

**„ΟΙ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΙ” AND „ΟΙ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΙ” IN PAUL’S DISCOURSE
IN MILETUS (ACTS 20,17-35)
- A REFERENCE TO THE SACRAMENTAL PRIESTHOOD OF
THE EARLY CHURCH? AN ORTHODOX EXEGETICAL
PERSPECTIVE -**

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Abstract. The goal of this article is to emphasize that Paul’s discourse in Miletus might represent a reference to the sacramental priesthood of the early Church. From this point of view I try to give an answer especially to the following question: Who were οἱ πρεσβύτεροι and οἱ ἐπίσκοποι τῆς ἐκκλησίας from Ephesus (Acts 20,17-35)? In answering this question I came to the conclusion that the elders from Ephesus wouldn’t have been simple old men, but a special category of persons who performed distinctive ecclesiastical tasks within the community. According to the Exegesis of the most Eastern Church Fathers on the above mentioned pericope, οἱ πρεσβύτεροι from Ephesus must have been members of the sacramental hierarchy of the Church. If this exegesis is correct, we then have to recognise that an obvious distinction between the *universal priesthood*, belonging to all Christians, and the *sacramental one* of the Church, belonging only to the “ordained priests” (τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους), has existed from the very beginning of the early Church. This latter group did not incorporate laity leaders of the community. Is Paul’s discourse in Miletus an appropriate reference to this regard? An answer to this matter can be found in the following analysis.

Keywords: priesthood, πρεσβύτερος, ἐπίσκοπος, sacerdotal, minister, early church, elder, community.

1. Preliminary remarks – type, structure and “Pauline authenticity” of the Speech

Sometime towards the end of the third missionary journey, on the way to Jerusalem, where he was going to deliver the collection made by the churches of Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia,¹ the Apostle Paul did no longer pass through Ephesus, but he called the Christian community “leaders” from this city to Miletus (Acts 20,17), where he gave an imposing speech, focusing particularly on the need

¹ “Galatia” was originally intended to be included in this action (1 Cor 16,1), but Rom 15,26 seems to imply that the churches in Galatia did not support Paul any longer.