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## ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ AND ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES: THE GOVERNING STRUCTURE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES?

**Abstract:** *The ambiguities in the definition of ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος in the Pastoral Epistles gave rise to speculations about the hierarchical structures of the early Christian communities. Using modern definition of the terms, and certain readings of the Ignatian corpus, some scholars argue that the existence of fully-fledged episcopal office is evident at the time of the composition of the Pastoral Epistles (c. 125 AD).*

*The present article analyzed the relevant passages from the Pastorals (1 Tim 3:1-13; 1 Tim 5:17 and Titus 1:5-9) and concluded that there is no evidence of a sacramental distinction between ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος in the Christian communities at the turn of the second century AD.*

**Keywords:** *Early Church, bishop, presbyter, hierarchy, Pastoral Epistles, Ecclesiology, Ignatius of Antioch*

### Introduction

One of the hotly debated issues in the contemporary biblical scholarship of the Pastoral Epistles is the precise translation and identification of the words ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος. In the text of the Pastorals there are no direct definitions or even references to the duties of either ἐπίσκοπος or πρεσβύτερος that would shed light on the role they played in the Pauline Christian communities.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, neither can one find there a clear distinction between the two. The result was a major controversy regarding the identification and definition of the two terms.

Traditionalists would argue that the two terms are to be understood in terms of their contemporary sacramental connotation of “bishops” and “priests,” assigning thus a specialized and formal meaning to them (see, for example, the RSV text of the Pastoral Epistles). However, as J. L. Houlden observed this interpretation would establish an overly smooth connection between those days and our own, which calls for caution.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the modern scholarship cannot but reserve at least a bit of scepticism towards it.

An alternative reading of the two terms is a proposal that they are entirely synonymous, i.e., two interchangeable terms referring to the same office.<sup>3</sup> A third proposal

1 Cf. Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 22.

2 Houlden, James Leslie, *The Pastoral Epistles: I and II Timothy, Titus*, (TPI New Testament Commentaries; London: SCM Press, 1989), 77, 74; see also HIBD, 472-73.

3 Brand, Chad O., Draper, Charles W. and England, Archie W. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

is that the ἐπίσκοποι were some type of ecclesiastical officials that were elected among the πρεσβύτεροι to exert solely administrative duties, who were a sort of governing body of every church congregation. Yet in terms of sacramental privileges ἐπίσκοποι did not differ from the πρεσβύτεροι. The logic of the last proposal seems very attractive.

The purpose here will be to offer a definition of the use of ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος in the Pastoral Epistles. It is to be done primarily by critically evaluating the modern scholarship on the representative passages of the Pastoral Epistles where the terms are mentioned. The passages that are common object of scholarly attention in the debate are: 1 Tim 3:1-13; 1 Tim 5:17 and Titus 1:5-9. It should be noted at the outset that it is beyond the scope of the essay to present an exhaustive history of scholarship on the passages. The main emphasis will be given to the exegetical ideas that could help in resolving the problem at hand.

Here it shall be argued that the office of ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος ought to be considered from two different aspects: 1. administrative, and 2. sacramental. In terms of the administrative duties, here it shall be argued that by the end of the first century CE, the ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος emerge in the Christian communities as two separate offices or institutions. They are most likely appropriations of the governing models of Jewish communities, which gave rise to early Christian church. Further, it shall be argued that in all likelihood ἐπίσκοπος was a distinguished governing figure within Christian communities. He was probably elected from among πρεσβύτεριον (the *college* of πρεσβύτεροι, which is a governing body of Christian communities and consisted of more than one πρεσβύτερος), to administer certain executive affairs of the communities. The distinction between ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος was that of administration, and not sacramental worthiness, so that the ἐπίσκοπος functioned as a mere coordinator of the body of presbyters in a particular local church which due to a growing membership had need for more than one πρεσβύτερος. Thence the overlap of the two offices one finds in Titus 1:5-9.

### Ἐπίσκοπος

The term ἐπίσκοπος is found on several occasions in the Pastoral Epistles. In 1 Tim 3:2 and in Titus 1:7 the term occurs in the form of an agent noun, whereas in 1 Tim 3:1 it occurs in the generic form ἐπισκοπή that describes the office held by ἐπίσκοπος.<sup>4</sup>

It has been already mentioned that the rendering of the two terms as pertaining to the office of contemporary bishops is highly problematic among biblical scholars. This argument is based primarily upon the fact that the term ἐπίσκοπος was extensively used in the Classical Greek world to denote a number of functionaries, e.g., inspectors, civic and religious administrators, finance officers, etc.<sup>5</sup>

It is also important to note with Houlden that ἐπίσκοπος is mainly a Greek term employed widely both in the religious and secular contexts of the Classic world, whereas a more Jewish term for the similar functions would be πρεσβύτερος, or “elder”.<sup>6</sup> However, Josephus informs us that ἐπίσκοπος was also used in the Jewish communities to denote an administrative function of superintendent, supervisor, and overseer (see Josephus Flavius,

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(Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 472-73, (hereafter HIBD).

4 The data is based upon a root search in Bible Works 6.

5 See Kelly, J. N. D., *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963), 73.

6 Houlden, J. L., *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 77.

*Jewish Antiquities* 10.4.1 and 12, 5, 4, Whiston).<sup>7</sup>

And yet, what the role of the ἐπίσκοπος was in the early Christian communities, and how he related to the office of πρεσβύτερος, awaits clarification.

### Πρεσβύτερος

The term πρεσβύτερος is found throughout the New Testament. Nevertheless, Pauline corpus did not use the term often. Grammatical variations of the term usually denote functions of ministry, rather than titles and offices. Πρεσβύτερος, for example, in Rom 12:6-9 denotes person with gifts for prophecy, teaching, serving and some other aspects of ministry (cf. 1 Cor 12).<sup>8</sup>

In the Pastoral Epistles the term was employed in two different ways: 1. as referring to a person's age (1 Tim 4:14; 1 Tim 5:1; 1 Tim 5:2) and 2. as denoting an office in the early Christian Communities (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Tim 5:19 and Tit 1:5). It is the second use of the term that is interesting for the purpose of this essay.

Some scholars argued that in the Pastoral Epistles the term πρεσβύτερος was invariably used to indicate age. For example, Joachim Jeremias, argued that πρεσβύτερος always denoted an "elderly man" and that any attempt to ascribe a religious function to it would be anachronistic for the Pauline Christian Communities.<sup>9</sup> Jeremias argued that in 1 Tim 5:17 and Titus 1:5-9 the term πρεσβύτερος was a mere reference to the age of certain community members.<sup>10</sup>

This view was vigorously opposed by J. N. D. Kelly, who convincingly argued that Jeremias' position disregarded some important moments in the texts themselves.<sup>11</sup> It seems that Jeremias indeed disregarded an obvious reference to double pay in 1 Tim 5:17, which suggests that πρεσβύτερος was a function of a certain kind that required compensation for the provided services. Secondly, Jeremias ignored Paul's statement that Titus was sent to appoint πρεσβύτεροι = elders (Titus 1:5, RSV).

Kelly, however, recognized that his reproach to Jeremias' theory could be challenged on the grounds that the reference to double pay could be understood as Paul's directions to provide compensation to those elderly people who teach and preach twice as much as a regular financial help would be offered to the elderly people in need. Moreover, one could argue even that Paul's direction to Titus in 1:5 was simply an instruction to appoint ἐπίσκοποι from among elderly people in Crete.<sup>12</sup>

There are few obvious difficulties with these possible challenges to Kelly's critique of Jeremias. The most noticeable one is the absence of reference to special provisions for elderly people from the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> Further, it would follow from Jeremias' position that all the πρεσβύτεροι in Crete would be in need of financial help, since Paul gives an express order for double compensation for πρεσβύτεροι. This is very hard to accept, as there is no evidence that would support this claim. Finally, it would follow from Jeremias' view that the Cretan

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<sup>7</sup> See H. Beyer, "ἐπίσκοπος", TDNT, 2:617

<sup>8</sup> See HIBD, 472.

<sup>9</sup> See Jeremias, J., *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1947); see also H. Beyer, "ἐπίσκοπος", TDNT, 2:617

<sup>10</sup> See Kelly, J. N. D., *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly, J. N. D., *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 122.

<sup>12</sup> Kelly, J. N. D., *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 122.

<sup>13</sup> See Kelly, J. N. D., *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 122.

administrators would be appointed only from among the elderly people. Even though this sounds as an attractive option, since it would match with general high regard for elderly people in many cultures, it is very unlikely for two reasons. Firstly, we see that Timothy, an Apostolic emissary with special authority in the Pauline communities, was rather young (see 1 Tim 4:12, RSV).<sup>14</sup> Secondly, one could possibly argue such a thing only on account of the general presupposition that the elderly people were more respected and considered to be wiser than young. Yet, this was hardly the case. The public position of the Classical world on this is faithfully presented in the classical works. Philo speaking about the Jewish *πρεσβύτεροι* of his time says that they were not the ones who are “bowed down by old age”, but the ones who are “worthy of precedence and honour” (Philo, *Sobriety* 16). The same author also testifies that *πρεσβύτεροι* were not necessarily elderly people, but those who “from their earliest years have grown to manhood and spent their prime in pursuing the contemplative branch of philosophy, which indeed is the noblest and most god-like part” (Philo, *Contemplative Life* 67).<sup>15</sup> Consequently, one would sustain strong critiques while arguing that the age was preferred to other personal qualities in the Classic societies.

Therefore, it seems very unlikely that *πρεσβύτεροι* were simply elderly Christians and, as Kelly ably argued, they must have performed certain functions in Pauline communities. The question that remains is, what exactly was their purpose and how do they relate to *ἐπίσκοποι*, with whom they were so often confused?

### **The *Ἐπίσκοποι* and *πρεσβύτεροι* in the Pastoral Epistles**

Indeed it seems that the terms *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* are often presented as synonymous by biblical scholars, as well as certain religious groups. William Hendriksen, for example, argued that the two terms were synonymous. The only distinction between them comes from the emphasis on different aspects of the function, i.e., if the emphasis was laid on the work, the term used would be *ἐπίσκοπος*, whereas if the emphasis was on the honor, the same person would be called *πρεσβύτερος*.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, the task in identifying the precise task and purpose of both functions is made more copious by the fact that there is no clear mention of the duties of either. Moreover, there is even no unambiguous list of qualifications for the function of *πρεσβύτερος*, unless one makes a strong assumption that the qualifications for *ἐπίσκοπος* listed in 1 Tim 3:1-13 would automatically apply to *πρεσβύτερος* as well. This opens the space for speculation whether the qualifications for *πρεσβύτερος*, if any, were not the same as those required of the candidates for *ἐπίσκοπος* (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-13).

The only instance in the New Testament when both terms were mentioned at the same place is Titus 1:5-9. The passage begins by an order for appointment of *πρεσβύτεροι* in every city and continues with the list of qualifications for *ἐπίσκοπος*. This would lead many scholars to a hasty conclusion that the two terms were fully interchangeable. Yet, it is very hard to explain why the Pastor used two different words to indicate the same function in so close proximity. Thus, an alternative should be explored.

14 See Kelly, J. N. D., *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 122.

15 For an interesting analysis of the term *πρεσβύτερος* see Collins, R. F., *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 144 and 327.

16 See Hendriksen, W., *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 118, 179; for additional information on the same topic see Beyer, “*ἐπίσκοπος*”, TDNT, 2:617 and HIBD, 472-73.

This controversial issue would be settled if we take for granted that in the Pastoral Epistles both ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος were understood as two separate and well defined functions of the early Christian communities that drew their origins from the governing models of Jewish communities, whose converts consisted majority of Christians.

It has been pointed out that πρεσβύτερος was a term often employed in the Jewish terminology of the period. It is precisely this fact that is revealing for the identification of the governing structure of the early Christian communities and consequently could shed light upon the true functions of πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος. The structure of the Jewish Diaspora synagogues consisted of a board of πρεσβύτεροι called *gerousia*. This board handled financial affairs, oversaw the community's charitable work and settled the disputes among the members of the community. Interestingly, this board had an *archesynagogos*, often a person distinguished in wealth, who acted as chairperson of the governing board and the head of the synagogue. This position, however, was not always occupied by a single person. Sometimes there are references to a number of *archesynagogoi*.<sup>17</sup>

Similar offices are also found in the Qumran communities. A "council of holiness" (1 QS 8:6-8; 9:3-11) that acted as a governing body is mentioned in these communities. Coincidentally, there is also a mention of an officer called *mebaqqer*, who would roughly correspond to ἐπίσκοπος. The duties of *mebaqqer* were of administrative nature and similar to ἐπίσκοπος of the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>18</sup> His duties were to be in charge of and to oversee the community affairs and to provide religious instruction. He would be receiving alms or settle disputes, but he was also in charge of penance and general spiritual leadership (1 QS 6:10, 12, 19-20; CD 9:18-19, 22; 13:6-16; 14:8-12).<sup>19</sup>

The governing structure of the Jewish synagogues in Diaspora and other Jewish sects suggests that this model of governing was rather common in Judaism. The obvious similarity between the Jewish model and the titles used in the Pastoral Epistles, whose addressees were in great majority former members of the Jewish communities, indicates that the Pauline Communities could have inherited, or rather, continued with their previous mode of religious government.<sup>20</sup> This connection is even more evident if one takes into consideration that the Pastor in 1 Tim 4:14 referring to the local Christian governing body used the term πρεσβυτέριον, the same term that was used in Lk 22:5, 66 to denote the Jewish Sanhedrin. Consequently, it is more than likely that the early Christians simply followed the established governing practice of the Jewish communities where a body of elected πρεσβύτεροι governed the community affairs, but an ἐπίσκοπος was elected from among them with executive responsibilities.

The support for this view is found in Titus 1:5-9 where the πρεσβύτεροι and ἐπίσκοποι are presented as presiding over the communities. Yet, as it has been mentioned, it is not clear in the Pastorals whether these two titles are definitely two separate offices or simply interchangeable. Since, as it was demonstrated previously, everything indicates that the two offices are simply a continuation from Judaism, one is prone to conclude that the two offices cannot be fully interchangeable, but are distinct functions. The explanation

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17 See Burtchael, J. T., *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 180-271; see also Johnson, L. T., *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 146.

18 For more on this see Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 145.

19 See Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 74.

20 Cf. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 34; Youngblood, R., Bruce, F. F. and Harrison, R. K., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1995), 1025-26.

reconciling the two premises is found in the fact that the two offices overlap, as it was hinted above. This possibility is supported by the fact that the function of ἐπίσκοπος in the Pastoral Epistles is mentioned always in singular, whereas that of πρεσβύτερος usually in plural, leaving space for speculation that a number of πρεσβύτεροι gave rise to an ἐπίσκοπος.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, bearing in mind the Jewish model, one could conclude that in all likelihood ἐπίσκοπος was an official elected from among the governing board of πρεσβύτεροι.

The office of πρεσβύτεροι was much respected among the Jewish communities and it seems safe to assume that they preserved the same dignity among the Pauline Communities. It seems very likely that as the Christian communities were growing that the size of the board of πρεσβύτεροι was following. Consequently the board of πρεσβύτεροι in many large communities seems to have definitely given rise to a person in whom the authority was concentrated.<sup>22</sup> The elected one was known as ἐπίσκοπος, i.e., the overseer. This theory is supported by 1 Tim 3:1-13 that gives a list of qualifications an ἐπίσκοπος ought to have, which implies an extraordinary importance of the function. Consequently, ἐπίσκοποι were elected from the governing board and indeed from among the distinguished members of the same.

It has been previously noted that the function of ἐπίσκοπος usually appears in singular throughout the New Testament. In the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:7 it appears exclusively in singular. For certain scholars this was indication that only one ἐπίσκοπος was supposed to be appointed for each community. The singularity of ἐπίσκοπος in one community was most likely derived from Paul's generic use of singular in 1 Tim 3:1, where the Pastor exclaims "Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται..." ("If *anyone* aspires to the office of bishop...", RSV; emphasis added).<sup>23</sup>

However, this is not necessarily the case. As Kelly observed the singular use of the term could be understood generically, i.e., plurality could be presupposed.<sup>24</sup> In case of 1 Tim 3:1, one could counter-argue that Paul in 1 Tim 5:4-10 while using in fact generic singular χήρα (widow, RSV), must be speaking about a number of χήραι since in 1 Tim 5:3 he speaks about χήραι.<sup>25</sup> The theory of the plurality of ἐπίσκοποι in one community is primarily supported by Acts 20:28, where Paul speaks to ἐπίσκοποι of the Ephesian Church. Also, Paul in Phil 1:1 greets ἐπίσκοποι of that Church. Moreover, one is constantly reminded in this essay that a plurality of ἐπίσκοποι existed in the Jewish communities. Consequently, an assumption that there was only one ἐπίσκοπος in each Pauline community would be rather hasty, since there is not enough evidence for this hypothesis.

One has to bear in mind though that there could be no certainty regarding the uniformity of the governing structures of the early Christian Communities.<sup>26</sup> The data in support of this are lacking and the reconstruction of the religious governmental structure has to be done on the basis of sparse primary information collected from the New Testament sources. Thus, one cannot be sure that the structure of one Pauline community in the New Testament resembled the structure of another Pauline community. One could only speculate that the structure should be similar in the predominantly Jewish Christian

21 See Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 13.

22 See Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 142, 77.

23 See Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 74.

24 Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 74.

25 See Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 74.

26 Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 142.

communities, as it has been proposed here. The problem that still remains is that the communities with majority of pagan converts, e.g., Philippian Church, had not necessarily inherited the Jewish mode of religious government. At least there is no convincing evidence that they did. This is primarily the reason for limiting this research on the Pastoral Epistles, since it has been presupposed here that they shared the model of Church governing.

Finally, one has to mention the difficulty of associating the Pastoral ἐπίσκοπος with the same office mentioned by Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius in his Epistles to different Churches in Asia Minor painted a very strong picture of an elaborate episcopal office of ἐπίσκοπος. In fact he put so much emphasis on this office that Kelly rightly characterized it as “monarchical”.<sup>27</sup> Roughly, for Ignatius, ἐπίσκοπος exerted absolute authority within the community entrusted to him, on account of the sacramental nature of his office. The ἐπίσκοπος was the central figure in the services of his communities and without his presence or at least consent services were void.<sup>28</sup>

This, however, cannot be the case, since there is no explicit mention of cultic or priestly functions of ἐπίσκοπος in the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>29</sup> Further, Ignatian understanding of ἐπίσκοπος would have a major difficulty with the fact that Timothy and Titus had overriding authority over the ἐπίσκοποι.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, Ignatian governing structure does not correspond to the one mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles. Certainly, it could be a variation of the Pastoral structure, but a full identification of the two would be anachronistic. One must take into account the fact that the epistles to Timothy and Titus were written c. 100 AD.<sup>31</sup> Then, the discrepancy between Ignatian hierarchical model based on sacramental distinction between ἐπίσκοποι and πρεσβύτεροι on the one side and that of the Pastorals one the other, could point to a possibility that Ignatius was describing a governing model that was particular to the ecclesial community in Antioch (Ignatius’ home town) from the very beginning, since, as previously mentioned, one cannot be confident that the governing structure of the early Christian communities was indeed uniform.

An alternative explanation takes into account the possibility that Ignatius, working within the governing framework of the Pastorals, used ἐπίσκοπος in the sense of the community leader who presides over the Eucharistic offering of the particular community. In that case the term would be synonymous with πρεσβύτερος as regards the sacramental aspect of the office, since in the hierarchical structure of the ἐπίσκοπος was in fact a πρεσβύτερος who performed additional administrative functions, namely, that of an overseer or coordinator in the communities with more than one πρεσβύτερος. The fact that Paul used Antioch as the pivotal point of his missionary travels, coupled with the majestic importance

27 Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 14.

28 On this see Zizioulas, J., *Eucharist, bishop, church : the unity of the church in the divine Eucharist and the bishop during the first three centuries*, (trans. E. Theokritoff; Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001) who mistakenly argued that the Ignatian office of ἐπίσκοπος is entirely a genuine continuation of the New Testament office.

29 See Johnson, *Letters to Paul’s Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 147.

30 See Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus*, 15; see also Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 142.

31 There are arguments for both for an earlier (c. 60 AD) and much later (c. 160 AD) dating. Yet, the current consensus is that the turn of the second century is the probable date of composition. See Wild, Robert A., “The Pastoral Epistles,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 893. See also Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Epistles* (Minneapolis: James & Klock, 1976), 3-4; Anthony T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles: based on the Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 5.

the city enjoyed in the civic constitution of the ancient world, necessitates the conclusion that the Christian presence in the city was rather significant and that it necessitated existence of more than one *πρεσβύτερος* whose work was coordinated by an *ἐπίσκοπος*. The Ignatian reference to the *ἐπίσκοπος* would be a generic reference to the “one who presides over the Eucharist,” be it a small community (in which case the presider would be called a *πρεσβύτερος*) or a large community with a number of *πρεσβύτεροι* (in which case the presider would be an *ἐπίσκοπος*). Therefore, Ignatius has in mind preservation of ecclesiastical order and unity in his epistles, which he argued for using the experiences and governing models of his own community. Nonetheless, any use of the Ignatian epistles to argue for an existence of a fully fledged office of a bishop in modern terms ought to be considered anachronistic.

### Conclusion

As it was stated at the outset, the primary purpose of this brief analysis was to identify the governing structure of the early Pauline communities mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles, at the turn of the second century, and the identification of the offices of *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* in them.

The conclusion reached here is that the two terms mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles in relation to the governing of the Christian communities, are two distinct offices that played an important role in the process of community governing. The two offices were overlapping in their sacramental functions while at the same time there was a distinction in terms of administrative duties. This brought about a confusion of the two by some traditional scholars.

The two offices originated in the governing structures of the Jewish communities, which gave rise to the earliest Christian churches. Naturally, the offices of *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* were inherited from Judaism. The office of *πρεσβύτερος* was an honorary governing function within the community. A body of a number of *πρεσβύτεροι* exerted general religious government. Among those a distinguished *πρεσβύτερος* was eventually promoted to *ἐπίσκοπος*, whose function concentrated authority and exerted executive power, but there is no evidence that they exerted an extraordinary sacramental authority that would supersede that of the *πρεσβύτεροι*. Finally, since it is very likely that the governing structures of the early Christian communities were differing among themselves, one cannot be certain about the number of *ἐπίσκοποι* in a community. It has to be also admitted that even the general governing structure and the roles of *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* could be dissimilar from a community to community. Be it as it may, it is certain that the function of *ἐπίσκοπος* in the Pastoral Epistles does not correspond to the Ignatian model of “monarchical” bishops and thus neither to the present day understanding of the episcopal office that derived from it.

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## ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ И ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ У ПАСТИРСКИМ ПОСЛАНИЦАМА: УПРАВЉАЧКА СТРУКТУРА РАНОХРИШЋАНСКИХ ЗАЈЕДНИЦА

Недоумице у дефинисању појмова ἐπίσκοπος и πρεσβύτερος у пастирским посланицама дале су повода размишљањима о хијерархијској структури ранохришћанских заједница. Имајући у виду савремено коришћење наведених појмова, као и одређене пасусе из дела Светог Игњатија Богоносца, поједини научници сматрају да је постојање развијеног епископата приметно већ у време писања пастирских посланица (око 125. год. н. е.).

У чланку се анализирају релевантни одломци из пастирских посланица (1 Тим 3:1-13; 1 Тим 5:17; Тит 1:5-9) и долази се до закључка да не постоје докази о богослужбеној разлици између ἐπίσκοπος и πρεσβύτερος у хришћанским заједницама на почетку другог столећа.

**Кључне речи:** рано хришћанство, епископ, презвитер, црквена јерархија, пастирске посланице, еклисиологија, Игњатије Богоносац.