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## ***Eldership in the Church of Jesus Christ***

Rev. Bruce R. Backensto

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*Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology  
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

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Having served as a Teaching Elder in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America since my ordination on May 31, 1972, it is my observation that it might be helpful to look again at what the Bible says the eldership is and does. The bulk of this article is taken from my contribution to the 1976 pre-synodic conference on *The Church and Her Ministry*.<sup>1</sup> This article argues the Bible presents the office of elder consisting of two primary functions.

### **Old Testament Usage**

To help us understand afresh the office of elder, the basic words to be considered in the New Testament are πρεσβύτερος (*presbuteros*), ἐπίσκοπος (*episkopos*) and ποιμήν (*poiman*) and the verbs derived from these nouns. Since both *poiman* and *presbuteros* are used in the New Testament without any formal definition given to them, it seems they must have developed from their use in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> However, in the Old Testament nation of Israel, the word *presbuteros*<sup>3</sup> is simply used with reference to a particular office or group of men in the community. Genesis 50:7 is the first translation of *presbuteros* as an elder. The reference is to the elders of the house of Joseph and the elders of the land of Egypt going up to bury Joseph's father. It is not clear whether a special office is being spoken of or a specific group of "senior citizens" representing the land of Egypt and the people of Joseph's household is intended. There are eight previous references in Genesis where the term *presbuteros* is used, but these are simply when a younger and older person is contrasted. The development of the Hebrew word *zaqen*, which *presbuteros*, translates in the LXX has the meaning "a man with a beard" to "an old man" to "older men . . . chosen (to form) the narrower colleges of elders which represent the tribes, city, locality or people."<sup>4</sup>

The elders generally were not rulers or governing authorities but basically representatives. It is interesting, however, to notice they were assembled on important occasions when the will of Yahweh was given, which would affect the whole nation or people of Israel. They went with Moses before Pharaoh concerning their emancipation (Ex. 3:16, 18; 4:29). They supervised the slaying of the family offering at the Passover (Ex. 12:21); they kept a sacrificial feast with Jethro

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce R. Backensto "The Parity of the Eldership: The Biblical Basis and Application" in *The Church and Her Ministry* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1976), 19-26.

<sup>2</sup> The term is not used much in either testament, but it is interesting to notice the words for which it was used in the Old Testament. This will be done at a later point in the article.

<sup>3</sup> Πρεσβύτερος generally is used in the LXX for the word זָקֵן *zaqen*.

<sup>4</sup> Gunther Bornkamm, "πρέσβυς, πρεσβύτερος, . . .", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids: Wm. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 655.

(Ex. 19:7); and some witnessed the miracle of the water at Horeb (Ex. 17:5). Seventy of the elders saw the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, when the covenant was made with Moses and his three companions (Ex. 24:1, 9). The elders went with Moses to punish Dathan and Abiram (Nu. 16:25). Other passages showing functions of the elders are Joshua 7:6, 8:10, 23:2, 24:1; Nu. 11:16f and 24f (many more could be added). In Deuteronomy, *presbuteros* is defined more specifically as being an office. The men are given authoritative roles in connection with other officials and judges. However, most of their jurisdiction was limited to their own locality and even their own tribe. The office of *presbuteros* continues through the exile both in Jerusalem and Babylon (Jer. 26:17, 29:11, Ez. 8:11f, 14:1, 20:1, 3). Elders existed in the Israelite community and were helpers of kings, rulers, or judges in a representative sort of way. Hence, even in the Old Testament, the term *presbuteros* simply appears in a rather “casual” way to designate a particular office.

As mentioned earlier, the word *episkopos* is used less frequently in the LXX, however, it is worth noticing the different Hebrew words it translates. It is used to translate the Hebrew word for God (יהוה), for שׂוֹרֵץ which is translated press, drive, oppress, exact; driver, taskmaster, and for טָרַף which is translated attend to, visit, master, appoint, appointed ones, officers, make overseers. In Job 20:29, *episkopos* is used to translate (El) as “overseer,” and as such, it came to refer to the sovereign Creator Who watches over everything. Not only the Hebrews used this word, but also it is used in pagan religions in this way. The term is used in reference to officers appointed by Abimelech (Ju. 9:28), and men who were to handle the money raised to repair the temple (2 Chron. 34:12, 17). Basically, in the Old Testament, *episkopos* is generally used to express the *function* one has of overseeing something or someone, and not a specific office.

The word *poiman*, which is related to *episkopos* in the New Testament (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Pe. 2:25; 5:2), is generally used to describe Yahweh as the Shepherd of Israel and then it came to refer to the expected Messiah who would watch the flock, Israel. In Jeremiah, *poiman* is used commonly for political and military leaders; however, surprisingly, it is never used as a title of the ruling king of Israel. This word, as does *episkopos*, refers more to a *function* performed than an office held. A political or military leader many times exhibited the characteristics of a shepherd of a flock while never holding the “office” of shepherd.

### ***Presbuteros***

As these three words are used in the New Testament, they generally retain their Old Testament meaning and usage. They are, however, somewhat more specifically defined, as the offices of the New Testament Church are developed. Beginning with the word *presbuteros*, it should first be noted, as was stated above, no formal definition is given, but the word is simply used with the writer assuming that the reader already knows its meaning. Jesus does it as He argues over the point of washing before eating with the Pharisees (Mk. 7:3, 5), and when He discusses His forthcoming death with His disciples and apostles (Matt. 26:3f). In the former case, Jesus argues the Pharisees were guilty of keeping the laws of the *presbuterio* whom He simply calls ἄνθρωποι (men) later in the same passage. The elders (*presbuteroi*) were also a part of the group who were to have Jesus crucified as seen in the second reference above. This shows an awareness of an existing office of elder (*presbuteros*) in the Jewish “church” system. Also, in Acts 4, when Peter is on trial before the courts of the Jewish “church,” he addressed them as “rulers and elders of the people” and stated his case (v. 5). Many other references in Acts could be cited to support the point that the office of *presbuteros* (elder) was commonplace in the Jewish “church” system.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 4:8, 23; 6:12. Cf. Mt. 21:23, etc.

It seems this office was simply carried over into the structure of the Christian Church. This first mention of *presbuteroi* (elders) in reference to a Christian congregation is in Acts 11:30. Agabus, led by the Spirit, indicated that there would be a famine in Jerusalem, which led to the gathering of supplies by the Church at Antioch to be sent to the Church at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were singled out to take the relief supplies “to the elders” (*presbuteros*) at Jerusalem. In Acts 14, Paul returns through some cities in which people had responded positively to his preaching and he “appointed elders” (*presbuteros*) for them in every church (Acts 14:23).<sup>6</sup> Of course, the monumental passage from which the Presbyterian view of Church government is derived — Acts 15 — mentions that the court at Jerusalem consisted of apostles (ἀπόστολος) (*apostolos*) and elders (*presbuteroi*) (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23). Especially, notice verse 23, “*And they sent this letter by them, the apostles and the brethren who were elders (or “the elders of the brethren”), to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings’.*” Here, the decision and concluding dispatch was signed by the “authority figures” of Jerusalem, the apostles (*apostoloi*) and the elders (*presbuteroi*). (cf. Acts 16:4) Other passages could be added to show that *presbuteros* was used to designate an office in the Christian Church, however, at this point, consideration of *episkopos* and *poiman* will be undertaken.

The main question to keep in mind is whether these two words are ever used to designate an office in the Christian Church or simply to refer to a *function* which men or officers (being mostly distinguished by some other word) perform as was the case in the Old Testament?

### **Poiman**

*Poiman* is used seventeen times in the New Testament and only once is it used in reference to an officer in the Church (Eph. 4:11). In Ephesians 4:11, Paul is telling the Church that Jesus Christ has just given apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (or pastors (ποιμένας) and teachers (διδασκάλους), with the word translated “pastors” coming from *poiman*) for the equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry. Most Reformed exegetes would agree the offices of apostle, prophet, and evangelist<sup>7</sup>, as they existed in the age of continuing “special revelation,” were primarily limited to that age, while the office of the “pastor-teacher” (or the office of pastor (*poiman*) and teacher) is in existence today. The Greek phrase τὸς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους is generally translated as *pastor and teacher* or better *pastor-teacher* because the article τὸς is understood to encompass both the words simply separated by the conjunction καὶ. In the case of the words apostle, prophet, and evangelist, each word has its own article, thus setting each apart as a separate entity. Not so with the *pastor* (*poiman*) and *teacher* (*didaskalos*). Yet *poiman* and *didaskalos*, while nouns as referring to men, speak more of *functions* that officers would perform, as shall be seen by the way the verb forms of the words are used. *Poiman* speaks of a shepherd or pastor, one who cares for sheep, while *didaskalos* refers to the instructing side of an officer’s duties. Thus, the Old Testament usage of *poiman* as a function of an office is carried into the New Testament. The use of the verb form of ποιμῆν (ποιμαίνω) will be studied in more detail later in the article.

### **Episkopos**

The word *episkopos* is used five times in the New Testament, while it only appears three times in its verb form. Those five references are worth noting. Acts 20:28 will be studied later. In the letter Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi, he addresses specifically the *overseers* (ἐπισκόποις) and *deacons* (διακόνους) (Phil. 1:1). In this case, ἐπισκόποις (plural of ἐπίσκοπος) is used in

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 14:19-28. This is the first reference to the appointing of elders (*presbuteroi*) in churches and it is quite possible more than one elder was appointed to each congregation.

<sup>7</sup> The present author recognizes there has been serious study given to the office of evangelist being present today by Reformed men in the late twentieth century.

reference to the office which is contrasted with the office of deacon. Since the word ἐπίσκοπος is in the plural ἐπισκόποις, there likely were more than one *episkopos* (overseer) per Church or congregation. It is also possible that more than one congregation existed in Philippi, hence more than one overseer (*episkopos*) existed in Philippi, yet with there being only one per congregation.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on Philippians 1:1, Lenski says the following about the word *episkopos* and how it relates to *presbuteros*, “*Elder* expressed the dignity of the office, *overseer*, to the *work*.”<sup>9</sup> In First Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7, Paul is discussing the qualifications for the office of an *elder* while using the word ἐπίσκοπος. Paul calls ἐπίσκοπος an office in First Timothy 3:2; however, the word may still be said to be a descriptive word showing the work of the office used in place of the word πρεσβύτερος which specifically speaks of the office itself. The word is used in First Peter 2:25 in reference to Jesus as being the overseer of the Christian’s life (ψυχή).

### ***Presbuteros and Episkopos***

Before studying the passages which use the various verb forms of these nouns, here are a few comments concerning the relation of the nouns *presbuteros* and *episkopos* from various sources. Thayer says of *presbuteros*:

That they did not differ at all from the (*episkopoi*) bishops or overseers. . . . is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately, Actss 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7, and that the duty of the presbyters is described by the terms of ἐπισκοπεῖν . . . ; accordingly only two ecclesiastical officers, οἱ ἐπίσκοποι οἱ διάκονοι are distinguished in Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 8. The title ἐπίσκοπος denotes the function, πρεσβύτερος the dignity.<sup>10</sup>

Moulton and Milligan support Hort’s conclusions given in *Christian Ecclesia* where he shows the word *episkopos* as used in the New Testament is not of an office but a function (Phil. 1:1).<sup>11</sup> This is the conclusion Beyer reaches in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. He notices two uses of the word *episkopos*. First, he sees it being closely related to the word *poiman*, especially as used in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2. Second, he sees that the apostles, prophets, and teachers are never called *episkopoi* and that it is only used where there are settled, local congregations. Beyer offers this comment regarding the relationship between *presbuteros* and *episkopos*:

. . . all *presbuteroi* are called *episkopoi* not in virtue of their age but of their position and accreditation. And, in Titus 1:7, where we suddenly have *episkopos* instead of *presbuteros*, this is another proof that the two terms originally referred to the same thing, namely, the guidance

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<sup>8</sup> Generally, commentators say there was only one congregation in Philippi. Cf, Lenski, Hendriksen and Muller.

<sup>9</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> J.H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1886), 536.

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 244-245.

and representation of the congregation and the work of preaching and conduction of worship when there was no apostle, prophet or teacher present.<sup>12</sup>

Such comments are contrary to the view held by J.A. and C. Hodge in their respective books, *What is Presbyterian Law as Defined by the Church Courts?* and *Discussions in Church Polity*.<sup>13</sup>

### When Present Together

Now for a careful look at important passages which use these three words, or two of them together at the same time. First, Acts 20:17-35, especially verses 17 and 28, where Luke is recording Paul's discussion with the Ephesian elders as he addressed them from Miletus. Paul calls the *presbuteroi* of the Church to meet him in Miletus. He addresses them as elders (*presbuteroi*). Then in verse 28, Paul warns them to be on guard for themselves and all the flock "among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to shepherd (*ποιμαίνειν*) the Church of God, . . ." Notice the *presbuteroi* of verse 17 are now called overseers (*episkopoi*) and called to shepherd (*poimainein*) the Church of God. Here, the words are melted together to refer to one office and the *functions* of that office. If in Ephesus there was one congregation, clearly, it had more than one elder who watched over and shepherded or pastored the flock. If there were many congregations and one *presbuteros* was taken from each congregation, then only one *presbuteros* is to exist in each congregation and not a session of *presbuteroi*. It seems from the account, only one office is meant, and many men of each congregation are involved in this office, and they each carry out the duties of the office.

The same point may be made from First Peter 5:1-5, if the reading in *The Greek New Testament*, edited by Aland, Black, Metzger, and Wikren, may be accepted. In verse 1 Peter addresses the elders (*presbuteroi*) and in verse 2 he reminds them of their *function*. They are to *shepherd the flock of God by taking oversight* (*ἐπισκοποῦντες*) *not under compulsion but voluntarily*.<sup>14</sup> From these two passages, it is evident that *presbuteroi* are to oversee (*ἐπικοπεῖν*) and shepherd (*ποιμαίνειν*). Only one office exists and that is the office of elder according to these key passages.<sup>15</sup>

The final text to be considered, is constantly drawn upon to argue for two offices — pastors and elders, or *teaching elders* and *ruling elders*. That text is First Timothy 5:17. It reads, *Let the elders* (*presbuteroi*) *who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching* (lit. *in word*) *and teaching*. The question is whether this passage by the phrase *those who work hard at preaching and teaching* (ESV, NASB)<sup>16</sup> intends to constitute a

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<sup>12</sup> Beyer, ἐπισκέπτομαι, ἐπισκοπέω, . . . *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 616 & 617 respectively.

<sup>13</sup> J.A. Hodge, *What is Presbyterian Law?* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publishing and Sabbath School Work, 1910). He does this mainly because the Church of Scotland did, 45ff. Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 128-133, 262-271. C. Hodge debates Dr. Thornwell who, in this writer's opinion, had the more Biblical view.

<sup>14</sup> The Greek phrase is ποιμάντατε τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν μοιμνιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπισκοποῦντες μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς ἀλλὰ θεοῦ . . . ; and codices A, P, Ψ, X etc. support this reading.

<sup>15</sup> There are two offices, elder and deacon. By saying there is one office in this context, the author is pointing out there is not the office of pastor (*poiman*) and the office of elder (*presbuteros*).

<sup>16</sup> Exegetical work needs to be done on the phrase ἐν λόγῳ διδασκαλίᾳ. Possibly due to the translation of λόγος and διδασκαλία as verbal nouns some want to read two offices into this passage. Basically, the verse *may* be referring to men who study the Bible and teach as being worthy of more intensified honor.

separate office? Is it proper to construe from this text that two offices exist – those of ruling and teaching elders? Who is worthy of double honor? The passage says the *presbuteros* who rules well is worthy of *double honor*. What is meant is elders who rule well are to be held in honor. Now, this honor is intensified in the case of those who *labor in preaching and teaching*. Both receive double honor with intensification of honor for the laborer because of the intensification of function.<sup>17</sup> It would be on weak ground to seek to defend the idea of two offices existing from this verse when it is compared with all the above-mentioned verses.

This paper has sought to show that there are two offices in the Church, that of elder (*presbuteros*) and deacon. In the office of elder, there are various *functions* to perform: oversight (*episkopos*) and pastoring (*poiman*) are just two, while, *to labor in word and doctrine* is another function, as is ruling. Not everyone in the eldership can teach, visit, counsel, or preach at the same time to the same people, so different elders are assigned various tasks in accordance with their gifts, time, and desires. The qualifications for the eldership are given in First Timothy and Titus, so that a congregation will use them as a guideline, when electing officers from their midst.

### **Practical Considerations**

Here are some practical applications derived from the fact that the eldership consists of many *functions* within the one *office* of an elder.

First, it seems all the elders (*presbuteroi*) should be chosen by the congregation (Acts 13:1-3). Elders will be elected according to the qualifications for the office being exhibited in their lives. Also, elders will be elected according to the gifts granted them by the Spirit to function as an elder. Generally, we speak of those elders who *labor in word and teaching* as being teaching elders. Similarly, those who *rule well* are designated ruling elders. As congregants observe the lives of the men within the congregation, they have the advantage of watching the men grow up among them. Our practice is, when we believe a man in the congregation is suited to be a teaching elder, the session requests the presbytery take the young man under care and begin a formal theological process of training him for the Gospel Ministry. Those men who do not manifest such giftedness, while manifesting the qualifications of an elder, are called upon by the congregants to be set apart to the eldership with the primary responsibility of ruling. Therefore, when a congregation is called upon to elect an elder given to *word and teaching*, they need to be sure they desire to be fed week-by-week from the pulpit by that man. When a congregation is called upon to elect an elder given to *rule*, they need to be sure they desire to be overseen by that man.

Second, from our consideration of the functions of elders, perhaps we should consider the adjective we assign to the man. Is this elder one who teaches and preaches? Is this elder one who rules and shepherds? Yes, the primary distinction between elders when it comes to function is that of teaching and preaching and ruling and shepherding. Look at Ephesians 4:11 again: *And God gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers*. The two officers designated are performing the *functions* of *pastoring* and *teaching*. From First Timothy 5:17 the two distinctions are *ruling* and *laboring in word and teaching*. This being the case, why do we refer to the elder who preaches regularly as *pastor*? Yes, the preacher/minister of the Gospel shepherds the flock as he expounds the Word of God each Lord's Day and he may shepherd the sheep throughout the week as needed; however, is it not more biblical to understand the ruling elder is also known as the shepherding elder? A practical outworking of this distinction between the *teaching and preaching elder* and the *ruling and shepherding elder* might manifest itself by dividing the members of the congregation into shepherding groups with

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Malarkey in an unpublished paper for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Committee on Church Government.

each of the *shepherding elders* (I use *shepherding* in the place of *ruling* which we normally do, to make the point, the Bible seems to divide the eldership into two primary functions). We are accustomed to speaking of *teaching* and *ruling* as the distinguishing features of our elders. What happens if we begin speaking of *preaching* and *shepherding* elders? If a congregation is divided into shepherding groups, the *shepherding* elder who oversees “his” group will build deep relationships with those in his flock. He becomes the elder who is called when a crisis befalls a family in his shepherding group. When this becomes the case, when there is an election of the traditionally named *ruling elder*, more care will be given to calling those men from whom the congregants will seek counsel – shepherding.

As an interim moderator of a session, after the congregation’s teaching elder had been called by another congregation, it has become apparent how important this aspect of the eldership is. As an interim moderator who lives three hours away, it is very difficult to be the primary *pastoring elder* also. If the *ruling elders* are committed to faithfully *overseeing* the congregation (and specifically those in his shepherding group), an interim moderator (*teaching/preaching* elder) will not have to “get up to speed” with the congregants immediately to be a knowledgeable *shepherding elder*.

As we consider the matter of parity of elders; i.e. one office with two primary functions, other questions arise for consideration. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has taken the step of requiring *teaching elders* to be communicant members of the local congregation where he ministers the Word and sacraments. When the Apostle Paul sent Titus to Crete to set things in order by appointing elders, one is hard pressed to find the practice of *teaching elders* being communicant members of a presbytery. Certainly, if *teaching elders* are to be admitted as such by a presbytery, it makes sense the credentials of the *teaching elder* reside with presbytery.

Perhaps, by emphasizing the parity of the *teaching* and the *ruling* elders, because ALL elders are to be able to teach, the *pastoring elders* will *oversee* the preaching of the *preaching elder* more carefully. Simply because the *preaching elder* has been seminary or theological hall educated, does not make him superior in knowledge of the Bible. Sessions might spend time together deciding which book of the Bible needs to be preached based on the needs of the congregation as reported by the *shepherding elders’* assessment of the spiritual well-being of the saints. Some *teaching/preaching elders* have men (*ruling elders* and others) with whom he meets regularly each week to go over forthcoming sermons to be preached.

Often as I have considered the period of the society meetings, I have wondered why in the absence of *teaching elders*, the *ruling elders* were not permitted to administer the sacraments. As I think of the length of time between partaking of the Lord’s Supper until a *teaching elder* was on site, I am grieved the means of grace enjoyed by observing the sacrament was absent. When children were born, surely a *shepherding elder*, if present, would be able to baptize the covenant child. Think of the benedictions the people of God missed because it was not thought an *overseeing elder* should pronounce God’s blessing upon the congregated saints for worship. Yes, the minister is called upon to open the Word and administer the sacrament. Why? Because, rightly, the Word preached and the sacraments go together; but, does that mean the one who exposit the Word is the only elder who can administer the sacraments? A shepherding/ruling elder may *teach* prior to administering the sacraments, as all elders must be able to teach. If the shepherding/ruling elder is uncomfortable expositing the Word, there are published sermons to be read before the sacraments are administered. Certainly, I am writing of extraordinary times, which the *Confession* mentions and offers counsel.

It is a common practice for a session to be moderated by the *teaching elder* installed in a given congregation. Why is the *teaching elder*, the only one thought able to moderate the session? The higher courts have enjoyed moderation by *ruling elders*, at least on occasion. It seems

counterintuitive to maintain the practice of *preaching elders* moderating courts instead of *ruling elders*, does it not?

Another practice which comes to mind with respect to practicing parity of elders is delegation to higher courts. Why is it that as the clerk of presbytery or synod, calls the roll, he automatically calls the *teaching elder* of each congregation and then the name of the delegated *ruling elder*? Yes, delegates to the higher courts are to be certified; however, when a session fails to send in the certificates, the clerk, it seems to this author, should call the name of the *teaching elder* of the session, and if he is not present, proceed to call the names of the *shepherding elders* on the roster of a given session to learn if there are two delegates present. I say two delegates because in the RPCNA each congregation is permitted two delegates in attendance and one more if there are more than one hundred members in the congregation.

Questions arise when ordination is being considered if a man who has been ordained in a congregation as an elder whose primary function is *overseeing, pastoring, ruling*. Yes, it does appear strange to list *pastoring* as one of the primary functions of the congregational elder we typically designate as the *ruling elder*, but from the study presented of the use of the words associated with the eldership, *pastoring* elder fits. Is such a man, if he is certified by a Presbytery to receive a call to be a *teaching/preaching* elder, to be ordained again when a congregation calls him to minister in Word and Sacraments as their *teaching elder*? Dr. Wayne Spear understands the Westminster Divines understood ordination to be to a *function*.<sup>18</sup> If they are correct, clearly a man is ordained to the primary function of either *teaching* or *ruling* as we traditionally speak of elders in a congregation. This author is of the opinion that ordination is to office, not function. When Paul left Titus in Crete to set in order what remained, Titus was to appoint elders. It seems the men who met the qualifications to be elders would have been ordained as elders. Of course, we do not know how many of those elders served primarily in Word and Sacraments (*teaching/preaching* – laboring in *Word and teaching*) and how many served primarily in overseeing, ruling, pastoring. Of late, in the RPCNA when men have been called as *teaching elders*, if they have served as *ruling elders*, they are not necessarily ordained when becoming a *teaching elder*; though some have questioned this practice of not ordaining these men because they are changing their primary function. However, this author does not know of any *teaching elder* who has retired from serving as a *teaching elder* being called by a congregation to serve as a *ruling elder*, being ordained again. If this is universally the case, why so? Is there an implied hierarchy if the practice is to ordain a second time *ruling elders* who become *teaching elders*, but not to ordain a second time *teaching elders* if they become *ruling elders*?

One final observation to be considered is over the use of the title “Pastor.” Since the Biblical teaching is for the parity of elders with two primary functions; those functions being *teaching/preaching* and *overseeing, ruling, shepherding*, why are we prone to refer to the *teaching elder* as the Pastor? Fundamentally, based on Ephesians 4:11 where the two primary functions are *shepherding* and *teaching* (ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους) and First Timothy 5:17 where the two primary functions are *ruling* (προεστῶτες) and *laboring in Word and teaching* (κοπιῶεν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ), it makes sense the function pairings should be that of *shepherding/ruling* and *teaching/laboring in Word and teaching*. We have ministers of the Word and sacraments, and shepherds of the sheep.

It is the author’s prayer that food for thought has been provided for the glory of God and the growth of Jesus Church.

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<sup>18</sup> Wayne R. Spear, *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners upon the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013).