CHAPTER HI

MARTYRDOM

This chapter looks at the concept of Christ's martyrdom as found in the various texts taken for study. Incidentally, this is one common theme that is found in all the six works used here. But before going into the details of how the concept of martyrdom is used by the various authors, it is important to have a working definition of the concept itself.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, martyrdom may be broadly defined as the voluntary laying down of lives by people for a particular cause, in solidarity with their group or community, which may be in conflict with another ideologically opposing group. The act of martyrdom is often considered as a higher purifying vengeance upon a powerful opponent so as to project the martyr's cause. A martyr may be seen as strengthening the community's resolve to bear their afflictions imposed upon them by another oppressing community. Martyrdom is not only a free and voluntary act, it is also altruistic in nature. The martyr accepts death for the sake of his/her own cause, even though s/he may have an option of avoiding this by conceding to the adversary. In due time, the martyr often acquires a sacred status and an authority too, around which the community rallies. Asceticism is also considered as a minor form of martyrdom. The enemy of the ascetic is bodily desire. The conquest of desire is seen as being equivalent to the conquest of a social or political adversary.¹ This may be treated as how martyrdom is defined in general religious terms.
This chapter will analyse how the life of Christ and the various events leading to his crucifixion and death are reshaped in the works used here. The biblical account of Christ's last few days would also be looked into. The character of Judas would be used wherever possible as an instrument to analyse the martyrdom of Christ as interpreted by the various authors. Judas is a common character in all these texts except Lawrence's *The Man Who Died*. While he is a major character in a couple of works, in some others, he is not given much importance. Works where Judas is given more weightage would be analysed first, thereafter moving down in descending order according to the prominence accorded to Judas. It is the two films—*The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Jesus Christ, Superstar* that portray Judas as a very strong character. We may however, start with *The Last Temptation of Christ* as this looks at the entire life of Christ, whereas *Jesus Christ, Superstar* focuses on the last few days in the life of Christ leading to his crucifixion.

Judas is an integral character of *The Last Temptation of Christ* and is found right from some of the opening scenes till the very end. In fact it is he who awakes Jesus out of his last temptation-fantasy. Judas initially is a member of the Zealot group fighting against Roman occupation. Though he hates Jesus for making crosses for the Romans and is ordered by the Zealots to kill Jesus, he finds himself being drawn to this man who willingly offers his throat to be cut. Judas feels that Jesus is special and he decides to see whether he can really do something for Israel. But he warns Jesus: "If you stray (this much) from the path, then I'll kill you." All the same, it is to Judas that Jesus pours out his doubts and worries: "Judas, I'm afraid; stay with me." So when he tells him that he's not sure about his mission, about what exactly God wants from him, Judas advises him to
go to John the Baptist. But the Baptist increases Jesus’ self doubts by not giving him a
definite answer and by asking him instead: "Who are you?" They have lengthy
discussions on Jesus' identity and the Baptist agrees with Jesus' decision to go into the
desert in search of God. There, Jesus faces the temptations of lust, power and greed.

On returning from the desert, famished and weary, he stumbles into the home of
Mary and Martha at Bethany. He comes to know from them that the Baptist has been
killed in captivity. He returns to his disciples and tells them that he has come to baptize
them with fire. Then he does what could be said to be his first miracle. He plucks out his
heart and tells them, "God is inside of us. The devil is outside in the world, all around us.
We'll pick up the axe and cut the devil's throat. We'll fight him wherever he is, in the
sick, in the rich, even in the temple... Who's with me?" It is Judas who's the first one to
respond to Jesus' call. He exclaims: "Adonai!" and kisses Jesus' feet. It's after this that
Jesus begins his ministry in all earnest. He casts out evil spirits, gives sight to the blind,
cures the sick, and even turns water into wine at a wedding. Nevertheless, the people of
his homeland, Nazareth, ridicule his message and turn him away. But unperturbed by
this, Jesus performs his greatest miracle. He confidently calls the putrid corpse of Lazarus
back to life. But he is shocked when the rotting hand of Lazarus reaches out and touches
him; and disgusted and scared when Lazarus hugs him, so much so that he can't help
exclaiming, "Adonai! Lord help me." Next he goes to the temple at Jerusalem and
violently disrupts the various businesses there and argues with the priests: "This is my
Father's house and not a market... I am the end of the old law and the beginning of the
new law."
Meanwhile, Lazarus is killed by Saul of the Zealots. Judas explains to Jesus that they did so, because Lazarus was the greatest proof of Jesus' abilities. They killed him because they did not want the focus of attention to be diverted from their revolution. Jesus then reveals to Judas that he had a vision, where the prophet Isaiah showed him a prophecy, according to which he had to die as the sacrificial lamb. "All my life I have been followed by voices, by footsteps and shadows and I know what that shadow is—the Cross! I have to die on the cross and have to die willingly." Jesus leads his disciples back to Jerusalem and this time the people hail him as "King of the Jews." They wave branches of pine and lay their cloaks in front of him. On reaching the Temple, he once again destroys the merchants' wares. He hopes that he will in this way earn the wrath of the authorities and get killed, so that he would not have to die a painful death on the cross. Soon Temple guards surround Jesus and the crowd. His followers plead with him to give the order to fight. Jesus himself asks for an answer from God. Suddenly he sees his palms bleeding. He realizes that he cannot escape the death on the cross. His strength suddenly disappears and he leans on Judas for support. The crowd that had earlier hailed him becomes frustrated that he does not do anything and throws rubbish at him. Later, when they are away from the crowd, Jesus requests Judas to help him get crucified, "God and man can never be together unless I die. I'm the sacrifice. Without you there can be no redemption." Judas however cannot even think of doing something like this, "No, I can't; get somebody stronger." But Jesus does not relent, "The temple guards will be looking for me, where there aren't any crowds... make sure they find me... I'm going to die, but after three days I'll come back in victory. Don't leave me, you have to give me strength." But Judas asks, "If you were me, would you betray me, master?" And Jesus replies, "No,
that's why God gave me the easier job—to be crucified." The strong willed Judas breaks down on realizing that he has to betray Jesus.

At the last supper, Jesus breaks the bread and asks his followers to share it; he tells them that it's his body and the wine they're drinking is his blood. "Do this to remember me." After this at Gethsemane, Jesus breaks down and prays to God to take away his cup of suffering. Jesus then sees John, who is actually sleeping beside Peter and James, give him a cup to drink from. Jesus then understands that he has no other choice but to accept the cup of suffering that God has chosen for him. Soon Judas arrives with the guards. Peter cuts off one of their ears. But Jesus rebukes him and heals the man's ears. Jesus is taken to Pilate who asks him to do some miracles. "I am not a trained animal. I'm not a magician," Jesus replies. Jesus does not answer any of Pilate's questions. He is flogged and tortured by the soldiers, a crown of thorns is placed on his head and he's then crucified at Golgotha. People jeer at him, but he asks God to forgive them. As his pain and agony increase, he screams, "Father! Why have you forsaken me?"

It is now that the final temptation arrives in the form of a little girl, who claims to be Jesus' guardian angel. She encourages and enables him to lead the life he always wanted. He marries Magdalene and later when she dies, lives with Mary and Martha as a carpenter and father of their children. However on his deathbed, his disciples visit him. Here too, it is Judas who plays the prominent role by making Jesus realize that he's been beguiled by the devil. Jesus realizes his mistake and pleads with God to once again make him the sacrificial lamb. And eventually this is what happens. He finds himself back on the cross and is so glad to be there that he happily exclaims: "It is accomplished."
Though everything works out well in the end for Jesus, initially at least he is very reluctant to pursue the path God chooses for him. God forces him to forsake his urge to live an ordinary life. But there is hesitation within him even after deciding to follow God's path. It's only after coming back from the desert that he becomes steadfast. He confidently raises Lazarus from the dead, but is rattled by his power to do so. Later he leads a mob to the temple, but refrains from giving them the final order to fight as realization dawns upon him that he has to die on the cross; no other manner of death is acceptable to God. He seems to be quite happy when he's rescued by the devil in the guise of a little girl and taken to Magdalene, but later regrets when he realizes that he has been tricked. Finally he's relieved to fulfill his mission by dying on the cross. This constant wavering between his own desires and his God-chosen mission is a hallmark of the Christ-character in The Last Temptation of Christ.

Martin Scorsese, while presenting his Christ-character, does not stray much from Kazantzakis' book, which inspired him to make the movie. But Scorsese's movie became several times more controversial than Kazantzakis' novel. However, much before Scorsese adapted Kazantzakis’ book into a film, another artistic presentation of the Christ story that was adapted into a film had become controversial. This was Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's Jesus Christ, Superstar that was later made into a film by Norman Jewison. The plot as such covers the period in Christ's life from just before Hosanna up to his crucifixion. This is the Holy Week. It is significant that this period is chosen, as it is undoubtedly the most important part of Christ's life, and it is this period that really shapes the religion called Christianity. The most important theme addressed
here is that of Christ’s martyrdom. The first instance in the film where Jesus gives a hint that he is going to be a martyr comes at the end of Simon Zealot's song where, replying to Simon's request to lead the people against Rome, Jesus clarifies that he is due for a different kind of power and glory. At the temple too, after driving out the merchants, Jesus says, 'My time is almost through.' Does he say this because he has divine knowledge of what's going to happen? Or because he knows that he has earned Caiaphas wrath and must therefore face the consequences of disturbing the peace in the Temple courtyards. In short, the question here is whether the Jesus in *Jesus Christ, Superstar* is human or divine? By and large, the Jesus here is overwhelmingly human, though there are a couple of contradictions here and there.

Thematically speaking, *Jesus Christ, Superstar* strays most from the Gospel in its depiction of a human Jesus Christ, especially by emphasizing the self-doubts of Jesus at Gethsemane in an extreme manner. There is yet another manner in which *Jesus Christ, Superstar* deviates from the Gospels. And that is in its unbiblical presentation of Judas' character. It is important to talk about Judas first; because it is through him that a lot of the divine aspects of Christ are questioned.

Judas here seems to believe that Jesus' main aim should be to free Israel from Roman rule. He feels that 'all this talk of God' is uncalled for. He does not like Magdalene stroking and massaging Jesus, for he feels that the proximity of a woman of 'her kind' could harm their movement. There is no need to waste expensive oil on Jesus when it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. The biblical Judas also
says the same thing [John 12:4,5]. But the Judas in the film seems hurt on hearing Jesus' words that though there will be poor always, he himself would have to leave them for good one day. Judas also looks so at other instances, like when Jesus screams that not a single one of his followers really care about him and that not even Judas understands the true meaning of power and glory. And truly, he finds it difficult to comprehend Jesus as king or God. To him, Jesus is just a man. He is perplexed when he sees Jesus' violent behaviour towards the merchants in the Temple.

The confused Judas is sitting in the desert when he sees military tanks rolling towards him. He runs away from them, straight to Caiaphas and his council. And his confusion is very much evident when he speaks to them. It is here that the betrayal of Jesus takes place. Why does Judas betray Jesus? In the Bible it is said that Satan entered Judas' mind and made him do the dastardly act:

Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad and covenanted to give him money. And he promised and waited for an opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude. [Luke 22:3-6]

In the film, there are no clear answers to the question. Judas seems to be in a confused state of mind when he goes to Caiaphas:

Now, if I help you, with matters that you see, these sorts of things are coming hard to me. It's taken me some time to work out what to do. I weighed the whole thing up before I came to you. I had no thought at all of my own reward; I really didn't come here on my own accord! Just don't say I'm damned for all time. I came because I had to, I'm the one who saw
Jesus can't control it like he did before; I know that Jesus thinks so too. Jesus wouldn't mind that I was here with you.

It's as though he himself doesn't seem to know what he's talking and why he's there in the first place. The last line seems to strongly imply that Jesus is a willing accomplice in the betrayal. The 'it' referred to could be the movement, which according to Judas is going the wrong way because of Jesus acquiring kingly and godly status. And perhaps Judas just wants Jesus to be reined in for the moment, so that 'all this talk of God' can be dispelled. Caiaphas and Annas don't let go of the opportunity. They promise Judas silver in exchange for information about Jesus' movements so that the soldiers can arrest him when he is away from the crowds. When Judas refuses to take their 'blood money', they tell him that he can use it for the poor, for it's just 'a fee'. Finally Judas accepts the money and tells them what they want. The background chorus gently sings 'Poor old Judas' repeatedly and fighter jets scream past Judas after this.

Nevertheless, Judas seems to regret what he has done, when Jesus, at the Last Supper reveals, "One of you here dining, one of my twelve chosen will live to betray me." Judas feels that Jesus wants himself to be betrayed for some other reason. He asks him, "What if I just stay here and ruin your ambition? Christ you deserve it." As Jesus persistently pleads with Judas to go, he goes away sobbing and stands at a distance. When Jesus goes towards him and gives him his blanket, Judas flings it away and angrily screams out:

You so pathetic man! See where you have brought us to. Our ideals die around us, all because of you. And now the saddest cut of all, someone has to turn you in like a common criminal, like a wounded animal.
Judas accuses Jesus of letting things go beyond his control and runs away. The scene at Gethsemane after the departure of Judas, where Jesus makes a passionate plea to God to take away his sufferings is quite a moving one. Jesus strongly feels the presence of God and voices all his concerns:

I only want to say, if there is a way, take this cup away from me, for I don't want to taste its poison, feel it burn me... now I'm sad and tired, listen, surely I've exceeded expectations, tried for three years, seems like thirty; could You ask as much from any other man?

Jesus repeatedly asks God why he should give up his life and is desperate to know His answer. God does not really answer Jesus; instead a wide range of portraits of the crucified Christ is flashed across the screen as though Jesus sees these in his mind and realizes that there is no escaping death on the cross. He resigns to his fate, but makes it very clear that he is going to do something very much against his wish:

Lord, thy will is hard. But You hold every card. I will drink Your cup of poison. Nail me to Your cross and break me. bleed me, beat me, kill me; take me now, before I change my mind!

When Jesus is taken to Caiaphas and when Annas thanks Judas and asks him to stay and watch Jesus bleed, the complete realization of what he has done hits Judas. He feels that he's to blame for Jesus' fate and tells so to Caiaphas and Annas. But they comfort him saying, "what you have done will be the saving of everyone, you will be remembered forever for this." But Judas is now terribly upset, for he realizes that he's responsible for the spilling of innocent blood and throws away the silver he had got for betraying Jesus. He's confused about his feelings for Jesus: "I don't know how to love
him...I don’t know why he moves me ... he scares me... when he’s cold and dead, will he let me be, does he love me too, does he care for me?" These are the thoughts that haunt Judas, as he seems to hear nails being hammered into wood. He becomes so maniacally disturbed: "I am sick; I've been used all the time for your crime, your foul-blooded crime. You have murdered me." With these words he hangs himself. Judas' repentance for betraying Jesus suddenly turns to disgust on realizing that Jesus deliberately used him as a tool for his own death. And it is this realization more than the feelings of repentance that prompts him to commit suicide. So we can see that the Judas here is so different from the one we find in the Bible. The biblical Judas comes into limelight just before the betrayal incident. But the Judas in the film is a strikingly prominent character right from the beginning. He’s the only one among the disciples who displays a capacity to think for himself and question the various moves and actions of Jesus. As he himself says, "I've been your (Jesus') right hand man all along." So it is Judas who's Jesus' most important disciple here, not Peter or John as we find in the Bible. The biblical Judas commits suicide out of sheer repentance [Matthew 22:3,4]. But the Judas in the film does so because he cannot bear the fact that he has been used for the murder of someone he so dearly loved.

As Pilate pronounces Jesus' sentence, the most popular song of the film, 'Jesus Christ, Superstar' is performed. The setting for this is some sort of post-resurrection scenario where Judas seems to be speaking from the present century. So many probing questions are asked here:
Jesus Christ, Superstar! Do you think you are what they say you are? Jesus Christ, Superstar! Who are you, what have you sacrificed... If you'd come today, you'd have reached the whole nation; Israel in 4 B.C. had no mass communication... Did you mean to die like that, was that a mistake? Or did you think your messy death would be a record breaker?

This seems to be a picturisation of all of Judas' and in turn perhaps a lot of people's doubts and queries as to who exactly is this Jesus and what is it that he has really sacrificed. The film does not answer any of these questions. It only attempts to show that whatever it is that Jesus did was not without unwillingness on his part; that he had to suppress his own doubts, dilemmas and fears of what he had to do, in order to carry out the will of God. Judas, I believe, is a powerful instrument here, used to highlight the inner feelings of Jesus himself. And through this, what the film attempts to outline is a very human Christ, not the divine God figure we find in the Bible. Throughout the film, it's this projection of a human Jesus that is emphasized. Jesus' inability to cure the sick seems to be a negation of his divinity. His constant appealing to God to explain why he should die underlines a very human characteristic of the fear of the unknown, the fear of death. In fact while Jesus displays human feelings and emotions, his divinity gets underplayed. But then again Jesus' divinity fails to get completely negated. For the confidence with which Jesus reaches out to the diseased shows that he has the ability to cure them. It's a different matter that he fails on this occasion as their numbers increase and engulf him. The clash between humanity and divinity is quite evident here as also at the Last Supper where Jesus exhorts his disciples to remember him whenever they dine, for it is his blood and flesh that they are consuming. But he realizes the futility of his words as he feels that they have not really understood what he just said: "I must be mad thinking I will be remembered, yes I must be out of my head; look at your blank faces,
my name would mean nothing ten minutes after I am dead." But the divinity within him seems to suddenly surge when he predicts "Peter will deny me in just a few hours, three times he'll deny me.' And later when Peter actually does so, Magdalene is bewildered and reminds Peter, "Its what he said you would do, I wonder how he knew."

It is as though in spite of the efforts of the lyricist and the director to focus on Christ's humanity by keeping out his divinity, they somehow cannot completely nullify the divine elements that Christ represents in the Bible. But because of this, there seems to be a conscious effort by the filmmakers to chip away at the divinity of Christ. And here again it is Judas who is used as a means to bring about this effectively. The undermining of Jesus' divinity goes to an extreme when this is ridiculed by Judas, at times emphatically—"I remember when this whole thing began, no talk of God then we called you a man," at times jeeringly—"Nazareth, your famous son should have stayed a great unknown, like his father carving wood he'd have made good," at times angrily—"You so pathetic man, see where you've brought us to, our ideals die around us all because of you," and at times pitifully—"Every time I look at you, I don't understand, why you let the things you did get so out of hand. You'd have managed better if you'd had it planned."

Everything that Judas feels about Jesus seems to come true when Jesus makes his passionate plea to God to take away his sufferings. If the Judas in The Last Temptation of Christ snaps Jesus out of his temptation-fantasy, the Judas in Jesus Christ, Superstar seems to be exhorting the audience to be prepared for a revelation of Jesus' innermost
doubts and anxieties which point towards the fact that "he's just a man, he's not a king, he's just the same as anyone I (Judas) know(s)."

In essence this is what Ted Neeley, the actor who plays the role of Jesus emphasises as being the primary objective of the film:

My own experience as a child, going to church constantly, I saw Jesus as a stained-glass window. In this project, we take him down off the stained-glass window, put him in the streets. Or, if you will, in the pew beside them, where he actually was. So that you get a personal view of the humanity of this perfect spirit... The premise of this show is taking Jesus down off the stained-glass window and putting him in the streets where he was, adding the humanity element to Jesus that is not in the Bible... The stress is on the humanity of Jesus, not his sanctity... No one ever talked about Jesus as a man—the human side—and that's what this (musical) does.

The worries and fears of Jesus that are part and parcel of every human existence are given maximum importance and distinctively brought out in the scene at the garden of Gethsamane, where Jesus feels the burden of the impending death on the cross wearing him down. He seems to be speaking like any human being when he asks God, "I want to know...I want to see...If I die what would be my reward!" A wide variety of human feelings like pain, anguish, suffering, regret, anger, etc are highlighted primarily to underline what Ted Neeley says, "adding the humanity element of Jesus that is not in the Bible." And before Jesus reveals his weaker human feelings, it is Judas who proclaims that Jesus is indeed just a man, by criticizing his divinity, which he describes as a myth! The main role of Judas itself is to countermand the divine element of Jesus. And at times he becomes larger than the Christ-figure while doing this.
This film can be better understood when we take a look at the period that produced it. *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, which began as an album, became a rock opera and eventually a movie, is a work of art firmly rooted in the American culture of the period that produced it. The late 1960s and 70s were a period that saw a lot of political and cultural upheavals taking place in the American society:

Students revolted in the streets of Paris, demonstrators were teargassed at the Chicago National Convention; Martin Luther King, Jr., was gunned down in front of his motel room in Memphis; and Robert Kennedy was murdered in a California hotel lobby while campaigning against Richard Nixon for President.4

It was a period during which African-American and feminist movements gained strength. The youth were becoming more vocal in expressing their opinions on what was happening around them. The American film industry too concentrated more on bringing to the fore themes and issues that were youth-centred and at times radical:

Americans favoured moody, off-beat performers with an edge...Thus, Jack Nicholson, Dustin Hoffman, and Robert De Niro brought with them culturally assembled images of what it meant be an American male: They were not just smoldering like their predecessors but eruptive and violent toward an unjust society.

In general, it was an era during which "American society was in the process of being re-thought and re-invented."6 One of the major reasons for this was the Vietnam War, which created a general sense of disillusionment. The youth especially, were highly anti-establishment in their views regarding this war. Criticism against the American military
Especially after the Tet offensive in 1968, in which a cease-fire was shattered and a bloody spectacle created for television audiences, Jesus' hip, antimilitant stance in the album seemed to fit well in the late 1960s youth culture. This was a Messiah who seemed to be a refuge from hawkish establishment values. Far from the site of middle-class values and status quo existence, any messiah after 1968 had to be socially conscious, youthful and anti-establishment in order to be credible. More than any other Saviour invented by the culture industry, this Jesus had to proclaim peace.

*Jesus Christ, Superstar* reflects its socio-political and cultural environmental surroundings quite closely. The manifestations of the youth-culture can be clearly seen in the film to a very large extent. The thin, frail-like appearance of Jesus and the hippy looks, hairstyle and costumes of his followers may be seen as markers of the period during which the movie was made. More importantly, the socio-cultural and political happenings of the period illustrate how the Christ-character in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, an anti-establishment figure, giving up his life, despite being apprehensive about it in the end, so that humanity may attain peace and salvation, is very much a product of the America of the 1960s and early 70s, so much so that at times he seems to be speaking directly for the youth of the period and voicing their concerns.

Both the visual forms of the depiction of Christ used for study in this thesis present their respective Judases as powerful characters, strong and sensitive to their Rabbi's feelings, so much so that at times the character of Jesus gets overshadowed by that of Judas'. Nevertheless it is only in these two films that Judas is so portrayed. In
most of the other texts, he is often portrayed as a minor character, though having a key role to play.

A good example of this is the Judas in *King Jesus*. Judas here is one of Jesus’ disciples and as found in the Bible, does betray him, but for entirely different reasons. Though the Jesus here is primarily a kingly messiah, there are similarities with the biblical Christ. The royal Jesus, like his biblical counterpart, performs miracles, cures diseases, drives out demons, gets into trouble with the Pharisees and also raises Lazarus from the dead. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on ass-back is similar to the episode discussed in the Bible. [Matthew 2:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-40, John 12:12-19] And exactly like in the Bible, he drives out money-changers, dove sellers and other merchants doing business in the Temple grounds. The Pharisees and the temple priests could not arrest him as they feared the pilgrim crowd, who were not only impressed with what Jesus did but also with the fact that he gave ample scriptural evidence for all his actions. And it was because of this that the so-called Doctors of Law could never defeat Jesus in an argument. And whenever they made any attempt to arrest Jesus, they were held back by Nicodemon and Joseph of Arimethea, two highly respected members of the Sanhedrin, who admired Jesus and found no fault in his teachings. However, Jesus knew that his time was drawing near. During his last Passover, he revealed to his disciples that one of them would kill him. They were shocked; each one asking, "Is it I?" and he replied, "At a goodly price have you valued me." Only Judas understood what he really meant. He recollected the citation of an ancient story, which formed the last chapters of the Book of Zechariah, where with two pastoral staffs called 'Grace' and 'Concord'
Zechariah attempts to stop the people from offering prayers to the Olympian gods and the Queen of Heaven to make them repent. But he fails and is scornfully referred to as the Worthless Shepherd and given thirty shekels. At this he cries, "At a goodly price you have valued me," and throws away the shekels. He breaks the staffs and sees himself in a vision impersonating the part of the Worthless Shepherd, who under divine orders, neglects all his duties and indulges in gluttony, preaches falsely and takes the sins of the people upon himself. Later he gets killed because his own parents betray him. But then everyone realizes that it's Zechariah's act of self-destruction that saves them from their own destruction.

Judas suddenly feels that Jesus intends to become the Worthless Shepherd in order to bear the sins of the people. Jesus had initially, even at the time of his recognition as King at Mt. Tabor, abstained from meat. But then revoked this decision at several instances. He had also broken his two staffs just like how Zechariah had done. Judas feels that the Eucharist itself was nothing but the attempts of Jesus as the Worthless Shepherd, a false prophet, to create something idolatrous, something that is against the holy laws given by Jehovah. But Judas knew that Jesus' mother would never betray him. Suddenly it dawned on him that the betrayal of Jesus would be at the hands of his own disciples and thereafter Jesus would be condemned as a false prophet till his body is pierced and then a final understanding would dawn on the people as what happened in the case of Zechariah.

Jesus then handed a piece of bread dipped in sauce to Judas and said: "What must be done, do quickly!"... Judas rose at once and went out, pale with terror. His instructions were clear: he was to buy a sword with which to kill his master. How could he obey? How could he take the life of a
man he loved best? And why had Jesus chosen him as the assassin... Knowing him from what he was, how could he run him through? "Thou shalt do no murder!" To kill Jesus except in righteous indignation would be plain murder: and murder he would not commit. [KJ. 368]

Judas goes to Nicodemon and explains everything to him. Nicodemon too did not want Jesus to die. He envisaged a plan to place Jesus on the throne of Israel:

You (Judas) must go to the High Priest at once and offer him your help in arresting your master. You had better ask for payment, or else the subterfuge may be suspected. Once he is safely in custody, all will be well... Nicodemon's plan was based on his observation that Jesus had never, preached against Rome... why may Jesus not show friendship to the Romans, and peacefully put forward his claim to the throne of Herod, at the same time entering upon the Sacred Kingship of the whole Jewish race? ... His plan was, that when Judas had saved Jesus from the swords of his disciples by helping Caiaphas to arrest him, Nicodemon would approach Pilate, with whom he was on fairly good terms, and inform him that Caiaphas had arrested a Roman citizen, none other than the secret heir to the Herodian throne... He would be obliged to remove Jesus from the custody of the High Priest, who had no right to try a Roman citizen, and then to make a full report to the Emperor Tiberius [KJ. 369-371]

The Judas in the Bible follows no such plan. He betrays Jesus of his own free will, or as mentioned earlier, because of Satan. [Luke 22:3-6] In the novel, Judas betrays Jesus on the advice of Nicodemon, so as to place him on the throne of Israel, or as per Jesus' intentions, to help him die as the 'Worthless Shepherd'. Now this prophecy that Graves introduces is indeed found in the Bible, in chapters 13 and 14 of the book of Zechariah. God asks Zechariah to become the shepherd of a flock that is about to be butchered. [Zechariah 11:4,5] The shepherd is paid thirty pieces of silver as wages. But God tells him: "Cast it into the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord [Zechariah
11:13] In the Gospel of Matthew, when Judas hears that Jesus has been condemned to die, he returns to the Temple and says that Jesus is innocent. But the priests and other Jewish authorities refuse to listen to his pleas. He then throws the thirty silver pieces, which was his reward for betraying Jesus, in the Temple and goes and hangs himself. The money that Judas threw was used to buy the 'Potter's Field' that was used as a cemetery for foreigners. [Matthew 27:3-10] Meanwhile in the Book of Zechariah, the prophet is once again instructed to act the part of, this time, the 'worthless shepherd.' [Zechariah 11:16-17] God then orders the death of his shepherd:

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn my hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die: but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God. [Zechariah 13:7-9]

This is how the prophecy of the 'worthless shepherd' is found in the Bible. In the novel, Judas interprets Christ's desire to die as being similar to the death of the worthless shepherd. But there seems to be a contradiction of sorts here, because the worthless shepherd, as the above verses show does not die on his own. His death is ordered by God. And in the Bible, Jesus considers himself not as a worthless shepherd but as the 'good shepherd' who's willing to sacrifice his life for his sheep. [John 10: 11-16]

We can clearly see here that there is marked difference in the aims of the biblical Christ and Graves' royal Jesus. And Judas and Nicodemon help him achieve this.
Nicodemon, the Pharisee who advises Judas to betray Jesus, is found in the Bible as Nicodemos, someone who believed in Jesus' teachings. [John 3:1,2] Nothing more is said in the Bible about Nicodemus, except that it was he and Joseph of Arimathea, who took Jesus' body and placed it in a tomb after following the required Jewish customs for burial. [John 19:39-41]

Another character who plays an important role as far as Christ's crucifixion is concerned is Pontius Pilate. In a sense, he tries to save Jesus. [Luke 23:20] In the novel, Pilate is already aware of Jesus' royal lineage when he meets him. He speaks to Jesus about restoring him to the throne, but Jesus replies that his kingdom is not of this world and that he is more interested in the Truth. Pilate gets annoyed with him and sends him to Antipas, who is none other than Jesus' paternal uncle. Antipas tries to buy Jesus off his claim to the throne of Israel. But Jesus does not speak a word to him. Antipas then meets Pilate and requests him to put Jesus out of the way. In the Bible, it is Judas who gets thirty silver pieces for betraying Christ. However in the novel, Pilate agrees to Antipas' request for the price of thirty silver talents. Pilate also asks the High Priest for the best emerald necklace in Jerusalem for his wife in return for sentencing Jesus to death.

Meanwhile, when Judas realizes that Nicodem's plan has gone awry and that Jesus had been condemned to the cross, he forces Nicodem's son to hang him. In the Bible too, Judas commits suicide, but does so all by himself. It is important to note here that there was a certain kind of turmoil in Jesus' mind during the time of his crucifixion. He felt that he was being punished now by Jehovah for his sins of presuming to be the
Chosen One. By doing this the novelist remains true to his notion that Jesus is the Christ, the 'Christos', the anointed one, because of his royal lineage and not because he is the Son of God.

These are some of the ways in which Graves departs from the biblical version of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus' resurrection too is interestingly portrayed by Graves in the sense that his followers—Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Miriam, Peter, John and others actually wait for him to rise from the dead. But it is to his wife, Mary of Bethany that Jesus first appears. The Gospels have varying accounts about who actually went to the tomb of Jesus on the third day after his death and also with regard to whom he first appeared after resurrection. The Gospel of Matthew describes an angel appearing to Magdalene and the other Man' (which could be the Mary of Bethany) when they go to the tomb at dawn, informing them of Christ's resurrection. [Matthew 28:1-8] The Gospel of Mark gives two accounts of the resurrection. In the first one, Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. There they see a young man in a white robe, who tells them that Jesus has risen and asks them to inform the others about this. [Mark 16:1-7] In the second account, Jesus appears to Magdalene alone. [Mark 16:9-11] In the Gospel of John too, it is to Magdalene that Jesus first appears. [John 20:1-18] In the Gospel of Luke it is Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joanna who, on going to the tomb are told by two men in shining clothes about Jesus' resurrection. [Luke 24:1-11]
So in all these accounts the prominent individual is Magdalene. But in the novel it is Mary of Bethany. And along with her, his mother and another veiled woman who could be Magdalene, Jesus ascends into heaven. In the Bible though, Jesus ascends into heaven all by himself after asking his disciples to baptize people, preach the Gospel and spread the word of God:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.[Matthew 28:18-20]

Its important to note, especially while comparing King Jesus to other fictional depictions of Christ studied here, that although Graves depicts his Jesus as dying in a confused state of mind, he does not attribute sexual qualities or features to Christ. Jesus marries Mary of Bethany, but refrains from sexual relationship with her or for that matter, he does not seem to show any interest in her as a person. It’s as though, since he was, as depicted by Graves, the rightful King of the Jews and a king required a queen, he married her. Graves' Jesus does not hate women, but feels that it is best to keep away from them for the Female is the companion of the Adversary. Graves depicts this as a reason for Jesus failure; his confused state of mind when crucified. Jesus here does not seem to realize that woman and man and their union are all part of life, part of existence, "... he tried to force the hour of doom by declaring war upon the Female. But the Female abides and cannot be hastened."[KJ. 408] Perhaps it is because this realization dawns fully upon him only after resurrection that he ascends to heaven with three women—his mother, Mary
the Queen and the other veiled woman who could have been Mary the Hairdresser. But the ending seems to contradict the five messianic theories advanced by Graves himself. All the five theories point towards the establishment of a kingdom. But Jesus here does not do anything of the kind. But then Graves does conclude the novel thus:

Jesus by his defeat of death remains alive, an earth-bound Power, excused incarceration in Sheol, but not yet risen to heaven. He is a Power of Good, who persuades men to repentance and love, whereas all the other earth-bound Powers (except only Elijah) are evil and persuade men to sin and death. In those days neither piety nor inequity was universal in Israel, therefore the Kingdom could not be established. But established it will be in the end, when the Female is conquered and then he will reign his thousand years and all the world will obey him. For he will be crowned once more, but this time his queen will be worthy of his virtues: a woman not carnal, nor arrayed in splendour as formerly but modestly clothed in fine white linen. [KJ. 417-418]

But here again Graves' messianic theories do not proclaim the destruction or defeat of the Female. Then why is such a pre-requisite put forth by Graves? There is an attempt by Graves to present Jesus as a king who subscribes to certain norms and traditions. And these seem to be in conformity with the divine right that kings enjoyed once upon a time in England as well as in other European kingdoms. According to this, a king's power was supposed to be given from God and it was absolute. The king was regarded as God's representative on earth. And one of the norms he had to fulfill was that of having a wife. According to this doctrine, the king is supreme. Everything else is secondary. So though the messianic prophecies don't discuss the destruction of the Female, it becomes difficult for Graves to depict the Female as having won over Jesus, who is king. If he did then it would be a contradiction, because here Jesus' power, even without being the Son of God, is absolute. Graves, I believe, has used those prophecies in the Bible that proclaim Jesus
as a king and combined these with the doctrine of the divine right to present a royal messiah who is human enough to marry just because a king should have a queen, and divinely powerful so as to rise from the dead. Judas, as we have already seen, is one of the tools that Graves uses to go in an antithetical manner to the life of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels.

Among the works taken for study here, *King Jesus* is the last one where Judas has atleast some role to play. In Gore Vidal's *Live from Golgotha*, Judas is given no importance at all. The gospel here is presented by Timothy, the biblical assistant of St. Paul, who, 'anti-marriage' in his views in the Bible, is a homosexual in Vidal's novel. And Timothy is his partner—both spiritual and physical. Christianity in itself, as a fledgling religion, is based to a very large extent, on the fund-raising-via-hoodwinking-ability of Paul, who is also a juggler and a tap dancer. He uses these abilities of his to capture the attention of the masses when they are bored, or to distract them when they ask loo many questions about Christ and his message.

The central plot revolves around the attempts of a twentieth century hacker to destroy all the existing records of Christianity and everything else associated with it. The hacker in fact, successfully erases all such records till 95 A.D. That is when the people at GE zoom back from the twentieth century to Timothy asking him to write a new Gospel, and plant it in the basement of his church, so that it will be found later on in time by archaeologists and thus save Christianity. GE also controls NBC, which wants to broadcast the crucifixion at Golgotha. Timothy is chosen to be the anchorperson of this
programme. A lot of people from the future have booked their tickets to be there at Golgotha when the crucifixion takes place.

It is only a few days before crucifixion that Timothy and others realise that the hacker is none other than Jesus himself. It so happened that when Judas had come with the soldiers to betray Jesus and get him arrested, Jesus turned the plates on Judas and declared Judas as the Messiah. As a result of this, it was Judas who had been crucified. And Jesus had escaped into the future time zone to work for GE. When everyone goes back in time to witness the crucifixion, Jesus too joins them as Martin Wesserstein. At this instance, Timothy informs Pilate that it is Judas who has been captured and not Jesus. Timothy leads the Roman soldiers to the real Jesus, who is then captured and crucified. And thus Christianity is saved. This, in a nutshell, is Vidal's Gospel. The novel swells with blasphemy. For example, Timothy after having sex with Aquilla says what St. Paul feels the real trinity is—"I dried my own glans and the rest of what was in Saints' eyes at least, the true trinity and pulled on my tunic."

Though Timothy and St. Paul are important characters of this novel, it is the characterisation of Christ that this thesis is mainly concerned with. In one of the very first reports on Christ in the novel, Timothy, after getting acquainted with the happenings of the twentieth century, understands that dates are calculated from the year of the birth of Christ. But he feels that there is an element of uncertainty here, as "it is well known that our Lord was constantly knocking years of his age in order to appear youthful and with it." [LG.15] St. Paul and Timothy preached about Jesus like this:
The messiah had actually entered Jerusalem a few years earlier, on ass-back, where he was promptly denounced by the Jews as a self-hating Jew and by the Romans as a Zionist terrorist. He was then tacked up on a cross, with some help from the old-guard rabbis, as Saint liked to remind him his onetime co-religionists. Then, on the third day, postmortem, Jesus came back to life and waddled out of the tomb where a number of His personal media staff—secretaries, gofers and so on—saw Him, thus convincing them that He really was the messiah and the Day of Judgment and the kingdom of God and so on would take place just as soon as He returned from the days with His Father, god, in Heaven. For Saint there was only the One God who had sent his only Son to be crucified and resurrected and then while the rest of us hang around waiting for the end of the world, now slightly overdue according to Saint's original timetable, those who had been associates of Our Lord would teach the others how to live in a state of purity—no sex mostly—until He comes back and everyone has to appear in court where the good are routed up to Heaven and the rest down to Hell, and so on. It's really and truly a wonderful religion, cash-flow wise, and I say this now from the heart. [LG. 25, 27]

Timothy describes Jesus as a very fat person with a serious hormonal problem.

Fat as a butterball, He was. Bad color. Short of breath too... Halvah was a weakness of Our Lord, according to tradition. A kilo of mashed beans with olive oil was also a favorite—usually as a pre-sermon snack. Give Him the carbohydrates and he'd let the proteins go. Naturally, He was a martyr to flatulence. [LG.39]

Bui this fat man who is described here is not Jesus. The real Jesus is Marvin Wasserstein, a computer genius and also the hacker who wants to delete all traces of Christianity. The fat man believed to be Jesus was actually Judas. Jesus later explains how he escaped martyrdom:

There was poor fat Judas, all set to betray me and then I turn him in and he is the one who has to serve time up there on my cross—the look on his face! Don't you love it?" He whistled with delight. "Anyway, let's face it, the Roman administration of Palestine under Pontius Pilate was easily the stupidest and most corrupt until the British, of course, in the twentieth
century after my birth in a ...what was it they say I was born in?" "A manger. For horses. In a stable. At Bethlehem. A star overhead..." Jesus winced. "How I hate all that pagan stuff! That star shone at the birth of Mithras, on December twenty-fifth, so in order to con the Mithraists, they added all his shit to my story where it doesn't belong. Born in a stable? My father, Joseph, was the pretender to the throne of Israel, and a direct descendant of King David. That is why those 'begats' are about the only true thing in the so-called 'Christian Story.' We were also in the lumber business, wholesale and retail. Anyway, I was—and still am—the King of the Jews and the messiah, and what that goy-loving creep Solly (Paul) did to my story is, frankly, actionable. [LG.191]

Timothy realizes that this Jesus is so different from the one around whom Christianity was built by Paul "He was a zealot. A fanatic. A revolutionary. A Zionist first, last and always." [LG.192] The main aim of the Jesus in this novel is to liberate Israel from Roman rule and establish a Jewish kingdom. Since he knew that the Roman forces were too strong for him to handle, he simply took off into the twentieth century, determined to come back:

...I shall return Israel to glory—all enemies defeated as I establish the Kingdom of God. It will be awesomely beautiful, I promise you, and those illuminated skies over Baghdad will pale by comparison. In fact, Baghdad, Damascus, Amman and Cairo will be taken out during the first announcement, as I establish the so-called Ring of Fire, as predicted by Isaiah. [LG. 194]

Jesus' plans however do not work. Paul appears to Timothy in a vision and asks him to tell the Romans that Marvin Wasserstein is the real Jesus Christ. Timothy then overhears Jesus talking to his disciples. Here Jesus denounces Paul as being the Devil himself; because due to Paul’s interpretation of Jesus as being part of the Trinity (the Holy Father, The Holy Son and the Holy Spirit), the true aim of Jesus—to create the Messianic Kingdom of Greater Israel was overshadowed. And Timothy realized that it was this
more than anything else that made it "necessary for Jesus, as Marvin Wasserstein, to become the Hacker in order to destroy Saint's great invention: Christ crucified."

[LG.214] But the knowledge of all this makes things more confusing for Timothy:

In one sense, I was delighted that Jesus was really the messiah and that he would establish the Kingdom of God and the terminal fire in the year 2001 A.D., long after my death next year. On the other hand, if Jesus was not Christian, as Saint Paul had taught, but just another run-of-the-mill Zionist terrorist, then I was all for doing him in right now. [LG. 216]

And this is what he eventually does. He takes the Roman soldiers to Marvin, who is captured and crucified. So Vidal's Jesus is basically a Zionist who's concerned only with Israel as a nation. He hates being referred to as the Messiah, which is why he destroys all existing records of Christianity, a religion of which he himself is the chief cornerstone. And because his aim was to free Israel from Roman occupation, he had no intention at all of becoming a martyr. Instead of being betrayed, he turns the betrayer and delivers Judas to the Romans. So martyrdom here is something that Judas had to put up with. It's a different matter that Jesus does not escape crucifixion thanks to Timothy, who ensures that Jesus is put to death. For as far as Timothy is concerned, the future of Christianity is at stake—without the crucifixion of Christ, there can be no Christianity!

There occurs only one problem though. Gulf + Eastern, the Japanese company, which was in charge of the broadcasting made a few changes while filming the crucifixion. Above the Cross on which Jesus is crucified is a bright sun—the product of special effects. At the centre of the sun, is the Sun Goddess, from whom were descended the Emperors of Japan. As Jesus dies, the Sun Goddess embraces the Cross. When the
blazing brightness of the sun recedes, the Cross is found to be empty. The broadcastings ends with a voice "Thus as foreseen, and foretold by John the Baptist, Jesus returns to his ancestress, the Goddess of the Sun, the ultimate divinity, Amaterasu. Banzai!" [LG. 224] The special effects for this was made by "...the Japanese Hollywood flagship, MCA Universal, (which) had been subcontracted by Gulf+ Eastern to create the special effects, using many of the same people who have made Steven Spielberg a byword for magic and box office. The last frame showed the new logo for Christianity: the cross within the circle of the sun." [LG. 224] So eventually, despite Timothy's efforts to the contrary, Christianity, the most powerful religion in the world gets hijacked by the Japanese!

By bringing in a Japanese firm more powerful than their American rivals, that uses advanced technology to appropriate Christianity, Vidal hints that this religion played a role in making western powers what they are today. This could be the reason why the Japanese try to make this and not any other religion as their own. In this novel too, Jesus is an unwilling martyr, but while in the other works he knows that he has to die for the sake of humanity, here he strongly believes that no good is going to come with his death. This is because he does not want to have any thing to do with the religion founded in his name. He wants to live as the King of the Jews, not die as the Messiah, which is why he conveniently slipped that tag on to Judas and escaped into the future, believing that he could return as the King of the Jews. Unfortunately for him, this does not happen, despite his earnest efforts to erase all trace of Christianity, as the religion grows, because if not the real Jesus Christ, somebody (in this case, Judas) has died as the Messiah. And Timothy and the others try to rectify this mistake and are successful in this by getting the
real Jesus Christ crucified. It's a different matter that nothing more is mentioned about what happens to Judas when the real Christ gets crucified.

Jose Saramago too uses Judas as the agent who helps Jesus in attaining martyrdom. But he remains just that. Unlike in The Last Temptation of Christ and Jesus Christ, Superstar, Judas is merely an instrument used by the author to implement Jesus' death and not a close disciple or friend to whom Jesus discloses his innermost feelings.

The answer to the question as to why Jesus has to die does not include Judas in any manner. For the decision to die is his own, or rather he is forced to make it his own, thanks to God Almighty. Until he meets God for the second time, Jesus is not very sure about his mission. This happens on a misty morning when Jesus rows his boat right to the centre of the mist, where he meets not only God, who this time is in the guise of a wealthy Jew, but also the Devil, for "everything that concerns God, also concerns the Devil." [GJC. 281]. The Devil is none other than Pastor with whom Jesus had spent his teen years, tending his sheep and he feels that "without God's beard they could pass for twins." [GJC. 281].

His conversation with God clarifies a lot of things for Jesus. In fact he understands the very purpose of his being. To his question, 'Who am I?' God replies:

I mixed my seed with that of your father before you were conceived, It was the easiest solution and the least obvious, And since the seeds are mixed how can You be sure that I am Your son, I agree that is usually unwise to feel certain about anything, but I'm absolutely certain for there
is some advantage in being God. . .you have been what might technically be described as incarnated... [GJC. 280,281]

God then goes on to explain his plan for Jesus, and in effect, for the rest of the world. God says that He is dissatisfied of being the god of a tiny Jewish race. He wants to be lord and master of the whole world and He wants Jesus to spread "My word, to help Me become the god of more people." [GJC. 282]. He wants Jesus to be a martyr for He observes that it "is the best role of all for propagating any faith and stirring up fervour... it is only fitting that a martyr's death should be painful, and if possible ignominous, so that believers may be moved to greater fervour and devotion." [GJC. 283]. Jesus wonders whether it wouldn't be easier for God to use his might to become the god of more races. But God replies "it is forbidding by the binding agreement between the gods to intervene directly in any dispute." [GJC. 284]. For this purpose there are humans, "a piece of wood that can be used for everything." [GJC. 284]. Jesus however decides that he wants to have no part of this bargain and he tells so to both God and the Devil, and prepares to row back to shore. However, even after rowing for a long time, he does not reach land. He realizes that it is futile to resist the will of God. But he tells God that even if he goes around proclaiming that he is the Son of God, no one would believe him. God then points out certain techniques to Jesus in order to win over more followers. He asks Jesus to preach to people about sin and repentance, because everyone, God feels, would have sinned at one time or the other, and asking people to repent would be one of the best ways to make people 'worried and perplexed.' Jesus agrees, but requests God to tell him about the future, about what will happen to his disciples and about what is going to happen as a result of his death. God tells him that his disciples will die painful deaths. He recites a
litany of future followers of Jesus all of who will be martyrs. He tells him about the future wars and massacres where several thousands will be slaughtered. There will also be a lot of non-martyrs who will have:

to mortify their bodies with fasting and prayer... mortify the flesh with suffering and blood and grime... an endless procession of people, thousands upon thousands of men and women throughout the world entering convents and monasteries... all with the same mission and destiny, to worship us and die with our names on their lips. [GJC. 294, 295]

God also tells Jesus about the inquisition, where hundreds of thousands of men and women will be killed, "burnt alive because they have believed in you, others because they will doubt you." [GJC. 298]. He tells Jesus about all the brutal sufferings that people will have to bear because of him, that the Devil remarks "One has to be God to enjoy so much bloodshed." [GJC. 298]. The Devil makes it very clear that he:

simply took what God didn't want, the flesh with all its joys and sorrows, youth and senility, bloom and decay, but it isn't true that fear is one of my weapons, I don't recall having invented sin and punishment or the terror they inspire. [GJC. 295].

The Devil even goes to the extent of asking forgiveness from God. But God rejects the Devil's plea, because God feels that His 'Goodness' cannot exist without the Devil's 'evilness'.

Thus ended Jesus' conference with God and the Devil. As he rows to the shore, he sees a large crowd at the bank waiting for him. His disciple Simon informs him that it has been forty days since he had left shore. He returns and starts his ministry, not on his own
freewill, but because the power-lusting God who wanted to spread His name to all parts of the earth, wills it. Jesus begins to preach about sin and repentance and also performs a lot of miracles, healing the sick and giving wide publicity to the Son of God image. But he feels guilty and remorseful when he says:

Blessed are you when men shall hate you... and shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man's sake. When Jesus finished speaking, it was as if his soul had fallen at his feet, for in that same instant, he could see in his mind's eye the tragic vision of the torments and death God had foretold at sea. [GJC. 309]

Nevertheless, Jesus has no choice but to obey God. He sends his disciples in pairs to various places to preach the 'good news.' He goes to Bethany to meet Magdalene's sister Martha and her brother Lazarus. At Bethany, Jesus does heal Lazarus, who is of a sickly disposition, but does not raise him back to life when he dies. This is at the instance of Magdalene, who feels that her brother was not such a bad sinner that he has to die twice.

Jesus also meets John the Baptist, who baptizes him. He goes to Jerusalem along with his disciples and drives out the merchants and moneylenders doing business inside the Temple. It is on his return from Jerusalem that Jesus learns of Lazarus's death. This greatly troubles him and following this comes the news of the Baptist's beheading, on the orders of King Herod. Jesus is disturbed and upset that both Lazarus, whom he had healed and John the Baptist, who had prophesized his coming, are dead. These events make him change his mind about playing the role assigned to him by God. He tells his disciples about their martyrdom and about all that is going to happen in the future and decides to go against God's plan:
The Son of God must die on the cross so that the will of the Father may be done, but if we were to replace him with an ordinary man God will no longer be able to sacrifice His Son... An ordinary man, perhaps, but a man who was prepared to proclaim himself King of the Jews, to incite the people to depose Herod from his throne and expel the Romans from the land. [GJC. 334]

Jesus strongly feels that he can prevent all the future bloodshed that is going to happen if he were not to die as the Son of God. He asks any one of his disciples to inform the Jewish authorities, that he is the King of the Jews come to overthrow Herod and drive out the Romans. But the disciples refuse, saying that if God wants Jesus to die as the Son of God, then so be it.

It is here that Judas comes into the picture. He heeds Jesus' request, despite the threats of the other disciples. And this is the only time that Judas is highlighted in this novel. Nevertheless it is important to note that even here it is Judas alone who seems to understand Jesus better than the other disciples. For only he feels like helping Jesus in his attempt to die as the King of the Jews and not as the Son of God. He becomes an informer for the sake of Jesus. Soon soldiers come and Jesus is taken as prisoner before the Jewish authorities and also before the Roman Prefect, Pilate. At both places, Jesus proclaims himself as King of the Jews and even denies that he is the Son of God. He requests Pilate to crucify him and also to put an inscription bearing the words "King of the Jews" on top of the cross. But if Jesus thought that he could hoodwink God by doing all this and dying as the King of Jews and not as the Son of God, then he was to be disappointed:

Jesus is slowly dying, and life is ebbing from his body when suddenly the heavens overhead open wide and God appears in the same attire He wore
in the boat and His words resound throughout the earth. This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Jesus then realized that he had been brought here under false pretences, as the lamb is led to sacrifice and that his life had been planned for death since the very beginning. [GJC.341]

But Jesus does make one last attempt to exonerate himself:

Remembering the river of blood and suffering that would flow from his side and flood the entire earth, he called out to the open sky where God could be seen smiling, Men forgive Him, for He knows not what He has done. [GLC.341]

The novel ends with Christ's death on the cross, and his last words seem to imply that life on earth would have been much better had not he died. Saramago's attempts to de-link Christ's divinity ends with his crucifixion. In fact most of the works studied here ends with Christ's crucifixion. King Jesus does talk about Christ's crucifixion, but D.H.Lawrence's story is an exception as it discusses, the post-resurrection period of Christ's life.

In The Man Who Died, we meet the resurrected Christ who wonders whether he has missed the simple joys and worries of an ordinary human-being because he had to play the role of the Messiah. Jesus does not offer any details regarding his past life. But after resurrection, he feels that it’s time now to forgo the philosophies and principles of the Saviour and to start life afresh as a common man. This is the primary reason why he does not go along with Magdalene, one of his closest followers:

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... [MD. 221]

Jesus says that through martyrdom he tried to obtain a kind of greatness that was beyond his own confines. And he feels that by attempting to do something like this he has harmed himself and also others like Judas:

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.222]

Jesus strongly feels that it was a mistake to try and change the ways of humanity. He feels that it would have been better if he had just minded his own business. He does feel that whatever it was that he had to do, he did and even died for this mission. But now it was time for him to live his own life without worrying about humanity and its problems,

"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. [MD.225]

Lawrence does not mention whether the role of the Saviour was thrust upon Jesus as seen in the other works studied in this thesis. But his Jesus does admit that he had forced Judas to betray him, which is why he feels guilty for what happened to Judas. The story as has already been detailed in the previous chapter, looks more at how Jesus lives his life during his post-resurrection period, rather than his life as found in the Gospels. But what Lawrence does through his brief description of Jesus looking back at his life as the Messiah, is to highlight the regretful mind of Jesus for having tried to become some
kind of hope for the people around him. He now feels that he never should have tried to force people to achieve something, even if that 'something' was as precious as eternal life itself. He says: "I tried to compel them to live, so they compelled me to die. It is always so, with compulsion. The recoil kills the advance."[MD.225]

So if in the other works we see Jesus as an unwilling martyr being forced by God to accept the painful death on the cross, in *The Man Who Died* we find a resurrected Jesus throwing his divine status to the winds and on hindsight even being apologetic and repentant of ever having tried to play the role of the Messiah.

In almost all the works referred to in this thesis, we find that the Christ character is an unwilling martyr. Different authors project their different Christs as having different reasons for being reluctant to accept the death on the cross. If in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus does not want to be a martyr because of his desire to marry and live the life of an ordinary man, in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, at the doorstep of martyrdom, he suddenly feels that this burden is too heavy for him. Like in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* too, Jesus is forced by God to accept martyrdom. If in *The Last Temptation of Christ* it's the powerful claws of God tearing his brains apart, in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, God appears in person to inform Jesus that he will have to be a martyr so that Jehovah, the Lord of the Jews can acquire a greater status by becoming a global God. In all the above texts, the Christ character accepts martyrdom, albeit unwillingly. However in *Live From Golgotha*, he does not accept it at all. The Jesus here is concerned only about the Jews and he hates
his name being used to initiate and develop a religion called Christianity, so much so that he travels to the future to erase all trace of this religion. In *The Man Who Died*, Lawrence's Christ regrets that he ever undertook such a task as to become the Messiah. At this point, it's important to take a look at how the concept of martyrdom is perceived in Christianity.

The ancient Christian communities within the Roman Empire had martyrs who suffered passively but who through their deaths were able to inflict moral or psychological pressure on the adversary. They were able to escalate their cause, unify their community and have their culture and ideology sanctified through their martyrdom. Often these martyrs were drawn from their socio-political and religious leadership. For example, almost all of Christ's disciples became martyrs. The history of the tradition of martyrdom in Christianity is invariably a stepping-stone to the veneration of saints. There was always a sense of dignity, joy and triumph associated with martyrdom. It was believed that "it is Christ Himself who is present and suffers in the person of the martyr. As a natural consequence, the greatest veneration was shown to the martyrs...]" In the 3rd century, it was believed "the giving of life for Christ, the baptism of blood was the example equivalent of sacramental baptism in its effect of completely remitting sin and rendering the sufferer worthy of immediate admission to the joys of paradise." The martyr himself, "while awaiting in person the hour of the supreme sacrifice, was an object of solicitude and veneration to all his fellow-Christians." If at all the so-called martyr somehow escaped the ordeal of death, he is considered "as already possessing the dignity of priest-hood without ordination." Sepulchers and mausoleums were
constructed over the tombs of martyrs, where the Eucharist would be celebrated and feasts were also held commemorating the martyr's death. All this was "recognition of the martyrs' dignity and formed the germ from which the whole calendar of saints' days ultimately developed."\(^\text{12}\) As martyrs got elevated to the status of saints, their names were invoked at the time of death, for "it was felt that help might be looked for from those who had made the journey (to the next world) in triumph and whose acceptance with God was assured. Burial in proximity to the martyrs was itself a form of commendation, a tacit request for their intercession."\(^\text{13}\) Later, it was felt that even ascetics and bishops who did not actually die as martyrs but "suffered more in a lifetime of courageous endurance than if they had actually shed their blood for Christ,"\(^\text{14}\) also qualified to be venerated as saints.

It's interesting to note here that though Christians believe Christ as having shed his blood on the cross to save humanity, Christ Himself is not generally referred to as a martyr. In fact, Stephen is generally regarded as the first martyr in Christianity. [Acts 7:60] So where exactly does Christ figure in the Christian tradition of martyrdom? In a sense, though Christ is never referred to as a martyr, it is his act of dying for a cause that Christian martyrs imitate. Christ's glorious death vis-a-vis his crucifixion at Golgotha is what other martyrs attempt to emulate. But even then, he is not a martyr because as God, he already knows that he has to bear the sins of the world and die on the cross, so much unlike the Christ-figure found in fictional works, who is primarily human, an example of which is the Jesus in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, who agonizingly questions God, "Why should I die?" Hence the Christ-character found in the texts used for study in this thesis may be called martyrs, because as human beings they have no fore knowledge of the fact
that they have to die. As human beings they deliberate upon whether or not they should die at all for some cause. As human beings, they are quite unwilling to die voluntarily and finally they are forced to take the plunge, because they don't have much of a choice. The biblical Christ may be treated as being above a common martyr, because martyrdom is something that is attained when a human being dies for a particular cause. But when God Himself dies for the sake of human kind, it's something that is treated at a much elevated level than martyrdom.

It is important for the writers of the above texts to present a Christ character who does not want to be a martyr so as to emphasise their viewpoints of who or what Christ is—primarily human and not divine! We may argue that the resurrection of Christ is not being discussed by most of these writers so as to negate his divinity. D. H. Lawrence, the one writer whose work does focus on the resurrection, reasons that Christianity gives more importance to the crucifixion of Christ than to his resurrection:

The Churches loudly assert: We preach Christ crucified!—But in so doing, they preach only half the Passion, and do only half their duty. The Creed says: "Was crucified, dead, and buried...the third day He rose again from the dead." And again, "I believe in the resurrection of the body..." So that to preach Christ Crucified is to preach half the truth. It is the business of the Church to preach Christ among men—which is Christmas; Christ crucified, which is Good Friday; and Christ Risen, which is Easter...But the Churches insist on Christ Crucified, and rob us of the blossom and fruit of the year.15

But belief in the resurrection of Christ is regarded in Christianity as a pre-requisite of salvation. Paul clearly explains the reason for Christ's death and resurrection, when he states, "Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our
justification.” [Romans 4:25] So the crucifixion of Christ becomes important not by itself, but in relation to his resurrection. Jurgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God* elucidates this further. Moltmann argues that the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ occupies a pivotal position in Christianity:

All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ... Cross and resurrection are not facts on the same level; the first expression denotes a historical happening to Jesus, the second an eschatological event. Thus the centre is occupied not by 'cross and resurrection,' but by the resurrection of the crucified Christ, which qualifies his death as something that has happened for us, and the Cross of the risen Christ, which reveals and makes accessible to those who are dying his resurrection from the dead...When the crucified Jesus is called the 'image of the Invisible God,' the meaning is that this is God and God is like this. God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity.¹⁶

We thus see that the crucifixion of the biblical Christ is something that is so divine, despite the fact that he is human. And Christ's resurrection is so divine an event that it becomes difficult to attribute this to him, were he purely human in nature. But as mentioned earlier, it is natural for the writers taken for study here not to give importance to the concept of resurrection, because they're focusing on the humanness of Christ. Though Lawrence and Robert Graves discuss this concept, they do so in a subversive manner, so that there is no divinity attached to it. And all the writers seem to be arguing that if the fictional Christ had his way, then he would have rejected martyrdom and his all-important mission to save human kind. The concluding chapter will examine why the humanity of Christ is stressed upon in these various texts, at times at the cost of his
divinity. The next chapter looks at what happens in the reception sector when only the human side of Christ is given importance.
NOTES


5 Ibid, 187, 188.

6 Ibid, 188.

7 Ibid, 187.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid, 54.

13 Ibid, 55.

14 Ibid, 56.
