

The Greco-Roman Meal: Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

(Response Paper, “Meals in the Greco-Roman World” – Atlanta, November 2003)

Willi Braun
University of Alberta
Willi.Braun@ualberta.ca

The man with whom I do not dine is a barbarian to me. (Pompeian graffito)¹

[W]e do not live with all indiscriminately; nor do we take our food from the same table as Gentiles, inasmuch as we cannot eat along with them, because they live impurely. But when we have persuaded them to have true thoughts, and to follow a right course of action, and have baptized them with a thrice blessed invocation, then we dwell with them. For not even if it were our father, or mother, or wife, or child, or brother, or any other one having a claim by nature on our affection, can we venture to take our meals with him; *for our religion compels us to make a distinction*. Do not, therefore, regard it as an insult if your son does not take his food along with you, until you come to have the same opinions and adopt the same course of conduct as he follows. (*Clementine Homilies* 13.4; ANF 8; emphasis added).

1. Introduction

Both Matthias Klinghardt² and Dennis Smith³ are agreed on the proposition that early Christian meal practices were not inventions *ex nihilo*. Theoretically this means of course that Christian meal practices do not have a monogenetic origin (in, say, the

1 “At quem non ceno, barbarus ille mihi est.” Cited by Emily Gowers, *The Loaded Table: Representations of Food in Roman Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 26.

2 Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (TANZ, 13; Tübingen: A. Francke, 1996); idem, “A Typology of the Community Meal” (Paper presented to the SBL Consultation on Meals in the Greco-Roman World, Atlanta, November 2003).

3 Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); idem, “The Greco-Roman Banquet as a Social Institution” (Paper presented to the SBL Consultation on Meals in the Greco-Roman World, Atlanta, November 2003).

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

putatively historical last supper of Jesus, or in the Jewish Passover tradition), nor are they to be placed on a simple and unilinear trajectory that stretches from, say again, Jesus' last supper to the Christian Eucharist. Methodologically this means, as Klinghardt suggests, that the relations between Christian meals and non-Christian meals in antiquity are not to be imagined in terms of "the categories of dependence and derivation" but in terms of "participation in a larger and encompassing [meal] tradition."⁴ Both Klinghardt and Smith thus assume, heuristically at least, that there was a single "form"⁵ or "ideal type"⁶ of meal, a form which Smith simply calls the "Greco-Roman banquet" and Klinghardt identifies as the "symposium," which are not really different forms, only different names for an "ideal type" on which Smith and Klinghardt also concur in general. This form served as the rudimentary phenomenological template for all Greco-Roman communal meal practices; Christian meal practices thus were not categorically different but only different in "accentuation and focus," to use Klinghardt's words.⁷

I am in full agreement with Klinghardt and Smith. I would like to take for granted that early Christians invented nothing from nothing in general, and, therefore, that their banqueting traditions and practices were formally, procedurally, and ideologically

4 Klinghardt, "Typology of the Community Meal," 1. (I hope I do cite Klinghardt accurately; it was not easy to determine what parts of his paper were meant to be read and regarded and which parts were to be disregarded, due to his use of highlighting, strike-overs, multi-coloured typefaces, etc.)

5 Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 1: "It is my contention that there was one form of meal that served as the basic model for all formal meals of significance in the Greco-Roman world. I define this meal model as the Greco-Roman banquet" (my emphasis).

6 Klinghardt, "Typology of the Community Meal," 1-2: "Not numerous single forms, but different representations of a greater, encompassing model"; "there is a common type of meal underlying the uncountable literary descriptions of and epigraphical references to communal meals in the Greco-Roman world"; the ideal type is then presented as the "symposium" later in the paper.

7 Klinghardt, "Typology of the Community Meal," 1.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

convergent or divergent variants of a range of Greco-Roman “matter-of-fact”⁸ commensal habits that gravitated around a standard form and a culturally shared semiotic⁹ index. In other words, the work of Klinghardt and Smith (to which one could add others), has established a proper point of departure for the next wave of research into the commensal practices of early Christians – a point of departure that has enabled both to produce major works of very useful redescriptions of early Christian banquet practices. (The comments that now follow thus should not be seen as oppositional but as an effort to move onwards from the starting point.)

2. Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

In acknowledgment of the fact that the topic for this year’s consultation focussed on meal typologies, allow me to note that both Klinghardt and Smith have produced a typology that consists of a single type! Although I am all in favour of reductionism as a valuable second-order analytic virtue,¹⁰ our chances of thickly describing and robustly explaining early Christian commensal practices may not be helped by a “single type”

8 The term here refers to an old distinction in anthropology between “matter-of-fact” elements of culture and secondary rationalizations or specifically interested deployments of these elements (elements being either material objects or specific practices). The distinction allows me to introduce some distance between “ideal types” and actual deployments of the types; and it is the latter that interests me much more. The distinction itself appears to have been invented by Robert H. Lowie in the early part of the 20th century; see Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 387-88; and Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 181-84.

9 On the semiology of food and dining see of course the classic article by Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Daedalus* 101 (1972) 61-81; see also Lowell Edmunds, “Ancient Roman and Modern American Food: A Comparative Sketch of Two Semiological Systems,” *The Comparative Civilizations Review* 5 (1980) 52–69. Edmunds focusses on food, but his comparative sketch is instructive also for thinking about the semiotics of commensal forms.

10 I share the sentiment of Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (London: Blackwell, 1996) 5-6; my view of “reductionism” is encapsulated in W. Braun, “The Blessed Curse of Thought: Theorizing Religion in the Classroom,” *ARC* 29 (2001) 175 n. 6.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

typology, if such a thing in fact makes sense in terms of typology making. My leading question thus is if we can, at least should try to, come up with a typology of commensality that is *operationally more useful*, that is, a typology that will take us forward not only in our descriptive efforts but especially, and more so, in our *analytic* efforts.

As a first and tentative reply to the question, allow me a basic supposition, roughly one that is articulated by the anthropologist Eric Wolf, who writes as follows:

In the rough-and-tumble of social interaction, groups are known to *exploit the ambiguity of inherited forms* [and, I should add, of “matter-of-fact” forms that are widely diffused as the way we do things], to *impart new evaluations or valences on them*, to *borrow forms* [and I should add, to alter forms so as to make them] *more expressive of their interest*, or to *create wholly new forms* to answer to changed circumstances. Furthermore, if we think of such interactions not as causative in its own terms but as *responsive to larger economic and political forces*, the explanation of cultural forms must take account of that larger context, that wider field of force. A ‘culture’ [and I would add, a discrete cultural practice such as banqueting] is thus *better seen as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct, and dismantle cultural materials [e.g., the ideal type banquet], in response to identifiable determinants.*¹¹

What I take from Wolf’s theoretical capsule is a fancy for typing the Greco-Roman banquet in reverse, so to speak. Rather than thinking, that is, about a typology of commensal forms, we might think instead about the form or forms of our typology. I suggest this lest our collective study of the Christian banquet traditions gets washed into the homogenous stew of Greco-Roman banquets so as to leave us in the rather unremarkable (and ultimately not very interesting) position of saying that “Christians were simply following a pattern found throughout their world,” to use words from

11 Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 387; emphasis added.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

Dennis Smith's concluding paragraph.¹² I suggest this, too, because it would bring into the foreground for our collective labours not so much the "ideal type" – which has, in any case, been described adequately enough already – but what Matthias Klinghardt refers to as the differences in "accentuation and focus."

It is, I imagine, not too difficult work out various morphologies with respect to early Christian dining performances. We could, for example, fret about "accentuations" and "foci" with a view toward differentiating, describing, and explaining them. We might be able to go about this if we take certain morphological cues from key terms in Wolf's description of "rough-and-tumble social interaction" and the exploitation of inherited or generally diffused social forms in these interactions. Thus, for example, what are the "ambiguities" in the typical form of the Greco-Roman meal? Exactly how, if at all, did various Christian groups "exploit" them? Of what special interests were these exploitations, alterations, or adaptations "expressive"? To what forces in the larger contextual "field of force" were they responsive? Can we identify specific "determinants"? And so forth.

Allow me to clarify the general sentiment of these questions with a morphology of early Christian (and general Greco-Roman) dinner practices that betokens a recent essay by the French sociologist Claude Grignon, an essay entitled "Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology."¹³ Grignon's work focusses on the evolution

12 Smith, "The Greco-Roman Banquet," 11 (restating what he wrote in *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 279: "Early Christians met at a meal because that is what groups in the ancient world did. Christians were simply following a pattern found throughout their world"). As I indicated above, this statement on the "ordinariness" of early Christian dining rectifies studies that proceed on the presumption of the extraordinariness or uniqueness of Christian commensal activities, but I should here perhaps add that Smith's adverbial stroke "simply" is both theoretically and ethnographically infelicitous. It is precisely the nature of the "following" (or "departing") from the cultural everyday that needs attention, and I suspect that close inspection of these following/departing processes will show that "simply" may need to be struck from Smith's sentence.

13 Claude Grignon, "Commensality and Social Morphology: An Essay of Typology," in *Food, Drink, and Identity: Cooking, Eating, and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages* (ed. Peter Scholliers;

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

of French food habits and semiotics and thus he develops a typology with reference to data that obviously is quite removed from our period. This does not matter, however, for I am interested in his conceptual and methodological moves. (Incidentally and fortuitously, and confirming to me that I am no more nuts than at least one other person, Grignon's typology has now also been adapted by John F. Donahue to generate a morphology of Roman dining, as I discovered just days before this conference, though I could not have discovered it much earlier since this article literally just appeared in the very latest issue of the *American Journal of Philology*.¹⁴) Grignon's aim is to "outline a reasoned inventory of commensal types."¹⁵ Important to note is that his types are not a morphological index of meal structures, but of commensal groups – because, he argues, "commensality is a result and a manifestation of a pre-existing group."¹⁶ In short, Grignon begins not with the form of the meal itself, "the diversity of commensal types is itself a consequence of the great diversity of ... groups" that make up society, groups that can be categorized by any of a number of different classificatory regimes: age, gender, status, kinship, lineage, ethnicity, voluntary associations, special purpose groups, etc.¹⁷ Grignon does not trouble himself with the notion of "group" itself, on how groups are

Oxford: Berg, 2001) 23–33. Note also the useful mapping of anthropological scholarship on food and commensality by Peter Scholliers, "Meals, Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present," in *Food, Drink, and Identity: Cooking, Eating, and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages* (ed. Peter Scholliers; Oxford: Berg, 2001) 3–22.

14 John F. Donahue, "Toward a Typology of Roman Public Feasting," *AJP* 124 (2003) 423–41. In anticipation, take note of his forthcoming work, *The Roman Community at Table During the Principate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); and the forthcoming book by Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, announced for 2003). Cf. Giuseppe Nenci, "Pratiche alimentari e forme di definizione e distinzione nella Grecia arcaica," in *Homo edens: Regimi, miti e pratiche dell'alimentazione nella civiltà del Mediterraneo* (ed. Oddone Longo and Paolo Scarpi; Milan: Diapress, 1989) 25–30.

15 "Commensality and Social Morphology," 25.

16 "Commensality and Social Morphology," 24.

17 "Commensality and Social Morphology," 24.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

made, what the determinants of groupness are, on why some sustain themselves while others have a short shelf-life;¹⁸ he simply notes that society consists of a large diversity of groups (however, classified), and that groups avail themselves of existing social forms to signify themselves and distinguish themselves from other groups (who are also making use of the same social forms). All this needs to be worked out, and there is no shortage of conceptual and ethnographic help if we are inclined to do so, but for now I'd simply like to stress that Grignon's starting point repositions our approach to meals. Rather than asking about the *morphology of meals*, our leading question might concern the *morphology of groups*;¹⁹ rather than asking what do *meals* do, we might ask what specific *groups* do with meals (and food, for that matter, to which I will address a brief comment, if time permits); rather than pursuing *commensal forms* we might try to ferret out *commensal interests*. This lists of "rathers" should not be read as oppositional pairs, of course, but merely as a way of staking out the angle from which to sneak up on the problem of classifying Greco-Roman meals and the marks of "distinction"²⁰ that we

18 This brief paper also is not the place for me to trouble myself with "group," around which a huge social-scientific literature has been piled, of course. My starting inclinations are best articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32 (1982) 1-17; and by Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) esp. 3-26.

19 Note the relevance of this apart from strictly theoretical considerations. Thus Donahue, "Toward a Typology of Roman Public Feasting," 431-32: "it is readily apparent that the Romans preferred to dine in distinct groups, whether priest, senator, plebeian, patrician, or *curia* member." Though note Jameson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 53-61, on the *kapeleia*, popular eateries/taverns that provided a place for the individual diner/drinker and spontaneous commensality of those who happened to be present.

20 See Pierre Bourdieu (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* [trans. Richard Nice; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987]) for theoretical assists on the question of why and how groups within a society/culture differentiate themselves from other groups and/or classes in the same society. Cf. Alan Warde, Lydia Martens and Wendy Olsen, "Consumption and the Problem of Variety: Cultural Omnivorousness, Social Distinction and Dining Out," *Sociology* 33 (1999) 105-127: "... people ... use consumption behaviour to signify who they are to other people, from whom they hope to gain approval and esteem for their 'style' ... In [a consumptive society] two typical problems occur for groups or classes trying to establish their claims to good taste; firstly, to legitimate the superiority of their own cultural practices and, secondly, to demonstrate in communication with others that they are indeed

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

might adduce for Christian meals *qua* Greco-Roman meals.

Grignon proposes three paired types of commensality based on his loosely described “social morphology.” The pairs are domestic, institutional; everyday, exceptional; segregative, transgressional.²¹ In the few minutes allotted to me, I do not have time for an exposition of these categories, some of which are more relevant to us than others. Several general comments will have to do:

(1) Grignon’s focus on commensal groups and meals as a group instrumentalities brings into acute focus *hierarchies and competitiveness* between and within groups in the social whole and allows us to focus on how commensality procedures and rituals are a mechanism both for generating and reinscribing competitive edge, however measured.²² The late John D’Arms pointed out some time ago that “our chances of penetrating Roman convivial realities will improve if we discard the notion of equality altogether.”²³ Though he was commenting on Roman elite banquets, over against which one might put Greek table-fellowship and its putative aims of “friend-making” (τοῖς φίλοις ἡ θραπέζῃ, as Plutarch puts it [*Mor.* 612D]) or as a ritual of *isonomia*, the friendly and egalitarian aspects of the Greek tradition of commensality are best not exaggerated.²⁴ Arguably, the old Greek notion of *isonomia*, symbolized by

members of a superior grouping” (106-107).

21 These pairs are separated by a comma rather than by an oppositional siglum, such as “versus,” in order to indicate spectrums and ambiguities in the relationship of the two types in the pair.

22 See Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 28-31, on commensality in hierarchical societies.

23 D’Arms, “The Roman Convivium.”

24 E.g., Michael Peachin, “Friendship and Abuse at the Dinner Table,” in *Aspects of Friendship in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. M. Peachin; JRA Suppl. 43; Portsmouth, RI, 2001) 135–44, and the literature cited there; see Alfred Schäfer, *Unterhaltung beim griechischen Symposion: Darbietungen, Spiele und Wettkämpfe von homerischer bis in spätclassischer Zeit* (Mainz: Zabern, 1997); instructive evidence and analysis also in James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (London: Harper Collins, 1997). More generally on the instrumentality of “friendship”

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

the distribution of equal portions in civic banquets, table arrangements, etc., was limited to the civic elite and restricted to citizens for their political purposes in the archaic and classical city.²⁵ In the Hellenistic *polis*, and no doubt in part under the influence of *Romanitas* and its more undisguised hierarchical social values, commensal practices basically served, in the words of Richard Gordon, “to register and naturalise the inequalities of the social system,”²⁶ as the Dutch scholar Onno van Nijf has recently demonstrated again in his work on professional associations in the Roman East.²⁷ When we put into the foreground of our inquisition the hierarchical values of Roman society and the stratifying strategies and tactics that groups therein employed,²⁸ several topics

for competitive gain see G. Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

25 See John Rundin, “The Politics of Eating: Feasting in Early Greek Society,” *AJP* 117 (1996) 179-215; for instructive analogies on the politics of commensality see, e.g., Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, “Persian Food: Stereotypes and Political Identity,” in *Food in Antiquity* (ed. M. J. Dobson, F. D. Harvey, and John Wilkins; Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1995) 286–302; Abbebe Kifleyesus, “Muslims and Meals: The Social and Symbolic Function of Food in Changing Socio-Economic Times,” *Africa* 72 (2002) 245-76.

26 Richard Gordon, “The Veil of Power: Emperors, Sacrificers and Benefactors,” in *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (ed. Mary Beard and John North; London: Duckworth, 1990) 229 (199-231).

27 Onno M. Van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 17; Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997) 149-52. As van Nijf points out, “Roman forms of commensality had a very different tradition. Roman sacrificial banquets (as well as other forms of commensality for which they served as model, including private and public banquets) emphasised the difference between the participants. ... This model was characteristic of all kinds of formal dinner, and of other food-sharing and food-giving rituals in Roman society. Even private dinners had a hierarchical set-up; the size of the portions, the location of the seats and the quality of the food could all be used as stratifying devices, allowing even the subtlest of status distinctions to be recognised” (*Civic World*, 152-53). Van Nijf (*Civic World*, 153) cites Pliny’s well-known sentiment as representative of the Roman view of dinners as stratifying practices: “I mean to congratulate you on the way in which you preserve the distinctions of class and rank; once these are thrown into confusion and destroyed, nothing is more unequal than the resultant equality” (*Ep.* 9.5.3). For additional argument see, for example, Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 113-43; and Mireille Corbier, “The Broad Bean and the Moray: Social Hierarchies and Food in Rome,” in *Food: A Culinary History* (ed. J. L. Flandrin and Massimo Montanari; New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 129-40.

28 I use the terms “strategy” and “tactic” as defined and differentiated by Michel de Certeau, *The*

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

related to commensality float into view as needing more work, both in terms of researching the evidence and worrying about conceptual precision.

(i) We know that social meals, whether Christian or not, neither cooked nor served themselves. Both were performed generally by what John D'Arms calls "the human props"²⁹ in ancient domestic and non-domestic dining venues, i.e., slaves, who by and large continue to remain invisible in scholarship on early Christian meals even though by some estimates there were six million slaves in the Roman empire of the Principate — with who-knows-how-many in Christian households.³⁰ Especially in light of the recent work by Jennifer Glancy on the obstacles to slaves' participation in the Corinthian Christian association³¹ we perhaps ought to adduce as much evidence as we have — and there is not much from the early period, I suspect³² — and see what a focus on the slave allows us to learn (or plausibly imagine) about early Christian banquets.³³

Practice of Everyday Life (trans. Steven Rendall; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 34-42.

29 John D'Arms, "Slaves at Roman Convivia," in *Dining in a Classical Context* (ed. W. J. Slater; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) 171 (171-83).

30 G. Scheidel, "Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire," *JRS* 87 (1997) 156-69.

31 Jennifer A. Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church," *JBL* 117 (1998) 481-501; idem, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

32 Although the interaction between master and domestic slave in the *domus* is a recurring topos in Greco-Roman literature, it is still the case that "In spite of this [literary] interest we know much too little about the physical details of the cohabitation of slaves and free in the Roman household" (William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000] 4). Though I am not familiar with what evidence we have for domestics in Christian households, I suspect Fitzgerald's general conclusion applies even more in this particular instance.

33 The literature on slavery in relation to ancient meals and commensal practices is meagre, indicating an underworked topic in relation to ancient meals. On slavery in general see, e.g., Ellen M. Wood, "Landlords and Peasants, Masters and Slaves: Class Relations in Greek and Roman Antiquity," *Historical Materialism* 10/3 (2002) 17-69 (and literature cited there); on slaves and banquets see esp. John H. D'Arms, "The Roman Convivium and the Idea of Equality," in *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (ed. Oswyn Murry; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 308-20; idem, "Slaves at Roman Convivia," in *Dining in a Classical Context* (ed. W. J. Slater; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) 171-83; idem, "Performing Culture: Roman Spectacle and the Banquets of the Powerful," in *The Art*

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

For example, Pedar Foss makes the following summary statement on slaves and banquets: “While slaves were accepted as part of the banquet’s course and (sometimes) admired for their entertainment, they were simultaneously segregated from the real camaraderie of the meal. In a sense, they were performing puppets, subject to derision, degradation, abuse and punishment.”³⁴ It remains a task still to examine if Christian meals demonstrated a difference in this regard, whether in “nuance” or in “focus” (Klinghardt).

(ii) Hierarchy was heavily gendered, as we know. And, although gender and early Christian commensality has been brought into relation in scholarship, more work remains to be done, both in light of some recent revisionist classical scholarship on women’s commensality in the Greco-Roman world³⁵ and in light of an increasingly clear picture of voluntary associations. It seems to me that when it comes to early Christian meals, as in other topics as well, we have been somewhat too seduced by the

of Ancient Spectacle (ed. Bettina Bergmann and Christine Kondoleon; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 301-19; cf. Pedar W. Foss, *Kitchens and Dining Rooms at Pompeii: The Spatial and Social Relationship of Cooking to Eating in the Roman Household* (PhD Dissertation; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994), 45-56. Iconographic evidence in Gernot Piccottini, *Die Dienerinnen- und Dienerreliefs des Stadtgebietes von Virunum* (CSIR Österreich II.3; Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977); and now especially Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, “The Waiting Servant in Later Roman Art,” *AJP* 124 (2003) 443-68.

34 Foss, *Kitchen and Dining Rooms*. Foss continues: “Slaves were socially as well as physically dirty. Except for the Saturnalia, they tended not to dine in a well-decorated room with nice furnishings and service of their own; they are pictured instead snacking in the kitchen. Some slaves were allowed only the leftovers of the meal, taking what the guests left behind after filling their own napkins. Slaves on some country estates are shown receiving rations from the bailiff and eating them around a fire. Slaves, the original ‘nobodies’ and lacking social identity, were not allowed to eat what, how or when they liked. That picture is given by their masters; how true is it? Were slaves scavengers, eating off the plates as they cleaned them, fighting for scraps? Or did slaves have their own place and time for rations during which they could enjoy the social interaction of their peers? Did slaves of differing status within a household eat differently?”

35 Jennifer Glancy’s recent work (see n. 31) is most relevant even though she does not focus on female slaves’ participation in Christian meals *per se*; in general see Joan Burton, “Women’s Commensality in the Ancient Greek World,” *Greece & Rome* 45 (1998) 143-65; Matthew Roller, “Horizontal Women: Posture and Sex in the Roman Convivium,” *AJP* 124 (2003) 377-422.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

metaphorics of egalitarianism and fictive families (imagined too often as happy modern families), metaphorics which, by idealizing, camouflage the social realities, perhaps even deliberately deconspicuate them so as thereby precisely to leave them be and/or reinforce them. I am suggesting that we can do better than we have done on issues of intramural hierarchies in the Christian meal scene.

(iii) The final underworked topic I want to mention in connection to commensality as a stratifying practice concerns the relatively recent and intriguing argument by John Riggs in his study of food in the *Didache*.³⁶ There he argues for a trajectory that goes from the “table-sharing of Jesus” to a form of cultic activity (the eucharist) that places food in the custody of the patriarchal control of the bishop. I am not much taken by his trajectory but *do* think that his suggestion of a connection between the development of the mono-episcopate, “the growth of patriarchy” and “power over food” in early Christianities deserves our serious consideration in the form of careful study.³⁷ A focus on food, resource management and early Christian alimentary distributive schemes will assist our study of meals to contribute more broadly to the wider effort to (re)describe the early history of Christianity. In addition, it may be in examining Riggs’ provocation that we could find a plausible scholarly narrative on the development of the “nibble-and-sip” (Crossan) dinner, i.e., the relatively foodless eucharist.

(2) When we think of meals it is common both in popular and in scholarly

36 John W. Riggs, “The Sacred Food of *Didache* 9-11 and Second-Century Ecclesiologies,” in *The Didache in Context: Essays on its Text, History, and Transmission* (ed. Clayton N. Jefford; NovT Supplements 77; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 256-83. Cf. idem, “From Gracious Table to Sacramental Elements: The Tradition-History of *Didache* 9 and 10,” *Second Century* (1984) 83-101.

37 Riggs, “Sacred Food,” 275-83. See also C. A. Bobertz, “The Role of the Patron in the *Cena Dominica* of Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition*,” *JTS* 44 (1993) 170-84. Cf. Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric*, where I argue in the context of an analysis of a Lukan banquet that Luke shows an interest in defending “a centralized and authoritarian kind of proto-bishopry” (181).

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

thought to stress the inclusionary aspect of commensality, the bonding effects of meals, and the like. Grignon helps us to reposition our imagination with his category of “segregative commensality,” which, he argues, is “likely to be found in hierarchised and discontinues societies, those in which hierarchisation is the very principle of structure and social life, and where this hierarchisation goes with social heterogeneity and repulsion, which render the distances between social universes impassable and the very idea of passing unthinkable.”³⁸ In such social contexts, commensality tends to “approve and express discontinuities that separate human groups”; and “to meet for eating and drinking is a way to set up or to restore the group by closing it, a way to assert or to strengthen a ‘We’ by pointing out and rejecting, as symbols of otherness, the ‘not We’, strangers, rivals, enemies, superiors, or inferiors. From this point of view, to include means first of all to exclude, to invite [means] to avoid.”³⁹ One is reminded here of the Pompeian graffito (cited above), “The man with whom I do not dine is a barbarian to me.” One could cite many explicit or implied instances of this from the early Christian material. A good example comes from the *Clementine Homilies*:

[W]e do not live with all indiscriminately; nor do we take our food from the same table as Gentiles, inasmuch as we cannot eat along with them, because they live impurely. But when we have persuaded them to have true thoughts, and to follow a right course of action, and have baptized them with a thrice blessed invocation, then we dwell with them. For not even if it were our father, or mother, or wife, or child, or brother, or any other one having a claim by nature on our affection, can we venture to take our meals with him; for our religion compels us to make a distinction. Do not, therefore, regard it as an insult if your son does not take his food along with you, until you come to have the same opinions and adopt the same course of conduct as he follows. (*Clementine Homilies* 13.4; ANF 8; emphasis added).

Looking at this (and other instances) as an example of segregative commensality may

38 Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 29. He points to the Indian caste system as the “most accomplished example” of this.

39 Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 28-29.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

achieve a usefully different regard for the conviviality of social dining (perhaps, what Smith calls “festive joy”), a theme that is usually prominent in studies of early Christian meals. In Grignon’s social-theoretical view, however, we should not confuse commensality with conviviality.⁴⁰ They are related, of course, but the latter is the result of the former, and in commensalities that are identifiable driven by segregative motives, the euphoria (Grignon’s term) that comes from eating together may be at least as much the result of the pleasure gained from those who are delectably absent, not invited, than from those who are present. “The attention attracted by this in-group conviviality (and academic analyses generally do not fail to provide it) must not allow us to forget that the group shows itself so freely to itself only because it is out sight of strangers – that part of the memorable pleasure that the participants get from the meeting is due to the feeling of the deprivation of ‘others’ (who do not even know ‘what they are missing’).”⁴¹ And as John F. Donahue has pointed out, “the segregative model would seem to fit especially well with those meals enjoyed by the many *collegia* of the Roman world. Comprised of free men and/or slaves and commonly centered around a specific deity or trade, the *collegium* met a strong desire for exclusivity in Roman society among the lower orders ... allowing them to imitate in many ways the social and administrative organization of the larger society.”⁴² Again, there is not time to consider all the implications and possibilities this notion of segregative commensality could mean for us, but it seems to me it has both corrective and constructive potential, if only to highlight not solidarity (which we usually do, and by no means errantly so) but reactive, even aggressive

40 Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 24, 29.

41 Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 29. On the “socially negative” effects of commensality see also Albert O. Hirschman, “Melding the Public and Private Spheres: Taking Commensality Seriously,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Selected Writings* (New York: Zone, 1998), 11-32.

42 Donahue, “Toward a Typology of Roman Public Feasting,” 432-33.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

rejection, exclusion and scorn that, paradoxically, enhances the conviviality of the in-group.⁴³

(3) Although segregative commensal practices are typical, perhaps the norm, of strongly hierarchized societies, they also manifest what Grignon calls “transgressive commensalities,” by which he means those commensal practices that “temporarily and symbolically” expose the ambivalence of the firm borders that divide groups in a society, but “by transgressing them ... contributes to recognising and maintaining them.⁴⁴ The Roman *Saturnalia* and the famously lavish *Cenae* of Domitian are the most spectacular and best-known examples of transgressive commensality in antiquity,⁴⁵ but I would suggest that we also consider the Greco-Roman so-called “anti-symposia” that we know especially from the satirical literature, a type of banquet that used parody, comedy, obscenity and burlesque to subvert the ideology and deface the coin of the standard elite banquet; it is a type that is exploited at least by Luke where it appears to have all the characteristics of Grignon’s model of transgressive commensality.⁴⁶ Further study of

43 “Segregative commensality” may be conceptually thickened with the notion of “public mystery”: the segregated commensal unit advertizes its closedness by publicly announcing its segregation, and the very fact of its public self-obscurtion aids in the in-group’s self-definition (and, no doubt) arouses the conviviality of the public-but-hidden in-group. On the notion of “public secrecy” as a strategy for social formation see Michael H. Jameson, “The Spectacular and the Obscure in Athenian Religion,” in *Performance-Culture and Athenian Democracy* (ed. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 321-40; Michael T. Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); a marvellous ethnographic example is in Robert I. Levy, *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 335-38.

44 Grignon, “Commensality and Social Morphology,” 30-31.

45 On the *cenae* of Domitian as examples of transgressive commensality see now Donahue, “Toward a Typology of Roman Public Feasting,” 434-37.

46 Description of and literature on the literary and social “anti-symposia” in W. Braun, “Symposium or Anti-Symposium? Reflections on Luke 24:1-24,” in *Scriptures and Cultural Conversations: Essays for Heinz Guenther at 65* [= *Toronto Journal of Theology* 8/1] (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Leif E. Vaage; Toronto, 1992) 70-84; idem, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (SNTMS 85; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 38-39; cf. B. R. Bracht, *Unruly Eloquence: Lucian and the Comedy of Traditions* (Revealing Antiquity 2; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); a fascinating analogous

early Christian dining in transgressive mode would be well worth our time, I think.

3. Food and Diet Matters

Finally, now going to a topic that is not too much dictated by the problem of commensal morphologies as by the fact that all this talk of dinners probably risks becoming an exercise in hyper-idealist phantasmagoria unless we set some food on the table. We know that food types, diet (moderation and self-control vs. gluttony) in relation to physical and moral health is among the standard topics in Hellenistic moralizing, philosophical, and medical literature.⁴⁷ I will not develop this point here but simply register “food” as (obviously!) an indispensable element of commensality. We might begin by indexing early Christian food-talk,⁴⁸ then develop an analytic that is informed

ethnographic exemplum and analysis is in Jane and Peter Schneider, “Mafia Burlesque: The Profane Mass as a Peace-Making Ritual,” *Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 9 (1982) 408-33; cited from the reprint in *Religion, Power and Protest in Local Communities: The Northern Shore of the Mediterranean* (ed. Eric Wolf; Religion and Society 24; Berlin: Mouton, 1984) 117-35. There is much to learn from the Schneiders’ effort to explain an odd Western Sicilian feast in which the central ritual is “an obscene and vulgar mass performed by men in women’s clothes in mockery of the priesthood, also in mockery of women for their blind allegiance to the Church” (133) that is witnessed by clerics and civic officials.

47 A few examples of scholarship that is quite voluminous: Danielle Gourevitch, “Le menu de l’homme libre: Recherches sur l’alimentation et la digestion dans les oeuvres en prose de Sénèque le philosophe,” in *Mélanges de philosophie, de littérature et d’histoire ancienne offerts à Pierre Boyancé* (Collection de l’Ecole française de Rome 22; Rome: École française de Rome, 1974) 311–44; Andrew Dalby, *Siren Feasts: A History of Food and Gastronomy in Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Oddone Longo and Paolo Scarpi (eds), *Homo edens: Regimi, miti e pratiche dell’alimentazione nella civiltà del Mediterraneo* (Milan: Diapress, 1989); *Galen on Food and Diet* (trans. with notes by Mark Grant; London: Routledge, 2000); John Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000); Andrew Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

48 The “idol food” issue in Corinth appears to have been the main course of scholarly digestion of early Christian food issues. Perhaps someone can explain to me the perplexing (to me, that is) classification of foodstuff found in Hippolytus: “These are the fruits which he [the bishop] shall bless: the grape, fig, pomegranate, olive, pear, apple, blackberry, peach, cherry, almond, and plum. But not the pumpkin, melon, cucumber, onion, garlic, or any other vegetable” (*Apostolic Tradition*, 32).

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

by a host of studies on food preferences, taboos, and significations⁴⁹ in Greco-Roman antiquity and by a burgeoning corpus of recent cultural and anthropological studies on food, social formation and identity, and cultural politics.

4. Summary

I summarize my response in three short points:

(1) Matthias Klinghardt and Dennis Smith have, with their work, brought us to a terminus that should now be our point of departure. Let's grant the point that Christians in the Greco-Roman world knew themselves, and were recognized by others, to practice a culturally familiar type of commensality.

(2) Pointing our classificatory effort at the morphology/structure of the typical Greco-Roman banquet or symposium may thus not required too much fuss from us any longer. Instead of hoping that a typology of meal form will aid us in understanding the mechanisms and effects of commensality, I suggest that we devise a typology of commensality that will be more productive for us – not to speak of intellectually challenging. We do not have to rely on the historical evidence to disclose to us a classificatory scheme for sorting that evidence; nor should we self-evidently rely on our informants (early Christian writers; Greco-Roman banqueters) to present to us a typology; inventing one to suit our purposes is *our* job.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the attribution of magical powers to food in early Christian eucharistic practices, as argued by Triggs, "The Sacred Food of *Didache* 9-10." The Greek Magical Papyri and extant divination handbooks (e.g., Thessalos of Tralles' astral-herbal manual; text in Hans-Veit Friedrich, *Thessalos von Tralles: Griechisch und lateinisch* [Meisenheim a.G.: Anton Hein, 1968]), that gravitate around foodstuff would usefully be brought to bear on this topic.

Typology of Form or Form of Typology?

(3) Urged by the possibilities suggested by Claude Grignon, I suggest that we pay attention to commensal groups and ask not what they do *at* meals (though that too of course) but what they do *with* meals (and food!). I think this will lend detail, specificity and conceptual robustness to the commensal effects that Smith rightly identifies (intramural and extramural boundary-construction, conviviality, etc.) and allow us to chase what Klinghardt calls the differences in “nuance” and “focus.”