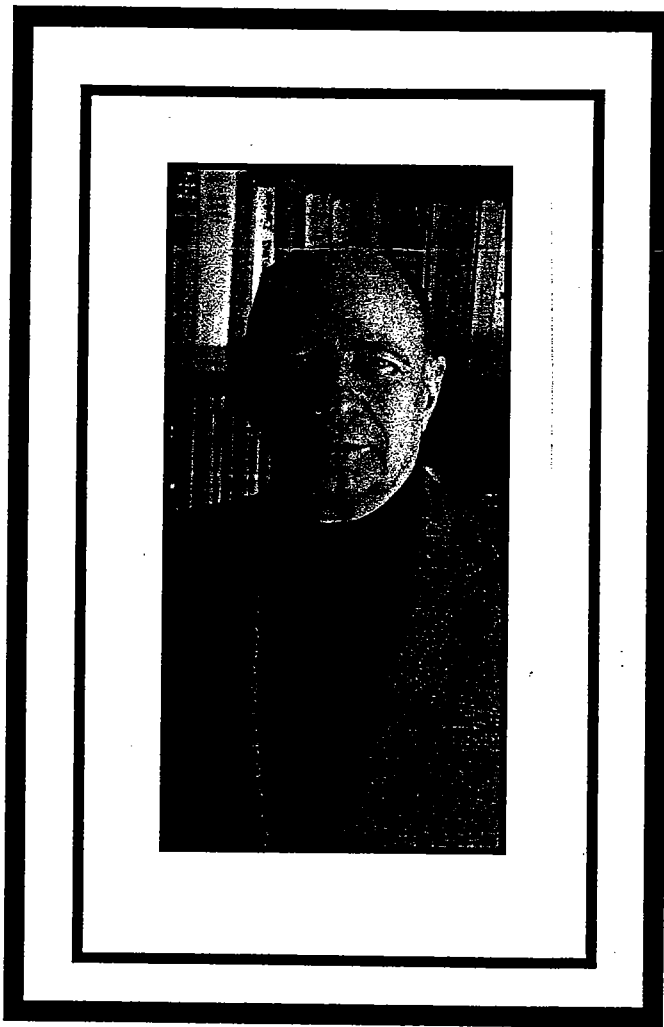


# The Ellul Forum

*for the Critique of Technological Civilization*

July 1994 Issue #13 ©1994 Department of Religious Studies University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620

## In Memory of Jacques Ellul, 1912-1994



### In This Issue

*Bulletin Board* p. 2

*Forum: Sermon by  
Jacques Ellul –  
The Truth Will Make  
You Free*

*Reflections on the Life,  
and Work of Jacques Ellul  
by:*

Joyce Hanks p. 4

Stanley Hauerwas p. 4

Bill Vanderburg p. 5

David Gill p. 7

Vernard Eller p. 8

Clifford Christians p. 9

David Lovekin p. 10

Gabriel Vahanian p. 11

Darrell Fasching p. 14

Ivan Illich p. 16

*Jacques Ellul's Response  
to the Symposium in His  
Honor, Nov. 1993*

p. 18

*About the Ellul Forum*

p. 19

History  
Manuscript Submissions  
Subscriptions  
Bibliographic Reviews  
Book Reviews

## Remembering Our Mentor and Friend, Jacques Ellul

This is an issue which I have put together with great sadness, for as many of you undoubtedly already know, Jacques Ellul died at the age of 82 on May 29th, 1994.

How does one measure a life such as his. It is immeasurable by anyone other than God. We can only respond to his life in terms of our gratitude for the insight and inspiration he has given us. From a scholars perspective it was a very productive life -- over forty books and hundreds of articles. And what books and articles! The power and scope of his mind were staggering. He has framed the issues for a whole generation of scholars. He taught us how to think about the role of technology in our lives historically, sociologically and most importantly -- theologically and ethically.

However, it was not just his mind that moved and inspired us, it was his life as well. His participation in the French resistance during WWII, his service as deputy mayor of Bordeaux, his service to the Reformed Church in France and the World Council of Churches, his tireless work on ecological issues and his work with juvenile delinquents -- all these form an inspiring witness. Jacques Ellul was a man of faith. In him faith in Christ, the intellectual life and ethical commitment to his fellow human beings all merged in

a singular witness that has touched and changed lives around the globe.

Jacques Ellul's death means that our lives are both poorer and yet richer. Poorer because he is no longer with us to lead the way. Richer because he left such a rich legacy and always encouraged us to think and act for ourselves, and therefore prepared us to carry on. In this special memorial issue I have asked a number of scholars from a variety of fields -- communications, languages, philosophy, engineering, theology -- to reflect on the significance of Ellul's life in whatever way they wished. Some have shared personal remembrances, others have spoken about how Ellul influenced their life, still others have chosen to reflect on his intellectual contributions. What emerges is a picture of the rich and varied ways Ellul has touched and transformed peoples lives.

Finally we are fortunate to have two pieces by Ellul himself. One is a sermon which Joyce Hanks secured for us some time ago, which I was holding for publication. The other is the comments Ellul made in response to the symposium held in his honor last November in Bordeaux. For this we owe thanks to Carl Mitcham. It seemed appropriate to begin and end this issue with these words from Jacques Ellul himself.

### L'Association Jacques Ellul

During the past year, Ellul family members and colleagues have joined together for the purpose of preserving the collection of his writings and manuscripts, and making his work better known. The Association has now been legally registered in France, and will soon be ready to invite interested citizens of other countries to join. If you would like more information about the Association as it becomes available, please send your name and address to: Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646. If you wish to join please send her a check made payable to Joyce M. Hanks for \$15.00. Joyce is willing to register all American applicants and save us from the hassle of having to change our American dollars into French francs.

### Donations Needed to Purchase Ellul's House

Just as we were going to press I received a letter from Joyce Hanks indicating that the *Association Jacques Ellul* is hoping to purchase the Ellul home and turn it into the headquarters for the *Association*. Anyone who is able to make a contribution should send a check to Joyce M. Hanks, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Scranton, Scranton PA 18510-4646. Make the check payable to Joyce and indicate its purpose and she will change the dollars into French Francs and see that they get to the proper person.

### Donations needed to Create and English Language Version of Film on Ellul

Serge Steyer, the director of the French film on Jacques Ellul entitled *Jacques Ellul, l'homme entier* has also recently been in touch with Joyce Hanks. He would like very much to produce an English language version of the film. The problem as usual is funding. If you can help with this project you can also send your checks for this project to Joyce Hanks at the above address. Be sure to indicate the purpose of the check so Joyce can keep all of this straight.

### New Members of the Editorial Board of the Ellul Forum

We have two new names to add to the editorial board of the Ellul Forum. Both are contributors to this issue. The first is David Lovekin, Professor of Philosophy at Hastings College. The second is Willem H. Vanderburg, Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development, Department of Industrial Engineering at the University of Toronto. Each has agreed to serve as a guest editor for a future issue. Both have made significant contributions to scholarship on Ellul's work and we look forward to the contributions they will make to future issues.

# Forum: A Sermon By Jacques Ellul

## The Truth Will Set You Free

Confirmation Day Sermon, 31 May 1992

Reformed Church of West Bordeaux: Pessac-Mérignac

*If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* (John 8:31-32, NJB)

Confronted with this saying of Jesus, we feel tempted to react just as the Jews did: "We have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, 'You will be set free?'" (John 8:33). Why does Jesus speak to us about setting us free?

France is a free country; we have political freedom, and on the whole our standard of living is rather high. The overwhelming majority of French people have their basic needs taken care of. Nothing makes us "slaves," in the usual sense of the word.

But Jesus gives a terrible answer: "In reality you are slaves to sin." And in fact we know very well that all of us are sinners. But sin is not a "moral error," like disobeying the Ten Commandments. Sin is genuine corruption of a person's reality. Nothing in us remains intact, the way God intended it for us. However "good" we may be, we remain sinners, "slaves" in one way or another of what conditions our life.

Sin always stems from *covetousness*. Adam was the first to covet, when he wanted to "be like God" (Gen. 3:5, RSV). Today and always, we covet in the same way, wanting to be like God! As moderns we do not use the same vocabulary, but the underlying reason for our actions remains the same. This same desire motivates our "progress," our science, our techniques, and the way we glorify ourselves, especially in the media.

Primarily, wanting to be like God means finally managing to do without Him! This is exactly what Jesus means when he calls us slaves. We are slaves of society, of our social relationships, our work, and politics. In all these areas covetousness leads us by the nose, suggesting new things to strive for: things that will "make our life complete," as the ads tell us.

God created us free: Adam's power to disobey gives us proof of that. God wants humanity, his most beautiful creation, to be free. But God does not behave like a person operating a machine, or like a wizard. He does not transform us by means of some kind of miracle. God has infinite respect for us, his creation, and he does nothing in our world unless we participate in it. He gives us the means to live, in truth and freedom. But we must use these "means."

There lies the trouble: we want to be free, but we want to become free on our own. Throughout history, including this last generation, we have experienced the results of human "will to freedom." Each time, we have replaced one kind of slavery with another. We are not capable of becoming free on our own, because we are inhabited by a spirit of power, a will to domination.

At this point Jesus' words relocate the question. No miraculous act can release us and make us free, changing our situation from that of slave to that of a free person. Only the "Truth" can accomplish this. But this truth is not philosophical or scientific; rather, it is a certain way of living. Instead of an intellectual matter, it is a question of life.

So how can we know this truth that will set us free? "Make my word your home" (John 8:31, NJB). Jesus' very way of expressing this makes an impression on us: he does not tell us merely to be

faithful to some teaching, or even to follow his example. "Make my word your home": it is as if we had entered a new world, in which we must live, "settle in," adopt a new lifestyle, and take up residence. In other words, we must be so permeated by Jesus' word that we live *in* it! When we do that, we have made our home there, because we are in real communion with Jesus, and we become free with respect to the "world" (society, morality, the powers), just as he was.

We must never forget, however, that Jesus himself leads us out of the world, the universe of falsehood and covetousness. Only in this way can we receive the very freedom of God.

Freedom does not in any way constitute a guarantee of happiness! Freedom is not tranquility, comfort, or security. People seeking freedom have always made this mistake.

First of all, freedom signifies responsibility: it means we take on the direction of our own lives, deciding among the different alternatives before us. Free! Certainly we can be fully human only on this condition. But freedom also constitutes our duty to be human as God wants us to be, and this means finding ourselves in Adam's situation! We can say "yes" or "no." For this reason, we must connect freedom with Truth.

Truth shows us the right direction, the right way to live. From now on, freed from the world's conditioning, we can choose our path and accomplish the work of our life (since the life of each of us is actually something we "make"). But in order to do this, we need orientation, a means of guidance. This is the role of the Truth that is in the Word of Jesus Christ. Without this guide, our freedom becomes endless, aimless wandering. In other words, it turns into a new ideology that makes us slaves all over again!

Having seen the guidance, the opening Jesus offers for our lives, what can we conclude about ourselves? When I look at my life and the life of my Church, can I claim that we express this "Liberty in the Truth"? Is our way of life truly "free"? Does our way of thinking express Truth?

We must not let ourselves be content with Jesus' promise, "the truth will set you free." We must not just piously listen to this "word of God." *We must live*—live as truly free persons: "if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free" (Jn. 8:36, NJB).

If we take this road, we will discover, as our experiences unfold, that we really do become free! We need only to make this decision. In each crisis, it is enough to know that God himself will free us. He has never let anyone fall who went forward on the basis of faith in his Word. Jesus himself is the Truth. We must live in this certainty and let our lives be inspired by this Word, which saves, frees, gives light, and shows the way: the way of our life, which is chosen, loved, and saved by God the Father who gave his Son so we could know the Truth, and at last live in freedom. Amen.

(Translated by Joyce M. Hanks)

## Jacques Ellul, 1912-1994

by Joyce Hanks, University of Pittsburgh

Jacques Ellul's death on 29 May 1994, although anticipated, in view of his protracted illness, came as a blow to those who knew him. His public lectures and other appearances have been considerably restricted in recent years, as his health declined. Nevertheless, in 1993 he was able to attend both the Bordeaux premiere of Serge Steyer's film entitled "Jacques Ellul, l'homme entier" and, last November, the first conference devoted to his thought, also held in Bordeaux. He addressed the conference in its closing session, reminiscing about his work, but primarily about his father's strong moral influence on his life.

Ellul's importance as an internationally recognized thinker never kept him from extending his help and friendship to those who asked for it. He regularly responded positively to requests for interviews, to letters filled with questions about his ideas and writings, and to local needs of all kinds. He was astonishingly trusting with his manuscripts, assuming younger scholars' need to consult them took precedence over his attempt to preserve them. It will now fall to Ellul's three surviving children, and to the Bordeaux-based "Association Jacques Ellul," to put his papers into some kind of order.

He was much more accessible and personable than a reader of his many scholarly books and articles might suppose. In view of the importance of his work and the excessive demands on his time, I always tried to avoid writing or telephoning him unless I had urgent questions regarding his bibliography--only to discover on more than one occasion that he had expressed concern to a mutual friend that he had not heard from me for some time. The year I lived in Bordeaux and interviewed him regularly, he often expressed some specific concern for me or one of my children, based on his keen observation of our adjustment to life in France. Just as freely, he shared his reactions to his own family's joys and troubles--the stimulus of having two of his teen-aged grandchildren live and study with him, and the distress he experienced at the illness and death of his wife, Yvette.

In recent years, Ellul's articles and books sometimes took extremely unpopular stands, especially with respect to South Africa, AIDS, and Islam. Previously considered by many as *the* Protestant spokesman in France, he rapidly fell out of favor in many quarters, so that he began to find it difficult to publish in some periodicals. Since he was never one to give in to pressure stemming from current fads, he bore all of this patiently, but clearly it affected his spirits in the last years of his life.

My main impression of Ellul is that of a man of God, a servant of the Church. He contributed in every imaginable way to the French Reformed Church, both nationally and locally. He conceived of brilliant new ways of proclaiming the Christian message, and threw himself into that project at every opportunity, often surprising people who had never expected to find Christianity attractive. He seemed to offer answers--not easy answers, but well thought-out responses to the hard questions of life. We will miss him sorely.

## Jacques Ellul, Courage and the Christian Imagination

by Stanley Hauerwas, Duke University

It is hard to believe that Jacques Ellul is dead. The energy and passion represented by such a life tempts us to believe he will always be "there." Of course he knew better as is clear in every sentence he wrote, but that does not mean we were prepared for his death. How do you prepare for the death of someone whose life and work has become essential for those of us committed to having the discourses of Christianity form the way we see and live in this world.

I was in seminary when I read *The Presence of a Kingdom*. I am sure I did not understand it then and I am not sure I "get it" now, but I understood enough to see here Christian language was working. I continued to read Ellul over the years, though I often disagreed with him, because I always knew that in reading him I would be reading an imagination formed by the courage of Christian convictions. For it was Ellul's great gift to help us see the "realities" of our world as illusion. He was able to do that, I believe, because he had not been trained to be a Christian theologian. It, therefore, never occurred to him that the problem might be that Christian convictions were incompatible with the world; rather he assumed the problem was that the world was incompatible with Christian convictions.

I remember struggling to understand his *The Technological Society*. I kept wondering what could lead one to write a book that described our being so captured by technique there was no way to free ourselves from it. For Ellul saw clearly that technology was not just the machine, but rather the machine embodied the modern presumption that human life had no *telos*. In the absence of any *telos* efficiency becomes the iron law determining all life. I confess I dismissed the book for some time as a typical example of the French intellectual style of exaggeration and hyperbole. Yet the power of his analysis haunted me.

Later I realized that Ellul in *The Technological Society*, as well as many of his other more sociological works, was remythologizing the Christian faith. By remythologizing I mean he was reimagining the world through Christian discourse. His analysis of technology renames the character of our existence as sin helping us see that we are possessed by powers from which we cannot will ourselves free. Accordingly apocalyptic takes on fresh resonance as we see that only God can and has broken the iron necessities that come from our possession by the powers.

The only figure I can think comparable to Ellul's courageous imagination is that of his fellow Frenchman, Michel Foucault. They each looked on the world with a courageous imagination that allowed them to see the world as it is without flinching. The power of Foucault's work is undeniable, but it is equally the case that many of us had been well prepared to face the realities of which Foucault's work directed us by the courage of Ellul. Of course, what Ellul offers that Foucault cannot, is hope. Such hope is not based on false utopianism, but rather resides in the very intervention by Ellul's work through which we know God matters.

Ellul's life is that "inefficiency" that God creates to challenge the powers that would rule in the name of efficiency. That he is now gone could be a counsel of despair except that Ellul has taught us that the God that makes lives like his possible has not abandoned us. We are fortunate indeed to have lived when such a one as this graced our lives with such an uncompromising imagination.

# Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: In Memory of Jacques Ellul

by Bill Vanderburg, University of Toronto

Jacques Ellul had run his race and quietly, around 7:45 on the morning of May 19, his life on earth came to an end. He had responded as best he could to an encounter with God. Many of us have experienced something of that encounter through his work. Whatever we may still learn about that encounter will not change his witness, received by many as a precious gift. We extend our condolences to his children, Jean, Yves and Dominique and their families, and we thank them for their role in this gift.

In Jacques' memory, I would like to share with you a meditation that I delivered in his presence the Sunday morning following the conference on his work held last November at the University of Bordeaux. It was entirely unplanned -- it so happened that there was no service that morning because of a regional meeting. Following the death of his wife and lifelong companion, Yvette, Jacques Ellul had been lonely and discouraged. His medical treatments did not help either, since they made him very tired. One Sunday afternoon, a friend found him particularly despondent following a Sunday morning service which had failed to lift his spirits. She read him a part of a letter in which I had explained the immense influence my four and a half years of study with him and our subsequent friendship continues to have on my life. I was deeply touched when I learned that my letter had helped to comfort and strengthen Jacques in an hour of need. I know he received similar letters from others to which he could no longer respond because of his failing health, but I would like you to know that such letters affirmed him greatly during the last few months of his life. So did the November conference, and I thank the *Association Jacques Ellul* for it.

Supporting and encouraging Jacques Ellul, therefore, was uppermost on our minds during our visit last November. Upon discovering there would not be any service the Sunday morning following the conference, we decided to organize one. I spent the next two nights preparing a meditation. I so much wanted to give something back to Jacques on what would be (to within a few days) the twentieth anniversary of when we first arrived in France to begin my 4 1/2 years of post-doctoral work with him. However, not having used my French regularly for the last fifteen years and not being able to read notes, I must confess I as a little uptight about the task. What follows is a brief summary of what I said that Sunday morning.

## *A New Famine and Drought?*

A number of our conversations during the past few days have focussed on how to share our hope and build one another up. I was reminded time and time again of the text in Amos 8, vs. 11-13, which we have just read together. It seems that many of us coming from different nations, cultures and traditions experience our time as just such a famine and drought. It is particularly true for Sunday mornings, when we search for an affirmation of our hope and faith and frequently do not find it. We have a profound longing for some good news as we try to find our way in the world: making sense of it as best we can so as to live in it as free people as we were meant to do. It is because we have experienced good news that we know what we are looking for, but we rarely find it.

Of course, as people of our time, place and culture we are aware of the profound changes in which we are participating. During the last fifty years, our cultures have undergone far-reaching changes. It is a time in which old ways have been lost and new ways are being found. Such times of upheaval are very difficult

for many people. Making sense of what goes on and meaningfully relating to it in the daily-life context is a difficult task. Institutions also have seen their foundations shaken and even destroyed. What is the response to this time of the God of Jews and Christians, who has entered into human history? I would like to reflect on these themes in the light of some Biblical passages.

## *Individual Responses*

It is tempting to identify with the feelings of the prophet Elijah that we have just read about in I King 19 vs. 9-18. In our feelings of isolation and frustration about what passes for Christianity in our world, it is essential to put things in perspective and take very seriously the assurances to the prophet that there are still 7,000 faithful people left in Israel. The number is highly symbolic: 7 refers to the reunification of God with his creation, which is taken 1,000 times. It reminds us of those hopeful texts in the Book of Revelation that we will come to in a moment, and it appears, therefore, that the message addressed to the prophet is not limited to that specific time or situation.

## *Institutional Responses*

While many Christians today will individually acknowledge an intuition that somehow, somewhere, something is going profoundly amiss, our churches as institutions have quite a different response. There is nothing new here, unfortunately, and we have many examples in the Old and New Testaments. The response during Jesus' day is well known. However, the story of I Samuel 4, vs. 1-11, is perhaps closer to our times. Feeling besieged, the churches hold out a modern ark, namely the Bible. They treat it as a sacred object, and confidently announce that Jesus is the answer while giving little evidence of knowing what the questions appear to be. There is no longer any question of walking with the Word as a lamp to illuminate our way. Instead, by staring at that light it is impossible to see what is going on in the world to find a way in it. As institutions stumble, some begin to feel hopelessly inadequate in the face of the issues, problems and sufferings in the world. Wishing to get more involved, they put the lamp down to free both hands for action. As they rush forward to respond to many needs, they soon move beyond the reach of the lamp, again to stumble when swallowed up by darkness. Neither of these two responses makes any sense, but they appear to dominate the scene. There is little in between these extremes in terms of walking with our given lamp as a light for our path.

## *Signs of Grace*

There is little question that since the Second World War, Western Civilization began a whole new era. Such a transition is one in which one way of life makes way for another. Of course, what this new way of life will be like and what consequences it will have is not always clear to the people living through such a transition. Making sense of what goes on and meaningfully relating to it in a daily-life context is a difficult task. It may give some people a sense of being adrift, of not understanding what is happening to their lives and their communities. Why are their values and convictions not providing adequate guidance? How can civilization push itself to the edge of a nuclear or ecological disaster? What is happening to families and communities? For others, the new age is full of promise brought about by the emerging post-industrial-consumer-information society. Between these extremes of secular hope and pessimism, we find the over-whelming majority of people coping as best they can. For Christians living out their calling, not to be enslaved or possessed by anyone or any-thing but to live a life of freedom in hope, faith and love, adds a challenge.

God's response to the situation is one we know from the Book of Hope, the Book of Revelation. In terms of specifics, I would like to focus on Jacques Ellul's encounter with God. The fact that he came from outside the Christian community once again affirms God's love for all humanity and probably says something about the condition of the churches as well. This encounter brought us a wonderful and urgently needed gift: a discernment of the spirit of our times. I know that for some of us, it was an experience of suddenly seeing the world and our life within it much more clearly -- the experience of a sudden illumination that touched us very deeply. In my country, I recall how George Grant said as much when he was interviewed for my radio series on the life and work of Jacques Ellul for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Yesterday, at the end of the conference, Ivan Illich expressed it in a deeply moving way. I recall how, as an engineer struggling with the questions of the limits to growth and the environmental crisis, the reading of the first two chapters in *The Technological Society* touched the very core of my being. It struck me as an accurate description of how I thought and worked and how, therefore, I was a part of the things I was trying to change. It presented a comprehensive global view of what was happening in the world in a way that one no longer encounters in the university, which has become an intellectual Tower of Babel in which individual disciplines can no longer contribute to a genuine intellectual culture. At the same time, this global thinking helps us find our way in the world. I found that it became much easier to understand other people who respond very differently to what is going on in the world and their lives and to relate to them as fellow-sojourners. Rather than being judgmental of those who are different, it is a part of what Ellul during my interviews with him called, "thinking globally and acting locally."<sup>1</sup>

It is only global thinking that can illuminate what appears to be happening, namely the beginning of a new epoch in human history where we no longer live primarily within nature nor within societies. Our cultures are now permeated by a scientific-technical approach to life. As cultural beings, this begins to define our "old nature." We are well aware of what happens to everything touched by this scientific-technical approach to life: almost everyone now recognizes what it does to the natural ecology and its ability to support all life. It is also becoming clear that the same thing is happening to the social ecology of society. Within the Christian communities, we have far from escaped these developments. The application of a scientific-technical (that is, historical-critical) approach to understanding the Biblical message has left us with a lot of debris and very little good news. Our religious studies departments, seminaries, and worship services testify to this tragedy.

All of us in one way or another have worshipped the new way and fallen victim to its consequences. Rather than treating science and the technical way of life as human inventions good for certain things, useless for others and irrelevant to still others, we have through the usual religious processes mystified and sacralized them with terrible consequences for the world. In a specific historical instance, we are seeing how the components of human history described in the second part of the Book of Revelation act themselves out in our times, and at the same time how this kind of global thinking in faith confronts us with the message of hope in the Book of Revelation. I have selected three passages in particular for our consideration this morning: Revelation 6, vs. 9-11, 12-17, and Revelation 7, vs. 1-17, which we have read together. I extensively drew on Jacques Ellul's commentary on these passages, but placed them in the context of our need to "think globally and act locally" with our hope and faith. These passages give an account of how the leaven in the dough causes it to rise in the reconciliation between God and His creation. They provide us with hope in this time of abandonment. We affirmed our hope in discerning what is happening before our very eyes, namely the reconciliation between God and all humanity in this century and for all time. In our prayer we gave thanks for the

many watchers on the towers, who had helped us and continue to help us discern the new developments coming across the horizon of human experience.

On Sunday afternoon, my wife and I met with Jacques Ellul in his living room, as we had done so many times before. We spoke about many things, including the experience of death; and reaffirmed in the faith, we parted not to meet again, at least not on this earth.

One short epilogue: following Jacques' passing, I have a profound feeling of abandonment, of being separated from someone who more than anyone else has marked my life, but it is much more than a personal matter. To whom would we go as a Christian community (fragmented and scattered as it is) for discernment on important issues, who has shown as much clarity of discernment, of vision and hope in this century as Jacques Ellul? We must continue to run our races for which Jacques Ellul has helped equip us. We will miss this great watcher on the tower, waiting for a new dawn of complete and total reconciliation.

---

<sup>1</sup>To my knowledge, the expression "thinking globally, acting locally" was introduced into North America via the CBC radio program on Jacques Ellul. He used it to sum up his life and work. Subsequently, this expression has been used by many for different purposes. American readers may wish to know the radio program was printed as *Perspectives on Our Age* by Seabury as if it were a book written by Ellul, by leaving out some parts. The Canadian CBC edition is complete.

# My Journey with Ellul

by David Gill, North Park College, Chicago.

My relationship with Jacques Ellul had two phases. From 1971 to 1981 it was a relationship of correspondence by letter; from 1982 to 1991 it was a relationship of personal conversations.

In late 1971 I read (and reviewed) my first book by Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City for Right On*, a monthly "radical Christian" journal in Berkeley, California, that later evolved into *Radix Magazine*. There were very few Christian perspectives on the city at that time so I was pleased to find Ellul's book. I thought it was interesting but nothing sensational. However, I noted a list of several other Ellul titles on the dust jacket and, in preparation for the 1972 presidential campaign, I read *The Political Illusion*, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, *Presence of the Kingdom*, and *False Presence of the Kingdom*. As I read these books and then attended the Democratic Convention in Miami I was "hooked" for good. His descriptions of modern politics and statecraft were played out before my very eyes. I found Ellul's discussions of both politics and Christianity powerful, illuminating, and brilliant. It was an intense, passionate, spiritual and intellectual awakening for me.

In late July of 1972 I decided to send a letter and copies of my articles and reviews to Ellul at the University of Bordeaux. I was surprised to get a personal reply from him in September 1972. He was very kind and encouraging about my articles and gave me helpful responses to a few questions I had asked.

For the next ten years I corresponded with Professor Ellul two or three times per year. I collected and read everything of his that I could get my hands on. A French-language bookstore in Los Angeles helped me acquire many of his French volumes. From 1973 to 1977 I was a Ph.D. student in Religion/Social Ethics at the University of Southern California. From my initial interview onward, my USC professors supported my project of studying Ellul's theological ethics, his intellectual sources (the Bible, Weber, Marx, Kierkegaard, Barth) and his counterparts (in ethics, in the sociology of politics and technology). In the fall of 1976 Lewis Smedes invited me to teach a course on Ellul's thought at Fuller Seminary, my first effort along those lines. While I lived in southern California I got to know Vernard Eller at LaVerne University. We met several times to discuss our mutual interests in Ellul's ideas.

From 1977 to 1982 I was back in Berkeley, leading a project to establish a graduate-level study center and think tank on the relation of Christian faith and biblical ethical perspectives to modern life and work. Ellul's ideas and counsel were certainly important to me as I worked on this project.

All this time, of course, I had wanted to go to Bordeaux in person and meet with Ellul. But my wife and I had two small children and not one cent extra in our budget. I was able to carry out my research and writing in North America by aggressively collecting Ellul's writings in French as well as in English translation and by writing to him for clarification and further detail.

Finally, however, I took my wife and children to Europe for two months in the summer of 1982. I'll never forget the excitement I felt as we drove into Bordeaux and then a few days later visited the Elluls at their home in Pessac. Joyce Hanks and my wife Lucia helped with my almost nonexistent spoken French as I interviewed Ellul (later published in *Christianity Today* and *Radix Magazine*). I also persuaded Joyce that we should invite the Elluls for Sunday dinner after hearing him preach at the Reformed Church in the Chartrons neighborhood. Ellul brought along a couple of excellent bottles of Bordeaux and we had an afternoon full of good food, fellowship, and conversation--made the more memorable by the experience of riding in Madame

Ellul's car. She is on my top five list of "wild drivers I have ridden with!"

That visit in 1982 laid the groundwork for my twelve months in Bordeaux on my sabbatical from June 1984 to June 1985. After two months of intensive work on my French I began meeting with Ellul for an hour or two on Friday afternoons at his home. Allowing for vacations, travel, etc., I probably averaged meeting with him two or three times per month for nine months. I also attended his monthly studies on Ecclesiastes at his church, heard him preach a couple times, and accompanied him to a weekend GBU (InterVarsity) retreat.

Basically we did three things in our meetings: (1) we discussed his work, sometimes arguing vigorously about the theology of work, eschatology, politics, etc., and often exploring intellectual terrain we occupied in common; (2) Ellul read and critiqued my writing and ideas--about Christian ethics, higher education, the church, etc., and (3) I prepared for him bibliographical introductions to the work of James Gustafson, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and other Americans. I asked him if I could do anything to assist him while in Bordeaux; he replied that he had difficulty sorting through the immense volume of American publications in ethics to see what was worth his special attention as he prepared his own books on ethics.

I have met many famous intellectuals but I have never met anyone as learned as Ellul. I locked horns with him many times (work and calling, universalism, individualism, etc.) and always found deeper layers of Ellulian research and knowledge as I pressed him on his case. He sometimes seems hasty and simplistic in his written statements; in person it was clear that his views were carefully, appropriately nuanced and reflected a vast research.

Ellul's personal character affected me as much as his intellectual brilliance. Unlike the self-important, sneering buffoons I met at Oxford, my Bordeaux mentor was relaxed, genuine, warm and kind. He was as good at relations with my children and with blue collar workers as he was in the pulpit, lecture hall or in debate. His marriage to Yvette and their warm hospitality were great and inspiring gifts to those who benefitted from them.

On one of my finer days in Bordeaux, my landlord, Henri Cerezuelle, who had been a long time friend of Ellul, drove me south into the foothills of the Pyrenees for a wonderful afternoon with Bernard Charbonneau, Ellul's best friend, often cited in his writings.

I (like some others) tried very hard to persuade Ellul to visit the USA. He said he would come, then backed out two or three times. His excuses were that his heart condition wouldn't allow him to fly, taking a boat was too long, and he didn't speak English (true). I told him we would bring along an entourage including his cardiologist, wife, and however many friends and translators he wished. I described to him Helmut Thielicke's tour and his method of successfully grappling with the English problem. But I think he really was afraid to fly (did he ever in his life?) and felt that his work in Bordeaux was a better use of his time. I also tried to persuade Bill Moyers and PBS to do a first rate interview series on Ellul--but didn't get very far. Thankfully we do have the Dutch and French video interviews to show our American friends.

I returned to Bordeaux for four weeks in the summer of 1988 and one week in the summer of 1991. On both occasions it was a great joy to be with Ellul again but painful to see his health and then (especially after Yvette's death in 1991) his spirit failing. Our correspondence continued until 1991 but after that date he wasn't able to respond to my occasional letters any more.

It is ironic that just as C.S. Lewis' death on November 22, 1963, was overshadowed by that of John F. Kennedy, so was Jacques Ellul's death on May 19, 1994 by that of Jacqueline Kennedy. (I'm not suggesting a conspiracy!) For me, May 19 has always been significant because it was the birthday of Malcolm X, the African American social prophet who woke me up to the depths of America's sin of racism. And now it also marks the end of the

life of another one of the twentieth century's most important prophetic voices. When I heard Daniel Cerezuella's voice on my phone with the news on the morning of May 19, I felt a great

emptiness sweep over me. The world was emptier. We lost a great man. But what a privilege it has been to have learned from him and to have known him.

## Merci, mon ami!

by Vernard Eller, University of La Verne

**M**y name is Vernard Eller; and I am most grateful for the invitation to talk about Jacques Ellul. As a writer of books, my first *magnum opus* was Kierkegaard (my doctoral dissertation). Two decades later, my last *magnum opus* was the most Ellulian thing I have written. But the dedication page of this last one read:

In appreciation of  
*JACQUES ELLUL*

who has led me not only into Christian Anarchy  
but into much more of God's truth as well.  
*Merci, mon ami!*

And those are the sentiments that will last as long as I do—or as long as the book itself does.

Long before Ellul and I had any knowledge of each other, we had in common a strong commitment to Kierkegaard, as our immediate Christian predecessor. In time, then, Ellul expressed deep appreciation for both my Kierkegaard *magnum opus* and my Ellul one. Yet it was the very *personal* character of that appreciation which so impressed me. Ellul voluntarily undertook efforts (futile) to get my Kierkegaard book published in French. And regarding the book itself, he picked upon and gave meaning to a detail no one else even noticed. That volume was dedicated to my two sons—with the prayer that the boys would grow up to demonstrate the same quality of Christian faith as was exemplified by their namesakes: Alexander Mack (the Brethren founder) in the one case; and Enten Eller (Kierkegaard's book title) in the second. Yet in a longhand note to me, Jacques Ellul found that prayer to be most significant. Yes, of course I consider all the thoughts, teachings, and writings of Jacques Ellul to be of critical importance. Yet it is the man himself I truly love and value.

When I finished college and got started on graduate studies, my one goal and dream in life was that I might become a teacher and professor like my dad—though, in my case, as professor of Bible at my alma mater, the little Brethren school in California. I did have degrees in English literature and knew that *writing* was my first love (although that simply as *hobby*). Never in my wildest dreams would I have foreseen my writings drawing such public notice and acclaim that they put me into personal contact with a recognized genius and intellectual giant the likes of Jacques Ellul. That I was destined to become a personal friend of Ellul's—that I consider to be a sheer miracle of God and one of his totally unmerited gifts.

My first notice of Ellul's *name* (let alone his thought) came with his article, "Between Chaos and Paralysis," in the 06/05/68 *Christian Century*. I immediately sensed his affinity with my own biblical/Kierkegaardian/radical--discipleship stance. So I went after Ellul's books, beginning (I think) with *The Meaning of the City*. I soon learned that Will Campbell and Jim Holloway (with their quarterly journal, *Katalagette*) had the best US connection with Ellul himself. I got in touch with them—and was soon invited to do a 1971 KAT article that would bring together the thought of

Ellul, Kierkegaard, the Blumhardts, and Malcolm Muggeridge. Holloway sent that KAT issue to Ellul—and Ellul responded to Holloway (not to me). He was very pleased with the article, complaining only that I had "placed him too high." (This was Ellul's regular complaint. For the truth is that he was always a very unassuming, truly humble man.)

Holloway passed Ellul's letter on to me; and I took it as an opportunity to write to the man himself. Thus began a correspondence that ran *spasmodically* for more than twenty years—averaging probably not even one exchange per year. I, of course, read all Ellul's books as they came out (in English). I sent him as many of my books as I thought would interest him. He was always extravagant in his praise—even crediting me with helping clarify his thought at points. On a scale of 1 to 10, if, intellectually, Ellul were rated a 10, I probably wouldn't make it out of zero. Yet Ellul always treated me as a scholarly peer—and more importantly, as a Christian friend and brother.

Actually, Ellul and I did pull off one joint venture, which may have won us the largest one-time hearing either of us ever received.

At the time, I was doing pretty well at landing articles in *The Christian Century*, so I submitted one entitled *How Jacques Ellul Reads the Bible*. It was accepted. You understand that Ellul and I never actually met each other; his English and my French wouldn't have made for much comprehensibility in any case. But the cover page of the November 29, 1972, issue of the *Century* looked like this: Apart from the *Century* masthead and dateline, there was only a photo of Jacques Ellul and the story title: *How Jacques Ellul Reads The Bible: Vernard Eller*.

That in itself would have been blessing beyond measure; but there is more. This *Century* issue happened to coincide in point of time with the monstrously large Quadrennial Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America. So in addition to its regular subscriber's list, free copies of the Ellul/ Eller *Century* were everywhere at hand (and underfoot) throughout that convention.

It probably wound up with us both being "placed too high." So, to Jacques Ellul, I end as I began: *Merci, mon ami!*



## Ellul's Prophetic Witness to the Academic Community

Clifford G. Christians, University of Illinois-Urbana

For over two decades, I have engaged Ellul's work intellectually. On the occasion of his death, allow me a highly personal account of the way his work has inspired my own journey.

One of my professors at the University of Illinois introduced me to Jacques Ellul in 1970. He assigned *Propaganda* and it captivated my attention immediately. At that point in my doctoral studies Ellul had been the only Christian scholar to be taken seriously in our department. From those days until now, Ellul has been more than an academic mentor to me. Here was a believer with a worldwide reputation who had not cheapened his religious commitment. His career and lifestyle as an academic have served for me as a model for integrating faith and learning.

Since his career revolved around a secular university, as mine does, Ellul's prophetic witness has enabled me to pursue my own calling more fruitfully. I have known the stories of the Old Testament prophets since childhood. Amos fascinated me particularly, called away as he was from his farming to preach against the wealth and indifference of Israel. However, it has never been obvious in my mind how these examples can be translated into the modern university setting. Ellul opened the prophetic door for me through his own Amos-like ministry to contemporary culture. He provided at least a glimmer of hope that the Christian mind of the 20th century can dominate the discussion about technology today in the same manner Karl Marx commandeered the 19th century agenda over industrialism. Sophisticated technology at present is unleashing novel and dangerous situations of unprecedented magnitude. Ellul's prophetic witness encouraged me in believing that we need not stand by immobilized.

As an antidote to the normlessness and cynicism of a university campus, Ellul inspired me to maintain an explicit faith without being naive. I have not forgotten that it was Aldous Huxley who introduced Ellul to America. Huxley had read *The Technological Society* in French and considered it more penetrating than his own *Brave New World*. And Huxley stood amazed at Ellul's faith which prevented him from becoming a bitter atheist as he was. As a sign of hope in this sense, Ellul sent us outside the tiny oasis which Bible-believing academics often rest content. In many ways, what C. S. Lewis accomplished in literature, Ellul did in the social sciences. He encouraged us to stretch beyond the minimal, beyond the modules and homilies, to a bold vision co-extensive with the abundance of contemporary power.

Moreover, Ellul was a testimony to the inevitability of suffering in academic life. No one can be a watchman on the walls without ridicule and attack. Ellul paid dearly for his distinctiveness. Alongside those who recognized his stunning insights and credentials were the hosts who incessantly denounced him. The political activists turned on him when he opposed violent means. Marxist intellectuals claimed his views were too diluted and apparently preferred more strident ideological commitments. Social scientists insisted on so-called neutrality and dismissed his impassioned work as moralizing. Even within the Christian community he was misunderstood as too scriptural by some and not biblical enough by others. A few found him too confrontational and others too individualistic. Among Christians who also wish to establish a correspondence between faith and the world, Ellul's notion of counterpoint was sometimes misdirected. Through it all, Ellul reminded me that genuine Christian scholarship entails suffering. While distinctiveness is necessary to accomplish any-

thing theoretically interesting, such forthright stands can never escape abuse. Though suffering can be ameliorated to some degree and may not be as intense for all, Ellul showed the nobility of a steadfast willingness to pay the price.

For those of us in an academic world, Ellul made it clear that the important battles are fought over content. Certainly a life of integrity is critical. Keeping one's promises, honesty with the data, respect for students, and other such virtues are necessary givens for a Christian testimony. Active involvement in social causes, and freedom from the demons of money and careerism are *sine qua non*. Christian institutions warrant support also, and time devoted to them can sometimes indicate that the university does not own my soul. But Ellul contended that all these are insufficient. While failure in any of the above undoubtedly weakens or besmirches our impact, they together are not a substitute for an integration of faith and learning. The issue in the secular arena is whether a biblical foundation makes any difference in the way we think, in our grappling with the latest headlines, in shaping our disciplines. If, in other words, Christians and non-Christians end up with the same conclusions on crucial issues, and if economic and political beliefs seem finally to carry the greatest weight, then the Christian worldview is unnecessary baggage. Regarding issues that matter, if the orientation is the same for all, then Christianity is clearly a paradigm which may have successfully anchored reality in the pre-scientific era but no longer has any legitimate claims on our allegiance.

Harry Blamires in *The Christian Mind* expresses the same concern. He laments that there is no clearly formulated Christian mind on the vital issues of the day. Such an identifiable perspective may be developing over civil rights and nuclear war and perhaps over abortion, but Blamires argues that even on those matters too much ambiguity and lack of unity still exist. To his way of thinking, in no instance really is there a powerful stream of Christian thinking which cannot be ignored. And Ellul shared an identical conviction about the urgent need for toughminded struggles against the modern mind -- in his case over the nature and role of technology in our culture. Some of us are convinced that the Bible communicates to all of life and not just regarding the soul. We refuse dichotomies between prayer and action, salvation and culture, word and deed. In this sense, scriptural truth is a white light which shines through the prism of space and time into a spectrum of colors, and it does not merely illuminate a narrow road leading to heaven. To us, Ellul has been a signpost that a holistic approach can be made meaningful even in an increasingly post-Christian era.

He brought the revolutionary motif up from a footnote in order to develop an approach that was radical enough to make major transformations as necessary in the status quo. Such prophetic appeals have consistently come out on the short end; they have been relegated to the final chapter or emerged as an afterthought when all the other intellectual work has been safely gathered in. Ellul made the urgency of revolt and resistance compelling, moving them solidly within the circumference of social responsibility itself. He was too uncritically Barthian at this point for my own taste, presuming Barth's dualism between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. Based on that dialectic, Barth denies meaning and value to time and space, a perspective which entails a gulf between secular and sacred histories. On this view, the latter culminates in an eschatological climax at the final judgment. And given this construct, the apocalyptic end-time moment anchored both freedom and revelation for Ellul. However, despite the limitations of this formulation, Ellul challenged me with an analysis which confronts our technological era without a hint of compromise, while simultaneously protecting the clear otherness of the solution. His achievement was to eradicate all middle-level compromises within the historical process.

Ellul heard the plea of James Houston in "The Judgment of the Nations" for a new sense of mission in the Christian community:

[We must learn] to use the whole range of our professional skills to speak prophetically about our time. We need deeper analyses of the pathology of scientific, technological, social and political evils in our contemporary world, in light of the eternal realities....A new missionary enterprise is involved: to go virtually into every professional area of life, just as in the past we have emphasized the geographical penetration of our world with the gospel. (*Prophecy in the Making*, ed. C. F. H. Henry, pp. 360-61)

Meanwhile the church has been giving pride of place to laity who serve internally, who contribute to its ongoing administration. Those on the church board or teachers in religious education are prized as involved lay persons. However, if Houston is right, the "worldly laity" are the urgent need at present. While churches may be devising strategies for communicating to the reachable, the alienated still remain virtually untouchable. Though the church has released incredible resources of late to train the internal laity, virtually no leadership or help emerges whatsoever about penetrating the professions and institutions of our time. Thus Ellul ranked in my mind as a strategic case of effective lay power, whose books and life were teaching instruments not only for educators, but for the worldly laity in the human community at large.

Ellul reminded me that the pivotal role of conscience must be recaptured in moral agency. Freud stifled our appreciation of the conscience, reducing it as he did to a nagging voice and repressive intruder yielding unnecessary guilt. Jacques Ellul knew better, using his prophetic voice to ignite the human conscience. Clinical appeals to reason and analysis are insufficient; on his view we ought not merely face social and cultural dilemmas with a calculator. Ellul's work surged forth like a mighty stream from a deeply touched conscience of his own seeking to inform and activate the consciences of others. I saw in his demeanor an insatiable thirst, a relentless yearning for justice and meaning that has marked prophetic agents over the centuries. From him I renewed my own concern for a vital prophetic witness against the human propensity to serve the interests of power. As his numbers increase, inspired by his legacy, perhaps our technological activity can be freed at last from its anti-normative direction.

## In Memorium for Jacques Ellul

by David Lovekin, Hastings College

I first learned of Jacques Ellul in the spring of 1969, a time when many Americans were discovering Ellul's work. I read *The Technological Society*, (1964) his "call to the sleeper to awake." American philosophy at that time was very much guided by Brizo, goddess of sleep, a condition which today has even deepened under the unwavering hegemony of analytical philosophy with its logic chopping and concept shifting -- the *la technique* of philosophical wisdom or of Heideggerian-like nihilism, the posture of spirit tired of making sense. For a time it appeared that phenomenology would provide respite, but that was shortly to be harnessed by conceptual batteries and wires that abandoned the concerns of the *lebenswelt* that had fascinated such thinkers as Merleau-Ponty.

I took seriously what Ellul was to state later in much clearer terms in *The Technological System* (1980):

Man's central, his-I might say--metaphysical problem is no longer the existence of God and his own existence in terms of that sacred mystery. The problem is now the conflict between that absolute rationality (*rationalité absolue*) and what has hitherto constituted his person. That is the pivot of all present-day reflection, and, for a long time, it will remain the only philosophical issue. (74)

Although he claimed not to be a philosopher, Ellul understood that a metaphysical realm beyond the here and now was obviated by the reduction of the real to the absolutely rational in the pursuit of evanescent efficiency with a mathematics-like methodology. Philosophy went the way of all disciplines. Philosophy seemed unconcerned or unable to take its own condition into account, to wonder why the concept and reason had come to hold such power and force, to see this incarnation of philosophy as a manifestation of the very business it was philosophy's traditional duty to examine: the *polis* in whatever form it might take.

Philosophers had become checkers and baggers in the supermarket of technique, pricing and inventorying items and then wrapping them but never calling them to question; or they became the homeless outside the market in the clearing of technique waiting for visits from *Dasein* in a shopping cart. Ellul's work was to my mind philosophical in the classical sense; uncovering the presuppositions of what currently passed for knowledge and locating this knowledge against the backdrop of the whole; and then relating the limits of knowledge, some form of otherness, to the known. Ellul sought freedom for consciousness and human awareness to become aware of itself, to take shape against what it was not, against its loss. Ellul examined the force and power of technical consciousness from a standpoint outside of it, employing the history of law, biblical exegesis, and social analysis with an imaginative totalizing vision. Technique was grasped as it appeared in time, as it took on the character of the sacred, and as technological society usurped traditional human culture produced against the backdrop of otherness. Technology became the sacralization of the familiar.

Typically the enormous scope of Ellul's work was beyond his readers wanting to reduce him to a pessimistic Christian luddite. But Ellul clearly understood that to come not to praise technology would be taken as its condemnation. Like nineteenth century Kierkegaard, he ranged the contemporary social world witnessing the idolatry of "absolute rationality;" like eighteenth century Giambattista Vico, he understood the debilitating power of the "intelligible universal," Vico's term for what clearly is Ellul's technical phenomenon, and of its disempowering effect on metaphorical and symbolic language revealed in culture and human law; and like twentieth century philosopher Ernst Cassirer, Ellul saw the human spirit alive in symbolic construction but endangered by monological technique. Ellul, like the above thinkers, stood outside of fad and fashion and offered the voice of the other to keep open the dialectic of human possibility.

# Anarchy and Holiness

by Gabriel Vahanian, Université des Sciences Humaines, Strasbourg

**H**ailed as "Mr. Protestant", Jacques Ellul appears on the American scene a few decades ago and, obviously, for the general reader, he still admires Barth.

It is not with Barth, however, that he shares the distinction of having probed the emergence of technology and its impact on the nature and destiny of the human person. It is with Tillich. To be sure, he differs from Tillich, too. In particular, with respect to the relation between religion and culture, they even seem to stand at opposite ends of the spectrum. Describing religion as the substance of culture and, conversely, culture as the form of religion, is not the kind of path Ellul follows. Like Barth, he distinguishes religion from faith.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, religion can also be an expression of the sacred. It belongs then to the same realm as culture; perhaps, it belongs to what we call civilization or, more precisely, to that of which technology would be the ultimate negation, if we must give credence to Ellul's contention that there can be no technological civilization.<sup>2</sup> When, however, he also contends that civilization itself is inextricably bound up with the sacred, we begin to wonder. Before long, one question leads to another: How Protestant is Mr. Protestant?

To what extent is Ellul's implicit, dichotomous, understanding of *faith* and culture congruous with classical Protestant openness to secularity? Is it not in contradiction with the idea suggested by Troeltsch that Protestantism is that form of Christianity which, rather than adopting, adapts to given historical circumstances and patterns itself after the emerging cultural mind-set? And do we still, with Ellul, stand in the tradition of Reformation, which Karl Holl depicts as consisting in the secularization of religion and the spiritualisation of culture? Or is Ellul more a sociologist than a theologian? Or, for that matter, is he too French a theologian? And if so, how could his thought be freed from its shackles, fettered as it is by the dialectic of the sacred and profane which still pervades a Catholic culture? How could it, genuinely, adhere to the iconoclastic dialectic he seems to wish and call for yet does not really spell out, namely that of anarchy and holiness?

## *Modernity: from the Reformation to the Death of God*

Indeed, in spite of all appearances and a litany of common places with which the Reformation is laden, there is an aspect of it which needs to be stressed. It has to do with the fact that, then, Christianity is about to face Modernity and does so, not so much by allegedly returning to the sources, as by developing a theology staked off a new conception of the world. On the whole, Christianity continues to fertilize Western culture, providing it with a sense of destiny, both individually and socially. Whether intellectually, spiritually, or ethically, the Christian faith still informs and belongs to the cultural mind-set.

At most, albeit with a touch of irreverent humor, one might somewhat wryly relish the thought that, with the Reformation, Christianity undergoes sort of a religious lifting. As a result, the world itself will look quite a different place. Not enough, however, to be spared from the growing gap between religion and culture or to resist their cleavage once it is set in motion. No sooner has Modernity begun its course and been identified as a challenge to established customs than it gives the impression of being programmed to break up with the Christian tradition. It will. But when it does -- if it actually does -- it will break up with the latter only because of its own premisses: they are rooted in the Christian understanding of the world.

Odd as it is, Modernity only reaps what it did not sow. It garners an heritage actually neglected by Christianity while the

church remains locked up in a religious tradition fast becoming fossilized. It rests on a misunderstanding.

As for the church, by splitting science and faith, it does in fact overlook the real theological questions. They are raised by the very scientists it impugns. But if theirs is a lucid struggle against the tyranny of outmoded presuppositions, its outcome surely is not less doubtful or reprehensible in its assumptions. For winning the day, scientism equally rests on dubious foundations. Prematurely blowing its horn, it deludes itself on a pyrrhic victory won from a religious tradition now seemingly fitted with savings of leveled-down transcendence.

True enough, both sides misconstrue transcendence. They think it stands or falls with supernatural dualism. But, in biblical thought, God is a God who creates and becomes incarnate and is all in all. He dwells among men. Immanence is not shunned by his transcendence, on the contrary. Given the iconoclastic bent of this biblical notion of God, immanence can even be said to come *before* transcendence. Accordingly, a demise of the supernatural understanding of the world is no surprise. It was inevitable. But it does not necessarily entail the demise of transcendence, much less of faith. It even radicalizes faith in God as Ellul would suggest through his rather peculiar notion of the silent God.

Indeed, ours is a time of disenchantment. In the wake of Max Weber, God's silence notwithstanding, Ellul continues to think of the *world* as being disenchanted. He does not want to realize that this disenchantment affects science or philosophy much less than the very Christian tradition on which they were weaned. It affects the world much less than it does Christianity. After all, if it was the world that was disenchanted, we should have by now found enchantment elsewhere, perhaps even in the classic posture of contempt for this world. On the contrary, it becomes more and more evident that Christianity alone does not and cannot by itself suffice to enchant the world. Just as one knows a tree by its fruits, so also does one know a religion by the world it bears and begets. Christianity seems instead bent on reneging the world it has borne. Searching for its own identity and, more or less disavowing the world it has brought forth, it is focussed on a quest of origins. Challenged by what is demanded of it, it recoils into what it demanded in another world. It is oblivious of the fact that it would know whence it comes if, as was still the case with the Reformation, it knew whither it goes. It seeks to reconstruct its past, instead of submitting to the permanent deconstruction of it as demanded by its own future. Admittedly, the issues with which Christianity is henceforth confronted are not quite the same as those of the sixteenth century. They will grow worse still in our time, when religion needs more than a lifting.

## *The Cultural Impact of Technology*

As innovative as the Reformation was, it was not at odds with the world; it shook up the church, not its cultural or, for that matter, religious underpinnings. It does not amount to what is called today a "cultural revolution." In particular, it does not presuppose, nor does it demand, a total reappraisal of the cultural, even of the religious infrastructure of the Christian tradition. By contrast, ours is a situation for which it is not the world but religion which is shorn of its supernatural dimension -- at once a fact, which must be dealt with, not by the world, but by the Christian faith, and a task, to which Christianity continues to remain reticent.<sup>3</sup> Theological bridgeheads have not only been rare, they have been frowned upon if not repelled. Christian *aggiornamento* has long since petered out, whether within or without the institutions; besides, it was promoted by a half-hearted Roman Catholic Church.

At best, the mountain has given birth to a mouse. The ecumenical movement has given way to a spiritual flea market and, more often than not, has resulted in the churches taking stock of

their differences. Beset by cultural pluralism, those same churches claim to cope with it simply by bracketing their respective theology. Inevitably, either they are led to compose and compromise with the prevailing ambient secularism or they are forced to retreat into a new type of orthodoxy, when they do not fall into the trap of fundamentalism or resort to an outright ritualization of the Christian tradition. Because the churches have become disenchanted and have nothing to say, they think Christianity's sickness unto death can be cured homeopathically: for lack of a daring faith, halleluias have replaced the sermon and mantric formulas have practically eclipsed theological reflection. By adding a sacerdotal touch to the minister's doctoral gown, the Presbyterian Church retreats from its historic adherence to, and its no less iconoclastic profession of, universal priesthood -- surely a misnomer if there ever was one. Universal priesthood makes no sense unless the Christian message is liberated from the shackles of ecclesiastical bondage. A church that does not preach what it practices is not a church that practices what it preaches. Like the ostrich, it buries its head in the sand. As a result, its predicament is far more grievous today than it was in the sixteenth century. Never before was the church faced with as decisive a dilemma. And unless or until the church understands that theological reflection is the concern of the layman, the rank and file will find no alternative to the melting pot of technological society. And yet what is technology if not, to begin with, an alternative to technology?

Pointing a finger at it because it has allegedly become a menace is pointless. It makes no sense. To the degree that technology has been a promise, it has been a menace -- always. Ignoring this amounts to compromising with it and, for a believer, that means nothing short of compromising one's faith: Ellul -- and this is not the least of his merits -- will never swerve from this line of thought. For him, the technological phenomenon is no mere mundane matter, if only because the Christian tradition cannot entirely be exonerated of its inception and development. And, therefore, except at the risk of serving two masters, no believer can be sheltered from its demands. Not only must it be coped with, it also lies, surreptitiously or otherwise, at the heart of every crisis affecting the Christian faith today.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Religious Impact of Technology*

In this connection, one need only consider any of the major debates of the last fifty years or so. From Bultmann's proposal for demythologizing the Gospel to the death of God by way of the political conscientization of the church as an attempt to make up for traditional, otherworldly salvation, none leaves Ellul indifferent. Indifferent to them or unaffected by them have been and still are only those of his disciples who, for being religious, have not plumbed the depth of Ellul's analysis of the technological question as being, on its own grounds, a religious question.

Of course, even Barth never saw it in that light. But he dominated the theological field. By contrast with Tillich and Brunner or, for that matter, by contrast with even Bultmann, he does not approach the technological question. While in France Brunner was silenced before he had a chance of being heard, Bultmann was practically put on the French Protestant index and Tillich remained unknown.

Ellul does not waver. Faithful to Barth, he will never grow into an unconditional Barthian. Assessing Barth's involvement with East/West politics after World War II, he hands down a rather drastic judgment: Barth does not understand politics. And when he subsequently expounds his notion of universal salvation, one wonders if he felt that Barth did not understand religion, either. More significantly, given the importance he attaches to this plea, one even wonders if it simply is Ellul's way of putting into question the very notion of salvation or, perhaps, of demythologizing this rather basic tenet of the Christian tradition.

Not that he warms up to Bultmann's method. Holding the view that technology is our new myth, Ellul is, from the start, of the opinion that, if anything must be demythologized, it is our present world rather than that of the Bible. It is not the past that needs to be demythologized, but the present. Not the New Testament, but the self-infatuating discourse of technology. Not the Word of God, but the word of man. Ellul does not warm up to Bultmann's method. He restates it in his own terms, i.e., those of the technological system. For whatever reason, their disagreement is ultimately quite superficial. Nor am I surprised that, like Bultmann, Ellul is often charged with locking up the believer in a subjective faith -- a charge, one must add, often made by precisely those for whom, when Modernity rests its case, there is no subject left that is not besides the subject, no selfhood of the self that is not eclipsed by itself. Ellul speaks a different language. He debunks our present myths from another vantage point. But his verdict is substantially the same: We think we are self-possessed when in fact we are lured into self-oblivion by reason of this very myth -- or is it a technology? -- of self-possession.

### *Political Illusion and Technological Bluff*

Be that as it may, ours are the myths that roughly belong to two families or two types of ideology that mingle their respective goals: on the one hand, a political ideology (which Ellul lays bare and qualifies as the *political illusion*) and, on the other hand, an ideology of total technology (sometimes identified with utopia until Ellul, correcting his aim, defines it less in terms of utopia than in those of a huge bluff, the *technological bluff*). Not less significantly, they feed one another and lure us away from ourselves -- not into a new world or a new Jerusalem but into another Babylonian captivity. For him, those are obviously the major myths that need to be demythologized: they prevent us from taking stock of what precisely is at stake in and through the technological phenomenon. In other words, it is not the technological phenomenon so much as the myth that surrounds it that Ellul objects to. At most, like politics, technology disappoints him.

It disappoints him, not because it eliminates, but because it assimilates the human person. Instead of being of use to her, it uses her. It begins as a tool and ends up turning whomever uses it into its own tool. Being above and beyond nature, it fits us with something like a second nature. But, like nature, it demands total surrender. Obedience to it therefore postulates its being sacralized, even while nature, subjected to some kind of open sky mining ground, is artificialized together with all that biologically or otherwise belongs to it. And, unlike Tillich, Ellul consequently maintains that technology is not neutral.

He is categorical: any suggestion that technology is neutral amounts to affirming that it is good.<sup>5</sup> Ellul adheres to that view relentlessly. But he never implies that technology has trapped us in a situation out of which there is no exit. His analysis of the technological phenomenon never yields any ground for developing a doctrine pegged on some kind of materialistic reductionism. He loves nature, but never denies that natural man is sinful man. He denounces technology, but only because, like nature, so to speak, it attracts the sacred. And no social network of cohesion has ever been devised that did not appeal to the sacred. Whether through nature or technology, we are beguiled if not enslaved to the sacred. And yet, just as no believer can worship God without being an iconoclast, somehow the human being remains an anarchist. And I think it is in this light that, for example, one must read the rather ambiguous statement with which Ellul concludes *le Système technicien*: "L'homme qui aujourd'hui se sert de la technique est de ce fait même celui qui la sert. Et réciproquement seul l'homme qui sert la technique est vraiment apte à se servir d'elle."<sup>6</sup>

If I quote him in French it is because one cannot read the last sentence without wondering what exactly is meant. What does Ellul mean when he states that only she who is used by technology

is yet *truly able* to use it? He readily says that each of his undertakings has been a failure. We are useless servants, and yet we must try and serve God as best we can. And when he says that we are truly able to use technology, does he perchance have in mind anything like what I do when I suggest that a poet is precisely that person who, because she submits to language, is truly able to master it? Moreover, it bears pointing out, Ellul also hints that the person who is truly able to use technology is not, as was the custom of saying, "man in general". That person is the person who was never before so subjected to it as she is *today*.

At this point, we have to back up and retrace our steps.

### *Anarchy and the Political Illusion*

A tool extends the human. Today technology alters it. Just as we have gone from tool to technology, so also we have moved from our natural to an increasingly technological milieu. We have moved away from the rich symbolism of nature, and its tools, to a world of artifacts for which a symbol is merely a symbol, a cipher, a sign. Which also reminds me that Ellul never missed the chance of bemoaning this shift from the elegance and nobility of the tool to the cold, calculating rationality of methods of systems that form an ensemble we call technology. And, in the wake of it, jobs, he points out, have replaced the vocational notion of work. It's as if we did not even need to be eliminated by technology. It has assimilated us. Has it, however, turned us into simulacra of ourselves? Ellul thinks so. Could he be wrong?

Whether technology is neutral or not, so much more significant is the consideration of another aspect of the problem. Consistent with himself, Ellul tends to neglect it. I think it deserves a review. I refer to an idea which is implicit in many of his statements regarding the use of technology. Namely: that, from technology at first a mere instrument for humans, we have reached the point where being human now depends on being an instrument of technology. And, of course, it all depends on what is meant by *instrument*.

Does it necessarily imply that the human being is shorn of its transcendental dimension? Does a person speak because she has a mouth? Or does she have a mouth because she speaks? And can God only be spoken as a being above all beings, as the Most High? Can he not be spoken of as the depth or the ground and the power of being as Tillich does? Too quickly, it seems to me, Ellul links his analysis of a robotized society resulting from technological efficiency with the so-called death of God. He construes the death of God as the ultimate expression of God's superfluousness and his metaphysical demise. And inevitably he ties it to his notion of a technological society as the ultimate negation of human freedom or the final theater of human dereliction. In such a society, man or woman can only be *de trop*.

But we should not mislead by Ellul's apparent naïveté. His point is well taken. By contrast with so many authors, he does not consider technology as the challenge of all times. Linking together the erosion of transcendence and the rise of technology, he shows that, instead of being challenged by technology, we hasten to succumb to it. It also gives him a further opportunity for showing that he is not opposed to technology as such.<sup>7</sup> He is repulsed by the fact that, instead of overcoming ourselves even through it, we are resigned to it. Time and again, he states that we claim to have been liberated from the constraints of nature and yet have rushed headlong into subservience to technology. Why? Because we cannot refrain from sacralizing it. "It is not technology that enslaves us, but the sacred which is transferred to it."<sup>8</sup>

### *Holiness vs Technology and the Sacred*

Having, so to speak, explained the spread of political illusion through a failure of the ethic of anarchy, Ellul now seems to view the sacralization of technology as the twin failure of an ethic of

holiness: an ethic through which presumably the world is desacralized *and* claimed for God and his glorification.<sup>9</sup> Holiness and sacredness must not be confused. While according to Biblical religion the former is iconoclastic, the latter is not. Which explains why, Ellul points out, in spite of the desacralizing impact of the Christian tradition, "everything is as if men and women could not live in a desacralized universe."<sup>10</sup> Nor does he shrink from viewing this kind of situation as the most monumental failure of Christianity. In spite of the stand he takes regarding the death of God controversy, he further considers this failure as "one of the most blatant proofs of the sacred as being inherent to human existence, of the constancy of this active (I don't mean objective) force that leads man ever so often to reconstitute a sacred universe without which, apparently, he could not put up with a universe of his own doing. Only the sacred (and not the Christian venture) reassures him and gives him the feeling of both a stable universe and the enduring, objective, meaningfulness of his life."<sup>11</sup> Rather obviously, nothing is spared from the clutch of the sacred, not even modern Western society.<sup>12</sup> Is then Ellul an unrepentant pessimist? Not at all. He is disappointed by the church – not by the Christian message. Nor would he expect it to be otherwise!

Society thus is driven by the sacred, and only by the sacred. Not by Christianity. Nor, perhaps, by technology: remember, it is not technology but the sacred, once transferred upon it, that enslaves us.<sup>13</sup> And it enslaves us all the more because it can then appear in the form of utopia --that *final solution* to which, according to Ellul, totalitarianism aspires and it alone can aspire, especially today, when technology combines both myth and the sacred under the aegis of a cold, calculating, rational efficiency.

But must it? And if it must, what is the point of Ellul's dialectic of anarchy and holiness?

Be that as it may, he reminds us that not even God is worshipped without becoming an idol. Human nature, being as fascinated with the sacred as it inclined to evil, will always settle for the commodities of comfortable if idolatrous life. That is, it will always fall short of the destiny to which it is called and belongs in spite of its origins. It is fulfilled by overcoming itself. It is sinful, though not by itself but before God. And sinfulness can be overcome and erased only by God's justifying and sanctifying grace -- not through sacralizing institutions, but through holiness of life or its (metaphorical) antonym: anarchy; which Ellul considers as the most complete and serious form of socialism. Though he opposes anarchy and utopia, I think he persists in doing so only because of reasons pertaining to semantics or because he simply wishes not to confuse it with the kingdom of God. This would exemplify the worst of political illusions, just as, in his assessment of total technology, he is careful not to confuse the sacred -- as a social phenomenon -- with faith as distinguished from religion. And if, from this perspective, there is no human freedom except in and through faith in God, then human liberation belongs less to the political or economic than to the spiritual order. Ellul, it must be admitted, is closer to Luther's two kingdoms than to Calvin's ecclesial revolution, or his eschatic conception of the *future life, or the true country*.

### *By way of concluding this footnote*

Whether Ellul's thought is consistent or full of contradictions, it surely does not seek to square the circle. Ellul himself puts it in this way: "I remained unable to eliminate Marx, unable to eliminate the biblical revelation, and unable to merge the two. For me, it was impossible to put them together. So I began to be torn between the two, and I have remained so all my life. The development of my thinking can be explained starting with this contradiction."<sup>14</sup> I have perhaps been insinuating that Ellul was a disappointed man. If so, I have been wrong: he is disillusioned, even torn apart. And therefore open to this world so loved by God that he gives his only begotten Son. (For notes, see p. 15)

# Jacques Ellul -- The Little Giant

by Darrell J. Fasching

As I write this on July 20th, 1994, America is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the landing of the first man on the moon on this date in 1969. Watching television clips of those events vividly brought back to me the context in which I first encountered the writings of Jacques Ellul. 1969 was the year I entered graduate school at Syracuse University. As I drove across the country from Minneapolis, the first moon landing was barely a month behind us. And yet it was not the moon that was on my mind but the earth, for the end of the 60's and the early 70's were apocalyptic times. Protest against the war in Vietnam was closing universities everywhere, our cities were literally burning from outbreaks of racial conflict and predictions of ecological collapse from overpopulation and pollution were daily events. Again and again the question was being asked -- Why is it we can put a man on the moon but we can't solve our social and environmental problems here on earth?

It was a year or two later that I first encountered the writings of Jacques Ellul in a seminar on theology and technology, taught by Gabriel Vahanian. In that context I read *The Technological Society* for the first time. What a different perspective Ellul brought to the issues. Up until then my perspective had been largely shaped by Harvey Cox's optimistic book, *The Secular City*. That book was published in 1965, the year that the first human being walked in space. From 1965 to 1969, when we put a man on the moon, it seemed as if our technological prowess would enable us to accomplish anything we set out to do. Cox's book fit the temper of the times, assuring us that our modern technology was the product of secularizing, liberating and humanizing impact of the Gospel upon the human city.

Coming from that perspective, reading *The Technological Society* was like taking a cold shower and sobering up. But Ellul's analysis struck a chord, not only with me, but with many children of the "60s" who felt trapped in a system unable to critique itself and insistent on carrying on "business as usual" while more and more of our generation were being sent home in body bags from a war without a purpose that technology was supposed to win for us.

Vietnam, became for many of us a symbol of everything that was wrong with "the system." Ellul's writings served to "raise our consciousness," helping us to understand what the "system" was, how it worked and how it might be subverted. The system, we were told, was technical and bureaucratic, autonomous and all encompassing, held together by media propaganda and the political illusion.

Ellul's insights were both convincing and frustrating. They explained why nothing seemed to be changing even as many engaged in intensive political and social action. At that time, it seemed that Ellul had two audiences. Alienated social activists who read his sociology and didn't even know he was a theologian and also a growing following among Christians, largely evangelical, who were to his biblical commentaries as ways of critiquing the idolatry of contemporary society. It took a while for people to put the two sides of Ellul together and see the whole man and the whole message.

With the passing of the Vietnam war, political activism receded. It is hard to psychologically sustain such activism when you don't have the drama of nightly television newsclips to psyche you up and tie you into the cosmic drama of your struggle. The realists drawn to Ellul's sociology found little to keep them going. But those who grasped the theological side of his message were able to accept that the presence of the kingdom had to be manifested through a church that was not driven by media attention but by an apocalyptic hope that totally breaks with "the system" -- a church

prepared to assume what Ellul called an "incognito" or "hidden presence" in the world, patiently subverting and desacralizing the social structures of "the system" at the local level where we actually live rather than being seduced by the grand gestures of the illusory world created by the media. Ellul's advice was: think globally but act locally. You need to understand "the system" holistically but than attack at its weakest point, which is precisely that point at which "the system" intersects with your own life.

It is my conviction that of all of Ellul's work, there are three books that are absolutely essential for understanding his message: *The Technological Society*, *The New Demons* and *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*. The first is purely sociological. The third is purely scriptural and theological. It is the second, *The New Demons*, which provides the link that ties them together. It was only after I read *The New Demons* (*Les Nouveaux Possédés*) that I really understood *The Technological Society* for the first time. I had completely missed the significance of Ellul's constant references to the sacred in that book until I read *The New Demons*.

*The New Demons* is the Rosetta Stone of Ellul's work. There Ellul violated his rule of keeping his sociological and his theological work separate. The book was primarily a work on the sociology of religion but its novel and brilliant thesis was that in our time and place in history, the sociology of religion and the sociology of technology have one and the same subject matter because the sacred has migrated from nature to technology. There it became clear, that for Ellul, it is the sacred that is the problem, not technology as such.

At the end of his sociological analysis Ellul tacked on a post-script to the book -- a "Coda for Christians" in which he argued that the theology of the secular city was ironically the byproduct of the sacralization of our technological world. In such a world Christians were called not to praise technology but desacralize it in the name of the holiness of God, the way Christians had once desacralized nature in the name of the holy.

In *Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation* Ellul then spelled out the scriptural basis for his analysis, showing that it is possible for Christians to be optimistic about the future of the city but not for any of the reasons Cox's *The Secular City* advanced. Quite the opposite. To my mind, Ellul's exegesis of the Book of Revelation is his most powerful exegetical work. If he had written nothing else, that alone would be enough to give him a place in the history of Christian theology. In one single work of scriptural exegesis he moved Christian faith beyond the quest for salvation and into the life of sanctification. With his scripturally based understanding of universal salvation, Ellul demythologized the Christian obsession with personal salvation and shifted the focus to the Christian vocation to sanctify the world. With universal salvation a given, the focus is shifted to our ethical responsibility as Christians to be a "leaven" or "saving remnant," whose task is to undermine the demonic power of the sacred so that human life might be possible. While there can never be a "secular city" in history, the ethical task of Christians is the never ending task of secularizing the city so that human freedom might be possible, the freedom which enables all human beings (not just Christians) to assume their vocation as children of God. That understanding of the Gospel has deeply influenced my own work. For that I owe Jacques Ellul a great debt.

I would like to end this reflection on a personal note. I met Jacques Ellul only once, when I went to Bordeaux in 1988 to deliver a paper on his ethics at an international conference of the Society for the Philosophy of Technology which gave special recognition to his work. When I met him for the first time, I was struck by how short he was (scarcely over five feet I would guess). In my mind he was a giant. I told him this and we made a joke together about him being a "small giant" (*un petit géant*). I was immediately struck by his marvelous sense of humor, the twinkle in his eye and the gentle graciousness of the man. Later I visited him in his home, where I met his wife Yvette and his dog. (That he was a dog lover immediately endeared him to me-- he shared my prejudices in this regard). Their hospitality was gracious,

overflowing. I came away from that meeting with the strong impression that he and his wife created between them a single powerful but gently humanizing presence. The only adequate word for it in my vocabulary is "holiness." I came away convinced that I had met someone whose life and teaching were one. Such a thing is a rare event and it may be Ellul's greatest gift to me -- one for which I will always be grateful.

## Notes: Anarchy & Holiness

1. *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 66
2. In a similar vein, Barth contended in the late forties that there could be no humanism outside of the Christ-event.
3. Again, I wonder if this reticence is not what Ellul is addressing and seeks to justify when he speaks of our time as being a time of dereliction (Cf. *L'espérance oubliée*).
4. That is the reason why, to my mind, Ellul has always claimed he was not opposed to technology and is misunderstood by those of his disciples, who, being believers, do not realize that the technological question is for him a religious question or by those who simply overlook the fact that for him technology is not criticizable for being technological but for being ideological.
5. Cf. *Présence au monde moderne*, Roulet (C.P.E.), Geneve 1948, p. 95.
6. *Le Système technicien*, Calmann-Levy, Paris 1977 (Ellul's italics): Whoever uses technology is by the same token used by it. Conversely, only he or she who is used by technology is *truly able* to use it (italics mine).
7. In *le Bluff technologique*, Hachette, Paris 1988, p. 9, he says that one can be against technology no more than against an avalanche.
8. *Les nouveaux possédés*, p. 259.
9. Cf. Darrell J. Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston (NY) 1981.
10. *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 67. Cf. also p. 181: "Il es parfaitement intolérable pour l'homme de vivre dans un univers religieusement désert, dans un monde désacralisé."
11. *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 83.
12. *La Subversion du christianisme*, p. 68.
13. *Les nouveaux possédés*, p. 259.
14. *In Season, Out of Season*, p. 16.

# An Address to "Master Jacques"

by Ivan Illich

(Speech by Ivan Illich, given at Bordeaux, France, November 13, 1993. Translation from the French by Hoinacki, June 27, 1994; changes inserted by Ivan, June 27, Octopéc)

It is an honor and great joy for me to be invited by Daniel Cerezuelle to participate in this act of homage. Professor Ellul - I would much prefer to say, "Master Jacques" ... I have been moved by your comparison of a master with an ox which, in pulling the plow, opens a furrow. I have striven to follow you in a filial spirit, making all the false steps which that implies. I hope you accept my harvest and can recognize some flowers among what might seem a mixture of noxious weeds.

I can thus express my gratitude to a master to whom I owe an orientation which has decisively affected my pilgrimage for forty years. In this sense, my debt is unquestionable, and I was recently able to verify this in a very specific way.

To prepare my presentation for this meeting, I wanted to read about twenty of Ellul's books, those which had heretofore escaped me. My student and friend Jose Maria Sbert made his library available to me, and there I discovered at least half of them; further, he had copiously annotated some volumes, even to the point of underlining whole paragraphs. After spending a few evenings immersed in this treasure, I was astounded by the freshness and vivacity with which, over the years, Ellul continually recaptures the fundamental intuitions of his earliest work, always clarifying them more. His tenacity, humility and magnanimity in the face of criticism make him an example one must bow to.

The present scholarly meeting at Bordeaux furnishes us with a unique opportunity to acknowledge the unity of his thought. Some of us have read him as a great commentator on the Bible, others, as a philosopher of technology. But few have seen him as the man who simultaneously challenges the reflection of both the philosopher and the believer. He reminds the philosopher of technology, who studies patent, observable phenomena, to be aware of the possibility that his subject may be too terrible to be grasped by reason alone. And he leads the believer to deepen his Biblical faith and eschatological hope in the face of two uncomfortable and disturbing truths, pointing out that each has the character of "extreme historical strangeness":

--First, it is impossible to compare modern technique and its malevolent consequences with the material culture of any other society whatever;

--Second, it is necessary to see that this "historical extravagance" is the result of a subversion of the Gospel - its transformation into an ideology called Christianity.

His work, from the first essays on the history of institutions and propaganda to the studies of a poetically-infused exegesis which crowns it, convinced me of this: The unique character of the time in which we live cannot be studied rationally if one does not understand that this age is the result of a *corruptio optimi quae est pessima*. This is why the regime of *la technique*, under which both the Mexican peasant and I live, forces one to confront three troubling issues:

--"This regime has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture which, taken together, are the clear inverse of what we read in the Bible, of what is indisputably found in the text of the Torah, the Prophets, Jesus and Paul."

--It is not possible to account for this regime if one does not understand its genesis as growing out of Christianity. Its principal traits owe their existence to the subversion which I have just mentioned. Among the distinctive and decisive characteristics of our age, many are incomprehensible if one does not recognize a

pattern: An Evangelical invitation to each person has been twisted historically into an institutionalized, standardized and managed social objective.

--Finally, one cannot correctly analyze this "regime of technique" with the usual concepts which suffice for the study of other societies. A new set of analytic concepts is necessary to discuss the *hexis* (the state) and *praxis* of the epoch in which we live under the aegis of *la technique*.

In a direct and clarifying manner, Ellul has made us face this triple aspect of a "completely unique historical extravagance." Whatever word one uses for it - culture, society, world - our actual human condition is a strange outgrowth of Christianity. All the constitutive elements are perversions of it. Since, in a sense, they owe their existence to Revelation, one can say that they are the complementary inverse, the negation of divine gifts. And, on account of what Ellul recognizes as their historical strangeness, they are often refractory to philosophical or ethical critiques.

This is clearly seen when we wish to raise ethical questions. Manifestly, the moral term, "evil," is not applicable to documented events such as the Shoah, Hiroshima or the current attempts at artificial reproduction of human-like creatures.

These repugnant, abominable, horrifying enterprises cannot be debated. One cannot make them grammatical subjects. For enquiry about such things, whether they are feasible or not, just or unjust, good or evil, legitimizes the status of inexpressible horror.

Those are extreme examples. Reading Ellul makes one understand that the immersion of daily life in a *milieu technique* places one no less beyond good and evil.

Let us look at one example: the technology that pulls the soil out from under everyone's feet. The world has become inaccessible if access signifies the result of pedestrian action: transport monopolizes locomotion in such a way that feet, given us for a pilgrimage on earth, atrophy into appendages of the accelerator and brake.

Among the hundreds of seemingly trivial examples of the mind's "humiliation by technique," I will cite the one in which I find a kind of humor. My church loudly denounces preservatives which frustrate the natural functioning of one organ, but she cannot envisage the equally powerful frustration of another, that seen in the analogy between rubbers and tires! By applying Ellul's concept of *la technique* to both, thus seeing that both must be declared *contra naturam*, my church could take the lead in the resistance to Moloch - all the way to martyrdom. I am ashamed of a Pope who limits his strong condemnation of technical perversion to the privacy of the bed, but refuses to preach the relevance of the natural law to Mercedes and jets. As Ellul has often made clear, if the subversion itself is not rationally comprehensible, the general blindness to it is certainly not less.

All these horrors, major and "minor," derive their ontological status from the fact that they are exactly the subversions of what Ellul calls "X" and what I would openly name, "divine grace."

When a half century ago Ellul first published his prophetic analyses, it was altogether evident that the rational integration of Ellul the "Calvinist" and Ellul the sociologist was beyond the comprehension of a majority of his colleagues. But at least many now understand that his profound rootedness in faith enables him to confront the darknesses which the rootless prefer to gloss over.

Already in his study of propaganda he made us see that modern men are so terrorized by reality that they surrender themselves to atrocious debaucheries of images and representations in order not to see. They manipulate media to simulate an even more sombre pseudo-world, using this to construct a protective veil against the darknesses of the real world in which they find themselves. Over the years, this absence of reality has become even more stupefying. This situation -- the obscurity engendered by the media -- has been well studied by my friend, Didier Piveteau, who proclaims himself Ellul's student.



More and more, people live their lives as in a nightmare: They feel themselves ensnared in unspeakable horrors, with no means to wake up to the light of the real. As in certain nightmares, the terror transcends the expressible. Ellul's recognition of the established status of "globalizing" technique allowed him to foresee in the 1950s what today is palpable but now irremediable. What surrounds us today is implicit in his analysis of *la technique*. Before this assembly, made up of attentive readers of Ellul, and at the conclusion of two days' intense exchanges, it would be absurd for me to elucidate this notion, original and of capital importance in his work. I prefer to narrate some circumstances in which the notion has furnished a decisive help to one Ellul reader -- and, if he accepts me as such, his student.

*La technique* entered my existence in 1965 in Santa Barbara, the day when, at Robert Hutchins's Center, John Wilkinson gave me a copy of *The Technological Society* which he had just translated, following up on the strong recommendation of Aldous Huxley. Since then, the questions raised by the concept of *la technique* have constantly reoriented the examination of my relations to objects and to others.

I have adopted this Ellulian concept because it permits one to identify -- in education, transport, modern medical and scientific activities -- the threshold at which these projects absorb, conceptually and physically, the client into the tool; the threshold where the products of consumption change into things which themselves consume; the threshold where the milieu of technique transforms into numbers those who are entrapped in it; the threshold where technology is decisively transformed into Moloch, the system.

During ten good years after my meeting with Professor Ellul, I concentrated my study principally on that which *la technique* does: what it does to the environment, to social structures, to cultures, to religions. I have also studied the symbolic character or, if you prefer, the "perverse sacramentality" of institutions purveying education, transport, housing, health care and employment. I have no regrets. The social consequences of domination by *la technique*, making institutions counterproductive, must be understood if one wishes to measure the effects on the specific *hexis* (state) and *praxis* defining the experience of modernity today. It is necessary to face the horrors, in spite of the certain knowledge that seeing is beyond the power of our senses. I have successfully analyzed the hidden functions of highly accelerated transport, communication channels, prolonged educational treatment, and human garaging. I have been astounded by their symbolic power. That has given me empirical proof that the Ellulian category of *la technique*, which I had originally employed as an analytic tool, also defines a reality engendered by the pursuit of an "ideology of Christian derivation."

Research on the symbolic function of technique in our time, begun by Ellul, continues to provide clarifying observations. Here I am reminded particularly of his reflections on magic and religion. Among modern thinkers, Jacques Ellul has always been one of a select few who understand that the place of the sacred is now occupied not by this or that artifact, but by *la technique*, the black box we worship.

My disembodiment seen, for example, in the loss of my feet, is more directly the result of this worship than ecological damage. Therefore, to understand society today, it seems more important to begin with an examination of the effects of *la technique* on my flesh and senses than to study current and future damages to the environment.

I have, then, attempted to explore the seductive power that the intensive dedication of modern enterprises to *la technique* exercises over my mode of perception. In fact, not a year passes, during the quarter century since Wilkinson gave me Ellul's book, that I do not detect a hitherto unperceived propensity to deny the reality of living in service to the Techno-Moloch. Existence in a society which has become a system finds the senses useless precisely because of the very instruments designed for their extension. One

is prevented from touching and embracing reality. Further, one is programmed for interactive communication, one's whole being is sucked into the system. It is this radical subversion of sensation which humiliates and then replaces perception.

We submit ourselves to atrocious debaucheries of image and sound consumption in order to anesthetize the pain resulting from having lost reality. To grasp this humiliation of sight, smell, touch, and not just hearing, it was necessary for me to study the history of the bodily acts of perception. Not only Biblical certitudes, but also medieval and classical truths concerning sensible perceptions have been subverted to the point where an exegesis of ancient texts must surmount both conceptual and physiological obstacles. Allow me to give an example, albeit extreme.

To tear out one's eye when it gives scandal is an evangelical mandate. And this is an action which always inspired horror. It was comprehensible, however, in a scopic regime where the eyes emitted a visual cone which, like a luminous organ, seized and embraced reality. But such animated eyes no longer exist - except metaphorically. We no longer see, enveloping reality by means of a cone of rays emitted by our pupil. The regime of seeing through which we perceive today turns the act of sight into a form of registration, very much like a camcorder. Eyes which no longer ravish reality are hardly worth tearing out.

Such iconophagic -- image-devouring -- eyes are worthless:

--to found hope on Biblical reading;

--to apprehend the horrors of the technological bubble which separates me from reality;

--finally, to find joy in the only mirror in which I can discover myself, the pupil of the other.

The subversion of the word by the conquering eye has a long history, a part of the history of technique in the world of Christianity. In the Middle Ages, this overthrow took the form of replacing the book written to be heard -- reading was done aloud -- by a text which addressed itself to the silent look. Parallel to this technogenic inversion of sensory priorities, the chapel -- the place for devout reading, was separated from the aula -- the place for scholastic reading. This portentous division marked the end of a millennium of *lectio divina*, the principal way reading was experienced.

And, concomitant with this architectural separation of the place of prayer from the place of study, the first -- to my knowledge -- institution of higher studies, the university, appeared. Here, the cultivation of abstract thought totally eclipsed the culture of the senses. This is not so much a disjunction between *fidens quaerens intellectum* (theology), and *intellectus quaerens fidem* (philosophy), as between asceticism and logical analysis. This latter separation permitted the emergence of a civilization in which Ellul has so much difficulty making himself understood. From him who follows the furrow he traces, he expects -- as he has written -- a devotion to virtue which would give one the courage and strength to pursue the analysis of reality in conditions which he has called "desperate," a situation which makes one feel hopelessly impotent.

Therefore, it appears to me that we cannot neglect the disciplined recovery (what is called "ascesis") of a sensual praxis in a society of technogenic mirages. This preservation of the senses, this promptitude to obey experience, the chaste look which the Rule of St. Benedict opposes to the *cupiditas oculorum*, seems to me to be the fundamental condition for renouncing that technique which sets up a definitive obstacle to friendship.

# Ellul's Response to the Symposium in his Honor at the University of Bordeaux, November 1993

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends:

**D**oubtless, I need to say first that I am full of gratitude toward the organizers of this colloquium, and toward those who worked so hard to make it possible, and I have to say that I am surprised whenever such signs of esteem and honor are conveyed to me. I never felt I was creating an important body of work. I have always imagined myself the way Bossuet did: *Bos suetus aratro* ("The ox takes to the plow"). Beyond any play on words, at least this much is true: I lived like the ox, worried only to plow a straight furrow. Although finally guided by others (without invoking He who "in the end" guides the plow) I want on the human level, in any case, to mention all those without whose help I would not have achieved anything: that is, my friends. I am a man of friendship. And without them I would not have known what to do. They have oriented me on every one of my paths.

I have to mention Bernard Charbonneau, of whom I can say that he taught me how to "think." But he also taught me to see the reality of society, instead of looking only into my books. He taught me to consider actively the social fact, "what is really happening" – to analyze, to criticize, to understand it.

In addition, there was the witness to Christian faith of Jacques Boso. Not that I was converted to Christian faith by his testimony, but after my conversion, he showed me what the Christian intellectual can be and taught me the meaning of theology.

Finally I want to mention my friend Henri Pouyenne, who made me leave the intellectual sphere in order to grasp the importance of life, for each of us, and who made me grasp that each life is essential, so that I had to be close to each "neighbor" with humility! My formation thus sketched, my task was to plow a straight furrow as straight as possible – nothing more.

I had to plow a part of the political or social world, perhaps in order to make room for ways other than the traditional ones in the world in which I lived.

This is how I worked, without genius but with perseverance, without a transcending inspiration, but out of the conviction that my task was to unveil the realities to that man and of that time, which nobody seemed to take into account and which appeared to me to be decisive.

These diverse orientations explain as well why my work was located in two domains, which led to the two domains of my books, sociology and theology.

What is their relation?

First a scrupulous distinction: I have always tried to prevent "my" theology from influencing my sociological research (Calvinism) and my comprehension of the world from distorting my reading of the Bible. These were two domains, two methods, two distinct interests. Only after the separation, one begins to perceive relationship.

First, the evangelical proclamation is addressed to this individual human being, living in this society, and not to some unimportant whoever – a "targeted" message. But also it is an expression of respect for the other and for the message. It follows that the key element is this: the sociological state of the world in which we live is rather desperate, so that it is difficult for modern people, deprived of hope and given over to immediate pleasure and

unconscious fear of tomorrow, to proclaim the hope of faith in Christ and in the possibility for true love.

This is one major purpose that has oriented my whole life.

Thus I accomplished my task without excessively doubting myself, and without participating in the vanity of success, a game of honors and of fashions! Some considered arrogance, other disdain what was really a form of indifference toward all questions of success.

With or without success, I had to do a certain work – I just had to do what I had to do, and I did it. That is all there was to it.

I nevertheless had a point of reference, and did not proceed in a haphazard manner. The straightness of this furrow consisted in two imperatives (which, incidentally, may appear contradictory). One was the foundation derived from Christian faith, from revelation, received and meditated in the Bible. This does not need further explanation.

Then there was the value derived from my father and realized through a rigorous education: that is, honor. For him, an agnostic, honor was the code of his whole life. But does one still know what that is?

Honor, this *passé* aspiration I was raised with, included four rules: never lie to others, never lie to yourself, be merciful toward the weak, and never yield to the mighty.

As a result, I had "to navigate" between Christian revelation and these four imperatives.

It was within this framework and according to these orientations that my work proceeded. After all, "I could not do otherwise." You see that my personal contribution is weak, and that the homage paid to me must be passed on to my friends and to my parents. I was nothing more than the bond that connected the elements, and that is precisely why I receive with gratitude, for all of them, what you said and achieved today. With sincere gratitude and recognition, thank you.

(Translated by Achim Koddermann and Carl Mitcham.)