

## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

#### Beyond Struggles and Conflicts

Even at the beginning of the 21st century, the novel, one of the most flexible of literary genres, continues to remain a powerful form for authors to represent the human experience both on the individual level and on the societal level. Writers everywhere use the versatility of the novel to offer new insights into people's actions, ideas, and aspirations. Kazantzakis' works, of course, cover an incredibly vast range, cutting across genres and forms. He has authored philosophic essays, travel books, tragedies, and translations into modern Greek of such classics as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Goethe's *Faust*. He has also produced lyric poetry and the epic *Odíssa* (1938; *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*), a 33,333-line sequel to the Homeric epic that represents the full range of Kazantzakis' philosophy, and which could be deemed to be his greatest achievement. But Kazantzakis is perhaps best known for his widely translated novels: *Víos kai politía tou Aléxi Zormpá* (1946; [Zorba the Greek](#)), a portrayal of a passionate lover of life and poor-man's philosopher; *O Kapetán Mikhális* (1950; *Freedom and Death*), a depiction of Cretan Greeks' struggle against their Turkish overlords in the 19th century; *O Khristós Xanastavrónetai* (1954; *The Greek Passion*); and *O Televtaíos Pirasmós* (1955; *The Last Temptation of Christ*), a revisionist

psychological study of Jesus Christ. Published after his death was the autobiographical *Anaforá stón Gréko* (1961; *Report to Greco*).

Kazantzakis is counted among the greatest novelists of modern Greece and among the foremost men of letters of an admirable European generation. He belongs to the great tradition of twentieth century writers like Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse who, like him often engaged in struggles to define their ideas in a world in which old philosophies are decaying. In Mann's *The Magic Mountain* we find characters torn between romanticism and rationalism. Similarly, in *Steppenwolf*, Hermann Hesse explores the necessity for individuals to overcome their social training and traditional ideas to seek their own way in their own worlds. Although, Kazantzakis and Hesse were contemporaries, both apparently remained in total ignorance to each other's works. The focus of their writings was one and the same, an earnest, dedicated endeavour to reconcile the flesh with the spirit, the temporal with the eternal, the finite with the infinite and real with the ideal. They seemed to share the thought that everything that exists is good – death as well as life, sin as well as holiness, wisdom as well as folly. It is true that, like Hesse, Kazantzakis went through several philosophies, ideologies, attitudes towards life, before he arrived at his final position (Stavrou, *The limits* 54-55).

Kazantzakis' theory of history is that the twentieth century is a transitional age. We have lost the primitive, spontaneous appreciation of the beauty of the world. We are far too sophisticated for this attitude. The spontaneous

unquestioned faith in God has not been restored after it was interrogated and challenged by Darwinism, evolutionism, and their philosophical and scientific variants.. We can not be pagans, because Christianity has civilized us: and we can not be Christians in the traditional sense as faith of this kind stands challenged. Kazantzakis distrusted both Christianity and the authenticity of modern western civilization. These factors led him to see modern man as the melancholy victim of his age. Yet Kazantzakis should not be seen as an absurdist or existentialist, like so many of his European contemporaries. He is able to bridge the gap between these thoughts with his own theory of transubstantiation of matter into spirit (Dombrowski 27). The key insight of this thought is elaborated in *The Spiritual Exercises* which says that we come from a dark abyss and we end in one as well. Life is a luminous interval between these two black voids. One can say that life is a transition from one void to another. In Kazantzakian terms, the void at the beginning of a human being is inert, unconscious matter and the void at the end is death. Life itself is an evolutionary spiritualization by means of transubstantiation, the ability to transform matter into spirit (Prologue to *The Saviours of God* 1-2).

It should be admitted that due to the constraints of language barriers, the present study has limited itself to in depth analysis of the English translations of the six most renowned novels of Kazantzakis, named earlier. As we have seen in the core discussion, Kazantzakis had his own distinct ways. In his autobiographical work, *Report to Greco* he declared that the decisive steps in his

ascent were the sacred names: Christ, Buddha, Lenin, and Odysseus. His journey from each of these great souls to the next was a great struggle and a great cry. "My entire soul is a cry and all my work the commentary on that cry" (*Report* 15). It would be accurate to say that the works of Kazantzakis embody a crystallized cry that rose from a struggling heart. Despite his affiliations to westernized liberal philosophies and ways of life, he and his art retain a sense of identity with the common people of his land which permeates all of his works. His long self exile in other European countries never diminished his love for Crete, and therefore, he incessantly glorifies the bravery and heroism of his people. But it can be seen that his characters give the impression that they apparently never succeed, but fail and continue to fail in achieving their mission. Perhaps Kazantzakis' tragic conception of life might have influenced him to create characters like Captain Michales in *Freedom and Death*, who heroically courts death with 'an inhuman joy'.

Reference has already been made to the predilection of Kazantzakis for the phrase "the Cretan glance" indicating the particular posture and temper which the miniature characters of young people in the Minoan Fresco in Crete assumed in accepting, full of unusual grace, and at the risk of their own destruction. Gazing into their eyes Kazantzakis perceived a blend of playfulness and fearlessness with which death is challenged without fear. There is no hope at all, yet they never give up. As Kazantzakis acclaims: "The heroic and playful eyes, without hope, yet without fear, which so confront the Bull, the Abyss, I call the Cretan Glance" (*The Odyssey* xix). On a philosophical

level, Kazantzakis utilized this metaphor to characterize, iconographically the “heroic and playful eyes” with which modern man may, “without hope yet without fear,” face the Nietzschean abyss and determine to continue the Bergsonian struggle for one’s ultimate destruction. It is this belief that characterizes the experience of Crete, and it is this insight that mostly distinguishes Kazantzakis’ life and art.

It can be truly observed that Kazantzakis’ life and art are interwoven with the complexities of spiritual, political and metaphysical issues concerning human life and God. His works reflect the struggle to resolve the problematic. This is made clear in Kazantzakis’ own words as recollected by his wife Helen Kazantzakis:

I have struggled, that’s true, throughout my life. And I’m still struggling to keep my soul from dying. I know how the mortal becomes immortal. And this is precisely the great torment of my life . . .The major and almost the only theme of my work is the struggle of man with God, the unyielding inextinguishable struggle of the naked worm called man against the terrifying power and darkness of the forces within him and around him. The stubbornness, the tenacity of the little spark in its fight to penetrate the age old boundless night, the anguished battle to transmute darkness to light,

slavery to freedom, have been my prime motifs. (Helen, *Nikos* 471, 507)

This untiring struggle is the literary manifesto of Kazantzakis. Anyone who surveys his works would discover that he remains true to this position.

Kazantzakis spent his whole life seeking to master darkness and to assert human significance even on the sacred. Darkness remains a powerfully marked and dominant presence in Kazantzakis but he never allowed it to dominate the his mind. In the midst of this darkness, there are sparkling moments of mystery and insight. Such moments rise above the silence and darkness and burst into pure song. Maria Bessa, in her study, *Nikos Kazantzakis and the Saviours of God* comments on the role of art and the artist: “throughout the ages one of the achievements of art has been to exorcise the powers of night and deliver the artist and those of his time and situation from its grip and fascination” (441). Kazantzakis always discovered this darkness in the heart of man and transformed it into truths. The focal point of his entire work “is the haunting concern to define man’s role in the dialogue between the human and the sacred.” Kazantzakis has been a fighter against what is considered sacred. “In art such fight or rebellion is creative; it challenges the present, it reduces the past to metamorphosis, securing it in a chain of creative filiations; it creates the vision that ensures future transformation; and so it belongs to duration, and not merely to time” (Bessa 441). If this beautiful definition on creative art is true, it is not difficult to identify why

Kazantzakis is still read and enjoyed by those who approach literature for a deep and serious understanding and perception of human life. Kazantzakis does not merely record the events that he sees around; so his works belong 'not merely to time' but to the world that is endless. The role of a creative writer has always been "reserved for those who could pierce the veil of appearance to reveal what lies beneath and beyond. From Tiresias to Kazantzakis the gift of second sight is the province of those who could penetrate into the Universe" (Bessa 442). Kazantzakis penetrated to the core of human passions hopes and fears and managed to distil this into the very marrow of his characters. As an artist, his long struggle was an intense dialogue which he carried on for years with his destiny, his God, and even with his own temperament. "Art is the slowly mastered expression of the artists' feeling about the universe" (Bessa 442). As far as Kazantzakis is concerned, this observation by Maria Bessa is true, because there is a progressive growth and maturity in his works. This slow progression finds consummation in his romantic autobiography, *Report to Greco*. Often he is after a philosophic synthesis; rather a unity in creative process. He knew that art is at the service of something sacred, some dominant value beyond the artist himself (442). For Kazantzakis, his art was a struggle with gods. "The artist recreates the world and art is a recreation of the universe". In that sense *The Last Temptation* is, no doubt, a masterful recreation of the conventional bible story, and though greater attention went to the controversies it generated, it remains an amazingly brilliant achievement.

Kazantzakis, in the prologue to *The Saviours of God* briefly describes the view that life consists of two opposing but harmonizing forces, one constructive and one destructive, stemming from the depths of the primordial essence. He observes that the struggle and the final harmony is the built-in organic process in the very psyche of man. The life-force emerges from the depth of our subterranean cells in which “five senses labour; they weave and unweave space and time, joy and sorrow, matter and spirit” (*Saviours* 2). It is the dark abyss from which man began and in which he will eventually end, despite his hopes that life has no beginning and consequently, no end. Life for Kazantzakis “is the luminous interval that is in a state of becoming; it is a constant evolution between man’s two dark points: the womb and tomb” (Prologue to *The Saviours of God* 1). As life is just a colourful space between the two abysses, Kazantzakis feels that there is no room for fear, or hope either. When man has ceased to hope he can say: I know: now I do not hope anything. I do not fear anything, I have freed myself from both the mind and the heart, I have mounted much higher, I am free. This is what I want. I want nothing more. I have been seeking freedom (*The Saviours* 6).

Kazantzakis gives a new contemporary face to God. For him, God is not a distilled product of our brains because God and man are one. It is not God who will save us –it is we who will save God, by battling, by creating and by transmuting matter into spirit. Man’s present duty is to help liberate that God who is stifling in us, in mankind, in masses of people living in darkness. The salvation



of man is possible only by struggling; each one must do it in his own way (Poulakidas, *Spiritual Exercises* 210). God and man are interdependent and finally they become a unique and comprehensive soul which could accommodate the universe as a whole. The reverberations of *The Saviours of God* can be seen in the dialogue between God and Father Yanaros in *The Fratricides*. God is in need of man as he is in need of Him. God speaks to him in a voice a little sad yet sweet:

“Father Yanaros, Father Yanaros! I ask one favour of you; do not be frightened.”

“Favour of me? Favour of an ant, my Lord? Command!”

“Lead me!”

“Lead You, Lord? But You are all-powerful!”

“Yes, I am all- powerful, but only with the help of man; without you on the earth that I created I find it difficult to walk – I stumble, I stumble on the stones, the churches, the people.” (148)

This does not mean that God is weak and man is strong. Kazantzakis wants us to know that if God in us is weak, we become weaker; if He is stronger, we become equally stronger.

Kazantzakis believes that man’s intellectual endeavour would be of no lasting value if not tempered by a regenerated heart that could love this world. Without this redeeming love, faith being dead, our imaginative efforts can produce

only dead souls unable to bear any suffering and incapable of profiting from their suffering (Paulakidas, *Dostoevsky* 310). Kazantzakis elevates this concept of humanism to the levels of political freedom and spiritual emancipation of the entire humanity. Kazantzakis' thought is based upon the assumption that at best man can know only himself and his own soul. Man's task is to impose order on the chaos within himself. This self ordering by man's spirit leads to spiritual freedom and salvation, as well as God's Salvation. Kazantzakis does not reject mortality, but places immortality above and beyond it. The dance of physical sense is confronted with the counter dance of physical awareness, and how each individual resolves this confrontation determines the way and direction of his personal world. If the physical sense and awareness, the life and mortality are confronted, comprehended and acknowledged man can make his life a meaningful existence. Kazantzakis' Ithaca in *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel* is the realm of spirit or individual soul in which each man lives. He calls for individual responsibility for human existence. Responsibility involves understanding and using the spiritual and imaginative forces in oneself to the fullest; this may lead to individual spiritual freedom and the salvation of God as a spirit (Savvas 289).

Kazantzakis' spirituality has never been just for the sake of spirituality. It crosses itself to the geography of his country to which he belongs politically and spiritually:

*The Spiritual Exercises* demonstrates dramatically the blending of Western and Cretan sources which characterize Kazantzakis' fiction. The image of the ascent for example, has roots in the naturalistic novel and in the Marxist theme of the inevitable revolution, as well as in the perpetual Cretan struggle for freedom. (Levitt, *Cretan* 180)

In history, it is seen that Cretans never give up fighting. The motif of ascent and encountering the inevitable defeat or death with no fear but with an unusual display of heroism is the theme of *Freedom and Death*. The Cretan glance, the third eye of the soul, is freedom, the ontological attitude that can grasp life and death; the life pulse of the universe. It is "that vision which can embrace and harmonize these two enormous, timeless, and indestructible forces, and with the vision . . . modulate our thinking and our action" (*Saviours*, 44). Kazantzakis believes that human beings are in a certain unfavourable situation in the world. In his view, they live in the world detached from the cosmos and are ignorant of the pulsating life force of the world. They are unaware of the meaning of life and are uncertain even as to the possibilities of their true existence. Naturally man becomes a kind of slave to certain beliefs which are never questioned but followed. But man is not meant to lead a life dominated and ruled merely by ideologies. In fact, beliefs and ideas are bound to be subservient to man for perfecting his life. According to Kazantzakis, man must fulfil three basic duties in

the world which reveal different levels of perception of life before he can escape this unreality (Lea 29).

The first duty is that man must explore the realm of the phenomenal with the mind's eye, to impose order, discipline, law, and rationality, to the chaos of things. To bleed in agony and to live it profoundly is the second duty. It is more a duty of the heart. The third Duty is to free oneself from both mind and heart, from the illusory yet tempting hope (*Saviours* 50). As for Kazantzakis this duty is perhaps the most paramount as it declares liberty from all fetters and entanglements of life. This should not let us think that he advocated the negation of the material world. However, unmistakably the third duty is:

...the metaphysical acceptance of nothingness; the transcendence of ill-fated illusions that hide the nonexistent; the transubstantiation of our materiality through the burning power of the third eye of the soul into free, self-conscious spirit. (Lea 30)

Here Kazantzakis emphasizes the all pervading power of spirit over matter. The victory and domination of the spirit over all that exists in the universe will ultimately lead to freedom which is absolute. This freedom elevates him to a greater freedom of existentialism and he declares with full confidence that: "Nothing exists! Neither life nor death. I watch mind and matter hunting each

other like two nonexistent erotic phantasms – merging, begetting, disappearing – and I say: This is what I want!” (*Saviours* 6).

Kazantzakis’ mind was consistently contemplating on the abyss of nothingness. He believed that freedom should be the true essence of man. This faith was so strong that he endeavoured earnestly to liberate mankind from the enslaving inhibitions of human mortality and historical and political temporality. For him, these efforts of reconciliations were not restricted to Greek literature or local politics alone. His views were catholic and cosmopolitan. With this vibrant attitude, he explored through his life and art, the advantages and disadvantages of social involvement versus literary activity as weapons in this battle (Lea 36-37). However, Kazantzakis’ politics represents a striking contradiction of his earlier asceticism. He upholds the morality of absolute and orthodox Marxism with which he passionately identified himself. Later we find him contradicting directly all that he exalted and believed, in favour of an existentialistic and nihilistic approach to life. He states that our duty is to stare at the abyss and not to succumb to the false masks of “Buddhas, Gods, Motherlands, Ideas . . . woe to him who cannot free himself from Buddhas, Gods, Motherlands, Ideas” (*Zorba* 198). By the time *Zorba the Greek* was written Kazantzakis’ mind must have started mounting the uphill path of nothingness. But it is only a truth that however strongly Zorba rejects the conventional morality of right and wrong, the Boss, though in gentle fashion, asserts his allegiances to the cherished ideals of Buddhism and its righteousness.

*The Saviours of God: Spiritual Exercises* and *The Odyssey*, depict artistically how an individual may attain the expanded consciousness and proper perspective to discover the true harmonious and unified evolutionary face of his age. This discovery is to save 'God,' which is the divine in man. Key elements of Kazantzakis' salvationist perspective are individualism versus community, nihilism and the human condition, atheism and spiritual values, and classical versus modern views of the nature of man (Lea 26). He seems to believe that salvation, whether political or spiritual can only be attained as the outcome of the conflict between two opposing forces. In *The Saviours of God* Kazantzakis makes his quest clear to himself. He has one longing only: to grasp what is hidden behind the appearances; then to discover the mystery which brings him to birth and later takes him back in the form of death. Kazantzakis naturally thought that behind what is visible and in the unceasing stream of the world an invisible and immutable presence hides. At the same time he thinks that we can never see beneath appearances because man is condemned to remain on the surface of his experience. He is bound into the cycle of existence, which surrounds him in time and space. Kazantzakis says that the saviours of God are the co-strugglers as well. They are deeply aware of their unity with the others who struggle. We are aware that God cannot be saved unless we save him with our own struggles, but at the same time we know that our struggles are continually being counteracted and that we are being thrown back. Kazantzakis believes that whenever man closes matter in his heart or blocks the spirit in his soul he actually restricts and restrains God in

his heart and soul (Will 117-119). For many, God is an instrument of the established religious and social order. For Kazantzakis, God is no abstraction. He is immediate, and a force to be encountered in the daily life of each man. Morton Levitt elucidates that, for Kazantzakis,

God is neither the Christian nor the Hebrew divinity, not some ultimate force beyond man's reach, not even the final goal of his achievement. God, like man, is a process in being, a process in being, a natural force of great creative potential. (Levitt, *Cretan* 12)

Kazantzakis believes that God and man engage themselves in an age old struggle which is self discovery and self realization for harmonizing the darkness in humanity and divinity.

The form and function of *The Spiritual Exercises* are the same, the ascent to God and beyond. The soul of man must climb to perilous heights, must lean out over the abyss and confront terrifying truths: God is as dependent upon man as man is upon Him; to save himself, man first saves God; . . . neither man nor God the two fighting together can save themselves. Knowing this but continuing to struggle, man discovers his dignity, becomes himself a kind of God. (Levitt, *World and Art* 173)

Thus *The Saviours of God: Spiritual Exercises* becomes the culmination of struggles and conflicts that Kazantzakis has been pondering over most of his life

time. The conflicts, spiritual and political or of any kind finally merge themselves with a greater eternal conflict which is freedom: a complete salvation from everything to which man is bound to in his life. Kazantzakis believed in freedom, to be precise, individual freedom. Individual alone can act with freedom and save himself and he must respect his own life as well as the life of others.

Kazantzakis' writings created a linguistic revolution as he upheld people's language, demotic as a necessary vehicle for transmitting his thoughts and their culture and as directing force of destiny which stirred his youthful imaginations from early childhood. His Cretan birth among the common people, his mistrust of pseudo-intellectuals and self serving politicians, and his maltreatment at the hands of various academics and literary critics, all led him to identify himself with the people and their language. Kazantzakis tells how impressed he was, during a Russian trip in 1929, upon meeting one hundred and fifty Greeks and discussing world issues with them:

If I were Christ surely my apostles would be people like these. Love, warmth, trust. The intellectuals are barren, dishonest, doomed. I had felt tired and sad. And with these simple people I regained my confidence in man. (Lea 179)

Kazantzakis always loved to be with the people, especially with the simple and straight forward people of Crete. It was in his childhood that he was able to mix and mingle with his folk. As he grew older, though he remained a Cretan emotionally, his intellectual and spiritual sphere widened larger than his little



island. In the later part of his life Kazantzakis worked in several capacities as a public servant. In 1945 he became the Greek Government's minister of state, and he tried to resolve political differences dividing the government. But he had to resign without achieving any significant success. Later, he served briefly as minister of education before the civil war in 1947. He also held the post of Director of UNESCO's Translation Bureau until 1948.

In championing the demotic, Kazantzakis felt he was defending the soul of the common people against the unimaginativeness of pedantic intellectuals, and more importantly, against the ever-expanding forces of newspaper jargon as well as the faulty composition courses in schools. In this attempt, he was violently attacked not only by the purists, but also by advocates of the demotic as well. They accused that he went out of his way to use obscure words. But he strongly defended his position, and the fact that his works truly reflect and convey the spirit of the people is perhaps the best proof that he was right (Translator's notes to *The Last Temptation*, 516). Kazantzakis' adoption of the demotic as the literary vehicle for carrying his thoughts to the people had the effect of reinforcing his identity and sense of unity with the common man. In the same manner he rejected the pseudo-intellectual, academic literary language that ignored the people's needs and exigencies. The political processes and solutions in which the common people were not involved or marginalized were utterly condemned by him. He argued that any regime that does not take people into confidence is no longer represents the aspirations of the ruled.

Kazantzakis' was a vigorous voice raised in defence of man against the inhuman forms of scientific progress taking place throughout the world. He levelled his criticism against the artificial needs that were created by an increasingly scientific, technological and industrial culture that is leading man to an alarming future. This over dependence on materialism diverts his attention from real values of life and spiritual potentialities inherent in man. He also condemned the dehumanizing manner in which scientific and technological innovations were utilized to produce these material needs (Lea 73). In diagnosing the ills of contemporary Western civilization, Kazantzakis believed that the widespread suffering, injustice, and despiritualization stem out from man's escapist surrender to the masks of ideologies which only stifle the spirit. The dominance of technocratic-materialism is perennially on the rise. On the other hand, artists, intellectuals, and religious leaders of the world become mere spectators and their synthesizing vision is either lost or deprived. As Yeats has rightly put it in *Second Coming* "The best lack all conviction, / And the worst are full of passionate intensity" make the present world scenario inhospitable and unfriendly. Kazantzakis left quite detailed accounts of his view of the role and duty of the artist in society and of the contribution that art can make to improve the human condition. He provided valuable guidance for the writer who is involved in socio-political themes. His invaluable social and political criticism and the philosophical beliefs that he expounded as remedy for excessive materialism, despiritualization, despair, and societal and governmental wrongs of his day, reflect his humanism

and sincere concern for man (Lea 103). It was not science that Kazantzakis was condemning but the perversion of civilization and the submission of the individual to the forces of technology. Any serious reader of Kazantzakis would realize that he saw the ultimate human goal as the spiritualization of matter. Science has failed to rehabilitate man because it has been unable to provide a human goal that has ethical validity. Kazantzakis intellectualized his personal passage from birth to death in terms of thoughts concerning human liberation. His entire life is a portrayal of the path to freedom, to a higher human existence beyond hope and rationality, despair and nihilism, overcoming the many obstacles in our life. His life was an unceasing battle with the abyss, an unceasing quest for immortality in an age when man has succumbed to the materialistic interests of the modern age.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of many scientific inventions and many revolutionary ideologies which, as a whole brought new perceptions in human societies all over the world. In such an age of ideologies, Kazantzakis strove after many of the major ideologies in different stages of his life. He foresaw with surprising clarity that the blind pursuit of science and materialistic fervour of life in the modern West would extinguish the spark of freedom that gives vitality and beauty to the human soul. He railed against injustice of all sorts, whether carried out by the leftists or the rightists, the Eastern or the Western. In an age of despair he sought rigorously for a higher synthesis of socio-political life, a new awareness to provide meaning and purpose

in place of the anxiety and absurdity of contemporary life (Lea xii-xii). Believing this and viewing his personal salvation as an artist and humanist in danger in this world, Kazantzakis could only say, through Father Yanaros, “Now, all is chaos, and I, the worm, must bring order” (*The Fratricides* 177). This has a distant echo in one of the philosophical utterances of Shakespeare’s tragic hero, Hamlet: “The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right” (1.5.196-197). It is an irony that a seemingly weak person like Hamlet is chosen and designated by arbitrary fate to set the things right in this world where everything is out of frame and time. Similarly, Kazantzakis assumes a great role for the artist, who must be prepared to bear heavy responsibility for the society to which he belongs.

While summarizing the various comments on the works of Kazantzakis, it can be seen that he has always been obsessed with the idea of God, immortality and religions of the world. The struggle undergone by Christ is in fact the struggle experienced by Kazantzakis himself in his life. Though he was greatly inspired by the existentialist thoughts of Nietzsche, and the Buddhist philosophy of negation, he continually explored the idea of Christ, even spending time in a monastery in an attempt to understand man’s relationship with God. His religiosity is often questioned by the heads of conventional religions and Christianity. Kazantzakis was always a controversial writer whose writings particularly, *The Last Temptation* was criticized severely and alleged to distort the Bible story. It was banned by the Orthodox Church in Greece. In writing *The Last Temptation*,

Kazantzakis was attempting to portray Jesus Christ the man in all his strength and weakness, which earned him both curses and cheers. Perhaps, next to *Zorba the Greek*, *The Last Temptation* is the most important work of art by which he will be remembered by the posterity. At the same time, *Freedom and Death* is basically the heroic story of the Cretan struggle and its historic significance is limited to Crete alone.

Kazantzakis had profound fascination for Marxist ideology and great admiration for the Russian Revolution. For him the Russian experiment symbolizes the hope and possibility for progressive change. He was eager to see that inequality of all kind and the squalid hunger of the people all over the world be eradicated. His humanity is not restricted to Greece alone. Kazantzakis always maintained the view that blind nationalism would only destroy us and internationalism would allow us to open up to the wider horizons of the world and face human race's common fate as fellow beings of the same planet. *The Odyssey*, *Saint Francis*, *Zorba the Greek* and *The Last Temptation*, all express this necessity for elimination of restrictive national boundaries, and advocate the universal brotherhood of man (Savvas 288). It is evident that although he took to heart much of the ideology of communism, his own personal philosophy of religion could not reconcile with it. His work comprehends a new theoretical formulation, which embraces socialism, and elements of Buddhism and Christianity. He hoped for a way of life free from materialism, and free from a rigid social and religious

structure that would dictate and impose morality as a burden on the individuals. Kazantzakis visualized a society which allows greater personal freedom for everyone so that each one could figure out his life and destiny as he wished.

While examining Kazantzakis' heroes we discover certain common traits: all of them are poor economically, but rich in spirit and courage. His courtship with communism made him feel that as an intellectual he has a moral obligation to people. Believing in the necessity of action as opposed to negation, he modified the communist approach with the ideals of Buddhism. It must be admitted that he was attempting an impossible harmony of these divergent views of life. One cannot ignore the host of saintly heroes that fill Kazantzakis' novels that are prime examples of holiness and suffering. In *The Fratricides*, Father Yanaros a martyr for the Christian concept of freedom, love and justice; in *God's Pauper*, Francis abandons this world, its desire and glory for the sake of Christ and for his love of man; in *The Last Temptation* the son of Mary, who becoming conscious of his divinity and sacred mission, dies on the cross for the sake of mankind; and finally, in *The Greek Passion*, Manolios who by practicing to become Christ in the Passion Play, willingly sacrifices himself in the hope of bringing peace to the village (Poulakidas, *Dostoevsky*, 309). Kazantzakis' heroes of epic dimension have something in common -- they all stand and strive for a certain faith for which they sacrifice their lives. The works of Kazantzakis provide authentic insights into the nature of man. On this issue, Anton P. John observes that:

Kazantzakis is modern in, at least two senses: (a) his heroes are meant to reflect the very essence of life; (b) his Literary works mirror life at the peak of human experience and therefore its truest movement. (60)

Literature being a supreme expression of life must reflect life in all its glory and ugliness. He further observes:

After much searching and agonizing, he came to the conclusion that, since life is ultimately tragic, its irreducible antithetical forces define both the poet and his work. The tragic contradictions of life are the bread and blood of the artist. Kazantzakis as poet and philosopher was quick to explore the thematic richness of the idea of the irreconcilable forces in life for his literature. (Anton, *Kazantzakis* 60)

Kazantzakis perceived that life consists and sustains the very reality of contradictions and the consequent struggles. His socio-political, cultural and family traits influenced and shaped the basics of his philosophy of life. As Kazantzakis matured as a writer, Christ, Nietzsche, Buddha, Bergson, Lenin, and Odysseus began to provide the metaphysical and intellectual foundation for his political ideas. Kazantzakis' Cretan glance, his ultimate philosophical perspective, is a synthesis of the influences of his native island, family, his childhood experiences and memories of which his personality is actually composed. It is this unique artistic landscape of his mind that produced the rich, complex, and

harmonious mosaic of his literary output. Similar to his peculiar mindset it can be seen that various regions in Greece are also dual in nature, and the emotions which spring from them are also dual in nature. Harshness and tenderness stand side by side, complementing each other and coupling like a man with a woman. Kazantzakis argues that this basic duality extends from individuals to the geographical locations in Greece. For example, he quotes the smooth landscapes and sloping meadows and the tough and stiff cliffs in Sparta which are the source of both tenderness and harshness (*Report* 158).

Kazantzakis believed that art has a great ennobling capacity that can alleviate the sufferings and distress of humanity. He drew this idea about the perennial nature of art from El Greco, a gifted Cretan artist, who according to Kazantzakis, is an enormously imaginative and vital individual who wrought creative confirmation of reality within clearly defined limits. It was to him that finally Kazantzakis reports his life's victories and failures in the candid language of personal confession. That is why he named his autobiography *Report to Greco*. He describes an El Greco painting as lying bare and revealing

...the whole fate of man, the entire soul of the world, flooded with the tragic-comic powers of good and evil. . . From every perfect work of art rises a cry of pain, joy, hope, strife. And, above all, the unchanging cry of liberation. (*Report* 102).

Liberation is possible only through struggle and suffering. Therefore, art has important implications to politics as well. This is so because political reality is a



central element of the historic flow. Kazantzakis reflected on this and concluded that the genuine role of the politician is not to freeze the creative impulses of the people but to work in harmony with them. The underlying thought of this belief is that politics and art must work in hand in hand, with the former following the lead of the latter (Lea 91).

Thus Kazantzakis believed that through art one could establish contact with life and reality. Explicit expression of this abiding allegiance to art can be seen in all of his major works. Art is “a mysterious science, a veritable *theurgy*. Words attract and imprison the invisible spirit, force it to become incarnated and to exhibit itself to man” (*Toda Raba* 90-91). One must learn “that art is not submission and rules, but a demon which smashes the moulds” (*Report*, 503). When he comes to *Freedom and Death* the ‘artist’ transforms and sublimates himself and becomes “a sort of angel...” (118). Thus, Kazantzakis defines his concept and reiterates the belief that art is superior and it has ennobling and enriching power over the baser things. The great, though agonizing, duty of the artist is one of exorcism - to separate the angel from the demon. In all his works, Kazantzakis attempted to preserve what is noble and universal.

Anyone who analyzes the concept of God and His relation with man would naturally pose a question, whether Kazantzakis can accurately be described as an atheist. Critical opinion, however, is divided on this question. At least three scholars, Kimon Friar, Prevelakis, Bloch and his wife Helen Kazantzakis portray Kazantzakis as a pure atheist, while Poulakidas and Stavrou believe that

Kazantzakis may have returned to Christian membership late in life (Lea 107). The Christian church and the believers were shocked by the seemingly implicated atheism of *The Saviours of God* and *The Last Temptation*. Controversy over these works spread beyond the borders of Greece. And later, his cherished ideals of nationalism were questioned because of his ambiguous treatment of Cretan political issues concerning the Anatolian villagers. Greece never gave him the honour that an artist deserved. *The Greek Passion* raised a furor over Greece which brought him close to excommunication. Later when *Freedom and Death* was published the newspapers branded him a traitor to Crete and Hellenism as he had shown both the good and bad sides of Greek heroism without romanticizing the peasants.

Regarding the propriety of the location of his burial in the Venetian Wall, controversy is waged even today in Greece. This makes us ask a question whether the great artist was rewarded or condemned. Although this is a difficult question to answer, the fact remains that he lost the Nobel Prize in 1952 by the margin of only one vote because, it is said, the Greek government refused to sponsor his candidacy (Levit, *Cretan* 61). In Greece, many of his contemporaries accuse that he falsifies everything Hellenic, while some see in him the very epitome of Greek culture and tradition.

By way of summing up, it has to be noted that Kazantzakis continues to inform, challenge, entertain and even embarrass the guilty. This thesis is based mainly on *The Last Temptation*, *Zorba the Greek*, *Freedom and Death*, *The Greek*

*Passion or Christ Recrucified, The Fratricides, The Saviours of God, God's Pauper: St. Francis of Assisi* and marginally on the other novels and *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. This is an attempt to clarify the ideas of Kazantzakis which lie buried in the mire of spiritual and political beliefs and complexities.

It is unfortunate that Kazantzakis' greatness and his genius have not been properly appreciated by the people in Greece. In this context, it would be appropriate to glance into his letter addressed to his literary friend, A. Sahinis. The words reveal his phlegmatic and saintly temperament about the gains and losses in this long journey of life:

No external passion ever upset me, be it wine, women, vanity or, ambition. Only one passion excited me: contacting the Invisible Presence. At times it would be a struggle, at other times a conciliation, and only occasionally identification with it. Give this Presence whatever name you wish. Call it God, Matter, Energy, Spirit, Mystery, Nothing. My entire work is nothing but this struggle, this conciliation, this identification with the Invisible Presence which I always fought to make visible." (Anton, *Kazantzakis* 55)

Based on this frank statement of denial or admission on those controversial abstract ideas, one is left free to infer an answer to the question whether Kazantzakis was a believer or an atheist. However it is my conviction that a man

who pronounces strongly that; “I have God behind me . . . I have God in front of me, God to the right of me, God to the left of me; I am encircled by God” (*The Fratricides* 242) can never be an atheist.

Kazantzakis’ attempted to revive Cretan heritage and his struggles became alien and incomprehensible to his contemporary Greek intellectuals. This is why Kazantzakis remained estranged and solitary in Greece. Kazantzakis has not been viewed favourably by the political regime as well. The memorial services which were to have been held at his grave on the tenth anniversary of his death were banned by the Military junta in 1967. This was an indication that even ten years after his death he is not honoured, but opposed and detested. However, the great artist was not discontent or unhappy about worldly gains and glories. Kazantzakis anticipated very well that he would, “at last retire into solitude, alone, without companions, without joy and without sorrow, with only the sacred certainty that all is dream . . .” He continues to contemplate through *Zorba* on himself after his death and he concludes that he would be “free, fearless and blissful”(27).

Therefore, his mind is truly reflected in the statement inscribed on his grave stone which reads:

“I hope for nothing I fear nothing I am free”