RELIGION IN THE WORKS OF NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

APPROVED:

[Signatures]

Lloyd M. Jeffrey
Major Professor

[Signatures]

[Signatures]

E. S. Clifton
Director of the Department of English

Robert Toulmin
Dean of the Graduate School
RELIGION IN THE WORKS OF NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Leila Gebhard, B. A.

Denton, Texas
August, 1967
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION: THE STRUGGLE OF THE SOUL.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. &quot;THE PREPARATION&quot;</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. &quot;THE MARCH&quot;</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. &quot;THE VISION&quot;</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. &quot;THE ACTION&quot;</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. &quot;THE SILENCE&quot;</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION: IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF KAZANTZAKIS' WORK.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: STRUGGLE OF THE SOUL

"My entire soul is a cry, and all my work the commentary on that cry,"¹ said Nikos Kazantzakis in his Introduction to Report to Greco. In this one sentence he summed up the essence of his life and work. This cry came from the struggle in which his soul was involved in its search for what might be called God, supreme Reality, or ultimate Truth. The cry that came from his lips was sometimes a cry of hope and sometimes a cry of despair, but it was always attempting to express the inexpressible anguish and joy of the struggle in which his soul was involved. This struggle he described in many different ways.

Often he described his life as a journey, a struggle to ascend "the rough, unaccommodating mountain of his destiny."² His journey was not one to be completed by the fainthearted; every man begins this journey but many fall by the wayside. Many stop to rest and enjoy the view and fail to resume the climb. Many fall into despair and never rise to go on. Kazantzakis also stopped to enjoy the view but not for long. He also fell into discouragement but realized the best way

²Ibid.
out of this trap was action. He had another difficulty. He couldn't decide which was the right road. He would follow one for awhile, see where it was leading, become afraid, retreat, take another road, and find that it was going to reach the same conclusion. He listed the roads he tried as 'the road of love, of scientific curiosity, of philosophical inquiry, of social rebirth, and finally the difficult and solitary path of poetry.' Each of the roads ended at the Abyss. Finally summoning his courage, he made the leap. He built a bridge across the Abyss. He reached the highest summit his strength and determination would allow, and this he termed 'The Cretan Glance.' The Glance was the ability to look humbly into the abyss of nothingness with neither hope nor fear. It meant to be free, to face life and death as a game, and to cross all boundaries that are too confining. This path of ascent he also described as a spiral, continually turning on itself like a mountain road but always ascending.

Vazantzakis also considered his life a struggle between flesh and spirit. Both of these fought within him. He loved both and knew that each was necessary to his life. Therefore, he sought to reconcile the two. At 'count them' he retreated 'from the world' and, living the life of an ascetic, subjugated

---


6 Vazantzakis, Report to Greece, p. 657.
his flesh to the spirit, enduring hunger, cold, pain, in every other privation. Then he concentrated upon the spirit seeking to conquer the minor passions, the easy virtues, the cheap spiritual joys, the convenient hopes. Suddenly the secret came to him: the transmutation of matter into spirit. He saw the ascent of the bloody Combatant, or the Elan vital, from inorganic matter into life and from life into spirit. Thus he saw that his duty was to fit himself to the harmony of the universe transmuting matter into spirit. In this way his contribution would not be lost, but work with One who is immortal. In the constant reconciliation of the flesh and spirit, then, he found his freedom and redemption.

Kazantzakis found himself to be a link in a mighty chain of progress. He was a link between his ancestors and his descendants, constantly being torn between the two. His ancestors represented the descending path to the heart and to earth. His sons represented in a symbolic sense the ascending path upward to the unknown. He needed to reconcile the warring elements within him. His preference had to go to his sons on the ascending path, but he could not lose contact with his ancestors, roots in the earth. Each

5Kazantzakis, Introduction, The Odyssey, p. 3711.
6Ibid.
7Ibid., p. 3714.
enriches the other. In such a way he maintained continuity in
the upward progress of the generations.

Kazantzakis' life was a mystic struggle alternating be-
tween light and dark, the presence and absence of God, the
paradise of illumination and understanding and the hell of
inadequacy and limitation. Here again he strives always up-
ward toward the light and seeks to place himself in active
harmony with God.

His struggle contained another element—that of broaden-
ing his boundaries until they contained as much of the world
and universe as he could possibly encompass. This broadening
did not limit itself but comprised all that he could assimili-
ate of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual worlds. He
strove to gain as much experience, to understand as many
ideas, and to see as many places as possible, and to make all
of them a part of himself. He extended his boundaries from
his own ego to Greece, from Greece to all men, and from all
men to the entire earth. Kazantzakis strove continually to
tear down the small world in which he found himself, assimili-
ate more from outside, and then, from the resulting chaos,
establish a new order on a higher plane.

Thus Kazantzakis' soul was fed by the sensual world, and
the world of ideas around him, and yet from within came a cry
demanding him not to be satisfied but to continue striving
with the Universe. In order to define and relieve that cry,
Kazantzakis turned to writing, and the words spilled forth.
It was in writing that he found the necessary action to fulfill his responsibility to the voice inside him. As he stated in Saviors of God:

And I strive to discover how to signal my companions before I die, how to give them a hand, how to spell out for them in time one complete word at least, to tell them what I think this procession is, and toward what we go. And how necessary it is for all of us together to put our steps and hearts in harmony.

The truth which he found and tried to communicate is too pervading to be limited by a set definition. Kazantzakis found himself hampered by the immobile word. For this reason he tried to say the same thing in innumerable ways, hoping to capture the elusive truth in a "net of words." His first step in this mission was an effort to impose an order over the chaos in which the world presented itself to him. This he did in Saviors of God, a lyrical outline of the struggle and journey of his soul. Here he set down, in its most precise form, his religious beliefs. This book contains the doctrine on which he based his life. Although written when he was about forty years old, it explained the principles by which he had lived for many years, and indeed the basic direction his whole life was taking. The remainder of his life was an extension and fuller development of these principles.

---


As Kazantzakis said many times, his duty in life took the form of writing, and in doing this he had to remain true to the vision which he had set forth in Saviors of God. All of his other works then, whether novels, travel books, poetry, or drama, reflect this doctrine. Even the works he selected for translation upheld this overall scheme.

Kazantzakis strove to reveal his soul on paper. It was a tremendous task that few men would be brave enough to attempt. With the poor instruments of words, the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, he endeavored to communicate the inexpressible. With these clumsy tools, he carved out his heart on paper, and if this image is ugly and misshapen in places, the fault quite often is the crude instruments with which he worked. And yet, as a true master of his craft, he performed wonders with his limited means of expression.

He assembled the raw materials with which he was to work. These consisted of the objects, people, places, and ideas with which he came in contact. All had their effect upon him, and yet not one held ultimate sway over him. He was never fully devoted to a person, country, or idea, except as he saw it as a part comprising the Whole. He saw life as a many-faceted jewel which could be turned over and over and looked at in many different ways. This he attempted to do in his works. The practice is perhaps more easily discerned in his travel books, written freely and directly without the complexity of a plot or story to obscure the technique. His
travel books attained tremendous popularity in Greece and all over the world because they contained more than the usual enumeration of places and customs, although they do contain these in great abundance. But Kazantzakis attempted to penetrate the soul of the country, delving into religion, history, art, and the attitudes of the old and young generations, of majorities and minorities. This he did with a perception surprisingly free of stereotyped opinions and provincial conceptions. He devoted himself to each country he visited, and while he was there thought of no other but her. And yet, though he immersed himself in a particular country, he still was able to see it as a part of the whole world and the entire universe.

This technique of viewing the many different aspects of life in relation to the whole is demonstrated in a much more complex degree in Kazantzakis' novels. In these are found intricate interweavings of the concrete and the abstract. Kazantzakis penetrates the microcosm and the macrocosm, showing their relationships to each other. The transformation of a worm into a butterfly may be compared to the development of a man, a country, a religion, or the entire world. He shows universal truths reflected on all levels and discerns the relationships between these levels.

The Truth that Kazantzakis endeavored to express extended beyond fact and reason and reached a higher plane—the attempt to understand the mystery of the Universe. He might order
facts around in his imagination, but he always remained true to the universal principles behind these facts. When he was quite young, Kazantzakis found himself telling stories that represented the most outrageous lies, and yet when he looked beneath the surface of the stories, he found that he was telling a Truth more true than fact itself. He describes this in Report to Greco:

"Every Sunday when I went to church, I saw an icon (placed low on the iconostasis) which showed Christ rising from the grave and hovering in the air, a white banner in His hand. On the bottom His guards were fallen on their backs and staring at Him in terror. I had heard many stories about Cretan uprisings and about wars, I'd been told that my paternal grandfather was a great military leader, and as I gazed at the icon, I gradually convinced myself that Christ was indeed my grandfather. I collected my friends around the icon, therefore, and said to them, 'Look at my grandfather, He's holding the banner and going to war. And see there on the bottom? The Turks, sprawled on their backs.'

What I said was neither true nor false; it overstepped the limits of logic and ethics in order to hover in a lighter, freer air. If someone had accused me of telling lies, I would have wept from shame.... I was not telling lies. I had an unshakable faith that the Christ with the banner was my grandfather and the terror-stricken guards below were the Turks.

Much, much later, when I started writing poems and novels, I came to understand that this secret elaboration is termed "creation."[^10]

Kazantzakis' objective in writing was not to tell a good story but to empower his immobile words with the spirit that was capable of exploding like a bombshell in the hearts of his readers. What he endeavored to present can not be reached by logic but must be felt to be understood.

[^10]: Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 73.
He discovered that this truth can only be made real as concrete items are rendered faithfully. This is the only way the artist can represent the spirit behind the form. In explaining Japanese painting he also described his own art:

You feel that the painter loves the external form, but loves still more the mystic forces that gave birth to the form. He paints the invisible through the only means he has in his command: by faithfully representing the visible.11

He endeavored to follow the advice of an old Chinese saint who said, "Rendere the spiritual life through the rhythm of things!"12

For this reason Kazantzakis found his most successful medium to be poetry. All of his works including his travel books, his spiritual discourse, and even his autobiography are poetic in nature. Although not all are in verse form, they have a lyric quality, are rhythmic, appeal principally to the emotions, and contain an unusual degree of figurative language. He adopted the forms of expression that were most successful in the religions with which he was closely acquainted—myth, parable, story, drama, metaphor, and haiku. Only in concrete terms can the inexpressible be expressed; otherwise nothing remains but empty air.

In Toda Baba Kazantzakis said through the mouth of the character Robakidze:


12Ibid., p. 109.
I'm a writer, but my art has a mystical idea. Every man is an ephemeral Son who contains the eternal Father within himself. The purpose of art is to discover the invisible spirit of the Father and to express it through the visible body of the Son. If man can grasp and express nothing but the Son, he creates a merely superficial work of art; if he expresses nothing but abstract ideas, nothing but the Father, he produces not art but metaphysics. The effort to find the Word able to capture the immortal essence alive in us: this is magic. That's why 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. Sitka meaning Utterance, the Word, in Georgian means also seizure and sexual intercourse. The Word must seize, subjugate and seduce Matter. Just as Adam knew woman, so must the Word know Matter.  

His insistence on the concrete was as strong as that of Rabbi Nahman in this story used in both *Report to Greco* and the *Introduction to Japan/China*:

Somebody once asked Rabbi Nahman, "What do you mean when you preach that we should go to Palestine? Surely Palestine is simply an idea, a faraway ideal which Jewish souls must someday reach." Nahman became angry. Driving his staff into the ground, he shouted, "No, no! When I say Palestine, I mean its stones, vegetation, and soul.... That is where we must go!"

Kazantzakis took this philosophy literally. When he wished to understand the crucifixion of Christ, he went to Jerusalem at Easter. When he wanted to know the God of Moses, he journeyed to Mount Sinai. He traversed the same ground as Nietzsche, and made a pilgrimage to Russia on the tenth anniversary of the revolution. Only by the concrete could he

---


understand the abstract. Kazantzakis knew that the Christian story, no matter how beautiful, was only a myth unless Christ's suffering and triumphs were made real in the lives of people living today. Every one of his books is a direct derivative of his own experience. His metaphorical language and stories come directly from the persons, places, and ideas he encountered during his lifetime. His writings represent a medley of the beliefs and ideas expressed by people all over the world; yet he never expressed anything that he had not first assimilated and made a part of himself.

The influences from which he gained his examples and metaphorical language were many. The major ones he traced in Report to Greco, and the most decisive of these he lists as Christ, Buddha, Lenin, and Odysseus. The first and last of these are most closely related to his Cretan background.

Kazantzakis grew up in an atmosphere of conflict. His father, whom his friend Pandelis Prevelakis described as "a primitive peasant, unsociable and taciturn," he pictured as 'a wild beast.' His mother, whom he loved very dearly, he described as a "holy woman." Throughout his life he strove to make a synthesis of the two warring bloods within him, his mother's Greek and his father's Italian.

15Ibid., p. 15.


17Ibid., Notes, p. 171.
The physical atmosphere of his childhood also involved conflict. The Turks were in control of Crete during this time, and the Cretans were constantly in a state of mobilization for rebellion or openly rebelling to overthrow the Turkish domination. In *Freedom or Death* he describes the two opposing religious groups, Christians and Moslems, living as neighbors and the complex emotional relationships between them. Growing up in the atmosphere of antithetical forces, Kazantzakis began to see life in these terms. After brief idyllic periods, he would find himself again in the center of opposing forces. His efforts were spent in synthesizing the elements of his heritage. Although he spent much of his life in other countries, he always remained true to Crete and the lessons that she taught. Fighting for freedom had been a characteristic of Cretans for centuries. Lying as it did in the crossroads of the three great continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, Crete had been conquered by Libyans, Greeks, Saracens, Arabs, Venetians, and Turks. Its history had been an effort to maintain its freedom. This history, together with the rough, rocky terrain, had made a race of rugged, independent men, eager to fight for liberty. Life in Crete was a struggle, and they had learned how to meet it. They were passionate fighters and were always ready to strive for the impossible, retreating at times to bolster their resources but always ready to return to the fight.
This overwhelming dedication to freedom Kazantzakis described in the story of his meeting with a peasant during World War II when Norway was in danger of being taken by the Germans.

One midday I heard a savage voice high above me as I was traversing the foot of Psiloríti. "Hey, neighbor, wait a minute! I want to ask you something!"

Lifting my head, I perceived a man draw away from a boulder and come tumbling down. He descended with giant strides from rock to rock; the stones rolled away under his feet, a great clamor began, the entire mountain seemed to be tumbling down with him. Now I could distinctly see that he was an immense, elderly shepherd. I stopped and waited for him. What could he want with me, I asked myself, and why such eagerness?

"Hey, neighbor, how is Norway getting on?" he asked with panting breath.

He had heard that a country was in danger of being enslaved. He had no real idea what Norway was, where it was located or what kind of people lived there. The one thing he clearly understood was that liberty was in danger.

"Better, grandpa, better. No need to worry," I answered.

"Thank God," roared the old shepherd, making the sign of the cross.

"Want a cigarette?" I asked him.

"Bah! What do I want with a cigarette? I don't want anything. If Norway's all right, that's enough for me!"

Saying this, he swung out his crook and climbed up again to find his flock.

The Greek air is truly holy, I thought to myself: surely freedom was born here. I do not know if the ordeal of a remote and unknown land fighting for its freedom could have been experienced with as much anguish and disinterestedness by any other peasant or shepherd in the world. Norway's struggle had become this Greek shepherd's struggle, because liberty, for him, was like his own daughter.18

Besides the devotion to freedom, the location of Crete spawned the characteristic of assimilation. The Cretans

18 Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 453.
adopted many of the customs and beliefs of conquering peoples. Being a crossroads in the Mediterranean Sea, Crete came in contact with the ideas and religions of the three continents, "saintly Asia, ardent Africa, and sober Europe." From Asia it drew mysticism; from Europe, logic; and from Africa, primitivism. Crete not only absorbed these influences but from them made a synthesis and arrived at her own creation.

... it was here ... that the Greek soul accomplished its destined mission: it reduced God to the scale of man. Here in Crete the monstrous immovable statues of Egypt or Assyria became small and graceful, with bodies that moved, mouths that smiled; the features and stature of God took on the features and stature of man.

The ancient Minoan religion of Crete fascinated Kazantzakis. Many of his symbols are derived from the ancient Cretan rituals, and these are particularly prevalent in his Odyssey. Among these religious rites were the prevalent motif of the cycle of birth and death, the processes of initiation in which the death and rebirth of the initiate was often represented with a contest or ordeal, the worship of the Mother-goddess, and the fertility rites in the worship of the bull, the snake, and the sun. Many of the Minoan religious beliefs were adopted by the Mycenaeans and contributed to the Olympic gods and the beginnings of such mysteries as the

19 Ibid., p. 455.
20 Ibid., p. 151.
Eleusinian mysteries. The religious beliefs of ancient Crete were definitely Dionysian, and Kazantzakis' emphasis on Dionysian principles, rather than the more classical Apollo-Lonian, reflects this attitude. These early beliefs have had considerable effect on all Greek religions up to the present day.

The present Greek religion, which seems to be strictly adhered to in Crete, is Christianity, represented by the Greek Orthodox Church. It was in this church that Kazantzakis was brought up and in which he received his early religious training. Much about the Eastern Orthodox Church would seem strange to Europeans or Americans. A number of pagan customs have been absorbed into the Church along with many of the beliefs which have prevailed since ancient times and which have been adapted to Christianity. Some of these practices and beliefs are the ritual dance of rejoicing still performed in a few places in Greece, the importance of icons as reflections of the spiritual world, the extreme jubilation and celebration of Christmas and Easter, the emphasis on historical perspective and progression, and the role of the cosmos in man's salvation.

Kazantzakis became interested in religion when he was quite young. Selling his toys, he bought pamphlets containing the lives of the saints and read aloud to neighbors in the evenings.

They listened, and little by little our courtyard began to ring with lamentations for the saints' sufferings and torments.... Passers-by hesitated and said to themselves, Someone has died in there.
They went to my father to bring him the sad news, but he shook his head and told them, "It's nothing. Just my son trying to convert the neighbors." 

This incident reflects Kazantzakis' life-long interest in great religious leaders and indicates his desire to pattern his life on the principles that would lead him in this direction. After completion of his law degree, he was free to pursue this interest. He had traveled through Greece and Italy but could not decide which direction his life should take. He and a friend, Angelos Sikelianos, eventually decided to visit Mount Athos, an island harboring twenty monasteries and many individual ascetics living in caves. Here the two young men explored important religious questions with those who had given their lives to this quest. Still not satisfied, suspecting that Christ had frequently been betrayed by the religious leaders, Kazantzakis decided to explore the path taken by Christ himself, and, to trace His steps as completely as possible, he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Easter. Of this visit he said:

I had never followed Christ's bloody journey to Golgotha with such intensity, never relived His Life and Passion with so much understanding and love as during my days and nights in Jerusalem, Galilee, and by the Dead Sea. Never with so much sweetness, so much pain, had I felt the blood of Christ falling drop by drop into my heart.

For in order to mount to the Cross, the summit of sacrifice, and to God, the summit of immateriality, Christ passed through all the stages which the man who struggles passes through...

22Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 72.
Christ's every moment is a conflict and a victory. He conquered the invincible enchantment of simple human pleasures. He conquered every temptation, continually transubstantiated flesh into spirit, and ascended... We have a model in front of us now, a model who opens the way for us and gives us strength.23

His view of Christ is further revealed in the following passage describing the understanding he gained from viewing an iconostasis.

I kept gazing at Christ's virile, ascetic figure in the gentle glow of the cressets. Perceiving the slender hands which maintained a firm grip on the world and kept it from falling into chaos, I knew that here on earth, for the full span of our lives, Christ was not the harbor where one casts anchor, but the harbor 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!"... That was why I liked Him; that was why I would follow Him.24

His visit to Jerusalem prompted him to make another journey, to Mount Sinai, in order to come closer to Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament. His stay here profoundly affected his life and formed the bulwark of his religious thought. On this forbidding mountain in the desert, he was able to explore into the depths of his soul and establish a temporary order over his spiritual pursuits. Resisting the temptation to remain in the security of the monastery, he returned to Crete, following the advice of Father Joachim, who said: "Return to

23Ibid., p. 291.

24Ibid., p. 292.
In this day and age the world is the true monastery; that is where you will become a saint."25

Father Joachim was right. The world is our monastery, the true monk he who lives with men and works with God here, in contact with the soil. God does not sit on a throne above the clouds. He wrestles here on earth, along with us. Solitude is no longer the road for the man who strives, and true prayer, prayer which steers a course straight for the Lord's house and enters, is noble action. This, today, is how the true warrior prays.26

After a few months' stay in Crete, Kazantzakis was ready to strike out anew—this time to Paris. Here he began his philosophical studies under Henri Bergson during the day and explored the troubled world of the Antichrist, Nietzsche, at night; Bergson's philosophy of the 'man vital' resolved the problem of evolution which had troubled Kazantzakis since high school days. Although Bergson's thought is so firmly embodied in his work that Simon Friar refers to Bergson as "perhaps the deepest influence on Kazantzakis' thought,"27 Kazantzakis devotes most of this section in Report to Greco to Nietzsche. He seemed to be more fascinated with the Dionysian philosophy of Nietzsche than the Apollonian view of Bergson, no matter how much he agreed with this view. The sheer daring of Nietzsche to declare, "God is dead," intrigued Kazantzakis.

25Ibid., p. 305.

26Ibid., pp. 305-306.

27Simon Friar, "Introduction," The Odyssey, by Kazantzakis, p. xvi.
To such a degree had I experienced this great atheist martyr's anguish, so severely had my old wounds begun again to rankle as I followed his bloody tracks, that I felt ashamed of my staid, well-ordered, cowardly life, which dared not destroy all its bridges behind it and enter, completely alone, the realm of utmost bravery and despair....

Together with him I had begun my own battle to match the unmatchable—to reconcile utmost hope with utmost despair, and to open a door beyond reason and certainty.28

In clarifying the roles of Bergson and Nietzsche, he said:

The wounds opened in me by Nietzsche were deep and hallowed; Bergson's mystic salves could not heal them. They relieved them temporarily, but soon the sores opened again and bled—for as long as I remained young, what I desired most deeply was not the cure but the wound.29

Leaving Paris for Vienna, Kazantzakis fell ill. During the period of hospitalization which resulted, he enjoyed the mystical freedom of fever, "completely liberated from time, place, and rationality."30 In May he returned to the world from the hospital—but it was not the same world he had left. The world he now entered was refreshed and renewed with a dreamlike quality about it. It was at this time that he turned to Buddha.

Buddha! I had read about his life and proud message of despair many years earlier, but had forgotten everything. Apparently I still was not ripe, and thus I failed to pay attention.... But now, in the midst of this city's cachinnation, here again came the sound of this exotic, bewitching flute! . . .

28Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 329.
29Ibid., p. 333.
30Ibid., p. 342.
I had been strengthened without a doubt by the satanic prophet's leonine nourishment [Nietzsche], for I began to feel ashamed of my attempts to cover the abyss with a gaudy stalking-blind. I still dared not confront it point-blank as it truly was: naked and repulsive. Christ, His arms held out compassionately, had placed Himself between the abyss and me to keep me from seeing it and being frightened.  

Buddha gave Kazantzakis the answer to his questions of salvation. From Buddha also he had gained the "elephant eye"—the ability to see all things as if for the first time and greet them, to see all things as if for the last time and bid them farewell.  

I kept telling myself that the world was a specter and that men were wraiths, dew-beings, ephemeral children of the dew. Buddha, the black sun, had risen and they were melting into nothingness. But pity took possession of my soul, pity and love. If only I could hold those specters at the edge of my vision for a moment longer and keep them from expiring! Every last bit of my heart, I felt, had not been wrapped in the yellow robe.... Inside me a Cretan was lifting his hand in revolt and refusing to pay even a brass farthing of tribute to the peaceable conqueror.  

In Berlin Kazantzakis was awakened from the dream of Buddhism by the reality of human suffering.

Little by little I began to divine the all-embracing, pan-human significance of the bloody experiment taking place in Russia's boundless land, her boundless soul. My mind began to tolerate and accept the revolutionary slogans which formerly had seemed so extremely naive and utopian to me. As I gazed at the famished faces, sunken cheeks, and clenched fists, I began to have a presentiment of man's divine privilege: by believing

31Ibid., pp. 345-346.
32Ibid., p. 358.
33Ibid.
in a myth, desiring it, imbuing it with blood, sweat and tears, . . . man transforms that myth into reality. I was terrified. For the first time I saw how creative man's intervention is, and how great his responsibility. We are to blame if reality does not take the form we desire.34 Kazantzakis saw Lenin as a modern-day prophet who had had a vision and had linked that vision with the people in the attempt to make it a reality. He was in Moscow for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the revolution, and never, before that day, had he felt so deeply the brotherhood of man. It was this spirit that attracted Kazantzakis, but the Communists' emphasis on materialism distressed him, and for this reason he could never give himself completely to that cause.

Russia had brought Kazantzakis back to earth from the dream of Buddha, but Lenin's vision did not satisfy. Asked to go to the Caucasus to rescue some of his fellow countrymen, Kazantzakis became involved in action. But remembering his experiences with Zorba, a man of action whom he greatly admired, Kazantzakis knew his road, as much as he would have liked, did not lie in this direction—he was doomed to be a "pen-pusher" for life. Where then did his road lie? It was based in his native land, Greece, and with his own talent, writing. Thus was born Kazantzakis' vision—his poetic masterpiece—The Odyssey—A Modern Sequel. Kazantzakis resurrected within himself and his writings those stalwart men—

34Ibid., p. 321.
the saviors, saints, heroes, adventurers, and revolutionists—that he had known and followed, made a synthesis of them, and from that synthesis arrived at his own creation. This creation, his Odysseus, saw and mastered life with the Cretan glance. Every hero he created since then is the same Odysseus, in a different time, place, and situation.
Kazantzakis' life, like that of his Odysseus, could be described as a spiritual journey. Although the path he followed was not that of the traditional Christian or Oriental mystic, the stages of his spiritual quest are much the same. The process by which Kazantzakis defined his Cretan glance was not basically rational but mystical. Through this mystical process, aided by his intellectual pursuits and numerous journeys, he developed a system which enabled him to live a serene and productive life amid the upheaval of the twentieth century. Kimon Friar quotes him as saying,

I am writing Spiritual Exercises, a mystical book wherein I trace a method by which the spirit may rise from cycle to cycle until it reaches the supreme Contact. There are five cycles . . . I describe how we ascend all these steps, and when we reach the highest how we live simultaneously all the previous cycles.... I tell you much about this because it is the last fruit of my search.35

In the Prologue to Saviors of God Kazantzakis asks in effect the two questions which started him on his search and which have always plagued mankind, "Where do we come from and where are we going?" He describes the situation in which man finds himself in a strikingly graphic manner: "We come from

35Nikos Kazantzakis, quoted by Kimon Friar, Introduction to Saviors of God, p. 11.
a dark abyss, we end in a dark abyss, and we call the luminous interval life.\textsuperscript{36} Man is constantly being caught between two forces, "the ascent toward composition, toward life, toward immortality" and "the descent toward decomposition, toward matter, toward death."\textsuperscript{37} Kazantzakis begins his works with this state of unrest, the need of man to somehow reconcile this dilemma in order to establish a path of action. The first two books of The Odyssey picture Odysseus' relationship to both his son and his father.

Odysseus shuddered at the sight, lowered his eyes, looked on the ground and cursed the rotting fate of man—his sturdy body, wedged between his son and father, suddenly rotted on the right, bloomed on the left, and for a lightning flash he choked and gasped for air then jumped up to shake off the oppressive company but drew his heart's reins tight and stopped at the cliff's edge.\textsuperscript{39}

Catching his son before him run to find a bride, feeling his father's body rot in the grave behind him, and he at the dead center, bridegroom both and corpse, he shuddered, for his life now seemed the briefest lightning flash.\textsuperscript{39}

Kazantzakis' character Zorba describes three kinds of men—those who turn their food into dung, those who turn it into work, and those who turn it into spirit. It is the third type with which Kazantzakis is most concerned. The process of turning food into spirit he often describes as

\textsuperscript{36}Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., Book Two, 11. 621-624, p. 59.
the journey of the soul. Indeed most of his books begin with
the start of a journey or quest. The first stage in this
journey is the preparation.

The preparation, or what in mysticism is often called
the conversion, is an awakening of the soul to a higher level
of reality. It involves a realization that the mind and sen-
ses are limited and that the only thing of which a man can
be sure is of his own existence. The senses can perceive only
a fragmentary picture of the external world. The mind orders
the chaos of these limited perceptions and makes of them a
picture of this world. This picture, however, is not the ex-
ternal world but only the self's projected image of it. This
image is "at best symbolic and approximate," but it is nec-
essary for man to be able to function. Man must recognize
these limitations and yet discipline himself to perform in
the face of them his required duties. The first duty of man
in his preparation then is to "determine the omnipotence of
the mind amid appearances and the incapacity of the mind beyond
appearances." 41

Thus each man orders his life in an interpretation of
those sensual impressions which he receives. This interpre-
tation is the one on which he acts. These sensations and con-
ceptions are individual and as such are different for each man.

40 Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (Strand, Great Britain, 1962),
p. 6.

41 Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 50.
Those people who have not been awakened to a heightened awareness mistake their interpretations of the reality for the reality itself. Therefore, they follow slavishly those devices which were originally their servants. In Chapter Two of The Rock Garden Kazantzakis makes this characteristic obvious in his description of the white men placed in the ports of the East and on shipboard as they try to live according to the interpretations of life they had developed in their original surroundings. This results ironically in the cold cruelty of the virtuous Salvation Army man in Port Said and the boredom and emptiness of life aboard ship for those who had lived for pleasure and excitement. The author also describes the beautiful and happy delusions of the Orientals in their worship of Buddha and the inhuman compulsion of Joshiro, the Japanese girl, in her desire for conquest and vengeance in China.

Yet Kazantzakis did not agree with the white man who could see only the guns behind the mask of cherry blossoms. He says,

\[ \text{Woe to the man who sees only the mask; woe to the man who sees only what is hidden beneath it!} \]
\[ \text{The only man with true vision sees at the same moment, and in a single flash, the beautiful mask and the dreadful face behind it.} \]
\[ \text{Happy the man who, behind his forehead, creates this mask and this face in a synthesis still unknown to nature. He alone can play with dignity and grace the double flute of life and death.} \]

The white man shook his blond head vaguely, he had understood nothing.
And I, I was happy listening to that distant double flute on the lips of Japan.42

A similar acknowledgement of appearances is found in The Odyssey. When Odysseus arrives at his longed-for destination, Ithaca, he finds himself constricted and bothered by a vague restlessness. Only when he tells the story of his voyage does he realize that the worlds of Calypso (immortal virtue), Circe (sensual pleasure), and Nausicaä (everyday enjoyment) were masks of true reality. Suddenly he knows why he is stifling. He recognizes Ithaca as the most dangerous of all the masks because it is the mask he is most likely to accept for reality.

'I will not accept boundaries; appearances cannot contain me; I choke! To bleed in this agony, and to live it profoundly, is the second duty.'43 Although the mind accepts these boundaries, the heart of man cannot. After the revelation has come, man can no longer be satisfied. The heart desires to grasp the essence of life and strives to merge with it but is separated from it by the body and mind. This attraction which causes so much anguish is described by Kazantzakis in this way:

God is a song in azure air and no one knows from whence he comes or what the meaning of his words; only the heart, a female bird, listens and trembles.44

42Kazantzakis, The Rock Garden, p. 20.
43Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 50.
44Kazantzakis, The Odyssey, Book Three, ll. 477-479, p. 81.
The soul reacts, Kazantzakis declares, "like a woman who not even can not, but will not resist warm words that lure her like a man."45

The heart of man, filled with hope, wishes to break its boundaries, but flounders, loses hope, and becomes afraid. At this point man must avoid the temptation of the mind to put things in order and the temptation of the heart to find the essence of things, but instead act without questioning and follow the winds that blow him to the heights and to the depths. It is at this stage that man comes to know the opposing forces within him. One is the voice of woman, standing for flesh, beast, the origins of man, security, necessity, and death. The other is the male voice standing for spirit, conquest, freedom, and life. Both are holy; both are a part of man. These two forces love and hate each other. They embrace and fight.

At the end of the section entitled "The Preparation," Kazantzakis sums up this step:

Without hope, but with bravery, it is your duty to set your prow calmly toward the abyss. And to say: "Nothing exists!"

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!'

I know now: I do not hope for 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.46

46 Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 59.
This awakening, or heightened awareness of reality, usually appears to come upon man suddenly. It has actually been built up during a period of unrest but generally arrives abruptly at the surface consciousness in a single moment. Kazantzakis recognized the individual differences of reaction in this respect. All of his characters have been shown to be in a period of spiritual unrest prior to the awakening, but some have proceeded through the three phases of the preparation faster than others. The speeding of the cycle is often due to unusual events, such as a battle or conflict in which the character finds himself involved and forced to act. The slowing of the process results from the man’s resistance to the mystical process in which he is involved and from which he cannot escape.

In The Greek Passion Manolios had been ready for this first step for many years. He had received extensive religious training in the monastery where he was reared, but at the age of fifteen he had been made a shepherd. It took his being chosen for the part of Christ in the Passion play to bring about his awakening. Manolios was caught up in the events resulting from the arrival of the refugees and passed through the entire period of preparation in a single day. In contrast to the brief period of awakening for the simple Manolios, Kazantzakis envisioned the preparation of Christ to have extended over a period of years. In The Last Temptation of Christ he dared to portray Christ as a cross-maker. In
this manner he sought to reveal the necessity of Christ's soul to explore the depths as well as the heights and the resistance and anguish of a strong-willed man to the attraction of God. Therefore, the period of awakening was shown to have lasted from age twelve, with his meeting with the elders in the synagogue, until, as a mature man, he left his home and carpentry shop.

Kazantzakis strove to avoid oversimplification in describing the steps in this mystical process. His *Saviors of God* gives a process of becoming rather than the stages arrived at. He is concerned with showing others the manner in which these states may be attained rather than the states themselves. He does mention in several places, though, the seven levels on which mankind may live. These he describes in *The Odyssey* when Odysseus is sold an ivory god with seven heads. Simon Friar lists the seven levels in his synopsis.

"The first is bestial, the second is savagely martial, the third voluptuous, the fourth represents the flowering mind, the fifth tragic sorrow, the sixth a serenity beyond joy and sorrow, and the seventh the ethereal soul."47 This passage notes man's "gradual purification . . . from the pure beast to the pure spirit."48 The process of becoming which has been divided into five parts can be listed, as Kazantzakis does in *Saviors of God*, as the preparation, the march, the

47 Simon Friar, in *Synopsis of The Odyssey* by Kazantzakis, p. 783.
48 Ibid.
vision, the action, and the silence, or in the terms of Prevelakis: the aesthetic, the ethical, the metaphysical, absolute freedom, and a study of death. By these procedures man moves from one state to the other. The last step in this process, that leading to the ethereal soul, is death. In one brief passage in The Odyssey Kazantzakis has shown the vision or depth of understanding characteristic of each of these five steps.

With silent strides Odysseus then shot back the bolt, passed lightly through the courtyard and sped down the street. [aesthetic or detached soul]
Some saw him take the graveyard’s zigzag mountain path, [ethical, able to see relationships]
some saw him leap on rocks that edged the savage shore, [metaphysical or comprehending the essence]
some visionaries saw him in the dead of night swimming and talking secretly with the sea demons, [absolute freedom]
but only a small boy saw him in a lonely dream sit crouched and weeping by the dark sea’s foaming edge. [study of death]

Because Kazantzakis recognizes this process as a period of growth, he realizes that narrowly defined limits can not be given. He also recognizes steps within these steps, cycles and epicycles. In “The Preparation” is found the whole cycle of the soul’s journey in miniature. Saviors of God is the least complex of his works in the sense that here he has limited the use of epicycles and levels within each cycle as much as possible and yet still retains the basic characteristics of his vision. His other works, although following this basic outline, attempt to capture the complexity of life.

Two of his works in which the outline can be most clearly discerned are The Rock Garden and The Odyssey. The Rock Garden, in which Kazantzakis actually incorporated Saviors of God, follows the outline on an almost chapter by chapter basis. The first chapter describes restlessness resulting in a journey—a political journey for Joshiro, a spiritual journey for the narrator, and a physical journey for both. Chapter Two begins the awakening, showing the dream quality of life and the masks behind which people hide. Chapter Three shows the anguish of the heart in trying to discover the essence behind these masks. In this case, the narrator tries to divine the true Japan from the appearance the tourist sees. Here are also shown the opposing forces—the old Japan against the new, white faces against yellow ones, and ugliness against beauty. In Chapter Four the narrator accepts necessity and allows himself to be swept away by Japan without questioning or resisting. Chapter Five is "The Preparation" from Saviors of God, and Chapter Six is the summation and bridge between the preparation and the march.

The Odyssey is not so conveniently divided as The Rock Garden. Comparable to the Prologue are the first two books in which Odysseus finds himself restless between life and death, between his father and son. The first duty comes when he describes the masks he encountered on his journey and realizes that his home is the most deadly mask. The second duty is completed when he sails to Sparta and recognizes the
existence of opposing forces in the form of the barbarians. These he tries to get his friend Menelaus to acknowledge, but the old man, bound by an illusion he wishes to hold, refuses to see. The third duty is the acceptance of necessity. Odysseus follows the path that leads him to Crete and accepts and participates in both the good and the bad of this land. These duties, however, are not so clearly defined as they might seem under analysis. For instance, even before Odysseus left for Sparta, he reacted to the opposing forces within himself and his men. They devoted their days to the spirit, building the ship, and the nights to the least, wenching. In Book Seven the entire process of the preparation is given in a dream. Fate stabs Odysseus with three knives. After he passes through the experiences of love, conquest, and acceptance of death, representative of the three duties, he finds relief, awakes, and prepares for action—the destruction of Knossos.
CHAPTER III

"THE MARCH"

The second step of the journey is the march or purification. This step involves stripping away the encumbrances which inhibit reaching that ultimate reality revealed briefly in the awakening. It is at this time that the cry, which Kazantzakis so often mentions, is clearly discerned.

The heart cries out. It is too circumscribed and wishes to extend the boundaries of its world. Kazantzakis stresses that the person should continue as before if he does not hear the cry. He is to be patient and to listen for the cry and not to start out unless he hears it. Otherwise, he is likely to injure himself and jeopardize the entire journey. This step is not to be taken lightly; only those who are fully ready and can do nothing else should undertake this road. Something as yet undefined within the man drives him on. Two roads open up before him and he must choose one. For some unintelligible reason, because he follows his heart, he chooses the ascending road, the hardest he can find.

At this point the mystic employs the two processes of detachment and mortification. In detachment the man looks within himself, sees the evil, his failure to conform to the rhythm of the universe, his cowardice, laziness, and lust. He is disgusted by what his soul reveals and is determined to
change this darkness into light, this evil into good. Therefore, he undertakes the process of mortification, "a deliberate recourse to painful experiences and difficult tasks."50 This process is necessary because the senses, and sometimes the mind, have usurped a place beyond their station and become the focus of energy instead of performing their natural functions of aiding the soul. They must be put back in their places by what are often extreme procedures of denial and discipline.

Here the mystic adopts the role of the ascetic. Asceticism for him is not an end in itself but a method of purging, cleansing, and throwing away that which stands in the way of the soul's progress. In Saint Francis Kazantzakis shows that for Francis of Assisi this involved the rejection of Clara, the denial of his family, the acceptance of poverty, humiliation before his village, and the kissing of lepers. All of this indicated a great sacrifice on the part of a sensitive, artistic, and wealthy young nobleman. Yet with the performance of each of these dreadful tasks came a profound sense of joy and relief. The life of the mystic in performing the feats of asceticism is not barren but instead profoundly enriching. Kazantzakis repeats a story told him by a recluse living on Mount Athos.

There was once a great king who had three hundred and sixty-five wives in his harem. He was very

50Underhill, Mysticism, p. 205.
handsome, and loved to eat and have a good time. One day he went to a monastery, where he saw an ascetic. He looked at him compassionately. "What a great sacrifice you are making!" he said. "Your sacrifice is greater," the ascetic replied. "How's that?" "Because I have renounced the ephemeral world, while you have renounced the eternal." 51

Thus the mystic patiently and carefully investigates himself, trying to find out and smash those things which hinder his development. The conversion of Brother Juniper in Saint Francis illustrates this process.

One day there came a simple, affable, somewhat corpulent peasant of about thirty years of age. He held a jug on which he had painted representations of the seven deadly sins, each with its name written beneath: Pride, Avarice, Envy, Lust, Gluttony, Wrath, Sloth.

"Brother, Father, listen to what I have to say, he cried, falling at Francis' feet. "I was calm and peaceful in my village. I cultivated and pruned my grapevines, harvested them: made a living. I had no wife, no children, no worries— or so I thought. But as soon as I heard your voice I realized that I was wretched. I looked into my heart, which I had thought innocent, and inside it I saw the seven deadly sins. I took this jug, therefore, and drew each of them on it, writing the names beneath. Now—look! I am going to smash it at your feet—and I hope all seven go to the devil!"

He banged the jug against the stones and it broke into a hundred pieces.

"May my heart shatter in the same way and may the mortal sins spill out onto the stones!" 52

In Freedom or Death is given an extreme example of the importance of complete purification and the harmful effects of the refusal to destroy one beloved item that stands in the

51Nikos Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, pp. 199-200.

way of the soul's development. Captain Michalis is given the honor of seeing Eminé, the wife of his blood-brother. From the moment that he sees her he has no peace. Although he refuses to give in to his lust for her, the vision of her loveliness haunts him. During an important battle in which the Cretans are trying to save a monastery, Captain Michalis deserts his post to rescue Eminé. Learning the Captain Michalis, the Cretan's most valuable leader is gone, the Turks attack and destroy the monastery. Realizing that his desire for Eminé will always stand in the way of his duty, Captain Michalis murders her in her sleep, and by this action is freed of her interference forever.

After the purging of the soul comes the discipline of it. At this point St. Francis danced in the streets and gained followers whom he molded into an order. In The Last Temptation of Christ Kazantzakis describes vividly the discipline demanded of Christ in following the commandment of God to go out and speak to the people. Up to this time Christ had been mute regarding his spiritual life; he had avoided men. Now he felt the necessity of speaking to all men even though he did not know what he would say. He had a duty to perform no matter what the consequences, and that duty was the most difficult that could be asked of him.

Through the processes of purging and discipline the soul sheds the various layers that encumber it. The first of these layers to be shed is the ego. When it is stripped off,
the individual man is aware that he is not alone in life but
rather a part of the earth and of the life process itself.
His fear and hope are not his alone but those of all life.
He sees himself then not as a lone man but as a link between
his ancestors and descendants, as a member of a race. He
feels deep within him the legacy of each of his forebearers.
He must choose which of these inheritances he will allow to
govern him, which he will allow to become immortal. He must
widen and expand upon those which he selects. In The Odyssey,
Odysseus spends seven days and seven nights communing with
God on a mountaintop. During the third night he has a dream
in which each of his forefathers passes before him as he
tries to choose which he wishes to revive. He refuses all
but his three Pates. Tantalus accuses him of wanting to set-
tle down and establish limits. Heracles wants him to con-
tinue the labors he began and asks him to strive for the
thirteenth labor, immortality. Prometheus laments his failure
to enlighten and save the world, and states that the task re-
 mains to be completed.

On man then rests a great responsibility. Not only his
own existence depends upon him but also that of his entire
race.

You are a throw of the dice on which, for a moment,
the entire fate of your race is gambled.

Everything you do reverberates throughout a
thousand destinies. As you walk, you cut open and
create that river bed into which the stream of your
descendants shall enter and flow.53

53 Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 72.
Man then sees that those living men and women of his race are an extension of his outer body; he suffers, rejoices, and fights for all of them. He realizes that if even one of these is lost this one contaminates and endangers the whole. In just this way Father Yánaros in The Fratricides extended his soul to that of his village.

He was a part of the stones and a part of the people; like the centaurs of legend—half man, half horse—so was Father Yánaros; from the waist down he was the village of Castello. If a house burned, he burned; if a child died, he died; and when he knelt in church before the miraculous icon of the wide-eyed Madonna, the Protectress of Castello, it was not Father Yánaros alone who knelt; behind him he felt the whole village—every house, every soul—kneeling. "I am no longer Yánaros," he would often say to himself in jest, "I am no longer Yánaros—I am Castello."54

The most difficult element of this stage of race is not man's selecting among the inheritances of his ancestors nor continuing and expanding their work, but allowing, even demanding, that his son surpass him. The son cannot be contained in the father, but must shed him and advance higher.

And you, the father, rejoice to hear the contemptuous voice of your child. "All, all for my son!" you shout. "I am nothing. I am the peg he is the Man. I am the Man, he is the Son of Man! 55

Father Yánaros gave birth to a rebel son. Tryakos surpassed him and, loving and hating him both, had to perform his duty. It was necessary for him to kill his father so that his work


55 Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 75.
might go on unhindered. Father Yanaros knew this and accepted death in order to mount to eternal life.

Just as men throw off the yoke of ego, he must also discard that of race. In order to advance farther, he must be able to see the struggle of all mankind. All men pass through the same experiences. They all search for the meaning of life, continue the inscrutable path toward death, and pass on their legacy to their children. Multitudes produce, replenish the earth, and die leaving a fertile soil for their offspring; but countless others fail to complete their journey and vanish, leaving the earth barren. Confusion abounds, disorganized guides are misunderstood, and men become separated from one another. Centuries upon centuries of men have risen and fallen, covered in blood. Civilizations arise, establish order, decay, and are overthrown by rebellion. The future of this struggling mass of humanity is uncertain, always hanging in the balance between immortality and complete extinction.

"Without illusion, impudence, or fear, man must learn to gaze on people moving in great stretches of time."56 He must become immersed in this vision and, in so doing, capture the rhythm of life. His duty then is to struggle to create order out of this confusion and nothingness, of which he is a part.

Within this arena, which grows more stable night after day, generations work and love and hope and

56Ibid., p. 78.
vanish. New generations tread on the corpses of their fathers, continue the work above the abyss and struggle to tame the dread mystery. How? By cultivating a single field, by kissing a woman, by studying a stone, an animal, an idea.57

When a section of man's work is destroyed, other men come to rebuild and make a stronger foundation.

Christ arose from the need of the Jewish race to find a savior, but the savior that they expected was not Jesus. They wanted a strong warrior who would liberate their race from Jewish domination, but instead Christ appeared on a higher plane. He came not to save just the Jews but all mankind, and his weapon was not the dividing instrument of war but the uniting instrument of love.

Communism interested Kazantzakis because in it he saw the illustration of this same principle. It was built in the heart of one man, Lenin. From him it extended to a group of revolutionists and eventually engulfed the whole of Russia. Lenin's vision soon spread from country to country until it was embraced by men of all races—white, yellow, and black. But before the tenth anniversary of the revolution, Communism was already deteriorating at the hands of the establishment who had lost sight of the ideal of a state for the working man. Instead they were concerned only with the tools they had been employing to achieve this ideal. They saw not the plight of men but the charts and tables representing economic growth. All of the characters of Toda Baba represented

57Ibid., pp. 79-80.
various divisions in this fight and thus warred among themselves. Only Toda Raba, the Negro and an unknown quantity coming from the Dark Continent, was able to attain the vision of the ideal, the whole, while viewing Lenin's body. From men with clear and simple vision such as his comes the hope of achieving the brotherhood of all mankind.

From this struggling mass of humanity, someone tries to free himself. He continually ascends on a never-ending path to liberate himself from matter, body, and mind. It is more than the voice of the generations of mankind within the individual man; it is the entire earth, "with her trees and her waters, and her animals, with her man and her gods." Within the mind of man her history can be traced. It is the path of the élan vital. From complete darkness and chaos the earth proceeded alone, flaming. Gradually it cooled, and plants began to grow on the surface.

And slowly the flame subsides, the womb of matter grows cool, the stone comes alive, breaks open, and a small green leaf uncurls into the air, trembling. It clutches the soil, steadies itself, raises its head and hands, grasps the air, the water, the light, and sucks at the Universe.

It sucks at the Universe and wants to pass it through its body—thin as a thread—to turn it into flower, fruit, seed. To make it deathless.  

Finally animals emerged, and from the evolutionary process of plants, fishes, birds, beasts, and apes, man was created.

58 Ibid., p. 81.
59 Ibid., p. 82.
Now that man has been created, the life force within him fights to free itself of him. It is cramped and stifled and wants to ascend higher. From this comes the yearning of every father to have a son greater than himself. A prehuman erotic power arises in man, pushing him on toward copulation in which is transferred the incomprehensible message of life. From this view of the history of the earth, man begins "dimly to apprehend why the animals fought, begot, and died," and the role of plants and inorganic matter behind them. Just as they fulfilled their duty and begot man, man must also struggle gladly, to the utmost of his ability, to release that Someone Else within him who will ascend and carry on the fight.

It is as though the whole of life were the visible, eternal pursuit of an invisible Bridegroom who from body to body hunts down his untamed Bride, Eternity.

And we, all the guests of the wedding procession—plants, animals, men—rush trembling toward the mystical nuptial chamber. We each carry with awe the sacred symbols of marriage—one the Phallos, another the Womb.

It is with this view of the relation and debt of man to the soil, the plants, and the animals that man gains pity and esteem for them. Thus Saint Francis preached to the birds and animals and addressed all animate and inanimate objects as Brother. He may have appeared a lunatic to sensible

---

60 Ibid., p. 84.
61 Ibid.
and logical persons, but his was what might be termed "divine lunacy," which comes from a fuller comprehension of life than other men are able to grasp.
CHAPTER IV

"THE VISION"

From out of the process of purification and the march in which ego, race, and mankind are shed comes the union with the earth and the third step in the mystical journey, the vision. The Spirit or Life Force, within man, tramples upon him, struggling to be free of man's narrow mind and heart. Man looks with terror and pity at the God he has created who is fighting to free himself from the weight and darkness of mankind and proceed upward toward the light. This God is manifested in the earth and all of life. Every religion that narrows God to pain, hope in a future life, life on this earth, joy or victory sees only one aspect and thus holds back the progress of God.

The essence of our God is STRUGGLE. Pain, joy, and hope unfold and labor within this struggle, world without end.

It is this ascension, the battle with the descending countercurrent, which gives birth to pain. But pain is not the absolute monarch. Every victory, every momentary balance on the ascent fills with joy every living thing that breathes, grows, loves, and gives birth.

But from every joy and pain a hope leaps out eternally to escape this pain and to widen joy.

And again the ascent begins—which is pain—and joy is reborn and new hope springs up once more. The circle never closes. It is not a circle, but a spiral which ascends eternally, ever widening, enveloping and unfolding the triune struggle.\[62\]

\[62\]Ibid., p. 92.
The questioning mind of man can never comprehend the purpose and the outcome of this struggle. The complete understanding of the Great Spirit or Life Force is beyond the mind of ephemeral man, and its many methods and divisions are often contradictory in man's eyes. Although he cannot understand the workings of this Spirit, man, nonetheless, is an instrument of It and is a part—a vital part—of the eternal march. Consciously or unconsciously, man performs a necessary duty.

Despite the futility of discerning the outcome of this eternal struggle, the mystic rejoices to feel this Spirit inside him. Through the manifestations of God on earth, he sees in a split second the "seeding, sprouting, blossoming, fructifying, and the disappearance of every tree, animal, man, star, and god."63 In this moment of illumination and vision man finds the essence of eternal life. In order to hold and express this eternal truth man resorts to words and to art.

Let us transfix this momentary eternity which encloses everything, past and future, but without losing in the immobility of language any of its gigantic erotic whirling.

Every word is an Ark of the Covenant around which we dance and shudder, divining God to be its dreadful inhabitant.

You shall never be able to establish in words that you live in ecstasy. But struggle unceasingly to establish it in words. Battle with myths, with comparisons, with allegories, with rare and common words, with exclamations and rhymes, to embody it in flesh, to transfix it.64

63Ibid., p. 94.

64Ibid., pp. 94-95.
As God speaks "in every way He can, with seas and with fires, with colors, with wings, with horns, with claws, with constellations and butterflies," so must the enlightened man or visionary. He maintains a place in the center of the universe and, like the prophets of the Old Testament, he must take responsibility as God's only hope for the expression of His ecstasy.

Thus Kazantzakis viewed his writing not as a craft but as a sacred duty. In order to fulfill this duty he had to express his version of eternal truth in every way he could imagine. Therefore, his writings from 1925 on tend to form a unified body. Through them he endeavored to express his concept of God in the hope that each work might enlighten at least one person and aid him in the attainment of man's highest spiritual level. The diversity of his works is due to the need to avoid limitation of this truth to a particular time, place, ideal, or type of writing. Kazantzakis followed the pattern of earlier mystics who, in an effort to communicate their experiences of illumination, resorted to the symbolism of the particular religion with which each was connected. He, however, by virtue of the location of his homeland and through his many travels, encountered numerous religions and philosophies in his search for Ultimate Truth. The reader of Kazantzakis benefits from his acquisition of a

65This, p. 95.
larger body of symbolism than could be contained in any one system and from his high degree of education, both formal and informal.

Kazantzakis realized the difficulty and hopelessness of the task set for him, but, convinced of the worth of this project, he pursued the course to the limits of his physical, mental, and emotional capabilities. Through the narrator's description of an icon of St. George, in The Rock Garden, Kazantzakis depicts the role of art as a link between ephemeral life and eternal truth and shows that this concept of art is the basis of his own writing.

Once I saw a Byzantine icon of St. George. The blond-haired young hero on his white horse, lance raised, was hurling himself against the dragon. All the bodies—St. George, the horse, the dragon—were compact, muscular, intense. A real drama, a bloody battle.

In the air above this real St. George was another St. George on another white horse, with another lance, facing another dragon. But in this upper level of vision, everything was dematerialized, the bodies were transparent and through them you saw the blossoming fields and the pale blue mountains in the distance.

This was a St. George more real than that of reality, the astral body of the action, the pale and immortal flower of matter.

I sensed, that evening as I sat in solitude before the flames, that double journey of my being, I saw, I touched the visible journey, all its details firmly fixed by matter. But the inner journey flickered, half invisible, stripped of any solid body. I would have to catch it in words if it was not to be dispersed.

To mobilize those intrepid soldiers, the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, to besiege the breath, channel it, no longer to let it wander in the air.... Yes, I know, the finest essence
cannot be caught in the net of words, but something still remains—a subtle perfume which stirs our senses and reveals the invisible.66

The problem of describing man's communion with Reality is insoluble because there is nothing to which this experience can be compared. It can only be revealed by masks, symbols, and paradoxical expressions which suggest rather than define the essence.

The sections in Kazantzakis' works devoted to the vision are generally quite brief in comparison to those sections devoted to the march and the action; but, although brief, they are important because they represent a change in the attitudes and actions of the characters involved. By these states of illumination the characters are impelled toward more noble deeds—Christ heads for Jerusalem, Father Yanaros finally acts to unite the warring factions, and Odysseus turns to creation, then continues his journey leading to death. These visions are kin to, but of a much higher form than, the dreams and mental images the characters have at other times. They are stronger and more decisive in nature.

In portraying the state of vision in his characters, Kazantzakis shows their contemplation of their origin, a clearer observation of the physical world in which they view the world as both transcendent and immanent, and the increased occurrence of intuition. The experience is not one resulting from thought but an inspiration or perception received intact.

at one time. As such it is described as coming by the means of auditions, visions, dialogues between man and God, and automatic writing. These experiences appear to be external in nature to the character although they are very personal and come from deep within the soul. They are both transcendent and immanent and represent an opening of the character's life onto a higher plane. In this stage of the transition man comprehends the higher plane towards which he strives.

Although Kazantzakis places great importance upon this type of vision, he realizes at the same time the need for critical appraisal of visionary experiences. He seeks to distinguish between those that come from God, the higher plane of Reality, and those that come from the Devil, the lower level of man's ephemeral existence. The consciousness of man, with its intuitive and visionary powers stimulated, has reached the threshold between two levels; it strives to rise to the higher but, exhausted from the unaccustomed exertion, sinks back periodically to the lower level. Christ's experience in the desert reflects this principle. After three days and nights of communion with the vision of John the Baptist and another day of communion with God, Jesus, ignoring hunger and thirst, came to understand the role he was to assume. It was at this time that temptation appeared to him in the form of a serpent, declaring the absurdity of his desire to save mankind, indicating a more realistic goal in the saving of Mary Magdalene. Christ rejected this vision
and once more was enlightened by God. But again temptation intervened as the desire of the warrior to possess the temporal kingdoms of the earth. Reality returned and, strengthened by it, Jesus left the desert and began his journey to Jerusalem.

In his effort to portray visionary perception, Kazantzakis uses the three major classes of suggestive symbols found in mystic literature—the journey, search for El Dorado, or pilgrimage; the craving of the soul for a perfect mate or love play between God and man's soul; and the craving for inward purity, growth, and transformation, or spiritual alchemy. In addition to these, he included another allegory, gained from his own childhood experiences—that of battle, man's unceasing fight for freedom. Also used extensively are light imagery and animal symbolism. Kazantzakis' favorite methods seem to be myth and parable. In Zorba the Greek the narrator says,

If only I could never open my mouth, I thought, until the abstract idea had reached its highest point—and had become a story! 

---


CHAPTER 7

"THE ACTION"

The fourth and most important step of the soul’s mystical journey is the action. Like the march this stage involves the pain of growth, and in it Kazantzakis stresses that man must act if he is to be saved. As the period of illumination or vision gradually fades away, man’s soul is left in a state of depression. Everything had been going so well, and suddenly everything starts going wrong. The soul can no longer attain this cherished state of vision and is now plunged into a state of darkness and despair greater than that of purgation. It is at this time that man must forget his visions and his insight into reality and become active.

In The Fratricides the village of Father Yañaros is plunged into this dark period, which lasts for years. The hard and perilous life that the people lead on their rocky, barren soil is a fitting background to the darkness and violence of the period, when brother kills brother in the civil war between the Christians and the Communists. Father Yañaros remembered back to the paradise they had lived in earlier in St. Constantine on the shore of the Black Sea.

But suddenly—why? Who was to blame? No great sin had been committed in the village.... Everyone followed the path of God, everything was going well. And suddenly, as God leaned mercifully over the happy village, He turned
His face the other way. Immediately the village fell into darkness. One morning a heart-rending cry came from the square: "Uproot yourselves! The strong of the earth command. Go! The Greeks to Greece, the Turks to Turkey! Take your children, your wives, your icons, and get out! You have ten days!"

A lament rose throughout the village; the people ran back and forth in confusion, bidding farewell to the walls, the looms, the village spring, the wells.... It is difficult, you see, very difficult, for the soul to tear itself away from familiar soil and familiar waters. One morning, Father Damianos, the older priest, rose at daybreak.... He ran, from door to door, shouting, "The hour has come! In the name of God, my children, the hour has come!"

From the early hours of dawn, the bells tolled sadly.... Now and then an old woman began to chant a dirge, but the men, swollen-eyed, turned and shouted for her to stop. What good are tears? God said it shall be, so let it be, let's get it over with! But quickly, quickly, before our hearts break, before we fully realize the tragedy. Hurry, friends, lend a hand! Let's bake the bread, let's sack the flour; our journey will be long, so let us take with us our daily essentials: pots, pans, mattresses, holy icons! Do not be afraid, brothers! Our roots are not in earth alone, they spread to the sky and thrive there, too. That is why our race is immortal. Onward then, my children, courage!69

This period then is not a time for tears; man must steel himself to forget the joy he has known and fall into the rhythm of the present. He cannot sit idly bemoaning his fate. At this stage action is the only way to deliverance and salvation. Only through action can man forget himself and his will which keep him separated from God, looking on Reality from the outside as an observer. He must lose himself and conform only to the Will of God, no matter what trials he must endure in the process.

69Kazantzakis, The Fratricides, pp. 11-12.
The purpose of the vision is the establishment of order over the previous chaos. It is not an end in itself for the soul to delight in but a means which enables the resulting action to be performed with new sight and understanding. Kazantzakis stresses that man's duty "is not to interpret or to cast light on the rhythm of God's march," not to dwell on abstractions or develop a theology, but instead to fall in with this rhythm himself, to adjust his life to Reality. "Only thus may we mortals succeed in achieving something immortal, because then we collaborate with One who is Deathless." Thus man's duty is not to contemplate Reality alone but to follow the rhythm of Reality; in so doing he himself becomes Real. The comprehension of Reality which man gains in the vision is lost so that man will avoid the temptation to remain passive in contemplation and will be forced into becoming a part of the rhythm through action. The narrator in Zorba the Greek says of himself:

I had fallen so low that if I had had to choose between falling in love with a woman and reading a book about love, I should have chosen the book.

In this step, then, man is weaned from contemplation and sees that his vision is only a new mask to conceal the nothingness and chaos of the Abyss. Man needs this mask he has

---

70 Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 100.
71 Ibid.
72 Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 101.
developed. Within its limited area he is able to work effectively until he has exhausted its possibilities, reached the limits of its boundaries, and can no longer be contained by it. Thus by working with the external world of appearances, with desires, anxieties, and deeds, man extends his knowledge and perception, thereby widening and increasing the essence. He must return again to the concrete after gaining the overview of the abstract; otherwise he will be lost in this one limited abstraction, and Reality will be lost within it too. Man should never hope nor wish to contain God in a limited form.

Within the narrow time and space given to him, man must learn to discern God and to fit within His rhythm, not to impede His progress but to aid it.

I do not care what face other ages and other people have given to the enormous, faceless essence. They have crammed it with human virtues, with rewards and punishments, with certainties. They have given a face to their hopes and fears, they have submitted their anarchy to a rhythm, they have found a higher justification by which to live and labor. They have fulfilled their duty. But today we have gone beyond these needs; we have shattered this particular mask of the Abyss; our God no longer fits under the old features.73 "God has grown greater,"74 and, because He cannot be contained within the limits created by preceding generations, chaos has again arisen. Because of this, man should not lose time

73Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 102.
74Ibid.
weeping but instead act—look bravely into the Abyss and his own heart and recreate the face of God.

For our God is not an abstract thought, a logical necessity, a high and harmonious structure made of deductions and speculations....

... He is both man and woman, mortal and immortal, dung and spirit. He gives birth, fecundates, slaughters—death and eros in one—and then he begots and slays once more, dancing spasmodically beyond the boundaries of a logic which cannot contain the antinomies.75

God struggles constantly to ascend higher; He is continually defeated but never yields. He is cruelly just, choosing always the best, then smashing it behind Him as He leaves it for something better. God is imperiled at every moment: He either grows, ascends, and expands or else He dies. Man cannot wait for a victorious God to save him, but he must instead rush to save God. God or Reality is imperiled within each man. If man does not grow, ascend, and expand, the Reality within him is lost. Only in saving this Reality can man be saved.

Man must be aware that his progress is marked by contrasts.

We must understand well that we do not proceed from a unity of God to the same unity of God again. We do not proceed from one chaos to another chaos, neither from one light to another light, nor from one darkness to another darkness. What would be the value of our life then? What would be the value of all life?76

75Ibid., p. 103.
76Ibid., p. 105.
The mystical process itself is based on this alternation of chaos and organization, with the light of the awakening, the darkness of purgation, with the brighter light in the vision and the bitter darkness in the action. Through this process the light and dark are progressively more clearly defined, and order is established over chaos. In art an object is more truly rendered through the use of light and shadow, and in music the melody can only be discerned in relation to harmony and dissonance. This is true also of man's understanding of the essence of life.

It is man's duty to transmute as much of this darkness into light as he can. This process, involving so much struggle, is not done for the individual himself.

We do not struggle for ourselves, nor for our race, not even for humanity. We do not struggle for Earth, nor for ideas. All these are the precious yet provisional stairs of our ascending God, and they crumble away as soon as he steps upon them in his ascent.77

Man has then a great responsibility, for only he can save that part of God immanent in him by letting God work through him. Each man has the duty to join with other men that they also may be saved by saving God within themselves. Thus God is immanent in every body, soul, and seed, and cries out to be free.

"Man will certainly die no matter what kind of life he has led, but if he devotes himself to the service of God, he

77 Ibid., p. 106.
will return to the earth fruitful, and the battle to release God will have been advanced. Man's relationship to God then is as a comrade-in-arms. Man and God work hand-in-hand and travel the same path together.

My prayer is not the whimpering of a beggar nor a confession of love. Nor is it the trivial reckoning of a small tradesman. Give me and I shall give you.

My prayer is the report of a soldier to his general: This is what I did today, this is how I fought to save the entire battle in my own sector, these are the obstacles I found, this is how I plan to fight tomorrow.78

Because man struggles for God's salvation and not his own, the perspective of good and evil changes and takes on a higher and richer value. Whatever aids this struggle is good; whatever impedes it is evil. Man is miserable, ugly, and evil, but within him is a Divine Essence pushing him upward. From this have arisen all his major accomplishments—beautiful music, great ideas, and violent love. From inside man rises a Cry, not to be satisfied; and this Cry, created by man, separates from his body and labors eternally. Thus through creation man transcends his limitations.

From outside man comes the transcendent power of the Universe. It hears the cry emanating from the soul of man and wishes to merge with it. It joins men together by force; it unites friends and enemies, good and evil. This spirit of God descends on them in all forms—"as dance, as eros, as

78Ibid., p. 107.
hunger, as religion, as slaughter. It does not ask our permission."  

He [God] is not the upright head of a family, he does not portion out either bread or brains equally to his children. Injustice, Cruelty, Longing, and Hunger are the four steeds that drive his chariot on this rough-hewn earth of ours.  

Dissonance and dissatisfaction drive men on to create new harmonies. The great enemy of God is the yielding to happiness, comfort, and glory.  

Kazantzakis emphasizes continually that man must fall into the rhythm of his times. In this age chaos is paramount; an old order is being destroyed and a new one has not yet arisen. Those who are the standard-bearers of this age are the workers, the bulwarks of God, who have become dissatisfied with the old system and wish to demolish it and erect a new one. The old authority does not wish to change; it is happy, satisfied with things as they are. The new are hungry, they demand cruelly and will not be content until they have destroyed the old. There is no kindness, no justice; there cannot be, or the march will not proceed. Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of the upward progress of God. Kazantzakis saw in the downtrodden of Russia, China, and Africa the hope of the future. Toda Raba, The Rock Garden, Japan/China, and England all emphasize the change of social

79 Ibid., p. 111.

80 Ibid.
order, religion, and the displacement of spirituality by industrialization and scientific emphasis. Amid the decomposition and destruction in the present age, men of the spirit have a tremendous responsibility.

They are duty-bound to let themselves be flooded by the destiny of their times. They must not seek to escape. They must stand at the crossroads where all anxieties and all hopes blow, the rose of the winds. They have these duties: (1) among all the conflicting directions of the present time, to distinguish the positive good each one has to offer and to see how each one helps modern man's frenzied yearning to create a new and more just world; (2) to try to make their own classification of all these positive contributions, and within their own minds to forge the design of the coming world; (3) to experience man's contemporary agony on a deep level and to strive to express it not only in art and thought (nowadays these by themselves do not suffice) but by the example of their own life as well—and this is the hardest thing of all!81

Therefore, in this time of crisis man must assume the superior virtues of responsibility and sacrifice. He must bear the responsibility for God and sacrifice and fight without certainty for God's salvation. He must plunge into action. With the old order and abstractions destroyed, "Earth takes on a new virginity."82 Odysseus says to his comrades,

"God is no song that darts and fades in empty air but a warm throbbing throat that brims with flesh and blood;
he's called us, spoken this dread word, and rushed ahead.
Forward, my friends, let's tread in our forerunner's steps,

plunge southward, lads, in Africa, in the sun's heat! There at the utmost rim of all, at the world's end, where wheat grows tall as trees, and weeds to a man's height, and the pig-thistle springs beyond a horse's rump, there we shall build new castles and a brand-new city, there we shall raise new hopes and virtues, joys and sorrows, there our strong arms will finish what the proud heart orders.

Push on! We'll give this old hollow earth a new virginity!  

The man of action follows his road to the fullest. He does not avoid sin nor virtue but makes them his instruments.

We leave our door open to sin. We do not plug up our ears with wax that we may not listen to the Sirens. We do not bind ourselves, out of fear, to the mast of a great idea; nor by hearing and by embracing the Sirens do we abandon our ship, and perish. On the contrary, we seize the Sirens and pitch them into our boat so that even they may voyage with us; and we continue on our way. This, my comrades, is our new Asceticism, our Spiritual Exercises!  

Man must love all of these opposing and contrary forces because through them he fights for the freedom of God.

Just as man has a responsibility to God and to his own epoch, he has a responsibility to the external world. This world, made up of plants, animals, and men, is the visible sign of the collision of the two antithetical forces. God is present in even the most insignificant of these. Man's duty here is to impose an order on these (such as create scientific laws), "force them to the yoke of superior powers."  

---

35 Ibid., p. 121.
and unite with and free the spirit within them. Man has another duty, and that is to create God out of these materials. A stone may be used to build a house or be shaped into an image of God.

Every man has his own circle composed of trees, animals, men, ideas, and he is in duty bound to save this circle. He, and no one else....

These are the labors each man is given and is in duty bound to complete before he dies. He may not otherwise be saved. For his own soul is scattered and enslaved in these things about him, in trees, in animals, in men, in ideas, and it is his own soul he saves by completing these labors.86

Through man's consciousness, God gazes on his own struggle for the first time, and man learns that this entire world is a part of him and all are joined as one in a continuous battle for freedom.

All of Kazantzakis' heroes are eventually men of action, but Zorba represents his most concentrated study of the man of action. Zorba was able to fit himself completely into the rhythm of the Universe.

I looked at Zorba in the light of the moon and admired the jauntiness and simplicity with which he adapted himself to the world around him, the way his body and soul formed one harmonious whole, and all things—women, bread, water, meat, sleep—blended happily with his flesh and became Zorba. I had never seen such a friendly accord between a man and the universe.87

He saw the world each day as if it were new, discovered and rediscovered the joy of it.

86Ibid., pp. 121-122.

87Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek, p. 132.
While going down a slope, Zorba kicked against a stone, which went rolling downhill. He stopped for a moment in amazement, as if he were seeing this astounding spectacle for the first time in his life. He looked round at me, and in his look I discerned faint consternation.

"Boss, did you see that?" he said at last. "On slopes, stones come to life again."

I said nothing, but I felt a deep joy. This, I thought, is how great visionaries and poets see everything—as if for the first time. Each morning they see a new world before their eyes; they do not really see it, they create it.  

Zorba was not afraid of the opposing forces of God and the Devil but accepted each as fulfilling a necessary function. He was able to take responsibility, being the only one to run to the widow's aid, to try to rejuvenate the faded cabaret singer Bouboulina, and to hold up the walls as the mine fell in.

"Blessed be Sorba!" I murmured. "He has given a warm, beloved, living body to all the abstract ideas which were shivering inside me."  

In a letter the narrator's friend, who had rescued Greeks in the Caucasus, said:

I at last know what happiness really is. Because it's only now that I have real experience of the old maxim: Happiness is doing your duty, and the harder the duty the greater the happiness.  

This is kin to the expression Kazantzakis felt was willed to him by El Greco, "Reach what you cannot!" and the three

---

88 Ibid., p. 136.
90 Ibid., p. 293.
91 Kazantzakis, Report to Greco, p. 22.
prayers for three kinds of souls:

I AM A BOW IN YOUR HANDS, LORD. DRAW ME, LEST I ROT.

DO NOT OVERDRAW ME, LORD. I SHALL BREAK.

OVERDRAW ME, LORD, AND WHO CARES IF I BREAK?\(^2\)

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 16.
CHAPTER VI

"THE SILENCE"

The fifth and final state of the journey of the soul is called by Kazantzakis the silence and by mystics the unitive life. It signifies the arrival of the soul at a higher level of being. In this state the soul of man, loosed of its selfhood, becomes united with God, the divine essence, the ultimate reality. Through the loss of its self-consciousness the soul becomes as a child in its approach to God and allows itself to be influenced solely by Him. In doing this, man is released from the conflict between his lower self and that self striving to live on a higher level. There are then in his complete surrender to God and dying unto himself an ensuing unity and peace. His physical, mental, and emotional powers then are unified in a single pursuit, and all function at peak efficiency.

Kazantzakis' description of this state must of necessity be of a highly metaphorical and paradoxical nature. He describes it as a flame which is the essence of his own soul and that of the universe. This flame is a burning, devouring conflagration. Like the burning bush of Moses, it burns yet does not consume; it is "immaculate, cool, and serene."93 The

93Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 127.
paradox of the raging fire with a core of coolness and tranquility is symbolic of the life of the spiritual man in the state of unity. This man is devoted passionately and with superhuman zeal to the unceasing labors which he performs in the face of all difficulties, and yet through it all he maintains serenity, objectivity, and joy. He is able to perform wonders because he is the man of passion with a cool head. He is successful not because what he does transcends the nature of man but because he conforms completely to man's highest nature.

The final fruit of the fire is light, and the spiritual man reflects this light. Other men are attracted by those who are in the unitive state, as Christ attracted his disciples, Saint Francis established his order, and Captain Michalis gathered his band to fight for freedom. These are the men whom Kazantzakis calls the pillars which hold up the corners of the world.

These men are those who are free because they have given up their selfish, personal desire for freedom; they are saved because they have stopped looking for salvation; they have gained strong, magnetic personalities because they have given up personality; they have found God because they have ended their search for God. This state is termed the silence.

Not because its contents are the ultimate inexpressible despair or the ultimate inexpressible joy and hope. Nor because it is the ultimate knowledge which
does not condescend to speak, or the ultimate ignorance which cannot, but because it is the losing of oneself in the rhythm of the universe, the simplicity of man's unity with his own highest nature. It comes from peaceful unawareness of self, where man is open to stimuli from without and within and acts upon these, avoiding the distortions that other men fall prey to.

From allowing himself to be completely permeated by the Spirit of the Universe, man becomes transformed. This transformation is compared by Kazantzakis to the metamorphosis of the silkworm.

The most ingenious worm on earth, the silkworm, is . . . the true symbol of China: nothing but belly and mouth, it crawls over the mulberry leaves, eats, defecates, and eats again—a lowly, filthy tube with two holes. And suddenly all the fodder becomes silk, the miserable worm is wrapped up in the wealth of its ingenuity and it sprouts, in the course of time, two white fluffy wings. No other culture has so much poetry and sensitivity as the Chinese. Man has never redeemed his spirit from mud so completely as the Chinese. By what method? By the sunset, following the rhythm of things, as an old Chinese wise man has said: or as the silkworm would say, by eating as many mulberry leaves and filling his stomach as full as he can.95

From this transformation comes a joy which expresses itself in childlike gaiety, song, and dance. This joy arises not only in spite of pain and sorrow but even because of them. This seeming inconsistency is explained by the fact that to

94Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 129.
95Kazantzakis, Japan/China, pp. 181-182.
suffer for God is a part of the duty of these men and their performance of this duty is a joy in itself. Kazantzakis explained the laughter of the Japanese, telling jokes aboard ship, in this manner:

The austere and soft-spoken Japanese people, who have developed the sense of responsibility as have no other people on earth, know how to laugh. Exactly because they have so profound a sense of responsibility. So rich is the vein of laughter in the Japanese bosom that so many centuries of Confucian and Buddhist fasting could not exhaust it.... On the horizon, the austere Mother, Japan, appeared, silent, and her children welcomed her, laughing. Everyone was selecting a joke from his memory and telling it, as if he wanted to find something on which to fasten the indomitable joy which burst out of his austere chest. And all together they let the laughs erupt, as if the joke were the reason.  

This joy of the spirit was also expressed in Zorba's dancing and Saint Francis's love of song. It was this spiritual joy resulting from the performance of his duty that caused Saint Francis to request a song of praise as he died.

The man in the unitive state exudes an air of freedom and confidence because he is devoted entirely to the interests of God. He is aware that this is where he gains his strength and authority and has a "peculiar consciousness of his own transcendence, which coexists with, and depends on, a complete humility." He makes "no arrogant claim to identification with God," but at the same time realizes that the authority

96Ibid., pp. 47-48.
97Underhill, Mysticism, p. 433.
98Ibid., p. 420.
he derives from this source supercedes that of society. This assurance of the rightness of his acts when based upon the rhythm of Reality is usually expressed "in some form of heroic effort or creative activity," and is "a source of spiritual vitality for other men."

Therefore, the silence is not a static period in the life of a spiritual man. It is at the same time the most productive and the most restful of all states because it follows the rhythm best suited to man. In it are found all of the previous cycles operating simultaneously. The soul is constantly being reawakened and renewed, perceiving opposing forces and synthesizing them, abandoning cumbersome attitudes that enslave the spirit, apprehending the essence of life, and losing the self in action. As such it is a continual, never-ending, always-ascending process. This then is Kazantzakis' religion: it is not a clearly defined, easily stated theology but instead a growing, living process in which man adapts himself to the ever-changing mask of God and, in so doing, furthers God's Kingdom by fulfilling that duty which only man can perform.

99 Ibid., p. 416.
100 Ibid.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF KAZANTZAKIS' WORK

Kazantzakis' mission was not the proclamation of a new religion, the spiritual search for the salvation of his own soul, the writing of novels as entertainment, nor the development of a philosophy for critical study; it was simply telling others the Truth as he perceived it. His purpose is expressed by Geranos in Toda Raba.

"Like Loyola," said Geranos, concluding, "I, too, have my spiritual exercises. First step: contemplate the whole circle, the waves of human beings undulating up and down. Second step: train every beam of light on the precise point marked by my own epoch. Third step: burn it up."

Rahel grabbed Geranos' arm, and Amita stood still for a moment, feeling as if the whole forest of scaffolding were shaking. But he quickly recovered his balance, and he heard distinctly what Rahel said:

"Comrade from Crete, you bring me a precious gift. I had the flame; you give me the light. I see clearly now. As I was listening to you, I could see the whole circle and on this circle I cut off the little arc of my own epoch and on this arc I located the little red point of my own existence. Now I see, I am happy!"101

In his effort to fulfill this purpose Kazantzakis devoted his time to travel and confession. In the Prologue to Brain he says: "Traveling and confession (creation being the

101 Kazantzakis, Toda Raba, p. 124.
highest form of confession) have been my two greatest joys in life." 102 His travel, as stated earlier, did not limit itself to the sight-seeing of the tourist but extended to a perceptive view of a country's history, language, customs, and religion. His insatiable appetite for exploration included not only countries but ideas, and that very special land—"the country of the soul." He was interested in knowing the soul of a man revealed in creativity and action and the soul of a country revealed through its history and people. Kazantzakis was possessed with a desire to understand those issues that stirred men of the twentieth century—intellectuals, workers, and peasants. He was concerned about the social and political history of these men, for this background put their attitudes and beliefs into perspective. He felt the need to trace back to their sources the ideas that had affected and would affect contemporary man. Assimilating all of this background and making it a part of himself, he became a reflection of the soul of the twentieth century.

Kazantzakis viewed the plight of this age as comparable to the period denoted in his scheme as action, when things had become chaotic and destructive. Kazantzakis would say that what is needed at this time is not the seeking of beauty as an escape, nor weeping and wailing, but action. Man must enter whole-heartedly into the conflicts between East and

West, workers and authority, the downtrodden and the comfortable, and ultimately between spirit and matter. Only in this way can a newer and higher synthesis be made.

The Chinese have a strange malediction: "I curse you; may you be born in an important age." We have been born in an important age full of kaleidoscopic experiments, adventures, and clashes, not only between the virtues and the vices, as formerly, but rather—and this is the most tragic of all—between the virtues themselves. The old, recognized virtues have begun to lose their authority; they are no longer able to fulfill the religious, moral, intellectual, and social demands of the contemporary soul. Man's soul seems to have grown bigger; it cannot fit any longer within the old molds. A pitless civil war has broken out in the vitals of our age, has broken out, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the vitals of every man abreast of his times—a civil war between the old, formerly omnipotent myth which has vented its strength, yet which fights desperately to regulate our lives a while longer, and the new myth which is battling, still awkwardly and without organization, to govern our souls. That is why every living man is racked today by the dramatic fate of his times.103

Kazantzakis recognized that the creative man has an immensely important role at these times. He must feel the rhythm of the present and interpret the insatiable cry of the future.

... In what I wrote, I often took my pretext from ancient times and legends, but the substance was modern and living, racked by contemporary problems and present-day agonies....

I was troubled by concern not so much for present-day man in his state of decomposition as—this above all—for future man in his state of composition and gestation. I reflected that if today's creative artist formulated his deepest inner sentiments with integrity, he would aid man to be born one hour sooner, one drop more integrally.

103 Kazantzakis, Report to Greece, p. 449.
... Today it [writing] is a grave duty. Its purpose is not to entertain the mind with fairy tales and make it forget, but to proclaim a state of mobilization to all the luminous forces still surviving in our age of transition, and to urge men to do their utmost to surpass the beast.104

In the performance of this duty, Kazantzakis formulated and dramatized his Decalogue. In it he tried to shed light on the predicament of twentieth-century man and man's duty in view of this predicament.

He placed a bombshell at the end of Saviors of God.

BLESS ED BE ALL THOSE WHO HEAR AND RUSH TO FREE YOU, LORD, AND WHO SAY: "ONLY YOU AND I EXIST."
BLESS ED BE ALL THOSE WHO FREE YOU AND BECOME UNITED WITH YOU, LORD, AND WHO SAY: "YOU AND I ARE ONE."

AND THIRTE BLESS ED 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!105

Kazantzakis remained true to the Cretan glance, which enabled him to look into the abyss of the future with a sure, steady gaze free from the distortions of fear and hope. He realized, even as he created his Saviors of God, The Odyssey, and all the other works based on this vision, that it was only a vision—an effort to capture the essence of the Eternal in those things which are ephemeral. He strove to create a myth for the twentieth century, another mask for God. It, like all myths, was not created as a dogma, but as an embodiment of Reality, an instrument for conveying the "Truth higher

104Ibid., p. 450.
105Kazantzakis, Saviors of God, p. 131.
than truth." He looked forward to the day when youth would outgrow this myth, smash it, and create a higher and less limited mask for God. Kimon Friar records a memorable utterance of this cherished dream of Kazantzakis in words that provide a fitting conclusion to this study of his religious thought:

When, because of the great harmony-in-difference between us, Kazantzakis once hesitantly told me that he looked toward me to complete some of his tasks after he had gone, I said to him, "But, Nikos, you must understand that to fulfill this I may perhaps have to do the opposite of what you intend, and even give you the Judas kiss of betrayal." His eyes lit up, he tossed his head in proud excitement, and he exclaimed: "Bravo! Bravo! You understand me fully! Such is the only worthy disciple. Destroy! Destroy! To destroy in this manner is only to rebuild."106

106 Kimon Friar, in Preface to Nikos Kazantzakis and His Odyssey, by Pandelis Prevelakis, p. 3.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Zorba the Greek, translated by Carl Wildman, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1953.


Articles


Painter, George D., "New Novels," New Statesman and Nation, XLIV (September 6, 1952), 271.


West, Anthony, "Happy and Happy-Go-Lucky," New Yorker, XXIX (April 25, 1953), 126-129.

Newspapers
