruitment or assessing qualifications. During the first and second century, most of the bishops are believed to be elderly because they were selected from the college of presbyters which is the class of elders. In addition to this, since the Emperors accorded bishops powers to solve lawsuits, then, most bishops were matured people though their ages have not been stated.

After centralization of powers to the Pope during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, requirements for the Bishop were revised, and the following five requirements recommended. The candidate must be a priest for at least five years; the candidate must be outstanding in strong faith, good morals, piety, zeal for soul, wisdom, prudence, and human virtues; He should be versed in sacred Scripture holding at least Doctorate in the line of field; should be at least 35 years of age as provided by Canon law.<sup>26</sup> The new requirements differ from what existed before; for instance; the previous age was thirty years. While in the new requirements, the minimum age is 35 years. These requirements have been changing, and they might even continue changing in the future. Since the Pope is a supreme decision-maker, he may make changes anytime depending upon his reasons and for the betterment of the Church. Under the current canon law, the retiring age of bishops has been set at 75 years. A bishop attaining this age is required according to Canon Law

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<sup>25</sup> Patout, Burns J. *Cyprian the Bishop*. Psychology Press, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Code of Canon Law. 2007. *Chapter II: Bishops C. 378*. [www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/\\_PIC.HTM](http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0017/_PIC.HTM) (accessed September 21, 2019).

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to send a resignation request letter to the Pope so that the process of finding a replacement can commence. (See c. 401.1)

### **Conclusion**

The office of diocesan and titular Bishop is an important position among the Catholic Church because of their roles and responsibilities. A Bishop is a person responsible for ensuring that the divine teaching of the Church is conducted according to the canon law. Considering this crucial role, the appropriate person must be appointed (in cases elected and consented to by the pope). It is also evident that the process of appointing a bishop is very vigorous. The candidates must meet all the requirements set out under canon law. Appointment and qualifications of bishops as seen in the above analysis started as early as the first century. During the early years, the requirements and age of a bishop were not of major concern because Kings and government leaders had the sole responsibility of appointing the bishops in some countries such as Spain. Retirement age for bishops was also not clear during the early formation years of the church especially prior to the 1917 Code, and they could be replaced only after they died. Understanding the historical development of requirements and age of bishops is crucial because it enables Catholic Christians as well as non - Catholics to understand more fully the developments of the Catholic Church.

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