

# THE GATHERING

The Meeting as the Heart of a Complex Apostolic Network

# Issues and Questions

Issue 1: The Gatherings, 1 Corinthians 11:17–14:26

Questions:

1. In what sense is 1 Corinthians 11:17–14:26 a universal framework or paradigm for the gatherings of the churches?
2. In what sense is the gathering a mark of a duly constituted church or assembly?
3. What is the framework of the gatherings? What is the shape of them?
4. How do the passages in between the Lord's Supper and the symposium inform the spirit of the meeting? How do they serve as principles to enhance the understanding of the purposes of the meeting?

# Introduction

All of The Encyclicals are situational. Often decades of “paradigm dialogue.” So it is with this encyclical.

## Global Executive Education

- 120 global network leaders from 8 of the 9 major civilizations.
- completely focused on The Encyclicals over the last 9 months (actually 30 years).
- everyone has learned a lot, including Michael and me, great test of their quality
- one issue surfaced big time: is the meal normative?

# Introduction

Long-term “paradigm dialogue”: worship and the Early Church. (Same as with Gospels)

- 1992—needed a course
- Last decade, 2 attempts
- Criticism within and without

Why now?

- 228 hours, 120 international leaders, opportunity to articulate
- learned a lot
- developed a deeper understanding of the paradigm

# Introduction

The Encyclicals, as a collection of papers delivered over 15 years, has become a very important tool for us. A trilogy has emerged.

- The Early Churches: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks
- Kerygmatic Communities: Evangelism and the Early Churches
- The Gathering: The Meeting as the Heart of a Complex Apostolic Network

# Introduction

As these ideas are understood, many Western paradigms will fall. Last point of resistance. A lot is at stake in understanding this New Testament church paradigm of “The Meal, The Meeting, The Gathering.”

The heart of this paradigm is 1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40. This passage frames the entire encyclical.

- church-planting movements—unsustainable
- churches, church networks, denominations—try to change to Acts, but will miss the heart without deconstructing Sunday morning
- Global Pentecostalism—will not mature if they build the Western Sunday morning service

# Introduction

40 years of Greco-Roman research

Major section of research “history of origins”

Last 20 years: The Meal, The Meeting, The Gathering

SBL Seminar on Meals — 2002–2010

Massive research

# The Gathering, The Assembly

To grasp the concept of *the gathering*, we must begin in the Gospels, which were written after Paul's letters and assume knowledge of them. The key passage is in Matthew 16:18

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” NRSV



# The Gathering, The Assembly

Let's begin, as the history of origins research calls for, at an understanding of Jesus' phrase "I will build my church."

What did that mean to the listeners at the time of Jesus?

What did that mean in Mark's passages on Jesus building a new family that would separate Jewish families?

What did that mean to the Ephesians as Paul unveiled the full revelation of the Church?

After all this had unfolded, what did it mean to the Christians who received Matthew's completed Gospel text?

# The Gathering, The Assembly

First the phrase in Matthew itself, “I will build my church.”

*Church* is the Greek word “ekklesia.”

- duly summoned assembly, an assembly (LSJ)
- national assembly; congregation, congregational assembly (EDNT)
- an assembly, meeting of assembly (PLGNT)
- assembly, as a regularly summoned political body; assemblage, gathering, meeting gener. (BGD)

# The Gathering, The Assembly

“The contexts where ἐκκλησία occurs do not allude to the action of people being ‘called out’; the term appears to mean simply ‘(duly constituted) assembly’” NIDNTTE

“What can it possibly mean to say ‘I will build’ (oikodomeso, Matt 16:18) ‘my meeting’ (ekklesia)? The metaphor is novel.... But ‘building my meeting’ must have been utterly puzzling.” E. A. Judge in *Paul and the Conflict of Cultures: The Legacy of His Thought Today*

So what did Jesus mean by His statement “I will build My church?” I will build My duly appointed association of assemblies that will grow and grow into My kingdom that Satan cannot stop.

# The Gathering, The Assembly

How does this relate to Mark's Gospel?

In two different passages Jesus points ahead to the fact that He will build His own assembly: Mark 3:31–35 and 10:28–31

From these passages we can see two things:

First, Jesus is going to assemble a whole new family;

Second, it will grow and expand exponentially until the kingdom comes. It is obvious what Jesus meant when He said “I will build my assembly”; it will be multiple, global families.

# The Gathering, The Assembly

How does this relate to Acts?

In Acts 2:42–47, we see this new family, this assemblage, at its birth.

Then, in two of the six summary statements in Acts, we see the statement, “I will build my assembly,” which always means both His global assembly and His local “duly constituted” assemblies.

<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. Acts 9:31 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup> So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily. Acts 16:5 (NRSV)

Multiplying assemblies was how He was building His assembly.

# The Gathering, The Assembly

Duly constituted assemblies?

- Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every assembly. (Acts 14:23)

Also consider Titus 1:5.

<sup>5</sup> I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.  
1:5 (NRSV)

The big point is that Christ's assemblies are duly recognized assemblies,

with a balance of apostolic leaders and local elders. All of Christ's assemblies were duly constituted assemblies.

# The Gathering, The Assembly

How does this relate to Paul's letters?

When Jesus says "I will build my church," He uses the word *oikodesmeso*, which means "to build a house." Paul uses two key words for the assembly

"what is the plan (*oikonomia*)" Ephesians 3:8–10 (NRSV)

"to behave in the household (*oikos*) of God" 1 Timothy 3:14–15 (NRSV)

*oikonomia* = plan, purpose, scheme

*anastrepho oikos* = principles for Christ's assemblies

*anastrepho* "fig., of human conduct act, behave, conduct oneself, or live in the sense of the practice of certain principles"

# The Gathering, The Assembly

One final passage to complete the picture.

<sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house. Romans 16:3–5a (NRSV)

In this passage, we see there was an assembly that met in Prisca and Aquila's house; for the first 300 years of the Early Church, almost all the assemblies met in homes.

So we can see that the assemblies were not a building. Thus, we can conclude that the Assembly that Christ is building is an *assembly of assemblies*, and nothing else.



# The Gathering, The Assembly

Now back to where we started and the final question: After all this had unfolded, what did it mean to the Christians who received Matthew's completed Gospel text?

When Jesus said, "I will build my assembly," we can see ...

- ... He meant He will build His Gathering through the process of multiplying Gatherings.
- ... He meant multiplying assemblies. (Acts 2:42; 9:31; 16:5)
- ... He meant duly authorized assemblies following His design. (Ephesian 3:10; 1 Timothy 2:14–15)
- ... He meant an assembly of assemblies with an overall grand strategy, a specific household order, and principles for all His assemblies.

# The Gathering in the Greco-Roman World

The Assembly, The Gathering, The Meeting, The Meal—In the Greco-Roman World (a 1,200–year conversation)

I want to begin this section by asking a question: What is really meant by “on the first day of the week, we were gathered together to break bread”?

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. Acts 20:7 (NASB)

To more fully answer this question, we will examine what *duly appointed assemblies gathering* meant in the Greco-Roman world.

# The Gathering in the Greco-Roman World

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## The Greco-Roman Associations and the Meal–Symposium Paradigm

The discussion and formation of this paradigm is a 1,200–year conversation:

The entire Greco-Roman world was shaped by this paradigm.

The Jewish world of synagogues was shaped by this paradigm.

The first 300 years of the Early Church were shaped by this paradigm.

# The Gathering in the Greco-Roman World

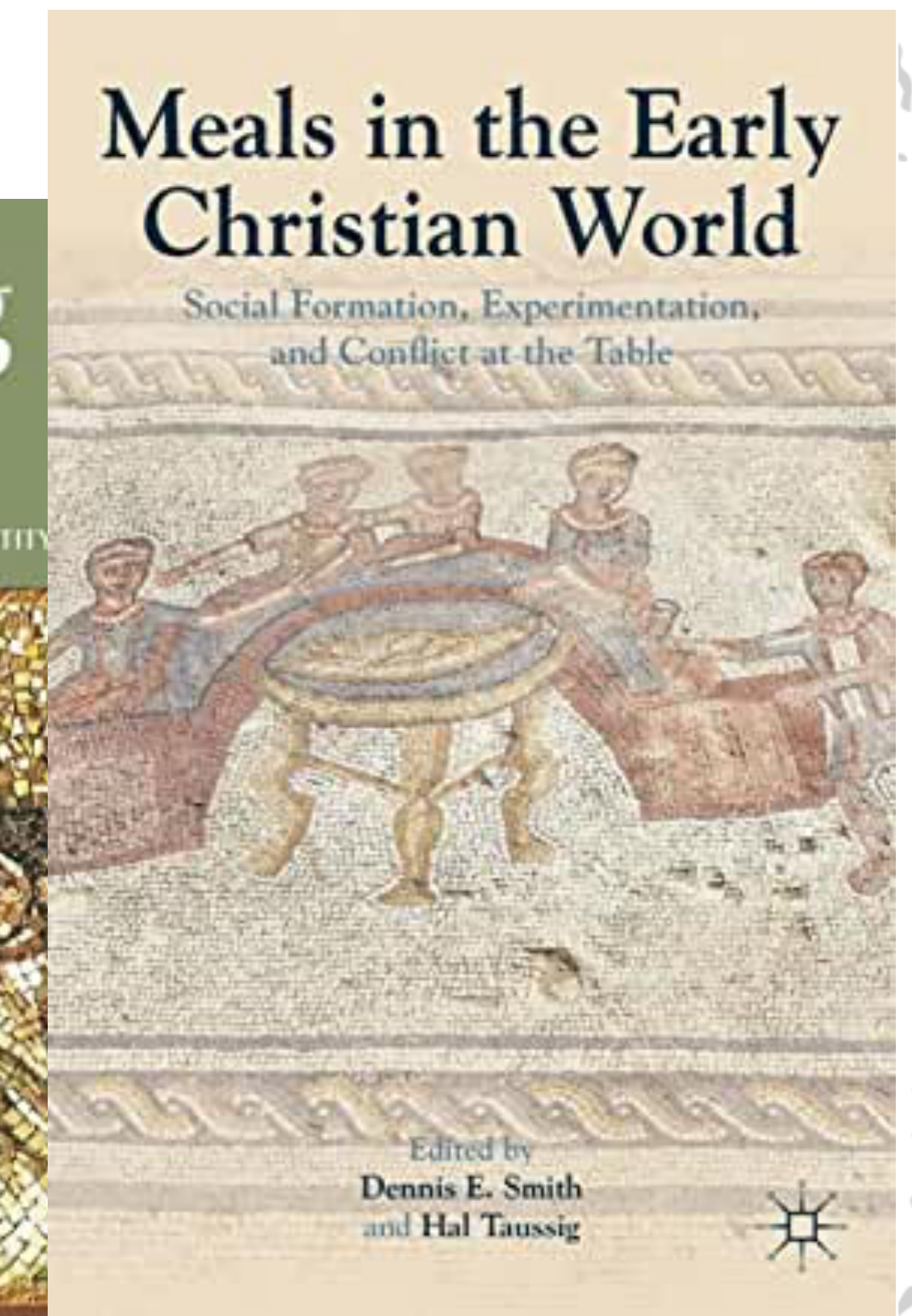
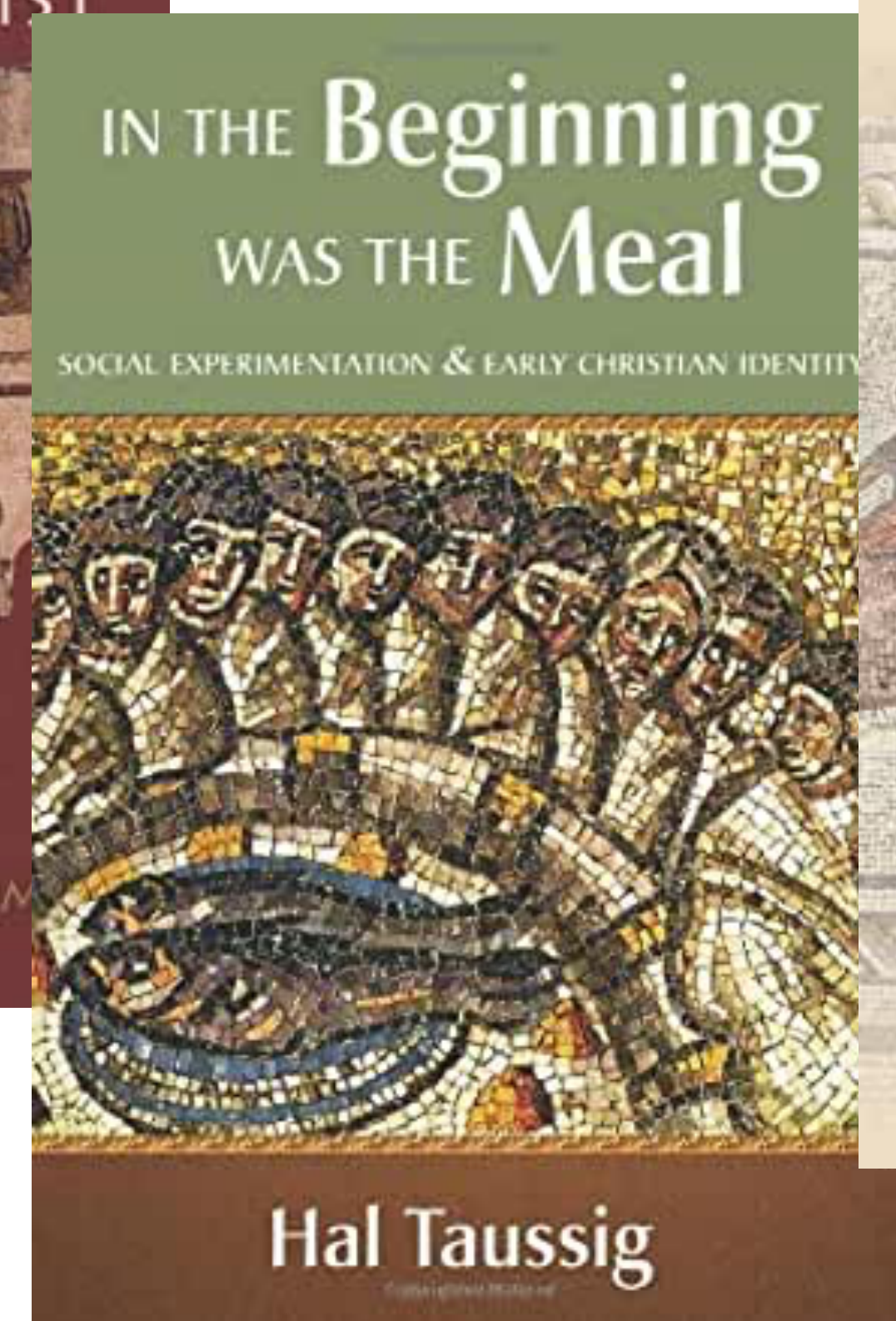
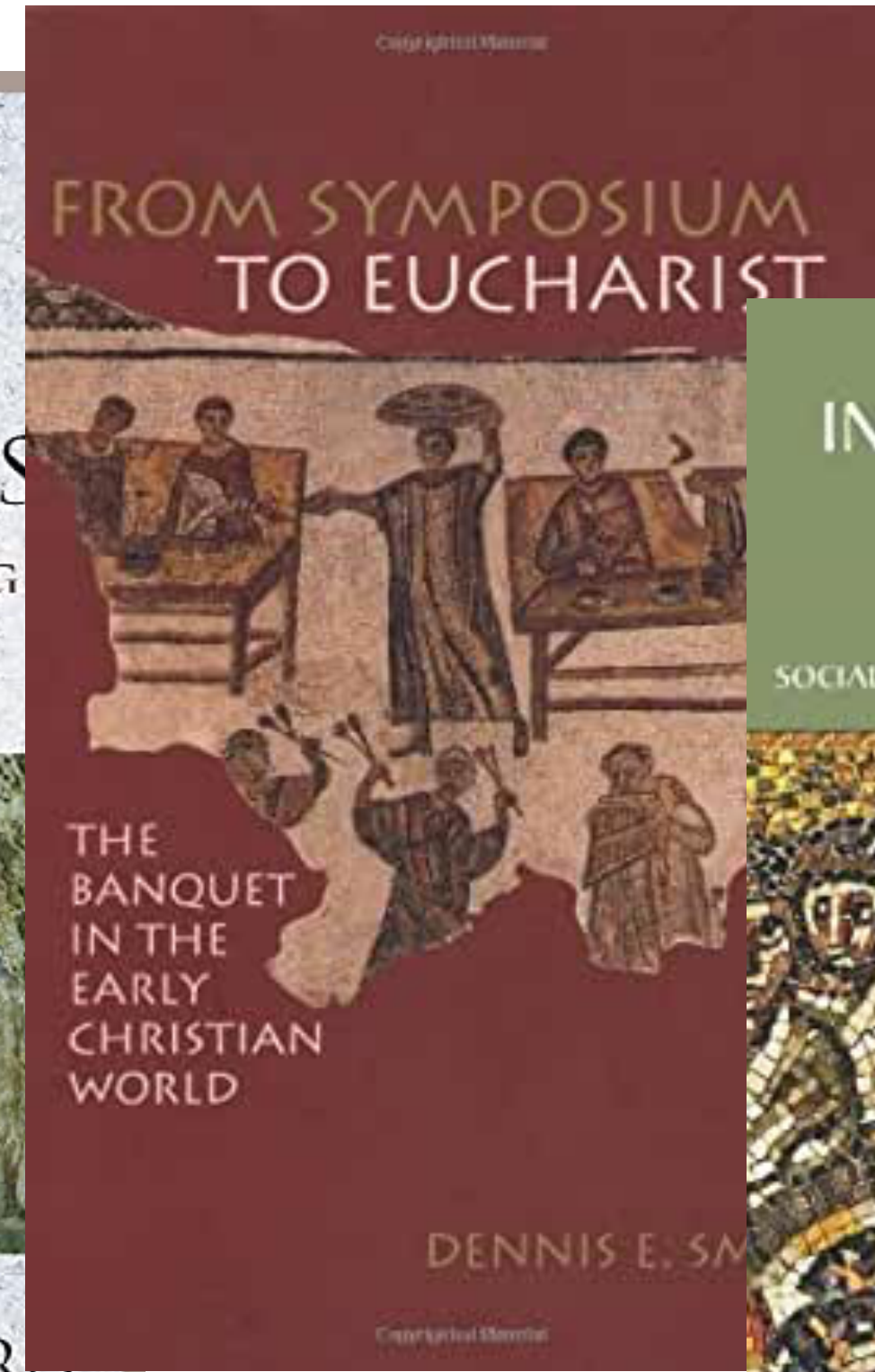
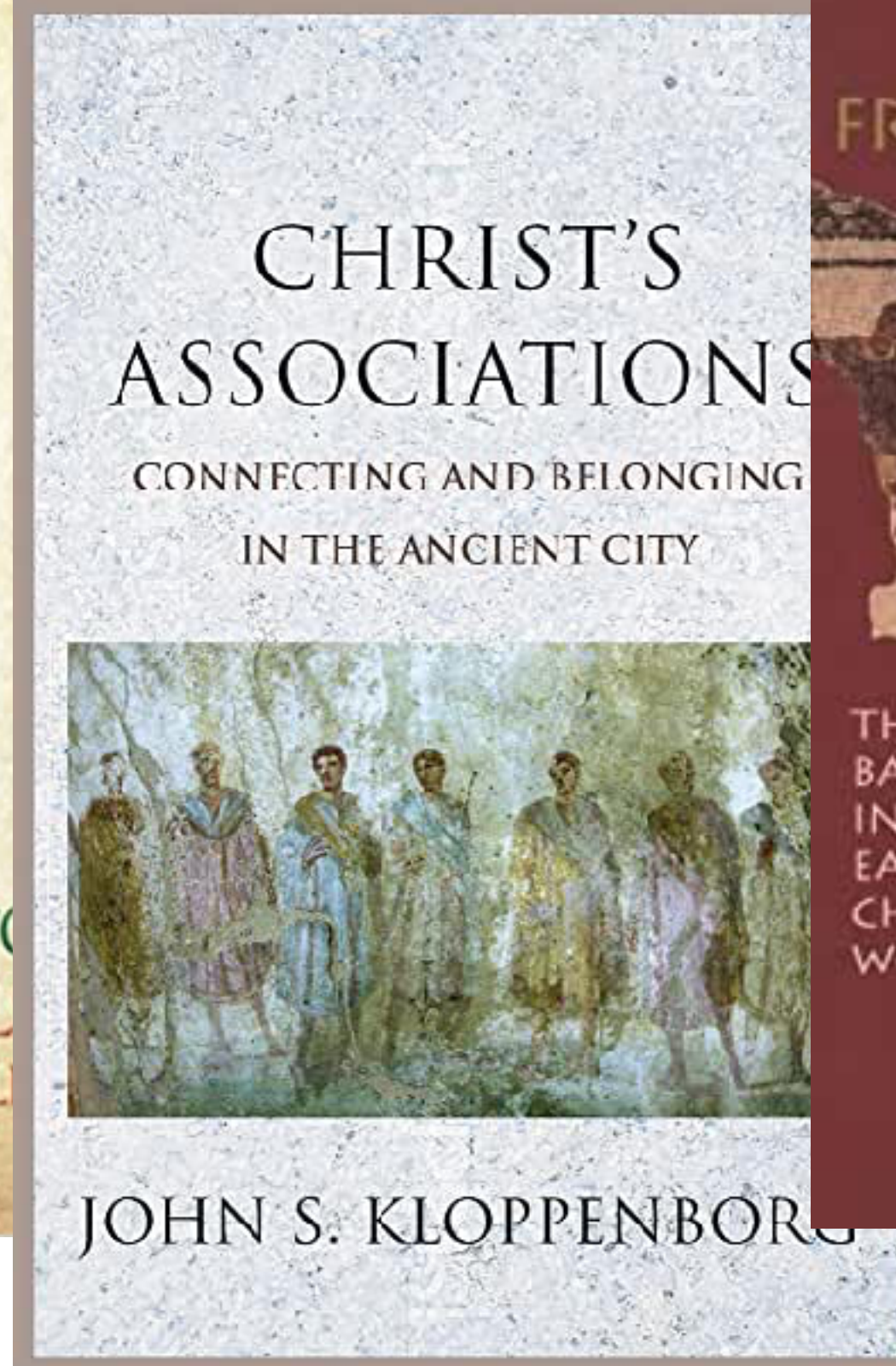
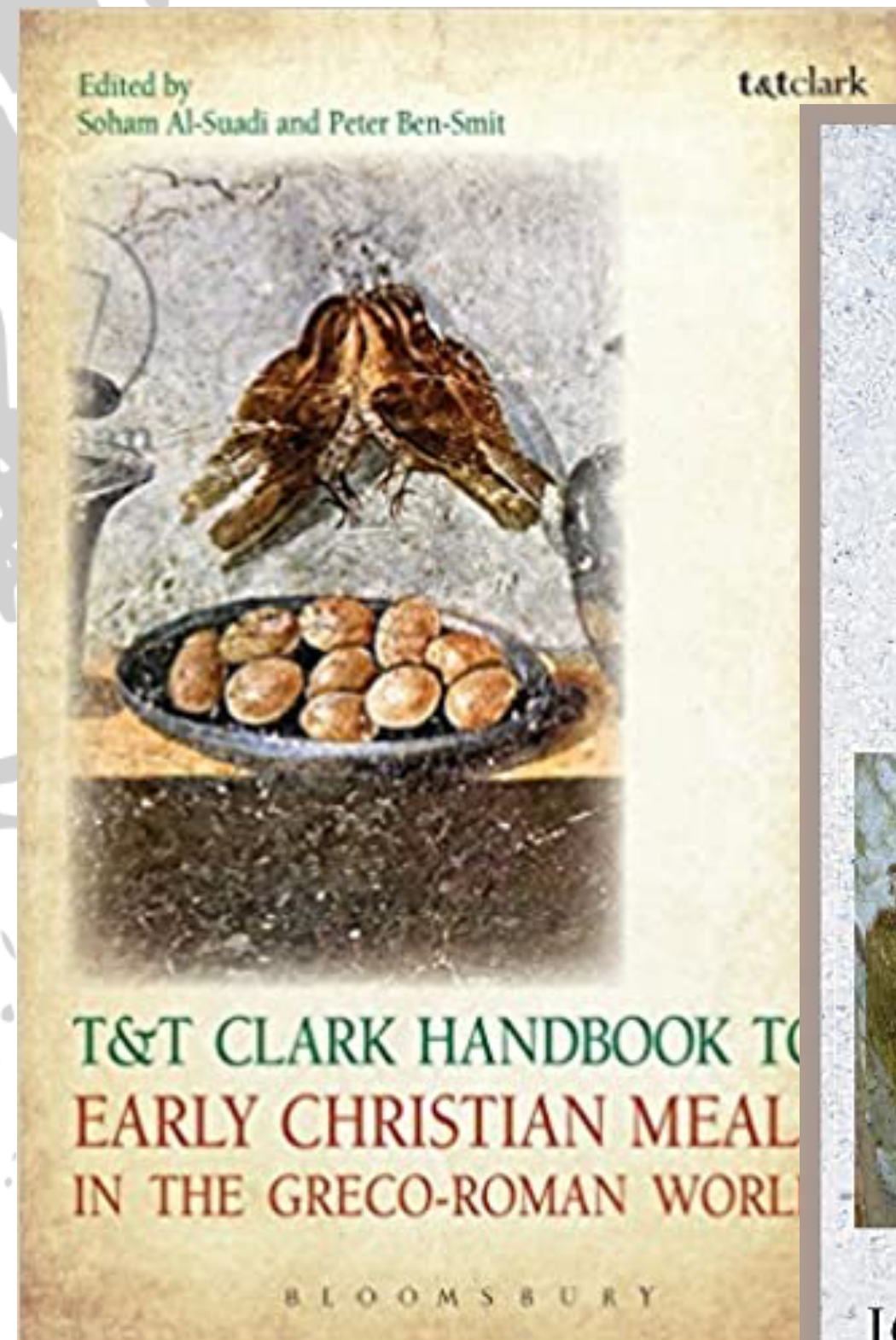
## Smith-Klinghardt Meals Paradigm

“Although this chapter cannot dwell on all the specifics of these studies, it is important to note the basic dimensions of what Smith and Klinghardt’s studies propose as a clear typology of the Hellenistic meal. They include the following:

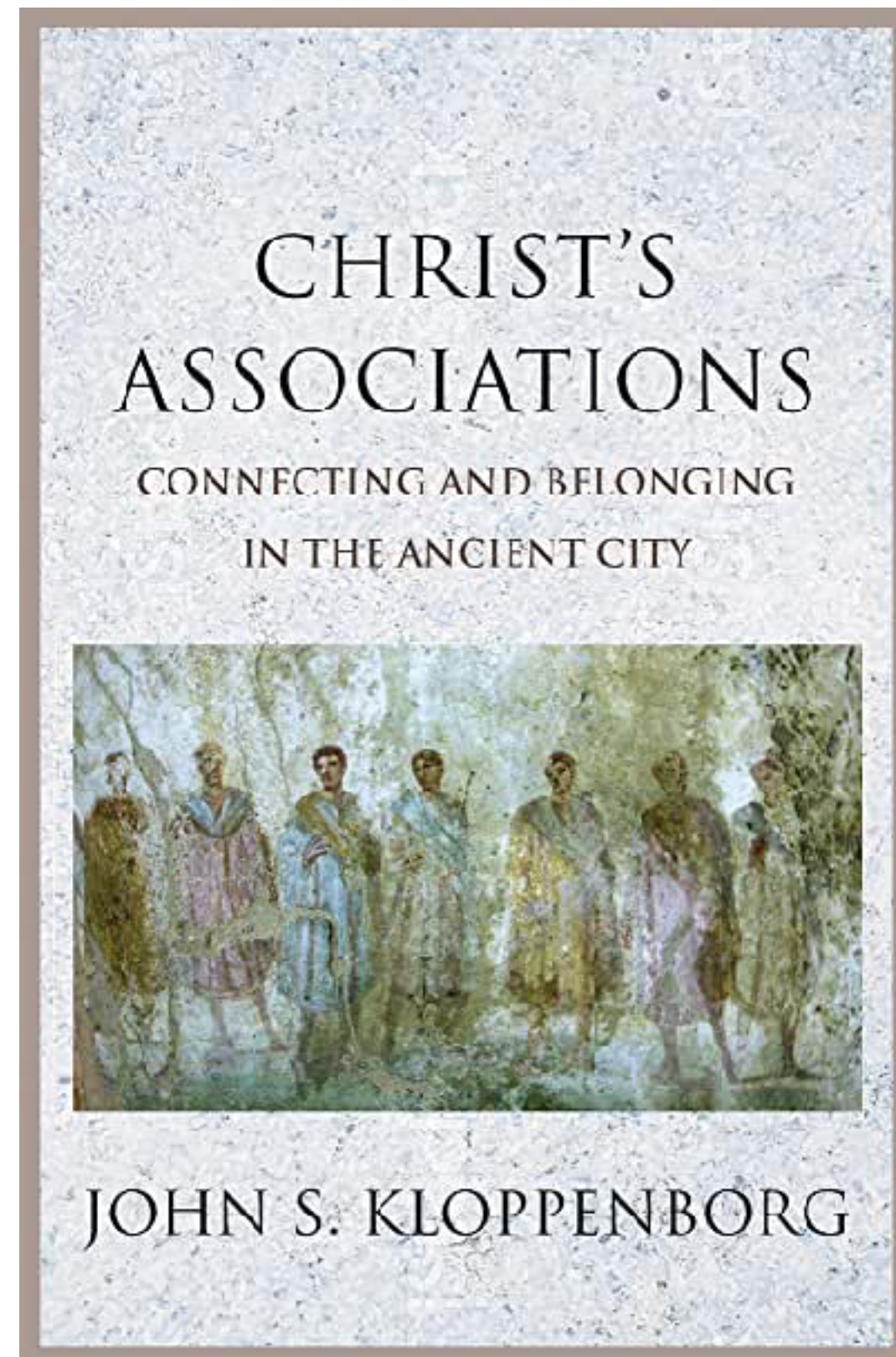
Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*

1. the reclining of (more or less) all participants while eating and drinking together for several hours in the evening
2. the order of a supper (deipnon) of eating, followed by an extended time (symposion) of drinking, conversation, and performance
3. marking the transition from deipnon to symposion with a ceremonial libation, almost always wine
4. leadership by a “president” (symposiarch) of the meal—a person not always the same, and sometimes a role that was contingent or disputed
5. A variety of marginal personages, often including servants, uninvited guests, “entertainers,” and dogs.”

# The Gathering in the Greco-Roman World



# The Gathering in the Greco-Roman World



“The contrast with the ninety-two cultic groups is striking: in the first place, the size range is more restricted—all are less than 100—the mean is 29.29, the median 24, and the mode only 15.”

“only three public synagogues have been found, but during that same time, it is estimated that (in Jerusalem alone) between 365 and 480 association synagogues existed.”

Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary

# The Gathering in the Greco-Roman World

Differences that made the Christian associations so attractive:

1. While they followed the Greco-Roman meals paradigm, they were not laden with all the rules, memberships, and bylaws.
2. They were attractive for many reasons, but anyone was welcome, and they functioned more like a family than a more formal association.
3. They met weekly rather than monthly, or quarterly, as other associations did.
4. They were all equal, staying away from all sorts of social hierarchy (benefactor worship) built into almost all other Greco-Roman associations.
5. As the Christians became part of other guilds and civic associations, it was natural to build relationships and invite them to their meal–symposium.

# The Gathering as a Topoi

The Household of God  
The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles

David C. Verner

*SBL*  
Society of Biblical Literature  
Dissertation Series

*Topoi* (common topics in one place) is a very important form of Greek rhetoric that enables you to structure an argument including several topics around one memorable schematic, or rubric, or literally in one place.

An enormous “hermeneutical principle”



# The Gathering as a Topoi

In 1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40, through this topoi, Paul lays out the *authoritative teaching* (traditions—“we practice no other *traditions* in our churches”) *handed down to him by Christ*. That teaching is His design for the Gathering, the core meeting of His assemblies.

The Gathering Topoi (1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40)

Literary frame: 11:17 “when you come together” and 14:26 “when you come together.”

# The Gathering as a Topoi

The Gathering Topoi (1 Corinthians 11:17–14:40)

The Gathering: In Brief

The Meal—1 Corinthians 11:17–34

Moral Exhortation (Parenesis)—1 Corinthians 12:1–14:25

Gifts and the gathering—1 Corinthians 12

Love and the gathering—1 Corinthians 13

Gifts in the gathering—1 Corinthians 14:1–25

The Symposium—1 Corinthians 14:26–40

# The Gathering as a Topoi

Remember, a *topoi* is like a schematic, a topic, rubric, a framework. There are very clear boundaries, core teaching and guidelines, but significant freedom. Just think about it:

...We are not told what we need to eat, how to pay for it, or who prepares the meals, just that it is a banquet.

...Everyone is free to participate.

...We are only given a representative core of what to bring to the symposium.

# The Gathering as a Topoi

This *topoi of the gathering* will work anytime in history, in any culture. It is similar to Paul taking the household and community codes practiced in Greco-Roman culture and shaping the “family of families” household topoi of the Pastorals. Paul claims they were both given to him by Christ, as the center of His grand strategy.

# The Gathering as a Topoi

Once you understand the gathering and its Meal–Symposium, it makes many other complicated passages simple.

For example, 1 Corinthians 8, 10, Romans 14

Or in 2 Thessalonians, when he says, if someone will not work, do not let him eat—freeloading at the gathering.

The gathering topoi informs almost every NT book; Paul's letters, the Gospels and Acts, and the Catholic epistles and John's writings, just as does the church as a family of families

# The Gathering in the 21st Century

As churches in the 21st century, we need to return to this tradition in laying the foundation for the next Christendom. We need to radically restructure Western Christendom and return to “the Way of Christ and His Apostles” in a way that fits our cultural situations in the 21st Century.

# The Gathering in the 21st Century

May the Spirit lead us in “the Way of Christ and His Apostles” in our networks of Gatherings, and in giving shape to the Emerging Next Christendom, especially based in the Global South (the Spirit’s work outside the Western Christendom paradigm). Without understanding the Gathering and placing it at the heart of the Emerging Next Christendom, there will be no next Christendom, but only a continued Western institutionalized Christendom, which will continue to decline.