

## Chapter II

### **Spirit versus Flesh: The Perennial Conflicts**

*The Last Temptation of Christ* is perhaps the most challenging and original recreation of a myth in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, more subtle and intense than any of the novels of its kind. Kazantzakis never intended to write a historical biography of Jesus. He sought to describe the human struggle of existence and the hope which breaks through, as modelled by Christ. The uniqueness of Kazantzakis' Jesus is that he is modelled after the human person who like us struggles to follow the call of God, and who in the struggle itself finds freedom. Kazantzakis remained obsessed all through his life with the figure of Jesus. Always, he had been in search of spiritual heroes after whom he could model his own life. He first became fascinated with Jesus when he was placed in a school run by the Franciscan Friars on the island of Naxos. This early Christian zeal and conspicuous impulse toward asceticism remained throughout his life and to a great extent this motivation inspired his philosophy in his great novels. Later Kazantzakis turned away from Christ when his spiritual and bodily exercises failed to produce the results he was longing for. Anxious to end his search, he experimented with a variety of intellectual positions. His allegiances range from youthful mysticism to nationalism, communism, nihilism and many other ideologies. In brief, he held on firmly to many fictional and non fictional heroes

like Jesus, Buddha, Odysseus, Don Quixote, Bergson, Nietzsche and Lenin at different stages of his intellectual growth and maturing years. However, after the mystical explorations of his youth Kazantzakis came to regard Jesus as a spiritual hero on a level with other heroic personalities. This resulted in the fictional transfiguration of Christ in his two great novels, *The Last Temptation* and *The Greek Passion* (Ziolkowski 124-125).

Levitt P. Morton in his study on *The Last Temptation* comments on the presence of Crete as metaphor in the fiction and life of Kazantzakis. As a metaphor Crete represents man's limitless potential for striving toward the unreachable, the abysmal depths to which he might fall and the supreme heights which his spirit might attain (Levitt, *The Modernist* 104). Christ struggles hard and suffers desolately, ultimately redeeming himself by his own sufferings like the quintessential Cretan who, never wins in material terms. In this novel, Kazantzakis sets a different yardstick to evaluate the sufferings of Christ and he achieves a bold new vision through the originality of his views. In the prologue to *The Last Temptation*, he elucidates his concept of God and his own struggles to attain the supreme:

The dual substance of Christ - the yearning, so human, so superhuman, of man to attain to God or, more exactly, to return to God and identify himself with him - has always been a deep inscrutable mystery to me. This nostalgia for God, at once so

mysterious and so real, has opened in me large wounds and also large flowing springs. (7)

He continues:

My principal anguish and the source of all my joys and sorrows from my youth onward has been the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh. Within me are the dark immemorial forces of the Evil One, human and pre-human, of God – and my soul is the arena where these two armies have clashed and met. (7)

The personality of Kazantzakis exemplifies many of his dualities. He had been a disciple of Bergson; at the same time he admired Nietzsche. His zeal for a drastic change made him love Lenin and his experiments in Russia. He was an ardent admirer of Buddha and he wanted to live according to Buddhist ideals of compassion and kindness. The characterization of his fictional heroes has been greatly influenced by this apparent contradiction. His characters are the extensions of his own psyche which is torn apart on core issues concerning God and man, anarchy and order and on many metaphysical questions.

The anguish and agony that Kazantzakis experienced has been intense. He loved his body and did not want it to perish. So is the case with his soul. He loved it, and did not want it to decay. All through his life he sought to reconcile these two primordial forces which are so contrary to one another, to make them realize

that they are not enemies but rather fellow workers, so that they might rejoice in their harmony. Kazantzakis elaborates this idea by stating that every man partakes of the divine nature in both his spirit and his flesh. The struggle between God and man breaks out in everyone, together with the longing for reconciliation. He says that more often this struggle is unconscious and short lived. A weak soul does not have the endurance to resist the flesh for very long. It grows heavy, becomes flesh itself, and the contest comes to an end; but among responsible men who keep their eyes fixed day and night up on the Supreme Duty, the conflict between flesh and spirit breaks out mercilessly and may last until death. The stronger the soul and the flesh, the more fruitful the struggle and the richer the final harmony. Kazantzakis says God does not love weak souls and flabby flesh. The spirit wants to wrestle with flesh which is strong and full of resistance. Using a terrifying image, Kazantzakis compares the spirit to a carnivorous bird which is incessantly hungry; it eats flesh and by assimilating it, makes it disappear (*The Last Temptation* 7-8).

In the first part of *The Last Temptation* we find the conflicting mind of Jesus of Nazareth who was chosen by God, unto the way of Cross, Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection to save humanity. But it can be seen that this choice was much against his will at the beginning. Certainly, he realizes the meaning and greatness of martyrdom at the end. The dilemma of Jesus is clearly depicted in the following passage:

There was a strange disquieting calm – thick, suffocating. He heard nothing, not even the villagers’ breathing, much less God’s. Everything, even the vigilant devil, had sunk in to a dark fathomless dried-up well. Was this sleep? Or death, immortality, God? The young man became terrified, saw the danger tried with all his might to reach his drowning mind to save himself – and woke up. He was soaked in sweat. He remembered nothing from the dream. Only this; someone was hunting him. Who? (17)

Jesus was unsettled and uncertain of the mission in preparation of which he suffers greatly to the extent that he is torn between the forces of spirituality and the flesh. When confronted with a direct and piercing question by Judas, he says that a great conflict is going on in his mind:

“What happened to you? He asked. “Why have you melted away? Who is tormenting you? The young man [Jesus] laughed feebly. He was about to reply that it was God, but he restrained himself. There was a great cry within him, and he did not want to let it escape his lips.

“I am wrestling” he answered.

“With whom?”

“I don’t know . . . I am wrestling.” (27-28)

Evidently, this struggle is not the struggle of Christ alone, but it is the struggle of Kazantzakis as well. In his autobiographical novel *Report to Greco* he admits that, unlike other artists who write for pleasure or beauty, he writes for deliverance. He could not derive any pleasure when he wrote beautiful phrases and matching rhythmic sentences. He wanted to be delivered from his own inner darkness to be filled with light. The terrible bellowing ancestors in him had to be transformed into human beings (451). For this reason, Kazantzakis always invoked great figures who had successfully undergone and endured the most elevated and difficult ordeals. He wanted to gain courage by seeing the human soul's potential for triumphing over everything.

One of the most controversial questions during Kazantzakis' life time was how he saw the figure of Jesus Christ. His portrayal of Christ earned him a place on the index of the Roman Catholic Church as well as censure from the Greek Orthodox Church. What Kazantzakis wanted to portray in his Jesus' story was a thoroughly human Christ who underwent all the personal struggles with which he identified his own struggles and those of his country. The genesis of this struggle, the basic element of his philosophy and the reason why he is driven to create, sprouts from his Cretan nationality. Crete was caught in an age-old struggle for freedom, and in this bloody war she had been impelled to willingly sacrifice her numerous sons (Chilson, *The Christ* 69-70). The struggle, he had seen and experienced in and around Crete continued to haunt him, and he later elevated it

from the mere physical milieu of Crete to the boundless metaphysical and spiritual levels of humanity as a whole. Kazantzakis reveals in *Report to Greco*:

It [struggle] was the inexhaustible motif of my life. That is why in all my work these two wrestlers, and these alone, were always the protagonists. If I wrote, it was because my writings, alas, were only means I had to aid the struggle. Crete and Turkey, good and evil, light and darkness were wrestling uninterruptedly inside me, my purpose in writing, a purpose at first unconscious and afterwards conscious, was to do my utmost to aid Crete, the good and the light to win. My purpose in writing was not beauty; it was deliverance.

(452)

The essential thought in Kazantzakis' life and literature is the struggle for deliverance from angels and demons who, according to him, are fellow workers, never enemies. *The Last Temptation* is perhaps the only work of Kazantzakis in which the hero is positioned between the divine and the diabolic. Christ suffers as he wrestles with certain indefinable forces about which he is quite unaware of:

“Someone came last night in my sleep,” he murmured under his breath, as though he feared the visitor were still there and might overhear him. “Someone came. Surely it was God, God . . . , or was it the devil? Who can tell them

apart? They exchange faces, God sometimes becomes all darkness, the devil all light - and the mind of man is left in a muddle.” He shuddered. There were two paths. Which way should he go, which path should he choose? (22)

Jesus is tormented throughout the first half of the novel by inner demons that whisper unthinkable ideas to him. He attempts to combat these voices by fully engaging himself in the profession of building crosses in order to crucify God’s Messiahs. He confesses that a demon within him tells him he is God himself. Finally in the desert Lucifer whispers and reveals to him that he is the Son of God. At first Jesus wrestles against these ideas, but eventually he gains control (Chilson, *The Christ* 88). Like the turbulent mind of Christ, Kazantzakis was also a tormented soul that was seeking answers to the puzzling questions about the existential problems of human life in relation to God. When finally Christ reaches the monastery after a great deal of physical and mental turmoil and temptations, he is asked by the rabbi:

“Why did you come to the monastery?”

“To save myself”

“To save yourself? From what? From whom?”

“From God”



“From God!” the rabbi cried out, troubled.

“He’s been hunting me, driving his nails in to my head, my heart,  
my loins . . . he wants to push me . . .”

“Where?”

“Over the precipice”.

“What precipice”?

“His. He says I should rise up and speak. But what can I say? Leave  
me alone,

I have nothing to say.” (149)

Kazantzakis portrays the divided and uncertain mind of Jesus who feels hunted by God. But later the dramatic situation comes in when Jesus has something to say to the public. Jesus trembled secretly and struggled to find courage. This was the moment he had feared for so many years. It had come; God had conquered, had brought him by force where he wanted him in front of men in order to make him speak. And now, what could he say to them? The few joys of his life flashed through his mind, then the many sorrows, the contest with God, and all that he had seen in his solitary wanderings. From where will he begin? After all he is a simple man whose mind is in great conflicts. Jesus thought, “My heart has much to say, but my mind is unable to relate it. I open my mouth and without any desire on my part, the words come out as a tale.” Finally he spoke out with renewed energy, “Forgive me, my brothers, but I shall speak in parables” (188). The Christ, here,

is an ordinary man. Kazantzakis' attempt is to portray him as naturally as possible and to share all the ordeals he had undergone until the end of his mission. After the first sermon, Jesus gains control over his unbridled mind and becomes more resolute. A kind of spiritual calm and certitude take possession of him until the end of the novel.

However, he is viewed with a great deal of suspicion by the rabbi who never swallows Jesus' sermon as genuine. He thinks whether this man could be the Messiah whom God had promised him. All the miracles he performed could also be performed by Satan, who could even resurrect the dead. The miracles therefore did not give the rabbi sufficient basis to pass judgment; nor did the prophecies. Satan was a sly and exceedingly powerful archangel. In order to deceive mankind he was capable of making his words and actions fit the holy prophecies to perfection. For these reasons the rabbi lay in bed at night unable to sleep and begged God (381). The rabbi is not the only one who suffers out of suspicion and mistrust; there is Judas who follows Christ, like a shadow, wherever he goes. Judas could not believe the beautiful words and the parables of Christ. He was not interested in the abstract ideas of the immortality of the soul and the kingdom of heaven preached and promulgated by Christ. There is a great deal of conflict in the mind of Judas whose only concern is for the kingdom on earth, and that too, not of the whole earth, but only of the land of Israel which is made of men and stones, not of prayer and clouds. He thinks that Romans are barbarians

and heathens. They were trampling over the land that belonged to them. First, they must be expelled; rather political salvation should be the top priority. Only after this can spiritual issues like kingdom of heaven and immortality of soul be taken up. This is the conviction and strong assertion of Judas.

Father Yanaros in *The Fratricides* experiences the same dilemma. But the only difference is that his mind is divided between two roads of action: political and spiritual. Marxist philosophy which offers equality and food for all people attracts Yanaros, though it said nothing or cared not about the spirit of man. For Yanaros, however, anything that rejected the spirit would not be acceptable; he looks up to heaven and then to the earth. Yanaros is totally tired and confused about the future course of action for which God alone can guide him. "... I am still alive, that I am still struggling with God above and with the demons below. These are the two millstones that grind me... To save my body or my soul - which of the two? ... as long as we live, those two beasts never part company." God seems to be indifferent to the questions of Yanaros: "I called to God, but I found no relief; God never answered me" (62-63). Yanaros comes under a great conflicting situation where he is left with two options; Communism and nationalism. The spiritual and political concerns of his tragic choice are discussed in the chapter, "Politics of Salvation," which focuses on three political novels of Kazantzakis.

Kazantzakis believes that man has to struggle and create a proper equilibrium of his inner self: he needed first to reconcile passion with reason, the concrete with the universal, the Dionysian with the Apollonian. This is the conflict expounded in *The Last Temptation* between Judas, the eagerly self-assumed Marxian revolutionary, and Christ the visionary mystic (Savvas, *Kazantzakis* 291). Judas himself is a dual personality comprising both the elements of God and devil. “It was not one, but two. When one half laughed the other threatened, when one half was in pain the other remained stiff and immobile; and even when both palm became reconciled for an instant, beneath the reconciliation you still, felt that God and the devil were wrestling, irreconcilable” (*The Last Temptation* 21). The endless conflict of these two opposing forces continues to be the focal point everywhere in the works of Kazantzakis:

Judas shook his head, infuriated. “first we have got to chase out the Romans,” he said, “we must liberate our bodies before we liberate our souls – each in its proper order. Let’s not start building from the roof downwards. First comes the foundation”.

“The foundation is the soul, Judas”

“I say the foundation is the body”.

“If the soul within us does not change, Judas, the world outside us will never change. The enemy is within, the Romans are within, salvation starts from within.” (355)

In a very broader sense, what Jesus means is the salvation from all earthly and unearthly bondages. He makes this clear: “But freedom, Judas, is exactly what I want too.” Judas knew that Jesus is cleverly trying to convince him of the greater freedom of the abstract kind in which he is least interested. His concern is a political one. So, Judas has just one thing to know, he asks a point blank question, “You want to free Israel from the Romans?” Judas is prepared to wait for an answer if Jesus, “were the One awaited by Israel” (209). To get the satisfactory answer has been the only aim of Judas who is troubled by thoughts of trust and mistrust.

The question of means is also explored in *The Last Temptation*. Judas, the firebrand revolutionary, casts his lot with Jesus because he believes Jesus spearheads the fraternity of disciples and possesses the fortitude to lead a successful revolt against the Romans. Jesus slowly leads Judas to make him understand that violent revolution is not the best way, but rather, the spiritual revolution brought about by his sacrifice as God’s son which will bring about the desired demolition of injustice. Therefore, Jesus enlists Judas’ aid to ensure that the crucifixion will occur. Consequently, Christ tries to soothe him: “Heaven and earth are one, Judas, my brother”, he would say, smiling at him; stone and cloud are one, the kingdom of heaven is not in the air, it is within us, in our hearts. Change your heart and heaven and earth will embrace, Israelites and Romans will embrace, all will become one” (201).

But the political conviction of Judas is very clear and he articulates it in unmistakable terms to Christ. “My heart will change only if the world around me changes. Only if the Romans disappear from the land of Israel will I find relief!” (201). Judas has been sceptic about the mission of Christ. He ventures to accompany Christ even to the desert to confirm whether he is the one awaited by Israel. Patience is something unbearable to Judas, he gets angry:

I don't know what to call you – son of Mary? Son of the carpenter? Son of David? I still don't know who you are but neither do you. We both must discover the answer, we both must find relief! No, this uncertainty cannot last. It's we two who must find out who you are and whether this flame that burns in you is the God of Israel or devil, we must! We must. (210)

Judas feels that he should know the truth of the matter before he dies. He is in hurry because he is a human being, obviously he can't wait. “God lives for many years,” he shouted. “He is immortal; he can be patient therefore and wait. But I'm human” with all human weaknesses. It must be noted that Jesus too is an ordinary man with an unsteady and unprepared mind for the great mission he has been assigned to. However, Jesus assures Judas that, “God is waiting for me in the desert” (252). Jesus' mind is overburdened with the thoughts of great spiritual responsibility that he has to undertake if he is actually the one awaited for. Judas and Jesus experience intense agony of uncertainty for two

diametrically opposite ideas which are politics and spirituality. “Go talk with God in the desert,” Judas urges impatiently, “But come back quickly, so that the world will not remain all alone” (259). Judas hopes and anticipates a political liberator in Jesus who, on the contrary in Kazantzakis’ version, is an ordinary man with no ambitions at all. “I am ready to be killed, and I am also ready to live,” (163) is the true reflection of the ambivalent mind of Jesus.

Christ himself felt that he still had much mud and clay within him, much of man. He was still subject to anger, fear, jealousy and other human weaknesses. However, Christ assures Judas that he must die at his own will for the sake of mankind. A Messiah who preaches love and tolerance was not at all acceptable to Judas. He had expected a different Messiah, a Messiah with a sword, a Messiah at whose cry all the generations of the dead would fly out of their tombs in the valley of Joshaphat and mix with the living. The horses and camels of the Jews would be resuscitated at the same time, and all – infantry and cavalry – would flow forth to slaughter the Romans. And the Messiah would sit on the throne of David with the universe as a cushion under his feet for him to step on (396). This was the Messiah Judas Iscariot had expected and vivified in his mind: a political Messiah who will free them from the bondage to Rome. He offers instead, spiritual salvation which is certainly secondary according to the conviction of Judas. ‘What a disgusting Saviour is this?’ is the impression of Judas. The soothing words of Christ would

no longer satisfy or console the agitated mind of Judas that knew no tranquillity for years.

The conflict and agony that Judas experiences during the betrayal, that too much against his will, elevates the character of Judas to a higher plane which is contrary to the conventional understanding of the Bible story. Many, however, were also very upset at the positive depiction of Judas as a heroic figure who shares a co-saviour relationship with Jesus. Jesus had to be stern with him so as to prepare Judas for committing the terrible act of betrayal. This great sacrifice on the part of Judas earned him the name synonymous with betrayal, for the posterity to remember with contempt and anger. Kazantzakis' art however exempts Judas from the accusation of being the infamous traitor. "Don't shout, [Jesus tells] Judas. This is the way. For the world to be saved, I, of my own will, must die. At first I didn't understand it myself. God sent me signs in vain: sometimes visions in the air, sometimes dreams in my sleep" (396). Therefore, Judas is condemned to accept the will of God for performing the so-called sacred duty. Kazantzakis reiterates the same idea of holy betrayal in *God's Pauper*, that betrayal is a duty assigned by God, Francis tells, "Even Judas is good, Brother Leo... even he is a servant of Christ, and if God destined him to be a betrayer, it was precisely in betrayal that he did his duty" (*God's Pauper* 199). Thus Kazantzakis discards the popular belief of betrayal and gives Judas a new dimension and throws light into the obscure realms of his mind and reveals his purity of intention and goodness of the purpose. Kazantzakis finds goodness even in darkness. "Every man," he says, "is half God;



he is both spirit and flesh.” This conviction of Kazantzakis made him create the character, Katerina, the whore in *Greek Passion*. For her, there is nothing unnatural about men becoming God. Because “All men, even Panayotaros (the one who acts as Judas in *Greek Passion*), are God for a minute. A real God, not just in words!” (72). Kazantzakis does not reject anything as evil and bad as he knows that man is composed of divinity as well as humanity.

As for Christ, his crucifixion is the culmination of wrestling with God for which Judas, the traitor is inevitable. Finally, when he arrives at this state of mind at the end of the painful journey, Christ is absolutely submitted before the will of God:

“I’m delighted to see you, Judas, my brother. I’m ready, It wasn’t you who hissed, it was God - and I came. His abounding grace arranged everything perfectly. You came just at the right moment, Judas, my brother. Tonight my heart was unburdened, purified: I can present myself now before God. I have grown tired of wrestling with him, grown tired of living. . . I offer you my neck, Judas - I am ready”. (160)

Later when Judas is convinced of the necessity of Christ’s martyrdom and is entrusted with the terrible duty of betraying his own master, he requests Christ:

“You say it in order to give me strength. No, the closer we come to the terrible moment . . . no, rabbi, I won’t be able to endure!” “You

will, Judas, my brother. God will give you the strength as much as you lack, because it is necessary – it is necessary for me to be killed and for you to betray me. We two must save the world. Help me”. Judas bowed his head. After a moment he asked, “If you had to betray your master, would you do it?”. Jesus reflected for a long time. Finally he said. “No, I’m afraid I wouldn’t be able to. That is why God pitied me and gave me the easier task: to be crucified. (430-431)

Here Kazantzakis implies that betrayal is a greater task than crucifixion. But just as Judas needs Jesus, so also Jesus is equally dependent upon Judas. He must continually prove himself to Judas alone. For if Judas is too materialistic, Christ is too much of the spiritual. Thus Judas becomes, in a way, co-redeemer with Christ. The core of Kazantzakis’ outlook is the pervasive duality of the material and the spiritual. The spiritual, represented by Jesus, is the higher element wherein salvation rests, but it must work and struggle through the material order and this involves crucifixion of the spirit. The whole relationship between Jesus and Judas functions in the novel on the level of allegory and acquires great dimensions at the end of the novel (Chilson, *The Christ* 84-85). It is remarkable that Jesus and Judas remain true to each other to the end.

The artistic recreation of the great moment of betrayal, despite its religious ramifications, is indeed intense and beautiful. Kazantzakis justifies his distortion

of the Gospels asserting that he has only filled up the gaps which were ignored by others (Levitt, *Cretan* 66). Although Judas is pressed and persuaded to undertake the bitter task, at the final moment Christ himself is torn within and struggles hard and yells to God:

“Father,” he murmured, “here I am fine, dust with dust. Leave me. Bitter, exceedingly bitter, is the cup you have given me to drink. I don’t have the endurance. If it is possible, Father, remove it from my lips.” (441)

While he is nailed to and hanging on the cross, he is tempted by the Devil. This is the last greatest trial – stronger and severe than those dreams, more demanding than those in the desert. These are temptations which confront all mankind. The temptation to lead a normal human life, with all its little sorrows and joys is exactly the temptation experienced by Christ. He is portrayed as a simple human being with all the shortcomings that are generally shared by humanity. But, as Jesus discovers when he wakes on the cross, his domestic desertion exists only in his subconscious. He has not deserted his post and abandoned the struggle to reach God; he has fulfilled his duty. The temptations are defeated and he courts martyrdom. A wild indomitable joy takes possession of him. He has proved that he is not a coward, and proved that he has not yielded to the temptations. He has stood his ground honourably to the very end; he has kept his word. “The temptation had captured him for a split-second and led him astray. All were

illusions sent by the Devil. He uttered a triumphant cry: IT IS ACCOMPLISHED!” (507). In other words, he has accomplished his duty. He is being crucified; he has not fallen into temptation. The mission entrusted by the Lord is fulfilled. He has reached the summit of sacrifice: he is nailed up on the cross.

*The Last Temptation* is a surrealistic fictional biography of Christ, whom Kazantzakis considered the supreme embodiment of man’s battle to overcome his sensual human desires in pursuit of a spiritual existence. The novel focuses on what Kazantzakis imagines as the psychological aspects of Jesus’ character and how Christ overcomes his human limitations to unite with God. Hanging on the cross, Jesus dreams that a guardian angel rescues him and allows him to reject his role as God’s representative on earth and live instead as an ordinary carpenter, husband, and father. In his dream he experiences erotic bliss and worldly life. Later, however, Judas Iscariot, whom Jesus has ordered to betray him, appears. Angry that Jesus has not carried out the saving of mankind, Judas accuses Jesus of succumbing to Satan at which point Jesus awakens from the dream and affirms his role as Christ (Trosky 210-214).

Kazantzakis writes, in the Prologue to *The Last Temptation*:

...this book was written because I wanted to offer a supreme model to the man who struggles; I wanted to show him that he must not

fear pain, temptation or death – because all three can be conquered, all three have already been conquered. Christ suffered pain, and since then pain has been sanctified. Temptation fought until the very last moment to lead him astray, and Temptation was defeated. Christ died on the cross and that instant death was vanquished forever. (10)

Kazantzakis states that every obstacle in his journey became a milestone, an occasion for further strength. “We have a model in front of us now, a model who blazes our trail and gives us strength. This book is not a biography; it is the confession of everyone who struggles. In publishing it I have fulfilled my duty, the duty of a person who struggled, was much embittered in his life, and had many hopes” (10). Peter Bien, who translated *The Last Temptation* into English observed that it is the summation of the thought and experience of a man whose entire life was spent in the battle between spirit and flesh. Out of the intensity of Kazantzakis’ struggle, and out of his ability to reconcile opposites and unite them in his own personality, formed his art which succeeded in depicting and comprehending the full panorama of human experience. The scope and diversity of his life is remarkable. He was always in search of a spiritual tranquillity. Attracted to the thoughts of Nietzsche and Bergson, Kazantzakis later became a student of Russian literature, but his disquieting temper led him to the calm and composed Buddha. A restless traveller even in his thoughts, Kazantzakis was still seeking something more than that he had experienced before. His ascetic

temperament was introduced to a new virtue, contemplation, and to the heroism of a very different kind of father, Christ. In writing *The Last Temptation* Kazantzakis was not primarily interested in reinterpreting Christ or in disagreeing with, or reforming the church. He simply wanted to lift Christ out of the church altogether and to rise to the occasion and exercise man's right to fashion a new saviour and thereby rescue himself from a moral and spiritual void. His own conflicts enabled him to depict with great penetration Jesus' agony in choosing between love and axe, between household joys and the loneliness and exile of the martyr, between liberation of the body alone, and liberation of both body and soul. Kazantzakis tried to draw Christ in terms meaningful to himself. Since his own conflicts were those of every sensitive man faced with the chaos of our times in the twentieth century, he wished to make Jesus a figure for a new age. In recreating the great moments in the Bible story, he retained everything in the Christ legend which speaks to the conditions of all men of all ages (509-512). However, one of the most controversial questions during Kazantzakis' life time was how he saw the figure of Jesus Christ. In fact, his portrayal of Christ invited widespread anger and protest from some sections of believers among Christians all over the world. As for Kazantzakis, Christ becomes one of the *Saviours* of God. He belongs to the race of men who helps the spirit which is struggling through matter to attain freedom. In this sense Christ is the saviour and a model and he has fought the battle and won. Kazantzakis wants us to engage ourselves in the same fight and it is our duty to bring the spirit to birth. Christ is:

... not the harbour where one casts anchor, but the harbour from which one departs, gains the offing, encounters a wild, tempestuous sea, and then struggles for a lifetime to anchor in God. Christ is not the end, he is the beginning. He is not the 'Welcome!' He is the 'Bon' Voyage!" He does not sit back restfully in soft clouds, but is battered by the waves just as on the helm. That was why I liked Him, that was why I would follow Him. (*Report 52*)

In *The Last Temptation*, Kazantzakis provides an answer. Through his hero we learn what harbour it is that our souls continue to seek. He believes that in a rotten world there is no perfect ideal for man, but being a Cretan, Kazantzakis shows us metaphorically that we should redeem ourselves by struggling and suffering as Christ did. Kazantzakis has constantly been torn between the need for action and for ascetic withdrawal. His untiring search for his true saviour to find meaning of his life and existence took him to many ideologies and personalities. He had to leave one for the other. Kazantzakis renounced Nietzsche for Buddha, then Buddha for Lenin, then for Odysseus. When he returned finally to Christ, as he did, it was a Christ not only a saviour but a co sufferer as well.

It would be interesting to note that the concept of temptation comes from Buddhism. Kazantzakis borrowed the idea and transplanted it into Christianity. The last temptation is there even on the path to enlightenment. According to Buddhism, the reason for suffering in the world is our desire. It doesn't matter

what we desire. A simple equation which Buddha recognised is that suffering comes from desire and from suffering comes re-birth and then more desire and more suffering and so on. The only way to break the cycle of birth and rebirth is to let our free will enter and stop desire. That's what Buddha was able to do. But to wish for enlightenment and later to cherish the cycle to be broken is a desire. And so, as long as we desire enlightenment, it will never be the last temptation (Allstrom, [www.firstunitariantoronto.org](http://www.firstunitariantoronto.org)). However, this concept, as Kazantzakis adapted from Buddhism, is not completely absent from Christianity. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever man will save his life shall lose it and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:23-24). Christ invites the disciples to give up desires and temptations. What he means is that the one who loves life loses the freedom from desires and the one who gives up his desires gains freedom from desires. Kazantzakis' desire is a greater freedom from all that curbs him, physical and spiritual and political and religious ideologies and dogmas.

The significance of *The Last Temptation* can be summed up with the beautiful observation of Levitt P. Morton that Jesus "truly lives and dies with his visions. In the silence at the edge of the precipice, confronting himself across the abyss of human desires and forgetfulness, he has at last sprouted wings, his life is



a dramatization of all men's struggles, a living metaphor that grows from the rhetorical imagery of *The Saviours of God*" (*The Cretan Glance* 79).

Another major work of Kazantzakis, discussed widely is *Christ Recrucified* or *The Greek Passion* which is more social and political whereas the religious impulse remains the undertone of the structure and development of the novel. But this becomes the theme and substance in *The Last Temptation* in which the Christian story is an actuality and not a metaphor. Jesus of Nazareth is not an archetypal figure in the back ground but the protagonist himself. In *Christ Recrucified* Manolios, the hero acts at times as if he were Christ. "When I open my mouth," Manolios says, "Christ will put the right words on my lips . . . that's the decision I have taken" (255). His emotional assumption and acceptance and final martyrdom is the theme of the novel. Meek and polite Manolios turns resolute and becomes the centre of the political actions which are described extensively in Chapter 3. Before becoming a political messiah, Manolios confronts with the tense dichotomy between the spirit and flesh. How he endures and survives the demands of the flesh is the subject of study here. Like Christ, Manolios too undergoes conflicts and sufferings at the beginning. But once he is convinced of his role as social reformer and fighter against injustice and corruption of the clergy, he is never disturbed or held back with any hesitating spiritual thoughts. Christ's mind has always been turbulent, but Manolios enjoys unusual calm and peace even in agitated political situations. However, at the

beginning of the novel when he is not completely ready for the mission he suffers from indecision and uncertainty about his own potentialities to carry out the great task.

Manolios, though not late, recognizes and accepts the ephemeral nature of sensual experience and the supremacy of spirit over body. But the flesh continues to lure him as in the case of Jesus in *The Last Temptation*. He is able to give up Lenio, his fiancée, but he remains obsessed by the widow Katerina, the town whore. Unable to resist the temptation he has decided at last to visit her in the night and go down to her in the village. Manolios reflects:

I left her, but I took her with me, in my thoughts, in my blood; day and night I now dreamed only of her. I pretended to be thinking of Christ; lies! Lies! It was of her I was thinking. . . One evening I could hold out no longer . . . I took the path - I was going to the widow. I told myself: I'm going to save her soul. I'm going to talk to her and lead her into the way of God . . . Lies! Lies! I was rushing to sleep with her. Then . . ." (*Recrucified* 185)

The already divided mind of young Manolios is further divided on the thoughts about flesh and spirit. Kazantzakis portrays this conflict that takes place in the mind and its miraculous manifestation through a rare physical phenomenon experienced by Manolios. The vivid sensual thoughts of Manolias as opposed to

his self-assumed role of saving her as and when he dreamt of enjoying sex with her, are obvious from the following passage as he imagines Katerina's impassioned welcome:

Manolios stopped his ears; his head was buzzing; the veins of his neck swelled. He could feel flaming blood mounting to his head. His temples were throbbing violently, his eyelids grew heavy, there was a prickling all over his face, as though thousands of ants were biting his cheeks, his chin, his forehead, and were devouring his flesh.  
*(Recrucified 118)*

Here, flesh is willing but the spirit exerts great control over on the body of Manolios. What Kazantzakis describes afterwards is logically unconvincing, yet he tries to explain the sudden transformation of the youth's face. He wants to establish it to be the result of the potential revolt of the slumbering spirit:

A cold sweat flowed over his whole body; he passed his hand over his face ... cheeks, his lips, his chin... felt swollen. His lips were so distended that he could not open his mouth ... and gave a cry: it was all bloated, his eyes were no more than two tiny balls, his nose was lost between his ballooning cheeks, his mouth was a mere hole. This was no human face, but a mask of bestial flesh, repulsive. No, it was

no longer his face; a foreign face fixed itself over his own.  
*(Recrucified 119)*

Manolios' innocent and angelic face is completely transformed into a horrible one that women could look at only with repulsion. The leprous tragic mask saves Manolios from his physical self and enables him to fulfil his spiritual role. Later he reveals himself to the widow, calls her sister and redeems her as well. "You have said the word which has set me free... You called me sister," Katerina said as if she were relieved of all the sins she had committed. Manolios' visit and consoling words transform her from whore to Magdalen and "delivers" her, as she puts it (*Recrucified* 166). However, Manolios' deliverance from this temptation is, perhaps, one of the less impressive parts of Kazantzakis' story as it has a melodramatic effect. It comes about through the sudden eruption of the skin of his face in a kind of repulsive leprosy. This loathsome mask remains until his soul is totally purged. After a considerable passage of time, the mask itself disappears miraculously as Manolios makes up his mind to offer himself as a sacrifice for the people. It is only when he is ready to be sacrificed, willingly and joyfully, that, to his own amazement, he realizes the mask to be falling from his face with an instantaneous smoothening of his skin. The fire of the temptation which has purged him of his pride and his lust has made him a lamb ready to be led to the slaughter on behalf of his fellow-villagers. (Dillistone, *The Shepherd*, 84 -85). "In amazement Manolios stopped, his heart throbbing: he saw with his eyes a hand

passing over his face, stroking it without haste, cool like a morning breeze...The exuded flesh had melted like wax”( *Recrucified* 213-214).

Kazantzakis claims that he himself had a similar leprous disease when he was in Vienna. He confesses in his autobiography that because of his swollen face he was unable to keep his date with an unknown woman. The moment he dropped her from his mind “. . . swelling in my face had entirely disappeared . . . The demon had fled; once more I was a human being” ( *Report* 356). Kazantzakis believes that our subconscious mind can affect the physical system of the body. “Ever since that day,” Kazantzakis recollects, “I have realized that man’s soul is a terrible and dangerous coil spring” which is stronger than the body itself. “How terrible not to know that we possess this force! If we did know, we would be proud of our souls. In all heaven and earth, nothing so closely resembles God as the soul of man” ( *Report* 356-357). According to Kazantzakis, human soul is a potential force that can play havoc over flabby flesh but not in the ordinary people who possess only the weak soul. For those who have strong soul and those who perceive life for a deeper meaning and understanding, the conflict is higher and greater.

Yet man’s spirit does not entirely negate the body. Kazantzakis personifies the soul in his experience that body and soul are truly entwined, because all human life is a kind of duality. Kazantzakis realized that this very duality is the substance of life such as saint and sinner, virgin and widow, Greek and Turk, life

in this world and in heaven, the road of man and that of God (Levitt, *Cretan* 39). He says that this very duality is the essence of life and the negation of any of the parts would lead to imbalance and disintegration.

*Zorba the Greek* is another remarkable and amazing work of art by Kazantzakis discussing the spiritual conflicts related to life and death. In its Prologue, he makes a strong assertion that “Throughout my life my greatest benefactors have been my dreams and my travels; very few men, living or dead, have helped me in my struggle.” It is only a truth that Kazantzakis was an untiring wanderer seeking new vistas of experiences wide and vast. These travels had been the sources for his prolific literary outputs. And *Zorba the Greek* is a fictional recollection of his own mining venture which meets with a catastrophic end. The novel reveals a world-weary thirty six year old man, who has retired from intellectual pursuits of his European existence and lands on the coast of Crete. He is very frequently addressed by Zorba as Boss who in fact represents Kazantzakis himself. Boss is accompanied by Zorba whom he has just met in a Greek sea port and hired as his aide.

The Boss and Zorba start living together in an unknown Cretan village on the pretext of a mining venture. At the beginning of the novel, Kazantzakis introduces the Boss as a philosopher who carries his manuscript of Buddha and volumes of Dante and the other, Zorba who is carries nothing but his own rich experience and unlimited and absolute freedom. “One lives through his art; the

other possesses a life that itself has the quality of art and inspires art in those who observe him” (Levitt, *Cretan* 91). Zorba’s Character embodies those qualities of Cretan life that function as metaphor throughout the Kazantzakis’ literary works. Zorba is full of life, vitality and daring. His closeness to nature and willingness to confront the abyss shocks the passivity and Buddhist aloofness of the boss. In the course of time he teaches the boss his own active philosophy which is a unique synthesis of the thoughts of Bergson and Nietzsche that life is composed of being and nothingness.

From the beginning of the novel it is clear that the two men are totally different in their temperaments and attitudes. The philosopher-narrator represents Kazantzakis’ ideas, and Zorba represents Nietzschean concepts. The whole structure of the novel is built up in the form of dialectics between the two men. The autobiographical narrator-philosopher is contemplative and introspective, and almost until the final part of the novel, acts as the analytical expositor of vanity of human life. The philosopher’s passive and negative withdrawal from life is contrasted with Zorba’s active and generally affirmative saturation in life. Gradually the philosopher learns to understand Zorba, whom he assumes at first to be a kind of non-reflective hedonist. By normal standards Zorba could not be considered as ethical or moral man, yet everything he does results in a kind of ethic beyond good and evil, and hence classification of his character becomes difficult.

Characterization of rationalism is also a theme brilliantly worked out by Kazantzakis in *Zorba the Greek*. The Boss represents one who has withdrawn into the world of intellectualism. He moves away from this enmeshment as he tries to free himself of “all these Phantoms . . . Buddhas, Gods, Motherlands, Ideas.” He continues and rebukes himself: “woe to him who can’t free himself from Buddhas, Gods, Motherlands and Ideas” (198). He is led to face his surrendered state by Zorba who, uncontaminated by learning and esoteric intellectualism, has instinctively overcome the void and followed his passions as his mind dictates. Zorba’s vibrant and active personality is the antithesis of Kazantzakis, who philosophizes the mystery of life (Lea, 58). Zorba, on the other hand, has only contempt towards these abstractions and he thinks that life is to live, and there is nothing mysterious about it. During their brief sojourn on this island there is a great deal of mutual understanding between each other. Before he met Zorba his mind was dwelling aimlessly in the intellectual abstractions of the Buddhist philosophy of resignation and philosophical disinterestedness. Later the philosopher learns great truths from Zorba, many of these eye opening truths are the answers he has been seeking over the years. Their philosophic and spiritual give and take is perhaps the theme and content of this novel. The philosopher’s admiration grows further; in fact the master turns a disciple of the all knowing but simple and rustic Zorba:

Yes, I understood, Zorba was the man I had sought so long in vain.

A living heart, a large voracious mouth, a great brute soul, not yet



served from mother earth. The meaning of the words, art, love, beauty, purity, passion, all this was made clear to me by the simplest words uttered by this workman. (14)

Kazantzakis' life as well as his art has always been a quest for a strange yearning for mystical revelation. In *Zorba*, Kazantzakis finds answers, the meaning and the meaninglessness of the agonizing drama of human life enacted on this earth. The Boss writes the life of Buddha as a literary exercise, for the purpose of alleviating his sufferings by individual creation through his experience and intuition. "Writing *Buddha* was in fact, ceasing to be a literary exercise. It was a life-and-death struggle against a tremendous force of destruction lurking within me, a duel with the great NO which was consuming my heart and on the result of this duel depended the salvation of my soul" (146). Personal salvation from all the spiritual and material entanglements by negating the desires of earthly life is hardly possible for him. Contemplating on Buddhism is an attempt towards freedom for Kazantzakis.

The attitudinal differences between Kazantzakis and Nietzsche should be admittedly noted in the context of *Zorba the Greek*. Kazantzakis perceived the exaltation of tragedy as the joy of life from Nietzsche. He also learned from Nietzsche that a certain tragic optimism of the strong man who is delighted to discover that strife is the prevailing law of nature. "Zorba's philosophy is based upon Nietzschean nihilism, an acceptance and affirmation of life in the face of

emptiness and of unflinching contempt for systems based upon hope and unfulfilled desires – metaphysical or otherwise” (Merrill, *Zorba* 104). Their characteristic differences can be illustrated here, when Zorba speaks out:

I think about what mankind is and why he ever came onto this earth and what good he is . . . No good at all, if you ask me. It makes no difference whether I have a woman or whether I don't, whether I am honest or not, whether I am pasha or a street porter. The only thing that makes any difference is whether I am alive or dead. Whether the devil or God calls me (I think the devil and God are the same), I shall die, turn into a reeking corpse, and stink people out. They'll be obliged to shove me at least four feet down in the earth, so that they won't get choked! (157)

The difference between the two principles in the novel is the difference between the conservative indwelling weak pessimism of the philosopher and the intuitive and activist strong pessimism of Zorba. The philosopher has created his metaphysics through an other-worldly blend of the Oriental, Stoic and mystical ideas; he longs for final peace and salvation from the woes of life through some sort of transcendence of spirit (Merrill 104). He is least interested in embracing life passionately as others.

Zorba is the character whose creation is the direct effect and influence of Nietzsche. He believed that Christian ethics, which interpreted nature, history and human life on earth in terms of God's care and moral order, are now an invalid thing of the past. As a sequel, he assumed and prescribed the view that "God is dead". In a godless world Zorba explodes himself in a free and unbridled manner and enjoys the fruits of life in an unethical and immoral pace. Nothing disturbed him in his mad pursuit of pleasures. Zorba's mind flies far beyond the contemporary events that they had already ceased to be anything. Everything appears out of date, outmoded and rubbish for him. Current morality and religion are just like "rusty old rifle. His mind progressed much faster than the world" (18). However, Nietzsche believes that even in a godless world man searches for his values, looks for guides, aspirations and expectations. Man is essentially alone, according to Nietzsche, but he must create from his loneliness, and the accompanying despair and alienation, a new fresh, creative, and more wonderfully human attitude towards life and to the world. He must "revalue all values" in free, forceful, human terms (Lea 17). Though Zorba does not share the second part of Nietzsche's words, Kazantzakis takes it to his heart, as he always yearns for the harmony in the midst of the discord. The stoic acceptance of life and its failures are beautifully philosophized by the boss:

When shall I at last retire in to solitude, alone, without companions, without joy and without sorrow, with only the sacred certainty that all is a dream? When, in my rags – without desires – shall I retire

contented in to the mountains? When, seeing that my body is merely sickness and crime, age and death, shall I free, fearless and blissful - retire in to the forest? When?, oh when? (27)

Zorba, on the other hand, does not favour any thing that neglects physical activism; he believes that indulgence in carnal pleasures is not a sin and he criticizes the philosopher for giving complete emphasis upon the mental abstractions. The mystical abstractionist, the philosopher reasons out: “The greatest prophet on earth can give men no more than a watch word and the vaguer the watchword the greater the prophet” (68). It is man’s duty to work out his philosophy of life, and however vague it is in the beginning, we should continue to search for an ideal and be a prophet of that ideal and of ourselves.

But Zorba rejects any philosophy for man, and he has a strikingly different concept about here and hereafter. He doesn’t nurse any philosophical and spiritual abstractions like his boss. Zorba’s blunt yet candid reaction is: “For me paradise is this: a little perfumed room with gay-coloured dresses on the wall, scented soaps, a big bed with good springs, and at my side the female of the species” (163). His paradise is not the reward for the good deeds that a man does in this life. The obvious mockery on the false hopes of heaven is revealed in the words of Zorba. This is a typical Nietzschean ironical laughter. The extent of Nietzsche’s influence on Kazantzakis and Zorba, can be seen in two important points. The first is that Kazantzakis found in Nietzsche not just a thinker whose ideas he could borrow,

but a full human prototype in whose joys and anguishes he could see his own struggles glorified. Though Kazantzakis has not accepted the pessimistic nihilism of Nietzsche in its full sense, a mellowed nihilism or passive nihilism is obviously seen in the philosopher's views. On the other hand, as far as the ideas and attitudes of Zorba are concerned, Nietzsche acts as a negative force. This negative attitude, to some extent, is in tune with Kazantzakis' conviction that the old order must be evaluated, challenged and overturned in the interest of developing a new and more viable civilization. They seem to admit that individual life is of no account and the world itself is just a purposeless spark surrounded by darkness (Bien, *Kazantzakis'* 249). Zorba does not attribute any other spiritual or even material significance to this life. Life is just life for him, neither greater, nor mean, whatsoever. He tells his Boss:

Can you tell me, boss, he said, and his voice sounded deep and earnest in the warm night, "what all these things mean? Who made them all? and why? and, above all"- here Zorba's voice trembled with anger and fear – why do people die ? I want you to tell me where we come from and where we are going to. (289-290)

Zorba's questions are of ordinary nature but they are the eternal questions of mankind. He has only contempt for the philosopher's bookish knowledge and his abstractions. While rejecting outright the intellectualism of his boss, Zorba asks in a blunt and sharp manner: "During all those years you have been burning yourself

up consuming their black books of magic, you must have chewed over about fifty tons paper! What did you get out of them?” (290). For Zorba, literature and fine arts are the refuge of the privileged and the lazy who are afraid of real life, its beauty and ugliness. He faces and challenges life and its so called values with open defiance and contempt. Zorba is the quintessential free spirit who can't get enough of the boss' wisdom and he is getting frustrated with him because he can't answer the questions. He asks all traditional impossible questions.

“We do nothing; we neither negate, nor affirm ourselves . . . we live dead lives - we are immobilized and devitalized” (Lea 28). This is the theme that Kazantzakis develops in *Zorba*. He also expands and presents his thoughts on the resolution of the human predicament. This resolution lies in the negation of the negation; in the affirmation of life; in the oppressiveness of the void. It lies in the recognition of fate, of mortality, of the misfortunes of life and the ultimate unalterable nature of death. It confronts the void but does not submit to it. Life comprises struggle, suffering, and rebellion, both in affirmation of life and in transcending of the strictures of that life. It is at the same time a negation and creation. “Say yes to necessity, fill the vacuum with joy as Zorba does, or... redeem life's anguish by transubstantiating matter into spirit, Dionysian reality into tragic myth”(Lea 28). This idea of transubstantiation of matter into spirit is the underlying thought system of Kazantzakis in all his works.

Zorba continues to ask questions, a volley of simple but puzzling questions about life, death, and God. The boss answers in a philosophic, but plain and simple manner. It is the answer of one who has travelled, experienced, struggled and learned the great truths about the limits and possibilities of human life. The most artistically perfect and hence the most powerful expression of the ‘Cretan glance’ which is explained in detail in chapter 3 of this dissertation, is also found in the Boss’s answer:

We are little grubs, Zorba, minute grubs on the small leaf of a tremendous tree. This small leaf is the earth. The other leaves are the stars that you see moving at night. We make our way on this little leaf examining it anxiously and carefully. We smell it; it smells good or bad to us. We taste it and find it eatable. We beat on it and it cries out like a living thing.

Some men – the more intrepid ones -- reach the edge of the leaf. From there we stretch out, gazing into the chaos. We tremble. We guess what a frightening abyss lies beneath us. In the distance we can hear the noise of the other leaves of the tremendous tree, we feel the sap rising from the roots to our leaf and our hearts swell. Bent thus over the awe-inspiring abyss, with all our bodies and all our souls, we tremble with terror. From that moment begins ... poetry. (290)

The Philosopher continues to describe the terrible moment that an individual confronts his abyss: “Some grow dizzy and delirious, others are afraid; they try to find an answer to strengthen their hearts and they say: “God!” others again, from the edge of the leaf look over the precipice calmly and bravely and say; “I like it” (291). The acceptance of the worst with a touch of playfulness is the unique thought behind the ‘Cretan Glance’ of which Zorba could be the best example among all the characters in Kazantzakis.

Besides the endless arguments of dialectics between the boss and Zorba, the superiority of art and particularly the redeeming quality of poetry is greatly dealt with. In the midst of the turbulence of daily life and anxieties about the unknown future, poetry acts as a refuge and it alleviates the miseries of life. In addition, art sublimates all the vain glories of man and finally art or poetry prevails:

Pure poetry! Life had turned into a lucid, transparent game, unencumbered by even a simple drop of blood. The human element is a brutish, uncouth, impure - it is composed of love, the flesh and cry of distress. Let it be sublimated in to an abstract idea, and, in the crucible of the spirit, by various processes of alchemy, let it be rarefied and evaporate. (145)

Zorba seems to believe that everything that exists is good; sin as well as holiness, wisdom as well as folly. He embraces life with all its beauty and ugliness. As for



Zorba, he has learned a stark truth that his body and soul are necessary for him only to sin. It is true that he needed lust - that he was to experience the bitter sweetness of life and the depths of despair in order to learn to love the world. In doing so, he no longer compares it with some kind of desired imaginary world or some imaginary vision of perfection as his boss thinks. Zorba leaves life as it is, to love it and be glad to belong to it. In his character we find a scorn for morality together with a compassionate concern for man's destiny. Zorba is an ardent worshipper of creativity and he views man as the sole creator. His nihilism is not merely a passive withdrawal from active life. Zorba redefines the nihilism which revolts against life; he makes it a deliberation of conflict as a spur to higher and higher forms of life (Stavrou 55).

Zorba is the man who has freed himself from everything - religions, philosophies, political systems - one who has cut away all the strings. He wants to try all forms of life, freely, beyond plans and systems. Keeping the thought of death before him as an inevitable reality and perceiving that the life given to him is an ephemeral one, Zorba indulges in every possible pleasure exhausting everything so that when death finally comes, it would find an entirely squandered one in Zorba. Zorba is not afraid of death, but is conscious of it; he describes an encounter with an old man:

An old grandfather of ninety was busy planting an almond tree.

“What, grandad!” I exclaimed. “Planting an almond Tree?” [Almond

is a slow growing tree that would take years to bear fruits]. And he, bent as he was, turned round and said, “my son, I carry on as if I should never die.” I replied “And I carry on as if I was going to die any minute.” “Which of us was right, boss? I kept silent. Two equally steep and bold paths may lead to the same peak. To act as if death did not exist, or to act thinking every minute of death, is perhaps the same thing. (38)

Both Zorba and the ninety-year old man face and accept the finitude of human life and incorporate ‘death’ into their way of life or view of life. For Zorba, death is something not to be dreaded, but to be treated as a silent fellow traveller. It is precisely Nietzsche’s Dionysian attitude that makes Zorba face death with contempt and casualness. Not only the existential thoughts and anguishes of Nietzsche, but also of Kazantzakis borrow many ideas such as the concept of superman, the will to power, and the terms, Apollonian and Dionysian, and the laughter and dance motifs. An Apollonian dreams of the world’s harmony and beauty and sees it in serene forms. He stays cool, calm, composed and tranquil at the turmoil of life. His look is full of light; even sorrow and indignation do not shatter his divine equilibrium. This is exemplified in the character of the boss. On the other hand, Zorba is a Dionysian who shatters individuation and rejects all the so called sanctities attributed to life and its meaning. Men and beasts become brothers; death itself is seen as only one of life’s masks.

This fusion of Apollo and Dionysus provides important revelations for Kazantzakis' *Saviours*. Historically, in this process "the unsettled cry of the Orient grows pellucid when it passes through the light of Greece and is transformed and humanized. Greece is the filter which, with great struggle, refines brute into man, eastern servitude into liberty, barbaric intoxication into sober rationality" (*Report* 165-66). Kazantzakis uses the conflict between the dream world of Eastern withdrawal and the actual world of Western commitment as the foundation of the new synthesis. Hellenism's synthesis produced a paradigm of harmony and creativity, in contrast with the present one which, in fact, is the paradigm of discord and destruction. In that taut, symbiotic moment in time, Apollo and Dionysus collaborated to produce a wedding of the divine and the diabolic, irrationality and rationality, beast and God, in order to eke out for a spiritually creative civilization. Kazantzakis' reliance on this ancient synthesis is evident extensively in one of the chapters in the *Report* (157). Kazantzakis' journey passes from spiritual victory to spiritual victory in an uninterrupted and magic unity. This unity is demonstrated by Greece's temples, art and architecture through an ideal organic linking of spirit and matter, myth and reality, tragedy and beauty, individuation and unity, love and struggle, effort and serenity, discipline and passion (Lea 117). Ancient Greece achieved splendid simplicity, balance and great serenity by compromising the fierce opposing forces that struggled relentlessly. "In Greece the light is entirely spiritual. Able to see clearly in this light, man succeeded in imposing order over chaos, in establishing a "cosmos"- and cosmos

means harmony” (*Report* 164). This inspiring recognition of the demonic dual forces is the vital lesson that Kazantzakis wanted to expound through the actions and utterances of Zorba.

In the prologue to *The Last Temptation*, Kazantzakis explains this common life - dominating inner struggle - the supreme duty, to reconcile the divine and the demonic:

I loved my body and did not want it to perish; I loved my soul and did not want it to decay. I have fought to reconcile these two primordial forces which are so contrary to one another, to make them realize that they are not enemies but rather fellow-workers, so that they might rejoice in their harmony - and so that I might rejoice with them. (7)

The idea of the blending of these antagonistic impulses has been Kazantzakis’ lifelong yearning which unconsciously or deliberately occupies the centre stage of his mind and art. Undoubtedly, the manifestation of this harmony is portrayed in the characterization of Zorba. Kazantzakis relates a tale of his meeting with a priest in an abbey in the Sinai Desert. This holy man who spoke only to God, passed on to Kazantzakis the fruit of an entire life spent in apprenticeship to the flesh and the spirit: “Angels are nothing more – do you hear! - nothing more than refined devils. The day will come – oh if only I could live to see it! – when men will understand this, and then...” (302). He leaned over to Kazantzakis’ ear and in a trembling voice he uttered:

...and then the religion of Christ will take another step forward on earth. It will embrace the whole man, all of him not just half as it does now in embracing only the soul. Christ's mercy will broaden. It will embrace and sanctify the body as well as the soul; it will see – and preach – that they are not enemies, but fellow workers. Whereas now what happens? If we sell ourselves to God, He urges us to deny the body. When will Christ's heart grow sufficiently broad to commiserate not only the soul but also the body, and to reconcile these two savage beasts? (*Report* 302- 303)

Kazantzakis believed in this counsel and incorporated both the devils as well as the angels in his thought system.

The insight that we must recognize the savage Dionysian powers within each of us individually and within all of us collectively can be seen as the recurring theme in Kazantzakis. This should act like a new visionary rhythm for the man to save himself and to ennoble his mundane life when confronted with the twin, terrifying abysses; of human's death and his life. Kazantzakis' ideal concept is to maintain the proper harmonious balance between mind and body. This ideal order must be founded on a comprehensive understanding of the natural world and human nature -- the diabolic as well as the divine. As Kazantzakis thought that Hellenism is insufficient in confronting this challenge, he probed the other dominant source of his view of future man. In this enquiry he was trying not to

negate the lessons of ancient Greece but rather to augment them with the spiritual criteria of Christianity. (Lea, 123)

Seemingly an atheist and nihilist, Zorba himself is not sure of the riddle of human life and its meaning. However, he is not tormented by the thoughts and agony of existential dilemma as his boss, instead he is ecstatic and Zorba questions: “Boss, d’ you believe that? That God became man and was born in stable?” His philosopher boss is completely at loss to unravel the purpose and meaning of God, he could only say, “I can’t say I believe it, nor that I don’t.” Zorba, on the other hand, can only say that “man is a mystery!” (126). Generalizing human life as mystery is an acceptance of life with all its good and bad. In a different context he defines man in a humorous but more philosophic way than the philosopher himself: “What a strange machine man is!” he said with astonishment. “You fill him with bread, wine, fish, radishes, and out of him some sighs, laughter and dreams. Like a factory. I am sure there is a sort of talking – film cinema in our heads” (274).

As for Zorba, these sighs, laughter and dreams are the stuff by which human life is made of; naturally bread, wine and women become his God. For Captain Michales in *Freedom and Death* God is his struggle for Cretan independence, while for Father Yanaros in *The Fratricides* God is his sermon of love and brotherhood. The God of each of them gives value and substance to his life and existence. God, in Kazantzakis’ view, was not merely a master who

authoritatively controlled His subjects in an arbitrarily manner. “When I say the Invisible, I do not mean any priestly version of God, or metaphysical consciousness, or absolutely perfect being, but rather the mysterious force which uses man - and used animals, plants and minerals before us –as its carriers and beasts of burden, and which hastens along as though it had a purpose and were following a specific road”(Report, 402). Zorba too believes in this ‘mysterious force’ and enjoys the life given to him in his own way ‘as though it had a purpose’; the purpose of life according to him is to ‘drink life to the lees’.

In *Zorba the Greek* Kazantzakis portrays the essential dilemma of human beings with Greek culture as the point of reference. The governing belief of western civilization according to his mentor Nietzsche, is the optimism, which is ignorant of the core of things. Western civilization is bankrupt because it bases all its thought and action on illusion. But Buddhist renunciation, the withdrawal from the life of desires as followed by the boss is equally reprehensible and one sided. Ancient Greeks were able to fuse the Apollonian and Dionysian principles. Being placed between East and West, they managed a classically pure third mode of existence (Bien, *Zorba* 148). Men and nations from time immemorial grow, attain fruition and finally dissolve or disintegrate into nothingness without being benefited by the chemical fusion of these opposing forces. By blending optimism and weak pessimism in *Zorba*, Kazantzakis reaches out to the ancient method of compromise to resolve the perennial human predicament.

In *Zorba* Kazantzakis presents the boss who has reached a philosophical impasse. Though a product of the west, he can no longer function as a creator of beauty optimistically because he has seen the Dionysian truth of contradiction and flux. He becomes pessimist and seeks refuge in the weak pessimism of Eastern renunciation, the weak pessimism. At the same time, however, he is not fascinated in the same way with the Buddhist solution. In other words, he clings to his western sense of identity and individuation. Unable to appease his Apollonian needs through western art he tries to remedy this paralysis by starting a capitalistic western mining venture. It is strange that the philosopher boss designs ambitious lignite mining with his mind which should have been primarily preoccupied with the Buddhist negation of desires. Here, ambition and negation, the two opposing impulses go hand in hand. At this point, enters the strong pessimist, Zorba, with his candid and blunt Dionysian utterances and actions. By virtue of their intimacy and co living, the boss solves all his problems that have been tormenting him over the years. He learns to feel, re-establishes contact with the soil, abandons all inactiveness of Buddhist abstractions and says yes to all the contradictions and ugliness which life is actually composed of. He also hopes for salvation through action, not through passive inaction or annihilation of desire.

The great scene in this connection occurs when the cable project which costs a lot of money disintegrates and the entire lignite venture ends in ruin. Such an ambitious investment suddenly collapses leaving no scope for recovery. To our



dismay, the boss reacts with irrational joy. A rare delight and relief take possession of him and he extricates himself from both hope and fear:

I had rarely felt so full of joy in my life. It was no ordinary joy, it was sublime, absurd and unjustifiable gladness. Not only unjustifiable, contrary to all justification. This time I had lost everything- my money, my man, the line . . . it was all lost. Well, it was precisely at that moment that I felt an unexpected sense of deliverance. (314)

He is free from all fetters of spiritual and human bondages. But this does not mean that he has become a Zorba. In fact he has been redeemed from Western paralysis and eastern negation. Now he can function as a tragic artist, fuse his western spirituality and Zorbaic barbarism and create a third mode. After the cable catastrophe, when the boss asserts that he is free, Zorba knows the truth that his boss is not completely free, he is still tied to reason and asserts:

No, you're not free, he said. The string you're tied to is perhaps longer than other people. That's all. You're on a long piece of string, boss; you come and go, and think you're free, but you never cut the string in two ...you need a touch of folly to do that: folly,d' you see ? You have to risk everything. (323)

Zorba understands that his boss lacks “just one thing – folly,” When he comes to possess this, he would achieve complete freedom. The Boss agrees with Zorba whole heartedly, “I nearly wept. All that Zorba said was true” (324). The Boss relieves himself of all the burdens of philosophies he had been carrying and instantly he acquires the innocence of an infant. The self assurance that the boss had at the beginning is contrasted at the end with the simple truths of the rustic Zorba. There is an additional and more important dimension to the philosopher’s anguish, for he realizes that Zorba in his folly has achieved a true knowledge of the illogical, contradictory core of things. Zorba, he knows: “simply cracked life’s shell – logic, morality, honesty – and went straight to its very substance (151). Folly can do that; reason cannot. Reason is analytic and argumentative. The boss is controlled by his understanding, set limits, separation of the possible from the impossible, and the human from the divine. Zorba accepts contradictions and acts in contradictory ways.

The boss can neither love nor hate with passion. He says he does not want troubles. He is a dualist obsessed with the conflict between matter and spirit, body and soul, darkness and light. In Zorba, body and soul form one harmonious though contradictory whole. Finally, the boss sees that all abstractions –Buddha, God, love, hope, country – are life denying. Without deluding himself about the superficial nature of things, he realizes that ephemeral things truly exist and they are good. The flesh is good; clay, seed, excrement and blood are good – as he

discovers once and for all when he sleeps with the widow. And he has learned something about the abstractions such as the soul and the spirit (Bien, *Zorba* 161). “That night for the first time”, he says, “I felt clearly that soul is flesh as well. Perhaps more volatile, more diaphanous, perhaps freer, but flesh all the same. And the flesh is soul” (256).

Finally the two arch rivals, the flesh and the soul, are reconciled. Bien observes that the reconciliation between art and politics is parallel to the reconciliation between activism and resignation that we find in *Zorba the Greek*. He argues that the novel is devoted precisely to depicting the process whereby art and politics are reconciled. Bien clarifies that the word ‘politics’ is taken in the root sense of active participation in the community. Art, on the other hand, is presented as an exit from fear, hope and despair as in the case of the boss in the novel. But the metaphysical exit must come only at the end of the journey of active participation as *Zorba* does. The aesthetics and the politics are reconciled because active participation in life is the only path whereby imagination earns the right to step back from life and treat it with engaged aloofness. The artist accepts the unaesthetic as a precondition of saving himself through the aesthetics (Bien, *Buddha* 270).

*Zorba* actively indulges in life despite the irrationality and brevity of life. When his infant son dies he explodes and questions everything that dictates man. He stands at the abyss without awe, unafraid of God’s judgment, willing even to

judge Him. His protest towards God is in the form of an eccentric wild dance. “For Zorba’s dance was full of defiance and obstinacy. He seemed to be shouting to the sky: What can you do to me, Almighty? You can do nothing to me except kill me. Well, kill me, I don’t care! I’ve vented my spleen, I’ve said all I want to say; I’ve had time to dance ... and I don’t need you anymore!” (291). It is his dance that frees him from the seeming bondage of nature’s unyielding cycle. Thus Zorba declares his freedom from the fear of death, the ultimate abyss where life terminates itself into nothing.

It can be asserted beyond any doubt that Zorba’s philosophy – the focus of admiration in the novel is not his own but the author’s. The two characters and their discourses are part of the dialectics, or the struggles of the author himself. None of Kazantzakis’ other novels contain a character like Zorba. On the contrary, most of the important characters in Kazantzakis’ works are rather ascetic, puritanical and preoccupied or overwhelmed by the problem of good and evil. Kazantzakis himself was such a man, a modern ascetic, who dreamed of starting a religion, and who refused the pleasures of the flesh in his desperate struggle to transmute the flesh into spirit. It is only a truth that Kazantzakis created his fictional hero, Alexis Zorba from the real George Zorbas, who was the author’s contemporary. One should not, however, underestimate Kazantzakis, the author, just because of these facts, because, the novel is not based on the facts surrounding the real Zorba alone. Kazantzakis’ powerful talent for narration and verbal dialectics make this novel a distinct one among the other novels he has authored.

Or else, George Zorbas would have been buried in anonymity along with many of his acquaintances. Kazantzakis took the real George Zorbas whom he knew and loved, idealized him, polished him and gave to us as Alexis Zorbas, a great figure in world literature. It is Kazantzakis' art that metamorphosed the crude, unlettered and uncivilized George into a pleasant, humanistic and witty-tongued Zorba of the fiction whom the lovers of literature remember (Richards, *Facts* 353-356). Zorba is a man whose character Kazantzakis would himself like to be, but could not as his mind was bent on to Apollonian ideas whereas Zorba was a hardcore Dionysian who enjoys life in its fullest extent. *Zorba the Greek* is the explicit attempt of Kazantzakis to bring together these two struggling forces; the flesh and the spirit, the dark and the bright, and whatever is contradictory in the human psyche. *Zorba* carries undercurrents of various philosophies that influenced the life and thoughts of the twentieth century world. In a precise statement Poulakidas rightly observes the magic myriad of ideas in *Zorba*. "Kazantzakis' existentialism is synthesis of Nietzsche's atheism and Dostoyevsky's humanism but this combination leads to a kind of spiritualism that has extremely strong ties with Bergson's mysticism and vitalism"(Poulakidas, "*The novels, 2260A*"). These ideas represent the actions and beliefs of Zorba and the boss at various levels in the novel, and this makes it remarkable compared to the other works of Kazantzakis.

The spiritual conflict that we find in *The Last Temptation* and *Zorba the Greek* reaches a harmonious blending of spirit and flesh in *The Saviours of God*.

The focal point of *The Saviours of God* is that man is not an outsider; instead, he is very much a part of the sacred. Kazantzakis “places man in the absolute; we are not separated from the world or from the universe. All thought is a meditation within existence. The union between soul and the universe is of the same nature as between soul and body” (Bessa 442). Kazantzakis believes that the world is an endless pageantry. Therefore nothing begins or ends with itself. The world is passing from eternity to eternity so there is no separation of anyone from anything. To exist is to be alive, to be borne along the living stream, on the crest of a wave. The past is gathered into the present, and later it is carried along and finally it presses itself forward into the future. This forward movement incessantly continues without any intermission. This very reality is life. It is an unceasing becoming, which preserves the past and creates the future. By the acceptance of this cosmic reality Kazantzakis reminds us, in a way, of the essence of Indian Vedic philosophy that ‘when infinity is taken from infinity, infinity remains’.

Kazantzakis believes that life is a great river which flows endlessly as the river in *Siddhartha* of Herman Hesse. Life is a riddle without past, present and future. He asserts in *Report to Greco*, “There is no such thing as progress; destiny is not governed by reason; religion, morality, and great ideas are worthless consolations, good only for cowards and idiots. The strong man, knowing this, confronts the world’s purposeless phantasmagoria with tranquillity and rejoices in dissolving the multiform, ephemeral veil of Maya” (*Report* 322).

Kazantzakis believes that existence and man are indefinable because man exists only as an individual and this individual is not something fixed but a reality which stands in the dialectics between being and nothingness. This nothingness in man is conceived by Kazantzakis as a dynamics which constantly drives him out of himself, as a soul. Nothingness is not only a given fact of existence; it is also something that man creates in order to realize his existence. Anxiety for one's own existence is manifested in concern for one's permanent being (Bessa 443).

It is death that brings man's being into question, and therefore life is related to death, and the absolute comprehension of death is possible only in the light of the other. For man, to live in this world is to know that he must die one day; life will be closed off by the curtain of death. Although there is an uncertainty about the exact death-hour, sure boundary between life and death is marked out beyond doubt. Kazantzakis does not want this life-curtailling frontier to be something outside life. In fact death is something which defines life. By limiting life, it is death that gives life its true being. This awareness of death made Kazantzakis incorporate death with our everyday life. That's why Zorba is not afraid of death. Like Nietzsche, Kazantzakis too is trying to experiment with the nihilistic tendencies which are the undercurrents of twentieth century literature. In *Zorba*, he seems to believe that consciousness of nothing and the absurdity of life need not drive one to resignation but it can be a stimulus to indulge in life. Kazantzakis' nihilism was, in fact, a creative one for the constructive accomplishments in life.

The burning concern in *The Saviours of God* is the essential human question to know what is to become of consciousness after each one of us dies. The problem that he confronts is that of man, of the human person and of his survival. Death poses the question of discovering what dying is. Does it mean merely annihilation or extinction from earthly life? What happens to man after death and can he enter everlasting life? Does it mean that man ceases to be, that nothing happens to him thereafter? Kazantzakis realizes the imminence of this problem. At the darkest point of nihilism Kazantzakis looks only for reasons to go beyond. His point of departure from nihilism is for man himself and his yearning for survival, for immortality. For Kazantzakis, not God but man himself is the immediate basis of religious feeling; it is man who leads us to postulate God. Kazantzakis' religion was to seek truth in life and life in truth (Bessa 445).

The real basis for the nature and character of life is the awareness of man's destiny which is the inevitable departure from the life given to him. For Kazantzakis this destiny is freedom from the fetters of earthly life, therefore it becomes the possibility as well. "Destiny - this freedom and possibility - is nothing other than the unknown into which Kazantzakis sailed" (Bessa 445). For Kazantzakis human freedom holds up the mirror to infinity. The fierce breath of life brings into human life the vastness and fearful passionless force of non human things. This is the vision that drives all philosophy. Philosophy is primarily an attitude towards life, a discipline of the mind and heart, a lay religion liberated



from groundless fear or anxiety, and superstition. *The Saviours of God* speaks of a new state of being. Kazantzakis with his vision of history and a movement of the spirit, grasps the essence that man is confronted with a new kind of freedom – man is more than a mere unit of society, a member of a species; he becomes as unique as God. In *The Saviours of God* we find a new metaphysics of energy - a principle of creation which allows one to place man in nature and at the same time invites him to rise above it. It expresses the purest part of Kazantzakis' unique vision which is a vision of intimate freedom resulting from personal effort and creation. He has deep faith in the destiny of man which is the final triumph of light over darkness. Kazantzakis' concept of destiny is not a well knit programme from birth to the end for everyman who is born into this earth. It is universally believed that human destiny and death are complementary and man's fatal flaw is his mortality. Kazantzakis rejects this traditional view about the death and destiny of man, because our attitude towards death is influenced by hope as much as by fear. Therefore, he asserts that hope and fear are the great enemies of man. But for the Greeks like Kazantzakis destiny is not simple but complex. This belief strengthened him to face life's challenges with unusual calm and fortitude. So, Kazantzakis hopes for nothing, if one is free from hope, he is free from fear as well. Eventually he is free from all fetters of life and what comes after it. Father Yanaros in *The Fratricides* feels the same about death, "Death, I fear you not," he addresses the Death again and acclaims:

Death, I do not fear you, he murmured, and suddenly he felt free. What does it mean to be free? He who does not fear death is free. Father Yanaros stroked his beard, satisfied. God, he pondered, is there a greater joy than freedom from death? ‘No,’ he went on. “No!” (55)

One of the striking messages in *The Saviours of God* is that destiny is not death. Destiny is composed of everything that imposes on man an awareness of his fate. Precisely stated, Kazantzakis’ theme is that man in his entirety goes from his birth to his death with his flesh, his personality, and above all his desire which is never to die completely. Nietzsche was also deeply troubled by the problem of life and its survival. For Kazantzakis life is continuous creation and continuous consumption, and is, therefore, unceasing death. Life must be made, created and imagined by him in an endless manner.

Maria Bessa observes philosophically that, “Kazantzakis is an agnostic as far as world-view is concerned, but an ethical mystic where life-view is concerned” (446). He discovered that life has a meaning in itself that lies in the will-to-live which for him stands as the only manifestation of the divine source. Here he draws a contrast with Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ and comes closer to Bergson. There is a striking similarity between Bergson and Kazantzakis in the concept of God which is life itself acting in all things. They also agree that cosmic force is not blind but purposeful and that there is a sharp dichotomy between

matter and spirit. For looking with the eyes of the spirit upon nature, we find that in us also there is matter and spirit. Searching into the phenomena of the spirit in us we learn that we belong to the world of the spirit and that we must let ourselves be guided by it. This spirit is light, which struggles with matter, which represents darkness. What happens in the world and within us is the result of this encounter which is the theme and content of Kazantzakis' literary output. This realization is the base of the spiritual conflicts in Kazantzakis' entire philosophical and fictional world. "*The Saviours of God* is not only a major work of poetic vision, it is also the realm of mediation between man and the absolute, in which man encounters his own individual fatality and that of his time. To think and to feel this fatality is the whole of man. What man thinks and feels is his God" (Bessa 447).

*The Saviours of God* is the philosophical basis for Kazantzakis' position in which he makes it clear that an individual human being proceeds through a series of steps - the Preparation, the March, the Vision, and the Action to the Silence. In the same way the human soul has to keep on climbing to hazardous heights, look down over the abyss, and confront the frightening truths. In the spiritual struggle, man has to ascend the mountain of peace and silence for which he has to prepare himself. Kazantzakis prescribes three duties to man to attain the abode of peace. They are: to see boundaries, to reject boundaries, to become free of hope as well as of fear. This is the only way through which man can prepare himself for the march towards God. On the march itself, he moves from the ego, to

the race, to all mankind and finally to the earth: from an awareness of self to a recognition that the individual is also one of a race of men with ancestors and descendants; from a further acknowledgment that both he and his race are but parts of a greater humanity to a final discovery that mankind, too, is united with all the other creatures of the earth in a single entity (Levitt, *World and Art* 173).

Living in a new age, Kazantzakis devises a vision of God different from those of earlier ages, for these have now lost all meaning and relevance. Man today serves God by going to His aid in his unending struggle for survival. If God falls, man falls with Him; if He is victorious, man is saved. This heretical vision perceives a divinity with dramatic possibilities. The vision is the result of Kazantzakis' life long-effort to reconcile the universals of Christianity with the ideals and rhetoric of Marxism, to combine the clear unassuming simplicity of Buddha with the Nietzschean view of the death of God. In addition, Kazantzakis blends Tolstoyan and Bergsonian ideas with which he attempts to counter Nietzsche's shocking message that 'god is dead'. It was in this context that Kazantzakis declared that his mission was to save God (Hartocollis 208). No one would have dared to call man "*Saviours* of God" as Kazantzakis did; Nietzsche issued the pronouncement "God is dead!", but Kazantzakis came to herald the most radical message of resurrection: "Man becomes God and saves God." Man takes on properties of the divine by accepting his responsibilities of the divine to save God (Anton 61). The essence of our God, Kazantzakis says,

is struggle. In *The Saviours of God* the basic motif is “not God who will save us - but it is we who will save God, by battling, by creating, and by transmuting matter into spirit” (*Saviours* 19). This involves a radical view of God. All the traditional religions which made man dependent upon God are rejected. This repeated rejection is expressly seen in Kazantzakis’ legendary hero Odysseus in *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* where he remains determined to cast down every idol and to denounce every form of worship, and every philosophy and political ideology that binds man to itself. He stays free to reject and to seek and be ready to transcend everything, including himself. This is true about Kazantzakis himself. The true hero can never turn back; nor can he denounce the ceaseless demand that comes from the inner self for continuous self-transcendence (Anton 64).

The ultimate stage of our spiritual exercise is called silence. Leaning out over the abyss, the man who has reached the peak of silence sings a profound and magical incantation of belief in God, of belief in the man who has climbed to the peak of the belief in the ultimate unreality of existence of both man and God. This view may lead us to believe that Kazantzakis is an atheist. But on closer observation, it can be understood that his philosophy is tantamount to a theology, the Indian metaphysic of “*Aham Brahmasmi*” implying that everyone is God.

Blessed be all those who hear and rush to free you, Lord, and who say:

Only you and I exist.

Only you and I are one.

And thrice blessed be those who bear on their shoulders and do not buckle Under this great, sublime, and terrifying secret: That even this one does not exist! (*Saviours* 27)

Another prominent novel in which Kazantzakis discusses the conflicting forces of spirituality and the demands of flesh is *God's Pauper: St. Francis of Assisi*. Unlike *The Last Temptation*, *Saint Francis* is much more a biography than fiction. The entire novel is written as a recollection of one of the disciples. The main fictional element Kazantzakis uses is making Brother Leo the constant companion to Saint Francis, and thus presenting him as an eyewitness to all the miracles in his life. In reality, although Leo was one of his first brothers and biographers, he did not accompany him on all the journeys. Leo also conveys the irresistible charisma of Francis, and his vision of abandoning all worldly desires to pursue and serve God through boundless love for not just every person, but everything in the universe with determined peace, and perfect simplicity. The novel starts slowly, with Brother Leo mourning the death of his friend Francis and recalling the years of self-denial he suffered in following Francis and his life of self-imposed deprivations. He begins to write the life of Francis, at first erratically, and then, chronologically, recording how he met him, and how God began the process of changing Francis.

As the novel proceeds we realize that Francis is not merely a character for Kazantzakis, but a safe vehicle for his own struggles and conflicts which are found unmistakably in characters like Jesus in *The Last Temptation* and Manolios in *The Greek Passion* and Father Yanaros in *The Fratricides*. Kazantzakis' mind has always been preoccupied with gods and spirituality. It grew complicated and complex as his mind broadened. The term 'God' served him many ways; it enabled him to express many facets of his own struggle towards self-definition and self-transcendence. Though Kazantzakis' own education took him straight to Bergson and Nietzsche, who enkindled the passion for self-transcendence, the concepts of philosophy of divinity and existentialism had already sprouted in the early days of his life itself. In addition, the brief stay he had in 1924 in Assisi, the home town of St. Francis, inspired him to know more about the saint. Later Kazantzakis felt intimately that he and Francis are fellow travellers searching for the same goal which eluded them as they advanced. Therefore Kazantzakis addresses himself most obviously to the philosophical and existential set of questions. For St. Francis it was a passionate, self-obliterating search; the search for God is in some ways the discovery of himself. What Kazantzakis calls God is also referred to as the soul or spirit. His God is devoid of any external existence other than what he perceived as refuge and consolation in times of misery and distress. To Kazantzakis, God is merely a human creation, as he explains through the words of his hero Saint Francis: "Perhaps God is simply the search for God"

(31). Therefore, God for him is the dynamic principle, the primordial force which drives man to surpass himself.

The massive single-minded and explicit enquiry of St. Francis is not within Christian theology alone, it is the quest of Kazantzakis himself. He finds new ways of saying, through Francis, that man is intimately, entangled in God. At one point Francis remarks: “Brother Leo, open your mind and engrave deeply there what I am about to tell you. The body of man is the bow, God is the archer, and the soul is the arrow. Understand?”(180-81). What he tries to explicate in these words is the interdependence of mind and body, and essentially the mutual dependence of God and man. God is both in and outside the body. The body contains the soul which in turn is eager to shed the body. Those interrelationships, and distinctions, could not be expressed more concisely. Here we find that the theology of Saint Francis is brought more forcefully into one image (Will 115). But Francis never attempts any harmony of the body and he undergoes the same mental ordeals as experienced by Jesus. The opposing forces always waged war in his mind; each of them being equally strong. This typical Kazantzakian temperamental predicament is clearly seen in Francis who tells Brother Leo:

...my mother and father, Brother Leo. The Two of them have been wrestling inside me for ages. This struggle has lasted my whole life... They may take on different names - God and Satan, spirit and



flesh, good and bad, light and darkness, but they always remain my mother and father. My father cries within me. (27)

His father exhorts him to become a noble man because he thinks that only the rich and the nobility deserve to live in the world. He never wants his son to be good in this world. To be good means he is finished, according to him. On the other hand, his mother in a trembling and soft voice advises him:

Be good, dear Francis, and you shall have my blessing. You must love the poor, the humble, and the oppressed. If someone injures you, forgive him! My mother and my father wrestle within me, and all my life I have been struggling to reconcile them. But they refuse to become reconciled; and because of that, I suffer. (27)

Contradictory parental influences and Kazantzakis' efforts of reconciliation are discussed elaborately in *Report to Greco* as well. What is found in *St. Francis* are but an echo of those experiences expressed in *Report to Greco* especially about the domineering father and the kindly mother.

Kazantzakis wants to portray the inner struggles of an individual man, largely aloof from the society around him. In this struggle he is least concerned about the political implications of the revolution he has begun. Caught up in his own personal struggle, he evades other political and religious issues and their ramifications.

Though Kazantzakis had a great scope to raise Francis to the level of a martyr as Father Yanaros and Manolios, he restricts the protagonist to the role of a

simple pauper. Father Elias the intellectual, who plays the dual roles of Saint Paul and Judas, represents the opposite poles of Francis' struggle. A third pole in the fiction is Sister Clara, who leads the Poor Clares, the Second Order of the Franciscan world. She is his greatest temptation, a sort of Magdalene as in *The Last Temptation* (Levitt, *Cretan* 145). Francis experiences intense agony of choice between spirit and flesh that he cannot endure it any longer:

There are many roads. Which is my road? How shall I conquer the demons within me? They are many, and if Thou dost not come to my aid, I am lost! How can I push aside the flesh, Lord, so that it will not come between us and separate us? You saw for yourself, Lord, how troubled my heart was when I faced the young girl at San Domino's, how troubled it was when I faced my father. How can I save myself from my mother and father and, from women, friends, from comfortable living; and from pride, the yearning for glory, from happiness itself. The number of mortal demons is seven, and all seven are sucking at my heart. How can I save myself, Lord, from Francis? (72)

Kazantzakis always maintains the view that the body and soul should harmonize and the rejection of either of them would make the other incomplete. That is why his characters suffer to align themselves with the soul or with the body. Francis tortures his body as if it is an enemy. He asserts that, "The body does not exist!

Yes, Brother Leo, there is no such thing as the body; nothing exists but the soul!” (51). But at the end of the novel Kazantzakis makes Francis apologize for his neglect of body and nature alike. “Forgive me, Brother Donkey” [Very often he describes the body as a donkey that carries him] he said:

...forgive me, my old ramshackle body, for having tormented you so much ... And you, my revered Mother Earth: you must forgive me also. You gave me a splendid, radiant body, and now look what mud and filth I am returning to you! (386)

It is obvious that Francis regrets having punished the body severely and the final confession is the realization that the spirit and the flesh are the fellow sufferers and fellow travellers as well. Thus Francis accomplishes Kazantzakis’ typical and age old yearning for the blending of the two rival forces in *God’s Pauper*.

In *God’s Pauper* Kazantzakis recreates the life of Saint Francis and shows his deep and abiding love for asceticism. On the contrary, he also points out the basically different priorities and attitudes on life and religious practices followed by the Bishop who is the representative of the organized church. The spiritual struggle, not political, is the central theme of *God’s Pauper*. Therefore, the strife in Franciscan Order is left unexplored deliberately. What Francis anticipated and what is accomplished is just suggested, but not expanded. It appears that Kazantzakis did not want to start new controversies by being very critical of the established church and clergy. So the very choice of the subject matter in *God’s Pauper* shows Kazantzakis’ intense interest in asceticism and primitive Christian

ethics. Saint Francis' life was a continuous struggle to elevate the spirit above the flesh, to subdue all demands of the flesh, and to live in absolute poverty. Francis' refusal to marry, his reluctance to satisfy his hunger as well as his deliberate and savage punishment of the flesh are in direct contrast to the life of any church official (Richard, *Christianity* 52).

However, the critical view is that *God's Pauper* is the least successful of Kazantzakis' fictions. The major flaw, according to Levitt Morton is that, "he rejects nature, senses, and rejects life in this world and suffers from excessive holiness" (144). On the other hand the greatness and literary merit of *The Last Temptation* is that Jesus offers possibilities of universal salvation. There is freedom to fail in his mission and "he [Christ of Kazantzakis] is prey to the failings of all men. He thus overcomes the narrow asceticism – that substitute for orthodox divinity – which attracts most of Kazantzakis' heroes but which Francis alone, succumbs to" (Levitt, *Cretan* 143). It seems that Kazantzakis has fallen into the trap of his own philosophy and given us excessive colour and metaphor while portraying the life of St. Francis:

In the dichotomy between his early and later life, in his appeal to the oppressed and impoverished masses of people, in his use of the vernacular for his teaching, in the apparent final betrayal by his organized followers, even in his relationship with his domineering father, the historical Saint Francis seems the very type of the Kazantzakian hero. He too makes the difficult ascent up the

mountain of human fears and desires- the Nietzschean Mountain of dreams –and confronts himself and God across the abyss of human experience. (Levitt, *Cretan* 144)

Therefore, it is felt that the available contradictions in the life of the Saint are not artistically recreated as done with regard to Jesus in *The Last Temptation*. His other messianic heroes, Manolios, Father Fotis, and Father Yanaros are much more feared than loved. Every one of them follows Kazantzakis' concept of struggle relentlessly throughout the life and finally transubstantiates matter into spirit as the culmination of their life's mission. In *St. Francis*, Kazantzakis could have elevated the historical 'pauper' to the level of a fictional martyr by exploring the ways how he suffered while his own ideas and dreams were flouted in the air as insignificant or unnecessary. At the end his concept of perfect poverty is contrasted with the poverty of perfectness. He falls into silence when his simplicity and sacrifice are replaced by luxury and extravagance. However, Kazantzakis' retelling of Francis' life despite its defects in characterization of the protagonist, remains the story of a saint, whose life was so radically distinctive in purity, poverty, and peace, that he created one of the most lasting and far reaching reformers in the history of the Church.

While concluding this chapter on the perennial conflicts of flesh and spirit about which Kazantzakis is pondering over time and again, it can be rightly assessed that his mind has always been preoccupied with the opposing elements in

life or nature. His writings are the manifestations of his tragic attempts to find deliverance by passing through all the stages of contemporary anxieties by pursuing the most daring hopes. Thus, it is natural for an artist to be a fighter and a loser as well in this world. No matter, the victory or defeat, Kazantzakis wrote the story of man's battle against the personal or impersonal forces in nature. In the midst of his simple joys and great sorrows, marginal successes and utter failures and with his disappointments, Kazantzakis continued to fight always his anguished struggle consciously and unconsciously. He can never give up the struggle. He writes: "I can never cease wrestling with God ... I shall be wrestling with Him even at the very last moment when I present my self before Him. I believe this is my fate. Not to reach my destination...but to wrestle" (*Report* 302). As his mind is preoccupied with the ideas of struggling with God, it is quite natural that the motif of wrestling with divine becomes the primary theme in his major works like *The Last Temptation*, *The Greek Passion*, *Zorba the Greek* and *God's Pauper*.

The process of clash and fusion underlines Kazantzakis' thinking, whether he describes the miracle of ancient Greece or prescribes a path for contemporary man. This clash and final fusion become the constantly recurring theme in his works. He philosophizes that Greece is placed geographically and spiritually between the East and the West and defines the Greek experience as the constant struggle between these antithetical forces. Therefore, the position of Greece is truly tragic, Kazantzakis' writes in his autobiography:

New forces are rising from the East, new forces rising from the West and Greece, caught as always between a whirlpool. Following the tradition of reason and empirical enquiry, the West bounds forward to conquer the world; the East, prodded by frightening subconscious forces, likewise darts forward to conquer the world. Greece is placed in the middle; it is the world's geographical and spiritual cross roads. Once again its duty is to reconcile these two monstrous impulses by finding a synthesis. (*Report 175*)

Therefore, being a Greek, most significantly a Cretan, Kazantzakis takes up the responsibility of the world, all by himself to find a solution and a synthesis. Like his own Odysseus, Kazantzakis seems to believe that "man's greatest duty on earth is to fight his fate" and that is the only way by which "the mortal man can even surpass his god" for deliverance.