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THE MEANS TO PROCEED BEYOND NIHILISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
research elective S-505

by

Dale Alan Erickson

May 1966

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INTRODUCTION

The Means to Proceed Beyond Nihilism

In The Secular City, a book provoking cheers and groans from a large audience of concerned Christians, Harvey Cox puts Albert Camus next to John Kennedy and maintains that these two men best represent the style of the secular, twentieth century man. Further, Cox says, "Camus addressed himself to the most salient issue of the modern consciousness: how to live with direction and integrity in a world without God."¹ There is no doubt of Camus' significance and influence in the Western world. In 1957, after fifteen years of literary acclaim, Camus received the Nobel Prize for "his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problem of the human conscience of our time." Prior to this official recognition, his world influence was evident in successful lecture tours of the United States (1946-47) and South America (1949). In 1956, his latest book, The Fall, was published simultaneously in English and French. In 1958, Thomas Hanna, an American critic, celebrated his popularity as a writer in these words:

Albert Camus has now come into his own as one of the most prophetic, persuasive, and hopeful moral philosophers of the mid-20th century . . . it is now the case that the works of Albert Camus are eagerly awaited everywhere and are translated almost as soon as they

first come into print. His significance is no longer just that of a Frenchman or even a European; it goes far beyond that. He is a world figure.²

By 1961, it could be said that Camus had been the subject of more scholarly articles than any French writer since Proust³ even though such giants as Malraux and Sartre were at the height of their influence. Camus' acclaim in France and other countries was outstripped by his impact on America. Serge Doubrovsky expressed amazement at the reception Camus' writings had in America. He finds neither reservations nor hostility toward Camus, whose writings are sold everywhere, cheaply, in paperback. Doubrovsky continues:

Students throw themselves upon these texts with an insatiable hunger; courses, lectures, books, and articles on Camus always draw sincere and immediate attention. This is true not only on university campuses, but in all the groups and "milieus" that have cultural interests What is unique in Camus' case is the depth of the public's attachment, its direct and heart-felt nature.⁴

But the most significant sign of Camus' influence appeared shortly after January 4, 1960, when with a railroad ticket in his pocket (evidence of a last-minute decision to take the journey to Paris by car) Camus was killed instantly, as the car driven at high speed by his friend Michel Gallimard smashed into a tree. Moving tributes in press articles and radio broadcasts appeared in great number. Doubrovsky gives vivid illustrations of the sense of loss experienced in America.

I am thinking of people foreign to teaching or to literature who came to professors with tears in their

eyes; of students of my acquaintance who vowed to fast several days at the announcement of his death. Poems in Camus' honor were born in every corner of the country, from pens both expert and clumsy. Whether in litany, elegy, or a few stammered words, sorrow sprang forth from the whole continent. Surely the death of no American writer, and much less any other foreign writer, would have excited such emotion in this country where literature is a secondary activity and often seems a poor relation among the arts. There were no tears at the time of Hemingway's supposedly fatal air crash several years ago, and Faulkner's death would arouse less emotion than a baseball player's retirement. Under these conditions, how can one explain the exceptional intensity of feeling solely about Camus?⁵

In the light of the man's popularity and influence in our lifetime, one has reason enough to examine his life and thought. But there are other reasons in the nature of what he had to say. He started with Nietzsche's premise "God is dead," which now has been revised and embodied in the "Christian atheism" of Thomas Altizer, William Hamilton, and Paul Van Buren. In addition, discussion of the "new morality" of J. A. T. Robinson, Paul Lehmann, and other Christian thinkers, as well as the relative ethics of non-Christians may be enlightened by the study of Camus who spent his life trying to establish human values apart from any appeal to God and passionately fought all absolute systems.

This particular study seeks to answer the question: Did Camus succeed in going beyond nihilism in developing a positive, workable, and moral philosophy of life in line with the facts of man's experience in the 20th century? The answer to the question will be developed in the following steps: (1) The definition of Camus' goal; (2) A description

of his means to that goal; (3) Camus' analysis of man's predicament; (4) His rejection of Christianity; (5) His rejection of other modern solutions; (6) The redeeming quality of nature; (7) His description of the ideal man of our century; (8) Social and political implications of his philosophy; (9) An evaluation of his work; (10) A Christian attempt to go beyond nihilism in the light of the same 20th century experience. This answer will be more suggestive than complete, but this will be in keeping with Camus' goal and the complexities of our life. This cannot be a mere academic discussion; for the writer shares with Camus a deep concern about the problems of our time and the same passionate desire to understand how men ought to behave after honest examination of the facts. Beyond this study, it is hoped that the appended chronology and bibliography will lead the reader into his own dialogue with one of the most stimulating artists of our time.

CHAPTER I

BEYOND NIHILISM

Fifteen years after he published the Myth of Sisyphus, the book that established his fame and contains all his themes developed in subsequent work, Albert Camus wrote in the preface of the American paperback edition:

this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. In all the books I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction. Although The Myth of Sisyphus poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert.¹

The book attempts to answer what Camus felt was the first problem that man must solve by thought and action.

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.²

Earlier than 1955 or 1940, before he published anything, way back in 1935, when he was organizing a Workers' Theatre in Algiers, Camus stated the same goal of affirming the value of human life.

This Theatre is conscious of the artistic value inherent in mass literature, wishes to prove that art can sometimes profit by moving out of its ivory tower, and believes that a sense of beauty is inseparable from a certain sense of humanity. These are not very new ideas. And the Workers' Theatre is well aware of it. But it is not concerned with originality. Its aim is to reinstate certain human values, it is not to bring new themes of thought.³

In his acceptance of the Nobel Prize, Camus once again

restated his basic goal to affirm the value of human life.

I am on a footing with all. To me art is not a solitary delight. It is a means of stirring the greatest number of men by providing them with a privileged image of our common joys and woes.⁴

The task of the men of his generation, Camus' task, was:

to fashion for themselves an art of living in times of catastrophe, in order to be reborn before fighting openly against the death instinct at work in our society For more than twenty years of absolutely insane history, lost hopelessly like all those of my age in the convulsions of the epoch, I derived comfort from the vague impression that writing was an honor today because the act obligated a man, obligated him to more than just writing. It obligated me in particular, such as I was, to bear--along with all the others living the same history--the tribulation and hope we shared.⁵

Finally, the goal of Camus' work may be expressed in a passage from the last page of The Plague, the novel most thorough in espousing Camus' philosophy. Dr. Rieux, the novel's ostensible author, reports the purpose of the entire book:

Dr. Rieux resolved to compile this chronicle, so that he should not be one of those who hold their peace but should bear witness in favor of those plague-stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise.*⁶

*Throughout this paper we shall assume that some of Camus' characters speak for their author. Because of Camus' didactic purpose and the unity of his work, the assumption seems warranted. Though he sometimes objected to the critic's practice of identifying him with a character (only in connection with The Fall), he also admitted, "A character is never the author who created him. It is quite likely, however, that an author may be all his characters simultaneously."⁷ In the context of the whole paper, the reader may judge if the character cited speaks for Camus.

In summary, on the basis of Camus' own words at important points throughout his life, we conclude that his goal in the midst of the convulsions of his age was to find the means of proceeding beyond nihilism to affirm life and basic human values. Did Camus achieve his goal? That is the question to this study. But before an answer can be given, we must turn to the critics to learn more of his goals and methods as a writer.

CHAPTER II

A FRENCH MORALIST

Unlike Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom he was for a long time associated, Albert Camus was not a professional philosopher. He never treated the traditional problems of time and space, of causality, of free will and determinism, of appearance and reality. On the other hand, he was widely read in philosophy, both ancient and modern. His teacher at the University of Algiers, Jean Grenier, inspired Camus with a passionate love for Greek literature. Consequently, it was through Plato and Plotinus that Camus first considered problems of essence and existence, which were treated differently by German philosophers such as Hegel, Heidegger, Husserl, and Jaspers, whom he later read. Camus' line of thought can be traced through Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Chestov, with Plato and the Neoplatonists as a constant check and reference.¹ Under Grenier's influence Camus developed a philosophical thesis concerning the influence of Plotinus on Augustine, which he completed for his degree in 1936. The writings of Nietzsche apparently had a great impact on Camus, for many of his ideas are formulated in reference and antithesis to Nietzsche. In addition to professional philosophers, literary artists had the greatest role in shaping the style and content of his writing. Camus and his critics point to the Greek tragedies and the French classics

as his models. A host of others should be added: Moliere, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Mme. de Lafayette, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Melville, Gide, Proust, Malraux, Mantherlant, and many others mentioned in his essays.

Camus has repeatedly denied that he is an existentialist, though many continue to classify him as such, because he shares these convictions with the existentialists: he opposes the rationalism of classic philosophy which seeks universal truths or a scale of values topped by God; he believes that truth is found by a subjective intensity of passion; he holds that the individual is always becoming, always involved in choice, risk, and experiential freedom; he emphasizes man's existence in the world and natural relation to it; he is deeply concerned with the fact of death.² But, as we shall see later, he rejects existentialism because to him it represents either a false escape from man's predicament or a needless stress on commitment to a cause to establish the value of existence.

Camus is neither a philosopher nor an existentialist.

Then what is he? Thomas Hanna characterizes him in this way:

Camus, like many others, is a child of his times, and he openly accepts this relative position. His abiding concern is with the relation between man and his world, between men and their history. His thought is not to be systematized; at best it is to be described and then characterized. The unusual quality which he brings to us is his radical fidelity to the experience of contemporary men at grips with a universe and history which baffle and oppress them. He is that rare and precious individual in whom we see all the contradictions and longings of an epoch held together in great

tension It may well be that Albert Camus is the most acute conscience of the contradictions of our times between nihilism of destruction and the nostalgia for peace.³

The concurrence of all the major critics with Hanna's description may be illustrated and deepened by excerpts from Germaine Bree, Camus' most intimate and astute expositor.

It is fallacious to seek a logical system of abstract reasoning in Camus' works. Camus himself speaks of certainties, convictions. All his meditations are intrinsically lyrical and eloquent in nature, though some tend toward demonstration. . . . And, indeed, his aim was not to demonstrate but to give thought its legitimate place in our lives. . . . Camus was always at some pains to explain that he was not undertaking either to build or to refute a system of thought. His essays are direct meditations on questions that proved obsessively important to him and which, in his judgment, were also characteristic of a time in which he participated. One may question the validity of Camus' generalization of his own intellectual experience, but one cannot refute his argument, for it is descriptive in nature. The point of view is admittedly partial, but it is perfectly clear and, within its own system of definition, perfectly consistent. The tone is dictatorial. . . . Never was a man more deeply and passionately committed in spite of the studied objectivity of the tone he liked to adopt.⁴

Bree gives us some trenchant examples of Camus' method:

[Who] . . . would accept the following conclusion simply as it stands: "The world then will no longer be divided between the just and the unjust, but between the masters and the slaves"?⁵ When was the world ever "divided between the just and the unjust"? Or again: "All great actions and all great thoughts have insignificant beginnings."⁶ Do they indeed? Cannot one exception be found to deflate so blatant a generalization? It is very easy to destroy Camus' argumentation, sentence by sentence. But what of it? Rhetoric sometimes opens the way to thought and what matters most is the movement of the essay as a whole, the point of departure, the orientation, the form imposed upon the material. The conclusion is not demonstrated. It demonstrates. It is implicit in the opening sentence,

arrived at beforehand, and proceeds pre-emptorily to dispose of any denial or hesitation, incontrovertible as a musical theme.⁷

Germaine Bree has taken us to an important point: Camus is an artist, a man engaged in "absurd creation" which merits the highest praise in the climactic section of the Myth of Sisyphus and is a recurrent subject of his writing. To remember that Camus is first and foremost an artist, proposing aesthetic rather than logical solutions to man's dilemmas, is of crucial importance in understanding and evaluating his work.

Not only an artist, Camus is also a moralist, intensely involved in ethical questions. Sartre places him in the tradition of the great French moralists of the seventeenth century.⁸ Philip Thody quotes Camus as saying, "What interests me is how one should behave."⁹ We shall see how he attempts to demolish Marxism and belief in God on moral grounds and how he appeals for limited justice and moral responsibility. If any other support is needed to justify calling Camus a French moralist, let it be found in the judgment of the committee who awarded Camus the Nobel Prize for "his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problem of the human conscience of our time."

CHAPTER III

THE PLAGUE

"Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure," Meursault says indifferently in the opening line of The Stranger, the novel that made Camus immediately famous all over Europe in 1942. The theme of death permeates the novel. Meursault's description of his mother's funeral, his later reflections on her death, his murder of an Arab, his trial, meditations and discussions with the prison chaplain, build up to a climax in which he confronts death realistically and anticipates his execution. He comes to see that death is the one reality that makes all men equal and every way of life the same, "since it all came to the same thing in the end."¹ All men, privileged like Meursault to live, must also say of death, "From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life from the years that were to come."² But once he faces his death squarely, he is emptied of all hope, and for the first time lays his heart open to the "benign indifference of the universe." The result is happiness: "To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still."³

Death is the common experience of all men; the happy response is not. Caligula discovers one truth in the

universe: "Men die; and they are not happy."⁴ This truth leads him to kill his subjects at every whim, declaring, "All these executions have an equal importance--from which it follows that none has any."⁵ "And everything's on an equal footing: the grandeur of Rome and your attacks of arthritis"⁶

In his second novel, The Plague, Camus develops the same theme, death is the common plague of all. When the plague infests the town of Oran, its prison guards die in the same proportion as prisoners. "The plague was no respecter of persons and under its despotic rule everyone, from the warden down to the humblest delinquent, was under sentence and, perhaps for the first time, impartial justice reigned in the prison."⁷ Plague means more than death--tyranny, war, the indifference of nature--but death is the real problem. So much so, that one character concludes, "But what does that mean--plague? Just life, no more than that."⁸ Though the plague leaves Oran for a time and jubilant crowds celebrate, Dr. Rieux ends his book with the sure knowledge that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good, and will again break out after years of lying dormant.⁹

What is implicit and particular in his works of fiction becomes explicit and general in Camus' essays. The Myth of Sisyphus is the writing which best develops Camus' analysis of man's predicament. Right at the center, what cannot be

changed, is the fact of death. "All that remains is a fate whose outcome alone is fatal. Outside of that single fatality of death, everything, joy or happiness, is liberty."¹⁰ But before the joy, happiness, and liberty can be achieved, some other things must be understood.

First, the world, the universe, nature cannot be reasonably explained. "This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction."¹¹ When scientists tell of an invisible planetary system in which electrons spin around a nucleus, to Camus they are speaking poetry, and he shall never know a satisfying explanation of the world. Camus passes off all of modern science's attempts to explain the universe with these words: "So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? The soft lines of these hills and the hand of evening on this troubled heart teach me much more."¹²

Secondly, Camus finds in man a vast longing for the rational explanation, which is not to be found. This longing for clarity in face of the facts is absurd, and man must live this absurd existence or commit suicide.

I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world.¹³

Camus connects this feeling of the absurd with the fact of death in the following passage.

There is no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death. But there can be no absurd outside this world either. And it is by this elementary criterion that I judge the notion of the absurd to be essential and consider that it can stand as the first of my truths.¹⁴

The following passages show how difficult it is for Camus, or any man, to accept this absurd experience.

I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it.¹⁵

In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.¹⁶

But accept this absurd experience a man must, if he is to refuse suicide, physical or psychological. "Everything begins with lucid indifference."¹⁷ Then one qualifies for Camus' title for today's heroes, "the absurd man."

The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible and everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation.¹⁸ By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death--I refuse suicide. I know, to be sure, the dull resonance that vibrates throughout these days. Yet I have but a word to say: it is necessary.¹⁹

In this indifferent, unreasonable world, where men must die, the absurd man is symbolized by Sisyphus, who was condemned by the gods to continually roll a rock to the top of a mountain, from which it would invariably roll back by its own weight. Such is the futile and hopeless labor of men. Yet here Camus finds man's dignity and grandeur.

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. . . . At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.²⁰ . . . There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.²¹ . . . The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.²²

This is Camus' analysis of man's predicament, and in capsule form the way to surmount it. We will see more of the absurd man, but first, we must examine what are the solutions to man's predicament which Camus rejects.

CHAPTER IV

DEIFIED INJUSTICE

Camus wanted to know how men should behave in the light of their predicament of death and the absurd desire to make sense of a world that was not reasonable. He talks about God and Christianity only as a possible solution to man's predicament and the moral effects Christianity had on believers. "Only after the reality of human evil is given does the question of God and ultimately man's submission to or revolt against God arise."¹ At this point, Camus rejects God and Christianity for the following reasons: (1) The solution of evil is postponed beyond history; (2) Nature is depreciated; (3) Christianity accepts the unjust suffering of the innocent; (4) Salvation is exclusively for some and not all; (5) Belief in God destroys human responsibility. We now examine these reasons in detail.

Confronted with this evil, confronted with death, man from the very depths of his soul cries out for justice. Historical Christianity has only replied to this protest against evil by the annunciation of the kingdom and then of eternal life, which demands faith. But suffering exhausts hope and faith and then is left alone and unexplained. The toiling masses, worn out with suffering and death, are masses without God. Our place is henceforth at their side, far from teachers, old or new. Historical Christianity postpones to a point beyond the span of history the cure of evil and murder, which are nevertheless experienced within the span of history.²

Camus felt that once meaning in life was placed beyond history, the door was opened to crimes such as those

perpetrated in the Spanish Inquisition. In this case, Christianity shares the evil trait of Communism, which justified its crimes in the name of a coming utopia.

Secondly, Camus rejected the depreciation of nature, which Christianity had developed through what he called the "German ideology." Originally, Christianity, according to Camus, introduced into the ancient world two ideas that had never been associated: the idea of history and the idea of mediation. The historical attitude, stemming from Judaism, looks for the transformation of nature to fulfill man's destiny in history. The mediational attitude, characteristic of the Greeks, seeks to obey and admire nature. In early Christianity, the idea of history prevailed, and men expected the parousia at any moment. But in the middle ages, St. Francis, the Albigenses, and others accepted the natural world as God's world, which possessed value and holiness. But in recent centuries, the German ideology has come to dominate Christianity, with a corresponding disdain for the value of nature.³ Hitler and Marx and Hegel and others have deified history and determined that nature will serve historical ends.⁴ This is the result of a Christianity which lost its Mediterranean heritage.⁵ Of the many passages that could be cited, the following will illustrate Camus' thinking:

The beautiful equilibrium of humanity and nature, man's consent to the world which underlay the risk and splendor of all ancient thought, was broken to the profit of history first of all by Christianity. The entrance into this historicity of the nordic peoples-- who do not have a tradition of friendship with the

world--precipitated this movement. From the moment that the divinity of Christ was denied or when, at the hands of German ideology, he symbolizes nothing more than the man-God rather than the God-man the notion of mediation disappeared; a Judaic world was resuscitated. The implacable God of armies reigns once more, all beauty is defamed as a source of useless pleasure, nature itself is enslaved. From this point of view, Marx is the Jeremiah of the historical God and the St. Augustine of the revolution.⁶

Thirdly, Camus rejects Christianity because it accepts the unjust suffering of the innocent. The issue is made clear in a scene from The Plague. The central figures of the novel, Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux, stand helplessly at the bedside of a child, who is dying of the plague, "in a grotesque parody of crucifixion."⁷ When the child dies, Dr. Rieux swings around on Father Paneloux fiercely, saying, "Ah, That child, anyhow, was innocent, and you know it as well as I do!" A while later, Dr. Rieux apologizes, adding, "And there are times when the only feeling I have is one of mad revolt."

"I understand," Paneloux said in a low voice. "That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand."

Rieux straightened up slowly. He gazed at Paneloux, summoning to his gaze all the strength and fervor he could muster against his weariness. Then he shook his head.

"No, Father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture."⁸

Camus knows the Christianity he rejects. For in Jesus of Nazareth, Camus sees the same unjust, innocent suffering that he portrayed in the crucifixion of the child. He

maintains that "in its essence, Christianity (and this is its paradoxical greatness) is a doctrine of injustice. It is founded on the sacrifice of the innocent and the acceptance of this sacrifice."⁹

From this point of view, the New Testament can be considered as an attempt to answer, in advance, every Cain in the world, by painting the figure of God in softer colors and by creating an intercessor between God and man. Christ came to solve two major problems, evil and death, which are precisely the problems that preoccupy the rebel. His solution consisted, first, in experiencing them. The man-god suffers, too--with patience. Evil and death can no longer be entirely imputed to Him since He suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the agony of death. This is the explanation of the Lema sabactani and the heart-rending doubt of Christ in agony. The agony would have been mild if it had been alleviated by hopes of eternity. For God to be a man, he must despair.¹⁰

Camus rejects Jesus Christ's vicarious suffering for all men and sees the crucifixion as the example of our predicament. He admires Jesus only as a man who tried to heal what is broken in life, who rebelled against evil to the end, but cannot accept him as a living Lord. That would mean belief in a God who is deified injustice--a repulsive thought to Camus.¹¹

Fourthly, Camus rejects Christianity in the name of compassion for the lost. He identifies with Ivan Karamazov, who refuses to be the only one saved and throws his lot in with the damned. "If he had faith, he could, in fact, be saved, but others would be damned and suffering would continue. There is no possible salvation for the man who feels real

compassion."¹² The point is made and Camus' sympathy with some in the church is shown in a passage from The Rebel.

Then we understand that rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love. Those who find no rest in God or in history are condemned to live for those who, like themselves, cannot live: in fact, for the humiliated. The most pure form of the movement of rebellion is thus crowned with the heart-rending cry of Karamazov: if all are not saved, what good is the salvation of only one? Thus Catholic prisoners, in the prison cells of Spain, refuse communion today because the priests of the regime have made it obligatory in certain prisons. These lonely witnesses to the crucifixion of innocence also refuse salvation if it must be paid for by injustice and oppression. This insane generosity is the generosity of rebellion which unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment's delay refuses injustice. Its merit lies in making no calculations, distributing everything it possesses to life and to living men. It is thus that it is prodigal in its gifts to men to come. Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present.¹³

Finally, Camus rejects Christianity because it destroys personal responsibility. He hates the kind of "faith" defined by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises, "We should always be prepared, so as never to err, to believe that what I see as white is black, if the hierarchic Church defines it thus."¹⁴ Another poor example of a Christian who gives up his responsibility and human dignity to God is Kierkegaard and his leap of faith. Camus finds human dignity thus: "Being able to remain on that dizzying crest--that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge."¹⁵ Speaking before Christians, Camus expressed disappointment at the silence of Rome during the frightful years of the war and the church's support of tyranny in Spain. He continued:

What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could arise in the heart of the simplest man. That they should get away from abstractions and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men resolved to speak out clearly and to pay up personally.¹⁶

The Christian idea of universal guilt, Camus felt, robbed the individual of his personal responsibility. The Fall satirizes the feeling of guilt which brought many middle-class intellectuals not only to Catholicism but also to Communism. Many try to make Meursault feel guilty by applying absolute standards to him, but the hero of The Stranger affirms his responsibility to do what he wishes to the end.

Therefore, we see, Camus rejected Christianity in the name of man. As Harvey Cox says, "Hopes and values which reach beyond this world he rejected as a betrayal of this world and therefore of one's fellowman."¹⁷ In a world of plague and death, the only goodness must be in man who revolts against his fate, without the aid of gods. "Yes, man is his own end. And he is his only end. If he aims to be something, it is in this life."¹⁸

Nevertheless, Camus, especially in his later years, did not want to show hostility to Christians or to Christianity. Irreligion had come to strike him as a kind of presumptuous vulgarity. Rather he considered himself an absurd man: "He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal.

Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. But he prefers his courage and his reasoning."¹⁹ He believed that "in an unjust or indifferent world man can save himself, and save others, by practicing the most basic sincerity and pronouncing the most appropriate word."²⁰ Finally, Camus had this to say to Christians:

I shall never start from the supposition that Christian truth is illusory, but merely from the fact that I could not accept it. . . . Hence, I shall not, as far as I am concerned try to pass myself off as a Christian in your presence. I share with you the same revulsion from evil. But I do not share your hope, and I continue to struggle against this universe in which children suffer and die.²¹

CHAPTER V

NIHILISM

In his analysis of modern history, Camus started with the statement of Nietzsche's madman, "God is dead."¹ In fact, Camus gives the precise date of God's death as a force in modern history. For Camus, "1789 is the starting-point of modern times."²

On January 21, with the murder of the King-priest, was consummated what has significantly been called the passion of Louis XVI. . . . by its consequences, the condemnation of the King is at the crux of our history and the disincarnation of the Christian God. Up to now God played a part in history through the medium of kings. But His representative in history has been killed, for there is no longer a king. Therefore, there is nothing but a semblance of God, relegated to the heaven of principles.³

The nihilists, according to Camus, go beyond the belief that "God is dead" to conclude that they are god. Invariably, this leads to excessive pride, murder, and tyranny. Therefore, in the name of humanity, Camus rejected nihilism as a solution to man's predicament. Because Camus was convinced that nihilism dominated the twentieth century, his attack against it was long and bitter. Most of The Rebel and the Myth of Sisyphus carries this polemic, as he documents his thesis: nihilism leads to tyranny and slavery. For the purposes of this paper, brief documentation should be sufficient.

Camus chooses one of Dostoevsky's characters to

illustrate the thinking of the "master" nihilists. When Ivan Karamazov loses his faith in God, he exclaims, "Everything is permitted." Then he becomes a murderer. Camus says, "With this 'everything is permitted' the history of contemporary nihilism really begins."⁴

If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance. There is no pro or con: the murderer is neither right nor wrong. We are free to stoke the crematory fires or to devote ourselves to the care of lepers. Evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice.

. . . Since nothing is either true or false, good or bad, our guiding principle will be to demonstrate that we are the most efficient--in other words, the strongest. Then the world will no longer be divided into the just and the unjust, but into the masters and slaves. Thus, whichever way we turn, in our abyss of negation and nihilism, murder has its privileged position.⁵

In Ivan Karamazov we see a paradigm of modern history, according to Camus. Here is the result of two centuries of nihilism:

All modern revolutions have ended in a reinforcement of the power of the State. 1789 brings Napoleon; 1848, Napoleon III, 1917, Stalin; the Italian disturbances of the twenties, Mussolini; the Weimar Republic, Hitler.⁶

The land of humanism has become the Europe of today, the land of inhumanity. But the times are ours and how can we disown them? If our history is our hell, still we cannot avert our faces. This horror cannot be escaped.⁷

Two centuries of rebellion, either metaphysical or historical, present themselves for our consideration. . . . The astonishing history evoked here is the history of European pride.⁸

The pride of the nihilist, who wants to be god, lived

on the stage in the play Caligula, the mad Roman emperor. Early in the play, Caligula announces that his freedom has no frontier and begins to convert his philosophy into corpses, ordering the death of his subjects at the slightest impulse. His pride knows no bounds as the following lines show.

And yet--what is a god that I should wish to be his equal? No, it's something higher, far above the gods, that I'm aiming at, longing for with all my heart and soul. I am taking over a kingdom where the impossible is king.

I want . . . I want to drown the sky in the sea, to infuse ugliness with beauty, to wring a laugh from pain.⁹

Humility's one emotion I may never feel.¹⁰

Caligula is finally deserted by all his friends, who are preparing his murder. Only Caesonia, his mistress, still loves the twisted madman Caligula has become. And despite her appeals, Caligula strangles Caesonia. Then he stretches out his hands to a mirror and sees the image of the nihilist's tragic end.

And yet I know, and you, too, know that all I need is for the impossible to be. The impossible! I've searched for it at the confines of the world, in the secret places of my heart. I've stretched out my hands; see, I stretch out my hands, but it's always you I find, you only, confronting me, and I've come to hate you. I've chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing. My freedom isn't the right one. . . . Nothing, nothing yet. Oh, how oppressive is this darkness!

As the assassins stab him, the nihilist's last words are, "I'm still alive."¹¹

Camus found a more subtle form of nihilism in the "slaves" of the twentieth century and rejected them with words only

slightly less telling than those against the "master" nihilists.

The slaves take the easy way out of the world where God is dead, according to Camus. They choose negation and death, escaping the disciplined effort needed to continually rebel and resist the injustice and irrationality of the world.

Kirilov, another character from the pen of Dostoevsky, illustrates the slave nihilist, whose pride leads him to suicide. Rather than rebel against the godless world, as the absurd man does, Kirilov wants to become god. Camus outlines his thinking in what follows.

If God exists, all depends on him and we can do nothing against his will. If he does not exist, everything depends on us. For Kirilov, as for Nietzsche, to kill God is to become god oneself; it is to realize on this earth the eternal life of which the Gospel speaks. . . . Kirilov must kill himself out of love for humanity. He must show his brothers a royal and difficult path on which he will be the first. It is pedagogical suicide. Before terminating in blood an indescribable spiritual adventure, Kirilov makes a remark as old as human suffering: "All is well."

Of course, like Nietzsche, the most famous of God's assassins, he ends in madness.¹²

Another group of slave nihilists can be covered by the term: existentialism. They follow Kierkegaard in escaping the tension of the absurd by a leap of faith. Rather than see clearly the reason of man and the irrationality of the universe in tension, rather than affirm man, they negate human reason, making negation their god,¹³ or leap to the Christian God, thus deifying what crushes them.¹⁴ These are

sweeping generalizations. But, as noted above,¹⁵ generalizations are common to Camus.

The problem with these slave nihilists may be summed up in this judgment: men are lazy rather than cowardly and they prefer peace and death to the liberty of discerning between good and evil.¹⁶

CHAPTER VI

THE INEXHAUSTIBLE SUN

Where does Camus draw strength to stand against the storms of death, plague, the inscrutable universe, nihilism, and the destructive forms of human pride? He draws strength from the sun, the beauty of the sky, the rare moments of communion between human beings. Though Camus saw nature as ambivalent to man, even the source of plague, he found inspiration for a life of struggle in the sunshine and the sea of his Mediterranean home.

In the preface of Betwixt and Between, Camus identifies the world as his god. Since the passage comes from a man searching for the roots of his inspiration in his childhood, we do well to give the statement proper weight.

I was placed half-way between poverty and the sun. Poverty prevented me from judging that all was well in the world and in history, the sun taught me that history was not all. I wanted to transform life, yes, but not the world, which was my god.¹

We see in this passage the fundamental dichotomy between "the German ideology of history" and the Mediterranean love of nature, which Camus found in conflict throughout this century.² Passionate letters to a German friend, written as the war progressed, demonstrate the conflict and Camus' choice of "the Mediterranean, where intelligence is intimately related to the blinding light of the sun."³ Camus wrote to his German friend:

You chose injustice, you aligned yourself with the gods. Your logic was only apparent. I chose justice, on the contrary, to remain faithful to the earth. I continue to believe that this earth has no superior meaning. But I know something in it makes sense and that is man, because he is the only being who insists upon it. This world has at least the truth of man and our task is to give man his justification against fate itself.⁴

After the war, in 1952, Camus returned to Algiers, where his love of life had been born and nourished. Reliving the beauty of the days and the joy of his youth, he reflected on the "barbed wire" of the war and observed, "Europe hates daylight and is only able to set injustice up against injustice." But because of his heritage, he concluded of his experience, "In the middle of winter I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer."⁵ Another essay from the same period reinforces his point, "In the center of our work, even were it black, shines an inexhaustible sun, the sun that cries out today over the plains and hills."⁶ Here at Tipasa, Camus explains how men find strength in nature.

I discovered once more at Tipasa that one must keep intact in oneself a freshness, a cool wellspring of joy, love the day that escapes injustice, and return to combat having won that light. Here I recaptured the former beauty, a young sky, and I measured my luck, realizing at last that in the worst years of our madness the memory of that sky had never left me. This was what in the end had kept me from despairing.⁷

The beauty of the earth inspires in Camus the lyricism and humanistic promise which makes him such an admired and influential writer. To do him justice, this paper must record some of his best passages, noting with regret that the finest

sounds are heard only by those who read the original French.

And for us who have been thrown into hell, mysterious melodies and the torturing images of a vanished beauty will always bring us, in the midst of crime and folly, the echo of that harmonious insurrection which bears witness, throughout the centuries, to the greatness of humanity.

But hell can endure for only a limited period, and life will begin again one day. . . . One can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and the stars.⁸

We shall choose Ithaca, the faithful land, frugal and audacious thought, lucid action, and the generosity of the man who understands. In the light, the earth remains our first and our last love. Our brothers are breathing under the same sky as we; justice is a living thing. Now is born that strange joy which helps one live and die, and which we shall never again postpone to a later time. On the sorrowing earth it is the unresting thorn, the bitter brew, the harsh wind off the sea, the old and the new dawn. With this joy, through long struggle, we shall remake the soul of our time, and a Europe which will exclude nothing.⁹

In addition to the explicit mention of the wholesome quality of nature in Camus' essays, the motif is implicit in his works of fiction. No better example can be found than the play, State of Siege. Throughout, the chorus extols the sea and wind:

We are the sons of the sea. Away, away! The sea is calling us to happy places without walls or gates, to shores whose virgin sands are cool as maidens' lips, and where our eyes grow dazzled gazing seaward. Let us go forth to meet the wind. Away! Away to the sea! To the untrammelled waves, to clean, bright water, the shining winds of freedom!¹⁰

And when the gates of the city are shut, when a cruel tyrant reigns, the people sigh, "Ah, if only the wind would rise . . . !"¹¹ But the wind does not rise until Diego,

inspired by the "smiles of summer," revolts against the tyranny and beats back the plague.¹² In Diego, as in Camus, the Latin proverb holds true: In magnificentia naturae resurgit spiritus.¹³

Swimming in the sea was a great joy to Camus, and he twice used the picture of two friends swimming side by side to show the saving quality of mutual communion with nature. Meursault at the height of joy, before a murder moments later proves his undoing, describes the bliss of people at one with each other and nature.

The water was cold and I felt all the better for it. We swam a long way out, Marie and I, side by side, and it was pleasant feeling how our movements matched, hers and mine, and how we were both in the same mood, enjoying every moment. Once we were out in the open, we lay on our backs and, as I gazed up at the sky, I could feel the sun drawing up the film of salt water on my lips and cheeks.¹⁴

After a long conversation about their understanding of life and death, Dr. Rieux and Tarrou go for a swim "for friendship's sake." In this scene from The Plague, a precious moment of communion is shared by friends, soon to be cruelly separated by death.

Tarrou was coming up with him, he now could hear his breathing. Rieux turned and swam level with his friend, timing his stroke to Tarrou's. But Tarrou was the stronger swimmer and Rieux had to put on speed to keep up with him. For some minutes they swam side by side, with the same zest, in the same rhythm, isolated from the world, at last free of the town and of the plague. . . . They dressed and started back. Neither had said a word, but they were conscious of being perfectly at one, and the memory of this night would be cherished by them both. When they caught sight of the plague watchman, Rieux guessed that Tarrou, like himself, was

thinking that the disease had given them a respite, and this was good, but now they must set their shoulders to the wheel again.¹⁵

Yet, only four pages later, Rieux records the thoughts and feelings that dominate most of men's time:

that a loveless world is a dead world, and always there comes an hour when one is weary of prisons, of one's work, and of devotion to duty, and all one craves for is a loved face, the warmth and wonder of a loving heart.¹⁶

And suddenly the image of nature changes, and we begin to see the underside of Camus' ambivalent attitude toward the "cold, fathomless depths of sky." Dr. Rieux stands by the bed of his dying friend, helpless, as nature takes its toll.

And now Rieux had before him only a masklike face, inert, from which the smile had gone forever. This human form, his friend's, lacerated by the spear-thrusts of the plague, consumed by searing, superhuman fires, buffeted by all the raging winds of heaven, was foundering under his eyes in the dark flood of the pestilence, and he could do nothing to avert the wreck. He could only stand, unavailing, on the shore, empty-handed and sick at heart, unarmed and helpless yet again under the onset of calamity. And thus, when the end came, the tears that blinded Rieux's eyes were tears of impotence; and he did not see Tarrou roll over, face to the wall, and die with a short, hollow groan as if somewhere within him an essential chord had snapped.¹⁷

In The Stranger, it was the sun that beat down mercilessly on Meursault at his mother's funeral.¹⁸ The sun drove him to kill the Arab.¹⁹ And it is a discussion of the sunshine and the sea that makes Martha resolve to murder the guest, who turns out to be her brother, in The Misunderstanding.²⁰ Nature may inspire one for a time, but in the end it kills

and defeats. Martha finally joins her mother in suicide, by plunging into the water that inspired such bright descriptions. Nature is the rock of Sisyphus, which he comes to love, even though it is his constant burden.

CHAPTER VII

A NORMAL MAN

Philip Thody has rightly pointed out that Camus had the mind of an intellectual, but the feelings of the common man. And when he called men to revolt, rebellion, and the life of the absurd, Camus was not recommending violence, hatred, excess, and disorder. Rather, he sees revolt as the proper attitude for the ordinary person, who protests against the injustice, disorder, and cruelty of the world by trying to realize those specifically human qualities of order, mercy, and justice.¹ These qualities are summed up in a phrase used in The Plague: common decency. Dr. Rieux approaches a man named Rambert to help in the fight against the plague. After stressing that what interests him is living and dying for what he loves, Rieux goes on to say:

"However, there's one thing I must tell you: there's no question of heroism in all this. It's a matter of common decency. That's an idea which may make some people smile, but the only means of fighting a plague is--common decency."

"What do you mean by 'common decency'?" Rambert's tone was grave.

"I don't know what it means for other people. But in my case I know that it consists in doing my job."²

The people Camus wrote about were common people. For example, Grand expressed his protest against the bureaucracy by trying to write the first sentence of a novel that would be so good, publishers would upon reading it rise and say,

"Hats off, gentlemen!" Camus would have been happy to have everyone say, "It is from my struggle to remain a normal man in exceptional circumstances that I have always drawn my greatest strength and usefulness."³ Those who really counted, who really advanced history, were those who dedicated themselves to their homes, to the earth, and upheld the dignity of man.⁴

In fact, people who practiced this kind of "rebellion" in their daily trials actually established the first value of the whole human race. Camus' first piece of evidence for the value of life was: I rebel--therefore we exist.⁵ When a man decided to live and not to commit suicide, according to Camus, he made a value judgment for mankind. "To breathe is to judge."⁶ Therefore, those who say "no" to death, plague, injustice, and all the rest make life worth living.

To exist and to do one's job is not easy because one is aware that it is all "for nothing." Death waits at the end, and plague fights one at every step. "Awareness" of death and plague are essential for the best kind of living. Tarrou explains the difficult life to which the common man is called:

I can say I know the world inside out, as you may see-- that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbe. All the rest--health, integrity, purity (if you like)-- is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The good man, the man who infects

hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. And it needs tremendous will-power, a never ending tension of the mind, to avoid such lapses.⁷

Here is a new asceticism advocated by Camus. He has defined its difficulty and dignity in many places. For example, this passage from the Myth of Sisyphus:

Elsewhere I have brought out the fact that human will had no other purpose than to maintain awareness. But that could not do without discipline. Of all the schools of patience and lucidity, creation is the most effective. It calls for a daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure and strength. It constitutes an ascesis.⁸

Tarrou went even farther along these lines of asceticism.

"It comes to this," Tarrou said almost casually; "what interests me is learning how to become a saint."

"But you don't believe in God."

"Exactly! Can one be a saint without God?--that's the problem, in fact the only problem, I'm up against today."⁹

But that is not the whole story. Tarrou is not quite the ideal "normal" man, though he is certainly on the right path, "the path of sympathy." He shares much with Dr. Rieux, his friend who is Camus' ideal. But Dr. Rieux goes beyond Tarrou in emphasizing the individual's part in the human community. A man should not be a saint, but a healer, a man of compassion, sharing and helping the common lot of mankind. Rieux corrects Tarrou's asceticism.

"Perhaps," the doctor answered. "But, you know, I feel more fellowship with the defeated than with saints. Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me, I imagine. What interests me is being a man."¹⁰

And to be a man, according to Camus, is a constant act

of rebellion, which affirms that "a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed." Especially when he risks his life, the rebel identifies himself with others, surpasses himself, and affirms that the rights of men are more important than himself. Otherwise, why rebel if there is nothing in life worth preserving?¹¹ The common man who rebels joins himself with others in collective discipline and says "We are." He definitely has a certain individualism, demanding discipline similar to a saint, but he finds his real vocation in cherishing and defending the life of his fellowmen. This balance between individualism and community is expressed in these words from The Rebel.

I alone, in one sense, support the common dignity that I cannot allow either myself or others to debase. This individualism is in no sense pleasure; it is perpetual struggle, and, sometimes, unparalleled joy when it reaches the heights of proud compassion.¹²

There is no end to the struggle of common men to maintain the value of human life against all the forces of negation, evil, suffering, and death. Camus does not predict peace on earth to men of good will. There is much that can be accomplished, but the forces of evil will prevail. His optimism has rightly been called modest.

Man can master in himself everything that should be mastered. He should rectify in creation everything that can be rectified. And after he has done so, children will still die unjustly even in a perfect society. Even by his greatest effort man can only purpose to diminish arithmetically the sufferings of the world. But the injustice and the suffering of the world will remain and, no matter how limited they are,

they will not cease to be an outrage. Dimitri Karamazov's cry of "Why?" will continue to resound; art and rebellion will die only with the last man.¹³

But Camus continues to write and create, continues to push his rock up the mountain, with the same common decency of Dr. Rieux, who fought the plague and compiled a chronicle of the common fight of men.

None the less, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of final victory. It could be only the record of what had had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.¹⁴

CHAPTER VIII

LIMIT

Camus did not write an extended political theory. However, he did devote much space to a scathing critique of communism and totalitarianism of any kind. He pointed out that much of the evil in these systems derived from the fact that they promised absolute freedom and justice, while indulging in all manner of crimes to bring in the future utopia. For this reason, Camus recommended relative justice, relative freedom, and the idea of limit. Freedom has its limits wherever another human being is found--the limit being precisely that human being's power to rebel.

The rebel undoubtedly demands a certain degree of freedom of others. He humiliates no one. The freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy. . . . Every human freedom, at its very roots, is therefore relative.¹

Freedom must be rooted in law, for Camus realized that chaos is a form of servitude. Neither absolute anarchy, nor absolute domination by the law represent liberty. What he calls for is a balance between just laws and personal freedom.

Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their limits in each other. No man considers that his condition is free if it is not at the same time just, nor just unless it is free.²

Camus quotes Rousseau in a favorable context, and maintains that there can be no justice in a society without natural or civil rights as its basis. He found friends in

America.

There will be times when injustice calls for organized rebellion, which is conducted by "innocent murderers"-- innocent because they did not start history or the injustice. Rebellion sets us on the path of "calculated culpability."³

This is the extent of Camus' positive political theory.

CONCLUSION

Disguised Nihilism

With the evidence spread before us, it is time to answer the question which started this paper: Did Camus succeed in going beyond nihilism in developing a positive, workable, and moral philosophy of life in line with the facts of man's experience in the twentieth century? It is this writer's judgment that Camus did not succeed in going beyond nihilism, for the reasons given below. To the writer's knowledge, he stands almost alone in this judgment, though few of his reasons are without precedent.

First of all, the major part of Camus' work has been negation. Large chapters of his essays are against communism, existentialism, nihilism, and Christianity. His definition and analysis of the absurd in the Myth of Sisyphus is so overpowering that the affirmations and myth at the end cannot dispel the dark, oppressive atmosphere. The work was read and praised by those caught in the ravages of war and its aftermath, because it expressed some of their despair and stoic determination. Camus has not been exceptionally popular in later times of prosperity. Fully three-fourths of The Rebel is an intense, sarcastic, biting criticism of German and French writers of the last two centuries, who, according to Camus, all fall into the paths of nihilistic

destruction and pride. The Fall is one long, sarcastic satire of an attitude he found all over post-war Europe. Plays such as Caligula, The Misunderstanding, State of Siege, The Just Assassins, and The Possessed have the major themes of death, murder, injustice, tyranny, and intrigue. Not one portrays a positive way of life. The Stranger and The Plague come closest to showing the kind of men Camus admires, but they live in the shadows of doom, execution and plague. Their affirmations are screams, or at best whistles, in the darkest night. Death will seize them in the end. Their fate is beyond manipulation. For Camus, evil is at the center of the universe and must be constantly opposed with the discipline and devotion of a saint, without hope. For comfort, one has a swim in the night and a bit of rhetoric about the sun and sea. Is this enough to take us from the pit he describes and to celebrate in our cells, while we await execution and plague?

Secondly, Camus has failed to affirm the life of the common man. The common man has never had enough of Walt Disney or the imaginative, yet simple dramas of TV, but Camus' heavy drama has utterly failed to draw sustained audiences, even in Paris, where people are accustomed to attend the theater. Every critic, without exception, testifies to Camus' failure as a playwright. The novelist techniques, imported into the theater, have failed to communicate. Like Arthur Miller, he has toiled in vain to produce a modern

tragedy. The audiences leave depressed and puzzled rather than exhilarated and purged. What impact has Camus made on the "normal man"? How has he been a healer? How many have heard his name, much less interpreted their lives as rebellion against plague? Camus himself has condemned the common man by his blanket generalizations about Europe as "hell," the scene of mass murder, slavery, and despair. He has scorned men as lazy and guilt-ridden. If inspiration to live comes from the sunshine and beauty of the Mediterranean, what affirmation can Camus give to those who live in the gloomy climates described in The Fall and The Misunderstanding? It is significant that he received the Nobel Prize for illuminating the problem of the human conscience of our time, not for giving solutions.

Thirdly, Camus has failed to go beyond nihilism in his political and social views. By precept and example his views lead to a dangerous privatism in a century where people are interdependent. The constant emphasis on individual integrity led him to break with his friend Sartre and every other writer of his day. He shunned public life and resented intrusions by all but a small circle of friends and acquaintances.¹ He was impotent in attempts to resolve the problems in Algeria, which continued in bloody civil strife long after his death. One can only speculate how much his views served to keep France fragmented into factions that brought changes in governments every few weeks, before the rise of Charles

De Gaulle. Camus satirized bureaucracy in The Stranger, The Fall, and State of Siege, while our well-being depends on the quality of our organization in an urban society of increasing complexity. Will a doctrine of hopeless rebellion against plague and death unite modern men to meet the problems of the mushrooming cities around the world? Camus' disdain for science and technology is out of place in our century.

Finally, one suspects that Camus failed to go beyond nihilism in his own personal life. Germaine Bree, who was so close to Camus that she alone had access to his notebooks and personal writings, tells something of the man behind his writing during the years of his best work:

Of the three main works that preoccupied Camus in this period--The Plague, The Revolt, and The Misunderstanding--it was his play, The Misunderstanding that embodied the deep underlying anxieties of the man and a despair which stands in almost direct contradiction to the defiant assertions of confidence which fill the Lettres a un ami allemand.²

Certainly Camus demonstrated his philosophy of resistance and absurd creation, by showing great personal courage in editing Combat, the important underground newspaper. It was after recurrent attacks of tuberculosis that he published his extended meditations: The Myth of Sisyphus and The Rebel. He overcame the defeat of a brief marriage in 1933 to marry successfully again in 1940. He was admired for traits of generosity and grace. But through all of this we know the man's preoccupation with death, his negations, his failure

in the theater. And when he stepped forward to receive the Nobel Prize, he described himself as a man "still almost young, possessed only with his doubts and of a work still in progress, accustomed to living in the isolation of work and the seclusion of friendship."³ Camus' disciples tell us that his most positive work was just around the corner, when death silenced his voice. To which one can only reply, "It was not done."

It can be said of Camus that he learned to love his rock and continued to push it up the slope, until a tree ended his toil. But he left us with a philosophy, which may be summed up by a passage from Dostoevsky:

Of course, I cannot break through the wall by battering my head against it if I really have not the strength to knock it down, but I am not going to be reconciled to it simply because it is a stone wall and I have not the strength.⁴

A Christian Alternative

I have evaluated Albert Camus only as a natural man without hope could criticize him in terms of Camus' own goals. Now I must step forward as a Christian in the twentieth century and proclaim an alternate view of man's experience, including that of Albert Camus, my natural brother. I, too, am committed and aim to write with passion, for the issues are life and death. My appeal is to a criterion beyond Camus and myself, but thoroughly human. I believe the means to proceed beyond nihilism is Man--the Man Jesus Christ.

He showed us how to master the enigmas of existence, how to live and die; he established the style of life most satisfying to human beings. He is the standard by which all men will be finally judged. He is the only fully natural, authentic man who ever lived. Jesus is my first piece of evidence for the value of life, just as Albert Camus asserts rebellion: "I rebel--therefore, we exist."

From this first piece of evidence, Camus went on to understand man in relation to the Greek ideal, the man with virtues of temperance, justice, prudence, fortitude, the man who defied the gods at times to live in harmony with nature, the man who took a circular view of history. Camus strove to write modern tragedy in the classical Greek style, including content and lyrical language. In short, he recognized Greek literature as primary sources for the understanding of man.

My sources are the documents of the Greek New Testament, which I search to discover the meaning of man in the Man Jesus Christ. But the New Testament is rooted in the Old Testament. Consequently, my canon is enlarged and my understanding deepened.

By such a standard as Jesus, interpreted in the Scriptures, I discover what is involved in being a full man. To be authentic, true to the facts of experience, a man believes in God, whom he calls Father. He accepts each day's trouble as enough for the day and each day as a gift from the Father's

hand. He enjoys the lilies of the field and the birds in the air, picks up a mustard seed to demonstrate faith, observes with careful attention the color of the sky and a puff of cloud on the horizon. He announces that God the Father knows the fall of a sparrow and keeps count of the hairs on each person's head. The Man Jesus commands the wind and calms the sea. He tells stories of fishing, sheep herding, managing property, waging war, building towers, searching for lost coins, and pulling fallen cattle from wells. He appreciates children's games, yet calls the local ruler a "fox." When this Man talks about the kingdom of God, he has in mind a lavish banquet given by a king for his son's marriage; he is thinking of a vineyard where the grapes are bulging in a coat of dew; he is picturing a celebration where the wine flows in abundance, food is left over by the basketful, and friends laugh to the sounds of music and dancing. This Man is a common man, who grows up in a small town, looking forward to a visit to the big city of Jerusalem. He walks dusty roads in the heat of the day, eats leftovers from the harvest, rides a borrowed donkey into Jerusalem, and to institute his sacrament picks up bread and wine from a modest table. He was a transient who had no place to lay his head. But he enjoyed a rich life.

Yet this Man did not lead an aseptic life or wander dreamily in roses. Rather he tasted bitter herbs and drank the cup of suffering to the dregs. He knew the cravings of

hunger and the loneliness of the desert. Men turned their backs on his proclamations and called him names like "glutton," "drunkard," "madman," "demon-possessed." He was laughed at, mocked, and spit upon, deserted by the friends who swore allegiance. He staggered in the garden, without human support, and cried from some deep pit of human agony on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"?

But there was no nihilism here. For his cry was not a shout of despair into a vacant, indifferent universe, but the question of a man to the good Creator, whom he worshiped and called Father to the end. This man of suffering was a servant of others, a royal servant in the King's house, the King's only son, who wrapped his waist with the dress of a slave. Never did he lose his dignity or sense of worth and purpose before men, hostile or applauding. With perfect self-control he silenced his opponents and corrected his disciples, healed the sick and raised the dead, fed the hungry and fired the poor with hope and promise. He held the door open for his betrayer's return, even as he sent him to do his ghastly task, and he frustrated his judges with majestic silence, until he moves his lips to acknowledge the truth that they call blasphemy. Here is a man beyond nihilism, who stares death in the face, promises life through death, and achieves what he has promised. This man with empty hands gives the world a kingdom, that men might have life and have it more abundantly. Jesus is the man by whom all men are

judged.

But Jesus and my New Testament tell me more. Jesus is not only one excellent man to admire and imitate. He is man for me and for all, living, dying, rising, accepting the rule of life in our place, opening the door of death for me and a million Camuses to enter into life. Common water and a name unites me in community with him and his people. Existence is radically transformed. Rather than see the world as indifferent or a hostile plague, I see it as the wrapped present of a loving Father. Evil is not at the center of existence or the universe; the beating heart of a loving Father is. And the natural outcome of my existence here will be the enjoyment of a new heaven and a new earth, whose luxuriance will surpass all dreams.

Now, by this standard, we will discover much truth in the work of Albert Camus. "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change"(James 1:17). God endowed Albert Camus richly and was a constant influence on his life. We are grateful for the many insights God gave to Camus: the profound awareness that men desire more than this world has to give, the realization of the common human nature which we share, the sense of beauty in nature, revulsion at death, compassion for others, the diagnosis of human pride, rejection of a morbid sense of guilt, criticism of the hypocrisy and silence of the church,

and the magnificent literary gifts and power of his art. I believe God was constantly tugging at Camus, coaxing him, opposing him, and inviting him. Camus definitely could conceptualize the essence of the Christian Gospel. But he rejected it and said "No" to God. He said "No" to the man Jesus Christ as the savior of men. He rejected all hope for the future in the promises of God. For he preferred to remain a Greek and rejected the gospel as foolishness, an unacceptable deification of injustice. His tragedy was pride, the flaw he hoped to avoid. His pride was thinking that he knew better than God and the man Jesus Christ. By his statements and products we know him and his ironic fall. But the final judgment must be recognized to be in the hands of God, while the truth expressed by Camus is a precious gift of the Creator.

I grieve in thinking of all that Albert Camus missed. He missed the joy of seeing the Spirit at work in the believing men of this century, who in the greatest suffering, cried, "Abba, Father." He missed the joy of using his literary skills in the service of the Gospel. He failed to see that history and nature were not opposing forces, but part of one plan which would fuse history and nature at the end of time into a new heaven and a new earth. What he called the hell of Europe is the result of pride and nihilism, not the Gospel, which was rejected. He was deafened by the silence of Christian leaders and missed the humble prayers of the saints, the witness of pastors and prisoners to the suffering love of

God. The communion he discovered in a brief swim with a friend was offered in richer measure in the bread and wine celebrated according to Christ's institution. Oh, he missed so much.

By the Spirit's movement, I can tell you about this universe and the experience of men. The universe is a work of consummate skill, designed for the welfare and enjoyment of human beings. But men are fallen, rebellious, and proud. They want to be god, make the world god, or devise countless dodges and hiding places. Therefore, God blesses them with experiences of pain, suffering, and death to remind them that the creation is not all. Natural disasters and social upheavals are God's megaphone calling men to repentance and faith in him for life, now and beyond all time and space. God has created a new humanity in Jesus Christ and incorporated individuals into this humanity by baptism. In Christ a man finds his personality, freedom, will for justice and mercy, strength to love, social responsibility--all that Camus was led to seek. In Christ a man enjoys the only genuine life the universe has to offer.

In Christ, I enjoy the life of compassion and glory of nature now. I search with men to discover the secrets of the universe by scientific methods. I join others in the task of subduing the creation and bringing more of it under man's control. I labor with relish that men may share the goodness of life here and now, upon the earth, but that is

not all. Beyond each man's grave, beyond the mystery of death, I see a new day, the dawn of a yet more glorious day, shaped and designed for those transformed by God's act through Christ into full manhood. Such full human life beggars description. The best sounds of choirs, the most magnificent architecture, the most pungent odors, the lush gardens and lavish forests are only pale hints of good things to come. The older I become, the more suffering wracks me and my loved ones, the more injustice and slaughter I bear and witness, the more graves I dig, the stronger will be my hope in God who in Jesus Christ suffered and defeated all the evil that I see and hear about. Daily in Jesus' cross, I see the love at the center of the universe, where my Father draws men to their home. No one can erase God's decisive act. Death is overcome. Already the strains of victory are in the air.

In times of suffering and injustice, the night grows cold around me. I stumble and fall on rocks and tear my skin on thorns. I scratch and claw for food. But it is still my Father's world. The breeze whispers through the pines; I hear the rushing, gurgling laughter of the mountain stream; my suffering brothers are at my side or not too far away. Deep, deep within me is the memory of my crucified Brother who taught me to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily

bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen." Suddenly, I am already on the slopes and the birds are singing about the morning. Soon, soon, I will stride with other new men upon the grand high road. The gray behind the mountain is the promise of the sun, and everlasting sun, God himself, living among his new humanity in new heavens and new earth.

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains into singing!
For the Lord has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his afflicted. Is. 49:13.

APPENDIX

Chronology of Important Dates

- 1913 (Nov. 7) Albert Camus' birth in Mondovi, Algeria.
- 1914 Father killed in Battle of the Marne, World War I.
- 1918-23 Attends grade school at Belcourt in Algeria.
- 1923-30 Scholarship student at the Lycee of Algeria.
- 1930 Student of philosophy at University of Algiers; first serious attack of tuberculosis interrupts his preparation for career in college teaching; for next several years supports himself with a series of odd jobs.
- 1933 A brief first marriage ending in divorce a year later.
- 1933-35 Brief membership in Communist Party, with which he is soon disenchanted.
- 1935 Actor-director-playwright in Theatre du Travail, which he founds; production of La Revolte dans les Asturies (The Revolt in Asturia), of which he is part author.
- 1936 Receives degree in philosophy.
- 1937-39 Camus' Theatre du Travail becomes the Theatre de l'Equipe.
- 1937 Publication of Betwixt and Between.
- 1938 Reporter for the Alger Republicain, publication of Nuptials.
- 1940 Second marriage, to Francine Faure, in Lyon; returns to Algeria in January, 1941.
- 1942 Publication of The Stranger; having left Algeria toward the close of 1942 to join French Resistance movement, becomes editor of clandestine newspaper Combat.

- 1942-44 Recurrent attacks of tuberculosis.
- 1943 Publication of The Myth of Sisyphus; becomes an editor at the Gallimard publishing house in Paris, a job he held until his death.
- 1944 After the Liberation continues as editor of Combat; production of the Misunderstanding in Paris; meets Jean-Paul Sartre.
- 1945 Birth of the Camus twins, Jean and Catherine, in Paris; production of Caligula.
- 1946-47 Lecture tour of United States.
- 1947 Publication of The Plague.
- 1948 Publication of The State of Siege.
- 1949 Lecture tour of South America; production of The Just Assassins.
- 1949-51 New attacks of tuberculosis.
- 1951 Publication of The Rebel.
- 1952 Break with Jean-Paul Sartre.
- 1956 Publication of The Fall; production of Camus' adaptation of William Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun.
- 1957 Receives Nobel Prize for "his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problem of the human conscience of our time"; publication of Exile and the Kingdom.
- 1958 Production of Camus' adaptation of Dostoevsky's The Possessed.
- 1959 Appointed by Andre Malraux, minister for cultural affairs of the French government, as director of the new state-supported experimental theatre.
- 1960 (Jan. 4) Camus' death in an automobile accident.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 70.

²Thomas Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus (Chicago: Regnery, 1958), preface.

³Albert Sonnenfeld, "Albert Camus as Dramatist: The Sources of His Failure," The Tulane Drama Review, V (June 1961), 107.

⁴Serge Doubrowsky, A Collection of Critical Essays, Edited by Germaine Bree (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 16.

⁵Ibid.

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¹Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), preface.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Germaine Bree, Camus (Revised Edition; New York: Harcourt Brace, and World, Inc., 1964), pp. 30-31.

⁴Albert Camus, "Camus at Stockholm, The Acceptance of the Nobel Prize," translated by Justin O'Brien, Atlantic Monthly, CCI (May 1958), 33-34.

⁵Bree, pp. 238-239.

⁶Albert Camus, The Plague, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 278.

⁷Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 37.

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¹Germaine Bree, Camus (Revised Edition; New York: Harcourt Brace, and World, Inc., 1964), pp. 24-25.

²Thomas Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus (Chicago: Regnery, 1958), xvi.

³Ibid., xix.

⁴Bree, pp. 192-195.

⁵Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 16.

⁶Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 26.

⁷Bree, pp. 194-195.

⁸Ibid., p. 210.

⁹Philip Thody, Albert Camus, A Study of His Work (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 98.

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¹Albert Camus, The Stranger, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1946), p. 152.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 154.

⁴Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 8.

⁵Ibid., p. 12.

⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁷Albert Camus, The Plague, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 153.

⁸Ibid., p. 277.

⁹Ibid., p. 278.

¹⁰Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 87.

¹¹Ibid., p. 15.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 47.

²⁰Ibid., p. 89.

²¹Ibid., p. 90.

²²Ibid., p. 91.

Chapter IV

¹Thomas Hanna, "Albert Camus and the Christian Faith," The Journal of Religion, XXXVI (Oct. 1956), 225.

²Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 303.

³Hanna, p. 227.

⁴Camus, passim.

⁵Ibid., p. 299.

⁶Ibid., p. 236.

⁷Ibid., p. 193.

⁸Ibid., pp. 196-197.

⁹Hanna, p. 225.

¹⁰Camus, p. 32.

¹¹Nathan Scott, Albert Camus, (New York: Hillary House Publishers, 1962), p. 62.

¹²Camus, p. 56.

¹³Ibid., p. 304.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁵Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), pp. 36-37.

¹⁶Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: The Modern Library, 1960), p. 53.

¹⁷Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 70.

¹⁸Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 65.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 49.

²⁰Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. vii.

²¹Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, pp. 52-53.

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¹Friedrich Nietzsche, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 105.

²Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 112.

³Ibid., p. 120.

⁴Ibid., p. 57.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁶Ibid., p. 177.

⁷Ibid., p. 248.

⁸Ibid., p. 10.

⁹Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 43.

¹¹Ibid., p. 67.

¹²Camus, The Rebel, pp. 80-81.

¹³Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 31.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁵cf. pp. 9-11.

¹⁶Camus, The Rebel, p. 60.

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¹Germaine Bree, Camus (Revised Edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1964), p. 61.

²Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 299.

³Ibid., p. 300.

⁴Bree, pp. 46-47.

⁵Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 144.

⁶Bree, p. 231.

⁷Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 144.

⁸Camus, The Rebel, p. 276.

⁹Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁰Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 167.

¹¹Ibid., p. 187.

¹²Ibid., p. 206.

¹³Albert Sonnenfeld, "Albert Camus as Dramatist: The Sources of His Failure," The Tulane Drama Review, V (June 1961), 109.

¹⁴Albert Camus, The Stranger, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 64.

¹⁵Albert Camus, The Plague, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 233.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 260.

¹⁸Camus, The Stranger, pp. 17-22.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 73-76.

²⁰Camus, Caligula, pp. 79-90.

Chapter VII

¹Philip Thody, Albert Camus, A Study of His Work (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 105.

²Albert Camus, The Plague, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 149.

³Germaine Bree, Camus (Revised Edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1964), p. 38.

⁴Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 302.

⁵Ibid., p. 22.

⁶Ibid., p. 8.

⁷Camus, The Plague, p. 229.

⁸Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1946), p. 85.

⁹Camus, The Plague, p. 230.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 231.

¹¹Camus, The Rebel, pp. 13-22 and passim.

¹²Ibid., p. 297.

¹³Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁴Camus, The Plague, p. 278.

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¹Albert Camus, The Rebel, translated from the French by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 285.

²Ibid., p. 290.

³Ibid., p. 297.

Conclusion

¹Charles Rolo, "Albert Camus: A Good Man," The Atlantic Monthly, CCI (May 1958), 32.

²Germaine Bree, Camus (Revised Edition; New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1964), p. 47.

³Albert Camus, "Camus at Stockholm, The Acceptance of the Nobel Prize," translated by Justin O'Brien, Atlantic Monthly, CCI (May 1958), 33.

⁴Fyodor Dostoevsky, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 61.

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