

## THOUGH THE FLESH IS WILLING, THE SPIRIT IS STRONG

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS 2250

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

Phone 508.775.8008 10 Sept 88

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The flap over this film is, like all things else in life for one who's biblically minded, an occasion for the revelation-in-life of God's glory (as, eg, Jn.93 & 1Cor.103): Whatever the last temptation of our Lord, we are tempted to be satisfied with being judges of this film, merely saying our yes or no: we are called to be witnesses.

1. Jesus the realist knew, directly and empathetically, that the flesh is strong. **Directly:** Hebrews 4:15: "tempted in every way we are." **Empathetically:** same verse: "not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses"; & Mt.26:41: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

2. Placard-carrying protestors of the film object that it (and Kazantzakis' 1955 novel of this title) shows Jesus' flesh as strong (as was his disciples' flesh when they lost the battle against nodding off: Mt.26:41, obviously their flesh being stronger than their spirit, as Jesus commented).

3. If the disciples had won their battle to stay awake, Jesus could have praised them with the words of this Thinksheet's title. During the last  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour of this  $2\frac{3}{4}$  - hour film, Jesus' flesh is willing (vis-a-vis sexual temptation), but his spirit is strong(er): that was Kaz.'s point, as he made clear in his preface; & this victory of Jesus' spirit is clear also in the film, which however makes the temptation so gut-grabbing that it's easier to remember the fantasized sex than the spiritual victory; which is my major criticism of both the novel & the film).

4. Cape-Cod-summer-resident Annie Dillard, our greatest living prose-poet of nature, got this message from the film: Jesus' last temptation was (not sex but) to abandon his divinity (the reverse, I may add, of Satan's three temptations, which were to flaunt & exploit his divinity). Gnostics of all times, including the present placard-carriers, have more or less yielded to the temptation to abandon our Lord's humanity. The placard-carriers are enraged that Kaz.-through-the-film rubs their noses in Jesus' humanity. For me, this is the point of greatest theological interest in what I may call the 1988 "Temptation" event.

5. In all Kaz.'s oeuvre the reader can feel what I may call two transforming energies wrestling for dominance not just in the human soul & human society but in the entire universe. The dark energy is trying to transform spirit into flesh: the bright energy, flesh into spirit. (I have dark/bright not from Kaz. but from Bonhoeffer.) See how he begins THE ODYSSEY: A SEQUEL (S&S/58/65): "O Sun, great Oriental, my proud mind's golden cap, / I love to wear you cocked askew, to play and burst / in song throughout our lives, and so rejoice our hearts. / Good is this earth, it suits us! Like the global grape / it hangs, dear God, in the blue air and sways in the gale, / nibbled by all the birds and spirits of the four winds. / Come, let's start nibbling too and so refresh our minds! / ... / O Sun, my quick coquetting eye, my red-haired hound, / sniff out all quarries that I love, give them swift chase, / tell me all that you've seen on earth, all that you've heard, / and I shall pass them through my entrails' secret forge / till slowly, with profound caresses, play and laughter, / stones, water, fire, and earth shall be transformed into spirit." For Kaz. the Christian believer (Greek Orthodox, though the Orthodox thought him unorthodox, esp. when he was Greece's Minister of Education), Jesus, in transforming his flesh into spirit, is the megamodel, the hero (pace Jos. Campbell) with a single face; but for Kaz. the poet, Odysseus is the Dionysiac antihero witnessing "Good is this earth" (Prologue, 4) in a culture he felt to be sadly split between biophilism from below and necrophilism from above. That split is in our culture, too, and is the central dynamic in the current film-flap.

6. After  $\frac{1}{4}$  century writing the 33,333 lines (in modern Greek, neologizing more than 5,500 times!) of THE ODYSSEY: A SEQUEL, Kaz. spent a few months doing a pop version, ZORBA THE GREEK (film version, ZORBA!)....A clue to Kaz.: "cocked askew" (Prologue, 2) and "kick up my heels" (Prologue, 39).