

POETRY'S NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOUR

INAUGURAL LECTURE DELIVERED AT

RHODES UNIVERSITY

on 19th October, 1977

BY

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PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES



GRAHAMSTOWN

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Reference

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The reason for the choice of title will emerge from what follows. What I am hoping to do in this lecture is to look at some of the factors which have enabled the four gospels of the New Testament to be such powerful media of communication and to have had such a profound influence on the history of the world over the last two thousand years. As a result we may be led to find some help in solving some of our problems of effective communication to-day. But more importantly I hope to produce some clues for a proper interpretation of the gospels. There is, of course, great danger in trying to say anything about the gospels. In 1957, at an International Conference on the Gospels held at Oxford, Professor W.C. van Unnik referred to the danger of hearing the verdict "The new things he said were not true, and the true things were not new."¹ I hope that anything I now say may not be so new as to be untrue, nor so true as to be mere platitudes.

In the communication of knowledge and information, there are at least four elements involved of the greatest importance - the message, the messenger, the medium for the message and the recipients. In the case of the gospels there is no doubt that the really important feature is the message itself, what the New Testament calls the *KĒRUGMA*, through the foolishness of which, according to St. Paul², men are brought to salvation. Of equal importance are the messengers, among whom are the evangelists, traditionally known as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, though we might remind ourselves that unlike the letters of the New Testament there is no mention of the author's name in the body of any of the gospels. I am concerned, however, this evening with neither of these, but rather with the medium of the message and with its recipients. In the Babylonian Talmud there occurs the saying "He that knows anything worth communicating and does not communicate it, let him be hanged by the neck."³ The evangelists believed that they had something of the greatest importance to communicate to others, what they saw as literally a matter of life and death.

Notice at the start the problem with which both the Christian and a university professor are concerned. Is the Christian concerned with finding the truth, the *Summum Bonum*, and contemplating and enjoying it? Or is his business rather to communicate it to others? Is the university lecturer's business

to do research or to teach others? Aristotle would have voted for research and the discovery of the truth as an end in itself.⁴ Plato thought that there is limited value in finding the truth if it is not to be communicated to others.⁵ Though the Christian tradition sees the contemplation of God as an end in itself, the object of contemplation ceases to be God if others are not helped to see the vision. The researches of the professor are of little use if they are not communicated to others. The evangelists had no doubt that they must communicate their knowledge to others.⁶ To whom did they write and how did they go about it?

The labours of Form Critics have shown that the four Gospels were directed especially to Christian communities, as a means whereby they might be reminded of the facts on which their faith was based and be given authoritative guidance about their own worship. In other words, though we need not go as far as R. Bultmann in his statement that the Synoptic Gospels "are completely subordinate to Christian faith and worship"⁷, we must recognise that they are not meant to be simply historical records (at least in the modern sense of that term) of the life of Jesus, but also carry a message to the Church for whom they are written. When we remember that the earliest of the Gospels was probably written in the form in which we have it at least twenty, and more likely over thirty, years after the crucifixion of Jesus, there is a *prima facie* case for holding that the gospels were written in forms which would be specially relevant to the community for which they were written. Thus E. Trocmé⁸ sees Mark's strictures on the Pharisees as having several motives, one of which is to help combat "a Christianity contaminated by rabbinic tradition in the matter of moral teaching". What Mark and the other evangelists are doing, therefore, is to relate the account of the life and ministry of Jesus in such a way as to give guidance to their contemporaries, and to help them meet problems, such as that of legalism, in their life and worship. Similarly, to take a straightforward example, any Christian community reading or hearing the account of the institution of the Last Supper by Jesus with his disciples could not fail to take note of the way in which they ought to be celebrating the weekly eucharist, while Mark's own description of the Last Supper would also be in line with the practice with which he was familiar. The gospels, then, do not provide us only with evidence for the life and teaching of Jesus: they also shed light on the problems of the Church of the first century and the nature of its faith. It has been recognised from as early as the 3rd century⁹ that the gospel of John is different from the other three, in that it offers a theological interpretation of the events of the gospel

message. It is one of the great merits of critical scholarship of this century to discern equally theological motives in the Synoptic gospels. I wish to suggest that the evangelists were not consciously setting out to be theologians, but were writing much more in the style of poets or dramatists who had been so caught up by the message they had to convey that they were correctly described as inspired. The evangelists therefore produced a form of literature which has the essential qualities of drama about it, whereby the audience - for in the first century certainly most Christians would hear the gospels read rather than read them themselves - are no longer mere hearers, but become participants in the events. What is described in the narrative is seen not as an event of past history, but as a matter of vital concern to the hearers of a later generation. This is exactly the kind of difference which Aristotle¹⁰ sees between history and poetry: "It is the poet's task", he writes, "not to relate things which have happened but those which may happen and such possibilities as accord with the law of probability or necessity". So he sees the true difference between the poet and the historian to consist not in the literary form of prose or verse. "The difference is this, that one tells of what has happened, the other of what might well happen. Therefore", he continues, "poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. For poetry is rather concerned with matters of universal significance (τὰ καθόλου) whereas history deals with particulars (τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον)". Some few lines later Aristotle goes on to say that even if the poet does deal with a subject which is a matter of history, yet he is none the less a poet because of the way in which he uses his material and constructs his plots.

The difference between poetry and history is perhaps not quite as clearly defined as Aristotle may wish. History deals not with naked events, but with events clothed with their context and adorned with the significance we find in them and the interpretation we give to them. Though poetry may be concerned with timeless realities it can be understood only from the standpoint of those rooted in the actual living out of history. So it is not surprising to find that Quintilian, an orator and teacher of rhetoric at Rome in the first century A.D., calls history "the next-door neighbour to poetry (proxima poetis) and in some way free verse (quodam modo carmen solutum)".¹¹ He is contrasting both history and poetry with the art of the orator, and he continues by saying that history "is written to tell a story, not to prove a point . . . as a record for posterity and for the renown of the author". This kind of understanding of poetry and of history helps us to see that if we are to treat the gospels as being primarily historical records or

narratives we are not taking them seriously enough. If we compare the gospels with other literature of a similar period, we note that they are of a unique kind. They are (for example) quite different from the long rambling account of the life of Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher and wonder-worker contemporary with Jesus (though he outlived him by far), and whose biography was composed by Philostratus at the beginning of the 3rd century, apparently from notes made by a disciple. Many of Apollonius' recorded sayings¹² might well have been uttered by Christians, and be significant to us today. He said to the hoarders of corn "The earth is the mother of all for she is just: but you in your injustice have made it the mother of yourselves alone".¹³ In talking about community life he used to teach the duty of caring for each other and being cared for by each other.¹⁴ In his prayer to Zeus he says "Good Zeus, you are indeed so good as to share even yourself with men."¹⁵ Here are ideas which one could parallel in the gospels: add to this the fact that Philostratus records miracles of exorcism¹⁶ and the restoration of a dead man to life¹⁷, and one could be excused for thinking that the *Vita Apollonii* is similar to the gospels, particularly as Apollonius is given and claims the title of 'god'.¹⁸ Yet one does not have to be a literary critic to see that there is a world of difference between the 'Life of Apollonius' and the gospels. The 'Life of Apollonius', even if rendered into verse, could never be mistaken for anything other than what it is - a prosaic and somewhat tedious attempt to celebrate, if not to reinstate, the fame of a Pythagorean philosopher whom many considered a charlatan.

The gospels are completely different: they speak to the reader or hearer and compel his attention. They are full of allusions, in the best style of drama or poetry, to words, phrases, incidents and ideas which would be familiar to most of the company who first heard them. These allusions were especially of three kinds - to the Old Testament, to other incidents in the gospel, and to the current practice of the Church at the time of writing. We shall be concerned particularly with the last class, but let me first draw attention to the way in which the evangelists seem to go to work, so as to show that there is substance in the claim that their work is different from a biography or a history.

The gospel of Matthew starts off with the words "The book of genesis" βιβλος γενεσεως): though this is rightly translated in the English versions as "The book of the genealogy . . ." (so RSV), the original Greek version could scarcely fail to lead the hearer back to the beginning of creation - especially as the same phrase occurs twice near the beginning

of Genesis¹⁹. Here, Matthew is saying, is the record of a new creation, effected in Jesus Christ. It is with the same purpose that John begins his gospel with the first words of the Greek Old Testament, being a literal translation of the Hebrew - "In the beginning . . ." If one should have any doubt about Matthew's intentions, John makes his quite clear by his opening words about the creation of the universe through the Word, who is one with God, and has now been made man in Jesus²⁰. It is therefore no accident that at the end of the gospel John records the new creation of man through the Spirit in the same sort of language as is used to describe the first creation in Genesis²¹.

Consider too the beginning and the end of Matthew's gospel: Matthew cites the prophecy from Isaiah - "Behold: a virgin will be with child and will bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel, which is translated as God with us"²². It is only Matthew who mentions the name Emmanuel as a name of Jesus, and it is only Matthew who gives at the end of the gospel the words of Jesus to his disciples "I am with you always to the end of the age"²³, and it is he alone who cites the well-known words "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst"²⁴. The name 'Emmanuel', therefore, becomes one of Matthew's devices by which he links together the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in Jesus and his continuing presence with his disciples, the Church, while at the same time he equates the presence of Jesus with the presence of God.

Consider too the artistry of Luke: in the first two chapters of his gospel he records in parallel form the stories of the birth of John Baptist and of Jesus, and he incorporates in his account psalms and canticles which have been a feature of Christian worship ever since - the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Nunc Dimittis and even the rudiments of the Gloria in Excelsis²⁵. Is Luke there so presenting his gospel as to draw attention to the presence of Christ with his people in their worship? Certainly the gospel begins with the dumbness of Zechariah, the representative of the old order, in the Temple, and ends with the continual praises of the disciples in the Temple: the praise of God can now be sung, since the act of salvation has now been completed.

Was Jesus born in a stable? It is only Luke who records this. Is it true if it did not happen? Here we are brought to the heart of the matter. Truth is that which is significant, and the significance of the account of the birth of Jesus in a stable is to be found not in the strict historical accuracy of his birth-place,

but in the meaning of the story. John²⁶ said "He came to his own country and those who were his own did not receive him". John has his own reasons for putting it like this: he is going to draw attention later²⁷ to the fact that his own people not only did not receive and welcome him, but actually handed him over for execution to the Roman authorities. Luke is saying very much the same: Jesus is born in the city of David²⁸, for he is of the royal lineage of David: but there is no room for him in his kingdom, and he is relegated to the stable. Whether or not Jesus was actually born in a stable is immaterial. In either event Luke's account is true: he is describing in pictorially vivid terms the rejection of him whom he calls "Saviour"²⁹ by those he came to save. We must surely agree here with Vincent Taylor³⁰ that the first two chapters of Luke are "a literary composition of no mean order which ought to be treated as inspired poetry rather than as sober prose". Nor should this be seen simply as a modern way of looking at ancient literature. Apollonius of Tyana in expressing his opinions of Aesop's fables, is reported to have remarked "He who relates a story which everyone knows to be false, tells the truth in the very act of saying things which are untrue"³¹.

If we can look at the gospels like this then we can find in them a richness of meaning which we can never derive from treating them merely as history. For the Jesus whom they represent is shown forth as a particular man in history, living and dying at a particular period, whose life and death is nevertheless claimed to show forth the meaning of all life. In the historical life of one man is focused the meaning of the life of all men³². But this can be understood only by those who have made their act of faith, and have entered the community of Christ, the Church. For by this act they have declared their choice and have made their decision. This is not primarily an act of intellectual assent to incredible truths, but rather the acceptance of the claims made for Jesus as having meaning for them and for all men. Those who are within this community of faith are bound together so closely that they are called the Body of Christ - a phrase which is meant to draw attention not to a corporate body in the modern sense of the term, but to the living person of Christ reproduced in the life of the Christian community³³. It is not surprising therefore that the early Church in Jerusalem either described themselves as *the KOINŌNIA*³⁴, or at least recognised the element of community as being so important that they were led to hold all things as the common possessions of them all³⁵.

This community of property and common life, involving especially a common loyalty to Christ the Lord, was not simply

a mark of the church at Jerusalem in the early years. Justin³⁶, in the middle of the 2nd century, draws attention to the unity expressed by Christians in their common life, by their concern for each other and their readiness to share their goods. Some years later Athenagoras stresses the unity which exists between Christians of every class – “uneducated persons and artisans and old women, who, if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefits arising from their persuasion of its truth.”³⁷ Perhaps more important evidence for the attitude of Christians is furnished by the pagan writer Lucian of the 2nd century, writing about one Peregrinus whom Lucian believed to be an impostor, trading on the goodness of Christians who helped him when he was imprisoned in Asia Minor. Lucian described the Christians as those who had been persuaded “that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property.”³⁸ All that I wish to show is the sense of unity among Christians reflected both in the New Testament and in the literature of the second century. We might say that many of the problems of the Church from the third century onwards stem from attempts to maintain, promote and reflect the unity given to its members as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ. For here is the community which can interpret the drama of the gospel account, and recognise Jesus not as a crucified sophist, but as the living Lord as truly present among them as he was with his first disciples.

One of the essential elements in communication is the existence of a common ground and context between the messenger and those who receive the message. Just because there was a common ground between the evangelists and those to whom they wrote they were able to convey their message in dramatic and significant terms which the first hearers and readers would understand³⁹.

The rest of this lecture is to be devoted to looking with some care at a particular incident in the gospel account as an example of the general position which I have so far outlined – that the evangelists were writing for the Christian community, and that in order to deepen the faith of their hearers they continually described the incidents in the life of Jesus in terms which would enable their hearers to evaluate their own experience and life-style.

The incident I choose is the betrayal of Judas, with particular

reference to the kiss of Judas⁴⁰. Mark and Matthew use practically identical words to say that Judas came up to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, greeted him as Rabbi, and kissed him⁴¹. They say too that this was to be a sign or signal to show the police whom they were to arrest. Luke, according to the best manuscripts⁴², has a different account. He says simply "He came up to Jesus to kiss him. And Jesus said to him 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are handing over the Son of man?'". He omits the reference to the signal, since he considers this not only unnecessary, but difficult to explain. We note that Luke, without being untrue to the account which he found in Mark, is at pains to change the wording so as to avoid having to say that Judas did kiss Jesus. Why should he feel so uneasy about Mark's account? What was it that Luke especially wanted to convey? Before we can answer this there are two preliminary points to be made. The first concerns the place of Judas in the gospels, and the second the meaning of the kiss.

Judas Iscariot is mentioned on twenty occasions in the gospels, twice in Acts and nowhere else in the New Testament. It is significant that the name Judas is always mentioned in connection with his treachery. In the lists of the twelve⁴³ he is designated always as "the one who handed him over", or the like. In the accounts of the actual betrayal, his membership of the inner circle of disciples is always stressed⁴⁴ or his rôle as traitor is expressly mentioned⁴⁵. The two references to him in Acts⁴⁶ are to his act of betrayal. The evangelists' purpose, therefore, is to make it quite clear that one of the chosen twelve was responsible for handing over Jesus, their Lord and master, to the Jewish authorities, who in turn handed him over to the Roman authorities. We note too that in every case, except one, Judas is not strictly referred to as "the traitor", or the one who "betrayed" Jesus, but as the one who "handed him over" or "delivered him"⁴⁷. This word (παραδιδόναι) is used in the New Testament in several different and significant ways - to describe the way in which the Jews delivered Jesus to Pilate, the way in which God delivered his Son for the sins of the world, and the way in which Jesus delivered or handed over himself⁴⁸. Patristic authors do not use the word with the meaning "betray" except with reference to Jesus' betrayal, or that of his disciples⁴⁹. An interesting record of bishop Polycarp's arrest in the mid-2nd century tells how he was delivered, or betrayed, (the same word is used as in the gospels) by those of his own household⁵⁰.

The description of the institution of the Last Supper given by St. Paul refers to the occasion as "the night on which he was being delivered", and this phrase found expression in one form

or another in the early liturgies of the Church⁵¹. The occasion, then, when the Church met to celebrate the death and resurrection of their Lord was also one when they were poignantly reminded of the part played by Judas, a disciple like themselves, in the act of deliverance.

The second preliminary point concerns the meaning of the kiss. The kiss was a sign of intimate relationship between two people, and was regularly exchanged between rabbis and their pupils⁵². Though Origen⁵³ seems to believe that this was the meaning of Judas' kiss, there is much to be said for the view that the evangelists find a much deeper meaning in it here, and refer it to the kiss of peace as exchanged at the celebration of the Eucharist⁵⁴. Let us look at the context of the kiss of Judas. It follows soon after the Last Supper, kept by Jesus with his disciples earlier that same evening. Mark describes Jesus' prediction of Judas' betrayal as they start the Supper. He writes⁵⁵ (followed closely by Matthew), "Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will hand me over, one who is eating with me'. They began to be distressed and to say to him one by one 'Is it I?'. He said to them 'It is one of the twelve, who dips with me in the same dish' ". The traitor is going to be one of those joined in this intimate table-fellowship with their master. Jesus makes it clear that this is in accordance with God's plan for himself, but predicts doom for the traitor - "It would be better for that man if he had never been born"⁵⁶. Imagine the drama of these words when they were recited in Christian gatherings, where they would normally have been read and heard. In the same way as the participants in the Jewish Passover meal see themselves as involved in the act of deliverance from Egypt and from slavery, so the Christians celebrating eucharist find their union with their Lord and enter into his act of redemption. Can it be that one of them will betray their Lord as truly and as fully as Judas did?

Now we note that Luke, who changes the wording of Judas' betrayal of Jesus with a kiss, changes too the position of Jesus' prediction of the betrayal until immediately after the Last Supper. The reason for Luke's change of position will emerge later.

There is no doubt that the kiss of peace was used regularly from the second century onwards in the eucharist, and that its meaning was to show the unity and solidarity which existed between the disciples and their Lord and therefore the unity which existed between themselves. Christians were to be united among themselves because each, by the act of God and by his own faith, was united with Christ his Lord. The first

clear reference to it is found in Justin⁵⁷, who was writing about 150 A.D. and who described what he knew as the regular practice. "When we have ceased from our prayers we greet each other with a kiss".⁵⁸ Justin then goes on to describe the prayer of thanksgiving, or eucharist, over the bread and wine which all receive, and Justin connects this with the words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper as recorded in the gospel. The kiss became an integral part of the eucharistic liturgy, and writers thought it necessary to underline its true meaning even before the end of the second century⁵⁹. It was described in different ways - the kiss of peace (*osculum pacis*), the holy kiss (*sanctum osculum*), the peace (*pax*)⁶⁰, the *AGAPE*⁶¹, the most awe-inspiring greeting⁶². Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, writing about the year 400 A.D. describes its meaning in these words: "This weaves our minds together and makes all of us become one body, since we all share too in the one body. Let us then join ourselves together to form one body . . . fastening our souls to each other by the bond of love"⁶³. We therefore know that it was a regular part of the liturgy from the 2nd century onwards, and that its meaning was to show the close unity and love which existed between all those who were to participate in the eucharist⁶⁴.

Was this kiss practised in New Testament times? There is no doubt that the eucharist was being regularly celebrated in Christian Communities by the early years of the fifties, and that though the authority for this form of celebration derives from the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples its meaning is to be found in the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We know this from St. Paul⁶⁵, who makes it clear that he believed that he was handing on a custom to the people of Corinth which he had received from others and which he was convinced came from the Lord himself. Now this is the only clear reference in the New Testament to what was the central act of worship of the Church, and we note that we have this reference only because Paul was trying to correct abuses which had arisen in the church at Corinth. In the same way Paul also draws attention to the unity of Christians with each other as set forth in the eucharist⁶⁶ which displays and stresses the loyalty called for from each Christian to Christ his Lord. Again this was mentioned by St. Paul to recall the Corinthian Church from any possible relapse into idolatry. Arguments that the early Church would not have developed, by the time Mark wrote, any formal liturgical practice for celebrating the eucharist, can be met by referring not only to the strict liturgical order of the Jewish worship - especially of the Passover, so similar to the eucharistic liturgies, - but also to the liturgical order of the Qumran community⁶⁷, where "The Pure Meal of the

Congregation" played such a central part in their life and ritual. The words of Paul in I Corinthians 11, already referred to, would seem to witness to the existence of a formal liturgy long before the time Mark wrote his gospel. The writings of the New Testament did not need to spell out the practices of Christian worship, for the letters and the gospels were written for communities who would not only be meeting for common worship but would normally read or listen to the writings when they were gathered for worship⁶⁸. In delivering their message, therefore, the evangelists wrote against a background which had certain common features, in spite of many differences, in each locality. So when Paul writes, as he does on three occasions⁶⁹, "Greet one another with a holy kiss", or when Peter writes "Greet one another with a kiss of love (*AGAPĒ*)"⁷⁰ it is likely that he is referring to the kiss of love at the eucharist which would symbolise not only their unity with each other but their unity with their correspondents in Christ. It is significant in this regard that both Paul and Peter link their injunction with the assurance of their own greetings and those of the churches from where they are writing⁷¹.

This likelihood is strengthened when we read John's account of the appearance of the risen Christ to his disciples⁷² who are greeted with the twice-repeated "Peace be with you" – the same greeting as is found at the end of I Peter. In his account John writes in such a way as to enable his hearers to realise that the risen Lord is as present with them as he was with the disciples on the first Easter Day⁷³. The giving of the Peace by the Lord is the same as the giving of the Peace in every eucharist and is to be distinguished from the greeting "Shalom" as generally exchanged in New Testament times⁷⁴. In view then of the evidence and of the context in which it occurs it is reasonable to suppose that the kiss of Judas whereby Mark describes the betrayal of Jesus is related to the eucharistic kiss.

We can then try to see why Luke has changed both the position of Jesus' prediction of his betrayal and the description of Judas' meeting with Jesus in Gethsemane. Mark in his account seems to say that Judas partook of the Last Supper with the deliberate intention of betraying Jesus. Luke changes the emphasis: although, like Mark and Matthew, he recognises that Judas had already made his agreement with the high priests, he defers Jesus' prediction of his betrayal by Judas until immediately after the Supper, and it is only then that he records the questionings among the disciples. These now reflect the questionings of later disciples regarding their continued loyalty to Christ and the brethren, with whom they have expressed their unity in the eucharist. It is with such a

problem that Luke seems to be specially concerned. Mark, in effect, is saying: "Before you partake of the eucharist, examine your intention of being loyal to Christ: will you be like Judas, kissing the Lord and then betraying him?" In this way Mark would reflect the early Church's stress on the need of purity of intention, as found, for example, in Paul's letters and in the *Didache*⁷⁶. Mark is pointing out the significance of the eucharist to believers, to stress the intimate relationship therein set forth between the believer and Christ, and the need to show the same faithfulness in one's life. He is more concerned with preparation for the eucharist, and the question "Is it I?" is one which each disciple is to ask himself.

Luke on the other hand is more concerned with the result of the eucharist. For he depicts the Church especially as a brotherhood, the nature of which is expressed in the common meal of the eucharist. He shows this not only by his references in Acts⁷⁷, but also by the way in which he describes the rivalry among the disciples for precedence in the context of the last Supper. Luke therefore finds the possibility of treachery among the disciples so abhorrent that he will not say that Judas actually kissed Jesus.

If this is the message which Mark and Luke wish to communicate, what about John? For if we want evidence of drama and poetry in the gospels, we shall find its clearest expression in John. His presentation of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas is different. In Gethsemane Judas does no more than lead the Jewish authorities to where Jesus is⁷⁸, and he then takes his stand with those who come to arrest Jesus. The emphasis in John's account here is entirely on the person of Jesus, who asks 'For whom are you looking?' They replied to him: 'Jesus of Nazareth'. He said to them 'I am he' (using the same words as elsewhere in the gospel with a reference no doubt to the name of God). They went away and fell to the ground. So he asked them again 'For whom are you looking?'. They said 'For Jesus of Nazareth'. Jesus replied 'I have told you that I am he: if it is I whom you seek, then let these go' . . . (and a few verses later) 'the cup that my Father has given to me, shall I not drink it?' Here Jesus is at the centre of the stage, and Judas in the shadows: here is God's purpose being worked out in the person of Jesus: here is the hour of his glory⁷⁹.

John's purpose becomes clearer when we look at his account of the Last Supper. He does not describe the Supper, but tells of the foot-washing which takes place during it⁸⁰. He starts his account by saying that the devil had already made up his mind

that Judas should betray Jesus, that Jesus knew what was going to happen, and that as he had come from God so he was now going to God. After the drama of the foot-washing, there occurs the prediction of the betrayal. Jesus indicates to the disciple whom he loved who the traitor will be: he dips a morsel⁸¹ (perhaps of bread, perhaps of bitter herbs) and gives it to Judas. After this Satan entered into Judas, and Jesus says "What you are going to do, do quickly". The pericope ends with the verse⁸² "So as soon as he had received the morsel he went out: it was night". Early commentators⁸³ rightly discern John's purpose here. Judas has left Jesus, and Jesus is the light of the world: Judas is now in darkness, alienated from the truth and from God; he is on his own, in the blackness of night. John's purpose is different then from the Synoptists. Judas does not kiss Jesus. For John does not draw attention to the enormity of Judas' act of treachery (though he does not overlook this⁸⁴): he puts Jesus in the centre of the picture, and sees him as in complete control of the situation. The one who is really defeated is Judas, for he has left the light of life, and wanders in meaningless darkness. Similarly, the disciple who betrays Jesus or his followers⁸⁵ cannot defeat God's purposes: when disbelievers reject the Lord they reject life for themselves. Jesus' triumph is not affected: indeed it is so sure that even before his passion John can have him say "I have conquered the world", (i.e. the powers of evil) in a context which assures his disciples that they too have no cause for fear, since they share in his victory⁸⁶.

Early preachers and teachers found more practical pastoral value in the approach of Mark and Luke than in that of John, and they were quick to use Judas as a terrible example of what might happen, and as a type of those who betrayed their Lord⁸⁷. In the eyes of the early Christian Church the most terrible sin was that of apostasy, of denying the faith, of becoming traitors of Christ or of his servants. This more than anything else posed the real problem of penitential discipline in the early Church⁸⁸. But it was a problem even in the New Testament period⁸⁹. How could the Christian who had been made a new creation be made new again? So the sin of Judas stood as the awful reminder of what might happen. Further, it is clear that later writers connected the kiss of Judas with the eucharistic kiss. Chrysostom, in the sermon to which reference has been made⁶², preached on the evening of Holy Thursday, the anniversary of the institution of the Eucharist warns his hearers not to be Judas, and Basil archbishop of Seleucia some 50 years later waxes eloquent in his sermon on a similar occasion. "Were you taught to kiss like this? Tell me, did you learn from me this rule of love? O kiss of full blood . . . What

you were taught in order to show love (*AGAPĒ*) you have used to show deceit (*APATĒ*).⁹⁰

The point which I want to make is simply this, that not only did later preachers find an excellent text in the kiss of Judas, but that this is exactly what the evangelists intended. Here is communication at its best: for the hearers are being told the events of the gospel in ways which strike home to them. For the communication of the gospel is not the telling of past events for their own sake, but in order that the hearers may again find the meaning of these events in their own lives and discover the truth for themselves.

Did Judas kiss Jesus? Two gospels say yes, one is ambiguous and the fourth omits all reference. It really makes no difference, for in either case the truth is being presented – one of the inner circle of disciples, the chosen twelve, united with his Lord, sharing with him in the Last Supper, handed him over to his death. This act of treachery could be, and is, repeated in one way or another by later disciples, and the evangelists were conscious of this when they wrote their gospels. So even Mark, whom Professor Trocmé describes as “a clumsy writer unworthy of mention in any history of literature”⁹¹, has yet as the result of either his own skill or that of his sources produced a dramatic situation in which the actors are not just Judas and Peter and the other disciples, but those for whom he wrote in the latter part of the first century, and after them for Christians of every age.

Here, then, is the conclusion of the matter – that the communication of the gospel goes hand in hand with the life of the community which shares a common faith and a common loyalty. The power of the Christian gospel is to be seen in its persistence in spite of the dissolution of the Church’s unity: but the meaning of the gospel can be genuinely communicated only when Christians have discovered again the meaning of the common life which they have in Christ. Perhaps there can be nothing more important for this land than that the Church should so recover its unity in Christ as to be able to interpret and live out the gospel entrusted to it. But the stress on a common faith and a common life is also of special importance to a university Faculty of Divinity. For the communication of the things of God is not an abstract theoretical exercise, but the commitment to a way of life. The message is transmitted not through learned lectures or scholarly theories but only by those and to those who try however falteringly to base their faith on Christ. Those who would learn the meaning of the New Testament need to belong to the community of faith, and in

worship and in life to acknowledge him of whom the New Testament speaks. This is not to deny for a moment the importance of the academic discipline: the worship of God involves the search for truth, and all our beliefs must be subjected to rigorous criticism. But academic enquiry without faith is like Pilate asking "What is Truth?" of him who is the truth incarnate. A Faculty of Divinity can avoid such shortsightedness only by combining the living of the Christian life in the context of the Church with the careful scholarship required for an honest examination of the basis of its faith in scripture, theology and history.

We may continue to think of the gospels as history: for such they are. But they are history of a special kind, aptly described by Quintilian's phrase as "next-door neighbour to poetry", since they do not simply record the origins of the faith of the Church but rather provide the source of its continuing life. The truth for the evangelists, as for all involved in the field of education, is not primarily a matter of imparting information, but is to be found in promoting the growth and development of the disciples, the learners, until they discover the true meaning of life, which the evangelists believe to be expressed in its fulness in the historical life of one who is reported as claiming to be, without any qualification, "the Way, the Truth and the Life"⁹².

The following abbreviations have been used in the notes:-

ANCL:	The Ante-Nicene Christian Library
ET:	English Translation
GCS:	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. (Hinrichs; Leipzig).
PG:	J-P. Migne (ed.) Patrologia Graeca.
TDNT:	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (edd.): A Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: English translation; Eerdman's. 9 vols.

References:

1. **Studia Evangelica: Papers presented to the International Congress on the Four Gospels, 1957:** ed. K. Aland et al. (Berlin, 1959), p.383.
2. 1 Corinthians 1:21.
3. Sukkah 53b cit. ap. P.I. Hershon: **Genesis with a Talmudical Commentary** (ET; Bagster; 1883), p.3.
4. Aristotle Eth. Nic. X, 7-8.
5. Plato Rep. 519C - 520D.
6. cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16.
7. R. Bultmann **The History of the Synoptic Tradition** (ET; Blackwell, 1963), p. 374.
8. E. Trocmé **The Formation of the Gospel according to Mark** (ET; SPCK, 1975) p.109.

9. Clement of Alexandria (ap. Eusebius H.E. 6.14.7) says that John composed "a spiritual gospel"
(πνευματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον)
10. Aristotle **Poetics** IX, 1451 a - b (ed. S.H. Butcher; Macmillan, 1963).
11. Quintilian **Inst. Or.** X.1.31.
12. Some of these sayings seem to be later attributions to him.
13. Philostratus **Vit. Apoll.** I.15.
14. *ib.* IV.3.
15. *ib.* IV.28.
16. e.g. *ib.* III.38, IV.20, Cf. Mark 9:17-27.
17. *ib.* IV.45. Cf. Luke 7:11-16.
18. e.g. *ib.* III.50, V.24, VIII.5, VIII.31; cf. Epist. 48.
19. Genesis 2:4; 5:1 (LXX). Each is in a significant context.
20. John 1:1-3, 14.
21. John 20:22, Gen. 2:7. In both places there occurs the word ἐνεφύσησεν ("he breathed into") Genesis 2:7 talks of "the breath of life" (πνοήν ζωῆς) and C.H. Dodd (**The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel** (Cambridge, 1954), p. 227) suggest that John may have there read πνεῦμα ζωῆς , as Philo seems sometimes to have read. In this case the parallel would be even closer.
22. Matthew 1:23, citing Isaiah 7:14 (LXX).
23. Matthew 28:20.
24. Matthew 18:20.
25. Luke 1:46ff, 68ff; 2:14, 29ff.
26. John 1:11.
27. John 18:35.

28. Luke 2:4.
29. Luke 2:11. The only other use of this title as applied to Jesus in the gospels is John 4:42.
30. V. Taylor **The Formation of the Gospel Tradition** (Macmillan, 1945), p.160.
31. Philostrastus op. cit. V.14. One might here consider too the way in which the Greek tragedians used the ancient myths as vehicles for their message. But note their essential difference from the gospels, in that the evangelists dealt with a figure of history, the tragedians with myth.
32. Cf. H. Conzelmann **The Theology of St. Luke** (ET: Faber, pb, 1969) p.185: "Jesus is at one and the same time a particular historical figure and an eternal type."
33. Cf., e.g., A.M. Ramsey **The Gospel and the Catholic Church** (Longmans, ed. 2, 1956) pp.35-38; H. Küng **The Church** (ET, Burnes & Oates, 1956), pp.203-241.
34. See L. Thornton **The Common Life in the Body of Christ** (Dacre Press, ed. 2, 1944), esp. pp. 69-78.
35. Acts 2:42 (τῇ κοινῶνίᾳ), 44 (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινῶν), 45; 4:32-5:11.
36. Justin **Apol.** I.14: "We who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to everyone in need" (Trans. M. Dods in ANCL, vol.II, T. & T. Clark, 1867).
37. Athenagoras **A Plea Regarding Christians II** (Trans. B.P. Pratten in ANCL vol. II, T. & T. Clark, 1867).
38. Lucian **On the Death of Peregrinus** 13, cit. ap. J. Stevenson (ed.) **A New Eusebius** (SPCK, 1965) p.135.
39. A good example of this common background is provided by Canon H.A. Johnson **Global Odyssey** (Bles, London, 1963), p.67, where he tells of an incident in his tour of the Anglican Communion in 1959. On the West coast of Africa he went on a trip with the Bishop of Gambia and the Rio Pongas - an Irishman. In the wild country through which they travelled they suddenly met an African who

had “a bandana to cover his head and a breechclout to take care of the rest of him. He was carrying a spear, a smoking flax, and a kind of hula hoop. The hoop was to enable him to shinny up the trees. The flax was for smoking out the bees so that the honey could be gathered”. The Bishop tried to converse with him, but with no success. The man was clearly far from home. The Bishop asked him ‘Christian?’ in several dialects. “The man looked blank. The Bishop then made the Sign of the Cross upon himself and folded his hands in an attitude of prayer. A broad smile irradiated the face of the African, who promptly threw down the spear, the flax and the hoop, took off the bandana, made the Sign of the Cross in return, dropped to his knees and folded his hands”. Compare too **Authority in the Church: A statement on the question of authority . . . agreed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, Venice, 1976** (SPCK, 1977) p.7: “Shared commitment and belief create a common mind in determining how the gospel should be interpreted and obeyed.”

40. Mark 14:45, Matthew 26:49, Luke 22:47f.
41. For the possible meaning of the intensive form *κατεφύλησε*, used by Mark and Matthew, but not by Luke, see F.W. Belcher in **Expository Times** vol. 64 (1952/3) p.240. Contra G. Stählin in TDNT IX, p.125 (n.121) and p.140 (n.240).
42. A few manuscripts assimilate the text to the reading in Mark and Matthew. In view of the weighty evidence for the other reading, there can be no real doubt of what Luke actually wrote.
43. Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:19, Luke 6:16; cf. John 6:71, 12:4.
44. Matthew 26:14, 47; Mark 14:10, 43; Luke 22:3, 47; John 13:2, 26, 29.
45. Matthew 26:25; 27:3; John 17:2f., 5.
46. Acts 1:16, 25.
47. The exception is Luke 6:16 where Judas is called “traitor” (*προδοῦτης*), the only use of the word in the gospels, though note its use in Acts 7:52, where the Jews are called “traitors and murderers” of Jesus.

48. John 18:35; Rom. 4:25, 8:32; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25.
49. See G.W. Lampe (ed.) **A Patristic Greek Lexicon** (Oxford, 1961) s.v. Cf. R.H. Lightfoot **The Gospel Message of St. Mark** (Oxford, 1950) p.52.
50. Mart. Pol. 6:2.
51. 1 Cor. 11:23. Cf. The Liturgy of St. Mark (ap. J.M. Neale **The Primitive Liturgies**, London, 1868, p.22) “the night on which he was handing himself over for our sins”, and the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom (ib. p.133) “the night on which he was being handed over, or rather was handing himself over”. The same word (παραδιδόναι) in the same tense (imperfect) is used in every case.
52. G. Stählin in TDNT vol. IX (Eerdman’s, 1974) p.140f.
53. Cit. ap. G. Stählin op. cit. p.141, n.244.
54. Note that G. Stählin (op. cit. p.142f), while citing the examples of the eucharistic and cultic kiss in the early Church, does not attribute this meaning to N.T. times. But see J-J. von Allmen **The Lord’s Supper** (ET, Lutterworth, 1969) p.73, n.14.
55. Mark 14:18-21, Matthew 26:21-25.
56. A traditional expression: cf. Eth. Enoch 38:2.
57. Justin **Apology** 1:65.
58. ib.
59. Athenagoras **A Plea Regarding Christians** 32 “The kiss (φίλημα) or rather the greeting (προσκύνημα) must be given with great care” (PG 9.264). Cf. Clem Al. **Paed.** III.11.81.2-3 cit. ap. J. Stevenson (ed.) **A New Eusebius** (SPCK, 1965) p.196.
60. All three descriptions found in Tertullian **de Oratione** 18.
61. Liturgy of Basil and Chrysostom ap. H.E. Brightman **Liturgies Eastern and Western** (Oxford, 1896) p.320.
62. Chrysostom **Hom.1 in Prod.lud.** (PG 49.382) (τοῦ φρικωδεστάτου ἀσπασμοῦ τοῦ πρὸς ἀλλήλους).

63. Loc. cit. (previous note). Cf. the similar language of Cyril of Jerusalem **Catech.** 23:3.
64. Matthew 5:23f; John 13:34f. Cf. J-J. von Allmen op. cit. (n.54 supr.) p.60.
65. 1 Corinthians 11:17-33.
66. 1 Corinthians 10:14-21.
67. IQS VI; 1QSa II: G. Vermes **The Dead Sea Scrolls in English** (2nd ed. Penguin Books, 1975) pp.81 & 121.
68. Cf. Colossians 4:16: "When this letter has been read among you, see that it is read too in the church of the Laodiceans; and you too read the letter which will come from Laodicea".
69. Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12.
70. 1 Peter 5:14.
71. Romans 16:16: "All the churches of Christ greet (ἀσπάζονται) you". 2 Corinthians 13:12: "All God's people greet (ἀσπάζονται) you". Cf. 1 Cor. 16:21ff and 1 Peter 5:13f.
72. John 20:19-23 (cf. vv. 24-29).
73. Cf. J.N. Suggit **The Eucharistic Significance of John 20:19—29** in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* no.16 (Sept. 1976) pp.52ff.
74. Cf. John 14:27.
75. Luke 22:3-6.
76. 1 Corinthians 11:27ff. Didache 10:6: "If any is holy (ἅγιος) let him come. If anyone is not holy, let him repent".
77. See note 35 supr., and compare Luke's account of the deception which Ananias and Sapphira played on the Christian community, and their punishment (Ac. 5: 1-11). Selfishly to withhold one's own property from the common stock cannot but result in death. Contrast the punishment on similar offenders in the Qumran community - exclusion from the "Pure Meal of the

Congregation" for one year and a 25% reduction in rations (IQS VI: G. Vermes op. cit. p. 82).

Luke's setting of the dispute about precedence (22:24-30) is particularly instructive. It is clearly related to, even if not derived from, Mark 10:41-45. By placing the dispute in the setting of the Last Supper he seems to represent a tradition mid-way between that of Mark and that of John (13:1-17). In any case, Luke has reported the incident in such a way as to stress the community aspect of the meal and the dreadfulness of treachery towards Jesus and his community. The incident occurs between the questionings of 22.23 and the promise to the loyal apostles of 22.28ff.

78. John 18: 2-12.

79. Cf. John 17:1-5.

80. John 13:2, where even if the present participle is not read, the aorist participle (a more difficult reading, with weaker MSS. support) seems to need an ingressive meaning, if it is to agree with the later narrative. Cf. B.M. Metzger **A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament** (United Bible Societies, London and New York, 1971) ad loc.

81. John 13:26.

82. John 13:30.

83. Origen **Comm. in Joann.** 32:24 (GCS 468 f).

84. See John 13:18-20.

85. John 13:20 (cf. v.16).

86. John 16:33.

87. Cf. Mart. Pol. 6:2; Origen **Comm. in Joann.** 32:24 (GCS p.468); Athanasius **ep. Aeg. Lib.** 21 (PG 25.588A); Chrysostom **Hom. 1 in Prod. Iud.** (PG 49.375); id. **Hom. 2 in Prod. Iud.** (PG 49.389).

88. See esp. Hermas Sim. VIII.9.3, 10.3; IX.19.1,3, 26.5; cf. IX.28.4,8.

89. Hebrews 6:4f; 2 Peter 2:20-22. Is this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

90. **Serm. in Prod. Iud.** (PG 28.1051).

91. *Op. cit.* (n.8 *supr.*) p.72.

92. John 14:6.