

**NARRATIVE DECOLONIZATION AND THE RE-IMAGINATION OF  
CHRIST: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF *THE LAST TEMPTATION***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the  
requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and  
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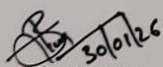
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I hereby declare that this project titled “Narrative Decolonization and the Re-imagination of Christ: A Postcolonial Reading of *The Last Temptation*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms Parvathy G., Associate Professor (On Contract), Department of English.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Narrative Decolonization and the Re-imagination of Christ: A Postcolonial Reading of *The Last Temptation*” by Anna Santhosh is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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**Abstract**

**Narrative Decolonization and The Re-imagination of Christ: A Postcolonial  
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This dissertation examines *The Last Temptation* by Nikos Kazantzakis through a postcolonial lens, basing it on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, and Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* This study reveals Christ as a postcolonial figure, very much in touch with the social realities of his time and highlights his hybrid identity, caught in between the humane and the divine. This analysis seeks to bring a new perspective to Kazantzakis's work and also to demonstrate the relevance of postcolonial theory in re-reading religious narratives, and tries to understand literature as a site of

ideological resistance and transformation.

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## Introduction

“Civilization is a term applied to any society which has developed a writing system, government, production of surplus food, division of labor, and urbanization. The term is difficult to define because not all ‘civilizations’ include every one of the above facets. The term is often used, therefore, to suggest a highly developed culture” (Mark)

Civilization began when human beings learned to manipulate certain plants and animals for their own ends and settled down after years of hunting and foraging. With increased agricultural production and trade came surplus food and economic stability. Subsequently, people began to engage in a variety of professions and interests. They went on to create cities, writing systems, rules and religions. Religions emerged when people couldn’t understand the natural world around them; when they couldn’t explain the confusing events of natural disasters, seasons and death. Shared belief in these religions fostered moral values and helped build trust, and helped unite the communities.

For centuries, religion has acted as one of the most important forces to form civilizations, group identities, and meaning systems. Throughout cultures, religious practices, politics, culture and social life are often shaped by religious texts and theological stories. Literature that deals with religion becomes a space of theological imagining and a space of negotiation where morality, authority,

representation, and power converge. Spanning from ancient epics to modern novels, literature houses many texts discussing or influenced by religion. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2100 BCE) is one of the earliest works of fiction that depicts the unpredictable nature of Gods and humanity's quest for immortality. The Greek epics *The Iliad* (800–700 BCE) and *The Odyssey* (750–650 BCE) reflect the religious beliefs, rituals and the active role of Gods in human affairs. Dante Alighieri, in his famous work *The Divine Comedy* (1308 and 1321) allegorize the soul's journey through hell towards God. Milton is famous for his *Paradise Lost* (1667), which reimagines the fall of man, influencing perceptions of Satan, sin and free will. *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan (1678), *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis (1950-1956), *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse (1922) are all works that allegorizes popular religious ideas. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958) is a postcolonial text that examines (though not exclusively) the clash between traditional religious beliefs and Christianity. *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie (1988) leads a controversial inquiry into the legacies of religious imagination. *The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant (1997) reimagines biblical narratives from a female perspective.

Different versions of the Bible exist, with each of them portraying a slightly different version of Jesus. In the canonical Christian Bibles (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox), the New Testament presents Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, with the four Gospels emphasizing different aspects of him: Matthew presents him as the Messiah of the Jews, Mark as the suffering Son of Man, Luke as a figure of compassion and concern for the poor and

marginalized, and John as the eternal word of God. Other non-canonical texts, such as the apocryphal or Gnostic writings, portray Jesus more as a spiritual teacher who imparts secret wisdom without emphasizing either his crucifixion or divinity. In the Jewish tradition, he does not figure at all as the Hebrew Bible is concerned with law, covenant, and prophecy. These reflect how different communities viewed Jesus and shaped their religious life in accordance with those views. Jesus also appears in literature under varied contexts, with authors either faithfully retelling the Gospel narratives or reinterpreting them rather controversially. *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* by Lew Wallace (1880) is considered the most influential Christian novel of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It follows a Jewish prince whose life intersects with Jesus at key moments, including the Sermon on the Mount and the Crucifixion. *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* by Anne Rice (2005) is a reverent, first-person narrative portraying Jesus as a seven-year-old child coming to terms with his divine nature. *The Book of Longings* by Sue Monk Kidd (2020) reimagines Jesus as a man with a wife named Ana, focusing on his humanity and “lost years”. *The Greatest Story Ever Told* by Fulton Oursler (1949) retells the four Gospels in a novelistic, accessible, and respectful manner. *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* by José Saramago (1991) offers a satirical, critical take on the life of Jesus, questioning the actions of God the Father and the institutional church. *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* by Philip Pullman (2010) is a modern retelling that separates Jesus into two distinct entities: the “good man” (the preacher) and “Christ” (the institutional, political church created by his brother). *The Testament of Mary* by

Colm Tóibín (2012) delivers a monologue from the perspective of Mary, portraying her son as a young man surrounded by radicalized followers.

In this context, Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation* (1955) is a highly relevant novel. On the surface, it reimagines the biblical story of Jesus Christ, delving deeper, one understands that the work explores the dynamics between human and divine, flesh and spirit, obligation and passion. These make it a principal work that goes beyond theology, asking questions which speak to cultural, political, and philosophical issues.

Nikos Kazantzakis, a Greek writer, journalist, politician, poet and philosopher, was widely considered a giant of modern Greek literature. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in nine different years and remains the most translated Greek author worldwide. He was born in the town of Kandiye (now Heraklion) in Crete, with origins from the village of Myrtia. Crete had not yet joined the modern Greek state and was still under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

“Sixty years after his death, Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957) remains the most popular and the most internationally renowned writer to come out of Greece during the last twenty centuries. His novels are the only works of modern Greek prose included in Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* and *Zorba the Greek* continues to sell thousands of copies every year. With the poet C.P. Cavafy, he has ‘branded’ a whole country and its cultural perception, defining an expectation about things Greek through his personal aesthetics and constructing

images that are considered ‘quintessentially’ Greek” (Karalis)

While Kazantzakis was deeply spiritual, he often discussed his struggle with religious faith, specifically his Greek Orthodoxy. He writes in his prologue to *The Last Temptation*,

“The dual substance of Christ--- the yearning, so human, so superhuman, of man to attain God, or more exactly to return to God and identify himself with him--- has always been a deep inscrutable mystery to me. This nostalgia for God, at once so mysterious and so real, has opened in me large wounds and also large flowing springs” (9).

Most critics and scholars of Kazantzakis agree that the struggle to find truth in religion and spirituality was central to many of his works, and that some novels, like *The Last Temptation* and *Christ Recrucified*, focus completely on questioning Christian morals and values.

Kazantzakis portrays a Jesus who is not only an otherworldly figure but also an intensely humane character, who struggles with temptation, doubt and desire. This reinterpretation invited harsh criticism, charges of blasphemy from the Church, and fueled many controversies when adapted into a film by Martin Scorsese in 1988. But it is through these tensions (between piety and resistance, belief and doubt, authority and insubordination) that this novel reveals its depth. The controversies it provoked speak to the extent to which narratives of religion are interwoven in society and culture, and how reinterpretation of a sacred subject threatens not just theological orthodoxy but also the authority of these

societies and cultures.

While *The Last Temptation* can most often be analyzed through theological, existential, or psychoanalytic lenses, it can also be subjected to a postcolonial interpretation. Greece, Kazantzakis' homeland, has always been geographically placed at the crossroads of empires (Ottoman, Byzantine, and Western European) and has also for so long faced tensions between East and West. This allows the novel to be read as one of cultural hybridity, where local custom meets Western Christianity, and where domination, marginalization, and the question of identity become the main concerns. Jesus' conflicts in the novel (his fractured identity between divine power and human weakness) reflect society's conflicts between imperial mastery and cultural definition.

Applying postcolonial theories to Kazantzakis' novel, therefore, reveals new paths of interpretation. Edward Said's *Orientalism* illustrates how the West characterizes the East as a crooked other, representing themselves as civilized and authoritative and the East as primitive and submissive. Reading *The Last Temptation* through this lens raises questions regarding how Christianity itself has been mediated by colonial discourses, and how the figure of Christ can become symbolic of both imperial power and the potential for resistance. Likewise, Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Brings to the front the silencing of marginalized voices, and in the novel, one would be able to question if Christ, Mary Magdalene, or any other characters are portrayed as representatives of repressed identities whose voices are mediated through mainstream discourse. Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity also offers a way of

understanding how Kazantzakis's reinterpretation of Christian legend creates a hybrid text; not entirely Western or Eastern, orthodox or heretical, but in between, disturbing already established categories of identity.

The Interest in studying *The Last Temptation* through these perspectives is that it will show how religious reinterpretations are never culturally neutral. They are highly indebted to the politics of representation, identity, and power. The journey of Christ, throughout the novel (from a mere carpenter battling with temptation to the messianic figure sacrificing himself for the whole world) can be seen as an allegory for cultural negotiation in the context of domination and resistance. His personal struggles reflect the challenges faced by the colonized, who must balance the authority imposed on them while yearning for self-expression and freedom.

Moreover, the novel invites reflection on how marginalized identities are portrayed. Women in the book, especially Mary Magdalene, are often positioned within patriarchal frameworks of sin and redemption. Looking at this through Spivak's lens reveals how women's voices are silenced or filtered, highlighting wider patterns of gender based marginalization. Similarly, Bhabha's theory of mimicry and hybridity helps us understand Jesus as someone who embodies both divine and human aspects, challenging strict categories and subverting established hierarchies of meaning. The novel thus becomes a space where colonial tensions, hybrid identities, and subaltern silences mix with theological issues.

The controversies over the novel also show how relevant it is in a postcolonial

context. The charges of blasphemy and censorship demonstrate how cultural powers try to control stories of religion, in the same way that colonial powers controlled stories of history and identity. The global debates surrounding Kazantzakis's book reflect the struggles over meaning that arise when minority voices try to redefine mainstream narratives. In that light, the novel is not only a literary exploration of Christ's humanness but also a political book that uncovers how stories are policed, challenged, and rewritten.

The current dissertation, "Narrative Decolonization and the Re-imagination of Christ: A Postcolonial Reading of *The Last Temptation*," attempts to examine these dynamics in depth. By placing Kazantzakis' novel within postcolonial theory, the research intends to illustrate how the themes of faith, temptation, and redemption are interconnected with issues of cultural negotiation, power, and identity. It argues that Kazantzakis's portrayal of Christ not only challenges traditional religious concepts but also tackles issues of representation that are at the heart of postcolonial theory.

Chapter 1, "Orientalism, Silence of the Subaltern, Hybridity: A Framework," lays out the key ideas of Orientalism, subalternity, and hybridity based on the teachings of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. This chapter provides a foundation for understanding Kazantzakis's book outside of theological contexts and placing it within the politics of representation. Chapter 2, "Postcolonial Reading of *The Last Temptation*", puts these theories into practice with the novel, examining how Christ's internal conflict reflects contradictions of colonial power, othered voices, and hybrid identity. This

examination shows how religious retellings become areas of conflict where power and resistance exist side by side.

Finally, the dissertation aims to add to our understanding of how *The Last Temptation* works as a religious and cultural text. By examining the novel from a postcolonial perspective, the research highlights the significance of understanding how religious stories connect with the politics of representation, how voice and silence are created, and how hybrid identities challenge rigid divisions. Kazantzakis' writing is not just a religious reinterpretation; it is a deep exploration of cultural conflict, exclusion, and the possibility of change through storytelling.

## Chapter 1

### Orientalism, Silence of the Subaltern, Hybridity: A Postcolonial Framework

Postcolonial theory is perhaps the most important critical approach in contemporary literary studies. It examines how histories of colonial rule, cultural contact, and identity politics have been represented in literature, art, and thought. Postcolonialism, at its core, questions how power, knowledge, and discourse shape the ways in which the narratives of peoples, religions, and cultures are told. Religion, a major force in society, plays a crucial role in colonial interactions. It has been employed to justify domination, but it also became a space of resistance and cultural negotiation. Even though Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation* (1955) is a retelling of the New Testament life of Jesus, it can be placed in postcolonial discourse because it explores cultural identity, opposes established beliefs, and the complex relationship between the divine and the human.

Three core theories help in shedding light on this connection: Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's writing on the subaltern, and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity and mimicry. All three offer a way for reading Kazantzakis's novel not just as a theological work but also as a place where issues of power, identity, and resistance are dramatically presented. "Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not

like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort” (Said xvi). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) revealed how Western discourse had portrayed the East as passive, inferior, and exotic in relation to Western rationality and progress. This was a calculated political process by the scholars. Through this, the West managed to legitimize control over the East by describing the Orient as irrational, dependent, and needing Western control.

Edward Said was born in Jerusalem in 1935, and his own personal history is closely intertwined with the historical struggles of the Middle East. “His dual Palestinian-American identity has enriched the art of literary criticism by blending it with political philosophy, refining the general "cultural representation" vision” (“Edward Said: Unveiling the Mind Behind ‘Orientalism’”).

*Orientalism* has since become the standard for examining the ways that literature and cultural texts engage with these politics of representation. Edward Said’s teachings will help us to understand how Christianity, as a Western cultural institution, influenced Eastern cultural spaces. Especially with regards to *The Last Temptation*. The historical Jesus of Nazareth lived in Judea, which was colonized by Roman rule. This context is often overlooked in Western theology.

Kazantzakis brings back this narrative to the front by portraying Jesus not as a fixed divine figure but as a troubled human between human weakness and divine purpose. This reflects the internal struggle of a colonized person between

imposed power and the desire to resist. The novel shows how religious language functions similarly to Orientalist language. Holy scripture becomes a tool for control, deciding what is “orthodox” and what is “heretic.”

Kazantzakis’s rejection of traditional religious concepts and the global backlash it received highlight how closely religious representations are monitored. It is somewhat similar to how guarded the colonial narratives are against deviation. Reading the novel through Said’s lens, therefore, reveals how the representations of Christ are not neutral, but caught up in larger power dynamics of cultural control and authority.

Gayatri Spivak’s seminal article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) critiques how Western intellectual traditions claim to voice the marginalized but often silence them more by speaking for them. Especially the voices of women. She says: ‘Imperialism’s image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind’(94). According to Spivak, the “subaltern” are those oppressed groups whose voices cannot be fully represented in dominant structures, since those very systems of representation distort, filter, or erase their experiences.

This observation is to be particularly noted in *The Last Temptation*. In the biblical heritage, some voices, especially those of women, are often pushed to the background. Mary Magdalene, for example, is usually seen only as the penitent prostitute, her social and spiritual complexity silenced by male-centred interpretations.

Kazantzakis’s portrayal of Magdalene tackles this issue. She is essential in

bringing out Jesus's humanity and represents love, temptation, and loss. But she is still plagued by the male theological views. Following Spivak's idea, one is made to ask, can Magdalene "speak" in the novel, or is her voice constantly absorbed into the patriarchal and religious structures that define her?

Similarly, Jesus himself can be seen as a figure of subalternity. The novel portrays him as deeply human, who experiences pain, uncertainty, and exclusion. He exists under Roman rule and faces rejection from his own society. His struggle to understand his divine purpose while dealing with human weaknesses highlights the subaltern's dilemma of trying to communicate and act meaningfully within systems that silence or distort them. Spivak's analysis reveals how *The Last Temptation* uses the silence, mediation, and partial visibility of marginalized voices in both gendered and colonial settings.

"The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end, we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture . . . And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha 38-39)

Postcolonial theory by Homi Bhabha focuses on cultural in-betweenness, the instability of identity, and the mixed feelings around colonial encounters.

Two of his core concepts, hybridity and mimicry, are significant in interpreting Kazantzakis' novel.

Hybridity, as defined by Bhabha, is the creation of new forms of culture that emerge when colonizer and colonized cultures come into contact. Hybrid forms challenge fixed ideas of identity and authority. They open up spaces for negotiation and resistance.

“Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of enunciation’ (1994:37). Cultural identity always emerges in this contradictory and ambivalent space, which for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures untenable. For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favor of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate” (“Homi Bhabha's Concept of Hybridity”).

The very portrayal of Christ in *The Last Temptation* is hybrid. He is characterized as neither divine nor human, but always in-between. His is a hybrid identity, caught in the tension between two conflicting realities. This hybridity disturbs traditional Christian beliefs, which try to limit Christ's nature to a box of fixed categories. Rather, Kazantzakis's Christ is a representation of the colonized subject—trapped between imposed identities, but capable of challenging power through this very in-betweenness.

Mimicry, one of Bhabha's ideas, refers to how the colonized subject

adopts elements of the colonizer's culture or discourse, but never in a perfect way. This "almost the same, but not quite" quality creates a space of mixed feelings that both reinforces and challenges power. In the novel, Jesus's identity as "Son of God" can be understood as a kind of mimicry: he takes on the role of divine power, but his humanness warps and destabilizes this power. His fears, temptations, and doubts make him "not quite" the transcendent divine being that orthodoxy demands. This incomplete imitation undermines theological power, just as mimicry undermines colonial power.

Together, Said, Spivak, and Bhabha offer a thick framework for reading *The Last Temptation* in postcolonial terms. Said reminds us that religious discourse is often woven closely together with Orientalist discourse, creating unhealthy power structures and silencing other potential interpretations. Spivak encourages one to reflect deeply on the silenced voices of women and marginalized characters. Bhabha illuminates how Christ's hybrid identity topples fixed binaries, while mimicry reveals the complexity of divine authority seen through human weakness.

By putting Kazantzakis's novel under these lenses, this dissertation contends that *The Last Temptation* must be read as something other than a mere religious novel. Instead, it is a cultural work that deals with identity, power and resistance. Its conflicts, between silence and voice, divinity and mortality, orthodoxy and heresy, reflect the broader struggles of colonized and marginalized people to assert themselves against dominant narratives.

## Chapter 2

### Postcolonial Re-reading of *The Last Temptation*

Through his book *The Last Temptation*, author Nikos Kazantzakis seeks to reconstruct the concept of Christ from the viewpoint of not being an all-knowing and divine deity, but rather as a complex and tormented man shaped by the various political, historical, and cultural forces surrounding him. *The Last Temptation* occupies a space that is simultaneously postcolonial and contradictory; while it both challenges the Western church's homogenized representation of Christ, it still grants authority to non-Western characters by depicting them through an interpretative lens instead of allowing them the ability to create their own narrative. Consequently, the text can be viewed as occupying an in-between space or a hybrid.

For Edward Said, Orientalism has three distinct yet interconnected meanings: it is an academic discipline, a style of thought and most importantly, a discourse. His book *Orientalism* challenges this Western discourse that portrays the “East” as exotic, primitive, brutal, and spiritually excessive, and significantly, less moral and less rational than the West. Said claims that this “Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections” (Said 8). Although Kazantzakis cannot be classified strictly speaking as a

colonial author, his account of the Palestine of the Bible overlaps

with and subverts the orientalist theme. *The Last Temptation* is set in a Palestine where there is terror, superstition, and suffering all the time.

"Mountains sank away, men vanished, the dream was wrenched into a new locale, and the sleeper saw the Land of Canaan unfold above him on the low cane lathed ceiling of his house—the Land of Canaan, like embroidered air, many-colored, richly ornamented, and trembling. To the south, the quivering desert of Idumea shifted like the back of a leopard. Further on, the Dead Sea, thick and poisonous, drowned and drank the light. Beyond this stood Inhuman Jerusalem, moated on every side by the commandments of Jehovah. Blood from God's victims, from lambs and prophets, ran down its cobbled streets. Next came Samaria, dirty, trodden by idolaters, with a well in the center and a rouged and powdered Woman drawing water; and finally, at the extreme north: Galilee—sunny, modest, verdant. And flowing from one end of the dream to the other was the river Jordan, God's royal artery, which passes by sandy wastes and rich orchards, John the Baptist and Samaritan heretics, prostitutes and the fishermen of Gennesaret, watering them all—indifferently" (Kazantzakis 3). Here, the land is portrayed not merely as a setting but as a moral and emotional force. "The people were crying for God. The air above their heads caught fire, flames bounded forth and joined heaven to earth. Their minds reeled: this world of stones, grass, and flesh thinned out, became transparent, and the next world appeared behind it, composed of flames and angels" (Kazantzakis 34). These characteristics conform well to what the West finds 'Oriental' in character—a

region of irrational beliefs and turmoil. However, the orientalist perspective is further complicated by the fact that Christ himself is placed within this environment, rather than looking down upon it from a divine perspective. Christ is not shown as the bringer of civilization in this primitive environment, but rather as someone who is produced by the violence, poverty, and Roman oppression that exists there. "I'm illiterate, an idler, afraid of everything. I love good food, wine, laughter. I want to marry, to have children" (Kazantzakis 26). This defies the traditional Western Christian image of Christ, who is not bound by the physical world.

The Binaries present throughout illuminate us further on the postcolonial aspects of the novel. The dichotomies between the divine and the humane, spiritual freedom and political freedom, between the self-sacrificial Jesus and the rebellious Judas all go on to highlight this. Jesus, as the son of God, is constantly caught between the struggles of his soul and his flesh. He is tempted by worldly aspects and is only barely able to hang on to the divine parts in him. The Israelites, on the other hand is thirsting for the political freedom that's been promised to them years ago, "Today! Not tomorrow, today!" (Kazantzakis 34) is their war cry. They are tired of waiting for the Messiah that their prophets promised them, yet they hold on with unwavering tenacity to that last bit of hope, looking for their savior in every zealot that comes their way. In the novel, Jesus finds his stark contrast in Judas, who is tasked with the job of murdering Jesus. Judas believes Jesus to be a weak and complacent Messiah who isn't rising up to the violent and strong warrior they and the zealous Jews were

waiting for. Jesus's focus on love as the path to freedom frustrates Judas to no ends and he forces Jesus to choose the path of armed rebellion or face death at Judas's hands. Even though the people are deaf to the calls of love, "Pie in the sky when we die!" (Kazantzakis 210), they retaliate. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," he shouted. "Righteousness isn't enough," interrupted one of the famished. "Righteousness isn't enough. We want bread!" (Kazantzakis 211). This marks the distinction between Jesus's idea of salvation and the Israelites' idea of it. Despite all this, however, the novel by no means completely resists orientalist coding. This is because the Jewish populace, zealots, and the women consistently appear to be motivated by their passions rather than any kind of politics, again and again falling into the orientalist pattern of the East being a volatile and rash place. The power of Rome also appears well-organised and logical, again highlighting the opposition between the volatile and disorganized East and the orderly West that Said urges criticism of. Hence, the novel appears to both contradict and confirm orientalist discourse.

The important question raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, assumes significance in understanding whose voice gets prominence and whose gets pushed to the background in the narrative of Kazantzakis's story. Though it revolves around Christ's crisis, it sidelines women, the poor, and the colonized with symbolic representation instead of giving them a voice.

Mary Magdalene, for example, is constructed not for reasons of her own

but for the reasons of Christ's desire, guilt, and redemption. She is often represented through Christ's internal conflict. Even though she occupies an important position in the text, her voice is transmitted to the reader as Christ's voice alone. She doesn't speak as an autonomous voice telling Christ of her oppression and desires, but emerges as what Spivak would call 'the native informant' whose existence is important for the self-discovery of the other voice, the voice of Christ. Still, it won't be entirely true to claim that she is without agency.

“With her bodice still undone, she advanced fearlessly towards the crowd. The makeup on her lips and cheeks had been washed away . . . When she saw her mortified father look the other way she smiled bitterly. She had already left shame far behind her, as well as fear of God, love of her father and care about the opinions of men. Scandal had it that she was possessed with seven devils, but her heart did not contain seven devils, it contained seven knives.” (Kazantzakis 38).

She stands strong and defiant in front of the society that humiliates and condemns her. She is honest with herself and her faith. Here again the complexities of Kazantzakis's character building come into play, Magdalene simultaneously is a oppressed figure more often than not cowing before the power structures but still manages to rise above them and rebel against the social conditions that persecutes her.

Similarly, the Jewish populace experiencing subjugation by the Romans is silent. Their pain is acknowledged, yet it is Christ who gives meaning to that

pain. The poor are represented collectively:

“He (Christ) turned to the people, his arms spread wide. “Brothers”, he said, “let us go!” All at once, as though they too have been awaiting this call for years and had heard their true name for the first time, the people rejoiced and bellowed: “Let us go! In God’s name!”. The son of Mary took the lead; the rest moved off in one body.” (Kazantzakis 203).

Although their suffering is foregrounded, their voices are absorbed into Christ’s interpretive authority. This aligns with Spivak’s warning that representation often replaces speech.

The subaltern is acknowledged in *The Last Temptation*, yet is hardly audible. As such, Christ himself finds himself in a contradictory role within the paradigm. Although he is a marginal figure within the Roman imperialist structures of power, he is not a subaltern figure in the Spivakian sense in that he is still a centered figure in the narrative. Christ, despite being oppressed under Roman imperial rule, retains narrative dominance: “We are listening, son of Mary,” shouted the people, “We are listening!” (Kazantzakis 207). His voice is the most dominant one in the text, with marginalized identities taking a back seat, which has severe effects with regard to the epistemic violence Spivak cautions against.

Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity provides a very useful perspective through which one can understand the significance of Christ as a blurring agent of identities in Kazantzakis’ *The Last Temptation*. His concept of hybridity

destabilizes fixed identity categories: "Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities" (Bhabha 112). Christ in *The Last Temptation* is a persona who occupies a space that is in between; one that is in between divine and humane, obedience and rebellion, spirituality and fleshly desire. "It is in the emergence of the interstices— the overlap and displacement of domains of difference— that the intersubjective and collective experience of nationness, community interest or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 2).

Christ's hybridity disrupts the idea of the purified, immaculate, and untainted sacred identity. His greatest struggle isn't against outside demons, but within himself. This internal conflict shows that even the sacred can be unstable and "mixed." By showing Christ torn between two worlds, the novel moves away from the rigid, absolute morality of traditional stories. Nonetheless, the application of hybridity within the novel is not consistent. While the novel explores Christ's inner conflict in great detail, it doesn't give that same depth to anyone else. Women and marginalized characters remain stuck in flat, predictable roles. Ultimately, the story's complexity is lopsided: it reimagines the identity of the savior but leaves everyone else in the background. The novel is a prime example of how postcolonial theory can interpret religious texts, especially in relation to the way it critiques the dominant Western theological traditions, orientalist stereotypes, subaltern silencing, and the quest for the homogenization of the hybrid subject. The narrative presents a situation where the subaltern can become a voicing body, and it makes an attempt to deconstruct colonial representations. It also reflects the postcolonial cultural production

context. By examining the novel in relation to the writings of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, this chapter illustrates how *The Last Temptation* serves as a site of intersection for the conflicting ideas of belief and disbelief, power and marginality, dominance and resistance. It reveals both the limitations and the possibilities of postcolonial interpretations of religious narratives.

## Conclusion

This project aims to look at *The Last Temptation* as a text that resists fixed theological, historical, and ideological interpretations. It presents Christ as a figure shaped by conflict, doubt, and becoming. By closely reading the novel through postcolonial theory, the study argues that Nikos Kazantzakis reimagines Christ not as a static divine ideal but as a deeply human subject navigating power, authority, and identity in a colonized and hierarchical world. By connecting the novel to the ideas of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, this project shows how Kazantzakis's narrative challenges dominant religious and imperial ideas and opens a space for marginalized voices, experiences, and spiritual possibilities.

One central finding of this study is that Kazantzakis's Christ occupies a complex position. He exists between divinity and humanity, obedience and rebellion, submission and resistance. This in-between state aligns with Bhabha's ideas of liminality and hybridity, where identity is not fixed but always negotiated. Christ's inner struggle, between God's call and the pull of ordinary life, reflects the condition of colonized people caught between imposed authority and personal desire. The novel's repeated focus on hesitation, fear, and doubt disrupts traditional images of Christ as an unquestioning agent of divine will. This challenge established theological authority and invites a more flexible understanding of faith.

The project shows that the spatial and political setting of the novel is vital

to its meaning. Judea is not presented as a sacred, idealized land, but as a contested territory marred by violence, surveillance, and oppression. Through this portrayal, Kazantzakis indirectly reveals the workings of imperial power, echoing Said's critique of how dominant narratives shape and control "the Orient." Roman authority, religious institutions, and divine command act as systems that seek obedience and silence dissent. Yet, the novel continually highlights the pain, labor, and longing of ordinary people (fishermen, women, laborers, and outcasts), shifting focus from centers of power to the margins.

In this context, Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?", becomes particularly significant. While Christ is a central figure, the novel persistently points to voices that are suppressed or ignored. Collective cries of anguish, unnamed suffering bodies, and communities depicted as tired and voiceless suggest a world where expression is fragmented and limited. Thus, Christ's role is complicated: he speaks, but he also listens; he commands, but he is commanded. This ambiguity makes it difficult to see him as a purely liberatory figure and places him within structures of authority even as he seeks to go beyond them.

Another important conclusion is that Kazantzakis's reworking of the Christian narrative critiques absolutism—be it religious, political, or ideological. "*The Last Temptation*" symbolizes the pull of certainty, comfort, and closure. The imagined life of domestic happiness offers an escape from suffering and responsibility, yet its rejection stresses the need for struggle and ethical involvement. From a postcolonial viewpoint, this refusal can be seen as a

rejection of easy fixes imposed by dominant systems of meaning. Liberation, the novel suggests, does not come only from transcendence but also through active, painful engagement with history.

This project does not claim that *The Last Temptation* is a simple postcolonial text. Instead, its value lies in how effectively it can be analyzed through postcolonial theory. Kazantzakis writes from a European perspective, and his narrative is not without tensions, contradictions, or moments of appropriation. However, these tensions make the novel a rich ground for theoretical exploration. By emphasizing struggle, uncertainty, and fractured subjectivity, the text resists neat conclusions and invites ongoing reinterpretation.

By merging literary analysis and theory, this study shows that *The Last Temptation* remains relevant in modern critical discussions. Its examination of power, obedience, resistance, and identity relates not just to religious debates but also to wider issues of authority, voice, and freedom in contexts shaped by dominance and inequality. The novel challenges readers to rethink the nature of sacrifice—not as passive suffering, but as an active ethical choice—and to recognize the cost of speaking, acting, and believing within oppressive systems.

In conclusion, this project argues that Kazantzakis's Christ is most engaging not as a distant divine figure but as a being of tension and transformation. Through postcolonial theoretical lenses, the novel emerges as a narrative that questions power rather than affirming it. It exposes suffering rather than sanctifying it and embraces uncertainty as a vital part of meaningful

faith and resistance. By rejecting simple answers and accepting contradictions, *The Last Temptation* ultimately supports the possibility of a spirituality and a politics rooted in struggle, responsibility, and the continuous reimagining of freedom.

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