

SERHII SMAHLO

# Jesus' Meals with Sinners

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*  
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**Mohr Siebeck**

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# Jesus' Meals with Sinners

Enactment of Reversal on the Background of  
Early Jewish Eschatological Expectations

Mohr Siebeck

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For Ksyu



## Preface

This book is a revised version of my doctoral thesis, defended at the University of Jena in 2022, with some minor adjustments in several respects.

The journey of this study has been long. My fascination with the topic began during the better days of the biblical department at the Moscow Theological Academy.<sup>1</sup> As I was working on my master's thesis on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians, I realized how illuminating an apocalyptic background could be for understanding the New Testament writings. From that point on, my research moved irreversibly toward the earlier layers of the New Testament and eventually arrived at the topic of Jesus's table fellowships with his unconventional companions – a subject that accompanied me for years and found its outcome in the doctoral dissertation. At some point in my intensive search through all the available material, I came to recognise an eschatological reversal underlying Jesus's meals with "tax collectors and sinners." However obvious and natural this correlation between Jesus's actions and apocalyptic envisioning may have appeared at first, the path through the mist of evidence proved to be full of unexpected turns and discoveries. On the one hand, I would agree that the journey is no less important than its goal. On the other, it was only toward the end that what I consider the most significant among the findings of this study began to emerge. If anyone following the same path through this book should catch a glimpse of what looms beyond – hinting, perhaps, at the unexpected nature of the Kingdom of God – then I would consider this work not to have been in vain.

I am thankful to all my friends and colleagues who supported me – personally and professionally – along the way. The completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of the EKD, whose scholarship enabled me to spend this valuable time with my family in a German university city. I am personally thankful to Martin Illert and Wolfram Langpape for their attentive support in connection with the scholarship. My deep thanks go to Tobias Nicklas for his professional support during my stay in Regensburg in the summer of 2017, where, in one of his seminars, I was able to sketch a way forward for my preliminary study. I cannot fail to mention Joel Marcus, for every meeting with him – whether at conferences or beyond – is

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<sup>1</sup> It was some years before it woefully took the catastrophic path of aligning itself with the war of aggression against my country and its people, which has brought, and continues to bring, nothing but death and destruction. With the hope for true and lasting peace, I am writing this.

marked by friendly attentiveness and professional feedback that inspired me to continue my research. To Dale Allison I am indebted not only for his studies – which inspired me and consistently exemplified methodological clarity and deep insight – but also for our immensely helpful email exchanges during my research. My thanks also go to the circle of Café NT, the New Testament Seminar at the Theological Faculty of the University of Jena – Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, Manuel Vogel, Klaus Scholtissek, Johannes Beck, and Volker Rabens – where I received valuable feedback and was able to discuss my study from its initial presentation to its later outcomes.

Yet with all the professional and friendly support I received, and with all the eagerness for research I had, this work would still have been impossible without the best Doktorvater I was fortunate enough to meet in my life – Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr. From the very beginning of our stay in Jena, we enjoyed attentive care that extended from great kindness in personal matters to professional guidance of rare excellence. I always received quick and thorough replies to my constant emails with numerous questions concerning my research. We frequently had unforgettable personal meetings, arranged at each of my requests and often lasting more than an hour, in which we discussed every difficulty in my study. As a family, we felt – and still feel – the continuous support from him and his wife, Anna. Dear Karl-Wilhelm and Anna, our heartfelt thanks to you both.

My dear sons, Seryozha, Vanya, and Gavriil, thank you for bringing me back to life after long hours spent in academic analysis and journeys through apocalyptic texts – by waiting at the window and then rushing toward me at the door with your unconditional joy and overflowing life. My precious Ksyu, thank you for being with me throughout this journey. Your love, patience, support, and the inspiration of your joyful and ever-lively heart are present in every effort of this work and behind it. Though you deserve only perfect gifts, and this study is far from perfect, I dare to dedicate it to you – not in the sum of its text, but in whatever insights it may offer or glimpses it may catch sight of along the way.

Jena, in September 2025

Serhii Smahlo

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## Note on Abbreviations

All abbreviations follow *SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd edition. Where no guidance is provided by SBL, *IATG*<sup>3</sup> has been followed.



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 The Subject of the Study

Jesus's table fellowship with "tax collectors and sinners," along with his other deeds, fits within the general framework of his eschatological outlook. This is why the subject of this study is rather complex, and defining it as "Jesus's meals with tax collectors and sinners" highlights only one of the various aspects of the issue at hand. While particular focus lies on Jesus's meals with those deemed unworthy, this topic is not investigated on its own, but in relation to a broader context. The belonging of the subject to the eschatological background with the kingdom of God in view is, however, much more than an issue of context. In a sense, Jesus's close proximity to sinners is considered here as a particular case of the eschatological outlook presented in the Jesus tradition. The main focus of this research is, therefore, not the exact definition of the terms "sinners," "tax collectors," or others, but rather the question of how the inclusion of participants of Jesus's meals in the kingdom was explained and justified by Jesus, and whether/how this fits within the eschatological picture he proclaimed. Thus, more specifically, the subject of the study is Jesus's table fellowship with "tax collectors and sinners" as a particular manifestation of the apocalyptic view, namely that of the eschatological reversal.

### 1.2 The History of the Issue

The theme of Jesus's table fellowship, including his associations with "tax collectors and sinners" in particular, has been the focus of a great deal of study.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the theme of Jesus's table fellowship with sinners cf., e.g., János Bolyki, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaften*, WUNT 2/96 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); Mary Jeanette Marshall, "Jesus and the Banquets: An Investigation of the Early Christian Tradition Concerning Jesus' Presence at Banquets with Toll Collectors and Sinners" (PhD diss., Murdoch University, 2002); Craig Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, NSBT 19 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); idem, "The Authenticity and Significance of Jesus' Table Fellowship with Sinners," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, WUNT 247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 215–50; Cecilia Wassen, "Jesus' Table Fellowship with 'Toll Collectors and Sinners': Questioning the Alleged Purity Implications," *JSHJ* 14 (2016): 137–57. See the review article by Jos-

Since the subject of this study is not the meals on their own, but their relation to the eschatological perspective, a survey of the history of the issue will mostly focus on how Jesus's meals with "tax collectors and sinners" were interpreted by scholars in regard to the eschatological view presented in the Jesus tradition. The idea that Jesus's uncommon table fellowship with outcasts had a bearing on the eschatological expectations, namely that it promoted the inclusion of its participants in the kingdom of God, has been shared even by scholars with very different views on the question of eschatology in the Jesus tradition.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation, in various ways and terms, is held by Eduard Schweizer,<sup>3</sup>

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tein Ådna: Jostein Ådna, "Jesus' Meals and Table Companions," in *Old Testament, Early Judaism, New Testament, vol. 1 of The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts. Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, eds. David Hellholm and Dieter Sänger, WUNT 376 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 1:331–53. See also studies on Jesus's associations with sinners: Peter Fiedler, *Jesus und die Sünder*, BBE 3 (Frankfurt: Lang, 1975); Martin Völkel, "Freund der Zöllner und Sünder," *ZNW* 69 (1978): 1–10; E. P. Sanders, "Jesus and the Sinners," *JSNT* 19 (1983): 5–36; James D. G. Dunn, "Pharisees, Sinners, and Jesus," in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 463–88. See also studies of the meals in the New Testament and the early church in general, e.g., Bruce D. Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings: Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles*, NovTSup 72 (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth, 1971); Lee E. Klosinski, "The Meals in Mark" (Ph.D., Claremont Graduate School, 1988); Bernd Kollmann, *Ursprung und Gestalten der frühchristlichen Mahlfeier*, GTA 43 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990) with a structured review of the research history (17–33); Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*, TANZ 13 (Tübingen: Francke, 1996); Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist. The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Last Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017); Phillip J. Long, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Origin of the Eschatological Feast as a Wedding Banquet in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013); Peter-Ben Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom: Eschatological Meals and Scenes of Utopian Abundance in the New Testament*, WUNT 2/234 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Marcus Öhler, "Cultic Meals in Associations and the Early Christian Eucharist," *Early Christianity* 5 (2014): 475–502; Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Springer, 2012). See also some examples of studies on the meals in the Early Jewish tradition: Susan Marks and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in Early Judaism: Social Formation at the Table* (New York: Springer, 2014); Claudia D. Bergmann, *Festmahl ohne Ende: Apokalyptische Vorstellungen vom Speisen in der Kommenden Welt im antiken Judentum und ihre biblischen Wurzeln*, BWA(N)T (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 222 lists here James Breech, E. P. Sanders, Richard Horsley, Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Bruce Chilton, and John P. Meier ("their reconstructions of the historical Jesus differ on significant points. Yet they all agree in giving prominence to the table fellowship theme").

<sup>3</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinen Nachfolgern*, ATANT 28 (Zürich: Zwingli, 1962), 10: through the table fellowship with Jesus, sinners are received in "die Gemeinschaft mit Gott."

Ed Parish Sanders,<sup>4</sup> John Dominic Crossan,<sup>5</sup> John Meier,<sup>6</sup> Marcus Borg,<sup>7</sup> Bruce Chilton,<sup>8</sup> and others.<sup>9</sup> Considering the subject of this study, the main question for this section is how the inclusion of “sinners” into the kingdom was interpreted in previous research. If it is assumed as the main purpose of Jesus’s meals, then in what way is this accomplished? How does it correlate with the eschatological view of Jesus?

The idea that Jesus’s activity was directed towards the eschaton has been soundly stated by Albert Schweitzer.<sup>10</sup> Presenting Jesus’s activity as condi-

<sup>4</sup> See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 174–211.

<sup>5</sup> See John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 260–64, 332–53 interprets Jesus’s meals in terms of egalitarian tendency (as “open or egalitarian commensality,” *ibid.*, 262). Besides that, he argues for “the conjunction of magic and meal, miracle and table, compassion and commensality,” *ibid.*, 332. Moreover, noting that missionaries “share a miracle and a Kingdom” and “receive in return a table and a house,” Crossan claims that it is “the heart of the original Jesus’ movement, a shared egalitarianism of spiritual and material sources,” *ibid.*, 341.

<sup>6</sup> John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 303. By means of the criteria of multiple attestations and coherence, J. Meier comes to a cautious conclusion that “[a] solemn festive meal which Jesus used to communicate a share in eschatological salvation would not have been something utterly unheard of in his ministry.” Further, he suggests that Jesus’s “banquet with sinful Israelites were a preparation and foretaste of the coming banquet in the kingdom of God – a metaphor that appears in various sayings and parables.” In this regard, “the Last Supper does not stand in splendid isolation,” but “is instead quite literally the ‘last’ of a whole series of meals symbolising the final feast in the kingdom of God.”

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (London: Continuum, 1998), 96 views Jesus’s meals with sinners in the light of holiness. Thus, “as a public embodiment of holiness,” they “seemed to many a ‘survival symbol,’ which, if shattered or eroded, would threaten the cohesiveness of Israel, expose it to the disciplining judgment of God, and call into question the theological underpinning of society: the understanding of God as *qadosh/parush*.” Thus, Jesus’s “table fellowship, because it included quishlings and publicly enacted the breakdown of holiness as separation, pointed to an understanding of Israel different from that advocated by those seeking a holy, separated nation,” *ibid.* 244.

<sup>8</sup> Chilton is mainly concerned with issues of purity and interprets Jesus’s activity, including his fellowship at the table, in this context. Cf. Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings*, 38–39; *idem*, *God in Strength: Jesus’ Announcement of the Kingdom*, SNTSU 1 (Freistadt: Plöchl, 1979), 179–201.

<sup>9</sup> See also James Breech, *The Silence of Jesus: The Authentic Voice of the Historical Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 22–64; Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 178–80 (“almost certainly a celebration of the presence of the kingdom,” 178). More references see in Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 222, n. 6 (348–49). See also Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration*, SNTSMS 117 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 80.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (from the first German edition „Von Reimarus zu Wrede,” 1906; London: A. & C. Black, 1911).

tioned by the framework of “thoroughgoing eschatology” (konsequente Eschatologie),<sup>11</sup> Schweitzer pointed out an apocalyptic significance of Jesus’s deeds and teaching and his belonging to the common apocalyptic background.<sup>12</sup> A special significance of the theme of eschatological banquet<sup>13</sup> can be seen, for example, in the feeding of multitude.<sup>14</sup> Even though Schweitzer did not pay particular attention to Jesus’s table fellowship with sinners in regard to the apocalyptic context, the idea of considering Jesus’s deeds within the apocalyptic perspective proved crucial to many aspects of studying the historical Jesus and served as a starting point for further reconsideration and development.<sup>15</sup>

Among those who clearly and consistently suggested an eschatological reason behind Jesus’s meals with “tax collectors and sinners” was Norman Perrin, who defined them as “an acted parable,” yet “more, indeed, than an acted parable.”<sup>16</sup> He argued that Jesus’s table fellowship was “the central feature of the ministry of Jesus ... which must have been most meaningful to his followers and most offensive to his critics.”<sup>17</sup> It presupposed the image of the messianic feast particularly indicated in Matt 8:11.<sup>18</sup> The offensive nature of these meals could have been a reason for the accusation of Jesus and his end on the cross.<sup>19</sup> Besides that, Perrin assumes that the eschatological reversal “is one of the best attested themes of the message of Jesus. It proclaims the Kingdom as an eschatological reversal of the present and so invites, indeed demands, judg-

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<sup>11</sup> Idem, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1913), cf. 390–443.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. idem, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 361 n.1, 365–68.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, 311.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 421–22. Schweitzer compares a sacramental meaning of the feeding of multitude with that of the Last Supper, 425.

<sup>15</sup> In the Preface to his “The Parables of the Kingdom,” Dodd admits that his own “work began by being oriented to the problem as Schweitzer had stated it,” even though he was “unconvinced” by the “formula of ‘konsequente Eschatologie.’” See C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1961), vii.

<sup>16</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 102.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. This feature signifies “the possibility of a new kind of relationship with God and with one’s fellow man,” *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 161–64.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 103: “There must have been a factor in the situation which both drove the authorities themselves to desperate measures and also gave them a defense against popular accusation. We suggest that a regular table-fellowship, in the name of the Kingdom of God, between Jesus and his followers, when those followers included ‘Jews who had made themselves as Gentiles,’ would have been just such a factor.” Similarly, Fuchs linked Jesus’s fellowship with sinners with his intention to suffer: “when Jesus directs the sinner beyond death to the God of grace he knows he must suffer.” Ernst Fuchs, “The Quest of the Historical Jesus,” in *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, trans. Andrew Scobie, SBT 42 (London: SCM, 1964), 11–31, here 26.

ment upon the present.”<sup>20</sup> Even though these considerations, taken together, could lead to the notion that “sinners” were included within the framework of reversal, no such proposals are found in his works.

Jesus’s meals as an announcement of the kingdom has also been attested by Günther Bornkamm, who pointed out that their significance is made clear within the framework offered in Jesus’s parables.<sup>21</sup> He considered Jesus’s meals with sinners and tax collectors to be understood in connection with “his proclamation of the coming kingdom of God.”<sup>22</sup> Although he refers to the fact that there are no apparent indications of “the historical situation” in the parables, their framework does convey the connection: “der Rahmen” [ist] “nicht gleichgültig, sondern ein der Sache entsprechender, unmißverständlicher Hinweis, daß was die Gleichnisse sagen in Jesu Tischgemeinschaft geschieht.”<sup>23</sup> Besides, he considers Jesus’s associations with “tax collectors” and “sinners” alongside his attention to those on the margins of society, listing among them the sick, possessed, Gentiles, women and children, and “immer wieder schlechte Personen, Schuldiggewordene, von denen der Fromme sich geflissentlich fernhält.”<sup>24</sup> However, he seems not to notice a preferable position granted for those “schlechte Personen” and defines a relationship with them quite in line with the easily comprehended explanation given in Mark 2:17.<sup>25</sup>

Géza Vermes argues that Jesus, in contrast to the Essenes, who “practice reserving instruction to initiates only . . . , addressed his preaching . . . to all Jews with ears to hear.”<sup>26</sup> He points out that “even within Israel he preferred the uneducated, the poor, the sinners and the social outcasts.”<sup>27</sup> Vermes seems to

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<sup>20</sup> Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 52. To “the eschatological reversal sayings” Perrin assigns Mark 8:35; 10:23b, 25; 10:31; Luke 14:11.

<sup>21</sup> Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus von Nazareth*, UB 19 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956), 74 points to the parable of the great feast and the three parables in Luke 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 74: “Es kann darum kein Zweifel sein, daß auch Jesu irdische Tischgemeinschaft mit den Zöllnern und Sündern in einem tiefen Zusammenhang steht mit seiner Verkündigung der kommenden Gottesherrschaft.” However, as Bornkamm adds, “[w]ir dürfen diesen Zusammenhang nicht schnell und fest mit den Vorstellungen einer Messias-Dogmatik verknüpfen.”

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73 emphasises that there is no “Umwertung aller Werte” in Jesus’s activity. Further, “[s]eine Freiheit erweist sich nicht in der abstrakten Kritik der Maßstäbe, sondern in der Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der er die Menschen selbst, die ihn brauchen, über die geltenden Grenzen hinweg sich begegnen läßt und ihnen so ihre Ehre gibt,” *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Géza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–27. “All were called to repentance and told that God’s rule over the world was imminent,” 27. Vermes interprets Jesus’ role “as healer of the physically ill, exorciser of the possessed, and dispenser of forgiveness to sinners” in the context of “charismatic Judaism,” *ibid.*, 58.

grasp the essence when he argues that at this point Jesus's attitude to "sinners" differs "from both his contemporaries and even his prophetic predecessors," who stood in favour of the poor, widows, and the oppressed.<sup>28</sup> He notes that Jesus "went further" and "took his stand among the pariahs of his world," receiving "sinners" as "his table-companions" and "the ostracised tax-collectors and prostitutes" as "his friends."<sup>29</sup> However, this quite accurate observation needs to be interpreted in relation to the backdrop of Jesus's story, especially to the apocalyptic picture outlined in the Jesus tradition.

A notion presented by Joachim Jeremias has become well-known, who argued that Jesus, rejecting the Pharisees' stance toward "'ammê hā'āreš" as those who would perish,<sup>30</sup> proclaimed them – the common people – the kingdom instead. Although his interpretation of "sinners" around Jesus as "'ammê hā'āreš" has been proven incorrect,<sup>31</sup> the general idea that those called "sinners" are included in the course of eschatological reversal is worth noting, as it will be evident further on in this study.<sup>32</sup> Jeremias considered many of Jesus's parables with reference to "Rechtfertigung der Frohbotschaft" to the poor,<sup>33</sup> including those referred to in the Gospels as "sinners," "tax collectors," "prostitutes."<sup>34</sup> In this way, Jeremias came very close to defining them as participants of the reversal.<sup>35</sup>

In her dissertation, Maria Trautmann<sup>36</sup> examines Jesus's meals with sinners along with his other symbolic acts, regarding it, quite in line with the general trend, as "a sign of the granting of salvation to sinful Israel."<sup>37</sup> She outlined an approach according to which Jesus's meals should be seen in the wider con-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 224.

<sup>30</sup> See Joachim Jeremias, *Die Verkündigung Jesu*, vol. 1 of *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1971), 111–15. Sanders rejects this opinion. Cf. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 188–89.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Sanders's critique, who stated that "associating with sinners – the actual charge against Jesus – has nothing to do with associating with the common people, though I presume that Jesus did associate with them and was one of them," *ibid.*, 198–99.

<sup>32</sup> Another essential point is that Jeremias emphasised the prophetic acts of Jesus ("Auf immer neue Weise proklamiert Jesus durch seine Taten den Anbruch der Heilszeit"). Joachim Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), 151. He offers the lists of Jesus's acts that can be interpreted as parables of the coming kingdom, *ibid.*, 151–52. Cf. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions*, 80, who considers Jesus's table fellowship as "enacted parable" similar to one described in the parable of the great feast.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 41, 124–45.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 125.

<sup>35</sup> In more details, Jeremias's interpretation of the subject will be considered below.

<sup>36</sup> Maria Trautmann, *Zeichenhafte Handlungen Jesu: ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem geschichtlichen Jesus*, FB 37 (Würzburg: Echter, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

text of his associations with “tax collectors and other sinners.”<sup>38</sup> Besides that, Trautmann argues that the tradition of Jesus’s table fellowship with sinners should have been based on particular memories of his activity, suggesting that other traditions about his association with sinners should have traced back to the memory like that in Mark 2:15–17:<sup>39</sup>

Diese Überlieferungen bewahren ein Verhalten und eine Verkündigung Jesu, die ihm kaum zugeschrieben werden könnten ohne die Erinnerung an konkrete Handlungen Jesu, wie sie das Zöllnergastmahl darstellte.<sup>40</sup>

Establishing Jesus’s purpose of calling sinners, Trautmann points out that it is indicated by contrasting sinners with the righteous and in the symbolic meaning of the meal:

Die Gegenüberstellung Gerechte – Sünder und das vorausgehende Mahl als Zeichen der Gemeinschaft und der Freude weisen in die Richtung, wozu der Ruf Jesu erfolgt. Sünder/ Gerechte als religiös relevante Begriffe kennzeichnen einen Unheils- bzw. Heilszustand. Der Ruf Jesu an die Sünder ergeht zur Wende ihres Unheilszustand.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the terms “sinners” and “righteous” may have had a symbolic meaning that indicated the condition in the eschatological perspective. In this regard, Trautmann considers Jesus’s association with tax collectors as a sign that they are received in the kingdom.<sup>42</sup> Trautmann seems to be on the right track when she defines a new condition (Heilszustand) offered to “sinners” and relates it to the announcing of the kingdom. However, in order to discern in what way “sinners” are received by Jesus, and how this fits into the general apocalyptic/ eschatological picture of the Jesus tradition, a more complete survey of those involved and their eschatological status is needed.

E. P. Sanders considers the theme as a significant one, pointing at the same time to “the difficulty of giving it a meaningful setting,” since its explanations “require an extended treatment.” He admits that the answer to the question of “what we can learn from the fact that Jesus was accused of associating with ‘tax collectors and sinners’” is “harder to discover than is usually thought to be the case.”<sup>43</sup> An interpretation of the “sinners” associated with Jesus was expressed by Sanders as a response to the view presented by Jeremias. He

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. However, Trautmann limits her survey to stories of fellowship with “sinners” (Matt 11:19 // Luke 7:34; Luke 7:36–50; Mark 2:1–12) and attention to the “lost” (Luke 15), *ibid.*, 165–66.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “Auszuschließen ist, dass Jesu Einladung in direkter Weise Nachfolge oder Umkehr intendiert,” *ibid.*, 161.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 162 (“Im Zusammenhang des Auftretens Jesu und seiner Verkündigung der anbrechenden Basileia ..., realisiert die Tischgemeinschaft mit Zöllnern daher zeichenhaft das eschatologische Heilsangebot Gottes an die Sünder, die Einladung der Sünder zum ‘Gastmahl’ des anbrechenden Reiches Gottes”).

<sup>43</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 175–76

rejects the idea that “sinners” received by Jesus could be defined as “‘ammê hā’āreš” and that salvation was not available to them.<sup>44</sup> Instead, he renders “sinners” as “the truly wicked”<sup>45</sup> – “resha‘im”<sup>46</sup> and points out that “the promise of salvation” to them is “the undeniably distinctive characteristic of Jesus’ message.”<sup>47</sup> He also assumes that a questionable reputation both in a social and religious aspect was characteristic of Jesus’s followers: “the Gospels lead us to see his followers as being religiously the ‘sinners’ and socially the lame, halt and blind: that is, as being on the fringes of society for one reason or another.”<sup>48</sup> A significant originality suggested by Sanders consists of the notion that Jesus receiving “sinners” “may have offered them inclusion in the kingdom not only while they were still sinners but also without requiring repentance as normally understood.”<sup>49</sup> In this regard, Jesus “could have been accused of being a friend of people who indefinitely *remained* sinner.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 188–89.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 210.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 177. Chilton rejects this claim of Sanders: Bruce D. Chilton, “Jesus and the Repentance of E. P. Sanders,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 (1988): 1–18.

<sup>47</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 174. Further, he asserts that “[t]he one distinctive note which we may be certain marked Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom is that it would include the ‘sinners.’” To substantiate the reliability of the tradition, Sanders lists the following considerations: “(1) The material which conveys that message is large in extent. (2) It reaches us in many diverse forms – parables, other sayings, flat declarations of purpose, reports of Jesus’ activity, and reported accusations against him. (3) A high tolerance for sinners was not a characteristic of the early church, as far as we can know it,” *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 206. “If the sinners had repented, they would not have been sinners,” *ibid.* See also: “Jesus did not issue a call for repentance and that it was Luke who emphasised the reform of the wicked who accepted him,” *ibid.* On Sanders’s underestimation of the issues of impurity and repentance see James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 61–88; Bruce D. Chilton, “E. P. Sanders and the Question of Purity,” in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration*, ed. Bruce D. Chilton and C.A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 221–30. There are some recent endeavours to revive Sanders’s notion on sinners. Thus, Tobias Hägerland, “Jesus and the Rites of Repentance,” *NTS* 52.2 (2006): 166–87 distinguishes “between moral and ritual repentance” and argues that Jesus demanded only the former. Mark Allan Powell, “Jesus and the Pathetic Wicked: Re-visiting Sanders’s View of Jesus’ Friendship with Sinners,” *JSHJ* 13 (2015): 188–208 tries to explain “sinners” around Jesus as “slaves” and “expandables” (‘pathetic wicked’). Cf. also *idem*, “Was Jesus a Friend of Unrepentant Sinners? A Fresh Appraisal of Sanders’s Controversial Proposal,” *JSHJ* 7 (2009): 286–310. Wassen, “Jesus’ Table Fellowship,” 147 finds it “doubtful that the accusation about Jesus’ associating with sinners should be traced to any controversy over the proper way of repenting” and points out that “the claim that Jesus was eating with ‘toll collectors and sinners’ is of a general nature.”

<sup>50</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 206.

Sanders speaks of the inclusion of the unrepentant wicked in the kingdom as “the novelty and offence of Jesus’ message.”<sup>51</sup> Interpreting it in terms of an eschatological gesture, he asserts that “Jesus offered companionship to the wicked of Israel as a sign that God would save them.”<sup>52</sup> It resembles the way Sanders interprets Jesus’s act in the Temple as a foreshadowing of the coming events.<sup>53</sup> In the end, as Sanders states,

it would appear that Jesus’ eating with ‘tax collectors and sinners’ promised, as clearly as words, that they would inherit the kingdom; and thus it is likely that Jesus saw his eating with tax collectors and sinners as promising membership in the coming kingdom.<sup>54</sup>

However, as it will be discussed further, Sanders is not quite certain about ascribing eschatological meaning to table fellowship.

Jesus’s decision to receive the wicked is explained by Sanders as a display of haste in the face of an imminent end: “He may very well have thought that they had no time to create new lives for themselves, but that if they accepted his message they would be saved.”<sup>55</sup> Further, he sees here “[t]he implied self-claim, to know whom God would include and not, and the equally implied downgrading of the normal machinery of righteousness.”<sup>56</sup> In dealing with “sinners” Sanders sees a key difference between John and Jesus: if the former was “the preacher of repentance . . . , the spokesman for repentance and righteousness ordinarily understood,” the latter “proclaimed the inclusion of the wicked who heeded him.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, “Jesus offered the truly wicked – those beyond the pale and outside the common religion by virtue of their implicit or explicit rejection of the commandments of the God of Israel – admission to *his*

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 207. By repentance, Sanders means what “was universally understood,” i.e., making “restitution, sacrifice” and turning “to obedience to the law.” Thus, Jesus “did not make his association dependent on their conversion to the law,” *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 75. This reading stands in line with Schweitzer’s interpretation applied to the feeding of the multitude and John’s baptism (cf. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 375, 377, see also above). In both cases, the action in the present serves as a sign of a future reality. Schweitzer and Sanders explain Jesus’s actions with a reference to the eschaton, albeit with different understandings of it.

<sup>54</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 208. As Sanders points out, the meal may have served to envisage the future banquet in the kingdom as one can learn from several passages from the Jesus’ tradition, including an expectation of messianic banquet” in Matt 8:11, the image of the kingdom as a banquet in parables and, “most tellingly,” Mark 14:25 par., *ibid.* Another question is: “did it work out that way?” Sanders asks: “Did Jesus’ table-fellowship with sinners help prepare the way for the church which, instead of the kingdom, followed his ministry?” He assumes further that “[t]here is an obvious drawback to this proposal. Those who had table-fellowship with Jesus did not, with the exception of Peter and John, become major figures in the church.” Thus, “‘sinners’ are hard to find in the early church,” *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 206.

group (and, he claimed the kingdom) *if* they accepted him.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, a condition of being included in the kingdom might have been consisted in accepting Jesus – just the opposite of what he met in Galilean cities.<sup>59</sup> Sander suggests that Jesus’s preaching implied “covenantal nomism,” according to which all the Jews had salvation through the keeping of the covenant, and only sinners, who were not a part of the covenant, could receive salvation through Jesus.<sup>60</sup> It is significant that Sanders identifies in Jesus’s sayings and parables “a reversal of values” that “cohere with the expectation that Jesus and his followers would take leading places in the kingdom and that it would include ‘sinners.’”<sup>61</sup> However, he has not elaborated on this point in further detail.

B. Chilton, among a range of other scholars,<sup>62</sup> interprets the conflict reflected in the criticism of Jesus’s table fellowship in the context of Jewish de-

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>59</sup> This is very close to the supposition that Jesus’s christological claims were at the core of his favourable reception of “sinners.”

<sup>60</sup> In his response to Sanders, Dale Allison argues that both groups – the sinners and the righteous – needed “recognition of God’s eschatological viceroy,” which may indicate that the righteous who did not respond to Jesus’s call would not receive salvation. See Dale C. Allison, “Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E. P. Sanders,” *JSNT* 29 (1987): 57–78, here 73. Allison supposes “that John the Baptist preached a radical, one-time repentance and delivered fulminating judgments upon those who came out to him because he placed a large question mark over the ‘covenantal nomism’ of his day and avowed that those born of Abraham were not by the fact alone worthy members of the people of God,” *ibid.*, 60. Further, he concludes that “Jesus, who came out of the Baptist movement, shared John’s rejection of what Sanders takes to have been the common idea,” *ibid.*, 61.

<sup>61</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 236. Cf. *idem*, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 196–204, where he defines the meaning of reversal in terms of “Jesus’s particular kins of perfectionism” (in the sense of having God’s mercy), which “goes very well with his view that in the kingdom many human values would be reversed.”

<sup>62</sup> Cf. James D. G. Dunn, “Jesus and Purity: An Ongoing Debate,” *NTS* 48.4 (2002): 449–67, here 465, who connects the criticism of Jesus at table with his loose attitude to purity norms, comparing it with purity halakhah of Pharisees and meal practices of the Qumran community. Wassen, “Jesus’ Table Fellowship,” 156 notes that “the purity praxis by sectarian groups should not guide our understanding of how the common people ate their meals.” Even if from the point of view of Pharisees “Jesus may have acted improperly also with regards to purity praxis by having those meals,” this “views represent those of a limited group.” Besides C. Blomberg and B. Chilton, mentioned above, Wassen (*ibid.*, 139) lists other supporters of this view on Jesus’s attitude to the issue of purity in recent studies: James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 603, 639–42; Tom Holmén, “Jesus and the Purity Paradigm,” in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. T. Holmén and S. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3:2709–44; Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “Jesus as the High Priestly Messiah: Part 2,” *JSHJ* 5 (2007): 57–79 etc. Cf. also Borg, *Conflict*, 148, 149, who asserts that holiness was affirmed in the Jesus movement as “an active dynamic power that overcame uncleanness” (he points at “an understanding of holiness as infectious” in regard to 1 Cor 7:12–14).

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