

# THE GATHERING

The Meeting as the Heart of a Complex Apostolic Network

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

Issue 3: The Gathering, Apostolic Leaders, Elders

Questions:

1. What is the role of apostolic leaders in the meetings? of senior elders?
2. Why is their role essential in preserving order in the context of the open ministry of believers using their gifts and spontaneously sharing?
3. How can you envision them exercising authority during the meeting?
4. How is it possible to guard *the teaching* (the faith, the deposit, sound doctrine) in the duly constituted assembly (churches) with such an open style? How is it possible to preserve *the Gathering* for future generations?

# 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 (2xs)

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

So let's now look at how Paul addresses *order and authority* in the meeting. Paul has a strong, reoccurring concern that these open meetings be orderly and under authority. Four things surface as we address this element of the gathering:

1. Chaos in the meetings resulted from the lesser gifts dominating and being out of control. So in the midst of the open meeting when anyone could contribute, Paul makes it clear that though everyone has gifts, ministries, and effects to share, God appointed first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers, and they carry a certain priority and authority in these meetings related to discussion and debating around the teaching and prophetic word.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

2. Because some have recognized gifts such as prophet, pay attention and don't interrupt so other recognized prophets can speak, debate, and assess. If you have a prophetic word yourself, do not burst in with yours to someone next to you, and do not claim to be a prophet without recognizing this order.
3. If you are a wife, don't enter into the public debate around the teaching or prophetic word, but recognize that the husband is to represent your home in evaluating and debating the teaching, so ask your husband at home.
4. All this is so you may all listen to each teaching and prophetic word and collectively learn together, be encouraged, and built up at the gathering, becoming truly one family, one household of faith, one unified assembly.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

But also remember, Paul had already taught them and set the gathering in motion, which they were turning into chaos. So you can draw other things he taught the churches from other letters, into what he meant by some of his points, at least up to the point of this letter. So what else did they know?

1. Paul appointed elders in every church from the beginning on his first missionary journey. Elders are an assumed part of the meeting.
2. We know later in Titus, that at the beginning of developing authorized assemblies, elders needed to be appointed in every city, probably meaning a cluster of churches. An elder must be able to teach, debate, and refute error, which again, is a given in the meetings.



# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

3. But there was also the balancing aspect of apostolic gifted leaders who needed freedom to move among the gatherings. It is attested to in *The Didache*, a document of the second century, that this was a regular practice throughout the cities and among multiple cities.
4. Besides that, anyone could bring a teaching, a teaching through song, or a prophetic word.
5. Also remember Timothy and Titus: Timothy was to follow Paul's instructions and see to it that the churches embrace the sound doctrine—not make changes to those elements; Titus was training senior elders in sound doctrine—to defend the doctrine.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

With all these elements working together and held in tension—

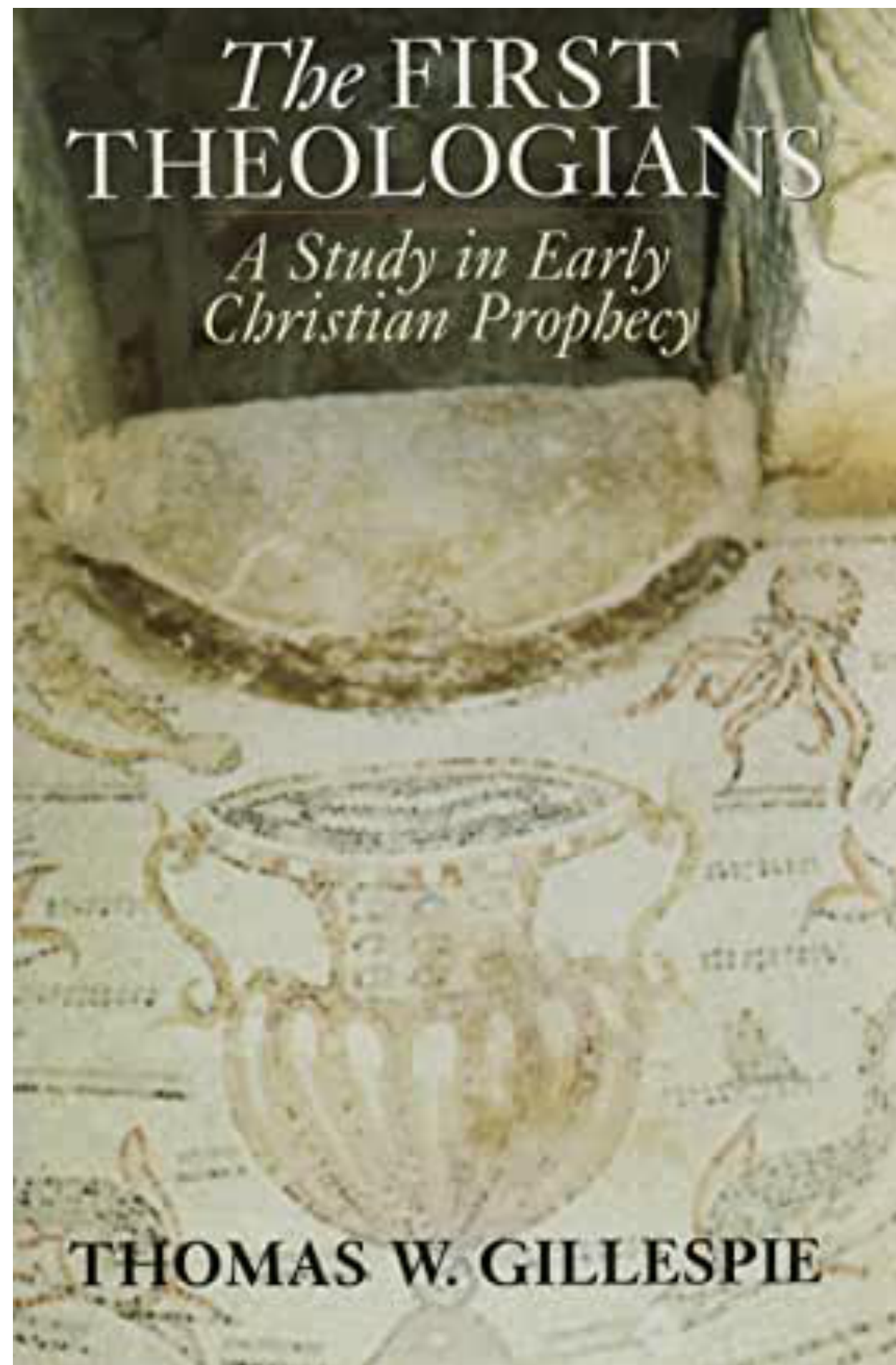
(1) the balance of apostolic leaders and local elders;

(2) two of Paul's main topoi: The Household (family of families) and The Gathering;

(3) and Acts as the framework for building networks of clusters and assemblies

—these gatherings could grow strong and multiply through cities and eventually the whole empire. Christ would be building His Gathering of gatherings.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



<sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers;

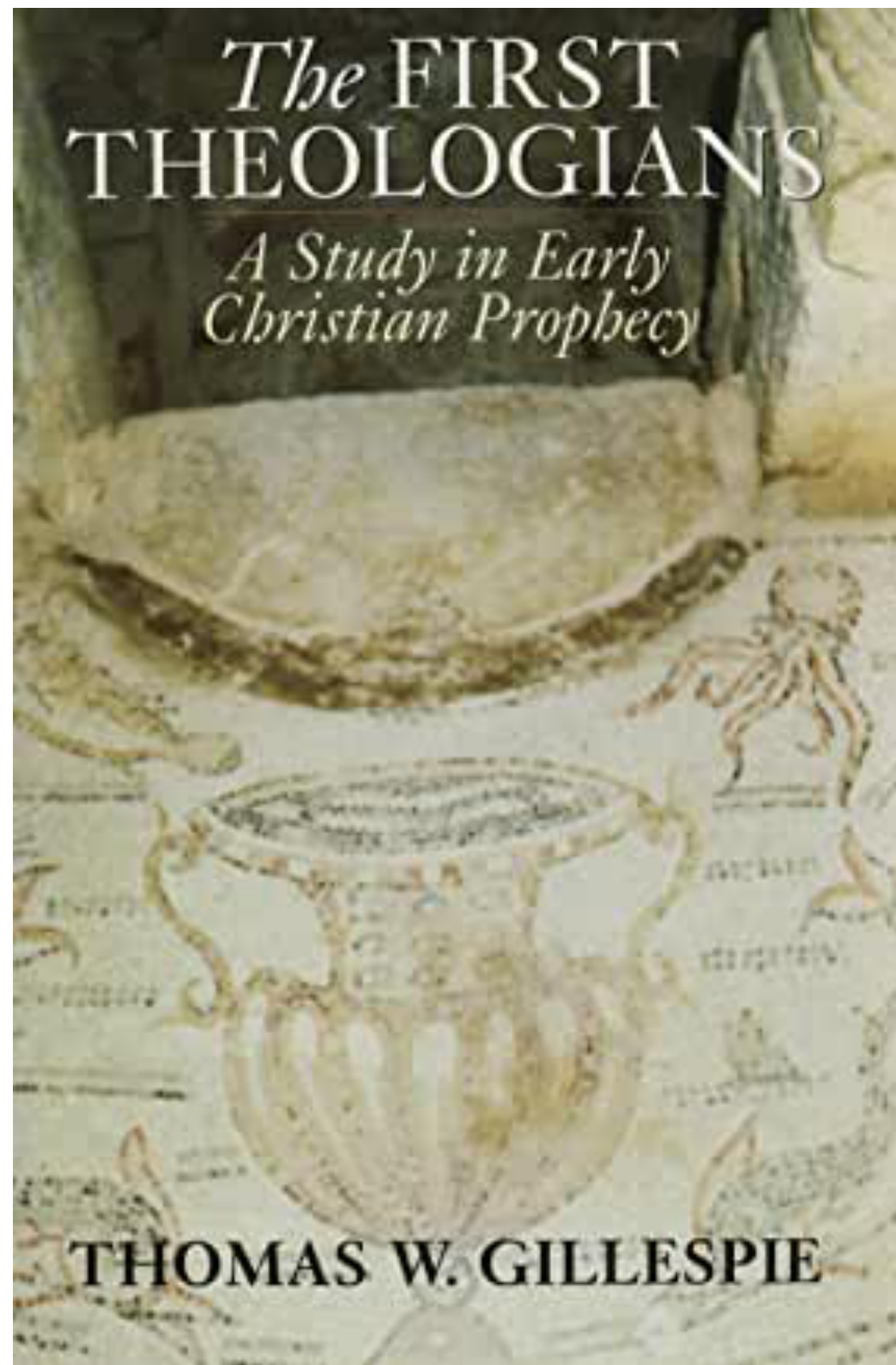
1 Corinthians 12:28 NRSV

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Ephesians 3:19–22

Who were the prophets?

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

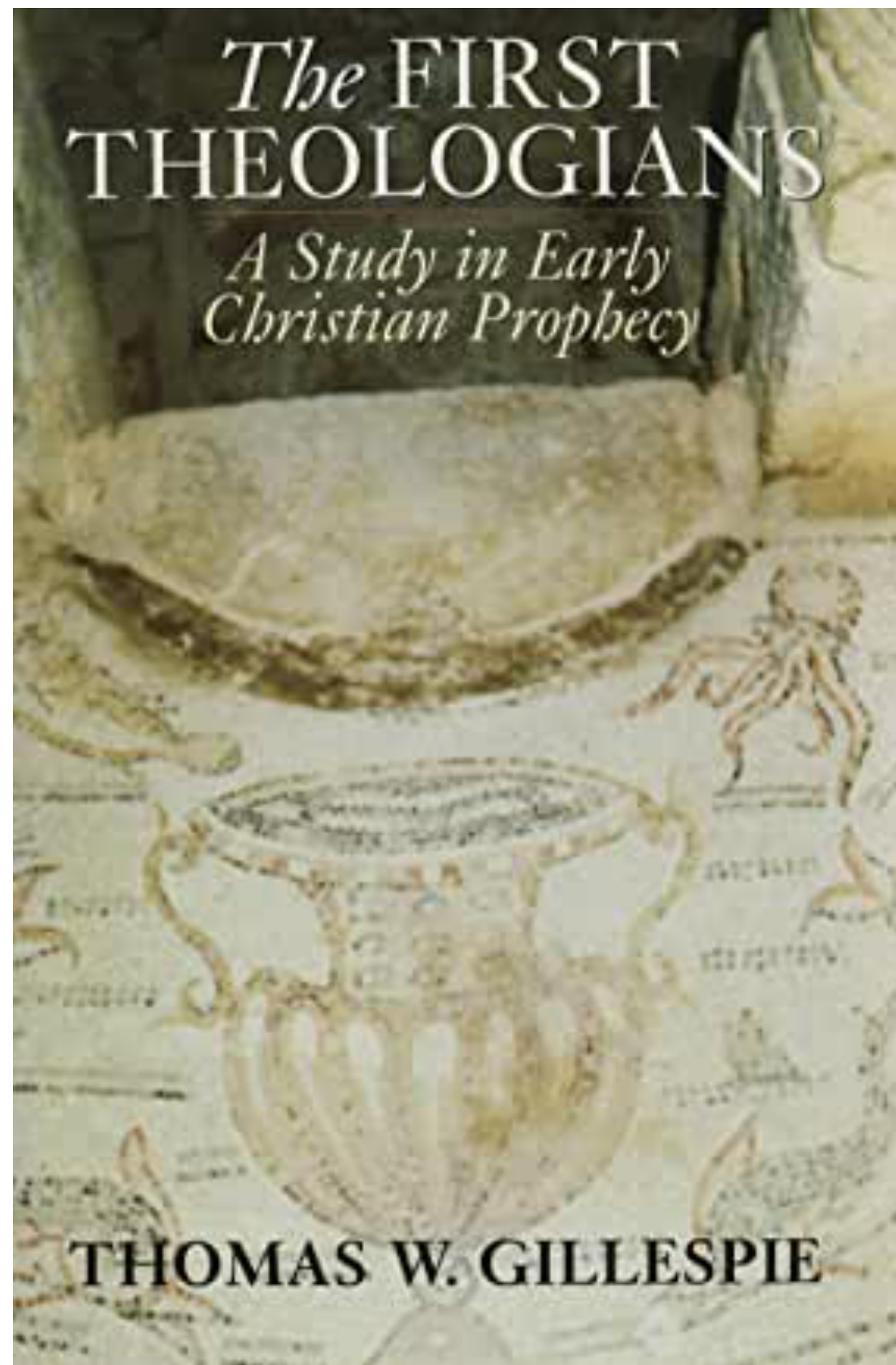


Who were the prophets?

“Here the early Christian prophets appear not vaguely as the community preachers but concretely as the original interpreters of Jesus and thus the formulators and expositors of the gospel.” p. 10

*First*—between Jesus’ sayings, Peter’s sermons, and Paul’s letters

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



Who were the prophets?

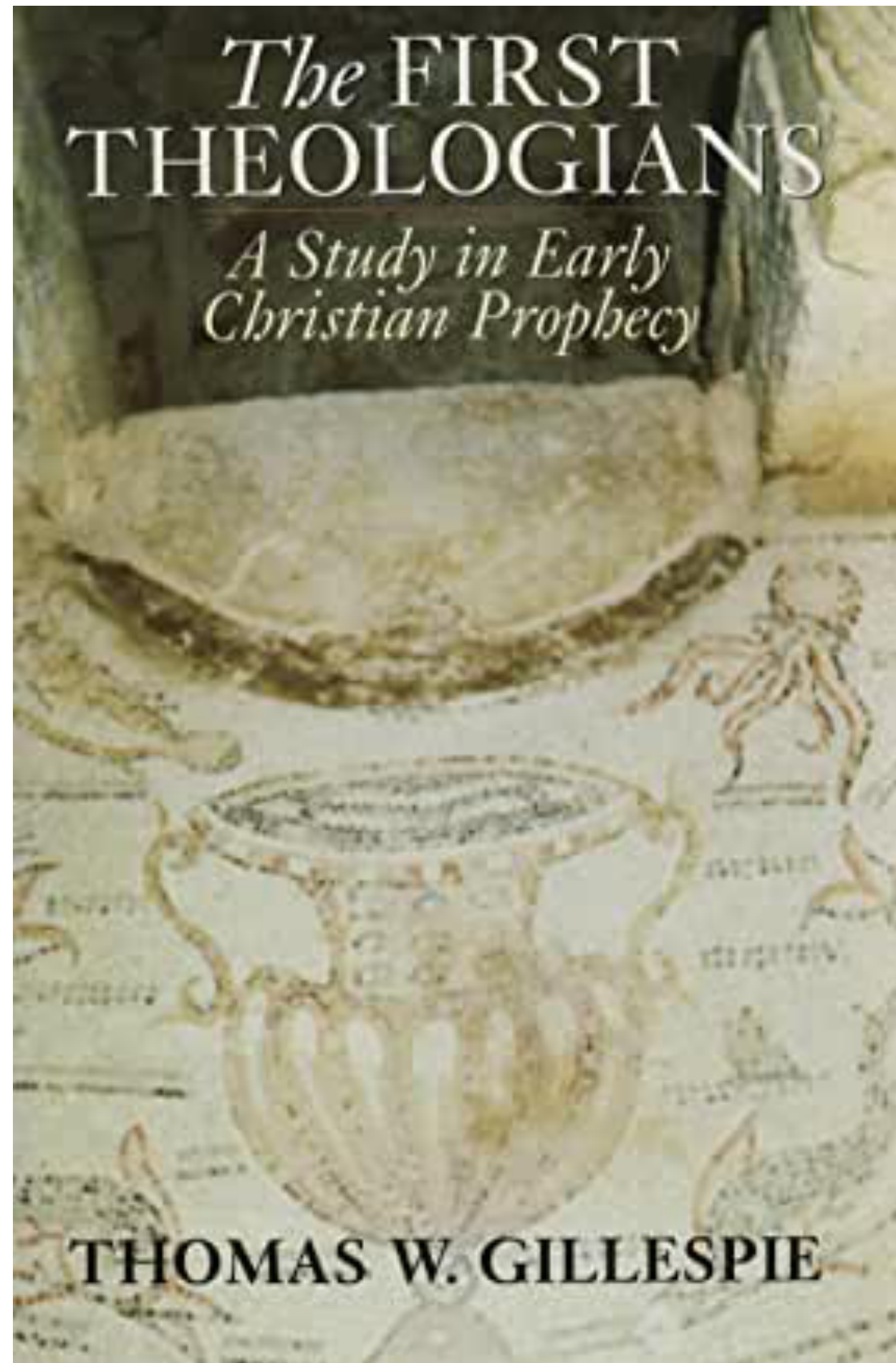
“The apostles, teachers and prophets were Spirit-endowed itinerants who served all of the churches and operated independently of local bishops, elders and deacons.” p. 3

“As ministers of the gospel, the apostles, prophets and teachers occupied the early church’s highest rung on the ministerial ladder, and together signified its unity.” page 3

“strive for the greater gifts” 1 Corinthians 12:31

“These charismata are ‘greater’ not in the sense of higher but in the sense of essential.” p. 127

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

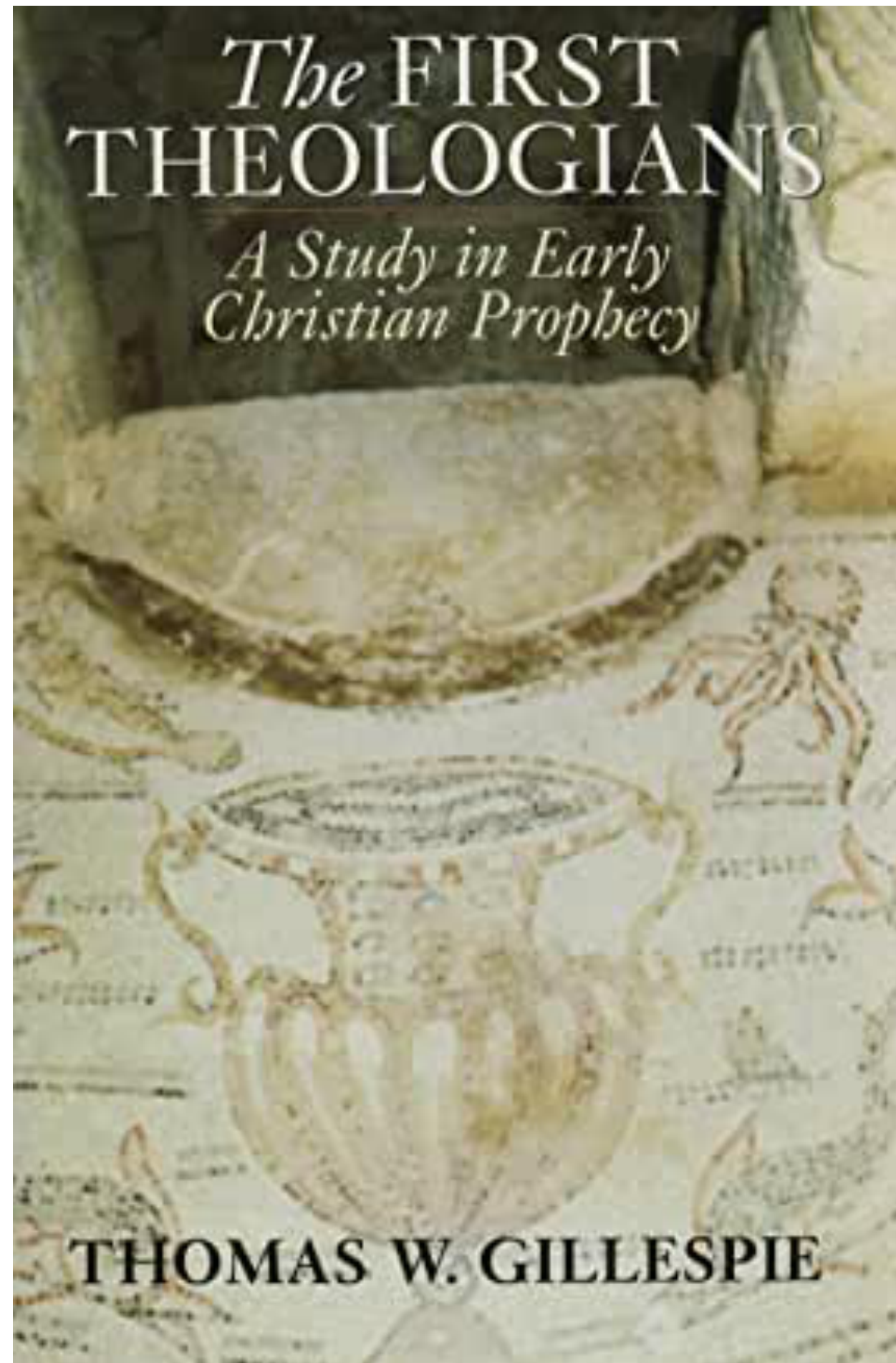


Who was Paul?

“<sup>11</sup> For this gospel I was appointed **a herald and an apostle and a teacher**,... <sup>13</sup> Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.... 2:2 and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.

2 Timothy 1:11, 13–14; 2:2

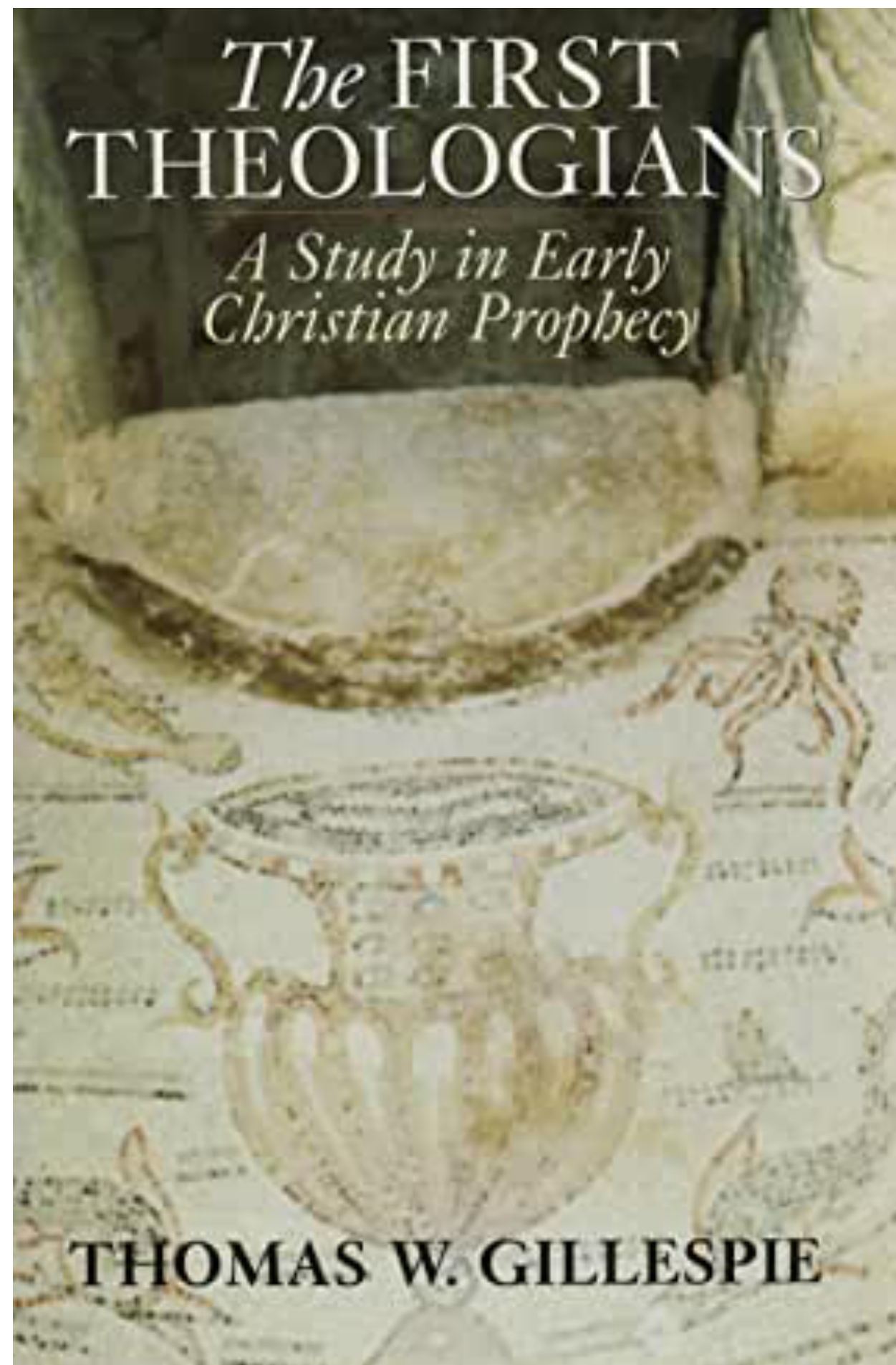
# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



Who was Paul?

- a herald—to proclaim; keryx (related to kerygma)
- an apostle—sent one, on a mission
- teacher—didaskalos (related to didache); skillful teacher, master teacher

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



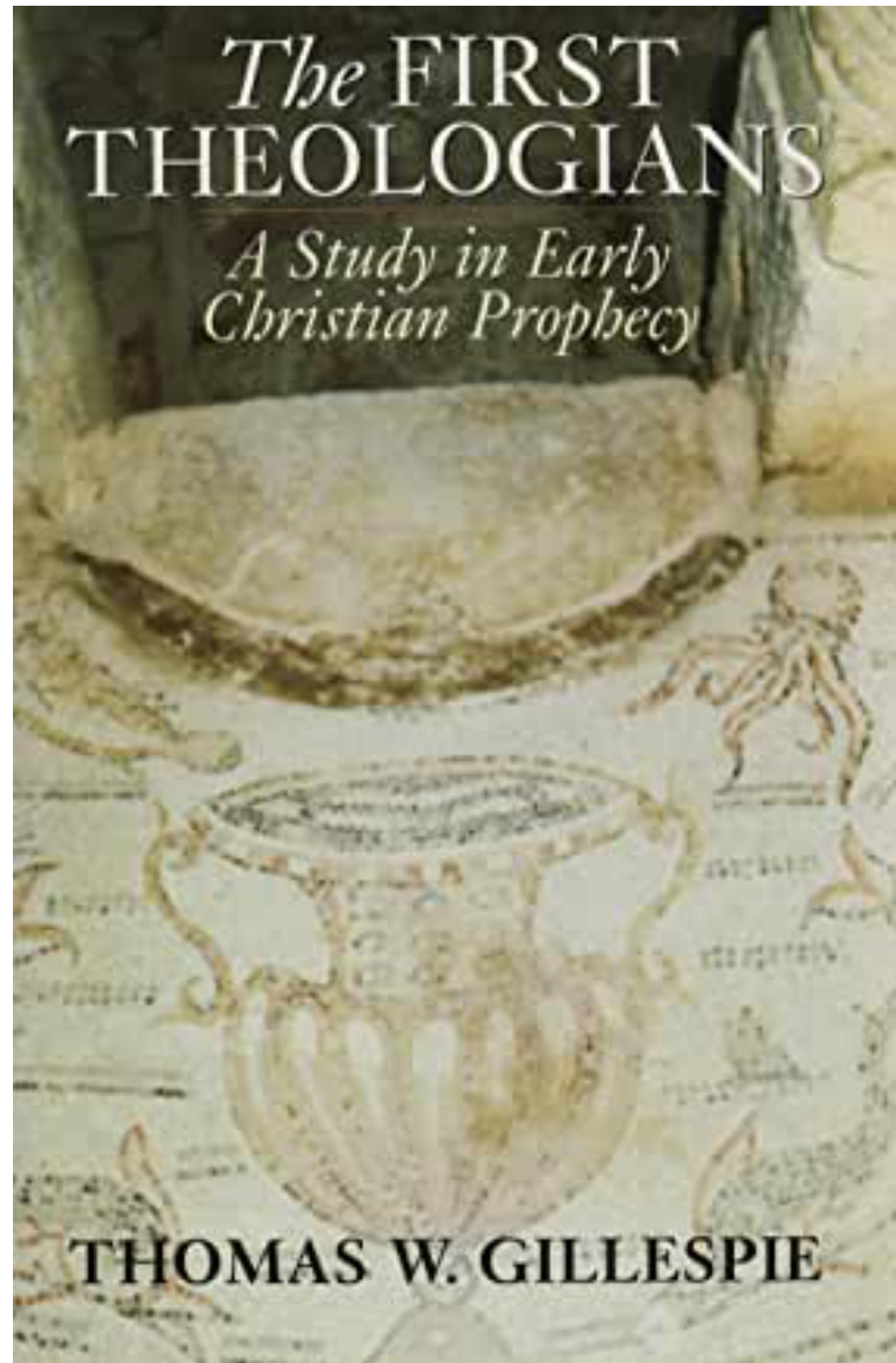
Who was Paul?

- Paul was an an apostle, shaping and expanding the complex apostolic network of the early church
- Paul was a prophet, proclaiming and defending the gospel (proclaiming related to prophet)
- Paul was a gifted, skilled teacher

Timothy was to multiply these functions



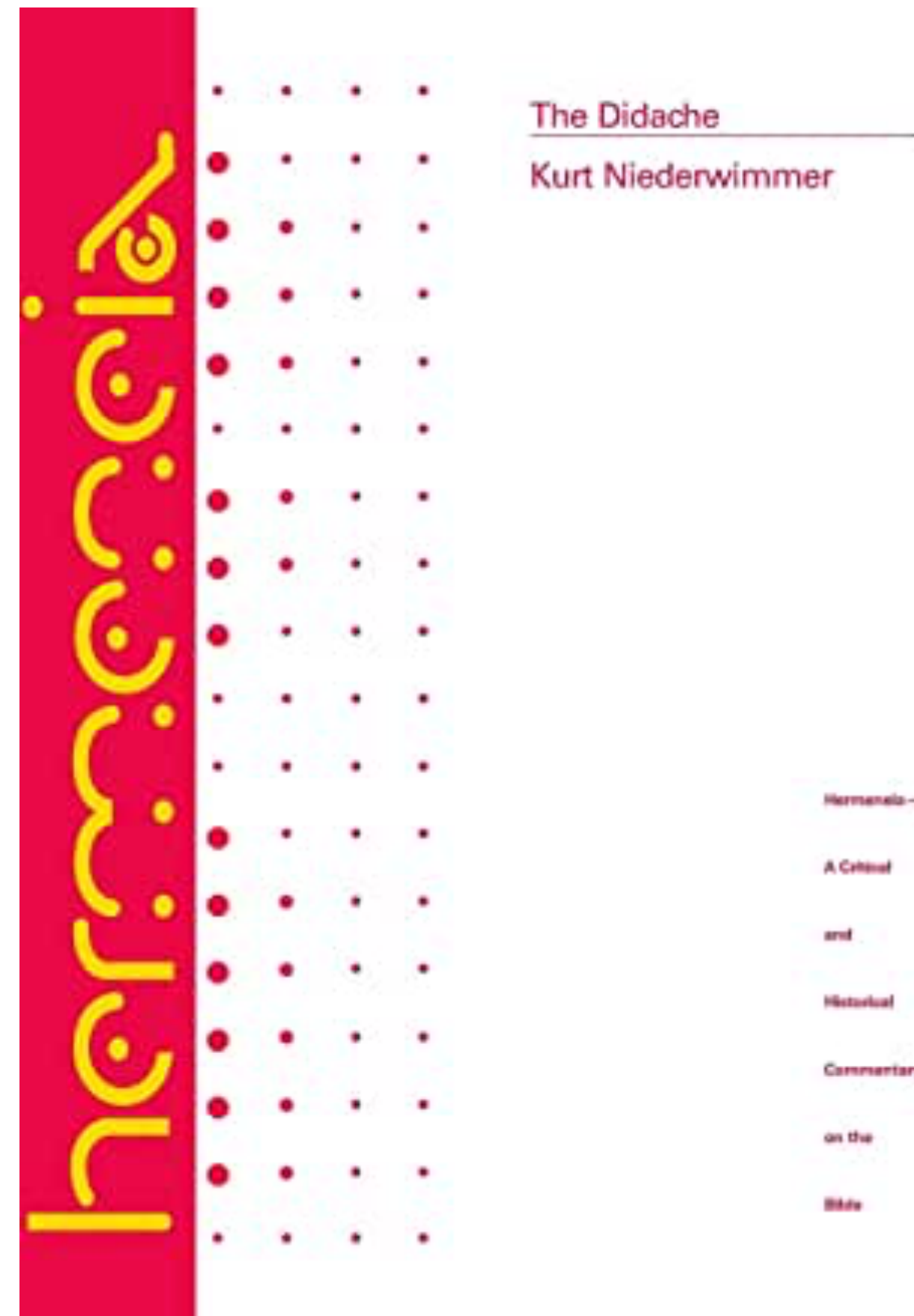
# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



## Who was Paul?

- In his mission described in Acts, Paul was being an apostle.
- In his early letters, he was mainly functioning as a prophet.
- In his middle and later letters, he mainly functioned as a gifted, skilled teacher.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



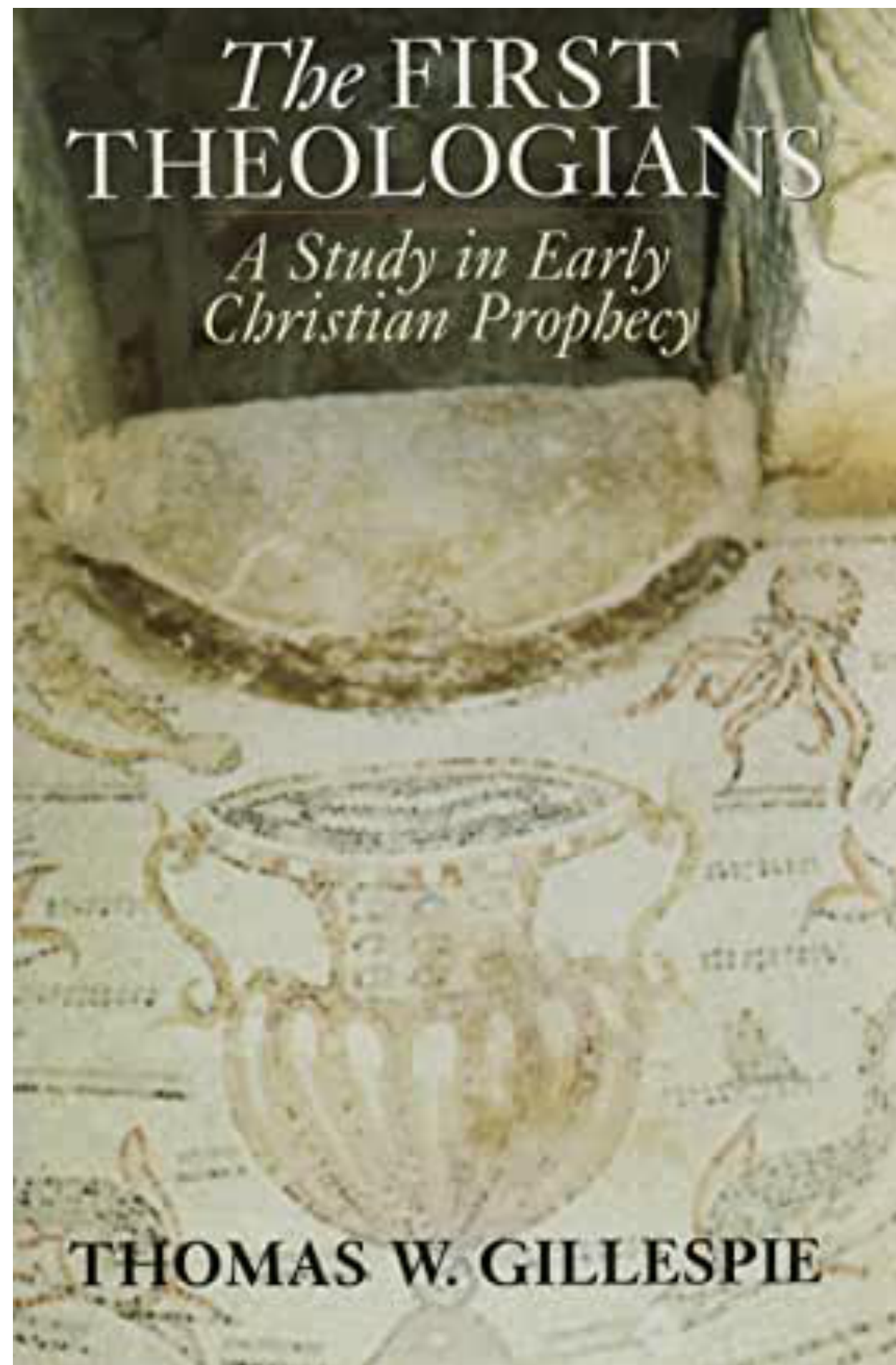
The Didache (130 CE) Hermeneia

Sections 11–15 are about guidelines for itinerate apostles, prophets, and teachers.

Most of the guidelines are for prophets, because there were so many false ones around.

Same as Paul and 1 Corinthians 14

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



Who were the prophets?

“The task of the prophets, as Paul understands it, is to explicate through divine revelation the implications, theological and behavioral, of the apostolic kerygma (15:3b–8).” p. 262

“What the early Christian prophets were doing when they were prophesying is theology, and for this reason they may be identified as the first theologians of the church.” p. 263

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

Now let's touch briefly on elders. We know they all had elders at these meetings as well, since we know that from the very beginning, Paul appointed elders in every church. Two key verses are important here.

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; 1 Timothy 5:17 NRSV

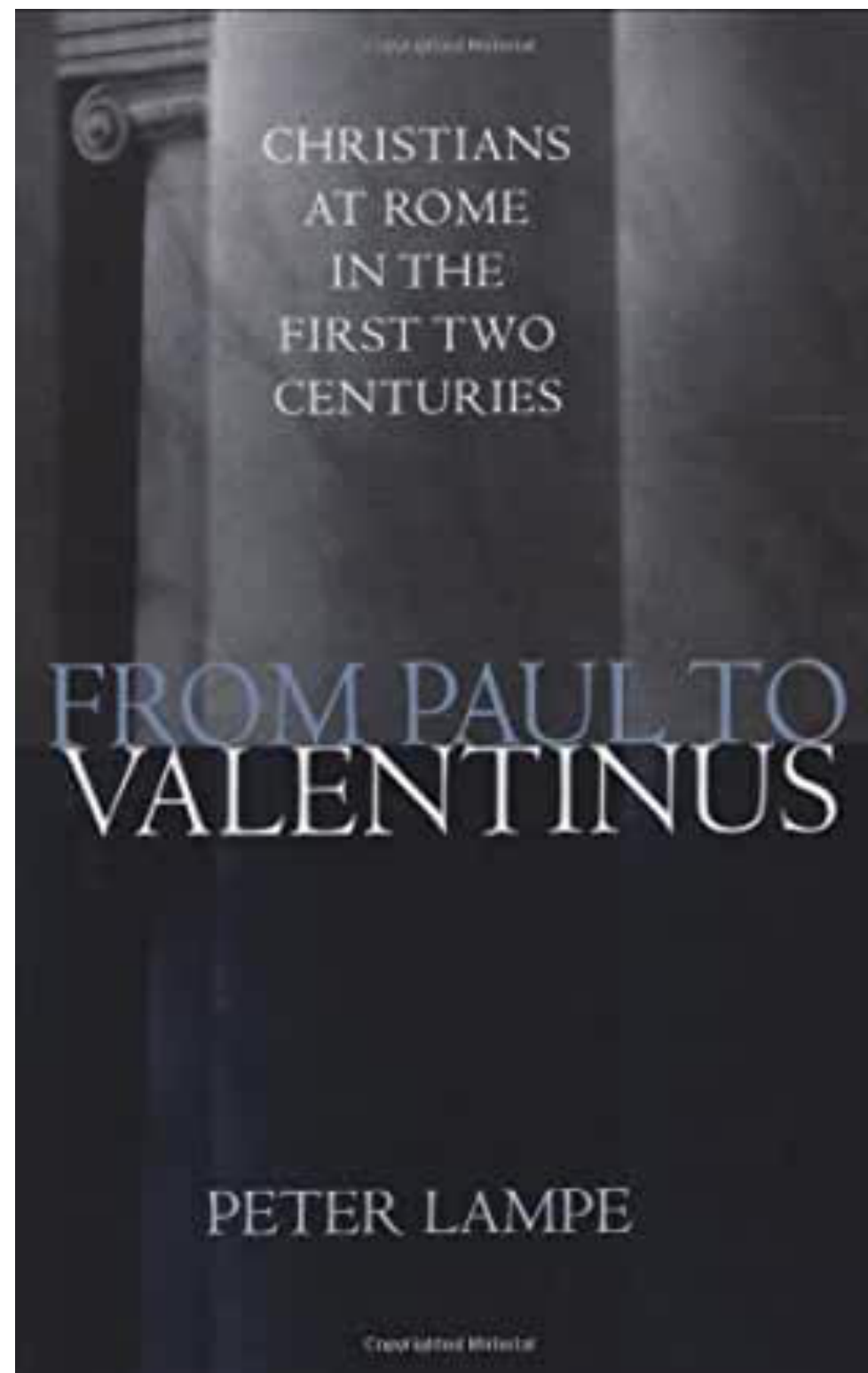
<sup>5</sup> I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town .... <sup>9</sup> He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it. Titus 1:5, 9 NRSV

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

There are at least two, maybe three, tiers of elders here: elders in every church and elders worthy of double honor. See Appendix 2: “Senior Eldership in the Early Church.”

1. Timothy is to continue Paul’s functions as an apostolic leader amongst the churches.
2. Titus was to appoint senior elders who can guard the teaching.
3. The future generations of elders must be careful not to institutionalize the networks of churches or formalize their authority. (i.e. bishops of Rome)

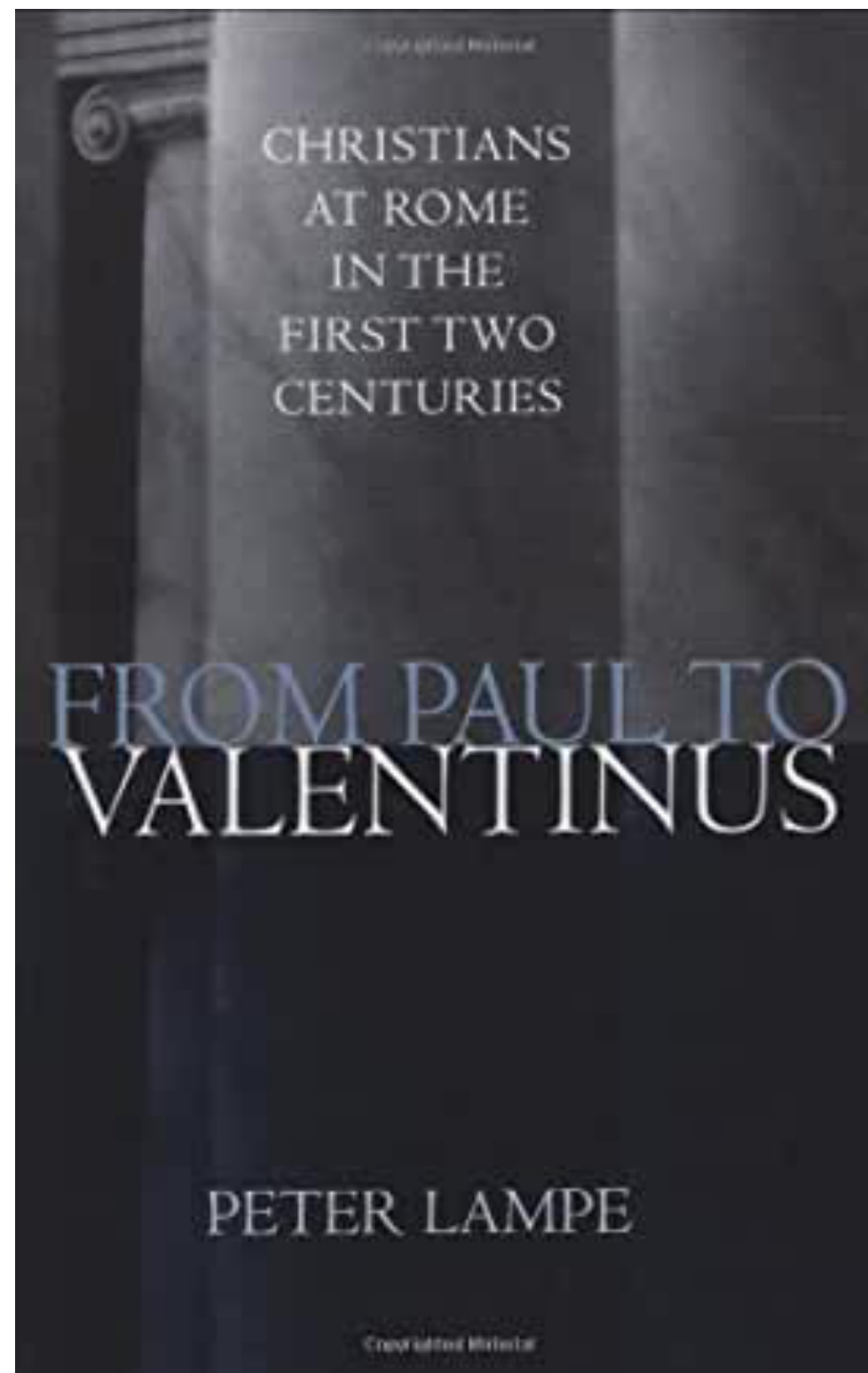
# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



A case study of Rome showed that Paul's Meal–Symposium Gathering was transmitted in tact until the mid-3rd century.

For the first hundred years, until 150 C.E., this is what happened. By 180 C.E., things began to crack. By 250 C. E., they started to move more and more away from Paul's Gathering topoi, and in the 4th and 5th centuries, the gathering was shattered.

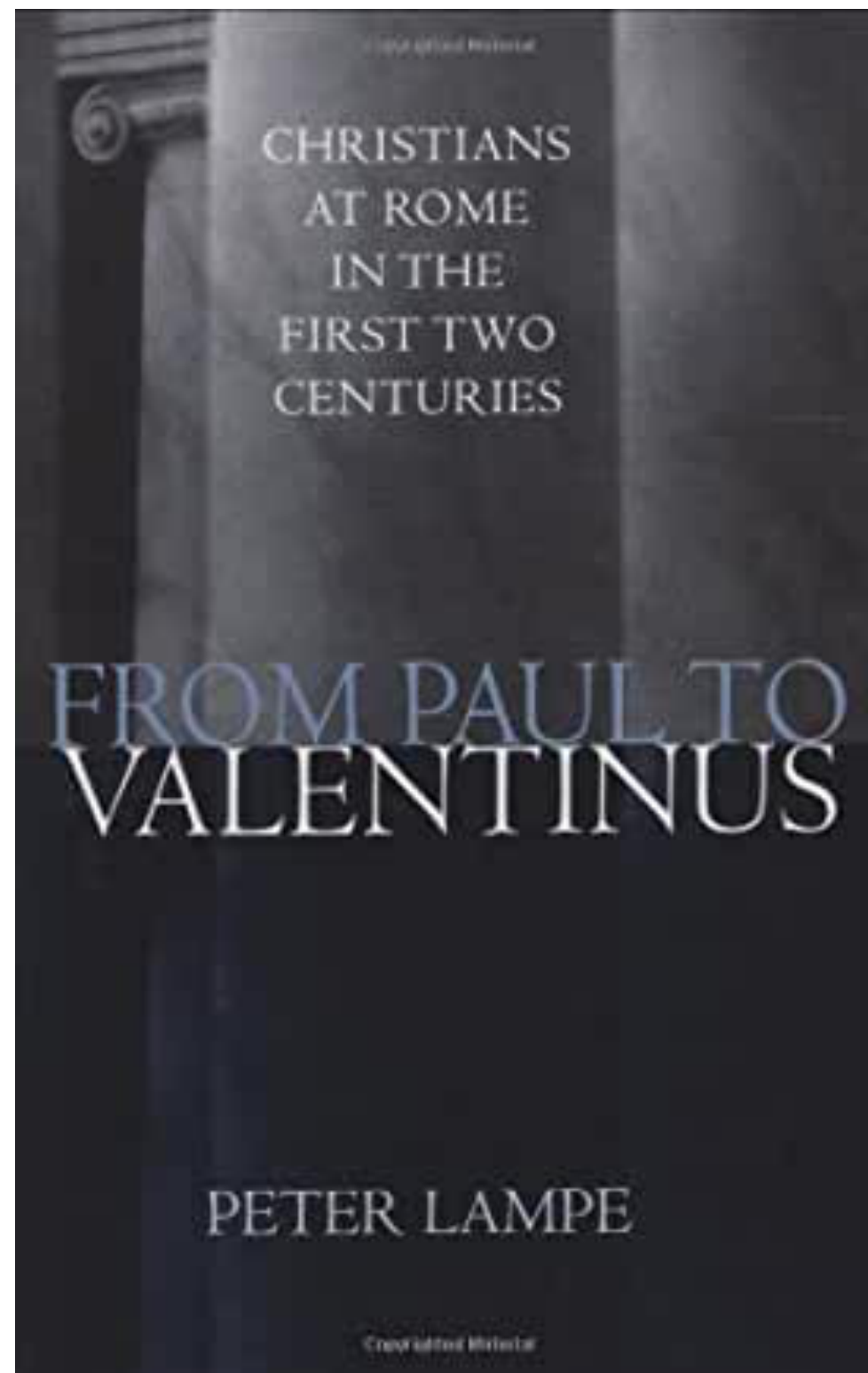
# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



From The Gatherings in Rome (Romans 16) to the Roman Catholic Church

1. By 250 A.D., there were 46 presbyters in Rome.
2. There were 15–23 titular parishes at that time, with 2–3 presbyters in each church meeting in houses, villas, or rented quarters of wealthy, patron-like owners.
3. Until near the end of the 3rd century, property had to be owned by individuals, as no provision was made by law for corporate ownership of property.
4. These churches had a sense that they were part of the church at Rome, though they never met together and were very theologically diverse.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

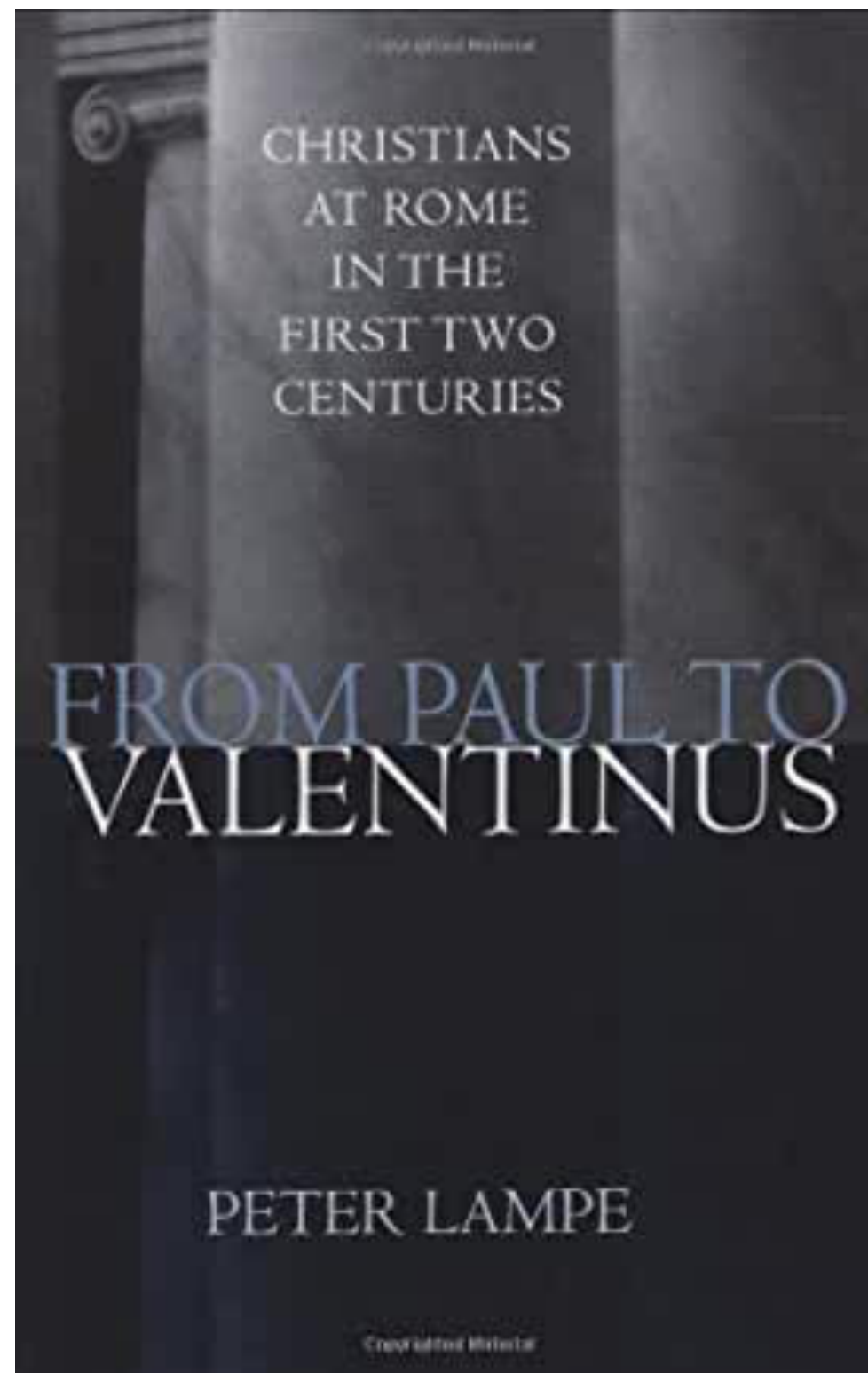


From The Gatherings in Rome (Romans 16) to the Roman Catholic Church

5. They accepted this wide range of theological diversity and seldom seemed concerned about that diversity.
6. The center of their collective identity revolved around “sending the Eucharist,” a concept of “sending pieces of the Eucharistic elements to each other through messengers.”
7. The church (made up of 15–23 titular churches, named after its patron) was loosely led by a group of “presbyters and teachers” who met in occasional conventions that focused on representing the Roman Church to churches in other cities; they eventually began to be appealed to concerning doctrinal matters.



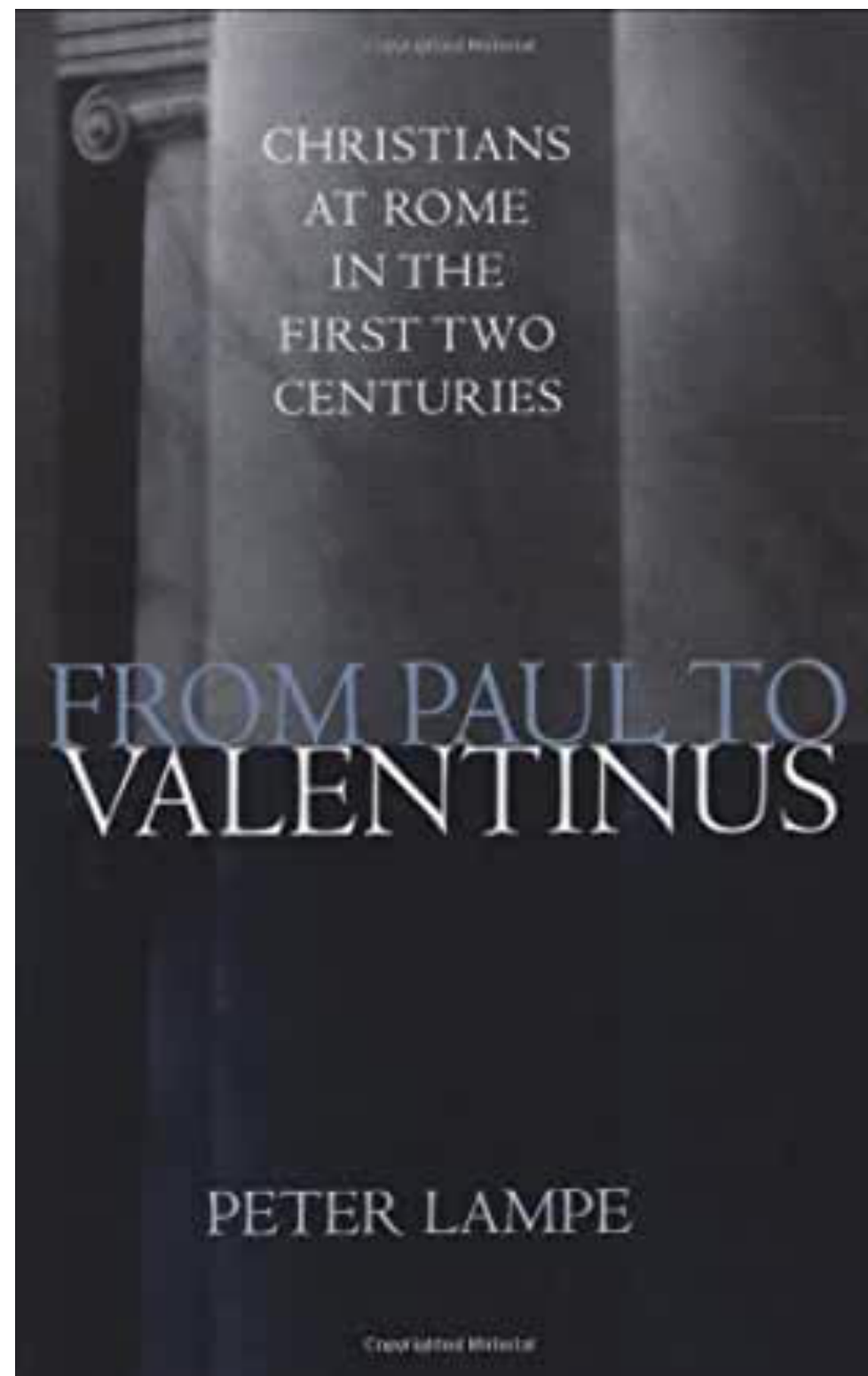
# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



From The Gatherings in Rome (Romans 16) to the Roman Catholic Church

8. Any groups regarded as heretical were still able to remain in Eucharistic fellowship with other house communities of the city.
9. This collegial type of presbyterial governorship still prevailed up through the mid-half of the 2nd century.
10. An official “list of bishops” eventually emerged in a more formal role by around 180 A.D.
11. In the Apostolic tradition, as the monarchical bishop emerged, he did not reside in a particular place, but resided in different communities at different times.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders



Crack 1: Kerygma–Didache (keep sound doctrine exact) not the core of all the churches in Rome (Timothy–Titus)

Crack 2: Presbyters—high positions, become administrative bishops with emerging institutional authority

Crack 3: City networks asking the Roman church for doctrinal decisions

Crack 4: Monarchal bishop—back dated pope

Crack 5: Apostolic teams: gone, scattered itinerant, then resurface as stoic monks—at the Meal, no laughing, no looking

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

## Implications

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 breakdown 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. We must take care in our meetings, through a balance of apostolic and local elder authority, to uphold the Apostles' teaching.

# The Gathering, Apostles, Elders

## Examples

1. Brethren—2nd generation elders
2. Episcopal—CPMs in India
3. Bible Church—independent elders