



Friedrich-Alexander-Universität
Philosophische Fakultät und
Fachbereich Theologie

**Jesus' Table Fellowship with Tax Collectors and Sinners as
Therapy.
The Symposium Tradition as the Background of Mark 2,15–17**

Prof. Dr. Christina Eschner
Lehrstuhl für Neues Testament I
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5493-9871>

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JESUS' TABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS AS THERAPY

THE SYMPOSIUM TRADITION AS THE BACKGROUND OF MARK 2,15-17

Eighty years ago, in 1937, Ernst Lohmeyer's commentary on the Gospel of Mark was published. Lohmeyer was acutely aware of how Mark arranges and by which special principles he classifies the content of his gospel. But even he could not identify a continuous tradition for the short narrative on Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners in Mark 2,15-17. On the contrary, he could merely establish the following: "Das Wort [in 2,17] paßt auch wenig in die angegebene Situation. Denn heilt etwa dieser Arzt 'Zöllner und Sünder' durch Tischgemeinschaft?"¹. Many scholars have perceived the use of the logion of the physician in the context of table fellowship as unexpected and inappropriate². Must we therefore criticize Mark for his narration of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners?

In order to answer this question, we first need to analyze the structure of Mark 2,15-17 in more detail³: At the outset, Mark 2,15 describes the scene of the table fellowship. Then in 2,16, the scribes of the Pharisees watch Jesus as he eats with tax collectors and sinners and are prompted to ask: "Does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?". This question clearly expresses their disapproval of Jesus, obviously provoked by his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners⁴. The whole section Mark 2,15-17

1. E. LOHMEYER, *Das Evangelium des Markus. Nach dem Handexemplar des Verfassers durchgesehene Ausgabe mit Ergänzungsheft* (KEK, 2), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967, p. 56.

2. Cf. also H. SCHÜRMAN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 2 vols. (HTKNT, III/1-2), vol. 1, Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 1969, p. 292: "Das Bildwort V 17a paßt nicht eigentlich in die Mahlsituation, war also vielleicht schon unabhängig vom jetzigen Zusammenhang isoliert tradiert?"

3. Due to limited space, I will only discuss the reasons for rejecting table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. For a detailed analysis of Mark 2,15-17 and further material, I recommend my soon to be published book *Essen im antiken Judentum und Urchristentum: Diskurse zur sozialen Bedeutung von Tischgemeinschaft, Speiseverboten und Reinheitsvorschriften* (to be published in AJEC, 108). I thank my long-term friend Dr. Cornelia Stärkel and Dipl. theol. Barbara Beyer for their support with the English translation.

4. In contrast to Mark, Luke clearly emphasizes that the Pharisees and their scribes disapprove of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners by using the term ἐγόγγυζον. The verb γογγύζω is found nowhere else in Luke (cf. also Matt 20,11; John 7,32), but

uses the term *τελῶναι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοί*⁵ strikingly often. According to the Pharisees, Jesus has much closer contact with tax collectors and sinners than was deemed appropriate. In contrast, his previous encounter with Levi at the tax collector's booth (2,14) was much more distant and apparently not problematic⁶. Finally in 2,17, the text climaxes in the Markan Jesus defending himself with a pointed double saying. He defines the table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners as essential, much like a physician would have with his patients. Thus in analogy to patients, the tax collectors and sinners are portrayed to be in need of healing, of which the Markan Jesus acts as executing physician.

But how does Jesus' reply correspond to the Pharisees' accusation of having table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners? At this, a broader framework opens up: What exactly is the point of criticism of such a meal? What perception of table fellowship is this conflict based upon and which tradition was it derived from?

To better grasp what exactly the Pharisees are criticizing about Jesus' behavior, we first need to clarify the identity of the tax collectors and sinners. Considering the many reports of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners in differing strands of tradition, the story was of great importance to early Christianity. It does not only appear in Mark 2,15-17 and its Synoptic parallels (Matt 9,10-13 / Luke 5,29-32), but also in Q (Luke^Q 7,34 / Matt^Q 11,19) and the distinctive Lukan material (Luke^S 19,1-10; cf. Luke^S 15,2). In these texts, the tax collectors are often quoted in connection with sinners as in Mark 2,15-16 (Luke^Q 7,34 / Matt^Q 11,19; Luke 15,1), or sometimes specifically called sinners⁷. Therefore, the two labels do not represent different groups⁸, but the tax collectors themselves *are characterized as sinners*⁹. So how do the tax collectors disregard God's

διαγογγύζω appears in the discussion of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners in Luke 15,2; 19,7.

5. Luke 5,29 uses *τελωνῶν καὶ ἄλλων* instead of *τελωνῶν καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν* as in Mark 2,15 / Matt 9,10. Thus, it is not the narrator identifying them as sinners, but the Pharisees later in Luke 5,30.

6. Note also that Mark does not mention any offense taken from Levi's contact with Jesus in his description of Levi's calling.

7. Cf. Zacchaeus being called *ἁμαρτωλὸς ἀνὴρ* in Luke 19,7. Cf. also Luke 18,13.

8. Scholars often distinguish between tax collectors and sinners, applying the term *ἁμαρτωλοί* used in Mark 2,15-16 to a certain group. Concerning the different suggestions cf. N. PERRIN, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York, Harper & Row, 1967, pp. 93-94, who understands "sinners" as "other Jews who have made themselves as Gentiles".

9. The tax collectors and sinners may be juxtaposed by *καί*, but these two groups overlap. Scholars who interpret the *καί* as an apposition regard the *τελῶναι* and *ἁμαρτωλοί* to be closely connected, e.g. F. HERRENBRÜCK, *Jesus und die Zöllner: Historische und neutestamentlich-exegetische Untersuchungen* (WUNT, II/41), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck,

will¹⁰? Three reasons qualify one for being judged as a sinner: *Firstly*, originating from the Gentiles, including idolatry; *secondly*, ritual impurity as a result of neglect or even transgression of purity rules; and *thirdly*, moral and ethical misconduct.

I. TABLE FELLOWSHIP WITH TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS – NOT A QUESTION OF RITUAL IMPURITY

Most scholars link Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners to the issue of table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles, which appears frequently in ancient Jewish as well as early Christian literature¹¹. Pesch, for example, clearly associates sinners with Gentiles as he notes: "Schon Jesus hat mit Zöllnern und Sündern (= Heiden) zu Tisch gelegen"¹². The *ritual impurity* of tax collectors or Gentiles is then perceived as the obstacle to table fellowship. For instance, Gnllka writes in his commentary on Mark 2,15-17: "Als Sünder galten insbesondere die Heiden, aber auch jene, die wie die Heiden die Reinheitsvorschriften nicht beachteten. Wer Tischgemeinschaft mit ihnen aufnahm, wurde selbst unrein"¹³. Some

1990, pp. 230 ("die sündigen Zöllner"), 242. Others assess differently: W. SCHMITHALS, *Das Evangelium nach Markus: Kapitel 1-9,1* (ÖTK, II/1), Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1979, p. 168: "Gemeint sind Zöllner und andere Sünder". This also makes the tax collectors a subgroup of sinners (cf. D.-A. KOCH, *Jesu Tischgemeinschaft mit Zöllnern und Sündern: Erwägungen zur Entstehung von Mk 2,13-17*, in ID. – G. SELLIN – A. LINDEMANN [eds.], *Jesu Rede von Gott und ihre Nachgeschichte im frühen Christentum: Beiträge zur Verkündigung Jesu und zum Kerygma der Kirche. FS W. Marxsen*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1989, 57-73, p. 68; subsequently C. LANDMESSER, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott: Ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Konzept der matthäischen Soteriologie im Anschluss an Mt 9,9-13* [WUNT, 133], Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2001, p. 88 n. 88).

10. Cf. also K.H. RENGSTORF, ἀμαρτωλός, in TWNT 1 (1957) 320-337, p. 331: The ἀμαρτωλοί are those who lead their lives "in bewußtem oder gewußtem Widerspruch mit dem göttlichen Willen (Tora)" (highlighted in the original).

11. This kind of connection is only rejected by F. ANNEN, *Vom Zöllner zum Jünger: Die Berufung des Levi und das Zöllnergastmahl in Mk 2,13-17*, in M. KÜCHLER – P. REINL (eds.), *Randfiguren in der Mitte. FS H.-J. Venetz*, Luzern, Edition Exodus; Fribourg, Paulusverlag, 2003, 59-72, esp. pp. 67-69.

12. Cf. R. PESCH, *Das Zöllnergastmahl (Mk 2,15-17)*, in A. DESCAMPS (ed.), *Mélanges Bibliques. FS B. Rigaux*, Gembloux, Duculot, 1970, 63-87, pp. 83-84.

13. J. GNILKA, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, 2 vols. (EKKNT, II/1-2), vol. 1, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1978, p. 106. Cf. also W. ECKEY, *Das Markus-Evangelium: Eine Orientierung am Weg Jesu. Ein Kommentar*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 2008, p. 122: "Tischgemeinschaft mit Heiden (vgl. Gal 2,11-14) und gewohnheitsmäßigen Sündern war wegen des gottesdienstlichen Charakters eines Mahls und speziell wegen der jüdischen Reinheitsvorschriften für toratreue judenchristliche Kreise ein nur schwer überwindbares Ärgernis".

even assume that the tax collectors were ritually impure *because* of their close contact with Gentiles¹⁴. However, this interpretation will prove to be implausible. While the tax collectors were deemed apostates¹⁵ and collaborators with the Roman Empire¹⁶, the synoptic-Palestinian *τελώναι* are still clearly Jews¹⁷. Moreover, the assumption that tax collectors collaborated with the Romans is not convincing especially in the case of Galilee¹⁸, where this scene takes place. Since Galilee was mostly populated by Jewish farmers¹⁹, taxes were payed to Herod Antipas instead of to the Romans. As the story of Mark 2,14-17 is situated in Capernaum (see Mark 2,1), these taxes were probably connected to the fishing economy²⁰.

14. Clearly e.g. M.J. BORG, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 5), New York – Toronto, Edwin Mellen Press, 1984, p. 85: “In both Herodian Galilee and Roman Judea, daily commercial intercourse with Gentile inhabitants and traders subjected tax collectors to grave risk of defilement. ... The collaboration of the tax collectors threatened the community goal of holiness which required separation from Gentile uncleanness and rule”. Cf. also K.-S. KRIEGER, *Die Zöllner: Jesu Umgang mit einem verachteten Beruf*, in *BiKi* 52 (1997) 124-130, p. 129.

15. Cf. e.g. D.A. SCHLATTER, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit. Ein Kommentar zum ersten Evangelium*, Stuttgart, Calwer, 2¹⁹³³, pp. 195-196.

16. For the common interpretation of the synoptic tax collectors as so-called *portitores*, i.e. employees of major Roman tenants, cf. by way of example H. BRAUN, *Gott, die Eröffnung des Lebens für die Nonkonformisten*, in G. EBELING – E. JÜNGEL – G. SCHUNACK (eds.), *Festschrift für Ernst Fuchs*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1973, 97-101, p. 97; E. BADIAN, *Zöllner und Sünder: Unternehmer im Dienst der römischen Republik*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997, p. 1; for other scholars cf. HERRENBRÜCK, *Jesus* (n. 9), p. 24 n. 18, p. 162 n. 2; and also ID., *Wer waren die Zöllner?*, in *ZNW* 72 (1981) 178-194, pp. 184-186.

17. Against TERTULLIAN, *Modesty* 9,4-7, who considers all synoptic *τελώναι* to be Gentiles and therefore identifies table fellowship with Gentiles to be the problem of Mark 2,15-17. In this passage, it is clear due to the name of the aforementioned tax collector, Levi, that the tax collectors were Jews.

18. Also e.g. J.R. DONAHUE, *Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification*, in *CBQ* 33 (1971) 39-61, pp. 45, 59-61. Generally against any collaboration between tax collectors and the pagan occupying force is F. HERRENBRÜCK, *Zum Vorwurf der Kollaboration des Zöllners mit Rom*, in *ZNW* 78 (1987) 186-199, esp. pp. 190-191; ID., *Jesus* (n. 9), esp. pp. 162, 189, 210-213.

19. The influence of Hellenism especially on the villages of Galilee seems to have been very little in the first century CE, against the general academic consensus esp. M. CHANCEY, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (SNTS.MS, 118), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 61-62, 117-119; concerning Capernaum cf. p. 103; and also ID., *Archaeology, Ethnicity, and First-Century C.E. Galilee: The Limits of Evidence*, in Z. RODGERS (ed.), *A Wandering Galilean. FS S. Freyne* (JSJS, 132), Leiden, Brill, 2009, 205-218, p. 209.

20. Cf. K.C. HANSON, *The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition*, in *BTB* 27 (1997) 99-111, p. 103; cf. already SCHLATTER, *Der Evangelist Matthäus* (n. 15), p. 302, referring to OGIS 496,8-10. HERRENBRÜCK, *Jesus* (n. 9), p. 189, mentions the collection of “Gebühren für die Benutzung der Hafenanlagen”. Contrary to this, R. HAKOLA, *The Production and Trade of Fish as Source of Economic Growth in the First Century CE Galilee: Galilean Economy Reexamined*, in *NT* 59 (2017) 111-130, argues that these taxes

Regardless of how close a connection one draws between tax collectors and Gentiles in particular, interpreting Mark 2,15-17 from a ritual background is prevalent among many scholars. They presuppose the tax collectors'²¹ and sinners'²² ritual impurity which is spread via *physical contact*, irrespective of how each group is connected to the Gentiles. While many of these researchers then think the Pharisees to have followed *special* purity laws²³, the sources speaking of such laws refer to the elite, the so called *haberim*, and not to all Pharisees. Also, these texts which contrast the *haberim* with the common folk, the *'am ha'areš*, are much younger. Therefore, referring to the category of *'am ha'areš* is invalid in the case of Mark 2,15-17²⁴. Finally, the Synoptics never mention the

were not payed as a license for fishing, which was always without any charges. Instead, they were payable when transporting fish from the sea to the market in town (pp. 124-126).

21. Early Christian disputes about tax collectors are often thought to be associated with purity issues, cf. not only BORG, *Conflict* (n. 14), p. 85, but also S. WESTERHOLM, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (CB.NT, 10), Lund, Gleerup, 1978, pp. 69-71, esp. 71: "In taking his message to the most notorious sinners, Jesus indicated that the matter of ritual purity was at best a very subordinate consideration". Cf. J. MARCUS, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 27), New York, Doubleday, 2000, p. 230; B. CHILTON, *Jesus and Sinners and Outcasts*, in T. HOLMÉN – S.E. PORTER (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 3: *The Historical Jesus*, Leiden, Brill, 2011, 2801-2833, pp. 2803-2805; J. KLAWANS, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 109 (adapted by L.M. WILLS, *Methodological Reflections on the Tax Collectors in the Gospels*, in A.J. AVERY-PECK – D. HARRINGTON – J. NEUSNER [eds.], *When Judaism and Christianity Began. FS J. Saldarini*. Vol. 1: *Christianity in the Beginning*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, 251-266, p. 259 incl. fn. 21-22; also p. 262); cf. also C.L. BLOMBERG, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2005, p. 24, who presupposes the tax collectors' ritual impurity in addition to their moral impurity, which stems from their immoral behavior (e.g. ID., *Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship*, in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 [2009] 35-62, p. 52). Cf. J. ÁDNA, *Jesus' Meals and Table Companions*, in D. HELLHOLM – D. SÄNGER (eds.), *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (WUNT, 376), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2017, 331-353, pp. 336-337, 352.

22. Cf. by way of example ECKEY, *Markus-Evangelium* (n. 13), p. 124: "Für sie [die Pharisäer] ist kultische Unreinheit durch sozialen Kontakt mit Sündern übertragbar. Gemeinsames Essen und Trinken mit Unreinen macht aus ihrer Sicht unrein". Cf. also R. GOVINDU, *The Table Fellowship of Jesus (Luke 5.27-32)*, Roma, Pontificia universitas urbaniana, 2003, p. 59: "Sinners are seen as needy and are to be helped, rather than as *contaminating* and deserving to be spurned" (emphasizing C.E.). Also BORG, *Conflict* (n. 14), p. 84.

23. Especially J. NEUSNER is convinced that the Pharisees even for everyday meals adhered to a level of purity which would only have been required in the Temple (e.g. *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*, New York, Ktav, ²1979; reprinted Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock, 2003, pp. 83, 86).

24. For details on Neusner's theory and its critique esp. by Sanders and the rejection of the category of *'am ha'areš* for Mark 2,15-17, cf. ESCHNER, *Essen* (n. 3), IIIB 3.1.2.3 and IIIC 1.2.

ritual impurity of tax collectors²⁵. Thus, the common interpretation that Jesus violates ritual purity laws²⁶ by his table fellowship with tax collectors is fundamentally problematic²⁷.

II. WISDOM LITERATURE AND POPULAR PHILOSOPHY AS THE BACKGROUND OF THE PHARISEES' CRITICISM

Mark does not elaborate on why the scribes of the Pharisees criticize Jesus' behavior, because he obviously assumed that his audience knew. This becomes clearer when considering the *moral corruption* of tax collectors as the underlying supposition.

In many instances, early Christian authors mention and emphasize *moral* digressions by tax collectors, sometimes adjacent to their depiction as sinners. The tax collectors are then accused of excessive tax collection²⁸ or

25. Although in Rabbinic literature there are reports which can be interpreted as tax collectors' ritual impurity (*m.Tehar.* 7,6), this explanation is not without criticism. H. MACCOBY, *How Unclean Were Tax-Collectors?*, in *BTB* 31 (2001) 60-63, pp. 61, 63, strictly denies the interpretation of *m.Tehar.* 7,6 as proof of a specific ritual impurity of the tax collectors and instead emphasizes their moral impurity.

26. Cf. e.g. J.H. NEYREY, *The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel*, in *Semeia* 35 (1986) 91-128, pp. 98, 108; R.H. GUNDRY, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1993, pp. 125-126, 128; J.D.G. DUNN, *Jesus and Purity: An Ongoing Debate*, in *NTS* 48 (2002) 449-467, p. 465; also A. JÜLICHER, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969, pp. 174-175; with reference to the historical Jesus also M.J. BORG, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, Harrisburg, PA, Trinity Press International, 1994, pp. 111-112. For ritual impurity as a reason of concern for the Pharisees cf. also E.P. GOULD, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (ICC), Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1955, p. 43; R.A. GUELICH, *Mark 1-8:26* (WBC, 34A), Dallas, TX, Word Books, 1989, pp. 102-103 (with the threat of moral defilement). Cf. also Y.-M. PARK, *Mark's Memory Resources and the Controversy Stories (Mark 2:1-3:6): An Application of the Frame Theory of Cognitive Science to the Markan Oral-Aural Narrative* (Linguistic Biblical Studies, 2), Leiden, Brill, 2010, pp. 211-212, 275; E.-J. VLEDDER, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories: A Socio-Exegetical Study of Matthew 8 and 9* (JSNT.SS, 152), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, pp. 205-206, according to whom the close physical contact during the meal poses the problem.

27. Against a ritual background explicitly e.g. I. ABRAHAMS, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, vol. 1, New York, Ktav, 1967, pp. 55-56: "The 'sinners' were thus not those who neglected the rules of ritual piety, but were persons of immoral life, men of proved dishonesty or followers of suspected and degrading occupations". Similarly DONAHUE, *Tax Collectors* (n. 18), p. 59.

28. We can also conclude from the words of John the Baptist in Luke 3,12-13 that the tax collectors took more than was legally required. Many sources have assumed the tax collectors to have committed extortion or defamation as in Luke 3,14, cf. F. HERRENBRÜCK, *Steuerpacht und Moral*, in *ANRW* 2.26.3 (1996) 2221-2297, pp. 2232-2234.

even deceit²⁹. It seems that this assessment was quite common in antiquity: Even non-Christian sources mainly accuse them of exploiting their profession for personal gain by collecting more money than the legally set rate. According to this tradition, greed, extortion and deceit were the prime offenses against tax collectors³⁰. Their frequent mention alongside people of questionable ethics and morals³¹ further supports the tax collectors' ethical and moral corruption³². Thus, early Christian³³ and non-Christian³⁴ writings list similar combinations.

Against this backdrop, we can conclude the following with regard to the Pharisees' criticism: They did not object to table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners because they feared to become impure by mere *physical* contact with these ritually impure people, but rather demanded of Jesus to restrict table fellowship to the *morally good*. This attitude appears several times within Greek-speaking Diaspora Judaism. Especially here, the issue of table fellowship among Jews, as we find it in Mark 2,15-17, is handled in light of people's moral and ethical nature. For example, Sir 9,16 LXX exhorts: "Let just men be your meal companions (ἄνδρες δίκαιοι ἕστωσαν σύνδειπνοί σου), and let your boasting be in the fear of the Lord (καὶ ἐν φόβῳ κυρίου ἕστω τὸ καύχημά σου)"³⁵.

The demand to eat only with those who are morally unobjectionable is, however, not limited to the Jewish context, but finds its counterpart in the Greek symposium tradition. It appears as early as Plato, then later also in authors like Plutarch³⁶, Gaius Musonius Rufus or Epictetus, who

29. Cf. esp. Luke 19,8, where the tax collector Zacchaeus promises to repay those he had previously deceived four times the amount.

30. Cf. HERRENBRÜCK, *Steuerpacht* (n. 28), esp. pp. 2232-2236, 2241-2243. For an assessment of tax collectors in Greece, Rome and Egypt cf. also ID., *Jesus* (n. 9), esp. pp. 89-94, 104-107, 157-160.

31. Cf. J. JEREMIAS, *Zöllner und Sünder*, in *ZNW* 30 (1931) 293-300, pp. 295, 300, against the interpretation as ritual shortcomings (p. 294).

32. For the low moral assessment of tax collectors cf. also Matt^Q 5,46.

33. In Luke 18,11, the tax collectors are named alongside "robbers, the unjust, adulterers"; in Matt 21,31-32 next to prostitutes.

34. Cf. esp. LUCIAN, *Menippus* 11: ... μοιχοὶ καὶ πορνοβοσκοὶ καὶ τελῶναι καὶ κόλακες καὶ συκοφάνται. Tax collectors are often associated with robbers (as in LUCIAN, *Pseudologista* 30; XENO COMICUS, *Fragments* 1 [Th. KOCK]; PLUTARCH, *Lucullus* 7,6-7; *Pollux* 9,32 [text in U. SCHNELLE – M. LANG (eds.), *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*, vol. I/1.2-1, Berlin – Boston, MA, De Gruyter, 2013, pp. 535-536, 538]). For similar lists cf. HERRENBRÜCK, *Steuerpacht* (n. 28), pp. 2280-2282; ID., *Jesus* (n. 9), pp. 81-85. Moreover, the tax collector is depicted next to a brothel owner (cf. texts in SCHNELLE – LANG [eds.], *Neuer Wettstein* I/1.2-1, pp. 536-539).

35. Cf. also Tob 2,2 (G^{II}).

36. Cf. PLUTARCH, *Moralia* 709D-E.

wrote closer to the time of Mark. Especially the Book of Sirach portrays a distinct influence of this tradition of the Greco-Roman symposium. Throughout the entire Book of Sirach and similarly in the symposium tradition, the *concept of friendship* is of fundamental importance³⁷, most likely being of Greek-Hellenistic background³⁸. While the theme of friendship does not play a significant role in the Hebrew Bible, it is widespread in Greek contexts³⁹. In the Book of Sirach, it surrounds the commands in Sir 9,16 (cf. 9,10) and plays a significant role in connection with table fellowship in the whole book⁴⁰. Besides friendship, another motif is significant in the context of table fellowship, that of table conversations (9,15; cf. 6,35). Apparently, the author of Sirach in 9,16 demands in light of his Jewish background to only have table fellowship with *morally good people* – those who keep the law.

To what purpose do these sources reject table fellowship with the morally doubtful or even reprehensible? It is primarily to avoid bad influence on morally better people. In this view, close contact with reprobate people, as it occurs during communal meals, will *inevitably* lead previously respectable people to become like the indecent ones, resulting in their ethical and moral decay. This process is referenced to as early as Plato⁴¹ and later in Sirach⁴², among others. The risk of convergence comes from the communal aspect of meals in antiquity. Far exceeding the purpose of consuming food, collective meals in the symposium tradition actually aimed at fellowship. The shared communion and table conversations were more important than the food or eating itself⁴³. Since table fellowship with good men provided the opportunity to learn good things, it was

37. Cf. Sir 6,1-17; 7,18; 9,10; 12,8-12; 13,25; 14,13; 19,13-17; 20,16.23; 22,19-26; 27,16-21; 29,10; 37,1-6; 41,25; especially the definitions of the true friend in 6,14-17; 7,18. Cf. J. CORLEY, *Friendship according to Ben Sira*, in R. EGGER-WENZEL – I. KRAMMER (eds.), *Der Einzelne und seine Gemeinschaft bei Ben Sira* (BZAW, 270), Berlin – New York, De Gruyter, 1998, 65-72; J. CORLEY, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship* (BJSt, 316), Providence, RI, Brown University Press, 2002; F.V. REITERER (ed.), *Freundschaft bei Ben Sira: Beiträge des Symposiums zu Ben Sira, Salzburg 1995* (BZAW, 244), Berlin – New York, De Gruyter, 1996.

38. Cf. J. MARBÖCK, *Jesus Sirach 1–23* (HTKAT, 32), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 2010, pp. 110-111.

39. Cf. J.T. FITZGERALD (ed.), *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship* (SBL.RBS, 34), Atlanta, GA, Scholars, 1997; K. TREU, *Freundschaft*, in *RAC* 8 (1972) 418-434.

40. Cf. Sir 6,10 with 6,8-9, here culminating with a friend and table companion deserting his friend in a time of need. For this interpretation cf. parallels in MARBÖCK, *Sirach* (n. 38), p. 112: Sir 37,4; Ps 41,10; THEOGNIS 1,115-116.643-644.

41. Cf. specially *ἄμοιόσθαι* in PLATO, *Laws* 656B; *Republic* 500C; *Theaetetus* 177A.

42. Not within the immediate context of table fellowship, but in Sir 13,1 about contact with the haughty: *ὁ κοινωνῶν ὑπερηφάνῳ ἄμοιωθήσεται αὐτῷ*.

43. Cf. PLUTARCH, *Moralia* 147F-148A; 697D; 708C-D; SENECA, *Epistles* 19,10.

especially desirable⁴⁴, as Gaius Musonius Rufus⁴⁵ for example noted in the first century CE. He cites two sources by the poet Theognis from the sixth century BCE who demanded: “Drink and dine with them”, which referred to the good people mentioned immediately before⁴⁶, “sit with them, and be pleasing to those whose power is great” (καὶ μετὰ τῶν σύ γε πῖνε καὶ ἔσθιε, καὶ μετὰ τοῖσιν / ἕζε, καὶ ἄνδανε τοῖς, ὧν μεγάλη δύναμις)⁴⁷. “For from the noble you will learn noble things⁴⁸, but if you mingle with bad people, you will lose even the sense you do have” (ἔσθλων μὲν γὰρ ἀπ’ ἐσθλὰ μαθήσεαι· ἦν δὲ κακοῖσι / †συμμιγῆς, ἀπολεῖς καὶ τὸν ἐόντα νόον)⁴⁹. This shows that just as one learns good from the good, one takes evil from the bad. Theognis’ belief was evidently widespread in general as frequent citations of him prove⁵⁰.

Epictetus, who was probably the most distinguished of Gaius Musonius Rufus’ students, urged his readers to avoid table fellowship with the uneducated crowd, because it resulted in lowering oneself to them. He illustrates to his readers the danger of changing for the worse by reminding them that any contact of a pure and an impure person inevitably leads to the impurity of the one who was pure before⁵¹.

44. Cf. CICERO, *Letters to Friends* 9,24,3: ... *ut cum viris bonis, iucundis, amantibus tui vivas*.

45. Gaius MUSONIUS RUFUS, *Dissertationum a Lucio digestarum reliquiae* 11.

46. Immediately before referring to table fellowship, THEOGNIS basically demands: “Know that this is so, and do not seek the company of bad men, but always cling to good people” (ταῦτα μὲν οὕτως ἴσθι· κακοῖσι δὲ μὴ προσομίλει / ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔχεο) (1,31-32). Cf. also the prohibition to befriend bad people in 1,61-62.113.

47. Cf. THEOGNIS 1,33-34.

48. Cf. also the educational meaning of visiting a good man in THEOGNIS 1,563-566.

49. Cf. also THEOGNIS 1,35-36. The aorist συμμιγῆς deriving from the zero grade is metrically problematic, as pointed out by O. HENSE in his edition by the character † (*C. Musonii Rufi reliquiae*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1905; reprinted 1990, p. 62). This is because the dactyl requires a short second syllable, like in συμμίσγησις in the original of Theognis instead of a long one like in συμμιγῆς.

50. Concerning the reception of THEOGNIS 1,33-36 cf. PLATO, *Meno* 95D; concerning the reception of THEOGNIS 1,35-36 cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9,12 (1172A13-14); XENOPHON, *Memorabilia* 1,2,20 and *Symposium* 2,4; DIOGENES OF SINOPE, *Epistles* 29,3; CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata* 5,8,52,4.

51. EPICTETUS, *Enchiridion* 33,6: “Avoid entertainments given by outsiders and by persons ignorant of philosophy (ἐστιάσεις τὰς ἔξω καὶ ἰδιωτικὰς διακρούου); but if an appropriate occasion arises for you to attend, be on the alert to avoid lapsing into the behaviour of such laymen (μήποτε ἄρα ὑπορρυῆς εἰς ἰδιωτισμόν). For you may rest assured, that if a man’s companion be dirty (ἐὰν ὁ ἑταῖρος ᾗ μεμολυσμένος), the person who keeps close company with him must of necessity get a share of his dirt (καὶ τὸν συνατριβόμενον αὐτῷ συμμολύνεσθαι ἀνάγκη), even though he himself happens to be clean (κἂν αὐτὸς ὦν τύχη καθαρός)” (translation by W.A. OLDFATHER, *Epictetus: Discourses, Books 3-4. Fragments. The Encheiridion* [LCL, 218], Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1928, pp. 517, 519).

Against this background drawn from other sources which ban table fellowship with depraved people, the Pharisees' question can be paraphrased as follows: Why does Jesus have such close contact with tax collectors and sinners as table fellowship, although this will result in him and his disciples being corrupted and thereby turning into sinners themselves⁵²? Therefore, the Pharisees' criticism of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners illustrates their *positive* assessment of Jesus at first. In principal, they assign a higher status to Jesus than to the tax collectors and sinners⁵³. If they had classed Jesus as a sinner from the beginning, his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners would hardly be an issue. But because they regard him higher than the tax collectors and sinners, they consider his table fellowship with sinners as dangerous and therefore a mistake⁵⁴.

III. THE MORAL IMPROVEMENT OF TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS AS THE GOAL OF SHARING A MEAL WITH THEM (MARK 2,17)

Jesus' reply confirms the *moral* background of the Pharisees' criticism in Mark 2,17. This is because the striking logion about the physician was well known in Hellenistic literature and came from philosophical writings, itself being ethically and morally oriented⁵⁵. In any of these references, good people make use of the logion to justify their close contact with bad people, emphasizing that the moral improvement of the depraved was their goal. Especially in relation to Diogenes, this figurative speech of the physician is used, e.g.: "An Athenian questioned him, because he considered the Spartans higher [than the Athenians], yet did not live there. [Diogenes] said, 'The doctor who supplies health does likewise not spend his time among the healthy' (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἰατρός' εἶπεν ὑγείας ὦν ποιητικὸς ἐν τοῖς

52. Similarly J.J. KILGALLEN, *Was Jesus Right to Eat with Sinners and Tax Collectors?*, in *Biblica* 93 (2012) 590-600, pp. 591-593.

53. Cf. also that the report of meals of the Pharisees with Jesus (Luke 7,36-50; 11,37-54; 14,1-24) would otherwise be difficult to explain.

54. Cf. LANDMESSER, *Jüngerberufung* (n. 9), p. 94 n. 122.

55. For a collection of proverbs cf. SCHNELLE – LANG (eds.), *Neuer Wettstein I/1.2-1* (n. 34), pp. 784-786; deriving Mark 2,17 from this Hellenistic background cf. A. YARBRO COLLINS, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2007, pp. 195-196; M. WOLTER, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT, 5), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008, p. 229. M. EBNER, *Jesus – ein Weisheitslehrer? Synoptische Weisheitslogien im Traditionsprozess* (HBS, 15), Freiburg i.Br., Herder, 1998, pp. 150-151, also knows of the Hellenistic tradition of the physician, but declines it for Mark 2,17 because of the different perspective as primary background. Instead, he prefers the Jewish tradition of the physician (pp. 152-155, 160).

ὕγιαίνουσι τὴν διατριβὴν ποιεῖται')"⁵⁶. In many instances, the depraved people are also rich⁵⁷.

The metaphor of the physician comes under the comparison of philosophy and medicine which was popular in Greek and Roman philosophy. It creates the following analogy between a physician and a philosopher: As a doctor heals physical illness, a philosopher heals the soul from diseases like gluttony and greed⁵⁸. Attested as early as Plato⁵⁹, this thought later appears in works which were in close proximity to the Early Christian age, particularly by representatives of the Stoa like Gaius Musonius Rufus⁶⁰, Epictetus⁶¹ and Seneca⁶², as well as by the Cynic-Stoic popular philosopher Dio Chrysostom⁶³, Plutarch⁶⁴ and Philo of Alexandria⁶⁵. Dio

56. Diogenes in STOBÆUS, *Florilegium* 3,13,43. Cf. *Gnomologium Vaticanum Epicureum* 37: "When someone asked him why he came in contact with the bad (διὰ τί τοῖς μοχθηροῖς πλησιάζει), he said, 'Because physicians also (come in contact) with ill people (ὅτι καὶ ἰατροὶ τοῖς νοσοῦσιν)'"'. Closely related to the notion of the sinner in Mark 2,15-17 is LUCIAN, *Demonax* 7, which focuses on sparing the sinners: Demonax is reported to not become angry, even when forced to punish. He is said to have reprimanded the sins, but to have forgiven the sinners (ἀμαρτάνοντες), because, among others, he believed that the philosopher should take the physician as a role model who heals disease but refrains from anger against the sick (DIOGENES LAERTIUS 6,4, however, describes a strict treatment of sick people by the physician).

57. Cf. DIOGENES LAERTIUS 2,70: "In answer to one who remarked that he always saw philosophers at rich men's doors, he (sc. Aristippos) said, 'So, too, physicians are in attendance on those who are sick, but no one for that reason would prefer being sick to being a physician'" (translation by R.D. HICKS, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 1 [LCL, 184], London – Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 199). Cf. DIOGENES OF SINOPE, *Epistles* 38,4 (see below); DIO CHRYSOSTOM 8,8.

58. For details about the medical metaphor of moral improvement cf. M.C. NUSSBAUM, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Martin Classical Lectures N.S., 2), Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1996; E. WASSERMAN, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology* (WUNT, II/256), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008, pp. 31-39; M. DÖRNEMANN, *Krankheit und Heilung in der Theologie der frühen Kirchenväter* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 20), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, pp. 46-57.

59. Concerning the metaphor of the physician of the soul in PLATO cf. *Charmides* 155A-158E; *Protagoras* 313E; *Theaetetus* 167A; *Gorgias* 526D.

60. Cf. especially AULUS GELLIUS, *Attic Nights* 5,1,2-3, who describes that a philosopher's speech is considered useful and healing according to Musonius, also providing remedies for errors as well as vices (... *quae dicuntur, utilia ac salubria sunt et errorum atque vitiorum medicinas ferunt*).

61. Cf. EPICTETUS, *Diatribai* 3,23,23-38.

62. Cf. esp. SENECA, *Lucilius* 15,1-2; 52,9; *Tranquility* 1,2; *De constantia sapientis* 13,2.

63. Cf. esp. DIO CHRYSOSTOM 8,4-8 (see below). Concerning the philosopher as a physician cf. also 1,8; 13,32; 17,1-6; 27,7-8; 32,17-18; 33,6-7,44; 51,8; 77/78,42-43.

64. Cf. PLUTARCH, *Moralia* 7D: Philosophy is the only cure for diseases and passions of the soul. Cf. also *Moralia* 13C-D; 73D-E; 74D.

65. PHILO, *Unchangeable* 67-68.135; *Rewards* 21; *Decalogue* 150; *Worse* 110.123; *Alleg. Interp.* 3,36; *Virtues* 3-4; *Providence* 2,23 in EUSEBIUS, *Praeparatio evangelica* 8,14,18-20

Chrysostom writes for instance, that Diogenes did not live in his own house or with a friend while in Corinth, but spent most of his time in the Craneion⁶⁶ (8,4) due to the following reason: “Accordingly, just as the good physician should go and offer his services where the sick are most numerous, so said he, the man of wisdom should take up his abode where fools are thickest in order to convict them of their folly and reprove them”⁶⁷. Here, disease stands for immoral conduct or one’s existence as a sinner, while healing refers to moral improvement. Some make use of this metaphor emphasizing that the physician himself *does not* fall ill despite his regular contact with sick people, like in Diogenes Laertius 6,6: “One day when he [sc. Antisthenes] was censured for keeping company with evil men (πονηροῖς συγγενέσθαι), the reply he made was, ‘Well, physicians are in attendance on their patients (νοσοῦντων) without getting the fever themselves’”⁶⁸.

Sharing table fellowship with the Markan Jesus has a therapeutic effect on sinners, just like a physician has on his patients. The Markan Jesus’ second statement in 2,17b confirms that this passage refers to the context of moral improvement, which was typical of the logion about the physician. According to this verse, Jesus’ occupation as a physician is the calling of sinners. Most likely, this is a call to discipleship, the permanent bond with Jesus entailing a fundamental change of mind and complete reversal of behavior⁶⁹. This interpretation of the verb καλέω, which is quite generic in meaning⁷⁰, is reinforced since in 2,17, the Markan Jesus

(text in SCHNELLE – LANG [eds.], *Neuer Wettstein I/1.2-1* [n. 34], p. 788). Cf. also the notion of the sick soul in PHILO, *Special Laws* 2,157: νοσήματα τῆς ψυχῆς; *Contempl. Life* 2; *Confusion* 22; cf. also *Cherubim* 16.

66. Suburb and aristocratic quarter of Corinth with a cypress grove and gymnasium.

67. Cf. DIO CHRYSOSTOM 8,4-8, text 8,5 translation by J.W. COHOON, *Dio Chrysostom: Discourses I: 1-11* (LCL, 257), London – Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 379.

68. Translation by R.D. HICKS, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2 [LCL, 185], London – Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1965 (complete reprint of the 1. edition 1925), pp. 7, 9. Cf. also *Appendix Gnomica* 87: Ῥομύλος ἐγκαλούμενος, ὅτι πονηροῖς σύνεστιν, ἔφη· καὶ ἰατροὶ τοῖς νοσοῦσιν, ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ ὑγιαίνουσι.

69. For the specific use of καλέω as calling to permanent fellowship cf. Mark 1,20. In Luke 5,32 by adding εἰς μετάνοιαν, repentance is clearly defined as the aim of calling.

70. In general, καλέω can also be used in the sense of “inviting to a meal”, cf. BAA, s.v. καλέω 1b; LSJ, s.v. καλέω 2: “call to one’s house or to a repast, invite” (highlighted in the original). Cf. PLATO, *Symposium* 174E.175B.213A; PLUTARCH, *Moralia* 148A; 678C.F; 707A.C-D; 708A-B.E; 709A-C.E.F; *Antony* 26,6; *Cato the Elder* 25,3; *Alexander* 53,2 (κλήσις); LUCIAN, *Parasite* 22; *Pseudologista* 31; DIOGENES LAERTIUS 7,184. Cf. also HESIOD, *Works* 342; AISCHINES, *False Embassy* 162; Jdt 12,10; Exod 34,15; 2 Sam 11,13 (all in LXX). Concerning the same use in early Christianity cf. Matt 22,3-4.8-9; Luke 7,39 with 7,36; 14,7-9.12-13.16-17; John 2,2; 1 Cor 10,27.

apparently considers this kind of calling to be his mandate. Thus, by stating that he came (ἦλθον) to call sinners, he is referring to the entirety of his teaching⁷¹. As a result, the Markan Jesus' reply reads as follows: "I am not eating – as you practice and demand it – with the just but with sinners, because they in particular need the call to discipleship, which is my mandate".

Hence in his reply, the Markan Jesus admits the great distinction between himself and the sinners, which is his opponents' main point of criticism. But according to him, table fellowship with the depraved does not lead to the moral corruption of the good, as opposed to the Pharisees' opinion. On the contrary, he claims his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners to be of central importance for their moral improvement.

This view again echoes the symposium tradition. We had seen earlier how rejecting table fellowship with sinners – like Jesus' opponents practice it – was common in this literary context. But yet another strand within the symposium tradition attests defending one's behavior by arguing for the sinners' moral improvement. As early as Plato, table fellowship was regarded as a means of education⁷². Strikingly, while the metaphor of the physician is widely used in Hellenistic literature, it also appears in the context of the symposium. There, the notion of the meal as a form of therapy appears, for example in Diogenes of Sinope. In one of the letters which is ascribed to him, dating from the first century BCE⁷³ (*Epistles* 38,4-5), Diogenes states that he only ate with those in need of therapy (ἐδεῖπνον δὲ οὐ παρὰ πᾶσι, παρὰ μόνοις δὲ τοῖς θεραπέας δεομένοις), these being the people imitating the Persian kings in their way of life. Evidently, Diogenes views this therapy to result in a radical change of their previous way of life. In this context, he describes his visit to a very rich young man, who as a result of eating with him decided to never leave his side again (οὐ γὰρ μὴ ἀπολειφθῶ σου ἕνα πόδα). Afterwards, he is told

71. In scholarship, Jesus' arrival is usually very generally interpreted as referring to the beginning of his work on earth, esp. E. ARENS, *The Elthon-Sayings in the Synoptic Tradition: A Historico-Critical Investigation* (OBO, 10), Fribourg, Éditions universitaires, 1976, p. 63, according to whom ἦλθον refers to "Jesus' divine origin, the source of his authority" and can be interpreted as "my God-given mission is to ..." (cf. also pp. 54-55: "my purpose is to ...", "my Lebensberuf is to ..."). Therefore, the words of his arrival are read in analogy to his being sent (e.g. Matt 15,24: ἀπεστάλην). Aside from this general interpretation, some commentators connect ἦλθον with Galilee (Mark 1,14) as the destined place of his arrival, e.g. D. LÜHRMANN, *Das Markusevangelium* (HNT, 3), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1987, p. 62; YARBRO COLLINS, *Mark* (n. 55), p. 196.

72. Cf. PLATO, *Laws* 671C: [...] τῷ δυναμένῳ τε καὶ ἐπισταμένῳ παιδεύειν τε καὶ πλάττειν.

73. Cf. A.J. MALHERBE (ed.), *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition, Greek Text with English Translation* (SBL.SBS, 12), Missoula, MT, Scholars, 1977, pp. 14-15.

to have given away all his property and followed Diogenes from the next day on (ἀπὸ τῆς αὐρίου δὴ ἐξ ἐκείνου διανείμας τὴν οὐσίαν τοῖς αὐτοῦ ἔμοι ἀναλαβὼν τὴν πῆραν καὶ διπλώσας τὸν τρίβωνα εἶπετο). Just as in Mark 2,15-17, table fellowship in Diogenes of Sinope aims at moral improvement.

IV. THE SYMPOSIUM TRADITION AS AN EXPLANATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARK 2,15-17

When we regard the notion of therapeutic table fellowship to be the backdrop of Mark 2,15-17, it becomes clear how this text developed. In particular, the link between the concept of table fellowship and the logion of the physician now becomes clear. By connecting these two, Mark refers to the traditional correlation between table fellowship and moral improvement, which – without any connection to Jesus – was common in the symposium tradition from Plato onwards. Thus far, the logion about the physician has been considered difficult to interpret⁷⁴, especially from a ritual background, which seeks to separate pure and impure. But in light of our study, it certainly fits the conflict of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners well. Thus, the answer to Lohmeyer's question above must be "yes": Yes, the Markan Jesus "heals" indeed by means of table fellowship.

The influence of the Greco-Roman symposium is also supported by references in the other passages about the tradition of Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. Q for instance in Luke^Q 7,34 / Matt^Q 11,19 characterizes Jesus as "the friend of tax collectors and sinners". Generally speaking, friendship is a central topos of the symposium tradition. Considering the close connection between table fellowship and friendship, Jesus' meals with tax collectors and sinners show indeed that a friendship between him and them exists⁷⁵. Moreover, the communion created by conversations at the table is of great significance for the meals

74. When interpreting the Pharisees to demand a distinction between pure and impure, the Markan Jesus' answer is indeed not fitting the criticism raised against him. Cf. exemplarily P.-G. KLUMBIES, *Der Mythos bei Markus* (BZNW, 108), Berlin, De Gruyter, 2001, pp. 167-168: "Strenggenommen stellen die Antworten Jesu auf der durch die Schriftgelehrten repräsentierten Ebene keine echten Erwidernungen dar. Jesus reagiert weder erläuternd auf die implizit vorgetragene Frage nach seinem Gottesverständnis noch auf die nach seinem Selbstverständnis angesichts der Forderung auf Trennung zwischen rein und unrein" (p. 168, highlighted in the original). Similarly PARK, *Mark's Memory Resources* (n. 26), p. 274: "the legal issue of purity raised by the Pharisees is left untouched by Jesus".

75. LUCIAN, *Parasite 22* views communal eating and drinking as a *distinctive marker* for recognizing a person's friends (ad loc. cf. ESCHNER, *Essen* [n. 3], IIB 2.2.1.1).

in Luke, just as for the Greek symposium. Thus, the reminiscence of the symposium tradition reaches well beyond the use of *κατάκειμαι*⁷⁶.

By taking the symposium tradition to be the background of Mark 2,15-17, all important motifs spring up from *one* complex of ideas⁷⁷. Hence both the Markan Jesus' view and that of his opponents are rooted in *one* tradition-historical background. However, table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners is *not* controversial because of a discussion about a certain requirement of the law, like ritual purity regulations; it is rather a *question of social status*. The reason for the dispute in Mark comes down to *differing definitions of the meaning and purpose of the meal*. The Pharisees, alongside many others in antiquity, viewed sharing a meal as a close form of contact, offering the participants the opportunity for *mutual* exchange. Therefore, they required the meal to be restricted to the morally good in order to avoid bad influence on themselves. This opinion on communal meals belongs within the bigger context of generally being

76. The verb *κατάκειμαι* can point to the symposium as the underlying theme, because it is of central importance for the symposium; cf. the common use of *κατάκειμαι* in PLATO, *Symposium*; cf. also H. BLÜMNER, *The Home Life of Ancient Greeks*, New York, Cooper Square Publishers, 1966, p. 203; extensively on the furnishing of refectories in Rome: M. ROLLER, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 15-95; K.M.D. DUNBABIN, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 11-71; in Greece: EAD., *Ut Graeco more biberetur: Greeks and Romans on the Dining Couch*, in I. NIELSEN – H.S. NIELSEN (eds.), *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Convivial Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World* (Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity, 1), Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2001, 81-101, pp. 82-89. Yet this verb does not necessarily refer to the symposium tradition, as it was used in the context of other meals, too. We can assume a rather broad use of *ἀνάκειμαι* and *κατάκειμαι*, as these verbs do not strictly refer to a certain position during meals. They apply to eating, while a reclined position at the table is optional, but not mandatory; cf. LOUW – NIDA, 23.21; D. NOY, *The Sixth Hour Is the Mealtime for Scholars: Jewish Meals in the Roman World*, in NIELSEN – NIELSEN (eds.), *Meals*, 134-144, p. 138; S. SAFRAI, *Home and Family*, in ID. – M. STERN (eds.), *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*, vol. 2 (CRINT, I/2), Assen, Van Gorcum, 1976, 728-792, pp. 736-737.

77. D.E. SMITH claims that early Christian meals as a whole originate from the Greco-Roman tradition of the symposium and therefore doubts their authenticity (*From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2003, pp. 219, 222, 229-239). This theory was strongly challenged, e.g. by BLOMBERG, who denies the origin in the Greek symposiums and aims to prove the authenticity of Jesus' table fellowship with sinners (*Jesus* [n. 21], pp. 35-36, 61; ID., *Holiness* [n. 21], pp. 21-22, 93-96, 105). The way in which the stories on table fellowship are portrayed, does indeed reveal a notable influence of the symposium tradition, but this does not mean that the accounts about Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners are secondary. Many sources independent from each other already attest to this. For a detailed discussion, cf. most recently ÅDNA, *Jesus' Meals* (n. 21), pp. 342-349, who following Blomberg, argues for the historicity and thereby refers substantially to the notion of the eschatological meal (pp. 349-352).

required to avoid close contact with morally bad people. The Markan Jesus then reverses the social exclusion of people due to their moral corruption. While the Pharisees seek to keep their good status by restricting table fellowship to people of the same social status, the Markan Jesus in contrast enables people to turn around their moral status from bad to good by sharing table fellowship with them.

Thus, rejecting table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners has a moral background. In this text as in Sir 9,16, the Pharisees constrain the sharing of meals to *righteous* people only, which is not fundamentally different from the Greco-Roman practice. In Judaism, this is distinctly integrated in the contrast between sinners and righteous people and the issue of fulfilling God's will. The ancient sources do not suggest a quasi-contagious ritual impurity of tax collectors, as has often been proposed in research. As a result, Mark 2,15-17 must be distinguished from Mark 7,1-23, where Jesus and the Pharisees are debating the observation of purity rules. Therefore, the issue of table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners is – unlike many scholars suggest – an autonomous complex of problems and distinct from the question of table fellowship between Jews and non-Jews.

V. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE BACKGROUND OF MARK

Taking all this into consideration, what can we conclude about the author of the Gospel according to Mark? The way in which he linked *different strands* of the symposium tradition, including the metaphor of the physician, and composed Mark 2,15-17 as a chreia suggest a Hellenistic background⁷⁸. Mark makes use of the symposium tradition, because the ideas associated with it were familiar to his Christian readers, who to a large extent would have been of a Gentile background. Even for Mark's Gentile Christian readers, sharing a meal with the depraved is considered offensive and requires an explanation.

Theologische Fakultät
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Unter den Linden 6
DE-10099 Berlin
Germany
christina.eschner@gmx.de

Christina ESCHNER

78. Note that U. LUZ, *Die Jünger Jesu im Matthäusevangelium*, in ZNW 62 (1971) 141-71, p. 167, locates the Markan disputes as in Mark 2,15ff.; 2,23ff. within Hellenistic Judaism, especially because the Pharisees are described from a certain distance.