CHAPTER II

SEXUALITY

This chapter looks at the sexuality of Christ, a controversial factor found in fictional depictions of Christ that do not conform to the biblical version of Christ's life. With the exception of Gore Vidal's Live From Golgotha, the other five works used in this thesis—Saramago's The Gospel According to Jesus Christ, Graves' King Jesus, Lawrence's The Man Who Died and the two films, The Last Temptation of Christ and Jesus Christ, Superstar—focus on the theme of Christ's sexuality in one way or the other. The term sexuality, in general, may be defined, as being used:

To emphasize the entailment of a wider configuration—a configuration that includes values, feelings and human relationships as well as biological drives...sexuality involves the ways in which persons define themselves, the definitions they make of others and the personal and cultural meanings that are attached to their inter-personal relationships.¹

This may be said to be a social interpretation of the term sexuality. This chapter while talking about the sexuality of Christ is more inclined towards the definition of sexuality as a biological drive. After going into how various writers deal with this theme, which is not at all mentioned with regard to Christ in the Bible, the chapter will look at how sexuality in general is defined in Christianity, and more importantly why it is so defined, as this will help in understanding why in the re-writings, this theme tends to rake up a lot of controversy. Michel Foucault's seminal work on sexuality, The History of Sexuality² will be used as a basic text in this context. But first, the chapter will analyse the theme of
sexuality through Mary Magdalene, a character who is common in all the above works, especially with regard to the picturisation of Christ's sexuality and who is often used as an instrument for highlighting this theme. Works that have generated more controversy will be taken up first, followed by others, where the character of Magdalene is not directly linked to the sexuality of Christ. The biblical depiction of Magdalene will also be looked into, so as to observe how different this emerges in the hands of various writers/directors.

One of the most controversial works of art dealing with the depiction of Christ in recent times has been Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the cinematic version of Kazantzakis' novel. The book itself, when it was published in the late 1950's, attracted much controversy. The publication of *The Last Temptation of Christ*, not only led to the decision of the Roman Catholic Church to place the novel on its Index of Forbidden Books, but also to Kazantzakis' excommunication from the Greek Orthodox Church. Scorsese stays true to the story in the novel, without straying at all from Kazantzakis' depiction of Christ and makes it a point to mention that his scriptwriter Paul Schrader had quite effectively reduced the big novel into a 90-page script.

To say that the movie was controversial would be an understatement. In fact Paramount, the studio house that undertook the project, shelved it midway through, not just because of spiraling costs, but also because of vehement protests from Christian groups. Later the budget of the film was slashed and the production was taken over by Universal Pictures, under whose banner it was finally released in 1988.
not as though hell broke loose. But for the liberal, westernized society that modern America stands for, the protests against this film were vehement. The controversy basically centered around the crucified Jesus having a 'temptation-like fantasy' of being married to Magdalene, having sex with her and later fathering the children of Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha. The picturisation of a very human Christ is what Scorsese aims at by introducing and turning the spotlight on such scenes. The film opens with Kazantzakis' words from the preface of the novel and clearly states that it will stick to this premise:

The dual substance of Christ—the yearning so human, so superhuman of man to attain God has always been a deep inscrutable mystery to me. My principle anguish and source of all my joys and sorrows from my youth onward has been the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh and my soul is the arena where these two armies have clashed and met. This film is not based on the Gospels but upon this fictional exploration of the eternal spiritual conflict.  

The clash between the spirit and the flesh that was the central theme of Kazantzakis' The Last Temptation of Christ and which Scorsese aims to portray in the film may in general terms, be defined as the 'calling' of Christ and his refusal to heed to it. It is to give top billing to this clash that Kazantzakis' novel and in effect Scorsese's film, strays from the Gospel depiction of Christ's life. Jesus here, is a man tormented by God to accept his calling. He is forced to go to the monastery in the desert to find out what is causing him so much pain, though he seems to know that it's God:

You're sure it's God? You're sure it's not the Devil? I'm not sure. I'm not sure of anything. Because if it's the Devil then the Devil can be cast out. But what if it's God? You can't cast out God, can you?
The Jesus of the Bible has no doubt whatsoever about his identity. In fact even as a boy, he knew very well where he belonged. [Luke 2:49] He does not have to go to a monastery to find out who or what he is. But by having such a scene, the film is able to show that Jesus is someone special and also more importantly, it is able to bring out his worries of donning the role of this special individual:

Can't you see what's inside of me, all my sins? I'm a liar, a hypocrite. I don't ever tell the truth; I don't have the courage. When I see a woman, I blush and look away. I want her, but I don't take her; for God. And it makes me proud, and my pride wants Magdalene. I don't steal, I don't fight, I don't kill; not because I don't want to but because I'm afraid. You want to know who my mother and father are? You want to know who my God is? Fear! You look inside me and that's all you'll find...Lucifer is inside me. He says to me, "You're not the son of king David. You're not a man; you're the Son of Man and more, the Son of God and even more, God!!"

So this Christ, initially at least, like any other ordinary human being, is more concerned about his own sins than the sins of humanity. The biblical Christ however, is sinless and his primary concern is about the sins of others [Luke 5:24; 19:10, 2nd Corinthians 5:21].

In fact, the Pharisees in the Gospels criticize Jesus for his proximity to sinners and people of ill repute [Mark 2:16; Luke 15:2]. There are such people in the film too who are used to focus attention on the humanness of Jesus. Mary Magdalene, a prostitute, is one such character. She is used to bring out the sexuality of Jesus by virtue of which his humaneness is emphasized. Magdalene's first appearance in the film is when she publicly spits at Jesus for being the only Jew to make crosses for the Romans. When he visits her brothel, she accuses him of ruining her life. But later she becomes his follower after he rescues her from a mob that was about to stone her. She's with him almost always after
this and even shares the last supper with his other disciples. She's at the crucifixion and is an important element of Jesus' temptation fantasy.

Magdalene is the character through whom the question of sexuality is raised. Had Jesus not been forced to accept the will of God, he would have preferred Magdalene to be his wife. But he has to forsake her because of God. Magdalene is presented as someone who does not take this lying down, which is perhaps why she publicly spits at him. It was as though she was waiting for an opportunity to get even with him. She gets another opportunity when enroute to the monastery, Jesus goes to her brothel and waits there along with her other customers. He sees them having sex with her. After everyone leaves, he begs her to forgive him, but she blames him for making her a prostitute for he was all she ever wanted. Jesus too admits that he had wanted nothing better, but that he has to follow God's path. She accuses both him and God for making her life miserable, but Jesus tells her that everything is his fault, not God's. On his return from the monastery, Jesus finds Magdalene about to be stoned for adultery by a mob. He deters them by asking anyone among them without sin to cast the first stone at her. And when Zebedee steps forward saying he has nothing to hide, Jesus lists out a few sins and wrong doings of Zebedee's. From that day, Magdalene, Zebedee's sons—James and John and others like Peter, Nathaniel etc., become Jesus' followers. He talks to people about love, performs miracles and cures people; but is still unsure of who he is or what exactly it is that God wants from him. Judas is the one who is closest to Jesus and he advises Jesus to meet John the Baptist, in the hope that the Baptist may be able to tell who Jesus is. The Baptist, on seeing Jesus, senses that he's special and asks him whether he's the Messiah. This
only adds on to Jesus self-doubts. The Baptist tells Jesus that it is not the soft message of love alone that will make people turn to God. He asks Jesus to be more action-oriented and speak about the axe that will cut down the evildoers and the fire that will burn them. He asks Jesus to go to the desert if he really wants to know what God wants him to do. But he warns him, "God is not alone out there in the desert."

Jesus spends several days in the desert and there temptation in various shapes and sizes visits him. First, it's a black cobra with anklets ringing and a female voice, which tells him that he should save himself and not the world, that he should start a family. And then it just explodes, leaving Jesus sobbing. Next, a lion comes claiming to be Jesus' own heart that desires power. "You said, God, God! Make me God." But Jesus is more confident against the lion, "Liar! Come inside my circle so that I can pull out your tongue." Finally its Satan himself in the form of fire who comes and tells Jesus that he is the Son of God and asks Jesus to join hands with him. The fire departs telling Jesus that they would meet again. Jesus looked quite vulnerable against the black cobra, "Look into my eyes, my breasts, you know me." It's as though he saw Magdalene in the cobra. Why does he cry when the snake explodes? Surely it's not because the snake perishes! One can't help feeling that Jesus cries because he almost believes in the snake. This is his first temptation and he almost stumbles; which is perhaps why a temptation based on 'woman' comes once again, this time on the very threshold of death, when Jesus is crucified—the last temptation of Christ.
Winds sweep dust across Golgotha, where Jesus is crucified. But as things become calm, Jesus realizes that some kind of a change has taken place. He does not hear any noise around. His pain also seems to have vanished. He sees a little girl at the foot of the cross, who claims to be his guardian angel, sent by God to rescue him. She explains to him, "The God of Israel is a God of mercy, not a God of punishment." She says that he does not have to sacrifice himself, for he's not the Messiah. God was only testing him, just like how he had tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. The angel removes all the nails on Jesus' hands and feet and brings him down from the cross. She takes him to Magdalene, whom Jesus marries. They make love and she becomes pregnant. But then Magdalene dies and Jesus is infuriated at this. But the angel comforts him saying, "there is only one woman in the world...with different faces. When one Mary Magdalene dies, another Mary, Lazarus' sister rises." Jesus then goes to Bethany, where he fathers the children of both Mary and Martha. Then one day in the village square, he sees Saul the Zealot, now known as Paul, preaching about Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Jesus confronts Paul and asks him to stop preaching lies about him having resurrected, or he'd expose him. Paul tells Jesus to go ahead and do it. He tells him that he's doing all this to ease the sufferings of the people and to bring them happiness.

Jesus grows old. He hears the destruction of Jerusalem. On his deathbed, Peter, John and Nathaniel visit him. The guardian angel tries to stop them, but Peter brushes her aside. All of them speak to him with reverence, but then Judas enters and calls Jesus a traitor. Jesus explains to Judas that it was God Himself who sent his guardian angel to rescue him. Judas asks Jesus to take a good look at his guardian angel. To his horror,
Jesus sees the same blaze of fire that came to tempt him in the desert. It was Satan, "I'd told you that we'd meet again." Jesus realises that he's been tricked. He painfully drags himself from his bed, goes outside and pleads to God:

    Father! Will You listen to me? Are You still there? Will You listen to a selfish and unfaithful son? I fought You when You called. I resisted. I thought I knew more. I didn't want to be Your son. Can You forgive me? I didn't fight hard enough. Father, give me Your hand. I want to bring salvation. Father, take me back. Make a feast. Welcome me home. I want to be Your son. I want to pay the price. I want to be crucified and rise again. I want to be the Messiah!!!

Suddenly he finds himself back on the cross, with all the people jeering and the two men crucified on both his sides writhing in pain. He is so relieved to be back on the cross that he joyfully exclaims: "It is accomplished." And thus ends the film.

The last temptation shows that Magdalene is only an instrument to lay bare the sexuality within Jesus. It's Magdalene alone who is used as the prime source of Christ's' temptation, and not Mary or Martha or any other woman. For it is Magdalene alone, who occupies an important place in Jesus' heart. In fact he does not seem to be much concerned about other women until his so-called 'guardian angel' tells him that all women are the same. The Devil is quite clever here. After using Magdalene as bait to lure Jesus into temptation, it further pushes him down this mire, by telling him "there is only one woman in the world...one woman with different faces." So in a way Jesus' sexuality gets reemphasized to the full. More than anything else it was this emphasis on the sexuality of Christ that made the movie problematic for many Christians.
If in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus' relationship with Magdalene and in effect his sexuality itself is founded on fantasy, then in Saramago’s *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, it is based on reality. We have already seen in the previous chapter, the Devil-Pastor provoking Jesus with his blunt comments on sexuality. 

Pastor asking Jesus to choose a sheep to satisfy his carnal desires is the first instance in Saramago's novel where the novelist introduces the element of sexuality with regard to his Christ-character; though he had in the opening pages itself depicted a sexual scene between Joseph and Mary. But it is after he is sent away from Pastor that Jesus becomes aware of his sexuality:

(Jesus is sitting on the bank of the river Jordan, listening to) the mournful song of a woman, who cannot be seen from here...the woman who is singing, naked, lying on her back in the water, firm breasts arising out of the surface, dark pubic hairs ruffled by the breeze... Jesus body gave a signal, something between his legs began to swell and as with all human beings and animals, the blood rushed to the same spot...Lord this body has such strength, but Jesus made no attempt to go in search of the woman, and his hands resisted the violent temptations of the flesh. No sign of anyone coming along the road, Jesus looks around him, sighs, looks for somewhere to hide and heads there, but he comes to a halt, remembering in time that the Lord had punished Onan with death for having spilt his seed on the ground... (He also remembers that God) had some firm plans for his future which were yet to be revealed, he would have found it neither feasible nor logical to forget the promises made and risk losing everything just because an uncontrolled hand had dared to stray where it should not... (All these) distracted him from what was on his mind and confused him so much that he soon lost the desire to yield to wicked temptations. [GJC. 203,04]

We find here that it is verses from the scriptures that first come to his mind as though to guard him against doing something wrong. He learns more about sexual matters from the prostitute Magdalene. After being banished from the presence of Pastor, Jesus decides to
go back home. The blisters and sores on his feet (which he had contracted while searching for his sheep in the desert) make travelling difficult. He stops by Lake Gennesaret and joins the fishermen in catching fish. He performs his first miracle here. God's words that His signs will accompany Jesus are manifested here, when the fishermen Simon and Andrew, who had till then caught not even a single fish that day, draw a net full offish on listening to Jesus' advice. Although the two fishermen persuade Jesus to stay with them, he felt that he should leave the place, as he "had no desire to find himself as a decoy by other crews." [GJC.207] On his way home, one of the sores on his feet open up exactly in front of the house of a prostitute called Mary Magdalene. She takes care of his sores as well as his carnal desires. She teaches him the lessons of lovemaking. He stays with her for almost a week and during that period they become very intimate. It is interesting to note that Jesus does not resist Magdalene, though verses of warning come to his mind:

Stay away from loose women lest you fall into their snares, Have nothing to do with female dancers lest you succumb to their charms, and finally, Do not fall into the hands of prostitutes lest you lose your soul and all your possessions. [GJC.210]

In fact as he sees her naked, it is the verses of Solomon's love poems that come to his mind:

At that moment he understood the real meaning of king Solomon's words, The joints of your thighs are like jewels, your navel is like a round goblet filled with scented wine, your belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies, your breasts are like two young roes that are the twins of a gazelle [GJC.212]
Saramago here describes Jesus as having a live-in relationship with Magdalene who abandons her profession after meeting Jesus and becomes his partner. Several things that Saramago has written in this book like Mary not being a virgin and the subversion of Christ's birth and early years may be said to be blasphemous. But it is the sexuality of Christ depicted by Saramago as follows that hits a believer the hardest:

Mary lay down beside him and taking his hand into hers drew them to her and guided them slowly over her entire body, her hair, face, neck, shoulders, breasts which he gently squeezed, her belly, navel...then the curve of her smooth thighs and as she moved his hands, she kept repeating in a low voice, Come, discover my body. Jesus looked at his hands clasped in Mary's, wishing he could have them free to explore every part of her body, Jesus was breathing fast, but for one moment he thought he was going to suffocate when her hands, the left one on his forehead, the right one on his ankles began caressing him slowly until they met in the middle where they paused for a second before slowly repeating the same movement all over again...she said it again, but in another way by changing one word, Discover your body, and there it was, tense, tout, roused, and Mary Magdalene, naked and magnificent was on top of him and saying, Relax, there is nothing to worry about, don't move, leave this to me, then he felt a part of his body, this organ here, vanishing inside her body, a ring of fire encircling him, coming and going, a tremor passed through him... it was him, yes, it was Jesus himself who was crying out at the same time as Mary slumped over his body with a moan and absorbed his cry with her lips, with an eager and anxious kiss which sent a second, interminable shudder through his body. [GJC. 212,13]

It is without doubt scenes like these that make books like Saramago's problematic. It must be mentioned though that it is not just the depiction of Christ's sexuality that makes Saramago's novel radically different. His portrayal of God is equally disturbing. But what is interesting to note is that Saramago's 'God' does not seem to mind at all Jesus' relationship with Magdalene. This is obvious when after Jesus tells Him that his mother never showed that she knew who Jesus really was, God replies, "You know what women are like, after all you live with one, they have their little susceptibilities and scruples."
God here, is not worried about Jesus’ relationship with Magdalene, who though she was a prostitute before meeting Jesus, abandons her profession after this. In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are two different people. In Saramago’s novel, they are one and the same; Magdalene is Lazarus’ sister. But the sister forbids Jesus from raising her dead brother: "No one has committed so many sins in life that they deserve to die twice."[GJC.328]

Magdalene in the novel is portrayed as a woman who loves Jesus (though they do not marry) travel and live with him. In fact Jesus' love for her is so great that he feels that he has an obligation to her and her sister Martha to remain with them after their brother has died, at the expense of forsaking his disciples and followers. He is confused between these conflicting obligations that he becomes very depressed. Even in this state of depression, it is Magdalene alone who offers him consolation.

You need me now more than ever before but I cannot reach you if you lock yourself behind a door beyond human strength, and Jesus...begged Mary, Even when you cannot enter, do not abandon me, stretch your hand even though you may not see me, otherwise I shall forget life or it will forget me... I’ll look at your shadow if you don’t wish me to look at you, she told him, and he replied, I wish to be wherever my shadow may be if that is where your eyes are. [GJC.330, 331]

What we clearly see here is two people who are deeply in love. The depiction of their lovemaking is as that of any lovers’. The only problem is that one of these individuals is someone whom Christians recognize as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who forget having an affair with a woman, does not even seem to have an inherent trait of sexuality as found in any ordinary human being. And this is absolute and irrevocable as far as the Bible is
concerned. Perhaps this is why Robert Graves, who introduces a lot of subversions in his novel to make Jesus the King of the Jews, does not deal directly with the sexuality of Christ.

In *King Jesus*, Jesus is baptized and anointed 'King of all Israel' by John. It seemed that when a king had to be crowned as 'King of the Jews', he had to have his face 'marred and buffeted' by the priests. But Jesus had to endure much more at the hands of 'the seven notables of Tabor'; a ritual:

performed again after more than a 1000 years in fulfillment of the prophecy. [They pelted] him with stones and sticks and filth until his face was wounded and disfigured ... They wrestled with him ... Jesus left thigh was put out of joint ... so that hereafter he limped with what is called the sacred lameness. The eighth sign of royalty had been added ...[KJ.264]

He is then married to his Queen, Mary of Bethany, but refrains from any physical encounter with her, as he firmly believed that physical intercourse was "the act of darkness, the act of death." We thus see that as per the requirements of a king to have a queen, Jesus marries Mary of Bethany. But they share a platonic relationship, much to Mary's displeasure, because Jesus adamantly refuses to sleep with her. He even goes to the extent of calling her, 'Sister!' But she questions him on his views. His answers do not convince her and she continues to question him, so much so that:

He sighed, and looking away from her unveiled face said: "Jose the son of Jochanan of Jerusalem wisely ordered: 'Do not prolong converse with a woman'; and this is interpreted by the Sages as meaning: 'not even with your wife.' Hence they have said: Each time a man disobeys the order, he does evil to himself, desists from the Law and at last inherits Hell.'" "How so?" asked Mary. "Are women all evil? Why then did you marry me?" "Women are not all evil, for our God created woman to be man's helpmeet. Yet it is well said: 'Man is to woman as reason is to the bodily
Jesus even suspects that the message regarding Lazarus illness is only a ploy by Mary to get him to come to her:

He was resolved not to see Mary, suspecting that the summons was an excuse to bring him to her house. He confided to Judas of Kerioth: "The hand of the female is in this. " "How so?" "She strikes at a man through his loved ones." "Who is the witch? Is it Mary the Hairdresser?" "All women are daughters of the Female; and the female is the mother of all witches." [KJ.336]

Mary the Hairdresser is Magdalene, who is not only a prostitute but also a witch in this novel, whom Jesus cures. This is one text where she is not used to project Jesus' sexuality. But she is one of his closest followers. But Magdalene's role and in effect the role of women in the novel is to a very large extent, ambiguous. We often wonder whether the novelist is arguing for or against women. Woman is considered as the chief antagonist of all that is divine and spiritual and Jesus himself considers that his main task lies in the destruction of the Female. This patriarchal view of Jesus is evident in several passages in the text, an example of which is given below, when he tells John the Baptist:

She is the threefold demoness who is Mother, Bride and Layer-Out to fallen man. On the first day of the five she spins the thread of his life; on the second she flatters him with hope of fame; on the third she corrupts him with her whoredoms; on the fourth she lulls him to deathly sleep; on the fifth she bewails his corpse. The Greeks worship her in trinity as the Three Fates—namely, the Spinner, the Distributor, the Cutter-off."...He (the Son of Man) shall appear to all men on the day that the female is defeated at last. [KJ.215-216]
Jesus believes that death will be a continuing factor "as long as women continue to bear children...The Female is Lust, the First Eve, who delays the hour of perfection. (She) has two daughters: the Womb and the Grave."[225] When Jesus, the central character of the novel himself comments like this that the female is the mother of all witches, one can't help getting the feeling that 'woman' is the other extreme of all that is spiritual and divine. But the narrator also talks about the insignificant role that Judaeo-Christian traditions have accorded women. He contends that this could be because both Judaism and Christianity are founded on a monotheistic faith that is based on a male-centred Jehovah. The narrator also makes a distinction between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The Jewish Christians not only reject the Eucharist (which the Gentile Christians greatly exalt) as idolatrous but also the view that Jesus is the Son of God. "A begotten God, the Jews say. must logically have a mother; and they deny that Jehovah has ever had any truck with either nymphs or goddesses" [KJ.4]

According to the narrator, Jehovah was the son of the Great Goddess and later formed a Trinity with two of the Goddess's three persons, namely Anatha of the Lions and Ashma of the Doves. But unlike other gods like Zeus and Jove, Jehovah abandoned the other two goddesses and ruled over both men and women, while in other religious traditions, the goddesses were in charge of women's affairs. The practitioners of Judaism continued the patriarchal tradition initiated by Jehovah:

Women, they said, have an unsettling effect on religious life: they introduce the sexual element, which inevitably tends to confuse mystical ecstasy with eroticism ... the only hope of survival for the nation, which was settled at the cross-roads of the world, lay in its keeping strictly to itself and avoiding the foreign entanglements in which amorous and
luxury-loving queens and priestesses invariably involve their subjects. [KJ.6]

This tradition was maintained in Christianity where "as the Second Adam, Jesus' self-imposed task was to undo the evil which, according to the patriarchal legend, the First Adam had caused by sinfully listening to the seductive plan of his wife Eve." [KJ.6] However the alliance between Mary and Antipater, based on the fact that "...in Israel, every ancient chieftain or king had ruled by woman-right..." seems to show that women were given importance once upon a time. Jesus spoke in favour of prostitutes too. He included them in the list of the poor and the outcasts. And after his resurrection, during his ascension into heaven, three women accompany him—his wife Mary of Bethany, his mother and another veiled woman who could be Magdalene. So though Jesus' sexuality is not directly touched upon by Graves, he uses Jesus¹ position as king to delve deep into what kind of importance Jesus gave to women and in effect what status women have or are supposed to have in Judaeo-Christian traditions. Although the novelist takes a stance with regard to the sexuality of Christ, which is on par with the biblical presentation of it, or lack of it, he does not offer a clear picture about the status of women. We may argue that though Jesus says that the female is the mother of all witches and that he has come to destroy the works of the female, his eventual ascension into heaven with three women seem to signify that women are important to him, albeit in an asexual manner.

The Jesus in Norman Jewison's film based on Andrew Llyod Webber's musical *Jesus Christ, Superstar* is also asexual in the sense that he does not reciprocate Magdalene's feelings, at least not in a sexual manner. In *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, one of
his followers who is quite close to Jesus, is Magdalene. In fact Jesus feels that she is the only one who understands his needs to a very large extent. When Magdalene massages his neck and face, he says, "She alone has tried to give me, what I need right here and now." But on seeing this, Judas exclaims:

It seems to me a strange thing, mystifying,
That a man like you, can waste his time.
On women of her kind.
Yes I can understand that, she amuses.
But to let her kiss you and stroke your hair
Is hardly in our line.

Judas clarifies that his criticism is based on the fact that someone like Magdalene doesn't fit in their group according to Jesus' teachings. And Judas is also worried that the authorities might use Jesus' proximity with Magdalene as a reason "to put us all away."

But Jesus vehemently rebukes Judas:

Leave her, leave her, let her be now,
Leave her leave her, she's with me now.
If your slate is clean, then you can throw stones,
If your slate is not, then leave her alone!

Jesus expresses his anguish by declaring, "There is not a man among you who cares to know if I come or go." But Judas is still uneasy about Magdalene. He criticizes her for anointing Jesus' hair and feet with expensive oil. He suggests that the oil could have been sold and the money used for charity. "People who are hungry, people who are starving matter more than your feet and hair." In spite of Judas' apprehensions of Magdalene being part of Jesus' group, Jesus does not alter his approach towards her. And what exactly are his feelings is not explicitly mentioned either by him or by anyone else in the
film. So much so that Magdalene herself is baffled about her feelings towards him. She admits that she does not know how to love him. He means a lot to her, but as what, she does not know. Her confusion is so great that she does not know what she would do if Jesus were to tell her that he loves her. There is no attempt in the film to portray the sexuality of Christ. He does enjoy Magdalene massaging him, but the film does not try to bring in an erotic or sexual element to this, at least as far as Jesus is concerned. The film only tries to project that Magdalene was perhaps sexually attracted to Jesus. As for Jesus it's only a platonic matter. She is important to him or else he would not have strongly rebuked Judas, his 'right hand man' for criticizing her. Jesus merely sees Magdalene as somebody who understood his needs.

That Magdalene is someone very close to Jesus is something that all the works studied here agree upon. And this is true even in works like King Jesus and Jesus Christ, Superstar, where neither is there an attempt to link Jesus and Magdalene in a sexual manner, nor is Jesus' sexuality explored. But D.H. Lawrence in his short story, The Man Who Died, looks at the sexuality of Christ without bringing Magdalene into the picture. Even here, there is no doubt that of all Jesus' followers, it is Magdalene who strongly believes in him. It is she alone who has real faith in him, for she repeatedly goes to his tomb, believing that he may have risen. Finally when she finds him, she pleads with him to go with her. But the risen Jesus is a different man. He refuses to go with Magdalene, for he now feels that he had nothing more to say, or do for the people, 'the multitudes':

I have outlived my mission, and know no more of it. It is my triumph. I have survived the day and the death of my interference, and am still a man. I am young still, Madeleine, not even come to middle age. I am glad
all that is over... The teacher and the saviour are dead in me; now I can go
about my business, into my own single life... Now I can wait on life, and
say nothing, and have no one to betray me. I wanted to be greater than the
limits of my hands and feet, so I brought betrayal on myself. And I know I
wronged Judas, ... I gave more than I took, and that also is woe and
vanity. So Pilate and the high priests saved me from my own excessive
salvation... I have not risen from the dead in order to seek death again.
[MD.221,222]

He takes some money from Madeleine, for he knew that the peasant and his wife, with
whom he was staying after his resurrection, were poor. He meets Madeleine once more,
who had this time come with Jesus' mother and another woman. But he only takes some
more money from Madeleine and declined to go with them saying that he had to ascend
to the Father. But as he left them he found himself saying:

Now I belong to no one and have no connection, and mission or gospel is
gone from me. Lo! I cannot make even my own life, and what have I to
save... I can learn to be alone... I tried to compel them to live, so they
compelled me to die. It is always so, with compulsion. The recoil kills the
advance. Now is my time to be alone. [MD.225]

And he seemed to be enjoying his present state:

How good it is to have fulfilled my mission, and to be beyond it. Now I
can be alone, and leave all things to themselves, and the fig-tree may be
barren if it will, and the rich may be rich. My way is my way alone.
[MD.225]

The Man Who Died is yet another Christ-story where pagan symbols, though not
found in abundance as in King Jesus, are instrumental in enabling Jesus to attain
redemption. Lawrence depicts a Jesus who yearns for salvation despite conquering death.
Finally, he finds it in 'woman', the priestess of Isis. Jesus here, is someone who feels that
the significance of earthly life is greater than all else. And it is erotic love that makes him
emphatically declare, "I am Risen." Before moving on to the story itself, it will only be appropriate if I include a brief extract of D.H.Lawrence's essay 'The Risen Lord', where he outlines his perception of how the resurrected Christ should be:

If Jesus rose as a full man, in full flesh and soul, then He rose to take a woman to Himself, to live with her, and to know the tenderness and blossoming of the twoness with her; He who had been hitherto so limited to His oneness, or His universality, which is the same thing. If Jesus rose in the full flesh, He rose to know the tenderness of a woman, and the great pleasure of her, and to have children by her... If Jesus rose a full man in the flesh, He rose to continue His fight with the hard-boiled conventionalists like Roman judges and Jewish priests and money-makers of every sort. But this time, it would no longer be the fight of self-sacrifice that would end in crucifixion... This time, if Satan attempted temptation in the wilderness, the Risen Lord would answer: Satan, your silly temptations no longer tempt me... Men have risen from the dead and learned not to be so greedy and self-important... Men have not died and risen again for nothing... And the poor women, they have been shoved about manless and meaningless long enough... The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and, I the Risen Lord am here to take possession. For now I am fully a man, and free above all from my self-importance. I want life, and the pure contact with life.\(^8\)

It is this Jesus we find in *The Man Who Died*. He wakes up in his tomb almost at the same time as an energetic and aggressive cock crows. On going out into the open, he meets a peasant chasing this cock. He goes with the peasant to his hut and stays there for a few days. He is fascinated by the cock, which for him symbolized the crest of a 'sharp wave of life':

...when his favourite hen came strolling unconcernedly near him, emitting the lure, he pounced on her with all his feather vibrating. And the man who died watched the unsteady, rocking vibration of the bent bird, and it was not the bird he saw, but one wave-tip of life overlapping for a minute another, in the tide of the swaying ocean of life. And the destiny of life seemed more fierce and compulsive to him even than the destiny of death. The doom of death was a shadow compared to the raging destiny of life, the determined surge of life. [MD.219-220]
Jesus thus feels that it was perhaps wrong for him to have tried to conquer death. He realizes that none can 'save the earth from tillage.' This story in fact, was initially titled *The Escaped Cock* thus giving due emphasis to the new zest for life, which for Jesus, the cock signified. It seems the origin of this story was closely bound up with Lawrence's visit, together with Earl Brewster, to the Etruscan tombs in April 1927. The later title, *The Man Who Died*, derives from the Etruscan symbol of the egg, which Lawrence interprets thus:

> It seems as if they too are saluting the mysterious egg held up by the man at the end; who is, no doubt, the man who has died, and whose feast is being celebrated... He holds up the egg of resurrection, within which the germ sleeps as the soul sleeps in the tomb, before it breaks the shell and emerges again ... On the last day of the expedition, in Volterra, Brewster tells us: We passed a little shop, in the window of which was a toy rooster escaping from an egg. I remarked that it suggested the title—'The Escaped Cock—a story of the Resurrection'. Lawrence replied that he had been thinking about writing a story of the Resurrection.9

It is important to note that not even once in the story does Lawrence mention or use the name 'Jesus.' Perhaps he did not want his character in the story to be identified as/ with the Jesus of the Bible:

> Thus the appearance of the person is the same; he has the same personality; his past and the events leading up to his present situation are the same. Yet it is a different man.10

While analyzing Tolstoy's Resurrection, Lawrence criticizes Tolstoy's view that, "Christ would go on being crucified everlastingly."11 Lawrence argues that Christ may have been crucified once:
As man puts off his clothes when he dies, so the Cross is put off, like a garment. But the Son of Man will not be crucified twice. That, never again. He is risen...Put away the cross; it is obsolete. Stare no more after the stigmata. They are more than healed up. The Lord is risen and ascended unto the Father. There is a new Body and a new Law.12

The Christ found in Lawrence's story may be seen as an embodiment of this. And for this new, risen man, who is so different from the resurrected Christ of the Bible, the needs of the flesh are important and it makes him leave the peasant's hut, taking along with him the cock. He did not however intend to keep it:

I must toss this bird into the seethe of phenomena, for he must ride his wave. How hot he is with life! Soon, in some place, I shall leave him among the hens. And perhaps one evening, I shall meet a woman who can lure my risen body, yet leave me my aloneness. [MD.227]

We thus see Jesus anticipating or desiring to meet a woman soon. On his way he meets a couple of his disciples who don't recognize him. But when they do, he gives them the slip. He leaves his cock at an inn after it kills the cock of the inn. He goes past Lebanon towards Egypt. There he meets the priestess of Isis, who herself was waiting for the reborn man:

Rare women wait for the re-born man...the lotus... will not answer to the bright heat of the sun... till... one of these rare, invisible suns that have been killed and shine no more, rises... To these the lotus stirs as to a caress, and rises upwards through the flood, and lifts up her bent head, and opens with an expansion such as no other flower knows, and spreads her sharp rays of bliss, and offers her soft, gold depths such as no other flower possesses, to the penetration of the flooding, violet-dark sun that has died and risen and makes no show. [MD.232]

She understands that Jesus is such a man, for she sees the scars on his hands and feet. He stays there at her request and even praises Isis: "Great is Isis!" he said. "In her search she
is greater than death. Wonderful is such walking in a woman, wonderful the goal. All men praise thee, Isis, thou greater than the mother unto man." [MD.236]

The priestess applies oil and ointment to his wounds. While she does this, he suddenly recollects all the past and the injustice that he had suffered. But as she continues, a certain kind of warmth replaces the cold terror that he had initially felt:

He stooped beside her and caressed her softly, blindly, murmuring inarticulate things. And his death and his passion for sacrifice were all as nothing to him now, he knew only the crouching fullness of the woman there, the soft white rock of life."On this rock I built my life." The deep-folded, penetrable rock of the living woman... He crouched to her, and he felt the blaze of his manhood and his power rise up in his loins, magnificent. "I am risen!" Magnificent, blazing indomitable in the depths of his loins, his own sun dawned, and sent its fire running along its limbs, so that his face shone unconsciously. He untied the string on the linen tunic, and slipped the garment down, till he saw the white glow of her white-gold breasts. And he touched them, and he felt his life go molten. "Father!" he said, "why did you hide this from me?" And he touched her with the poignancy of wonder, and the marvelous piercing transcendence of desire. "Lo!" he said, "this is beyond prayer." It was the deep, interfolded warmth, warmth living and penetrable, the woman, the heart of the rose! ... "My hour is upon me, I am taken unawares" so he knew her, and was one with her. [MD. 245]

We see earlier in the story that Jesus did not allow anyone to touch him, saying that he was yet to ascend to the Father. But he allows the priestess of Isis to touch him, initially to heal, but later the touch becomes a mode of sexual expression. The Father to whom he was waiting to ascend may perhaps be this sexual expression to which he arose:

For the first time in his life he is alive in the flesh, and the Phallic thrust is literally a rising to the Father... Imperceptibly Christ has become Osiris. The corpse of Christianity has been resurrected as a young fertility god.13
Jesus makes the priestess's place his dwelling though he knows that her mother does not approve of him. The priestess discovers that she is with child, and he knows of it even before she tells so. But her mother too knows. And Jesus is sure that the Priestess's mother would let the slaves after him. He feels that it is time for him to leave. Much against her wishes, he bids the priestess farewell and leaves the 'place satisfied:

I have sowed the seed of my life and my resurrection, and put my touch forever upon the choice woman of this day, and I carry her perfume in my flesh like essence of roses. She is dear to me in the middle of my being. But the gold and flowing serpent is coiling up again, to sleep at the root of my tree ... So let the boat carry me. To-morrow is another day. [MD.248]

Thus we see a Jesus who is glad that he left all his lofty ideals and self-important proclamations and returned to the natural fold of humankind. He finds salvation in his oneness with the priestess. And though he is forced to depart from her, he is nevertheless pleased that his seed is growing within her.

Lawrence's Jesus finds freedom and redemption in erotic love. He is upset that his Heavenly Father hid this from him. And he feels that he has risen from the dead to live a real life like any other real man. The subversion of the Christ story here is based on Jesus' discovery of sex. Lawrence does not seem to be interested in Jesus' birth or his various teachings or principles. The story itself begins with his resurrection. But resurrection itself as a notion of redemption in Christianity is undermined by Jesus' inclination towards an earthly life and more importantly towards 'woman' as an object of sexual desire. To a certain extent, even others like Saramago and Scorsese are doing something similar. The major differences lie in the fact that they don't mention anything
about the resurrection and also that they use Magdalene as the link between Christ and his sexuality. As far as the character of Magdalene is concerned, this is more of an unbiblical nature in works like *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *King Jesus* than in *The Man Who Died* and *Jesus Christ, Superstar*.

Chronologically speaking, Mary Magdalene is mentioned in the Bible, by name in the Book of Luke (8:2) as one of the women who accompanied Jesus, from whom seven demons had been cast out. All other references to her have been as someone who was present at Jesus' crucifixion [Matthew 27:56, 61; Mark 15:47; John 19:25] and also as one of the first who went to his tomb on the third day and actually met the resurrected Jesus [Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1, 9; John 20:1-2, 11-28]. Contrary to popular belief, it is not Magdalene who anoints Jesus with oil/perfume. There are different versions of this episode in the Bible. The Book of Matthew (26:6-13) and the Book of Mark (14:3-9) describe an unnamed woman anointing Jesus at the house of a person called Simeon who had suffered from a dreaded skin disease. The Book of Luke (7:37-50) also mentions a woman who had led a 'sinful life' who anoints Jesus at the house of a Pharisee called Simon, to whom Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." However the Book of John (12: 1-8) describes Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus at her home. *Jesus Christ, Superstar* depicts Magdalene as the woman who anoints Jesus. Magdalene is also depicted as a prostitute in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Jesus Christ, Superstar* and *King Jesus*. This seems to be another common misconception. The Book of John (8:3-11) does talk about the 'woman caught in adultery' whom the
Pharisees bring before Jesus and to whom Jesus says, "Go, and sin no more." In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Magdalene is portrayed as this prostitute whom Jesus saves from a mob, that was about to stone her. But the Bible does not name this woman as Magdalene. Therefore it is a little surprising why Magdalene is chosen as the one who highlights the sexual element in Christ. Perhaps it is because after Jesus' mother Mary, Magdalene is the one woman in the Gospels about whom one can find a lot of references, even if these are mainly found in connection with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The various writers perchance conceive a level of intimacy between Christ and Magdalene because she is the common character who's depicted as going to Christ's tomb in all the four Gospels.

Nevertheless, what happens as a result of the introduction of a character like Magdalene or as in Lawrence's case, the priestess of Isis, is that a trait—sexuality—that is commonly found in human beings, but not in Jesus Christ as per the Bible, is given a lot of importance. But as mentioned earlier the sexuality of Christ is not talked about in the Bible. However, the notion of celibacy is something to which Christianity attaches a lot of importance.

Celibacy refers to the deliberate abstinence from sexual activity and as far as Christianity is concerned, it was St.Paul who first introduced the notion that celibacy occupied a higher realm than marriage. The basis for this may be found in the New Testament [1st Corinthians 7: 1-40] where Paul voices his support for marriage only as an instrument for prevention of fornication, and emphasizes that the unmarried state is
preferable. He was followed by other leading early Christian thinkers like Jerome and Augustine who endorsed his view and devalued sexuality further. Reay Tannahill emphasizes this in *Sex in History*:

It was Augustine who epitomized a general feeling among the Church Fathers that the act of intercourse was fundamentally disgusting. Arnobius called it filthy and degrading, Methodius unseemly, Jerome unclean, Tertullian shameful, Ambrose a defilement.\(^\text{14}\)

Augustine argued that feelings of lust and other sexual impulses became manifest in Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God and sinned. In fact the Bible says that as soon as they ate the 'Forbidden Fruit', they became aware of their nakedness. Augustine argues that their sin is in this way linked to their genitals and that this has become a part of humanity, which can be explained by:

...the perversity and independence of the sexual organs, the intractable nature of the carnal impulse, and the shame generally aroused by the act of coitus. Lust and sex were integral to the doctrine of Original sin, and every act of coitus performed by humanity subsequent to the Fall was necessarily evil, just as every child born of it was born into sin.\(^\text{15}\)

Thus it was argued that the original sin committed by Adam and Eve converted the "blameless physical instinct" that God had created for the human race into something shameful. According to this, one had to abstain from sex, in order not to inherit the sin associated with it, thereby leading to the belief that a celibate led a better life than others. However for those who found it difficult to abstain, Augustine prescribed:

...the original blameless physical instinct of god's purpose, to use sex without passion to beget the next generation of Christians... if it was sinful to find enjoyment in sex, then the great majority of ordinary people were sinners.
It was only after the arguments of Augustine and other like-minded early Christian thinkers became absolute that the concept of clerical celibacy got established. However it was not easy to impose this, as earlier, ordained priests had the right to marry. It was only after the eleventh century that celibacy became a norm and it is still so as far as the Catholic Church is concerned. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the priest "as an administrator of divine office...is seen to function within the holy mother church and should reflect her virginal purity." \(^{17}\) This is true even with regard to Oriental Churches. But here, "though married men are allowed to become priests, they are not allowed to rise to the highest Episcopal office and once a man has become a priest, he may not take a wife." \(^{18}\) Generally speaking, "the ability to devote all of one's efforts to spiritual matters without the burden of family obligations is a very frequently voiced justification for celibacy..." \(^{19}\)

There was a lot of confusion in the early church with regard to the question of celibacy for priests and bishops. "In the Ecumenical Council at Nicea...a motion to impose conjugal abstinence on bishops was vetoed." \(^{20}\) Later the Trullan Council allowed conjugal rights to priests, but they had to be married before being ordained as priests. The Oriental Churches follow this and here "bishops are always celibates, being chosen from the monks." \(^{21}\) The Roman Catholic Church however does not follow this. Their teachings on celibacy are based on the creeds of the Council of Trent, which "elevated the rule of celibacy into a dogma." This council:

asserted the Church's right to establish impediments to marriage, its right to enjoin marital avoidance, the invalidation by the vow of chastity of the right to contract marriage and the superiority of virginity or celibacy to the
married state. Anathemas were pronounced on all who held to the contrary. This remains the law of the Roman Catholic Church. \(^22\)

Protestant churches however, are firmly against celibacy for the clergy:

Luther, as early as 1520 advocated allowing Pastors their freedom in the matter and denounced compulsory celibacy as the work of the devil... (Calvin) denounced the 'vile celibacy' of the priests and the interdiction of marriage to priests as contrary to the word of God and all justice. \(^23\)

Protestant priests and even bishops of most Protestant churches can occupy the highest office of their churches. Nevertheless, when celibacy gained a superior mode, the institution of marriage got underplayed:

...the church saw marriage as a series of concessions to human weakness-to the need for companionship, sex, and children- and it did what it could to undermine all three. One marriage, it claimed, should supply enough companionship for any man; second marriages were adultery, third fornication, and fourth nothing short of 'swinish.' More specifically, it refused to regard sex as an integral part of marriage. \(^24\)

Thus we see how sexuality was never seen in a good light by the early church and to a very large extent, the church-prescribed norms of morality are still held sacred by most Christians. Michel Foucault in his work on sexuality, describes Christianity as a religion that considers the sexual act as evil, where it is "granted legitimacy only within the conjugal relationship." \(^25\) Earlier Greek and Roman philosophers and thinkers already envisioned such a 'model of sexual austerity'. It's just that Christianity gave it 'a legal framework and an institutional support.' In Christianity:

Sexual activity is linked with evil by its form and its effects, but in itself and substantially it is not an evil. It finds its natural fulfillment in marriage, but with certain exceptions—marriage is not an express,
indispensable condition for it is to cease being an evil. Since early Christian thought, Eros was put under the starkest suspicion. Confessional man replaced the aesthetics of pleasure by a painful, censorious, repressive introspection of debased desire. Spiritual overcoming of the libido ceased to consist, in Plato, in looking upwards and remembering what the soul knew long ago but had forgotten; rather, it came to consist in a constant watch-out for sin, in looking 'continuously downwards or inwards in order to decipher, among the movements of the soul, which ones come from the libido.  

Sexuality became repressive in nature mostly during the Victorian age. It was during this period when silence, meant to be dignified in nature, was maintained with regard to matters associated with sexuality. Sexuality within marital relationships alone was deemed to be legitimate:

Nothing that was not ordered in terms of generation or transfigured by it could expect sanction or protection. Nor did it merit a hearing. It would be driven out, denied, and reduced to silence. Not only did it not exist, it had no right to exist and would be made to disappear upon its least manifestation—whether in acts or in words. ...repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and by implication, an admission that there was nothing to know.

Things of course, have changed in the twentieth century. Foucault aptly describes how sexuality has come to be regarded in the west during recent times:

Today it is sex that serves as a support for the ancient form—so familiar and important in the West—of preaching. A great sexual sermon—which has had its subtle theologians and its popular voices—has swept through our societies over the last decades; it has chastised the old order, denounced hypocrisy, and praised the rights of the immediate and the real; it has made people dream of a New City.

Foucault argues that the present discourse "purporting to reveal the truth about sex, modify its economy within reality, subvert the law that governs it and change its future"
are invariably linked. In fact Foucault places his reasons for attempting such a study within this ambit:

aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function... What led us to show, ostentatiously, that sex is something we hide, to say it is something we silence? It is certainly legitimate to ask why sex was associated with sin for such a long time—although it would remain to be discovered how this association was formed, and one would have to be careful not to state in a summary and hasty fashion that sex was "condemned"—but we must also ask why we burden ourselves today with so much guilt for having once made sex a sin. What paths have brought us to the point where we are "at fault" with respect to our own sex?31

Foucault's study of sexuality through its historicity so as to understand it as it is viewed today, especially his linking of Christianity towards the reason for sexuality becoming such a problematic concept, is vital to this thesis, where the sexuality of Christ as seen in the texts used here, becomes an area of contention. Foucault points out, the "penitential practices of medieval Christianity, the dual series constituted by the obligatory, exhaustive, and periodic confession imposed on all the faithful by the Lateran Council and by the methods of asceticism, spiritual exercise, and mysticism that evolved with special intensity from the sixteenth on"32 as major techniques that led to the concept of sexuality getting sidelined in a negative manner. He makes special mention of how confession was used to introduce rigorous norms of self assessment, which in turn led to the highlighting of 'insinuations of the flesh' that had to be scrutinized in detail so as to:

... trace the meeting line of the body and the soul, following all its meanderings: beneath the surface of the sins, ...bare the unbroken nervure of the flesh. Under the authority of a language that had been carefully
Foucault's findings contribute immensely towards comprehending the manner in which sexuality acquired a certain negative shading in Christianity, even in very general terms. So one can imagine why it becomes scandalous when this theme is directly linked to Christ, who is God Himself as far as Christianity is concerned. Though the various Christian denominations may differ on their views so as to whether or not celibacy is required, all of them are unanimous in their opinion that Christ did not engage in any sort of physical relationship with any woman, as the Gospels don't mention anything at all to this effect. It would therefore be interesting at this juncture to take a glance at a book that argues that perhaps Christ could have been married after all!

William Phipps' *The Sexuality of Jesus*34 sheds light on why the theme of sexuality is not just looked down upon but completely ignored by the Church. Phipps book is based on the argument that Jesus belonged to a race that never denounced normal sex life nor ever felt the need that its spiritual leaders had to be celibate. Phipps quotes from the Talmud to show that Jesus must have been married. According to the Talmud, the responsibilities of a Jewish father to his son were as follows: "he must circumcise him, redeem him, teach him Torah, teach him a trade and find him a wife.”35 It seems the Talmud also states that, "An unmarried man may not be a teacher.”36 Phipps therefore argues that had Jesus not been married, his opponents would have attacked his neglect of a sacred duty. But nowhere is such a criticism of Jesus seen in the Bible, thereby implying that Jesus must have been married! Phipps also mentions Jesus' words to
Magdalene after resurrection, "Touch me not." [John 20:17], and argues that what Jesus could have suggested through this statement to Magdalene is that the relationship between them now will not be one of physical contact, hence suggesting that they had shared a physical relationship earlier. Phipps argues that the reason Christ's sexuality has not been addressed by Christianity is because though the Church had Jewish beginnings, it was influenced heavily by Hellenistic ideas that gave importance to sexual asceticism. "From the third century onwards it was believed that Jesus and his apostles were celibates." Phipps mentions that several early philosophers like Pythagoras, Plato, Democritus, Aristotle, etc, felt that in order to obtain intellectual supremacy it was essential to denounce sexuality. For example he quotes the ancient theologian Augustine who felt that:

> guilt feelings were normative even in marital expressions of sex. The common inclination to cover one’s genitals in public and to prefer privacy and darkness for engaging in marital relations is evidence that the sexual impulse is a sin and a shame... Augustine was among the first to relate sexual desires closely to original sin.

Phipps also quotes Thomas Aquinas, who held that "anyone who desired to develop his rationality had to exclude coital distractions." He argues that even modern philosophers like Kant and Kierkegaard considered celibacy to be a superior form of living. Thus it is Phipps' contention that frontline philosophers and thinkers throughout the ages have all along "bifurcated the human self into a dishonourable physical part and a noble non-physical part." He further goes onto say that "those theologians in church history who have advocated sexual asceticism have often unwittingly held a doctrine of man closer to
Athens than to Jerusalem." This forms the basis of Phipps argument regarding why the sexuality of Christ has always been a problem for the Church.

Often when fictional depictions of Christ focus on his sexuality, readers, who are believers, tend to center on this disturbing feature at the expense of missing out on other aspects/issues that may actually be given more weightage in retellings of the life of Christ found in fiction/film. So much so that works of art that not just focus, but even mention the sexuality of Christ become controversial, sometimes in a very volatile manner. An important element in this regard that gets overshadowed by the sexuality of Christ is his crucifixion and martyrdom. The ensuing chapter looks at the various renderings of episodes in the life of Christ that lead to his eventual crucifixion, an aspect that is of utmost significance as far as Christianity is concerned. As all the works taken for study here, focus more on the humanity of Christ than his divinity, the issue of Christ's resurrection is found to be conveniently absent in all these, except Lawrence's story. But here again the concept of resurrection is trivialized. So more, or rather complete attention is found to be given to Christ's martyrdom and the various modalities that shape this concept.
NOTES


12 Ibid.


15 Ibid.

16 Ibid, 131.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 145.


21 Ibid, 274.

22 Ibid, 275.

23 Ibid.


26 Ibid.


29 Ibid, 7,8.

30 Ibid, 8.

31 Ibid, 8,9.


33 Ibid, 20.


36 Ibid, 45.

37 Ibid, 77.

38 Ibid, 85, 56.

39 Ibid,87.
40 Ibid, 92.

41 Ibid, 94.