Until quite recently, a broad cross-section of NT scholars agreed that Jesus’ intimate association over meals with the notoriously wicked of his world formed one of the most historically reliable motifs in the canonical Gospels. In the 1990s, J. D. Crossan and N. T. Wright, theological sparring partners on numerous other scholarly issues, illustrated this agreement. Crossan stressed Jesus’ “open commensality” as central to his goal of “building or rebuilding peasant community on radically different principles from those of honor and shame, patronage and clientage” and as being “based on an
egalitarian sharing of spiritual and material power at the most grass-roots level.”1 Wright insisted that “he ate with ‘sinners,’ and kept company with people normally on or beyond the borders of respectable society—which of course in his day and culture, meant not merely social respectability but religious uprightness, proper covenant behaviour, loyalty to the traditions, and hence to the aspirations of Israel.”2 Numerous similar sentiments could be cited.3

In 2003, however, Dennis Smith published an entire monograph challenging this consensus. Building on his 1980 Harvard dissertation and numerous subsequent articles, Smith believes that the Gospel writers portray the festive meals that Jesus enjoys as Greco-Roman symposia and that these portraits largely reflect the redactional innovations of the Evangelists rather than the activity of the historical Jesus.4 Matthias Klinghardt had come to very similar conclusions in his even more detailed study of 1996.5 Kathleen Corley, in books released in 1993 and 2002, envisions Jesus fraternizing with friends at public meals but denies that they included literal “tax collectors and prostitutes.” Instead, she argues, this language reflects conventional labeling or vilification, particularly of the “new Roman women” who increasingly joined their husbands at public banquets against older social convention.6 Thus, we should not envision Jesus associating with the most notoriously wicked of his society, as E. P. Sanders has so famously claimed.7

2. N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 149.
4. Dennis E. Smith, From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), and his earlier writings cited therein.
6. Kathleen E. Corley, Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict and Women in the Synoptic Tradition (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993); idem, Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2002). One wonders, though, how relevant a social development more prominent in the Western than in the Eastern “half” of the Roman Empire, and predominantly limited to the upper classes, would be for Jesus and outcasts in Israel.
7. E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM / Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 174–99. Sanders rejected the earlier consensus that “sinners” were simply those who did not follow the more scrupulous purity laws of the Pharisees, arguing instead that they were actually the flagrantly immoral in Israel. For a more sweeping rejection of the authenticity of Jesus’ acceptance of one key category of sinners, the tax collectors, see William O. Walker Jr., “Jesus and the Tax
Both Smith and Corley view the symposium format as having so permeated the first-century Roman Empire that even Jews in Israel would have adopted it for their celebrations. Where Smith and Klinghardt reject the historicity of Jesus’ meal scenes, they do so not because of their depiction as symposia but because they detect layers of tradition and redaction in the relevant pericopae and a consistent Lukan literary and theological emphasis on Jesus’ eating with sinners. Neither of these arguments withstands close scrutiny, but other related issues remain unresolved. Were symposia as pervasive as these writers claim? Would Jesus have participated in what often degenerated into little more than a giant drinking party? If not, and if this is how the Evangelists portray Jesus, then must we reject the historicity of the relevant texts, even if for slightly different reasons than do Smith and Klinghardt? How do we adjudicate between Corley and Sanders? And what of Sanders’ claim that Jesus often accepted sinners without calling them to repentance?

Appropriate criteria of authenticity become crucial at this juncture. A promising advance on the old quartet of dissimilarity, multiple attestation, Palestinian environment, and coherence, especially given the tension between dissimilarity and Palestinian environment, emerges with what Wright calls the criterion of “double similarity and dissimilarity” or what Gerd Theissen, Annette Merz, and Dagmar Winter term the “criterion of historical plausibility” (Plausibilitätskriterium). This approach argues that, when a given element or episode of the Gospel tradition simultaneously (a) fits credibly into a first-third-of-the-first-century Palestinian Jewish context, while nevertheless (b) reflecting some practice that sharply distinguished it from conventional Judaism, and (c) continues to influence subsequent Christian thought a little, (d) without it being a dominant later motif, then we have a powerful combination of factors in support of historicity. It is unlikely that any typical Jew or Christian would have made up the detail, falsely attributing it to Jesus.

8. Identifying redactional traits or persistent literary emphases enables one to discover what a given evangelist stresses and in what fashion, but neither selection nor stylization has any necessary bearing on authenticity. See, e.g., Joel B. Green, “Which Conversation Shall We Have? History, Historicism and Historical Narrative in Theological Interpretation: A Response to Peter van Inwagen,” in Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation (ed. Craig Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, Mary Healy, and Murray Rae; Carlisle: Paternoster / Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 141–50.
10. For a thorough survey and critique, along with quite different, creative suggestions for new criteria, see Stanley E. Porter, The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).
Despite some misgivings in certain quarters, this criterion appears to represent a significant advance on the older methodology. How do Jesus’ meals fare when measured against this four-pronged standard? We may dispense with the latter two prongs comparatively quickly. The requisite continuity and discontinuity with later Christianity comes into play at once. Jesus’ followers continued to eat together (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7–12; Jude 12) and looked forward to the coming Messianic banquet or wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7–9). Sharing meals with “outsiders” at times remained a key to breaking down barriers, most notably between Jews and Gentiles. The lengthy Cornelius narrative in Acts (10:1–11:18) proves paradigmatic in this respect (cf. also Acts 16:34, 27:33–36). On the other hand, ordinary meals, even festive ones, soon gave way to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as the focal point of Christian table fellowship. Building on Jesus’ own appropriation of the Passover meal at his Last Supper, Jesus’ followers came to view the memorializing of his death via bread and wine as one of the central elements of worship (1 Cor 10:14–22, 11:17–34; Heb 13:10). They also developed criteria for excluding certain kinds of unrepentant sinners from this table (1 Cor 11:32–34; Did. 9:5, 10:6, 14:2). Other nonritual and/or fully inclusive meals recede in significance. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Christians a generation or more after Jesus’ lifetime, based on later church practice, would have invented as a major motif in their portrait of the historical Jesus his countercultural association with the outcast in the intimacy of table fellowship.

**Special Meals in the Hebrew Scriptures**

But what of similarity and dissimilarity with pre-Christian Judaism, including a Judaism supposedly permeated by Greco-Roman symposium revelry? Here, the issues become more complex and require more detailed scrutiny. Even then, in this and the next two subsections, we will barely scratch the surface of the available material. But we will see enough to begin to make some valid generalizations. The OT presents a diverse array of special meals. In the Pentateuch alone, we encounter a varied menu: meals for ratifying covenants with God and people (Gen 26:30–31, 31:54; Exod 18:12, 24:9–11), festivities for weddings and other family milestones (Gen 12:2), and meals for the Holy Spirit’s presence (Exod 29:38–46). But these are not the only types of meals prescribed in the OT. For example, meals for purification purposes (Lev 12:2, 14:3), meals for刪除 or deletion purposes (Num 19:1–8), and meals for dedication purposes (Exod 29:38–46). These meals are significant because they help to establish the boundaries of the covenant community and the relationship between God and his people.

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14. Imagery that was present whether or not the meal was technically the first, main Passover meal. See Scot McKnight, Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus and Atonement Theory (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 275–92.

24:54, 29:22–23, 43:24–34), banquets to celebrate military victories (Gen 14:18), and meals in the context of extending hospitality to strangers (Exod 2:20). Genesis 18:1–8, in which Abraham thereby entertains angels “unawares,” with its unusually lavish provisions, becomes a model for considerable later Jewish and Christian emulation. In the exodus, the Passover ritual is born (Exod 12); in the wilderness God provides manna from heaven (Exod 16), a miracle that Jews later believe will be replicated by the Messiah (see esp. 2 Bar. 29:5–8; cf. Philo, Mut. 44–45; Sir 24:19–23). The promised land will flow “with milk and honey” (Num 13:27), while sacrificial meals will accompany the forgiveness of sins wherever the tabernacle is erected (Lev 1–7). But one exclusivist note is sounded. Leviticus 11 introduces the dietary laws that will separate the Israelites from all the peoples surrounding them, reminding all nations of their role as God’s uniquely chosen people. Here, barriers begin to emerge, establishing boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, particularly in the context of meals (cf. esp. Deut 14:2). As Gene Schramm elaborates, “the effects of practicing kashruth, from a socio-religious standpoint, are clear: the strictures of kashruth make social intercourse between the practicing Jew and the outside world possible only on the basis of a one-sided relationship, and that is on the terms of the one who observes kashruth.”

In the Historical Books (or Former Prophets), a broad cross-section of these different kinds of meals reappears (e.g., Judg 6:21, 14:10; 1 Sam 1:3–8; 1 Kgs 8, 13). During the monarchies, ceremonial feasting accompanies the anointing of kings (1 Sam 9:12–24; 1 Kgs 1:9–10), while new miraculous feeding miracles occur (1 Kgs 17:1–6, 7–24; 2 Kgs 4:38–41, 42–44). NT writers will later present remarkably close counterparts to some of these passages in the context of Jesus’ ministry (see esp. Luke 7:11–17, Mark 6:30–44 par.) but with enough differences and other earmarks of authenticity to belie the claim that they were merely created on the basis of their OT parallels. More than just expressions of hospitality, meals increasingly establish networks of human allegiance, so that treachery against those with whom one has eaten proves all the more heinous (1 Kgs 13; 18:19). A unique text that cuts against this grain appears in 2 Kgs 6:15–23. After Elisha traps the blinded Arameans in battle and leads them to Samaria, he


17. For a complete list of references, see Timothy R. Ashley, The Book of Numbers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 239 n. 18.


rebukes the king’s desire to kill them and commands instead that food and water be set before them “so that they may eat and drink and go back to their master” (v. 22). This results in a great banquet and the temporary end of raiding parties from the north. Here appears key background material for Jesus’ later parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27–35). 2 Chronicles 28:8–15 offers a similar gesture of good will against prisoners of war. At the same time, nothing in either text suggests that any of the Israelites actually ate with their enemies.

The Latter Prophets introduce us to two new, diametrically opposite kinds of banquets. Due to syncretistic influences from the surrounding nations, some Israelites begin to participate in the debauched marzéah festivals. Marvin Pope sufficiently captures the spirit of this feast with his definition: “a social and religious institution which included families, owned property, houses for meetings and vineyards for wine supply, was associated with specific deities, and met periodically, perhaps monthly, to celebrate for several days at a stretch with food and drink and sometimes, if not regularly, with sacral sexual orgies.” Texts such as Amos 4:1, 6:4–7; Jer 16:5; Isa 28:1–9; Hos 4:16–19, 7:1–16; and Ezek 8:7–13, 39:17–20 probably represent prophetic lambastes against practices of this sort in Israel. More edifying are passages that prophesy a coming eschatological, perhaps even Messianic, banquet, beginning with Isa 25:6–9. On the one hand, the prophet stresses that the Lord will prepare this feast of choice meats and fine wines “for all peoples” (v. 6). On the other hand, he immediately adds that Moab, representative of God’s enemies, will be trampled down (vv. 10–12). The vision is not only one of the salvation of Israel and all who join themselves to her but also of the destruction of her opponents (chaps. 26–27). A solitary text bucks the overall trend and again forms the background for a “parable” of Jesus. Isaiah 58:6–12 promises restoration and renewal to the recalcitrant Israelites if they share their food with the hungry, provide the poor wanderer with shelter, clothe the naked, and

20. Indeed, in the former passage, T. R. Hobbs (2 Kings [WBC 13; Waco, TX: Word, 1985], 78) suspects that Elijah was “more intent upon embarrassing his foes with kindness than sparing them for purely humanitarian reasons.”


23. Walter Brueggeman (Isaiah [Westminster Biblical Companion; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 1:200) restates these twin emphases: “The work of this God is both positive and negative. The positive is a welcoming feast that signifies the new governance of abundance and well-being. The negative is the elimination of that which threatens and precludes festivals of generosity.”
satisfy the needs of the oppressed (cf. Matt 25:31–46). But the end of v. 7 makes it difficult to demonstrate that Isaiah has anyone beyond the people of Israel in view when he explains that they should not “turn away from their own flesh and blood.”

The Writings, as with their contents more generally, prove the most amorphous of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible with respect to shared meals. Meals of all kinds abound in the Psalms. Particularly famous is Ps 23, which includes the metaphor of God preparing a table for the psalmist in the presence of his enemies (v. 5). His cup overflows, but it is clear that he is not sharing his bounty with his enemies but being provided for and protected in their midst. Psalm 41:9 offers a typological backdrop for Judas’s betrayal of Jesus (see esp. John 13:18), as “David’s” close friend, whom he trusted enough to share his bread with, “has lifted up his heel against” him. Job calls down curses on himself if it is not true that he shared bread with the needy (Job 31:17). Ecclesiastes, of course, includes the best of dining as one of the vanities of this life that by itself proves meaningless; while the Song of Songs compares sexual love to an earthly feast. In the right contexts, the satisfaction of both bodily appetites remains beautiful. Contrasting banquets and menus reappear in Daniel (chaps. 1 and 5) and Esther (chaps. 1, 5, and 7) too, both to save God’s people and to judge her enemies. Analogous to 2 Kgs 6:22–23, Prov 25:21–22 commands the Israelite, “If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat; if they are thirsty, give them water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on their heads, and the Lord will reward you.” Yet even here we are probably not meant to imagine actual table fellowship among enemies, and the second sentence suggests that the acts of kindness are intended to shame them into repentance. R. N. Whybray observes that “these verses are concerned with the harmony and well-being of the local community, which ought to override the selfish interests and feuds of individuals. Love of enemies, however, is not prescribed.”

**Sharing a Table in Second Temple Judaism**

If shared meals in the OT typically marked off close friends or co-religionists from outsiders, even while acknowledging an ideal age in which the ground rules would differ, the period between the two testaments saw Judaism develop an even clearer nationalist or ethnocentrist emphasis. One might assign a large swath of teaching to the category of avoiding ritual impurity, including that which accrued through table fellowship with


25. For the fullest study, see Stephen A. Reed, *Food in the Psalms* (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1987).

those who did not follow the laws of kashrut. A huge quantity of traditions on this topic appears in the rabbinica, but this corpus always raises questions, some of them unanswerable, about the date of the origins of the traditions prior to their post-Christian written forms. Because we have plenty of material to work with in the Second Temple Jewish literature from the first century and earlier, for this section we will limit ourselves to that database.

Among the Apocrypha, Sirach extends the dangers of eating with the wicked, enunciated in the biblical book of Proverbs, to include dining with another person’s spouse (9:9), the powerful (13:8–13), and the stingy (14:10). The extensive focus in Sir 31:12–32:2 on drinking wine in moderation rather than excess, if not a response to symposia, at least continues the warnings against marzeoth. Tobit proves exemplary in commending almsgiving to the poor and needy, but 4:17 shows that, even in a context of enjoining charitable giving, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, one can read, “but give none [of your bread] to sinners.” The whole plot line of the book of Judith turns on its heroine’s insistence that God was about to judge his people at the hands of the Assyrians for breaking his dietary laws, which is why (she claims) she is defecting to the enemy. Instead, her obedience to those same laws allows her to bring her own “lunch bag,” which turns out to be her vehicle for hiding the severed head of the Assyrian commander, Holofernes, after she slays him when he thinks he is going to seduce her (Jdt 10:5, 10–13; 12:5–20; 13:6–11)! The Additions to Esther revise the canonical text so that, whereas the queen originally does eat of the king’s food, some of which was not kosher, now she does not (see esp. 14:17). The books of the Maccabees, finally, repeatedly highlight the faithful Jews’ refusal to eat unclean food even when they had to die at the hands of the Seleucid rulers as the consequence (1 Macc 1:62–63, 2 Macc 6:18–7:42, 3 Macc 3:2–5, 4 Macc 5–18).

27. In addition to the Levitical dietary laws, kashrut came to include regulations concerning ritual handwashing, surfaces on which and containers in which food was served, priestly and Levitical gifts, the land, produce used for tithes, utensils, ovens, seats, beds, and human bodies. See Christine Hayes, “Purity and Impurity, Ritual,” in Encyclopaedia Judaica (ed. and rev. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum; 22 vols.; Detroit: Macmillan Reference / Jerusalem: Keter, 2007), 16:746–56; Gedalyahu Alon, Jews, Judaism and the Classical World (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 146–73; and the ancient sources cited in both.

28. Thus, we will lay to one side a consideration of the Pharisaic groups known as haburot or haberim, known only from the rabbinic literature. For the key debate about their nature, see Jacob Neusner, “Two Pictures of the Pharisees: Philosophical Circle or Eating Club,” AThR 64 (1982): 525–38. Probably the most valid assessment lies somewhere in between the two poles mentioned in Neusner’s title. At this juncture, we may begin to see something a little like Greco-Roman symposia, but it is hard to know if this form of meal/society predates A.D. 70.

Within the pseudepigrapha, one finds the Letter of Aristeas with its classic and expansive justification of the Jewish purity laws. Jubilees 22:16 has God explicitly command Jacob, “separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them, and do not perform deeds like theirs. And do not become associates of theirs, because their deeds are defiled, and all of their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable.” Joseph and Aseneth initially refuse to be given to each other in marriage in large part because of their respective religions’ incompatible laws concerning table fellowship. Once Aseneth converts to Judaism and agrees to keep a kosher house, the wedding can proceed. The Pseudepigrapha also expand on the vision of an eschatological or Messianic banquet in the future. In 1 En. 62:14, the righteous will eat with the Son of Man forever. In 2 En. 42:5, the righteous dead can look forward to “dinner with delightful enjoyments and riches that cannot be measured, and joy and happiness in eternal light and life.” In 2 Bar. 29:3–4, “the Anointed One will begin to be revealed.” Then “Behemoth will reveal itself from its place and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left.”

The Dead Sea Scrolls likewise develop the twin themes of avoiding impurity and anticipating a Messianic banquet. All participants at the Qumranians’ communal meals had to remain in a state of ritual purity (1QS 5:13); some texts insist on purification baths before every meal (4Q513, 4Q514). Just as the unrighteous may not eat these Essenes’ fare, neither may the sectarians sell their food to the Gentiles (CD 12:8–10) or eat any impure food themselves (12:11–15), including even items that Gentiles have merely touched (4QMMT 6–11)! Both the Manual of Discipline and the Damascus Document stress separation from all kinds of sinners (e.g., 1QS 5:2, 10–11, 14–18; CD 6:14–18). Even the Qumran hymns regularly warn against the danger of sin and sinners (e.g., 1QH 7:21–23; 10:10–11, 31–36; 12:7–21; etc.), with one passage closely parallel to the Gospels’ appropriation of Ps 41:9 in John 13:18: “[all those who have eaten my bread have lifted their heel against me, and all those joined to my Council

31. Interestingly, in the larger context of this passage it becomes clear that it is the ritual impurity more than the immoral behavior of the Gentiles that defiles them. Cf. Bolyki, Jesu Tischgemeinschaften, 197.
have mocked me with wicked lips” (1QH 13:23b–24). That this kind of treachery was perpetrated by those who had shared table fellowship made it that much more heinous. By the time one reaches the War Scroll, one finds full-fledged enmity between the sectarians and the Gentiles throughout, with the ultimate goal of extermination of “the sons of darkness.” The sectarians then looked forward to a joyous messianic banquet, but conspicuously absent are any other peoples or any other kinds of Jews. Even in the age to come, the dinner proceeds according to a carefully monitored agenda of actions, beginning with those highest in the hierarchy and most ritually pure (1QSa 2:17–22).34

Second Temple Judaism thus, in many respects, saw the drawing of even sharper boundaries between pious Jews and unclean outsiders. Table fellowship could create intimate friendship, so it was increasingly reserved for those whom a person deemed the right kind of companions, who ate the right kinds of food. The Dead Sea sectarians were clearly the most extreme outgrowth of this trend, but it was by no means limited to them. Basic to the rationale behind this behavior was the conviction that the power of the unclean to defile the clean far outstripped the ability of the clean to sanctify the unholy.35

GRECO-ROMAN SYMPOSIA

Walter Burkert defines a quite-different kind of meal with deep roots in the history of Hellenistic culture.

The symposium is an organization of all-male groups, aristocratic and egalitarian at the same time, which affirm their identity through ceremonialized drinking. Prolonged drinking is separate from the meal proper; there is wine mixed in a krater for equal distribution; the participants, adorned with wreaths, lie on couches. The symposium has private, political, and cultural dimensions: it is the place of euphrosyne [good cheer], of music, poetry, and other forms of entertainment; it is bound up with sexuality, especially homosexuality; it guarantees the social control of the polis [city] by the aristocrats. It is a dominating social form in Greek civilization from Homer onwards and well beyond the Hellenistic period.36

Fairly homogenous groupings of people typically characterized gatherings of this sort; their egalitarian nature was limited to a certain group of peers. Special banqueting halls were reserved for these gatherings; reclining


35. See further my Contagious Holiness, 65–86, and the primary and secondary literature cited there.

typically took place on cushions arranged to form a square-shaped _U_. Originally a part of preclassical Greek village communal meals and special gatherings to prepare soldiers for battle, the symposium became in classical days “highly valued” and “widely practiced at many levels . . . as occasions for philosophical, political, and moral discussions and their reflections in poetic and prose literature.”

The most famous and restrained form of symposia was narrated by Plato (_Symposium_) and Xenophon (also _Symposium_) about the classical period. The participation of Socrates and other philosophers led to the post-mealtime entertainment portion of the symposium largely limited to refined, intellectual discourse. In later times, Plutarch would include among his list of acceptable topics for conversation whether or not the host should arrange the seating of his guests, why places at table acquired degrees of honor, why it was the custom to invite many guests to a wedding banquet but not a good idea to do so for ordinary symposia, whether or not the music of flute_38_ girls afforded appropriate after-dinner entertainment, and whether or not it was good to deliberate over wine (_Mor. 1.615, 1.619, 4.666, 5.678, 7.710, 7.714_). But these were the exceptions, not the norm, even in the classical age. During the Hellenistic period, symposia increasingly deteriorated into showcases of gluttony and drunkenness (_Athenaeus, Deipn. 614a–615a_). Even in Plato’s _Symposium_, “as Agathon was getting up in order to seat himself by Socrates . . . suddenly a great crowd of revelers arrived at the door, which they found just opened for someone who was going out. They marched straight into the party and seated themselves: the whole place was in an uproar and, losing all order, they were forced to drink a vast amount of wine” (223b)! Eventually, Greek and Roman writers would compose satires about the symposia, attesting to their notoriety (Petronius, _Satyricon_; Juvenal, _Sat._ 5; Martial, _Epigr._ 60).

The Roman _cena_ or _convivium_ was at times a bit less hedonistic, not least because of the controversial first-century participation of the “new Roman women” _39_ (somewhat liberated wives in well-to-do families who accompanied their husbands to dinner), whose presence did away with the courtesans previously provided for the sexual favors of the otherwise all-male diners. But these symposia never garnered a majority and, even when celebrants did not become totally inebriated or engaged in public sex, drinking and merriment remained the primary purpose of

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38. This is the standard word used in most English translations, but this wind instrument was different from our flutes and may have more resembled an oboe.

the gatherings.\textsuperscript{40} As we turn to the Gospels, we will have to inquire if there really are any signs to confirm the claims that Jesus’ meals with sinners are being portrayed as symposia.

JESUS’ MEALS WITH SINNERS

Twelve passages merit particular consideration. We will proceed from episodes more explicitly depicting Jesus dining with the most notorious sinners and outcasts of his society to those that have a more implicit bearing on our topic. We will also treat the texts within each of these two categories roughly in order of those with the strongest cases for authenticity to those that are less clear cut.

More Explicit Texts

Levi’s Party (Mark 2:13–17 par.). On form-critical grounds, the climactic saying (v. 17) of this pronouncement story becomes the most demonstrably historical core of the passage.\textsuperscript{41} While there are many settings in which calling sinners rather than the righteous could apply, the immediate context of a group of tax collectors and their friends fits aptly. These were the toll collectors or revenue contractors of their day, Jewish middlemen working for the Roman publicani and viewed as traitors to their nation. To the extent that they made a decent living for themselves skimming extra profits off the top of their take, they would have formed part of the “up and out” (even if not “down and out”) from the standpoint of the orthodox Jewish leadership. Many self-respecting Pharisees and scribes would not have associated with them for table fellowship as Jesus is described as doing (b. Bek. 31a, t. Dem. 3:4).\textsuperscript{42} Yet there is nothing anachronistic or out of place in the episode that could not have happened in his day. The juxtaposition of “tax collectors” with the generalized term “sinners” shows the paradigmatic nature of that occupation as representing immorality and treason against Israel, not to mention the resulting ritual impurity.\textsuperscript{43} In the Jewish literature,

Tax collectors were grouped with murderers and robbers. To avoid loss, one could deceive a tax collector. The word of a tax gatherer could not be trusted, nor could his oath be believed. As a consequence, he


\textsuperscript{41} See throughout Arland J. Hultgren, Jesus and His Adversaries: The Form and Function of the Conflict Stories in the Synoptic Tradition (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979).

\textsuperscript{42} When we lack unambiguous pre-Christian Jewish documentation of various practices, we will cite the oldest relevant rabbinic literature, recognizing that if the traditions behind the documentation do not go back to Jesus’ time in oral form, then the points they support may need to be modified.

\textsuperscript{43} For all of these points, see Fritz Herrenbruck, Jesus und die Zöllner: Historische und neutestamentliche-exegetische Untersuchungen (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), esp. pp. 231–34. Tohoroth 7.6 begins, “If taxgatherers entered a house [all that is within it] becomes unclean.”
could not testify in a court of law or hold a communal office. Money in the pocket of a tax collector was considered stolen property.44

A tax collector grateful for Jesus’ calling him would have naturally reciprocated by offering hospitality.45 Subsequent Pharisaic criticism does not require the Jewish leaders to have been eavesdropping on the banquet, though the open-air courtyards of many homes might have made it possible for them to do so had they desired (cf. b. Ta’an 23a–b).46 The early church was scarcely known for its high tolerance of the most notoriously sinful of its society, so discontinuity with subsequent Christianity likewise emerges. Still, this is not a portrait, as in Sanders’ reconstruction of the historical Jesus, in which Christ accepts sinners without any hint of repentance. Mark 2:15b explicitly declares that “there were many who followed him,” employing a verb regularly used in the Synoptics for discipleship, of at least some tentative or initial form, including as early an example as in Mark 1:20.47 So there is continuity with the early church as well.

If ever there were a context in the Gospels in which we might expect Hellenistic influence in general or the appearance of a symposium in particular, it would be with a meal involving well-to-do turncoats working for Rome. And just possibly this is what we are meant to envision. But Mark offers no actual positive signs of this kind of meal. The verbs for dining in v. 15 come from the verbs katakeimai and sunanakeimai, which mean “reclining” and “reclining together with,” respectively. But first-century Judaism had come to embrace reclining at table for a variety of festive meals, not just symposia, and at times these verbs and their cognates (or their Hebrew equivalents) referred not to a literal posture at all but merely to dining (e.g., m. Ber. 6:5, m. Neg. 13:9, Prot. Jas. 18:2). For whatever reason, kathizó, the standard term for sitting never appears, in its 48 occurrences in the NT, in the context of table fellowship, even though we know that Jews regularly sat for ordinary meals.48 So nothing can be inferred about the nature of a given meal simply from the presence of verbs that in other contexts sometimes referred to literal reclining.49

44. Frank Stern, A Rabbi Looks at Jesus’ Parables (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 141, citing the Mishnaic texts Ned. 3:4, B. Qam. 10:1–2, Tohoroth 7:6, among others.
45. This makes unlikely the view that one or more of the Evangelists envision Jesus hosting Levi and his friends at Jesus’ place of lodging. Rightly, David M. May, “Mark 2:15: The Home of Jesus or Levi?” NTS 39 (1993): 147–49.
48. Indeed, its only occurrence in the context of any form of eating appears in 1 Cor 10:7, where it reproduces the LXX translation of Exod 32:6.
49. A point that cannot be stressed too much, since many who support the symposium hypothesis often infer the presence of this sort of meal from the use of these and related verbs.
What is striking is that Jesus favors these moral outcasts with his presence, rather than becoming contaminated by them, a feature not found in conventional symposia or Jewish feasting. Indeed, v. 17 suggests that he is in the process of trying spiritually to cleanse the unclean, just like a medical doctor attempts to bring physical healing to a patient. Matthew 9:13a (“I desire mercy and not sacrifice”) provides a plausible, scriptural motive for an objective such as this.

A Glutton and a Drunkard (Q 7:31–35). The little parable of the children in the marketplace appears in similar contexts in both Matthew and Luke—chapters in which Jesus is commenting on John the Baptist and comparing himself to his forerunner. The parity in the treatments of John and Jesus, both in the parable proper and in the appended logia, could suggest that the two individuals were on a par with each other. Early Christians, eager to exalt Jesus and play down John, would not likely have invented parity such as this. Nor would they have readily characterized Jesus as a “glutton and a drunkard.” In terms of continuity and discontinuity with Judaism, even the accurate portions of this depiction of Jesus—eating and drinking with sinners and their unclean food (or hands, or utensils, etc.)—go beyond what many upstanding religious teachers would have found appropriate (cf., e.g., Toh oroth 2:2; b. Sotah 22a; t. Mak. 3:7; t. Demai 2:2, 11, 15; 2:20–3:10). Yet the theme of the overall and ultimate rejection of both spokesmen for God by the majority of the Jewish populace, and by their leadership in particular, closely matches the historical realities of the first century that no one disputes.

The more one focuses on the “tax collectors and ‘sinners,’” the more one can make the case that Hellenistic influence may have led these outcasts to host various symposia. “Playing the flute” does recall one of the common forms of entertainment at these Greco-Roman banquets (Plato, alone. For the wider use of reclining, see Hugo Blümner, The Home Life of the Ancient Greeks (rev. ed.; New York: Cooper Square, 1966), 203; Shemuel Safrai, “Home and Family,” in The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions (ed. Shemuel Safrai and M. Stern; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1976), 736; and David Noy, “The Sixth Hour Is the Mealtime for Scholars: Jewish Meals in the Roman World,” in Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World (ed. Inge Nielsen and Hanne S. Nielsen; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998), 138.

50. Cf. Joel Marcus, Mark 1–8 (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 231: “Jesus is not defiled by his contact with impurity but instead vanquishes it through the eschatological power active in him.”


54. “Result: vv. 16–19d may indeed come from Jesus” (Ulrich Luz, Matthew 8–20 [Hermentia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 148).
Blomberg: Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship

Syp. 176ε, Xenophon Syp. 2.1, Plutarch Mor. 7.710–11). But flute players also regularly accompanied Jewish wedding feasts (and therefore presumably the eschatological banquet that Revelation would later call the “wedding feast of the Lamb” as well), so there is no way to narrow down the kinds of “partying” in view here. Nor need we choose between Smith and Corley, who see merely unjustified slander, and the majority who insist that Jesus did fraternize with his society’s disreputable. As Rudolf Schnackenburg determines, “Underlying the reproach are Jesus’ meals with ‘tax collectors and sinners’ (see [Matt] 9:10). The crass expressions used reflect denunciations in leading Jewish circles and are actually traceable to Jesus’ days on earth.”

That God’s wisdom will be justified despite Jesus’ unconventional practices suggests that his “partying” does not render him impure. He does not shun the unclean and includes even the most morally impure among those with whom he is willing to associate.

A “Sinner in the City” (Luke 7:36–50). Jesus’ compassion for outcasts of many different kinds—women, lepers, other sick persons, Samaritans, Gentiles, and the poor—forms a major emphasis within Luke’s writing. So we cannot argue that the specific pericopae of Jesus’ meals with sinners in this Gospel fail to fit the Evangelist’s redactional tendencies. But there are plenty of other signs of authenticity that emerge. In this passage, we find a woman who appears at a banquet hosted by Simon the Pharisee. Despite noteworthy parallels with the account of Jesus’ anointing by Mary of Bethany (Matt 26:6–13, Mark 14:3–9, John 12:1–8), this passage should be viewed as a separate event. The unnamed woman here is never called a prostitute per se, but rather she was viewed “in the city” as a “sinner.” Theoretically, she could have been “the wife of someone with a dishonorable occupation,” “a woman in debt,” “an adulteress,” or a person who was ill, disabled, or in regular contact with Gentiles. Still, prostitution was the most probable “occupation” from which she would have incurred this stigma.

Obviously, the woman is not a formal courtesan, as regularly encountered in symposia. No self-respecting Pharisee would plan that kind of

56. Jonathan Klawans (Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]) thoroughly discusses ritual and moral impurity in the various strands of ancient Jewish literature, concluding that a stricter separation of the two arose in the rabbinic era than before and that John the Baptist and Jesus refused to compartmentalize the two but greatly prioritized the latter (p. 160).
banquet. Nor does Luke describe her with any of the standard terms for a professional prostitute—*pornē*, *koinē*, *pankoinē*, or *hetaira*. The woman, moreover, engages in none of the other activities that symposia “escorts” typically performed—drinking, reclining, dancing, playing music, and the like. But her behavior remains potentially scandalous. Joel Green explains: “Letting her hair down in this setting would have been on a par with appearing topless in public, for example. She would have appeared to be fondling Jesus’ feet, like a prostitute or slave girl accustomed to providing sexual favors.” Charles Cosgrove has recently shown the broad range of meanings of unbound hair in the Greco-Roman world, which was not just a sexual advance but also devotion to a god or goddess, grieving, conjury, and more. Cosgrove argues that the woman’s behavior would not have been inherently objectionable, because then Simon would not have thought that Jesus needed any extra insight into the woman’s background (Luke 7:39). But this does not necessarily follow. Perhaps Green has exaggerated the analogy, but imagine a woman today coming to a Christian house party in tears, distraught, and scantily clad, falling down at the feet of the host who answers the door. Some present might at first think she was fleeing a pursuer, or had met with some accident or injury, or was mentally ill, or the like. Knowledge that she was indeed a prostitute would color things differently for some. But the scene would still be shocking for all in attendance. At any rate, it is not a story any early Jew or Christian is likely to have invented.

But then is it even credible in an early first-century Galilean Jewish setting? Those who see a symposium here liken the woman to the stock figure of an uninvited guest who can disrupt the banquet in various ways. But these figures differed from the prostitutes; they provided entertainment or participated in the philosophical debates. If any of Cosgrove’s Greco-Roman analogies apply, then the woman’s behavior might be credible in a number of different ways, but he does not demonstrate that any or all of these meanings were present, much less common, in Jewish culture. More likely, this woman had prior knowledge that Jesus would be present at this gathering. Jesus declares her behavior to represent pure love that flowed from saving faith (vv. 47–50); her sins “have [already] been forgiven” or “stand forgiven” (the perfect passive *apheōntai*—vv. 47, 48). The imagery of the forgiveness of debts in the little parable of vv. 41–43 could suggest the background of the Jewish Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8–

Her desire to “crash” this party and lavish her thanks on Christ then becomes perfectly understandable. Her ability to do so stems from the access the public had to the open courtyards or to the open doors in more formal banqueting rooms (recall above, p. 47). As the guests reclined, their feet would have extended out from the cushions so that an “intruder” would have encountered that part of their bodies first. Though admittedly speculative, John Nolland’s reconstruction shows one plausible way the subsequent set of events could have unfolded:

The accidental fall of tears on feet begins a chain reaction: with nothing at hand to remove the offending tears, the woman makes use of her let-down hair; the intimate proximity thereby created leads to a release of affectionate gratitude expressed in kissing the feet which have just been cleaned from the dust of journey in this unique and probably unintended manner; and the anointing perfume, no doubt intended for the head (since only this has a place in Jewish custom) but finding no ready access thereto, is spent upon that part of Jesus’ body with which the woman has already made intimate contact.

Luke wants the tears themselves to be understood as reflecting “repentant sorrow for her sinfulness,” given the consistent meaning of klaiō earlier in his narrative (6:21, 25; 7:13, 32), which makes her acceptance by the dinner guests more imaginable. The comparatively gentle rebuke of Simon the Pharisee implied by the parable, in which he is likened to a less indebted sinner who has nevertheless had his sins forgiven too, further bespeaks authenticity. Thus, the passage scandalizes Jewish and early Christian sensibilities, while fitting into an early period in Christ’s ministry in an intelligible Jewish context when hostilities against the Jewish leaders had not yet escalated. Yet, according to the moral intuitions of many Jews and Christians, Jesus’ allowing this potentially sexual advance implicated him in outright sin, not merely ritual impurity.

From Luke’s perspective, however, he remains sinless and she becomes ritually and spiritually whole.

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67. A similar line of reasoning is adopted by Kathleen E. Corley, “The Anointing of Jesus in the Synoptic Tradition: An Argument for Authenticity,” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 1 (2003): 61–72. In keeping with her earlier work, however, Corley insists that the woman was a respectable person, not a notoriously sinful one like a prostitute.
68. Luise Schottroff’s argument from silence (The Parables of Jesus [trans. L. M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006], 147) that the woman does not necessarily give up her sinful lifestyle seems weak, especially in light of Jesus’ frequent calls to repentance elsewhere.
Zacchaeus Short-Changed? (Luke 19:1–10). Only Zacchaeus among the tax collectors in the Gospels is called an architelōnēs (a “chief toll collector”). Even without Luke’s explicit adjective (v. 2), therefore, we should have imagined him to be “rich,” in part at least due to an even greater degree of extortionary earnings than his subordinates amassed. Jesus’ actions would have thus shocked his onlookers all the more.70 Before hearing any word that could reflect Zacchaeus’s state of mind or heart, Jesus invites himself to this man’s home for dinner. He is thereby requesting the conventional hospitality owed to traveling strangers but without showing the least concern for Zacchaeus’s perpetual ritual impurity due to his immoral and traitorous lifestyle. Perhaps for that very reason, Zacchaeus is so humbled that, when the entourage has reached his home, he announces that he is giving half of his goods to the poor and restoring fourfold to those whom he has defrauded—good signs of genuine repentance (v. 8; cf. John the Baptist’s charge to tax collectors in 3:13, unpacking his call to repentance in 3:2). Jesus’ holiness, not Zacchaeus’s past immorality, has rubbed off on his counterpart.

This “reverse contagion” clearly satisfies the two dissimilarity portions of the criterion of historical plausibility. The realism of a chief tax collector having defrauded his countrymen in this fashion coheres with the ancient reputation attached to toll collectors. Whether in the Latin West or the Greek East, whether in pre- or post-Christian Judaism, telōnai are regularly grouped with other notorious criminals or sinners and most commonly thieves and smugglers.71 Luke’s use of the passage to epitomize the heart of Jesus’ ministry—to seek and to save the lost (v. 10)—coheres with early Christianity as well. Zacchaeus must repent, but the way Jesus elicits this response is by taking the initiative to associate with him in ways guaranteed to bring down the wrath of the conservative religious insiders, indeed, of much of the populace as a whole. The scene has been reenacted countless times in church history by those who have attempted to emulate Jesus in this respect. All four prongs of the double dissimilarity and similarity criterion are thus again satisfied.72

A common, recent objection to this interpretation indeed demonstrates how hard it is for many to accept such countercultural behavior on Jesus’ part. Various scholars have alleged Zacchaeus is not repenting in this passage; perhaps his declaration in v. 8 is a vindication of his typical be-

70. “To stay in such a person’s home was tantamount to sharing in his sin” (Marshall, Luke, 667).
72. From a more conventional form-critical perspective, see François Bovon (Das Evangelium nach Lukas [3 vols.; Zürich: Benziger / Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989–2001], 3:271), who, even after stripping away what he believes to be more recent tradition-historical layers, finds a core passage here of Jesus dining with the historical Zacchaeus.
behavior. The present tenses (didōmi and apodidōmi) read most naturally as ongoing, current actions, not as futurist presents promising what Zaccheaus will do in the near future. From this point of view, Zaccheaus would not be regularly or intentionally defrauding anyone, but when, on occasion, it turns out that he has, he is quick to make amends. But this interpretation founders on the first-class condition of v. 8b (“if I have defrauded anyone”). While first-class (real) conditions do not necessarily express true statements, they do present them from the viewpoint of the speaker or writer as not introducing any doubt. If Luke wanted to portray Zaccheaus as promising to restore fourfold anything he has defrauded without believing that he had in fact defrauded anyone, or if he meant to imply “whenever” defrauding of this sort occurs, Luke would have used a third-class (hypothetical) condition. The “today” of v. 9 reinforces this observation. Had v. 8 reflected Zaccheaus’s regular practices, there would be no reason to announce that salvation had arrived at his house on this particular day. Nor would Jesus’ role have been that of seeking and saving the lost (v. 10), merely of pointing out and helping to facilitate the public recognition of one who was already saved, though perhaps not widely recognized as such.

The only meal in this passage is the one implied, though never narrated, by Zaccheaus’s acceptance of the obligation to host Jesus as an overnight lodger in his home. So we can scarcely speak of anything that would point us toward a symposium format. As a wealthy employee of Rome, we might imagine that, if ever there were a setting in which a Gospel character was used to banquets of this sort it would be here. But we are told nothing that would positively move us in the direction of this interpretation. Indeed, the only hint we get, if it is even a hint, as to other meals that Luke might have had in mind, comes with his inclusion of Jesus’ statement that “this man, too, is a son of Abraham,” an expression that acknowledges his ethnic and religious connection to the house of Israel, whatever his recent involvement with Hellenistic culture has been. What is more, Luke may hear an echo of Jesus’ teaching about the eschatological banquet, when “sons” of the kingdom are thrown out as Gentiles come to feast at table with Abraham and the other patriarchs (Q 13:28–29; see below, pp. 56–57).

More Implicit Texts

Tax Collectors and Prostitutes (Matthew 21:31–32). A refrain that could have stood in either “Q” or “M” forms the conclusion to Matthew’s parable of the two sons. This is the only place in the NT where tax collectors are

75. Matthew’s parable of the “Two Sons” has usually been viewed as independent tradition, but at times it has been treated as a drastic abbreviation of Luke 15:11–32.
paired not with other “sinners” more generally but with “prostitutes.” Perhaps some of this language is generalized slander applicable to other professions, too, but Luke 7:36–50 shows that we dare not deny the probable reference to literal harlots as well. The combination of these otherwise unrelated occupations probably stems from the fact that prostitutes in the Roman Empire were often licensed, so that they could be taxed, and the tax collectors would be responsible for gathering that revenue (cf., e.g., Cicero, *Verr.* II.1.39.101; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 4.97.98, 14.14; Plutarch, *Apoph. Lac.* 236b–c). Thus, there is compatibility with earliest Christianity and the Judaism of its day. But apparently few in either religion dared emulate Jesus’ scandalous disregard for appearances in dining with these overtly immoral groups, so neither Jew nor Christian is likely to have made up a description of Christ such as this. That the previously immoral enter the kingdom “ahead” of the chief priests and elders of the people leaves the door open for the latter to enter as well, an aperture not likely made available by a later editor. But it will require repentance (like the ultimately obedient son’s change of heart in the parable—v. 29), which shows that Jesus was not just accepting the tax collectors and prostitutes without laying down any conditions for their acceptability before God. Thus, we have seen continuity with Judaism, discontinuity with Judaism, discontinuity with Christianity, and continuity with Christianity, in this order. No explicit meal appears here, but to the extent that “entering the kingdom” often suggested the eschatological banquet, that festive occasion may well lie in the background.

_Feasting in the Wilderness (Mark 6:30–44 par.)._ As I first demonstrated more than 20 years ago, the core of the Markan version of the feeding of the 5000 is most likely authentic, not least because it closely matches the core parabolic teaching of the historical Jesus (cf. Matt 7:7–9 par., 13:33 par.; Luke 11:5–8, and 14:16–24; cf. also Matt 6:11 par.). Here we may add further rationale. Jesus providing bread in the wilderness represents precisely what many Jews had come to expect the Messiah to do, reenacting the miracle of the provision of supernatural sustenance in Moses’ day (recall 2 Bar. 29:5–8; see above, p. 43). We have also seen OT background to the miraculous provision of bread enabling Elisha to feed a large number of people out of a small number of loaves with abundant leftovers in 2 Kgs 4:42–44. But here, Jesus feeds so many in such a remote place that the people could hardly have obeyed the purity laws of the day. Indeed, in so

77. Galatians 2:11–15 involved eating “only” with Gentile Christians, not the immoral, yet note even here how quickly the Judaizers were able to convince everyone except Paul to abandon the practice.
heterogeneous a crowd of “peasants” from Galilee, many present may have been considered more permanently unclean. The requisite continuity and discontinuity with conventional Judaism again appears.

Intriguingly, Mark actually calls the groups into which the crowd divides symposia (Mark 6:39). This is the only NT occurrence of this word. But there is nothing in the context to suggest Mark viewed the gathering as a collection of formal drinking parties, and it is difficult to see how the distributive plural (sitting down “by companies”) could make much sense as a form of dividing the crowd if a Greco-Roman festive banquet were implied! Tellingly, both Matthew and Luke omit the term in their versions of the event; Luke, the Hellenist, would surely have preserved if not clarified the reference were it a more specific kind of shared meal. Indeed, the arrangement of the people, also described as comprising “groups of hundreds and fifties” (Mark 6:40) much more clearly calls to mind the Jewish background of the division of the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings into similarly sized companies (cf. Exod 18:25; Num 31:14; and, among the Essenes, 1QS 2:21–22 and CD 13:1). As elsewhere in the Gospels, a new Moses (and a new Elisha) has appeared, reenacting the ministries of the Moses and Elisha of old. Verses 39 and 40 do make reference to “reclining,” but again the verbs need not indicate a literal posture, and we cannot be meant to imagine the thousands leaning back on couches that they brought with them into the wilderness! The heterogeneity of the crowd further distinguishes the gathering from a symposium. If there is any allusion to a banquet, it would be to the coming Jewish messianic banquet, not to any Greco-Roman form of dining.

Many scholars discern eucharistic significance to the feeding miracles, particularly in light of John’s redactional overlay about eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood (John 6:51–58). Whether or not this was the Fourth Gospel’s meaning, it is unlikely to have been in Mark’s purview at the earliest stages of the tradition. Jewish meal hosts regularly gave thanks, broke bread, and distributed it to those who ate with them, and these are the only parallels between the synoptic versions and the Last Supper narratives. Nothing about wine appears in any of the four accounts.

81. Cf. esp. Marcus, Mark 1–8, 410. On these portraits of the eschatological prophet at the core of authentic historical Jesus material, see Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 147–97.
84. Klaus Berger, Manna, Mehl und Sauerteig (Stuttgart: Quell, 1993), 99, 152, and the literature there cited (cf., e.g., b. Ber. 39b and 47a.)
of the feeding miracle. The criterion of dissimilarity with early Christian-ity would not apply were this an unambiguously eucharistic narrative. As it stands, it aptly affords the right balance between intelligibility in an early Christian context, perhaps even foreshadowing the coming eschatological feast, and distinctiveness from the primary early Christian meal, the Lord’s Supper.

**Déjà vu All Over Again (Mark 8:1–10 par.).** Much of what applies to the feeding of the 5000 carries over to the second miracle involving loaves and fishes. The passage has, of course, regularly been viewed as a doublet or variant tradition of the earlier feeding miracle, so that we do not want to put as much weight on it as on those passages already discussed. There is good reason, however, to see it as a deliberately intended mirror image of its predecessor, by Mark and/or Jesus himself, but still a separate incident, demonstrating Jesus to be the “bread of life” for a primarily Gentile audience in the way he had already revealed himself to a primarily Jewish audience. The location is further from any village with provisions for purchase, the word for “basket” reflects a more Gentile “backpack,” the number of baskets leftover is the universal number 7 rather than the Jewish number 12, and the disciples return across the lake of Galilee to Jewish territory afterward. This centrifugal extension of ministry into Gentile territory contrasts with the centripetal streaming of the nations to Zion in OT prophecy and combines with the probable ritual impurity of an even higher percentage of the 4000 than of the 5000, thus satisfying our criterion’s need for dissimilarity. But the points of continuity with the previous feeding miracle, along with that passage’s OT background, afford sufficient continuity as well.

**How Not to Win Friends and Influence People (Q 13:28–29).** Matthew’s and Luke’s versions of these sayings appear in quite different contexts and in different sequences (Matt 8:11–12; Luke 13:28–29). Still, the common core of both versions is the contrast between people from throughout the nations taking their place at the eschatological banquet with the Jewish patriarchs and many “subjects of the kingdom” (ethnic Jews) who are evicted. Here we have not an account of Jesus actually eating with the outcast during his lifetime but his prediction of an unexpected guest list at the great supper over which he will one day preside. The inclusion of Gentiles fits early Christian hope, while the exclusion of many Jews (presumably including some among Jesus’ audience) distinguishes these logia from more conventional Jewish expectation (e.g., Isa 66:15–21, Ps. Sol. 86:18–21).

87. See Schnackenburg, Matthew, 82.
17:22–31, 2 Bar. 72:2–6, t. Sanh. 13:2). At the same time, Matthew’s model of love for an enemy of one’s people and his household (in this case, the military officer representing the occupying foreign armies) proved little easier for Christians to emulate than for Jews, while Luke’s context of the closed door appears to exclude lawless “Christian” believers, a theme that cuts against the grain of the universal emphasis of early Christian mission. Simply eating and drinking with Jesus is no guarantee of salvation. Moreover, nothing distinctively related to a symposium appears, nor does the presence of Gentiles defile the Jews, for all are made pure in the age to come.

Fixing Dinner or Favoring Devotion? (Luke 10:38–42). At first glance, the inclusion of this pericope seems inappropriate, because there are no explicit sinners or actual meal involved. Still, the hospitality extended to travelers of this kind necessarily implied a nice dinner and overnight lodging, and Mary’s behavior was sufficiently countercultural that Jews then and Christians ever since have often found it inappropriate! Martha’s behavior and attitude fits conventional Judaism and much subsequent Christianity: the woman’s place is in the kitchen and with other typical domestic responsibilities as a gracious hostess for her visiting guests. Jesus, however, dismisses Martha’s role as less important than her sister’s. Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet, learning from his teaching, in the position and posture of a typically male disciple of a rabbi. Yet, with rare exceptions, rabbinic policy forbade teaching Torah to women (see, classically, R. Eliezer in Soṭah 3:4). And while it has been exaggerated, there is no doubt that there was at least some retrenchment in the early generations of church history from the more liberal attitudes of Jesus and the apostles to what women could and could not do in Christian circles. Once again, it is less


90. Bovon, Lukas, 2:105.

91. For a whole array of relevant texts and discussion, see Aida B. Spencer, Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 46–57.

92. One thinks, e.g., of the devolution of the role of women deacons in NT times (Rom 16:1, 1 Tim 3:11) to the more limited roles of the office of deaconess over the next three centuries, to its eventual “mutation” into women’s holy orders in Roman Catholicism and its disappearance altogether from Eastern Orthodoxy. For a very even-handed treatment of these and related developments, see Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 19–127.
likely that some later Jewish or Gentile Christian created this vignette than that it reflects an authentic event from the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

A Rude Guest (Luke 11:37–54). The scandal of the previous episode does not prevent another, this time unnamed, Pharisee from inviting Jesus to a festive meal. In this case, there is no indication that the host fails in any way in his responsibilities to his guests. It is Jesus, rather, who snubs his host, by refusing to perform the expected ritual of ceremonial handwashing/purification before the meal. Compounding that insult, which was seemingly unprovoked, he then turns on at least some of the other guests—those who were Pharisees—and berates them for their hypocrisy in stressing external purity while masking internal filth of various forms.93 This then launches him on a tirade with numerous woes against the worst practices of various Pharisees and scribes, woes that implicitly call their listeners to a “profound repentance.”94

The original setting of Jesus at table with a Pharisee before any animosity intrudes into the scene thus cuts against the grain of the hostility more characteristic of Jewish-Christian relations at a later date. But what early Christian, desiring to exalt Jesus, would have invented a story of him behaving in so rude a fashion? Yet his invective does cohere with the criticisms that do emerge without any moderating elements at a later date. As for coherence with an early Jewish setting, E. S. Steele argues vigorously that we must envision a Hellenistic symposium here.95 Yet the elements that lead him to make this identification are common to numerous forms of banqueting in the ancient Mediterranean world: a host notable for his wealth or wisdom, a chief guest, other invitees from the social elite, and a gradual reversal of the honor or identity of one or more guests, often triggered by a fait divers (in this case the host’s amazement at Jesus’ failure to wash his hands). Jesus, moreover, regularly “upstaged” his opponents as a result of some public challenge, whether or not at a meal, and none of the other items Steele stresses prove at all distinctive to a symposium. The truly distinctive elements—a clear separation of the meal from the discourse, the invocation of God or the gods, the pouring of a libation, emphasis on drinking, and levity and other forms of entertainment—are all missing. The meal remains thoroughly Jewish; the setting and activity, credible. No “down and outs” explicitly appear, but, contrary to all expectation, the Jewish leaders present are implicitly lumped with marginalized people such as the tax collectors as “up and outs.” Their lack of deeds be-

fitting true repentance, however, shows that they, rather than those they criticize, are the truly unclean. 96

A Rude Host and a Reply in Kind (Luke 14:1–24). That Jesus was not tarnishing all the Pharisees or scribes with the same brush is clear from the fact that he receives at least one more invitation to a dinner with a prominent Pharisee at a later date. Luke nevertheless remarks that “he was being carefully watched” (v. 1), doubtless to see if he would again exhibit such bad manners! It may well be that the invitation to the meal was a deliberate ploy in hopes that Jesus would indict himself by some improper behavior. Why else would a man with dropsy suddenly appear in front of him in this setting, on the Sabbath no less, as if to test Jesus’ very reputation for defying Sabbath halakah through his healing ministry (vv. 2–6)? 97 Jesus raises unanswerable questions before and after healing the man; by not responding, the host and his guests refuse to accept the conversational gambit that would give honor to Christ and demonstrate his control of the situation. 98 So he attacks the entire convention of seating oneself according to perceived position or rank and of inviting only those guests who can reciprocate on some other occasion (vv. 7–14). Very similar teaching on voluntarily seating oneself at a lower place than one thinks one deserves to increase the chances of later promotion rather than demotion is later attributed to Simeon ben ‘Azzai in Lev. Rab. 1:5 and appears in an anonymous saying in ‘Abot R. Nat. 25. 99 His follow-up parable reinforces this point by showing how God will not tolerate those who refuse his invitation, when their excuses remain flimsy and hypocritical,100 but will nevertheless fill his “banquet table,” by finding replacement guests from the highways and byways (vv. 16–24).

Thus, the entire scenario fits a credible early first-century Jewish context, while Jesus’ rebuke so radically rejects the etiquette of the setting that no ordinary Jew would likely have invented it. The concern for the sick, the poor and the person of low “estate” coheres with important early Christian emphases, but Jesus’ rudeness would no doubt have been substantially moderated by subsequent Christians concerned more to honor and glorify him than to portray him as so thoroughly discourteous and

96. Cf. Green, Luke, 470–71: “Jesus’ deviant behavior might have led to his negative valuation, a possibility Luke circumvents by referring to Jesus as ‘Lord’ and by reasserting Jesus’ capacity and mission, prophesied by Simeon, to make known the inner thoughts of others (2:35). In a remarkable turn of events, then, the one whose behavior seems deviant is acknowledged by Luke’s audience as Lord, and the Lord classifies those whose behaviors apparently have not transgressed the boundaries of socio-religious propriety as ‘fools!’”


subversive. While the details of the dinner, most notably the seating by rank, could fit a symposium, nothing described requires that format. No reference to drinking appears at all, while v. 15 suggests only the barest hint of a dialogue. Other opportunities to depict the meal as a stimulus to lively conversation on controversial topics pass by unexploited when host and guests alike remain silent. To the extent that Luke's focus remains on Jesus' critique of this form of meal, one may even think of it, with Willi Braun, as an anti-symposium. As in Luke 11, finally, the sinners with whom Jesus dines turn out to be the religious leaders, not the social riff-raff. Too-close association with them potentially defiles a person, rather than table fellowship with the poor, crippled, lame, or blind!

A Scandalous Summary (Luke 15:1–2). These two verses form Luke's redactional introduction to and summary of Jesus' message for “tax collectors and sinners” (recall above, p. 49), as epitomized by the three parables of the lost sheep, coin, and sons in vv. 3–32. Given that vv. 1–2 form a different literary subgenre than our passages thus far have comprised, the criterion of multiple forms supports the authenticity of Jesus' table fellowship with sinners as well. The parables in general, and those of Luke 15 in particular, are widely recognized as authentic, even by the old dissimilarity criterion; they satisfy the double similarity and dissimilarity criterion even better. To the extent that the introduction aptly encapsulates their message, it forms an important historical justification for generalizing from the behavior depicted in the parables to a key component of Jesus' ministry itself. He has come to call sinners, even those who have "fallen" as far as the prodigal son. But repentance is explicitly in view in each of the parables, so it will not do to deny that Jesus called sinners to mend their ways. If the banquet with the fatted calf points to anything other than a joyous Jewish dinner, it is the eschatological banquet and not a Hellenistic symposium that is intimated. And if anyone is in danger of rendering others morally or ritually impure, it is the overly critical religious leaders, not the notorious sinners and outcasts of society.

104. Bovon (Lukas, 3:21) speaks of this kind of table fellowship as "einem Test, einem Kriterium, einem Schibboleth" of whether the church stands or falls.
105. The slaughter of one special, large animal could make one think of the role of Behemoth in 2 Bar. 29.
CONCLUSION

Despite (and in part, because of) the enormous bibliography of scholarly literature on the Last Supper/Lord’s Supper, we have assiduously avoided asking questions about the Eucharist in this study. Smith, of course, devotes the attention to symposia that he does precisely in order to suggest that the Corinthian celebration of the Lord’s Supper followed symposium structures. That conclusion ultimately stands or falls independent of this investigation, though to the extent that Smith builds his case on the supposed all-pervasiveness of symposia, even in first-century Israel, question marks would have to be placed next to it. There is no definitive evidence in any one of the nonliturgical meals that Jesus celebrates with his disciples that points to a symposium format. Indeed, every significant element shared by Jesus’ meals and Greco-Roman symposia reappears in the Jewish hope for the eschatological banquet, for which a stronger case can be made as background, especially with its emphasis on forgiveness. The distinctive features of the symposium, on the other hand, and especially the central, dialogical banter of table talk, scarcely appear at all. Here is where writers like Sanders, Crossan, and Wright prove far more convincing than Smith, Klinghardt, and Corley. The (Jewish) Passover background to the Last Supper does not bode well for the symposium hypothesis there either, especially when one recognizes how detail after detail can be more plausibly interpreted in light of the haggadah for Pesach.

But our concern is for the noneucharistic meals of Jesus. All of them demonstrate the fourfold combination of intelligibility in their Jewish context and continuity with some aspect of early Christianity, along with significant divergence from conventional Jewish belief or practice and typical early Christian thought and behavior. Whether one speaks of this combination as the double similarity or dissimilarity criterion or as the criterion of historical plausibility, a powerful case has been mounted for its satisfaction and thus for the authenticity or historical trustworthiness of the main contours of each passage studied. If, in some instances, the evidence is somewhat less persuasive than in others, the sheer number of examples leaves us with plenty of passages that prove that the general pattern of Christ intimately associating with sinners in table fellowship deserves to remain at the core of what the historical Jesus represented.

When one inquires about the significance of these meals, one finds repeated hints that Jesus is foreshadowing the eschatological banquet at which he, the key eschatological figure, will partake in radically inclusive fashion with followers of his from all the people groups on the planet. Indeed, one could speak of these meals as enacted prophecy or symbolic of

106. But, again, see Marshall, “Last Supper.”
the kingdom’s surprising inclusions. But this is no “brokerless” kingdom, as in Crossan’s depictions,\textsuperscript{108} for Jesus himself is the crucial “broker.” Nor does this inclusivism imply universalism. There are surprising exclusions as well. Not everyone is saved, and no one is saved apart from repentance and faith in Jesus. But precisely to enhance the possibilities of genuine repentance for those alienated by standard Jewish separationism, Jesus “mixes it up” with the notorious and the riff-raff of his world. Scarcely fearing that he will be morally or ritually defiled by them, in many instances he winds up leading them to God and to true ceremonial and spiritual wholeness. Or to put it more succinctly, holiness, not impurity, turns out to be the most contagious.\textsuperscript{109} The challenge to Jesus’ followers to demonstrate this truth in their lives has not often been accepted, or demonstrated when it has been accepted, but the same power of the Holy Spirit remains available to believers in every place and time. When it has been demonstrated within small niches of the worldwide family of God’s people, the church has grown, the kingdom has advanced, and God has been glorified.\textsuperscript{110} May 21st-century followers of Christ recapture this vision and experience the blessings that come with its implementation.

\textsuperscript{108} Crossan, \textit{The Historical Jesus}, 225.
\textsuperscript{109} Cf. Scot McKnight, \textit{The Jesus Creed: Loving God, Loving Others} (Brewster, MA: Pariaclete, 2004), 159–60.
\textsuperscript{110} Cf. my \textit{Contagious Holiness}, 168–80, and the literature there cited.