

experiences and so people will either be hesitant to make revelations or will make biased ones. Thus, it would appear that the only way out of the Civil War predicament is for the controversial issues to be settled in the minds of the people. The volume under consideration will go far in helping people to do so. It addresses all of the controversial issues of the civil war, and on the basis of the available sources, it reaches the best common sense conclusions that can be reached. And, despite its failure to always abide by conventional editorial forms, it should definitely be among the basic book collections on the Greek Civil War.

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Peter Bien, *Kazantzakis. Politics of the Spirit*, Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 309.

Peter Bien's *Kazantzakis. Politics of the Spirit* is certainly a major and definitive study of Nikos Kazantzakis in English by a literary scholar whose involvement in the life and art of modern Greece's most widely known and controversial author has been extensive as his translator and critic.

Bien argues that Kazantzakis was involved in politics because of a basic concern that "reached beyond politics". Like Dante, one of his many mentors, Kazantzakis was concerned with that which made man eternal, and his political engagement was the means by which "he actualized his own non-political potential".

To many he "appeared" to be essentially political, and yet because of a personality that saw the complexity in any political position, he often earned the support and the hatred of a variety of contradictory elements. The Greek communists saw him as a decadent mystic, the Greek Orthodox Church tried to persecute him as an atheist and a communist, the monarchists viewed him as a Bolshevik rabble-rouser, and the Chinese communists called him "an apostle of peace" even though he often advocated violence as the way that mankind moved forward in its evolutionary development.

And Kazantzakis did not remain silent when attacked. He courageously expressed his views, at one time suggesting to the consternation of the left and the right that fascism and communism might be "involuntarily and unknowingly faithful collaborators" that would delay the forthcoming conflict between capitalism and the left. He was also harsh on the concept of a liberal democracy, particularly as he saw it at work in Greece with its inability to rise above mediocrity and factionalism. As he once said: "There is not a regime that can tolerate me—and very rightly so, since there is no regime that I can tolerate".

Bien feels that Kazantzakis' seemingly chronological allegiances to "nationalism, communism, socialism, metacommunism, aestheticism, Buddhism" were temporary manifestations of an essential core in Kazantzakis, an obsession with a freedom whose basic nature was often expressed in his favorite concept: the transubstantiation of the flesh into spirit.

This freedom was actualized by his heroes—Odysseas, Manolios, Capetan Mihalios, Christ—who chose death as an antidote to despair and bourgeois inertia, and whose lives were marked by a "passion that was a good in itself and not just a duty". Kazantzakis' advocacy of a passionate virility led him during his nationalistic phase to an admiration for others—Napoleon, Mussolini, Kipling, Cellini—but his view was eventually tempered by a

respect and love for those (and perhaps Alexis Zorbas is his most widely known prototype) who express a "deep hardihood" and a "purposeless heroism".

What in fact attracted Kazantzakis to the Soviet Union during its revolution was not its political theory which he considered naive but its "inexplicable passion", a miracle of the ascending spirit. "What moves me in Russia is not the reality they have reached, but the reality they desire and *do not know* that they cannot reach". But what dismayed him was his prophetic view that the communist experiment would atrophy because it really was not anything new but merely a final attribute of capitalism's materialism. The Soviet Union, like America, would make productivity its major goal. It would become conservative and reactionary. When one thinks of the enormous cost of the Cold War to fight an economic view that had the seeds of its own demise sixty years ago, Kazantzakis' analysis is a Cassandra-like pronouncement that again went unheeded.

In his study Bien takes time to give the reader the major figures that play upon Kazantzakis' thinking: William James' antirationalism and denial of the intellect's power to solve ultimate questions ("the most important truths are those that are felt and lived before being thought"); Nietzsche's advocacy of the destruction of old dogmas in a transitional age, and Bergson, who convinced him that the fundamental law in the universe was not the will to power, but the annihilation of materiality, a concept that sees the "physical world as a creative action that unmakes itself".

Bien then devotes a major section in his study to Kazantzakis' *Odyssey* in which his hero moves from the carnal to the aesthetic (his devotion to feeling) to the ethical (his concern with commitment to a code) and to the religious (his relationship to the Absolute), something outside of time that provides a happiness that the momentary world cannot give him, a kind of circular quest in which Odysseas discovers that god (sic) is "not encountered at the end of life's journey, but ... indeed *is* the journey". Bien takes issue with those critics who feel the *Odyssey* is nihilistic and argues that Kazantzakis' Buddhism is subsumed by Bergson's dynamic and positive *élan vital*. One might argue that Buddha's concept of nothingness (the absence of self or ego in any object) is also not a denial of meaning, and one thinks of Meister Eckhart's concept of the universe as a blessing where in a kind of Zen awareness the person who lets go of all things is indeed the most in touch with things as they are. Kazantzakis' *Odysseas* reaches this kind of epiphany.

A massive work of scholarship, Bien's study will also be a kind of blessing for a very misunderstood writer who believed that the person who creates is truly free, particularly the one devoted to the search for the cry of a spiritualized future. Kazantzakis may not have been a great artist, but he made an enormous impact on many lives, and, as the Greeks say, led them *sto kalo* (to the good). We are looking forward to a second volume in which Bien will focus his analysis on Kazantzakis' novels.

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