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REBELS AND CHRISTIAN PRINCES: CAMUS AND AUGUSTINE ON VIOLENCE AND POLITICS

G. J. MCALEER

The world of grace and the world of rebellion.
The disappearance of one is equivalent to the appearance of the other
- The Rebel

In The Rebel, Albert Camus takes it upon himself to be the coroner of modernity. No other author has displayed such awful patience and courage when examining the blood-spilling logics of modernity. The Rebel is a document of the crimes of nihilism and a soaring plea for a politics of rebellion so as to provide European thought with a philosophy of hope. For Camus, there is only hope if there is no submission to persons, thoughts or governments that would destroy human solidarity and rob humans of their dignity. Camus does not simply reject modernity — he aims at its transformation. Camus has absolutely no nostalgia for some glory days before modernity. Quite the opposite. He insists throughout The Rebel that the earlier "age of grace" was no less destructive than modern and contemporary logics that have led to nihilism. Camus has no hope that medieval thought can be transformed so as to sustain human solidarity, but he has every hope that such is possible with modern thought: thus, his theory of rebellion. This essay will argue both that Camus does not demonstrate that violence is intrinsic to Christian politics and that his own politics of rebellion is inadequate to the conditions he himself establishes for a post-nihilistic politics.

2 Although not a much-discussed work, Camus said of the text, "It's the book of mine which I value the most." Cited in Olivier Todd, Albert Camus: A Life, trans. B. Ivry (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 315.