

Monday September 1 1997 Women 6 • Profile 8 • Real Lives 10 • Arts 12 • Wheels 18 • Private Lives 21 • TV and Radio 22-24

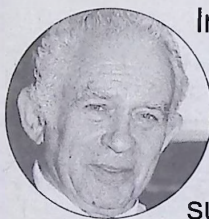
Mailer's testament

Exclusive extracts
from Norman Mailer's
controversial story
of the life of Christ



MAILER'S CHRIST

Continuing our exclusive serialisation from *The Gospel According To The Son*



In his version of the New Testament gospels **Norman Mailer** uncovers the man in the Deity, a man who suffers the doubts and

desires common to us all. In our first extract on Saturday, Jesus met Mary Magdalene for the first time, suffered the fury of the priests in the Temple and, in a forgetful moment, scorned the poor and offended Judas. Now he prepares for his farewell to the disciples at the Last Supper and in the Garden of Gethsemane. Fear and doubt descend

'That good man will show you to an upper room ... make it ready for us'



Ch. 42 In my dream it had been foretold that the first day of Passover would be my third day in Jerusalem. On that day the Romans would lay hands on me. And here were my limbs heavy on the morning of this third day. I could not rise. My eyes ached from all I had seen, my ears from all that had been heard; an unholy congestion of spirits was in my chest. Multitudes would be waiting to accompany me to the Temple, more than on the first day, or the second. And I was not ready. I asked myself whether it might not be God's will for me to quit this city so that I might preach by the Sea of Galilee once more. How beautiful was the sun upon the water of the Sea of Galilee.

How many debates had there been during the night among the priests of the Temple? Were they looking to imprison me? Today was the feast of the Passover, and so these priests would hesitate to engage in any deed that might cause riots among the people. Jewish riots would enrage the Romans. The priests could find themselves in much disfavour for failing to protect the peace of the city. They did not know what to do. Of that, I was certain. But then, I did not know what to do. On this third morning, I could not rouse myself to go to the Temple. If prudence comes to us from God and cowardice from the Devil, the line between cannot always be discerned. Not by a man. On this morning I was no longer the Son of God but only a man. God's voice was weak in my ear; a low fear was in my heart.

By afternoon, the disciples gathered at my bed. "Where shall we go," they asked, "that we may all eat together on the Passover?"

At last, I could begin to act. I said, "Let two of you go into the city and follow the first man you see who is

carrying a pitcher of water. Walk with him to his door. Tell him: 'My Master asks for the guest chamber. He would like to eat the Passover here with his disciples.' That good man will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared. Make it ready for us."

I saw this as clearly as if God had told it to me. And, indeed, the man was soon found. All was as I had said: they made ready the Passover. In the evening, in the dark, I came to that house with my twelve, and we ate.

I remained silent until I took the bread. Then I blessed it and broke it and gave a piece to each of my friends. I recalled the hour when I had broken bread in the desert and five loaves had fed five hundred. In that hour I had lived in the miracle of God's favour, so I said now: "Eat of me, for this is my body." And what I said was true. In death our flesh returns to the earth and from that earth will come grain. I was the Son of God. So I would be present in the grain.

I took the cup, and offered thanks to the Lord, and poured our wine, and recalled other nights when we had drunk together and had felt as if all were one, and things hidden would be revealed. Now, indeed, was much revealed. The wine made me feel near my Father, and I looked upon Him as if He were a great king. Indeed, for these few breaths, my fear of Him was less than my love; I felt close to His long labours. He had sought to bring order to the chaos our people had made. How hard He had worked, and how often He had fallen into rage and sent us into exile for our sins. Yet even as He had scattered us, so had He brought us back. He had sought to forgive us no matter how we had despoiled His Creation. Could I now tell these twelve men at this table that God would come, and soon, to save us? I could not give them such a certainty. For I knew that we Israelites were a scattered



The Last Supper, by Andrea del Castagno (c.1447), a fresco in the Cenacolo di Sant' Apollonia, Florence

THE BRIDGEMAN ART GALLERY

and sinful people who would prefer, doubtless, not to be saved but judged. For we were so vain as to believe that we would pass judgment.

Like a soldier loyal yet weary, I said to myself, "O Lord, help my unbelief."

And as I gave them to drink, I said: "This is my blood, which is shed for you and for many."

Whereupon, as I tasted the sorrow of the grapes that had been crushed to make this wine, I told them: "I will drink no more wine until I drink it in the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God seemed near.

My apostles stirred. One said: "How can a prophet give his flesh to eat and his blood to drink?"

I said: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will have no life. But he who will eat my flesh and drink my blood will have eternal life. I will raise him up on the last day. He will dwell in me and I in him."

I heard much muttering. Judas spoke out: "This is a hard saying. Who can hear it?"

I answered: "Have I not chosen you? Are you not my twelve?" And I resisted what I was ready to say next, but then I said it: "And among your twelve, is not one of you a devil?" I said this with certainty. Did I not feel the boundless sorrow of the Lord? I said: "One of you shall betray me. Woe to him. It would have been good if he had never been born."

Such a man must be close to me, as close as my own sins and my own fatigue, for now I felt grief for this man. If he would betray me, his suffering would be greater than mine.

Yet with such thoughts I grew stronger. For strength always came to me when I was enriched by compassion.

I arose from supper and laid aside my garments, and

with a loincloth I girded myself. Then I poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of each disciple.

When I came to Peter, he said: "You shall not wash one foot or the other."

I replied, "If I do not, you can be no part of me."

Peter answered, "Then not only my feet, Lord, but my hands and my head."

Some of their feet were clean, and others' stank of the alleys of Jerusalem; still, I knew whose limbs were brave and which men were ready to flee. So when I was done with bathing all twelve, I said: "In time to come, wash one another's feet as I have washed yours."

But the same thought kept repeating itself: "One of you will betray me." I must even have spoken these words aloud, for now Simon Peter asked, "Lord, who is it?"

I answered: "He is the one to whom I shall give a sop."

And a little later, lowering my bread into the wine, I handed this piece to Judas Iscariot. Much passed between us. And not the least of it was the conversation we had had before we set out for Jerusalem.

Judas' dark eyes grew luminous with the glow of false faith we offer when we wish to hide what we feel. Yet I told myself he was, after all, loyal. Just so much did I wish to believe in him. For I could understand how men could have faith but be faithless. Therefore I said to Judas, "What you will do, do quickly" Even if I did know, I did not, just so much did I love him - so, I said it tenderly. No other man at the table understood; some could have thought I sent him out with a blessing. I had clasped him by the shoulder. And he went out. The night was dark.

I was as moved as if I were ready to walk again upon the water in the Sea of Galilee.

I said, "A new commandment I give to you: Love one another as I have loved you. By this alone shall others

know that you are my disciples. For soon I must go, and where I go, you cannot come."

Peter said: "Lord, where do you go?"

I answered: "You cannot follow me now. Only afterward will you be able."

Peter said: "Lord, let me follow now. I will lay down my life for you. I am ready to go with you into prison and into death." He believed it. He was certain that he could never fail me. Even the best of warriors can grow so fond of his deeds that he begins to think he is as large as he wishes to be. But he is not. He can still be blind to himself. I said: "This day, even on this night, before the cock crows once, thou shalt deny me thrice."

He spoke vehemently: "I will not deny you. Not in any way." And the others spoke the same words.

I said: "Are there swords among us?"

Ch. 43 When there was no reply, I said, "Let the man who has no sword sell his garment and buy one."

Then they confessed. "Lord, here are two swords," they said, and two of them brought forth short swords, whereupon Peter took one. I said: "It will be enough." But I wondered. Would twelve legions of angels be enough?

The apostle Thomas now asked: "Lord, how can we know the way?" He was simple, and I had to repeat the same words many times for him to understand. So I said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me." But it was late, and he was not the only one who did not know.

Whereupon Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father." I told him: "Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Now I saw as never before that if they **page 4**

page 3 did not believe this, they would be without power to do any works. I told them: "Know only that you must love one another as I have loved you."

Never had I felt more love for them, or more compassion for their weakness. So many perils were waiting. "Know," I said, "that I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Try then to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. But beware of men. For they will deliver you to their councils and, because of me, they will scourge you and subject you to evil judgment by governors and kings. Yet take no thought of what you must say, for it will be given to you in that hour of trial. It is not you who will speak but the Spirit of your Father." (To that, I could bear witness.)

These words brought fear to many of them. But then, few are ready to seek greater faith by climbing upward, ever upward, against their fear. So I added: "Be not afraid, my friends, of those who kill the body; fear rather Him who has the power to cast you into hell. Fear Him."

Now they might understand at last the fear that lay beneath all other fear: Would they see that death was not the end but the beginning? The joys or the agonies to come would surpass all that they had known before. Had I accomplished this much — that they would no longer keep from looking upon the face of death in the hope that thereby a harsh verdict might be avoided?

I knew that all I had told them was true but for one thing. I had said: "Love one another as I have loved you." Yet my love had been mixed with anger.

So I would tell them what must always be true: "Greater love," I said, "no man can have than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. I tell you again: Love one another. You must."

I spoke as if I had already left them. I believed it. Yet I also believed that I would never leave them. I would be with them tomorrow.

I looked at my apostles, and some were ugly and some were misshapen of body; some were misshapen of nose; the hands of many were thick and broken; the legs of others were crooked. Yet they were not only my followers but my friends. I would love them. "They will persecute me," I said. "They will persecute you. And all these things they will do to you because of me. For if I had not told them of their sins, they would not have had to know that they sinned. Now there is no cloak for their evil."

I heard a roaring in the wilderness, and it was far from my ear even if it was inside my ear. The rage of the Devil was immense. If the Pharisees were now without a cloak for their sin, then the Devil might lose his harvest.

"The time shall come," I said to my people, "when whoever will look to kill you will think that he does service to God. Wars shall be waged in God's name that will profit the Devil."

If I was feeling the sorrow that I might not live to see my disciples for even one more evening, still it was necessary that I say: "Your unhappiness shall turn to joy. For you will come to know yourselves, and then you will see that you are also the sons of the living Father."

I wanted this to be true for now and for eternity, but I also knew that my Father's heart was heavier in this hour than my own. Again, I did not dare to wonder whether I had failed in the larger part of my ministry. Instead, I lifted my eyes and prayed, "Father, give back to me the glory that I had with You before the world was." And it gave me great hope to think that He had been with me from the beginning, and even before the beginning. Might that give me strength in the trials to come?

"Father," I said, "if I am no longer to be in this world, my men are still here and I have given them Your Word. So I pray that You will take them into Yourself and keep them from the evil of others. As You, Father, are in me and I in You, may they also be in Us, and be One with Us. And then the world will believe that You have sent me. The glory which You have given to me I would give to them so that they may be One even as We are One, I in them and You in me."

I could feel the love of God. Such love was like an animal of heavenly beauty. Its eyes glowed in my heart. As these prayers echoed within my chest, so did I know that I must go again to the Temple even if it was the night of the third day. And I must go with these questions in my heart. If they were heavy, so must I carry them as my burden. I set out.

Ch.44

With every step my legs grew heavier.

When we came to Gethsemane, I said to my disciples, "Sit here. I will pray."

I chose Peter and James and John to come with me and began to mount the small hill to the garden of Gethsemane. It was as if my limbs belonged to another and could hardly stir.

"Keep watch," I said. I hardly knew why, but I said to Peter, "Do not enter into temptation." My soul was sor-

rowful unto death. Then I went forward to where they could not see me, and fell to the ground. I prayed that this hour might pass. I wanted to live in less terror. Sweat was on my brow, and heavy, like drops of blood. I said, "Father, take this cup from me." Yet I knew that the cup of misery would not pass; the pit was bottomless. Suddenly I was afraid of my Father for I was full of pity for myself. I said to Him: "It is not what I will but what You will."

When I made my way down to the three I had left behind, they were sleeping. I said: "Peter, could you not watch for an hour?" By his face, I knew that he was imbued with his own terror and it was as large as mine. For what does a strong man do in the hour of his cowardice but fall into sleep? Yet once again Peter swore loyalty to me, and said he would stand guard. "The spirit indeed is willing," I told him, "but the flesh is weak." I went off to pray by myself in the garden. And the odour of betrayal was in the flowers. Even in the flowers. When I returned to the other three, they were asleep. Again they had fallen asleep.

I said, "It is enough. The hour is come."

As I spoke, Judas came toward us. With him were Temple Guards and Roman soldiers. He marched straightaway to me and said, "Master, Master," and he kissed me on the mouth. It was then that I knew he loved me too, and more than he could ever have believed.

By no more than half, however, did he love me. His lips were burning with fever. He must have said to the guards: "He whom I will kiss speaks as the Messiah." He could have said no less than that, for they came forward at once to lay hands on me. Peter then drew his sword and struck a servant of the High Priest on his ear. That poor fellow's ear turned raw with blood. I said to this servant, "Suffer no further." And touched his ear and healed him. I asked his name — Malchus. The Roman soldiers were silent and did not come to aid Malchus because he was a Jew, but then they also drew back because I had healed a wound.

I said to the Temple Guards: "Have you come to find a thief?"

Hearing this speech, they seized me, and James and John fled. Even Peter was gone. So were the Roman soldiers.

I suffered these Temple Guards to lead me away.

Ch.45

They took me to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, and it was a large house. At the other end of a long hall, a fire had been kindled, and there, followers of the High Priest sat together. I could see that Peter, having stolen after me, now sat among them warming himself by the fire.

The men who held me put a blindfold over my eyes. And as soon as that was done, one of these fellows slapped me on the face. Then several said: "Tell us who struck you. Prophecy!"

Another, whom I could not see, left his spit on my cheek. Then came the priests and the elders and some of the council of the Sanhedrin. I knew false witnesses would accompany them. Soon, two men told the High Priest that I had said, "I will destroy this Temple, and within three days I will build another." Yet they did not agree on whether I had said I would use my own hands or would rebuild the Temple without hands.

Caiaphas, the High Priest, now ordered my blindfold to be removed. He was a tall man, and his white beard was worthy of a prophet. He stood in the midst of the others and asked gently: "Will you reply to my questions?"

I did not answer. My silence must have seemed insolent, for this High Priest Caiaphas then said: "I adjure you by the Living God to tell us whether you are Christ, the Son of God, our Messiah." He had adjured me. I could not swear a false oath to the High Priest of my people; no, not even if I was the Son of God and thereby, by half, superior to any priest. So I said, "I am what you say." These words might as well have come from the sky. They seemed far away from me even as I said them.

He did not seem surprised. With deliberation, the High Priest tore his robes and said, "We need no witnesses. All of you have heard this blasphemy."

And in ripping his garment Caiaphas had declared to all that I had no claim to be the Son of the Father; no, I was a son of the Jews. This son had committed so great a sacrilege that he, the High Priest, had had to rend his clothes. By the common bond of our people's blood, I was his offspring. Condemned by him, I was now to be mourned as dead.

The guards beat upon me. These words by Caiaphas had removed all fear that I might yet bear witness against mistreatment. So they felt free to beat my face.

I could still see Peter. He remained on a bench at the other end of the hall, and when a servant came up to him and asked, "Were you not one of those who was with Yeshua of Nazareth in the Temple?" Peter said, "I don't understand what you say."

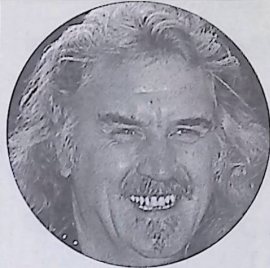
But, at once, he left her and went out onto the porch,



Pass notes

No 1079

Billy Connolly



Age: A youthful 54.

Appearance: A beard that walks.

Excuse me? Billy is a man who has built his career around beards, bum gags and low-alcohol booze. He's also married to Pamela Stephenson.

I don't remember her. The Scottish press does. When Connolly left his first wife for Pamela, the hacks were quick to accuse Billy of immoral activity.

What, advertising Kaliber? Very funny. Connolly has never forgiven the press for slighting his morality, and attacked them on a recent visit to Edinburgh. "They are going to feel the black sperm of my vengeance," he insisted.

That's a bit poetic for the Big Yin isn't it? Don't bet on it. Eloquence is part and parcel of the new Billy Connolly. He's an actor you know.

Ah yes, Supergran. What a televisual landmark that was. Indeed, but Billy has moved to headier climes. He is currently starring with Judy Dench in the movie *Mrs Brown*, to be released this Friday, with people in the know whispering the word "Oscar".

Well, he certainly has a way with pithy remarks. No, not that Oscar you idiot. If you don't stop being facetious, I won't tell you that Billy's performance as a gruff Scottish ghillie romancing Queen Victoria has been incredibly well received.

So it's the bright lights of Tinseltown for Billy? I suppose so, although he's already accustomed to sharing the bill with giants of the silver screen. Brad Pitt once appeared as a special guest in Billy's ropery American sitcom, *Head Of The Class*.

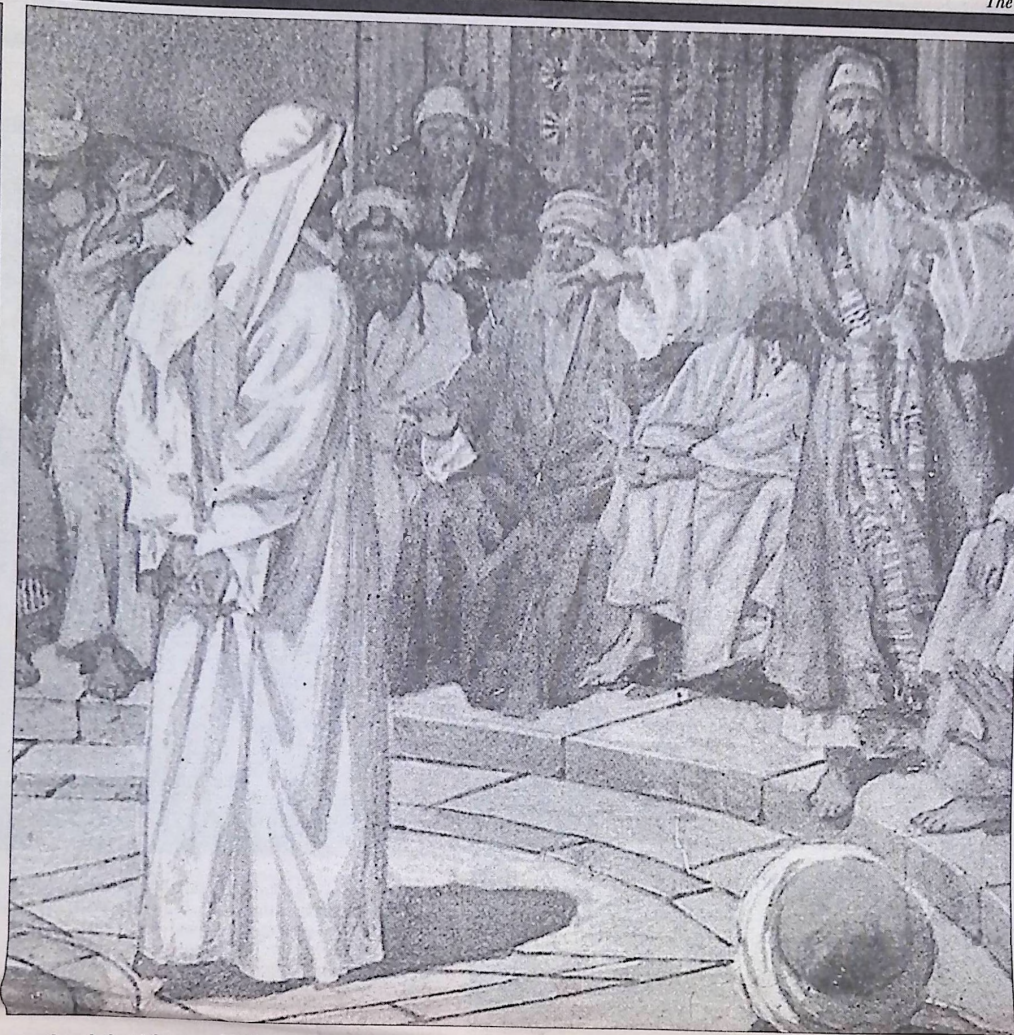
It sounds like Billy hasn't had the most credible of careers. Well, he's been in Muppet Treasure Island, *The Return of the Musketeers*, Billy (another American sitcom about a gruff Scotsman with a beard) and the Goldfish ads. You begin to understand why the Scots don't like him.

And then there's the politics... Billy has apparently rejected his working-class roots, by upping sticks and moving to the States. At the same time his opinions have become increasingly right-wing. To top it all off, he's a known royalist who has dinner with the Queen.

But surely playing a gruff Scotsman who has an undying love for the monarchy will endear him to the Scottish public? Erm, something like that.

Most likely to say: "Yes it was delicious, thank you your majesty..."

Least likely to say: "There's these two birds walking intae a bar..."



The Betrayal of Christ (detail, left) by Giotto, a fresco (c.1305) in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua

(Above) detail from The Accusation of Blasphemy by Caiaphas by William Hole, Life of Jesus (1890)

THE BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY/MARY EVANS

even though the night was cold. There, another maid saw him and said: "This is one of them."

Again he denied me. "Woman," he told her, "I do not know him." A man came up and said to Peter: "Aren't you one of his people? Your speech has the sound of Galilee."

Peter declared: "I do not know this man of whom you speak." It was then that the cock crowed. It was night, not morning, but the cock crowed. In that moment, Peter recalled what I had said. He left the porch. He was weeping. He wept. Peter's sorrow passed over to me, but, suddenly, like the point of a lance. He would spend his life offering amends for this hour when he had denied me thrice before the cock crowed once.

The High Priest Caiaphas departed with the elders of the Sanhedrin. And I was thrown into a small dungeon, where I was kept through the night and, unable to sleep, considered what I might do. No matter that Judas had betrayed me; he had also warned me. And now I needed his counsel. It was he, of all my disciples, who had been the wisest in explaining how our priests went about arranging matters with the Romans. So I knew that in the morning, much would depend on the nature of the agreement entered into between Caiaphas and the Procurator of Judea.

Judas had spoken often of these two men and how they kept peace in Jerusalem. Pontius Pilate allowed his soldiers to commit no insolence against the Great Temple, and Caiaphas tolerated no orthodox burial for those Jews who died in attacks upon Roman soldiers.

Thereby they maintained order. The Romans kept belief, as such pagans would, in their own Roman destiny. Whereas the Jews believed in one God, One, more powerful than all pagan gods and demons. On other matters there was much accord between Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate. As Judas had told it to me, the Roman Procurator received gold in secret from the Temple; this made for much difference in the way he treated Jews. In his first year of governing Judea, Pontius Pilate had committed the mistake of displaying the Roman eagle upon the standards of his garrison in the holy city. That was idolatry, and a demonstration commenced against Pontius Pilate. A great number of Jews gathered outside his residence

and refused to leave. They were soon encircled by Pilate's legions and ordered to depart or to die. But none of these Jews would take a step. Pilate had to give way. He removed the Roman eagle from the standards of the legions. The Jews had not only been brave but knowing. They had divined that Pilate did not wish to disturb his superiors in Rome by a war at the beginning of his command as Procurator. Now he had ruled over Judea for more than five years, and peace had been preserved, even if he still conducted his affairs with a daily fear of revolt.

Caiaphas had been High Priest for more than ten years. The sum of his agreement with Pontius Pilate was that he also abhorred an uprising. So said Judas, who had seldom been hesitant to show his dissatisfaction with me because I was not willing to lead a revolt. Before the Jews could come to know the brotherhood of man, they must be free of the Romans, Judas had said. That was the only way, he declared to all of us, that the Jews could be free of the shame that kept them apart, some few rich, so many poor, and all subservient to the Romans. Yes, he was furious when I told him that I wished to bring my people to my Father, and that was all I wanted. I had told him this more than once on our journey to Jerusalem, and indeed, I was innocent of any urge to rebel against the eagle of these pagans. But then, I did not feel subservient to the Romans. They might hold us in their grip here on earth but they were as nothing compared to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Could this be cause for hope? That I did not wish to be a leader of a revolt? Already my limbs had begun to brood upon their misery, and the bruises on my face were swollen. This dungeon was blacker than the night.

The Gospel According To The Son, by Norman Mailer, is published by Little, Brown on September 18, priced £14. To order it: ● Call our free credit-card hotline on 0500 600 102. ● e-mail bid@mail.bogo.co.uk. ● Fax 0181 324 5678. ● Write to CultureShop, 250 Western Avenue, London W3 6EE.

Tomorrow: The road to Golgotha