ABSTRACT
Campbell in his book, *The elders: Seniority within earliest Christianity* (1994), proposes a 'new consensus' in viewing the evolution of church leadership in the New Testament. He utilises the results of the sociological approach to the New Testament in an attempt to establish a link between the term *presbuteros* and the *paterfamilias* figure of the house churches in the Pauline churches. In so doing he asserts that the evolution of church leadership should not be viewed in terms of a decline from charismatic to ecclesiastical leadership (the 'old' consensus). In this article it is maintained that the church had 'natural' leaders since its inception. This leadership then matured into the hierarchical church order of the second century, of which the letters of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch bear early testimony. The article concludes with a brief appraisal in which certain deficiencies of Campbell's 'new consensus' are pointed out.

1 INTRODUCTION

A few introductory remarks are in order: (a) I basically accept Campbell's thesis. I therefore present his arguments in such a manner that I can identify with them. However, in the course of the article my reservations will also become apparent. (b) As far as possible I try to steer clear from the term 'office', since in the early days of the church it is not always certain whether the terms describing various ministries refer to offices in the technical sense of the word. Hence the more neutral term 'leadership'. (c) The word 'evolution' in the title may be misleading. What is at stake here is not some kind of linear process whereby certain forms of leadership developed out of an initial stage of total absence of leadership. Leadership had always been present in the church. What is rather highlighted is how certain existing patterns of leadership matured into full blown church offices, and others receded into the background. (d) As it will turn out, more attention is paid to the figure of the elder. This is so because it is the one form of leadership in first century Christianity about which we know most, especially when developments at
the turn of the first century and in the early second century AD are taken into consideration.

2 SURVEY OF THE EVOLUTION OF LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Before I engage in Campbell’s views, I first wish to briefly survey the terms used for leadership in the New Testament. These are set within the broader framework of the evolution of leadership.

2.1 The writings of Clement and Ignatius versus the New Testament writings

The evolution of leadership in the New Testament is best evaluated if offset against the situation encountered in the writings of Clement of Rome\(^1\) and Ignatius of Antioch\(^2\) around the turn of the first century AD. It is clear that by now church leadership has already developed into three distinct offices, namely bishop (\(episkopos\)), elder (\(presbuteros\)) and deacon (\(diakonos\)). We do not hear much of the other ministries so prominent in the New Testament.\(^3\) Ignatius particularly emphasises the special position of the bishop. Nothing should be done without the bishop being present (\(Ign\,Trail\,2:2;\,PhLd\,7:2\)), particularly when administering the sacraments (\(Ign\,Smy\,8:2\)).\(^4\) In the subsequent

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\(^1\) His letter to the Corinthians is usually dated approximately 96 AD (cf Fischer 1986:20).
\(^2\) Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria, suffered martyrdom in Rome during the reign of emperor Trajan (98-117 AD). Ignatius’ seven letters were written en route to Rome. They should therefore be dated not long before his death, the latter being in 109 AD, according to Jerome (Fischer 1986:115).
\(^3\) Mention is made by Ignatius of what we may typify as wandering charismatics, but they are regarded as heretics bent on destroying the church (cf \(Ign\,Eph\,7:1;\,9:1\)). They should therefore be strongly opposed (\(Ign\,Smy\,4:1\)). Their teachings might have been of a Judaistic (cf \(Ign\,Mag\,8:1;\,Phld\,8:2;\,9:1\)) or docetic (\(Ign\,Mag\,9:1;\,11\)) nature. As far as prophetic ministry is concerned, according to Giles (1989:47,143) the bishop has assumed prophetic status himself and silenced others (cf \(Ign\,Eph\,20:2;\,Phld\,7:1-2;\,Pol\,2:2\)).
\(^4\) It is not clear to what extent the status of the bishop as described in the letters of Ignatius is a true reflection of the de facto situation in the church at large at this time. It rather appears that Ignatius is ‘a lone voice for his opinions, with no supporters for many decades’ (Giles 1989:44). Most scholars acknowledge that Ignatius might have engaged in some special pleading for enhancing the position of the bishop (cf Conniry 1994:251). His letters therefore reflect his own views—what he would have liked the church to believe—and not necessarily the situation at grass roots level. However, this is not reason enough to reject Ignatius’ views on the status of the bishop, since he represents a sentiment which at least must have been present in his day, especially if later developments about the status of the bishop are taken into account. From a more positive point of view it could be argued that Ignatius’ appeal for uniformity signifies the vision of a true prophet, whose views were borne out by the subsequent decades.
decades and centuries these three offices grew in stature. Eventually this led to the distinction between the clergy and the laity, which in turn contributed to the establishment of the monarchical episcopate of the bishop of Rome.

Turning to the New Testament one might say that there is a 'literary gap' between the writings of Clement and Ignatius, and the canonical writings: the three offices mentioned above are not as such present in the New Testament. We encounter instead a confusing plethora of terms broadly relating to church leadership. They are (in no particular order, and with the Greek equivalent in brackets): apostle (ἀπόστολος), prophet (προφήτης), teacher (διδάσκαλος), evangelist (εὐαγγελιστής), shepherd/pastor (ποιμήν), overseer/bishop (ἐπίσκοπος), elder (πρεσβύτερος), deacon (διακονος), leader/ship (προϊσταμενος; κυβέρνησις; ήγούμενος), and assistant (ὑπηρέτης). It is not always clear whether we are dealing with offices or functions—be they permanent or temporary—or whether there is any overlapping between them. There is much reason to believe that the terms 'overseer' and 'elder' are synonyms, describing the same function or office (so Ysebaert 1994:60-61; see particularly Ac 20:17, 28); or that 'prophet' and 'teacher' designate the same people (at least in Ac 13:1 they are not clearly distinguished, cf Haenchen 1971:395); or that pastors may be called 'overseers', 'elders' and 'deacons' (so O'Collins 1996:144); furthermore, '...that a man could be both an overseer/elder and also a prophet/teacher' (Campbell 1994:164).

One might try to order the above terms in some way. One possibility is to classify them in terms of their distribution among the various authors of

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5 Even in the Pastoral Letters where these three ministries are the only ones mentioned, it does not necessarily lead to the assumption of a three tier church order for the Pastors. We can say this because the three terms are never mentioned in the same breath (cf Dibelius 1977:472).

6 In Gl 2:2, 6, 9 the term ἀδικούεται, 'distinguished leaders', is used. Scholars agree that it refers to the apostles (cf Schlier 1971:6; Mußner 1981:105; Ysebaert 1994:23-28). Ysebaert interprets it as an ironic description of the apostles, especially in the light of verse 6 where the status of the apostles is seemingly played down. However, the general thrust of Paul's argument clearly undercuts such a notion. He is not denigrating the authority of the apostles, but rather rejects any false grounds for their authority (cf Schlier 1971:76).

7 Other terms such as μάρτυς (Ac 1:8; 26:16) and ἐγγέλος (Rv 2-3) are perhaps too general to be regarded as terms of leadership. Προστάτης (Rm 16:2) may also be taken as a term of leadership. However, Vogt (1995:192-193) has argued convincingly that Προστάτης pertains rather to being a διάκονος than describing a separate function or office. Of further interest is the term ἔργον that almost attains technical status in Paul's vocabulary to characterise his ministry (1 Cor 3:10-15). ἔργον probably refers to the effort, sacrifice, toil, fatigue and stamina involved in the work of the Lord (cf 1 Ths 2:9) (Collins 1995:117-118).
the New Testament. A distinction could also be drawn between Pauline and non-Pauline terms. However, a quick glance at a concordance will show that this is not very helpful since many terms used by Paul also appear in the rest of the New Testament. Another possibility is to order the terms according to their probable meanings or functions. Thus one might say that certain terms refer to itinerant missionaries, such as prophet, teacher, and evangelist (cf. Beyer 1971b:615), and others to local leaders, such as elder and overseer (cf. Ysebaert 1994:58-59, 122-123). However, in many instances we are at a complete loss as to the specific function designated by a term, so that this kind of ordering becomes very tentative (cf. Collins 1995:125). Since the emphasis in this article is on the evolution of church leadership it seems best only to list the terms, as was done above, and then concentrate on the most obvious line of development. In this way speculation is kept to a minimum.

Apart from the above leaders there are also the gifts of grace (charismata). 1 Cor 12:8-10 mention the following: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Apart from these more spectacular gifts Paul in Rm 12:6-8 puts the 'ordinary' ministries of service and management on a par with the previous ones by calling them charismata too. They are: helping others, teaching, encouragement, generosity, leadership and compassion. The charismata—be it the 'spectacular' or the 'ordinary' ones—are as much part of ministering in the early church as the more formal leadership (cf. Collins 1995:121). Furthermore, it is not very helpful to try and separate leadership and charismata or even distinguish between them, such as between prophecy (gift) and prophet (leader); wisdom, knowledge, and teaching (gifts) and teacher (leader). It seems that charisma and office—to use fixed terminology typifying the two extremes—are mutually dependent and complementary (Collins 1995:122; Flemming 1994:240-242). You cannot have the one

8 Because of the foundational and supervising nature of the apostles' work one might tend to also include them in the category of 'wandering missionaries'. However, since the apostles occupied such a fundamental position in the early church, they should be placed in a category of their own.

9 It is an interesting observation that the Corinthians speak of spiritual gifts (pneumati̇a), but Paul subtly shifts the emphasis from human pretension to God's grace. Therefore Paul speaks of charismata—gifts of grace (cf. Giles 1989:16).

10 One could also say that Paul is toning down the more spectacular gifts by elevating the 'natural' talents or abilities of people to the level of gifts of the Spirit (cf. Blank 1982:214; Ridderbos 1973:494-496). This observation lets Holmberg (1978:179-192) advance a sociological interpretation of the situation in the Pauline churches in general and Corinth in particular. He characterises the Pauline churches as predominantly charismatic (as a result of the charismatic activities in them), but also as socially determined (because of their rational, financial, and disciplinary needs). Thus they are caught up in an inevitable and continuous process of institutionalisation.
without the other.

In all fairness it must be added that it is not clear to what extent the gifts displayed in the Corinthian congregation were also present in the other Christian communities (cf Campbell 1994:249). Besides this, it must be remembered that Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians also has polemic overtones. He is trying to create some order in a situation which tended to get out of hand. On the one hand he does not oppose the gifts; on the other he is trying hard to bring some theological perspective into the picture by putting all the gifts on a par as manifestations of the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:11), and by placing them under the supervision of the Word (1 Cor 14:1-5). Nevertheless, the fundamental way Paul argues the gifts in 1 Cor 12 and Rm 12 is enough to demonstrate that both charisma and office are part and parcel of Paul’s vision of church leadership (cf Lombard 1976:47-48).

The point made in the previous paragraphs is that, compared to the situation in the writings of Clement and Ignatius around the turn of the first century AD, the New Testament writings do not portray a unified picture of the structure of leadership in the early years of the church, at least not in terms of the three offices of bishop, elder and deacon. How then did it come to pass that this variegated picture of church leadership eventually evolved into the three offices mentioned?

Until recently there has been a consensus of some sort about how leadership developed in the early church. In the light of what will later be discussed in 2.3, I shall refer to this view as the ‘old consensus’.  

2.2 The old consensus on the evolution of church leadership

The whole debate on the evolution of leadership in the early church hinges on the interpretation of the elder (presbuteros). As a point of departure one might raise the question why the term presbuteros does not occur in the genu-

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11 Campbell (1994:250-251) has an interesting way of describing how Paul sought order. Campbell differentiates between *charisma* and *charismad*. *Charisma* refers to any Christian activity evaluated by Paul as a gift of grace, whether normal or paranormal. *Charismad* denotes paranormal, pneumatic, or spontaneous activity. In 1 Corinthians Paul is confronted by people who are placing excessive value on what may be called *charismad*. The whole tenor of Paul’s approach is to characterise the work of the ‘natural’ leaders as *charisma* and to place all *charismad* under their control.

12 For a description of the old consensus, see Campbell 1994:11-19 (also cf Karrer 1990:153-154). Campbell does not use the term ‘old’ consensus, but simply speaks of ‘consensus’. However, in this article I shall refer to the latter as ‘old’, simply to contrast it with ‘new’ consensus.
ine Pauline letters. In search for an answer to this question a consensus of some sort arose, which even in our day has its supporters among many New Testament scholars. The roots of this consensus go back to the influential ideas of Rudolf Sohm, the well known German scholar of jurisprudence who also studied church history and polity. His magisterial work of 700 pages on church polity was published in 1892. His view was that charisma (describing the free guidance of the Holy Spirit) was opposed to any idea of church office (cf Ridderbos 1973:490). The church in its early years would have had no need of any office because it was led by the free working of the Spirit. The Spirit endowed the church with charismata which from time to time manifested in various people, such as apostles, prophets and teachers. This is where the real authority lay—not in people, but in Christ as the Head of the Church whose authority was exercised through the charismata. This means that the church indeed had authority. However, it was not legalistic in nature, but a charismatic authority and order. People were not formally elected in positions of authority. Rather their gifts were simply recognised and cherished.

Eventually, various offices (e.g. bishop and elder) did emerge towards the end of the first century. Sohm's views on the nature of the offices differed from those of his contemporaries. Whereas scholars such as Hatch and Lightfoot claimed that the offices emerged purely for financial, organizational and disciplinary reasons—following the examples of Greek clubs and societies, and of the Jewish synagogue—Sohm held fast to the spiritual and charismatic nature of the church's ministry. It was his view that the elders had not held an office in the church, but that they nevertheless had the charisma of teaching. And the functions of the bishop, who was elected out of the ranks of the elders, were to lead the assembly in the eucharistic prayer and to administer the church's charity.

13 I regard the following as genuine Pauline letters (in chronological order, to my view): 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philemon and Philippians. The others are deutero-Pauline: Colossians, Ephesians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus.
14 For a description of Sohm's views, see Campbell 1994:5-10.
15 Kirchenrecht, Leipzig: Duncker und Humbolt.
18 Roberts (1984:283) typifies this line of thinking as 'utilitarian considerations' (Afrikaans: 'nutigheidsoorwegings').
19 It is of interest to note that Sohm is treated differently by modern authors as to whether he was an exponent of an old or a new consensus. Whereas Campbell regards him as the source of an old consensus (as described above), scholars such as Burtchaell (1992:61-100) and Roberts (1963:4-5) consider him to be part of a new consensus—but argued from different angles. What Campbell calls old consensus, Burtchaell labels new because he contrasts Sohm's legacy to the views of the church of the middle ages, the
Many New Testament scholars and church historians bought into Sohm's charismatic understanding of the church. By elaborating upon and modifying Sohm's views, a broad consensus eventually developed on the evolution of church leadership in the first century, especially within German scholarship. The contributions of the church historian, Hans von Campenhausen, around the middle of this century give classic expression to this consensus. This understanding argues that the church in its years of inception had no need of formal structures of human authority. The church was guided by the Holy Spirit through the *charismata* in the church, and whatever order was necessary occurred spontaneously. This would then explain why a term such as *presbuteros*, which is indicative of human authority and occurs many times in the later writings of the New Testament (e.g., Acts and the Pastorals) is absent in the genuine Pauline letters. From this observation Von Campenhausen infers that when mention is made of human figures of authority later in the first century, it is a sure sign of church decline that has already set in (cf also Hoffmann 1990:246–247). The church no longer lives by total dependence on the guidance of the Spirit. Instead it has started relying on human authorities.

According to Von Campenhausen, this development is also a result of two church traditions merging: a Hellenistic-charismatic, typical of the Pauline churches, and a Jewish-authoritarian, characteristic of the Palestinian church. Within the latter the *presbuteros* is the prominent figure of authority who guards over the tradition and the order in the church. This presentation of affairs in turn harks back to the influential work of F. C. Baur in the 19th century. Baur, utilising Hegel's historico-philosophical categories of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, moulded the early church's history into a specific pattern of development: from a legalistic Jewish-Palestinian Christendom (thesis) to the Hellenistic-Pauline Christendom of freedom of the law (antithesis) until early catholicism where these two strands merged into a latter holding ecclesiastical authority for being essentially unchallengeable since it was thought of as the succession of the authority of Jesus and the apostles. Roberts also regards Sohm as a proponent of a *new* consensus, but his argument slightly differs from that of Burtchaell and from what is at stake in this article. To Roberts the 'old' consensus refers to the view that the various NT churches arose purely out of human needs (people sharing the same interests, comparable to clubs and societies), and the 'new' consensus describes the view that the church is a spiritual entity—the one eschatological people of God. Roberts holds Sohm to be one of the early supporters of the spiritual character of the church, hence part of a *new* consensus. In a nutshell: Campbell compares Sohm to a *recent* (post-Sohmian) state of affairs (see 2.3), therefore grouping him with an *old* consensus, whereas Burtchaell and Roberts contrast Sohm to *older* (pre-Sohmian) views, therefore placing him in a *new* consensus.

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synthesis (cf O'Collins 1996:140). This accounts for the fact that the term presbuteros, typifying human authority, is absent in the genuine Pauline letters but crops up in Acts and the Pastorals in which the features of early catholicism are most pronounced. Within this portrayal of developments Von Campenhausen found it possible to acknowledge the presence of the presbuteros figure from an early stage in the church. The office of presbuteros was not a late development per se, but was present in the Jewish dominated churches in Palestine right from the start. As time went by this figure also gained popularity in the Pauline churches, although too early to be mentioned in Paul’s genuine letters. Eventually it won the day in the Hellenistic churches too as the need for ecclesiastical control mounted.

This concludes the discussion of the old consensus.

2.3 Towards a new consensus on the evolution of church leadership

Campbell’s book (1994) puts in a strong plea for replacing the old consensus by a new one. In what follows I by and large present Campbell’s views of what the new consensus should look like, elaborating on various aspects and pointing out certain problematic areas in his argument as I go along.

In the past ten to fifteen years we have experienced an avalanche of publications from the side of the so-called sociological approach to the New Testament. No doubt this area of research has opened up new avenues of understanding the structures and dynamics of the ancient Mediterranean society, which in turn directly influenced the interpretation of the New Testament writings. In particular it sheds more light on how a theme such as ours should be approached. It boils down to the thesis that ‘natural’ authority is not foreign to the church of the New Testament—not even to the Pauline churches in the early years. This view stands diametrically opposed to the old consensus which precisely propounds that office and charisma mutually exclude one another, that natural authority is not present in the Pauline congregations.

2.3.1 Why does Paul not mention the term presbuteros?

In order to understand the basic point of Campbell’s new consensus, we need to return to the observation that the term presbuteros does not occur in the genuine Pauline writings. According to the old consensus this is indicative of the view that Paul has no eye for natural authority and therefore refrains from referring to the authoritative figure of the presbuteros. However, Campbell’s point is that although the term presbuteros does not occur with Paul it does not mean that these authorities were absent in his congregations. The key to this view lies in the phenomenon of the house church in the New
Testament (1994:117-118). On a number of occasions mention is made of people who hosted a church in their house (e.g., Rm 16:15; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2). Sociological research in this area has pointed out that the house church found its home in the house of a head of family (cf. Branick 1989; Klauck 1981; Van Zyl 1997). This figure, called *paterfamilias* in the Latin literature, had an extended family dependent on him—wife, children (and their spouses), grandchildren, slaves, wage-earners, and sometimes, depending on his wealth, even societies, clubs and artisans. These heads of families were respected men, influential and powerful. In the early years of the church they provided the necessary infrastructure, protection and stability to the church. Also, their houses were the only ones big enough to accommodate a large number of people for worshipping. But more importantly, the *paterfamilias* was, without formally being appointed to any office, the natural figure of authority in the house church (cf. also Dassmann 1994:84; Van Eck 1991:673-674). Because of his position in society and as head of a family industry, he possessed managerial and authoritative skills and was used to exercising these functions. This made him the natural leader in the house church.

If this is the case, surely Paul must have known about them. So the question why *presbuteros* does not occur in the genuine Pauline letters forcefully repeats itself. To my mind this is one of the grey areas in Campbell’s new consensus, not so much because the concept or institution of the *paterfamilias* is obscure, but because linking the concept to the term *presbuteros* is not so obvious. Thus the crucial question is: were the heads of families called *presbuteroi* in the Greek world of the first century AD?

If Campbell is correct in linking the head of family to the term *presbuteros*, then the fact that this word does appear in some New Testament writings such as Acts, the Pastorals and 1 Peter, which are unquestionably tuned to Greek audiences, clearly indicates that the term was not unfamiliar in the Greek world as a description of the *paterfamilias*. However, this is a somewhat circular argument: you first accept that in these writings *presbuteros* refers to the *paterfamilias* and then you submit this as evidence for the terminological link between *presbuteros* and the *paterfamilias* in the Greek world at large. But there is no obvious reason to accept this link in the first place. We therefore need more hard evidence for this connection in the Greek world.

Campbell (1994:67-96) has accumulated some data from Greek sources for the first century AD which point in the direction of such a connection. In ancient times, distinguished and wealthy families formed the power base of society. The leaders of these families also exercised authority in the state, city or rural communities. As a rule they were not in their official capacity
referred to as presbuteroi, but as hoi gerontes or he gerousia. Presbuteros was rather a ‘term of endearment’, reserved for those senior men in the family or circle of friends who were held in high esteem and were respected for their age and wisdom. From this description the question arises as to whether the leaders of families and the presbuteroi were one and the same. Not necessarily so. With the leaders the aspect of leadership and power is highlighted, whereas with the presbuteroi the emphasis falls on acquired prestige in the family, regardless of any current position of formal leadership (cf Campbell 1994:116). However, normally the presbuteroi would have been former leaders (some may even still be). In any case, the loss of leadership in the technical sense of the word did not amount to the loss of prestige within the closer circle of the family—on the contrary.

It is precisely at this point where the data becomes important to Campbell’s proposal of a new consensus, since it was within the intimate fold of the family that the Pauline churches flourished. According to Campbell (1994:96) the above survey leaves us with enough evidence to at least suggest the presence of presbuteroi-like figures in the house churches. However, although Campbell’s general thesis makes sense, to my mind a clear cut terminological connection has not been established between the heads of families and the presbuteroi in the Greek world. This is an area that still needs further investigation.

According to Campbell, the above terminological situation is more or less the same in the churches of Jewish origin (1994:44–54). The term presbuteros (Hebrew: zaken) does not refer to a specific office within Judaism, for instance in the synagogue, which the Jewish Christians would have borrowed. Such a borrowing rather represents the old consensus which boils

21 Bornkamm (1971:661) says that presbuteros was not common as an honorary title in Greek.

22 Burtchaell (1992:339–351 [summary]) suggests such a borrowing. His thesis is that the early Palestinian church heavily relied on its Jewish antecedents, i.e. the synagogal offices, one of which was the ‘gerousia—a college of presbuteroi—that served the community as its boule’ (.229–230, 294; cf Bornkamm 1971:660, 663–664). Mappes (1997a:92) also supports the idea of synagogal eldership having influenced church eldership ‘in a general way’. However, Karrer (1990:159) denies the existence of an elder office for the synagogue as early as the time of the New Testament. According to him it is rather the OT eschatological background of Is 24:23 (the kingship of JHWH displayed before the elders in Jerusalem on the day of the Lord), linked to the tradition of God’s Spirit empowering the 70 elders who assisted Moses in governing the nation (Nm 11:16–17, 25), that account for the status, position and function of the Christian elders in Jerusalem (cf Ac 11:30; 15:2, 6, 22–23; 21:18). However interesting, Karrer’s proposal is too much of an idealistic-theological construction to account for the origin of the Christian elders in Jerusalem. It may be part of Luke’s theology, but the presence of these elders should rather be explained sociologically, that is, on the basis of the actual position elders occupied in the Jewish community at the time of the
down to the following: it is submitted that the *presbuteroi* in Judaism were the official guardians of the Mosaic legal tradition and that they as such played an important role in expounding and handing down the tradition for posterity, ex officio also handling all disciplinary matters and acting as community leaders (cf Lk 7:3, Bornkamm 1971:661). This institution was borrowed by the Jewish Christians. From there it gradually spread to the Pauline churches, where initially there had been no need for this authoritative figure because of the charismatic nature of these churches. As the charismatic fervour waned the need for ecclesiastical control and formal structures grew. It was then that the *presbuteros* became the dominant figure in the Pauline churches too. This view ties in with another, namely that whereas the *presbuteros* was the dominant figure in the Palestinian church, in the (later) Pauline churches it was the *episkopos* (cf Phil 1:1). Unlike *presbuteros*, there is ample evidence that the *episkopos* held an important office in, inter alia, the Greek communities and clubs (cf Lohse 1980:63; Dassmann 1994:226; Beyer 1971b:612, 619). So this was the obvious choice to be borrowed by the Greek speaking churches when the need for authoritative figures arose. What we then find in the later New Testament writings is that the Greek speaking churches also adopted the *presbuteros* term; the result being a merging of the *presbuteros* and *episkopos* traditions. Therefore we find both terms operating alongside each other, as reflected in the Pastorals and in Ac 20:17, 28.23

However, this survey represents the old consensus. Campbell's new consensus holds a completely different view of the *presbuteros* as far as the Jewish world is concerned. He submits that there is no hard evidence that the *presbuteroi* ever occupied official positions in the synagogue in New Testament times (1994:54).24 It is rather a general term referring, as in the Greek world, not to an office but to senior members of the family or community who were

**church's inception.**

23 Karrer (1990:171–188) more or less accepts the old consensus's view of how the *presbuteros* figure eventually emerged in the Pauline churches. However, he gives a more sophisticated theological interpretation of the process. According to him the *presbuteros* leadership began in the Jerusalem church as an eschatological fulfilment of the Mosaic tradition of caring for the people of God (Nm 11)—see previous footnote. A generation later (around 70 AD) it spread to the Diaspora where it established itself as a presbyterate for shepherding God's flock. Consequently it became part of the heritage of the Pauline churches too. To some extent the presbyterate can be seen as the continuation of the apostolic office. Therefore its leadership reflects unmistakable charismatic traits (cf 1 Tm 4:14). Only from the late 2nd century onwards does the feature of strict ecclesiastical authority more distinctly step to the fore.

24 Bornkamm (1971:661) also comments that 'the titular use of *presbuteroi* is much less prominent in the synagogue of the *diaspora* in the first centuries A.D.'
held in high esteem because of their age, accumulated wisdom, and undisputed positions of leadership, such as heads of families. (This usage goes back to Old Testament times, cf Mappes 1997a:81-82.) Of course, as such they indeed wielded authority over a wide range of areas, for instance representing the Jewish aristocracy in the Sanhedrin. However, their most obvious circle of authority was closer to home—in the family. And it was in the bosom of these families where the earliest churches in Jerusalem and surrounding areas were nurtured (cf the situation described in Ac 4:31; 8:3; 12:12). This was the situation for the entire early church, whether in Palestine, Syria, Asia, Macedonia or Greece. The term *presbuteroi* does not refer to an office in the early church, but to natural leadership which was there from the very inception of the church, even though they are not always mentioned by name.

So the question is again prompted: why does Paul not mention the term *presbuteros* as an indication of being aware of these natural figures of authority? Campbell mentions two reasons (1994:100-111, 119-120, 140): firstly, because Paul accepted their authority as self-evident. There was no need to labour the obvious. Secondly, because the focus of Paul's correspondence to the congregations was not to defend or enhance the authority of the heads of families, but to fortify his own position as apostle. However, although the term *presbuteros* does not occur in Paul, there is ample evidence that he was cognisant of the presence of natural leaders, and that he accepted their authority as a matter of fact. For example, in 1 Ths 5:12 Paul admonishes the congregation to adhere to the authority of the *proistamenoi*, and in Phil 1:1 he refers to the *episkopoi* and the deacons. Whatever the meaning of these terms was, at the very least they suggest a natural leadership of some kind. The reason why the term *episkopos*, and not *presbuteros*, is used by Paul, is because *episkopos* was more generally known in the Greek world as a term designating leadership (cf Lohse 1980:62-63; Lietzmann 1977:96-101).

2.3.2 The evolution of church leadership in the Greek speaking churches

With the exposition in 2.3.1 forming the background, we could render Campbell's new consensus about the evolution of leadership in the Greek speaking church as follows (somewhat augmented and modified by me—HCVZ). In the Pauline churches the heads of families (=the *presbuteroi* and *episkopoi*) are the natural authorities. In these early years there is no distinction between *episkopos* and *presbuteros* (cf Roberts 1963:154-155; Floor

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25 Interestingly enough Karrer (1990:157) does not accept any house churches being present in Jerusalem. He says: ‘... wir (wissen) von einer frühen Hausgemeindebildung in Jerusalem nichts.’
1976:84). One could say that the latter describes the person and the former the function (as Ac 20:17, 28 aptly demonstrates). Furthermore, as 1 Corinthians and Romans clearly show, many other ministries were also at work, some of which may be described as charismatic of the more ecstatic kind. However, it is doubtful whether these charismatic gifts were active in all the congregations as in Corinth. The evidence is simply lacking. In any case, although Paul does not oppose these gifts, it is clear from the way he treats them that he tries to bring them under the control of the ministry of the Word (1 Cor 12:28; 14:12, 19) and that of the natural leaders (cf 1 Cor 16:15–16), and by presenting the more ‘natural’ gifts as charismatic too.26

The next phase is represented by the situation encountered in the Pastoral Letters. It is a widely held opinion among scholars that the leadership being described here is more pronounced and uniform than in the rest of the New Testament. The only question is how to interpret the data in terms of an evolution of leadership. In the light of (a) later developments in the second century, and (b) that by highlighting the elder/overseer and deacon the other ministries (be they ‘charismatic’ or ‘natural’) are clearly not in the picture in the Pastors, the information is best interpreted within the following scenario. As a result of the increasing occurrence of heresies (cf Dassmann 1994:228) the need was felt for greater control by figures of authority. The presbuteroi/episkopoi of the house churches now stepped to the fore as these authorities.27

The only question remaining is to define the relationship between these two terms in the Pastoral Letters. Here, to my mind, is another grey area in Campbell’s new consensus, since there is a clear parting of the ways among scholars in arguing the status of the episkopos.28 The data are as follows: Tt 1:5 mentions the appointment of presbuteroi in every town, whereupon verses 6–9 spell out the requirements of being an elder.29 The interesting thing is that

26 See footnote 11 for the distinction between charismá and charismda.
27 There may be another reason why these figures attained greater authority. A spontaneous development towards theologically basing the church’s offices could also be detected. Thus Ignatius in Trall 3:1 and Mag 6:1 compares the bishop with God (the Father), the elders with the apostles, and the deacon with the serving ministry of Christ (cf Giles 1989:42–43). However, it remains a question as to whether the theological grounding of the offices was actually a reason for their gaining prominence (cf Dassmann 1994:230). More likely it was an effort to theologically make sense of the existing offices in retrospect.
28 Cf Dassmann (1994:94): ‘Die exegetische Meinung ist in dieser Frage (the status of the episkopos in the Pastors—HCVZ) zwar noch immer gespalten ...’. 29 Desired moral qualities were also generally associated with eldership in old Israel (Mappes 1997a:84).
verse 7 uses the term *episkopos* to refer to the *presbuteroi*. 1 Tm 3:1-7 follows the same lines as Tt 1:5-9 when giving a more expanded description of the requirements for being an elder, but here *episkopos* is the only term utilised. In 1 Tm 5:17, 19 it is the term *presbuteros* which appears when mention is made of the double honour which is due to elders who give good guidance, and how to act when an elder is accused of misdemeanours. In 1 Tm 5:1 the meaning of *presbuteros* is uncertain. Most probably older men in general, and not the office of elder, are in view here. From this brief survey it is apparent that the relationship between *presbuteros* and *episkopos* in the Pastorals is not a clear cut issue.

Campbell is of the opinion that the Pastorals are exponents of that phase in first century Christianity when the unique position of the *episkopos* was on the rise (1994:176-205). According to him the Pastorals promote the concept of the *episkopos* as a *primus inter pares*-figure who gradually gained prominence as a supervisor over the house churches in a specific town, city or region, especially with a view to guarding over sound doctrine. Campbell gives the following reasons for his view (1994:194-204): (a) mention is made of *presbuteroi* being appointed (Tt 1:5). In the house churches *presbuteroi* were never formally appointed. As heads of families they simply exercised their natural authority; (b) the elders' authority now extends over a larger area than that of a single house church (Tt 1:5), clearly indicating increased responsibilities; (c) 1 Tm 3:1 mentions that someone may *aspire* to the episcopate. Formerly *presbuteroi* never had to aspire to be *episkopoi*. As heads of families it was part of their 'job description' to oversee the churches assembling in their respective homes. Thus, what is at stake here is clearly a position of leadership over and above that which they already enjoyed as heads of families; (d) 1 Tm 5:17 speaks of elders who should be given 'double honour'. This probably refers to the *episkopos* who, apart from being head of a house church, now also carries responsibilities for a number of house churches and therefore is entitled to remuneration; (e) the existence of a 'body of elders' (*presbuterion*, 1 Tm 4:14) who ordained someone in their midst—Timothy—by laying on of hands (to the position of overseer?), reinforces the idea of a *primus inter pares*-figure; (f) Timothy's 'ordination' probably also points to the fact that the author is portraying the addressees of the Pastorals, Timothy and Titus, as the ideal role models of being *episkopoi* (cf also Campbell 1992:127). Thus the overall illocutionary speech act of the Pastorals would be to promote and characterise the position of the overseer, primarily that of Timothy and Titus, but also of other overseers.

Giles (1989:38-40, 85-89, 95-96) too is of the opinion that in the Pastorals *presbuteros* and *episkopos* should not be equated: the *episkopos* holds a special position as the leader of a house church. However, Giles differs from Camp-
bell by claiming that only the term *episkopos* points to the leadership of a specific house church. According to Giles *presbuteros* is simply a general term for distinguished leadership in the church, and does not, as Campbell proposes, indicate the head of a family, and hence the leader of a house church.

Other scholars are not convinced that the promotion of the unique position of the overseer above the elders is the issue in the Pastorals. The main reason is the interchangeability of the terms *presbuteros* and *episkopos* in the Pastorals, as may be inferred from the data supplied three paragraphs earlier. For all practical purposes they function as synonyms (cf. Ysebaert 1994:69-73, 123; Dassmann 1994:229; Mappes 1997b:164ff; Sabourin 1988:241; Flemming 1994:240; Ridderbos 1973:510-511).

Be it as it may, at the very least it must be ceded that the *episkopos/presbuteros*-figure in the Pastorals clearly points to a pronounced form of leadership in the early church, possibly that of a formal office. It receives a prominence and articulation which is unprecedented when compared to other ministries and functions mentioned in the New Testament. We might even go one step further and concur with Dassmann (1994:94) that although the unique position of the *episkopos* is not yet a *fait accompli* in the Pastorals, '... eine Tendenz, die auf ihn hinziel, gleichwohl nicht zu übersehen ist' (so also Bornkamm 1971:667).

As was mentioned in the introduction, the emphasis of this article is on the *presbuteros/episkopos*. However, to complete the picture on the evolution of leadership in the New Testament, I conclude with a few remarks on the deacon (*diakonos*).

The origin of the position of *diakonos* as leader is uncertain. Part of the uncertainty has to do with the fact that 'deacon' is sometimes used in a very general way in the New Testament. Thus Christ is described as a *diakonos* in the service of the Jews (Rom 15:8), and Paul sometimes refers to his ministry and that of his fellow workers by the term *diakonos* (e.g. 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4). However, this usage should be distinguished from the more technical application of the term. It is the latter we are interested in when speaking of the origin of the deacon.

The position of deacon must have emerged very early. Phil 1:1 is evidence of deacons being active in the Pauline churches. And although Philippians is probably one of the latest of Paul's letters (Campbell 1995:3), it may be inferred from this reference that the position of deacon goes back to earlier times. Furthermore, some of the deacons may have been women (Rom 16:1, cf.

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30 Apart from *episkopos, presbuteros* and *diakonos* in the Pastorals, mention is also made of prophecy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14; cf. 1 Tim 4:1). However, it recedes into the background in favour of the afore-mentioned offices (cf. Giles 1989:137).
Pelser 1976:103). These Biblical references do not necessarily imply that the deacon first appeared in the Pauline churches. Dassmann (1994:232-233) is of the opinion that the origin of the deacon lies with the system of communal charity among the Jews. And although the appointment of the seven men in Ac 6 to supervise the daily distribution of food does not constitute the beginning of the office of deacon, according to Dassmann it does point to one of the essential aspects of its work: to take care of the needy. It was this view, together with the interpretation of the word *diakonos*/*diakonia* as that of lowly, humiliating service—literally, 'to wait at table' (Beyer 1971a:82)—that led to a consensus of some sort among scholars about the work of the deacon: selfless, humble, even despised service, always concerned with practical needs (Campbell 1994:132).

The penetrating analysis by Collins (1992) has brought a much needed corrective to this 'consensus'. He has sifted through an enormous amount of relevant Greek sources describing the function of *diakonos*. His conclusion is that *diakonos* is not an everyday term indicating a menial service, but, on the contrary, that it is a highly developed literary term mostly used in religious contexts. It depicts a go-between figure, an authoritative messenger, one who acts on the authority of his superior and mediates an important message or revelation from heaven to humans.

It is remarkable how this interpretation fits the New Testament contexts too. This is best illustrated by 2 Cor 2:14-6:13 where Paul describes himself as *diakonos* of a new covenant (2 Cor 3:6). God has entrusted the *diakonia* of reconciliation to Paul and his co-workers (2 Cor 4:1; 5:18), and they will carry out this commission as trusted *diakonoi* of God, no matter the hardships (2 Cor 6:4ff). The overriding notion here is not that of (menial) service, but of acting as authoritative, responsible and trustworthy assistants of God. And it is perhaps this aspect of trustworthy assistance that eventually led to the deacon becoming a trusty helper of the bishop (cf Campbell 1992:121), which may befit the description of the deacon in the Pastoral Letters (1 Tm 3:8-13). Although not explicitly stated here, in the light of how the position of deacon developed towards the second century and further, it is most appropriate that the deacon is being portrayed here as requiring the same qualities as the bishop/elder (cf Weir 1993:77). If it was the task of the deacon to assist the bishop in every task his superior had entrusted to him, then it speaks for itself that he should display the same qualities as his superior (Campbell 1994:200). Perhaps the circumstances in the Jewish synagogues where the 'head of the synagogue' (*archisunagogos*, cf Ac 18:8) was assisted by a *hupéretés* (Hebrew: ḫazzan) (cf Lk 4:20), may serve as a parallel to the position of the deacon as assistant to the bishop in the Christian communities (cf Giles 1989:66-69).
The subsequent development of church leadership is clearly depicted in the writings of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch at the end of the first and start of the second century, as was discussed at the beginning of the article. With these writers, especially Ignatius, the process of concentrating clerical authority in the offices of episkopos, presbuteroi and diakonoi had been concluded, and the episkopos as the highest clerical authority was now highlighted, the latter two being his subordinates.

All that remains to be done is to venture a few critical comments about Campbell's new consensus.

3 APPRAISAL OF THE SO-CALLED NEW CONSENSUS

3.1 Although others have also applied a sociological approach to the episkopos/presbuteros figure and have come up with similar ideas to Campbell (cf Van Eck 1991), Campbell is the first, to the best of my knowledge, to coin the term 'new consensus' for a comprehensive sociological description of the evolution of church leadership from the early house churches to the second century data. But perhaps Campbell is a bit premature to speak of a new consensus. Only time will tell whether his formulation has been prophetic or not.

Surely the main contribution of the sociological approach lies in the fresh light it sheds on the position of the presbuteros as the head of family, and thus as 'natural' leader in the early church from the very beginning. But apparently this does not of necessity lead to a paradigm shift in presenting the evolution of church leadership. For instance, someone like Dassmann (1994:226–227), who also accepts the important role of the oikos in the life of the early church, still maintains the basic tenets of the 'old' consensus (cf also Hoffmann 1990:248): the evolution from charismatic leadership to a more ecclesiastical one (although Dassmann recognises the role of the Spirit in the ordination of [the later] church offices, e.g. that of Timothy), and the distinction between two separate modes of Christianity in the early years, the Jewish-Palestinian and the Pauline-Hellenistic, with the presbuteros being the hallmark of Palestinian leadership, adopted from the synagogue. The point is that even though the importance of the house church may be recognised, apparently this does not exact a complete change of heart with regards to viewing the evolution of church leadership.

3.2 As was mentioned in the course of the article, there are two grey areas in Campbell's argument which will have to be clarified in future. The first is that the term presbuteros as referring to the paterfamilias is not well established in the Greek world. Much research still needs to be done in this area before the minds will be converted to a new consensus. A closely related matter is
Burtchaell's thesis (1992; for particulars see footnote 22 of this article) of a 'take-over' by the early church of concordant synagogue offices and terms, such as 'elders'. Despite scholarly objection to the synagogue elders having occupied an office in New Testament times, it remains a strong possibility. There is a very thin line between Jewish elders having served as informal community leaders (to which no scholar would object), and elders occupying official positions. The material brought together by Burtchaell as evidence for the latter is most impressive. Perhaps Burtchaell's views may serve as an alternative to or modification of Campbell's new consensus. In any case it would strengthen Campbell's view that the early church had 'natural' leaders right from the start, but weaken the argument that the house church provided the natural leaders.

The second area is the position of the Pastoral Letters. Two aspects come to mind: (a) the dating of the Pastoral in relation to the dating of Clement's letter, and even to that of Ignatius' letters. Most scholars (e.g. Campbell 1994, Giles 1989, Ysebaert 1994:211) date the Pastoral before Clement; Dassmann, though, after (1994:39, 228). This has a direct bearing on how the evolution of church leadership is presented. If the former dating is accepted, a more 'linear' development is possible. On the other hand, the latter dating obscures a linear development. If a low profile church hierarchy is accepted for the Pastoral, the later dating opens the possibility of a 'zigzag' evolution (up to the more advanced hierarchy in Clement, and one step back to the Pastoral), or, if a high profile hierarchy is proposed for the Pastoral, the later dating suggests an overlapping in the evolution of leadership (the Pastoral and Clement displaying the same phase in the development). These observations lead to the second aspect: (b) the relationship between the terms presbuteros and episkopos in the Pastoral—whether they are viewed as synonyms or as evidence for the episkopos being singled out to a unique position above the presbuteros. It seems that scholars are still much divided about this issue.

These two matters—the scientific weight of the data produced by the relatively new sociological approach (3.1), as well as the interpretation of old problems (3.2)—will eventually determine whether we will have a new consensus in viewing the evolution of church leadership in the New Testament.

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