

THE GATHERING

The Meeting as the Heart of a Complex Apostolic Network

The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

Issue 6: Toward Apostolic Networks with Multiplying Duly Authorized Gatherings

Questions:

1. Where do we start with churches in the West that are following an institutional paradigm, but want to change to Christ's design for His churches, as duly authorized gatherings?
2. How does Christ's design for His churches lend to reaching unreached peoples and cultures as well as those in Western secular societies with little interest in the declining institutional Church?
3. How do we go about building a complex apostolic network with these kinds of gatherings at the heart of its existence?
4. Why is the meal so important in reaching people of all cultures? Why is it so central to the progress of the gospel and to the multiplying of churches?

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 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 and the Spirit

The Spirit is moving through the entire gathering:

- The Spirit is working during the meal, the heart of the meeting.
- The Spirit is working in the symposium
 - through manifestations to and utterances of believers.
 - through psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and prayers of believers.
 - through apostles, prophets, and teachers.

The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

Key Principles

1. We need to maintain the balance of apostolic leaders and elders and not institutionalize either.
2. If we do institutionalize leadership and increase the balance of leadership into formal authority of bishops, we will begin to break down Christ's design for His churches.
3. We must respect the spontaneous expansion of the gatherings and networks of the gatherings and not institutionalize our emerging networks.
4. In our meetings, we must take care to uphold the Apostles' teaching, through a balance of apostolic and local elder authority.

Rethinking the Worship Paradigm

The implications of all we have studied so far are that the gathering *topoi* completely disintegrates our Western church paradigm of worship.

Worship is not what happens as a singing experience before a sermon. Every part of the gathering is worship. Every part!

Rethinking the Worship Paradigm

Every part!

- Sermons are not the oratory of one leader, **the pastor**; teaching is dialogue in community.
- **Eastern and Western eucharist** and Protestant communion are shattered, even missions and evangelism are radically changed.
- *Worship* is the whole thing, although **Paul actually never uses** the term *worship* in his letters on the gathering topoi. (That is why I did not change these headings to “worship and the early church.”)

The Gathering and Western Church

Radical De-Institutionalizing the Western Church

With the decline of the Western Church and coming out of the COVID shutdown of churches, it is time to radically restructure. Let's consider four options:

Churches with Buildings (2 main options): This applies to churches with large, medium, and small buildings.

1. Radically Restructure—Turn your church into a network of small churches mostly in homes; and begin restructuring your church building into a resource center for your new churches and the community. (3–5 years)
2. Gradually Restructure—Turn one or more groups into strategic house churches of 10–15, and begin immediately reimaging your church building. (5–10 years)

The Gathering and Western Church

Radical De-Institutionalizing the Western Church

Church-Planting Networks Without Buildings (two main options)

3. Radically Restructure—properly set in order your churches (the Pastorals) and establish resource centers as needed. (3–5 years)
4. Properly Structure—for new church-planting networks, avoid Western church buildings that serve the church service paradigm, and lay careful foundations from the beginning, building resource centers as needed.

The Gathering and Western Church

For us, we chose the “radically restructure” option, and it took us one year of direct teaching on the radical restructure and 3–5 years to make our new churches solid. It was difficult work.

The second encyclical, “The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks,” became our manifesto for turning our church into a complex apostolic network of house churches.

The encyclical was written in 2009, and after a series of teaching in 2010 on “Going to Church in the First Century,” we took the step in 2011.

The Gathering Restructuring Framework

10 Recommended Phases

These 10 phases are just a recommended process. These steps, together with the three Encyclicals

“The Churches of the First Century: From Simple Churches to Complex Networks”

“Kerygmatic Communities: Evangelism and the Early Church”

“The Gathering: The Meeting as the Heart of a Complex Apostolic Network”

should be enough to guide you through your restructuring option. They will serve as a guide for you and your leaders to build a strategy that fits your cultural situation over the next few years.

The Gathering Restructuring Framework

Framework for Restructuring: (10 Recommended Phases)

1. Build a one-minded foundational church around “the meeting”—large, small, renewal situation, or new plant—and begin practicing it.
2. Build a sodal–modal team. (Antioch: a number of local leaders and Paul and Barnabas’s initial team.)
3. Start a few strategic house churches and see to it that they practice “the meeting.”
4. Build an apostolic team that is one-minded around the “the meetings,” appointing elders quickly.
5. Quickly appoint elders and train them quickly and intensely (at least 6 weeks, but with a 3-year follow-up development plan).

The Gathering Restructuring Framework

6. As churches multiply, keep developing your apostolic team, begin identifying senior elders, and develop a plan for training them.
7. Set up a shepherding system that guards the churches, with senior elder teams within emerging clusters of churches, as your complex network grows.
8. Set up a system so that your growing apostolic team can visit clusters of churches and bring apostolic and prophetic type teaching.
9. Set up a system for churches meeting as clusters or across a city or small network for celebration meetings (Love Feasts).
10. Join a global family: a network of networks built around a multiplication of churches strategy, at which the heart of their meetings is having weekly “supper with the Lord.”

The Gathering in the 21st Century

Why has this massive research discovery, and all of the last 40 years of the Greco-Roman Early Church for that matter, not restructured our Western church paradigm?

The Gathering in the 21st Century

Mainline denominations (called that in North America) and the World Council of Churches (e.g. CNS and CSA in India, the Uniting Church in Australia):

- They are aware of the massive Greco-Roman research of the Early Church—at least their scholars are—and embrace these ideas.
- But, they see them as just an example from the Early Church, since they do not embrace the inerrancy of Scripture; so they will not radically change their dying paradigms.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

Evangelicals: They are no better off;

- they think they are in the right because of at least keeping the gospel (kerygma) clear. But they have no idea of the New Testament Church didache,
- and they are not even aware of the massive 40-year body of Greco-Roman literature rediscovering the true historical church, let alone the last 20 years of research unearthing the Meal-Symposium paradigm, which is key to understanding Christian origins.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

Gospel Communities (Western church-planting movements):

- They reject the Western Christendom paradigm,
- are rooted in the Gospels only, do not understand Christ's grand strategy and household design for His gatherings, start off simple,
- but soon return back to the Western church paradigm for sustainability, with little or no true understanding of Acts—which is what Jesus continued to do and teach.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

The Global Pentecostal Movement: A pure movement of the Spirit unfolded like Acts,

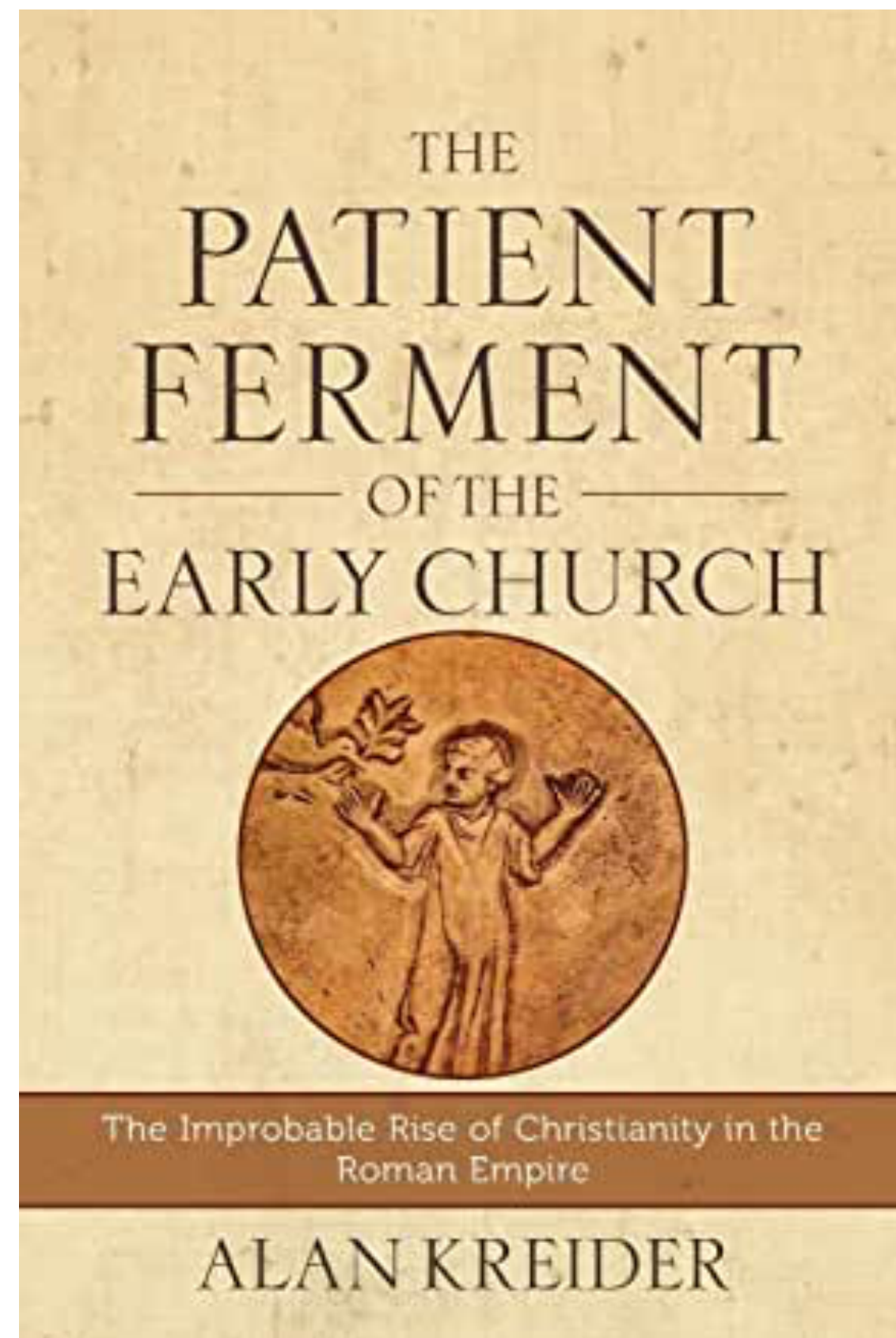
- outside the Western institutionalized paradigm of denominations, seminaries, and mission agencies,
- but it is untaught in how to move to the second phase of Acts and Paul's letters.
- They often are controlled by Western missions money
- and are almost totally unaware of the 40 years of Greco-Roman research in the New Testament and Early Church.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

How can we be sure this Meal–Symposium paradigm is for us today?

1. Acts is catechetical.
2. These letters of Paul are in the New Testament canon.
3. Christ has a grand strategy, as well as clear directions for His assemblies to follow.
4. According to Paul, Jesus gave him these instructions for His assemblies.
5. The household texts, both for families and for His assemblies, matched the Greek household and city codes, and we would never throw them out. Neither can we throw out the meals–symposium topoi just because it was also in the culture of the times. Christ's Gathering/Gatherings are perfect, and even Satan cannot stop their growth and expansion.
6. Christ's Assembly/assemblies paradigm has always had plenty of room for global culture down through the centuries.

The Gathering in the 21st Century



“The Pauline model—an evening meal providing real sustenance and also in remembering Jesus; a multi-voiced symposium in which all could pray and contribute; face-to-face relationships in a domestic setting—was still present 150 years later in Tertullian’s community in Carthage. This durability is not surprising. The two-part meal was deeply embedded in the culture of late antiquity, and Christians persisted in using it because they found that it was conducive to their common life. As time passed the Christian communities Christianized the banquet and developed a habitus that made it distinctive. According to Tertullian, Christians at some point gave it a new name—agapē—that expressed its character as love.”

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.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

What will come next following *The Paradigm Papers* and *The Encyclicals*? Over the next 5 years, a third series is being designed—*The White Papers*. They will continue the ideas of the previous two series, with a next Christendom focus.

The White Papers:

Paper 1: “The Grand Strategy and the 9 Civilizations” will focus on Christ’s grand strategy for His Gatherings (Assemblies). Everywhere in the world where His gatherings are multiplying they need to share His strategy in common; everyone in their own networks must know the strategy, down to each gathering and the Gathering.

Paper 2: “Paul and Strategic Global Cities” will focus on building a strategy for a Global City, using Rome as our case study: focusing all gathering clusters in the city, preserving cultural distinctives but laying common foundations around the kerygma and didache and The Household Topoi and The Gathering Topoi.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

Paper 3: “Peter, the Jewish Letters, and the Diaspora” will focus on Peter and his letters to his diaspora, examining the core elements of the first two White Papers but adding Peter’s focus to Gatherings scattered throughout a diaspora and global tribes, in light of 21st century global connectedness opportunities.

Paper 4: “John and Small Networks” will focus on a small network of gatherings and clusters of gatherings in a small network of cities, through the lens of Christ walking amongst the gatherings and assessing them in the last canonical communication, with John’s letters adding a final set of guiding principles.

Paper 5: “The Grand Strategy Revisited: In the Small Worlds of Global Networks,” it will address shaping a global network with a focus on global connectivity of civilizations, global cities, and diaspora (global tribe networks).

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.

The Gathering in the 21st Century

Mastering the Scriptures: Parallel to these papers will be the completion of a First Principles style set of booklets—Mastering the Scriptures Series—on the entire New Testament canon. They will follow a biblical theology approach, gleaning all the key teaching and principles from the apostolic teaching in the New Testament canon, which the Early Church did not possess until around 180 C. E.

1. Paul's Early Letters
2. Paul's Middle Letters
3. Paul's Later Letters
4. Peter's Letters and the Jewish Letters
5. Johannine Literature

The Gathering in Global Perspective

Apprenticeship Academy

- The Apprenticeship Academy is part of this Global perspective.
- It will play a big part in developing the 3rd generation of many of our partners.
- It is built, and we will launch in September.
- There are huge opportunities to serve: mentors, teachers, and host apprenticeships.
- It will not disturb High School schedules; it will fit with any home schooling or private schooling.

The Gathering in Global Perspective

Apprenticeship Academy (AA)

- Apprenticeship Academy (AA) Team—August 16, 3–6 p.m.
- Parents and potential students—August 24, 7–9 p.m.
- Enrollment of students in AS the next two weeks and BILDCloud training.
- Begin AA “Dialogues”—Tuesday, September 7, 6–9:15 p.m. (6 weekly meetings, then once a month thereafter).
- Begin apprenticeship strategizing after the 6-week dialogues.
- BILD Leadership and Education courses will be scheduled in September.