

Florus of Lyon, *On the election of bishops (De Electionibus episcoporum)*

Florus was a highly-educated cleric of the church of Lyon. He probably wrote this treatise c. 835 to defend his archbishop Agobard, who was deposed and replaced at this time for his role in a rebellion against the emperor Louis the Pious.

Edition: K. Zechiel-Eckes, 'Florus von Lyon, Amalarius von Metz und der Traktat über die Bischofswahl', *Revue Bénédictine* 106 (1996), pp. 109-33, at pp. 129-133, from four late ninth-century and early tenth-century manuscripts. For a bibliography, see

http://www.geschichtsquellen.de/repOpus_02246.html

Translation by Charles West, August 2016

It is clear to all those who administer the sacerdotal office in the church of God what those things should be, that the authority of the sacred canons and church custom command should be observed in episcopal ordination, according to the disposition of divine law and apostolic tradition. That is, that when the pastor has died and the see is vacant, one of the clergy of the church, whom the agreement and concord of that clergy and the consensus of the whole congregation (*plebs*) has chosen and by public decree has ceremonially and solemnly designated, and who has been consecrated into the legitimate number of the bishops, is able properly (*rite*) to take the place of the deceased bishop. Nor can it be doubted that what has been celebrated by the church of God in such a holy order and with legitimate observation is confirmed by divine judgment and disposition. This is what can be found in the councils of the fathers and in the decrees of the pontiffs of the apostolic see, and what is proven to have been observed by the church of Christ from the beginning.

And the holy martyr Cyprian said about Saint Cornelius pontiff of the church of Rome, defending his episcopacy against certain proud and jealous critics and setting out evidence for his holy and legitimate ordination,

“Cornelius was made bishop by the judgement of God and His Christ, by the testimony of all the clerics, by the vote of the congregation, by the agreement of the elder priests and respectable men, since no one had been made bishop and since the sacerdotal grade of the episcopal throne was vacant. Now it has been occupied and confirmed by the agreement of all of us: whoever now should wish to become bishop, it is necessary that he should not have the ecclesiastical ordination, since he does not hold the unity of the church through agreement. He is not able to be the second after the first. For whoever wishes to come after someone who has been consecrated by election, he is not the second: he is nobody.”

According to these words of blessed Cyprian, it is clear that all bishops of the churches of God were ordained and legitimately in charge of the universal people without any consultation of the worldly power, from the times of the Apostles and for almost four hundred years afterwards. From that time

there began to be Christian princes, and manifest reason shows that this ecclesiastical liberty (*ecclesiasticam libertatem*) remained for the most part. For when one emperor had the rule (*monarchia*) of the whole orb of the earth, it was not possible that all those who were to be ordained as bishops from all the widest parts of the world, that is Asia, Europe and Africa, could be brought to his attention. But the ordination which the holy church had celebrated according to apostolic tradition, and according to the form of religious observance, remained intact and valid.

The custom that emerged afterwards in some kingdoms, that episcopal ordination should take place by the consultation of the prince, was valid for the increase of fraternity, for the sake of peace and the concord of the worldly power – but not for completing the truth or the authority of the holy ordination, which cannot be conferred to anyone by royal power (*regius potentatus*), but only by the will of God and the agreement of the faithful church. For the episcopacy is not a human gift (*munus*), but a gift (*donum*) of the holy spirit, as the Apostle shows, when speaking of bishops he says

“Take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”

And in the letter to the Hebrews he says

“Neither doth any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was. So Christ also did not glorify himself, that he might be made a high priest: but he that said unto him: Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”

And again

“Thou art a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedech”.

In these apostolic words it is demonstrated most evidently that the grace of God, with the assistance of faith and the grace of devotion, suffices for everyone to obtain and take up this gift, and that without these it cannot be conceded to anyone by human judgement. And any prince is seriously wrong, who thinks that what only divine grace can dispense can be given by his beneficence: since for carrying out this kind of business he ought to add the ministry of his power, not put it in charge.

Finally, to provide a few examples of this matter. About the ordination of the blessed Martin, when he was led out of the monastery on some pretext and was seized by the people and was taken to the church and was there at once consecrated by the bishops who had been invited for this purpose: no prince of this world was asked about it. In the church of Lyon too there was formerly the religious and venerable custom, as ancient history recounts, that when the pontiff died, the whole church would come together, and after celebrating a three day fast in joint prayer and supplication, they would appoint without any doubt as bishop whomever the Lord would show them through revelation, whether from their own clergy or from elsewhere. The book of the most holy life of the blessed Eucherius, bishop of that city and outstanding doctor, shows that this took place. From the most noble

family of senators, he renounced this world, and gave away all his wealth to the poor for the love of Christ, and hid away in some cave in the backwoods of the province. There he lay low, devoting himself to God alone in fasting and prayer, until he was shown by such a revelation and discovered, and was placed in pontifical government. From this example it is extremely clear that in all that time, in which almighty God wished to show such bounty and grace in that church, the grace and devout faith of the church was enough and sufficient for the consecration of its leaders.

And in the Roman church to this present day, we see that pontiffs are legitimately consecrated without asking any prince, by the judgement alone of disposition and by the vote of the faithful. And the pontiffs according to ancient custom in that liberty ordain and constitute priests/bishops (*sacerdotes*) in all the regions and cities that are subject to them, and there is no one so absurd who thinks that the grace of their divine sanctification is lessened because it is not accompanied by the authority of worldly power.

We say all this not as if we intend to diminish the power of princes in any way, nor to persuade of a way of thinking against the religious custom of the kingdom, but so that it can be most clearly demonstrated that in matters of this kind divine grace suffices, and that human power, unless it agrees with it, can do nothing (*nihil valere*). Therefore nothing about this matter can be found included in the holy canons of the fathers, where many things are discussed without which an episcopal ordination is held as incomplete.