Sir,

As I promised, the following is a brief rebuttal to your comments regarding church government (*against centralized church-government*). I also read the article you forwarded to me via e-mail (*which basically presented the same information*). As I mentioned, I have encountered others with your views many times before and have examined the arguments at length in the past. I have always strongly disagreed with these interpretations for reasons I will elaborate on below.

First, allow me to define a phrase that is very important for our discussion, "*plurality of elders.*" I do not deny that a plurality of elders, per se, is taught in the Scriptures, but rather, how it is defined. By *"plurality of elders"* the Bible does not mean "*several elders with equal authority (none above another),"* but simply that there may be more than one leader in any given local church, that's all. Hence, unless otherwise noted, when I use the phrase, *"plurality of elders"* it is to be understood to denote more than one elder, not several men with equal authority.

I will briefly address several of your comments...

"I have come to see that the idea and practice in question (passed on from Roman Catholicism) is the Nicolaitan error which Jesus hates. (a one man leader at the top of the elders and deacons, and laity."

This is an extra-Biblical point; the Scriptures only vaguely define what the *Nicolaitan* deeds and doctrines are. To assume that local churches, autonomously established, manned with a plurality of elders, but structured with central authority, represents the *"Nicolaitan error"* is a matter of opinion. I have studied the *Nicolaitans* for years and have concluded very little by referencing history. The only provable doctrines that can be reliably attributed to the *Nicolaitans* are *Gnosticism* and *Antinomianism*. I realize the name *"Nicolaitans"* literally means "*rulers of the laity*" or something to that effect, however, what does this prove? Regardless of our views of church polity, we both agree someone has authority to rule and govern, whether a group of elders or a single overseer/bishop. And, no doubt, Romanism may be represented by the *Nicolaitans*, nevertheless, I am not promoting the extreme ecclesiastical structure of *Roman Catholicism.*

"If you put aside traditions of men.."

Yes, dear Sir, if we set aside traditions and opinions of men we must set aside the above point and several others that are often used to defend the views you espouse.

"...just look at the pattern laid out in the Book of Acts"

Indeed, what do we see in the *Book of Acts*? There is nothing in the Scriptures that irrefutably prove that the first church at Jerusalem was governed by Apostles and Elders who possessed equal authority *(none above another).* In fact, it certainly appears that *the Apostle Peter* was considered the central leader and perhaps a strong argument can be made that he possessed more authority than the others. However, it is commonly acknowledged that *James* was the first bishop of the

church at Jerusalem. True, in *Acts 15*, it appears the entire early church leadership gathered to address the issue of the Judizers, but this was not strictly a local church matter, but a threat to the integrity of the gospel and a universal danger against Christianity in general, especially among the new Gentile believers.

"Jesus' instructions to His apostles, then you will see that Jesus is the one and only head of His body... Jesus is the only 'Chief Shepherd' pastor of His flock, Elders , or bishops, or presbuterous, or overseers are undershepherds."

My view of church government does not negate *Jesus* as *Lord* or Chief Shepherd over the flock, the Body of Christ. Again, it is a moot point, as we both believe there are men, called, ordained, and vested with divine authority to govern and rule in local church matters.

"... which is many bodies in various locations on earth each of which had several elders on an equal authority (none above another)."

Again, I do not deny that God's church consist of many members all contributing to the spiritual vitality of the *Body of Christ*. Nor do I deny that God's intention is to place several men with heavenly gifting within each local body for edification. I only contend that the Bible does not teach that these elders will all have equal authority. Likewise, I concede that the Scriptures do not specifically teach that one elder/overseer will have central authority either. Nevertheless, this is why I appeal to the totality of God's Word regarding spiritual authority. As I mentioned in my last correspondence with you, throughout Scripture, and in every sphere of divine, delegated authority, God has revealed His pattern as theocratic. Whether it is civil, domestic, parental, occupational, or spiritual, God has rarely, if ever, established rule by "*committee*."

Moreover, you have the example of the *Apostle Paul*, one man, under God, by the Word, who again and again exercised clear and uncontested spiritual authority over churches he recently established. He dealt with almost every conceivable problem ranging from church discipline to order in the marriage. God exclusively used him to address the order of worship and to limit how often believers could give a message in tongues, etc. It is never implied that he consulted with other "elders" of equal authority when addressing these issues. In my estimation, a fairly clear example of what you irreverently referred to as a *"one man show."*

"In fact a Greek word study reveals that "pastor" is not in the NT..."

Unless you attack the translation of the divinely preserved *KJV*, which I would denounce as arrogant and dangerous indeed, you cannot deny that the word "pastor" is in the N.T.. The pastoral office gift is mentioned, as you know, in *Ephesians 4:11.* Nevertheless, if you prefer to use other titles "overseers, elders, or bishops,' for local church leaders, I have no qualms, but I do not see how this impacts our disagreement.

I also can appeal to extra-Biblical evidence. I am no scholar, but as far as I can tell, there is not one witness among the pre-Constantine church fathers to verify your views. On the contrary, one statement after another, among such early church writers (*first & second century*) as *Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus,* etc., point to the Apostles appointing a single authority figure, usually a Bishop, along with other teaching elders, over the local churches.

There are many, many quotes; below is a mere sampling...

"Keep in remembrance Euodias, your deservedly blessed pastor, into whose hands the government over you was first entrusted by the Apostles." -Ignatius

"Polycarp, that most worthy bishop, who is also deeply interested in you, salutes you; and to him I have commended you in the Lord. The whole Church of the Smyrnaeans, indeed, is mindful of you in their prayers in the Lord. Onesimus, the pastor of the Ephesians, salutes you. Damas, the bishop of Magnesia, salutes you. Polybius, bishop of the Trallians, salutes you." -Ignatius

"Be ye subject to the bishop, to the presbyters, and to the deacons." -Ignatius to Philippians

"I salute thy holy clergy, and thy Christ-loving people who are ruled under thy care as their pastor." -Mary of Cassobelae to Ignatius

"But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna.." -Justin Martyr

"Those Pastors are to be heard to whom the Apostles committed the churches." -Justin Martyr

And finally, Sir, though I admit my Christian experience is, at best, limited, I cannot deny what I have seen. Wherever I have been, both abroad and within the U.S., the pattern of church government you promote yields, in my opinion, the most suspect spiritual fruit. Rebellion, independence, and disorder generally abound in such places (though it may be different with you). True, I have rarely observed what I would consider to be a N.T. local church. However, the best testimonies I have seen and the most robust and spiritually healthy believers I have encountered always, without fail, are cultivated under the church polity that I defend above.

In Christ,
-B.W.