The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

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10th Anniversary Issue

About the 10th Anniversary Issue

Welcome to the tenth anniversary issue of ***The Ellul Forum***. It is hard to believe that ten years have gone by. For three years in the 1980's a group of scholars, organized by Dan Clendenin, interested in the work of Jacques Ellul met at the American Academy of Religion annual meetings to discuss his work. At one of those meetings, (in 1987 I believe) it was suggested that it might be a good idea to have a newsletter to facilitate communications among us. Having just recently gotten into "desktop publishing" I volunteered to produce such a newsletter.

As I thought about the newsletter, I got rather ambitious. I decided that it might be useful to have a vehicle not only for the exchange of information but also for the exchange of ideas among those who were interested in Ellul. What I had in mind was something more formal than a newsletter but less formal than a journal – the result was the *Forum* as we now know it, with its combination of news, book reviews and a "*Forum* issue" addressed in one or two essays. In August of 1988 the first issue came out, and it has been produced twice a year ever since.

On the whole I have been pleased with the results. On page two of this issue, you will find a complete list of the issues produced over the last ten years. It is, I think, an impressive list of topics and I am grateful to the members of the editorial board, many of whom served as guest editors. I have thoroughly enjoyed editing the *Forum,* but after ten years I am ready to step aside and allow others to assume the editorial task. Starting with issue twenty-one, my Associate Editor, Cliff Christians will become the editor and David Gill will step into the position of Associate Editor. Both Cliff and David are seasoned Ellul scholars who have contributed much to the advancement of scholarship on Ellul's work. They will provide able leadership for the issues to come. I welcome them to their new roles. I am not planning to disappear entirely, however. I will remain a member of the editorial board and will also serve as Managing Editor for the *Forum*, taking care of subscriptions, typesetting and production, as I have in the past.

I hope you enjoy the 10th Anniversary issue. The *Forum* essay is written by Rick Clifton Moore from Boise State University. Moore brings an interesting perspective onusing Ellul in the analysis of television drama. Then a special *Forum* section celebrating our 10th Anniversary follows with essays from several of our editorial board members reflecting on the influence of Ellul on their life, work and thought. Finally, we conclude with two book reviews, one of Andrew Goddard's dissertation on Ellul and the other of a book of poetry by Ellul which was published after his death. I hope you have enjoyed the last ten years of ***The Ellul Forum*** and that you will look forward to further issues of the *Forum* in the future.

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N.B. Back Issues of the ***Forum*** are available at $4.00 each. Send a check made out to ***The Ellul Forum***, Department of Religious Studies, CPR 304, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620.

Forum: From Ellul to "Picket Fences"

The Residue of Culture:

An Ellulian Dialogic Analysis of Religious Imagery in a Network Television Drama

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In *Technopoly*, cultural critic Neil Postman argues that the technological state has developed to a point where it will allow no competitors. A technopolic world view is one in which technical efficiency and progress are the consummate values. Whereas in the 19th century (a period Postman calls "technocracy") many world views were able to coexist, in 20th century all thought worlds that compete with technopoly disappear. Among these alternative thought worlds is religion, which Postman argues is made invisible and therefore irrelevant in technopoly.

My purpose here is to analyze the possible invisibility and irrelevance of religion within a technopolistic world, specifically looking at one instance of such invisibility and irrelevance, the depiction of religion in a prime-time television drama. Using the work of Neil Postman and Jacques Ellul I investigate the conflict between a technopolistic world view and a theological world view in one very exemplary episode of the program *Picket Fences*.

Mass Media in Jacques Ellul's Technological Society

Postman's basic orientation toward the technological world is greatly influenced by the work of Jacques Ellul. For Ellul, today's world is one in which humans are so enamored of technology that the machine becomes the model for society. As Cliff Christians and Michael Real describe Ellul's theory, "we are beguiled enough by machine productivity to reconstruct almost unconsciously all our social institutions on this model" (Christians and Real, 1979, p. 84). Technique, then, is the elevation of means over ends, the worship of mechanistic efficiency.

Ellul argues that such worship is all-encompassing. One cannot worship technique and God. Accordingly, for the technological society to move forward, all citizens must be consistently reminded of their allegiance to it. This is why such a large part of Ellul's oeuvre relates to the mass media. The media are essential components in the world of technique. As the technological world becomes somewhat cold and heartless, it is necessary for its citizens to be reminded of their allegiance to it. As Ellul states it, "In the midst of increasing mechanization and technological organization, propaganda is simply the means used to prevent these things from being felt as too oppressive and to persuade man to submit with good grace"(Ellul, 1965, p. xviii). Such submission must be all inclusive. His point is that "technique has taken over the whole of civilization"(Ellul, 1964, p. 128).

Recognizing both the Judeo-Christian orientation of Ellul and the Judeo-Christian elements of some facets of American society, however, the reader might question the outcome of clashes between the "religious" element of the technological world (the worship of efficiency and the technological state) and the "religious" elements imbedded in American culture (the religious roots of many western social institutions). There would seem to be a clash between the religion of the new world and the religion of the old world.

Postman addresses this issue by suggesting that the religion of the new world is fundamentally different from the religion of the old. By suggesting that Technopoly has made religion invisible he is not suggesting that it does not exist, rather, that it does not exist in its original form. Technopoly is successful in "redefining what we mean by religion"(Postman, 1992, p. 48).

Postman's shortcoming, however, is in suggesting that such a redefinition is a one-time historical event which occurs in the technocratic world (which, as mentioned earlier is a how Postman defines the world of the 19th century). He maintains that in that era the traditional world clashed with the modern world and something had to give. The machinery of the modern world was already in place, but the minds of the people were not prepared for the massive assault of such machinery. The people were not ready because their minds had been formed in a traditional world, a world he calls "tool-using." Postman (1992, p. 46) claims these people bore the "troublesome residue of a tool-using period." His assertion is that such residue had to be removed, and it was. When we move to technopoly, an authoritarian form of technocracy, alternatives are eliminated.

Yet it is possible that residue of earlier cultures will always remain in a technopolistic world. If so, such residue must be dealt with. Ellul suggests this in his most media-oriented work *Propaganda*. The reader must be aware that Ellul visualizes propaganda not as a specific, biased, communication phenomenon, but as an integral system of modern communication. As

Real explains it, "Ellul redefines it (propaganda) as a universal condition which pervades all individual lives in industrially advanced societies"(Real, 1981, p. 110). Basically, technique becomes the determining factor in the flow of information. In this environment, preexisting ideologies cannot be ignored altogether. Ellul claims that there will be times in the technological society when certain ideologies command belief among the masses and might be an obstacle to the goals of the technological state (Ellul, 1962, p. 197). Such ideologies might even provide the citizen with "criteria for judgment," a phenomenon that would likely defeat efficiency. As Ellul sees it,

> In this case the propagandist must be careful not to run head-on into a prevailing ideology; all he can do is integrate it into his system, use some parts of it, deflect it, and so on. Secondly, he must ask himself whether the ideology, such as it is, can be used for his propaganda; whether it has psychologically predisposed an individual to submit to propaganda's impulsions. (p.198)

For Ellul, then, cultural residues are not eliminated in the technological society, but must be dealt with within the broader realm of propaganda. The mass media must occasionally adopt these residues and adapt them to their purposes.

Dialogic Analysis

Ellul is one of many modern scholars who have shown interest in the way the media deal with conflicting ideologies. Dialogism is a popular method of media analysis that examines this issue. Originally borrowed from the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), dialogic analysis attempts to understand how "meaning is constructed socially through the interaction of a variety of languages that emanate from a given text" (Parry-Giles & Traudt, 1989, p. 147). Bakhtin's vision of the novel insisted on an "interplay of dialogues" within a given social system (Hoy, 1992, p. 765). He used the term heteroglossia to refer to the multi-vocal characteristic of the medium.

Horace Newcomb (1984) was instrumental in introducing dialogism to mass media scholars. Working with Bakhtin's original ideas, Newcomb claimed that television critics can study the utterances of characters within a program. Clearly, in any such product, there will be a variety of speakers. Just as a novel, it is considered dialogic because it is "shot through with many coinciding voices" (Shevtsova, 1992, p. 753). Each of these voices represents something. For example, in the world of television drama "each character responds to the central ideologies from a different perspective" (Newcomb, 1984, p. 41). In doing so, the characters create what Newcomb calls "character zones." These character zones overlap and conflict, revealing much about the program as a whole. As Parry-Giles and Traudt (1991, p. 147) point out, one goal of dialogic analysis is to "discover how the utterance mixes and is changed by its conflict with other utterances." Newcomb proposed that by examining these character zones and their interaction within the television program one could understand the hegemonic intention of the script. That is, one could determine the ideological orientation of the text as a whole.

Such a task is important from an Ellulian perspective. After all, our perception of characters in many ways has an impact on our perception of ourselves and our own world view. Ellul relates this closely to the role of propaganda.

> From then on, the individual in the clutches of such sociological propaganda believes that those who live this way are on the side of the angels, and those who don't are bad; those who have this conception of society are right, and those who have another conception are in error. (Ellul, 1962, p. 65).

Which characters are confirmed and which are not thus becomes an important element in textual analysis. Beyond examining specific statements in a text, we must look at the conflict and resolution involving those statements. Ellul claims this is especially true of television as a medium, because of its tendency toward process rather than product. Viewers enter into the dialogue in such a way that "the possibility of reacting and criticizing is accordingly reduced" (Ellul, 1981, p. 360). Most television viewers, then, are unaware of these ideological dimensions of the text. The critic's job is to help them become aware.

Picket Fences

David Kelley, Producer of the television show *Picket Fences* was once quoted as saying "If we're different from other shows, it isn't that we've accented religion, but we have not pretended that it's not there" (Broadway, 1994). Such a comment calls to mind Postman's point that in technopoly, many television shows *do* pretend religion is not there. *Picket Fences* offers fruitful ground for dialogic analysis of religious imagery because it dares to recognize the continued existence of religious thought in our culture.

Appropriately enough, the episode of *Picket Fences* examined here begins with scenes of a Christmas caroling event in the town of Rome, Wisconsin, the normal setting for the weekly drama. As carolers sing "Away in a Manger," the image cuts to a tight close-up of a snowball hitting a statue of Christ. Immediately, the local priest, Father Barrett, steps forward to confront Matthew Brock, the perpetrator. Barrett in a half serious way tells Matthew to be careful, lest he end up in a place "where there are no snowballs." The boy's mother, Jill Brock, happens to be a respected doctor in the small community, and asks Matthew, her oldest son, if he will behave and listen to the carols.

As the caroling scene continues, the director begins crosscutting to another location. Jimmy Brock, husband of Jill and the town sheriff, is busy pulling a car from an icy body of water. The crosscutting continues until the carolers finish their song and Jimmy Brock and his crew fail in their attempt to revive a young woman they have pulled out of the car. Jill Brock listens to the final words the carolers utter, her face showing a confused expression of contentment and concern. The scene fades to black and the title sequence rolls.

As the local coroner prepares for an autopsy of the accident victim, she shocks him by showing signs of life. The revival of Dana Marshall (to a comatose state) causes a stir in the small town, but that is just the start of the stirring. In speaking with the coroner, Jill Brock adds a new twist to the plot. Her examination has determined that Dana is four months pregnant.

The coroner objects. During his examination he found the young woman to be a virgin.

At this point a brief subplot is introduced. Snowball hurler Matthew Brock is in the process of telling his younger brother Zachary that there is no Santa Claus. He explains all the gory details. Parents sneak presents into the house, pilfer letters to Mr. Claus, and run other forms of interference. Christmas for Zack is not going to be what it used to be. But it is Christmas nonetheless, and the people of the town are very quick to make a connection between Dana Marshall and the virgin birth of Jesus. Even the town clergy enter the discussion, though they try to keep things quiet until they can decide a course of action.

Uncertain about her own feelings about a putative miracle is Brock. She explains to husband (and Sheriff) Jimmy that her textbooks cannot possibly explain what she has seen. Maybe, it is a miracle. She's willing to consider that. Others have already made up their minds. The coroner, Carter Pike, is immediately suspicious and begins searching for purely scientific explanations, including the possibility that a deluded religious girl might impregnate herself. Dana's gynecologist, Dr. Haber, objects. He is a religious man who does not discount a miraculous explanation. In addition, he takes offense at Pike's claim that religious people are prone to schizophrenia.

Jill feels caught in the middle. As a doctor she wants to adhere to the scientific view. As a member of a society with deep religious traditions, she does not want to discount the possibility of a miracle. Her discomfort is increased when the next major plot twist occurs. Dana Marshall starts experiencing medical complications as a result of the baby. Jill explains to Dana's father that there is little chance his daughter will survive if the pregnancy continues. And, there is no chance the baby will survive if Dana does not. The father recommends that Jill terminate the pregnancy. Since Dana cannot make a decision on her own, however, Jill must ask the local judge to decide the matter. Flamboyant local attorney Douglas Wambaugh takes the case to the judge. At this point the clergy step forward to request an injunction against the abortion. Still claiming agnosticism in regards to the deity of the unborn baby, they feel they must prevent its demise and they ask smooth-talking attorney Franklin Dell to plead their case. The judge agrees to a hearing on the issue.

When the hearing begins, Dr. Haber is brought to the stand and claims there is no medical explanation. On cross-examination, he claims that the fact that Dana was a virgin means the pregnancy must be supernatural. A quick edit to Jill Brock under examination by Wambaugh shows the difference between her and Dr. Haber. She does not see it as supernatural. But, the assertive Franklin Dell confronts her on this issue, asking her if she believes Mary experienced a virgin birth. Jill lowers her eyes and answers yes. Wambaugh confronts Doctors Brock and Haber outside the courtroom, claiming both neglected their medical duties to their patient Dana Matthews. Brock briefly claims that she merely told the truth. Haber, however, responds very defensively, claiming he is tired of having his religion trod upon. He then turns to Brock and denounces her, claiming that she was ashamed of her faith.

Here is where the major conflict of the show comes through. In Dana Marshall's hospital room, Jill Brock discusses the confrontation with her husband. "Do we really believe in God?", she asks. He briefly reassures her with an "Of course!" answer. But this doesn't satisfy Jill. She recognizes that they "dance around religion." They never confront it. Jimmy explains that he is sure of the presence of his belief, but not its nature. Given his uncertainty about some biblical tales, he finds it easiest to keep his distance from God, knowing he is out there, but "not getting in the same room with him." Jill, stares at Dana, a patient for whom she can do nothing, and seems to wonder whether it might not be better to have God in the same room with her. She presumes that without a miracle it will be necessary to either abort the baby or watch mother and child slowly die.

Her faith in miracles is soon diminished, however. Further evidence (and a bit of deception) prove that Dr. Haber impregnated Dana. Jill asks Haber why he would do such a thing. He claims that his actions allowed people all over the world to regain hope. Even Jill, he says, received that hope.

With new information, the judge gives Dana's father the go ahead to terminate the pregnancy. As Mr. Marshall discusses his hesitancy about such a move with Jill, Dana suddenly cries out, coming out of her coma. Her father exults in the occurrence, and Jill immediately calls in the technicians and their equipment. When she has a moment to stop and think, she speaks to Jimmy, explaining that such sudden changes are rare, but they do happen.

As the show concludes, the Brock family huddles together near their fireplace. They listen attentively as Jimmy reads a passage about the existence of Santa Claus. He warmly announces "Thank God, he lives. He lives forever. A thousand years from now, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood." When the reading is completed, Zachary states "I like that ending." Jimmy and Jill respond in agreement.

The Dialogic Nature of "Cross Examination"

The opening shots of this episode forewarn the viewer about the acerbic nature of the dialogue within. Certainly a snowball striking an icon of Christ is dramatic enough to make the viewer realize this is no mild mannered Christmas special. More than this though, the opening sequence as a whole shows dialogue. One world is the old world of town squares with manger scenes and citizens gathered in a tradition. The other world is a high technology world with sounds of sirens, wenches, medical equipment and screaming voices. In one venue, carolers and their audience use candles to light their way through a centripetal community event. In the other, scuba divers and EMTs use electronic search lights in investigating a centrifugal event. The two scenes focus on two different sets of technology, and Postman argues that different technologies produce different thought worlds.

The focus of this show is the collision of those thought worlds. Jill Brock is in the path of the collision. Being placed between people who seem much more certain of their orientation toward religion, she is perplexed. She is presented with utterances from several key characters which lead her to question her own world view. This element is a crucial part of dialogue of the show. Through the juxtaposition of Zachary's questions about Santa Claus and Jill's questions about her faith in God, we get a sense of her discomfort.

Another juxtaposition in the episode is the one between key characters who represent varying points on a religious-technopolistic spectrum. The strongest alternatives in this episode are Dr. Haber and Carter Pike. These two stand as alternative

world views Jill could consider. In Newcomb's terminology, they offer us clear character zones. Haber exemplifies one extreme. He is confident of his faith and seems willing to let it have an impact on his everyday life. His utterance suggests that God should play a major role in human affairs. This is demonstrated clearly in the closing arguments in the courtroom. Franklin Dell, the lawyer for the church states it succinctly.

> What has happened in this country that has made us so ashamed of believing in God? Politicians are schooled never to bring it up. Try saying a prayer in school and its "Quick, call the ACLU!" Oh no, it's all right to be religious. But for God's sake, keep it to yourself. Whatever you do, don't tell anybody. You'll be labeled a zealot, a ranting demagogue, an idiot. I'll tell you, judge, this country is in moral decay. Maybe it's time we stopped punishing people for bringing their religious and moral concerns into our public arenas.

This basically reiterates the point Haber makes outside the courtroom when confronted by Wambaugh. In that utterance, Haber sounds as if he is pronouncing a creed. Basically, he disregards the advice of those Attorney Dell speaks of when he says "Whatever you do, don't tell anybody." Haber tells Wambaugh very succinctly what he believes. Jill watches him as he does.

We watch him also, wondering about the viability of this world view alternative. And, at this point in the show Haber is presented as a reasonable alternative. Peter Michael Goetz, who plays the role, is well groomed and portrays the character as amiable and conversant. For him, when the scientific perspective does not answer a question, he turns to religion for the answer.

Yet Haber's world view is eventually discredited, even if there is some cost in this discrediting. The show suggests that he really is a zealot, a ranting demagogue, an idiot. But, he was a demagogue who gave us hope. That is how he defends his actions as he is hauled off to jail. His view of God is one in which God intervenes in human affairs. The clergy in the episode are mandated to take this view and seem aware of that mandate. Yet they are fearful and distance themselves from the whole scenario as much as possible.

When Haber is whisked away, his utterance goes with him. The audience is no longer led to perceive his ideology as a reasonable one. The next scene is in the judge's chambers, where Coroner Carter Pike takes over the dialogue. His utterance is dominant. He doubted the miraculous all along and proclaims he was proven correct in his belief that everything was to be explained by modern science and technology. When Wambaugh and Sheriff Brock had nearly given up on finding a scientific explanation for the events, Pike had not. He stated. "If that judge finds this could be divine, we look like fools. We can't give up." Any explanation beyond the natural, is unacceptable within this character zone.

Pike's utterance, then, is a stark contrast to Haber's. It rules out the possibility of the miraculous altogether. Though the technological society finds this cold rationality appealing, it is not without its problems. In this case, Jill and her specialists sit next to Dana Marshall's bed feeling helpless. Once Pike determines that the pregnancy is not miraculous, he is content. Yet Jill is not. For her, the pain of watching an innocent young girl and her unborn child suffer is valid reason to question the detached logic of a mechanistic world. At one point in the script she seems to realize that there are times when the only thing she can do is pray. Yet such prayer would deny the utterance of Carter Pike, a technological utterance devoid of spirituality.

Such denial comes in the next scene. Dana's father has consistently been portrayed as a devoutly religious man. Yet near the end of the script he has been swayed by the technological utterance. He looks at his daughter hooked up to the latest medical equipment and seems to have been convinced by the evidence Carter Pike presented. This puts him in contrast with Haber, who was the man of hope. This contrast is starkly demonstrated when in the first line of his final scene Mr. Marshall asks "There's no real hope, is there?" Jill, confirms the position with a simple "No." Haber's utterance held hope but was dismissed. Pike's general orientation is presented as logical, but is presented as hopeless and therefore not desirable. Nobody wants to live in a world without hope.

But Jill and Mr. Marshall are not left to reside in this world. When the miraculous recovery occurs with two minutes left in the story, they are given one more opportunity for hope. Though they have discounted the possibility of seeing God as personal and close, they do not want him too far away. If he chooses to work a miracle or two, all the better. Jill, in the end, seems to embrace her husband's brand of religion.

That this leaves the Brock family in a certain ideological state is demonstrated in the scene that immediately follows, the family sharing in the reading of a story about Santa. Just as Zachary has been convinced that a certain form of belief in Santa is a good thing, Jill has been convinced that a certain form of belief in God is a good thing. This message is not only demonstrated in the script, but also with the title of the episode. Herein, "Cross examination" has less to do with the courtroom maneuverings than it does the theological elements of the show. After all, the title is not the legal term "Cross-examination" (which would be almost meaningless since many of the show's episodes contain a courtroom scene), it is "Cross Examination." For Jimmy Brock, Christian belief in general poses no problems. He states that much when speaking to Jill. Yet specific elements of belief are stumbling blocks for him. The biggest stumbling block might not be the birth of Christ, but the cross of Christ. A person can easily bear with a story of a virgin birth 2000 years ago. It is very easy to conceptualize the story in such a way that it has no direct impact on our lives. The crucifixion, however, calls into question deeper theological issues of human sin and the need for propitiation. For someone like Jimmy Brock, the cross is an offense.

In this light, the first and the last scenes in the episode make perfect bookends and help us make sense of the hegemony of intention. The Brock children's actions in the very first scene are part of the battle between mother and father. Matthew's snowball didn't collide with the icon of the baby Jesus in a manger. It collided with the icon of the adult Jesus on the cross. A close look at the brief shot shows a bearded Jesus with his thorn-crowned head sagging. The presence of such an image might be unacceptable for a person (such as Jimmy) who wants to keep God at a distance. Though Jill was present at the religious event with the children—hoping to enjoy the moment—Jimmy was absent. In the children, the wishes of both parents are manifest. They are present, but they are fighting certain elements of it.

By the end of the episode we discover that this show is about striking a balance. This balance is between a religious faith that invites God to interact with us on a daily basis, and an atheism that says there is no God. The show seems to suggest that something in the middle of these two extremes is comfortable. In the first scene, there are too many images that allow God to get close. For example, the words of the Christmas carol "Away in a Manger" refer not only to the birth of Christ, but the lordship of Christ. Moreover, as noted earlier, the statue of the crucified Jesus brings Christian soteriology into the dialogue in a way that the baby Jesus might not. The less offensive the symbol, the closer it is to the middle position to which this episode points.

This is manifest in the final scene, a scene God and Christmas have been sterilized. As the Brocks gather around the fire, there are no strongly religious visual images in the room. Rather than carolers singing "Away in a Manger," a canned, instrumental version of "Silent Night" plays. Basically, the words have (or in Christian theology, the Word has) been removed from the message. This is not an uncommon occurrence in the media of the technological world. Ellul suggests that a contradictory cultural element must be dealt with. One option is to "obliterate it or disguise it". Another is to "interpret it in such a way that we can fit it without harm into an understanding that has an answer for everything"(Ellul, 1989, p. 33). Both of those tactics seem present here. The Brocks are presented as being very comfortable with this view of God and religion. Their "yeah" responses to Zack's affirmation to the message on the eternal nature of Santa Claus is really an "amen," the acceptance of the creed of their religion.

In Postman and Ellul's views of the technological world, this is what one might expect. Granted, the former seems to misjudge the persistent lingering of the residue of earlier cultures his analysis. Religion is still a factor to be dealt with. But Postman does seem correct in suggesting that religion is assaulted by technopoly. He would probably agree with Franklin Dell who claims "This country not only trivializes religion today. It scorns it." Postman's more accurate judgment is on the meaning of cultural elements and how they can shift. In this instance one can clearly see that the religion the Brocks cling to at the end of the program is very different from the religion which is discussed through much of the episode. Given our dialogic analysis, the implication is that the audience should sympathize with such a shift.

Such sympathy is part of the *weltanshauung* of the technological world. Ellul suggests that audience affinity for certain characters is a predictable element of the entire communicative phenomenon. Much of his work deals with conformity in the modern world.

> To act in conformity with collective beliefs provides security and a guarantee that one acts properly. Propaganda reveals this consonance to the individual, renders the collective belief perceptible, conscious, and personal for him. It gives him a good conscience by making him aware of the collectivity of beliefs. (Ellul, 1965, p. 200)

This "good conscience" is not proper in some metaphysical sense, only in a cultural sense. What Ellul is suggesting is that this is one more example of our tendency to fall into place in the technological world. He would argue that in a technological world where efficiency and standardization are the driving forces, a religious view such as the Brocks' does not pose problems. Other views might. To clarify this, we can note that when Franklin Dell steps out of his role as a litigator and openly questions the implications of the court case in which he is involved (and the possibility the second coming is imminent), he recognizes that not all forms of religion are equally beneficent. He reminds the pastor and the priest that if the baby is the son of God, the current political and social systems might not fare well. In his own words, "We'd have to deny him. Otherwise the world order would crumble." Though readers might not necessarily agree with all of Ellul's theological arguments, they must admit (as Dell does in his moment of honest reflection) that some forms of religious belief are more problematic for the modern technopolistic state than others. If they are problematic, one would expect the media to question, if not denigrate them. Such is what appears to happen here. Though this is only one example of such, the analysis above suggests that using the ideas of Ellul to analyze the mass media depiction of religion is a worthy task.

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Jacques Ellul's Web

by Joyce Hanks

When I have explored the question "How did you discover what you wanted to concentrate on in your research?" with friends, I have found that most of them came to their primary interest through reading related to university course work, usually in graduate school. But Jacques Ellul studies seem to constitute a case apart. Many of us in the United States first read Ellul at the suggestion of a friend who had found him stimulating. Or life-changing. *The Presence of the Kingdom* got many of us started back in the 1970's. Reading one of Ellul's books led to several more, and then to an attempt to lay hands on *everything* he had written.

An enormous bibliographical effort often resulted, leading to contact with other avid Ellul readers who were also trying to find more. My trajectory has differed from that of others mainly in two ways: I never managed to wind down my bibliographic search, and I had a background in French studies. Familiarity with the French language and French libraries has made it easier for me to track down and read obscure articles by and about Ellul, as well as books of his that were available only in French.

Like so many other people, I continue to "devour" Ellul eagerly, and to give him priority in my research efforts. I can see positive and negative reasons for this persistence. Negatively, my efforts to continue giving papers and publishing in my original research field (French Renaissance poetry) have met with all kinds of frustration. Poetry seems to be currently "out" (although Renaissance studies generally continue to enjoy a good deal of success), so that feedback on papers given at conferences proves nearly nonexistent. Current critical trends in literature seem to have polarized scholars to such an extent that satisfying one editor or referee inevitably involves alienating another. And I have often asked myself if publishing in my original field really adds much to knowledge. Significant knowledge. Working on Ellul has given me a new set of priorities.

On the positive side, I continue to study and publish on Ellul because of continued requests for updates of my bibliography on him, and because he has become so thoroughly central to my thinking. Childhood influences aside, I believe no one has influenced me like he has. Almost everything I read causes me to make mental "notes in the margin" based on Ellul's thought, and he elbows his way into an increasing proportion of my conversations.

How does he manage to touch on almost everything? I think he has done it by going "under the surface of the ocean," to the deep currents, to use his image for what lies under most of our thinking. These normally unexamined presuppositions affect just about everything that takes place "topside." An example: shortly after Christmas 1997, as I read a review of the philosopher Thomas Nagel's *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press), I found myself thinking again about the whole matter of objectivity, as Ellul understands it. Rather like Nagel, he considers that we do not have the ability to adopt some sort of "neutral" stance with regard to every issue ("unqualified" thinking, in Nagel's terms). But we can recognize our bents, and have confidence in our thinking when we make allowances for these preconceptions.

Although Nagel might not recognize this simplified summary of part of his book, I found it reassuring to recognize Ellul's conclusions in the work of another thinker. And I found additional reasons for agreeing with Ellul on this important issue.

I do not always agree with him, of course. During interviews that he allowed me to record, mainly during the 1980's, I sometimes attempted to challenge his ideas. I never got very far, but neither did he convince me to change my mind! A case in point: Simone de Beauvoir. I had read a great deal of her mammoth output when I first ran across a slur in one of Ellul's books. The slur turned into what sounded like a sneer when I asked him about her, and he remained unimpressed, in spite of all I could think to put forward about her importance in establishing the dignity of women. As often proved to be the case, our difference of opinion on this occasion stemmed from historical and sociological roots. Ellul was likewise concerned for women's dignity, but also wanted to offer a counterweight to French popular opinion that he believed simply bowed to Beauvoir as an admired figure, without examining the content of her thought. I was eager to recognize her influence in establishing the importance of women, but did not feel overawed by her reputation. I continue to teach Beauvoir regularly in French literature and culture courses, and see no reason, at least not so far, to let Ellul's reasoning affect my appreciation of her contribution. On the contrary, the more I read of her work, the more pivotal she seems.

One of my primary interests in the development of Ellul's thought centers around World War II and the period leading up to it. I cannot fathom how he grasped the dangers of fascism so early, with such certainty, especially when one considers the fascination it held for many other thinking people in French society at the time. His writings on the subject shine with amazing foresight and clarity, and he does not hesitate to write some "I told you so" articles after the war.

I have interviewed everyone I could find who knew Ellul in the pre-war era, or who had reason to know something about his thinking from that period. So far, none of the suggested answers to my questions about his insight into the true nature of nazism seem to ring true, or to offer an adequate explanation for his understanding. I remain "stumped," at least until I

broaden my perspective by absorbing more background on the intellectual and political atmosphere in Europe prior to World War II.

Ellul's seminal concepts refuse to remain confined within our convenient categories. The same weekend I read the review of Nagel's new book mentioned above, I found my thinking revolving around Ellul during an adult Bible study at church. Oddly enough, my thoughts had no apparent connection with Ellul's theological concepts, important as I believe them to be. We were studying one of Jeremiah's many prophecies of disaster: "If you do this, the result will be that," the prophet predicted. My mind moved to the same general pattern as we find it in Ellul on Technique: "If you do this, the result will be that," he so often wrote.

Specifically, I began wondering about my rather uncritical enthusiasm regarding the use of the Internet: so convenient, so quick. I keep in touch with so many people I didn't seem to be able to, formerly. Problems can be resolved so readily, decisions made without delay. But, "If you do this, the result will be that"—including writing with no forethought, not to mention without care or style, writing as a quick means to a sure end, without nuance—or even diacritical marks! For the sake of speed and convenience, have I, have we, begun to eliminate a facet of life we had good reason to preserve, namely careful writing of letters? Ellul calls us to question new patterns, rather than slipping into them unthinkingly. Before I began to listen to him, I did not reflect on such matters. I took my place, expectantly, as a child of my century, submitting to its influences, considering them as inevitable "progress." Jeremiah took my thoughts in many directions that day, but at least one of them constituted a response to Ellul's call.

Ellul's thought forms a kind of World Wide Web unto itself. You can enter this web at an unbelievable number of points, and it may lead you in directions seemingly unrelated to your point of entry. One idea connects with another, and ultimately relates to a vast array, touching most of the important facets of life and thought. Since I first found myself in this particular web, I have not been able to stop making connections.

Some of those connections involve new people. In part because of the Ellul bibliography, hardly a week goes by without someone e-mailing or writing me with an Ellul question: do I have a certain Ellul book, do I know where he wrote about a given topic, do I have names of people interested in Ellul in this country or that? I should not have been surprised, then, when the September 1997 conference at The Pennsylvania State University on "Education Technology: Asking the Right Questions" attracted more than 200 people, most of them apparently readers of Ellul. But I was amazed to find so many of us gathered in one place, with Ellul central to so many of the papers given, and with Ellul-talk filling the conversation over every meal (contact Christopher Dufour, Continuing and Distance Education, The Pennsylvania State University, 225 Penn State Conference Center Hotel, University Park PA 16802-7002, for information on the soon-to-be-published papers from the conference).

My experience at Penn State encourages me to believe that Ellul's ability to clarify and stimulate thinking has not diminished since his death in 1994. On the contrary, his web keeps spreading more widely, touching more and more people. Books and articles about him continue to be written, the second posthumous book by Ellul has just been published in French, another Penn State conference is planned for 1999, and there is even talk of republishing Ellul's complete works. Some days, I think work on his bibliography will never end. Nor would I want it to.

My Encounter with Jacques Ellul

Bill Vanderburg

My encounter with Jacques Ellul began with the reading of his book *The Technological Society*. I had purchased it at the recommendation of an acquaintance but did not read it until I had to make some important decisions. While I was a doctoral student, a good deal of time was spent with some fellow students discussing the implications of the Club of Rome Report and the environmental crisis. It appeared to me at the time that the very possibility of serious resource crises or an environmental collapse would force our civilization to rethink its steps. The implications for my profession were clearly immense: the engineering, management and regulation of modern technology would have to change fundamentally. To explore the possible nature of these changes, I decided to continue my studies in technology on the post-doctoral level via the social sciences and humanities to see what these disciplines knew about technology that I in my profession would have to become more knowledgeable about

I began reading *The Technological Society* to see if Jacques Ellul might be a possible mentor for my post-doctoral work. After reading about a chapter and a half, I had a powerful intuition that I had found the person I was looking for. However, the encounter was not without ambivalence. On the one hand, the description of technique corresponded exactly to my experiences in the world of engineering. On the other hand, it implied a critique of the technical mind-set that I had spent many years in acquiring. This was rather depressing, because I had always been considered the "philosopher" in the Faculty and had received a great deal of support and encouragement from the assistant dean and the academic vice-president. *The Technological Society* was telling me that the problems were not merely "out there" but that I was an integral part of the technical mind-set and spirit that dominate our age.

My letter of enquiry as to the possibility of studying with Ellul received a negative reply. He explained to me that he would welcome the possibility of working with an engineer, but that he was already so over-committed that he did not dare to take on yet another project. In the meantime, I had received a post-doctoral fellowship from the only non-military committee of NATO, The Committee for Challenges to a Democratic Society. Hence I wrote Ellul again, offering to limit the time I would request of him to seven hours a year on the assumption that, by auditing all his courses, I could probably figure out most of what I needed to know by myself. He accepted, and we packed our bags to move to Pessac where we spent four and a half years, during which time I rethought everything I had learned.

Upon my return to Canada, I had in my pocket one job offer — if it might be called that — from the University of Toronto to teach a course on technology and contemporary society in the sociology department, a course on the relationship between society and engineering for the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (a service course to engineering students), and a teaching assistantship in a full-year course on the history of technology. It was a foot in the door, which eventually led to the creation of a new tenure-stream position to develop that part of engineering education which deals with technology-society-environment interactions and their implications for engineering theory and practice. Five years later, I received tenure and at the same time became the founding Director of the Centre for Technology and Social Development.

The mission of the Centre was simple: to reach engineering students to take into account social and environmental considerations along with technical and economic ones so as to make technology as compatible as possible with human life, society and the biosphere — what I now call preventive approaches. I developed from scratch three undergraduate courses and two graduate courses that would give students a conceptual framework for understanding how technology as an integral part of technique is embedded in, interacts with and depends on human life, society and the biosphere, and to use this understanding in their design and decision-making.

What does my conceptual framework and professional approach owe to Jacques Ellul? First, an iconoclastic attitude to science in the sense that it knows things only through abstraction, that is, out of their usual context and in the intellectual context of a specific discipline and, where applicable, in a laboratory. There is no science of the sciences capable of producing a comprehensive understanding of our world and the forces that shape it. Science, like all other human creations, has its place but the limitations of scientific knowing are rarely recognized. Ellul's scholarship includes science, but goes well beyond it in recognizing that human life and society cannot be understood in a piecemeal fashion one discipline at a time. I have tried to illuminate this aspect of Ellul's thought through my book *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*. I can still recall his first reaction after reading it. "Have I not said all of this already?" I could not say I had read all of his work so I asked him for the appropriate references. Thinking for a moment, he said that there were none. What we finally agreed on was that, without a doubt, my theory of culture was implicit in all his work but that nowhere had he made it explicit. His concern was that the book was too systematic and could possibly be assimiliated by the "system" to create even more powerful techniques — a problem he had encountered with some of his own writings.

As the Hennebach Visiting Professor at the Colorado School of Mines this year, I have a lot of time to write and hope to complete the second and third volumes of my series entitled *Technique and Culture*. These develop two themes. The first is what can be done with preventive approaches for the engineering, management and regulation of modern technology to resolve or reduce the many problems humanity currently faces. The second theme deals with what cannot be resolved in this way, namely the influence of technique on human life and society, and ponders what else must be done to make modern

civilization more sustainable with respect to the biosphere and with respect to human life itself.

In terms of seeking the best possible understanding of where our most powerful creations of the second half of the twentieth century are taking human life and modern civilization, I believe the thought of Jacques Ellul is second to none for our age. I am not at all sure that it will be recognized as such. One of the reasons may well be his iconoclasm of technique, but I hardly think this is the whole story. In describing individual and collective human life as best he could for the second half of the twentieth century, Ellul, like other great thinkers who attempted this for their times, goes where science cannot follow. This is because making any claim of alienation or reification implies a norm that human life was meant to be different. This is equally true for the work of Karl Marx and Max Weber, but I believe Ellul goes further than either one of them. The reason I believe this to be the case is that Ellul is much more iconoclastic towards his own position as a person of his time, place and culture. For example, in the case of Karl Marx, if one proceeds to eliminate the great myths (in the sense of cultural anthropology) of progress, work and happiness that dominated Western civilization during the nineteenth century, his entire work comes apart at the seams. Why would the fifth stage in human history be better than the fourth? Why would a political revolution improve the human condition? Why should the characteristics of technology magically change when it is publicly rather than privately owned?

To be iconoclastic with respect to your own culture by means of which you make sense of and live in the world is like cutting the ground from underneath your feet. Of course, this can not be done in an absolute sense, for then we would cease to be people of our time, place and culture. However, even attempting to do so requires what I do not hesitate to call a spiritual struggle that is extremely difficult (I cannot help speculating that Max Weber's long illness had a great deal to do with what he was describing about the human condition). The few people who I regard as having a good understanding of Ellul's work have themselves gone through this iconoclastic journey with respect to their being people of their time, place and culture. It tends to force us toward the periphery of our intellectual disciplines, professions, and institutions and also marginalizes us in our personal lives away from our political, ethical and religious roots. It is like attempting to grow new roots without being able to shed the existing ones.

This aspect of Ellul's life and work was clearly evident in his approach to teaching. In his course on Marx (and only those readers who appreciate the French cultural setting will be able to understand the implications of what I am saying), Ellul stated in his introductory lecture that he recognized that everyone in that room had a position on Marx. He expressed the hope that, when they were finished with the course, they would know better why they held the position they did, and why they could not accept alternative ones. In other words, as a young French person, it was essential to think through your own life and its commitments of whatever kind with respect to what Marx had to say. There had to be a measure of iconoclasm with respect to one's own position. Otherwise, it would be impossible to understand Marx.

In the Bible studies he organized for students who had approached him with existential difficulties, Ellul proceeded in much the same way. The ideal composition of a group, he told me, would be one quarter agnostics, one quarter Jews, one quarter Catholics and one quarter Protestants. (Today, he would have probably added another group). To my amazement, he pretty much was able to have that mix during the years I was there. The study of the Bible demanded a certain iconoclasm with respect to one's own traditions, profoundly influenced as these are by the spirit of our age. The challenge of the text to all of us, regardless of our commitments, was to be iconoclastic but not to fall into relativism or nihilism. On the contrary, what is demanded is what in secular terms may be expressed as the recognition, in the sense of cultural anthropology, that human life during a particular historical epoch is rooted in myths, and that this cannot be otherwise. In terms of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is a constant struggle not to bow down to idols or, to put this in more contemporary language, not to be alienated or reified by one's own culture and the spirit of one's age.

I think I can safely say that my intellectual life is unthinkable now without the work of Jacques Ellul. I have sought to build on that work in general, and on its iconoclasm with respect to science and technique in particular, so as to find ways in engineering that can help create some play in the present system. Hopefully this may contribute to the mutation that many recognize is essential. I know there are others who struggle in much the same way with their own profession and their roots. As I already mentioned, this struggle necessarily marginalizes those who engage in it. However, there appears no place or opportunity deliberately and consciously designed to facilitate the sharing of these intellectual, professional and personal ventures. We have all heard about invisible colleges and their fundamental role in the development of science. In closing, I will argue that all of us stand much to lose if we somehow, in the very near future, do not establish an invisible college within which we can each flourish in our endeavours through communication, critical reflection and sharing. I am obviously not thinking of a learned society, not anything that would directly look good on our curricula vitae (if you happen to be a professor or teacher), but a completely informal group where people discuss the intellectual and existential struggles in which they are engaged. At present, there is no such grassroots association, yet I believe that on this tenth anniversary this is what should happen.

Ellul and the Sentinel on the Wall

Marva J. Dawn

A chance remark to John H. Yoder, my dissertation director at the University of Notre Dame, changed my life in more ways than I can enumerate here. I had just read Jacques Ellul's *The Ethics of Freedom* and mentioned to John that Ellul's comments in that volume about the biblical notion of the principalities and powers intrigued me. John answered that this was a subject that needed much more study — and the rest is, as they say, history. I had planned to do my dissertation on economic redistribution, but that moment led me to exchange this for Ellul's insights into contemporary manifestations of the powers. The requirements of dissertation writing compelled me to read as much of Ellul as possible; his incredible grasp of things, in turn, propelled me into numerous changes of thinking, working, and living.

Principalities and Powers

The extent of Ellul's influence on my life and work can't even begin to be indicated by the fact that my notes from his publications and my own writings about him fill a branch of my computer hard disk with almost 6 million bytes, not counting books of mine on other subjects, yet heavily impacted by his insights. Though ultimately not the most important, the most comprehensive element of that influence is his insight into the biblical notion of the powers. The section, "Freedom in Relation to the Powers," in *The Ethics of Freedom* lists the following possibilities of interpretation for biblical passages about principalities:

> Are they demons in the most elemental and traditional sense? Are they less precise powers (thrones and dominions?) which still have an existence, reality, and, as one might say, objectivity of their own? Or do we simply have a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such...? In this case the powers are not objective realities which influence man from without. They exist only as the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence. Or finally, at the far end of the scale, are the powers simply a figure of speech common to the Jewish-Hellenistic world so that they merely represent cultural beliefs and have no true validity?[1]

Ellul situates himself somewhere between the second and third interpretations, for these reasons:

> On the one side, I am fully convinced with Barth and Cullmann that the New Testament *exousiai* and the power of money personified as Mammon correspond to authentic, if spiritual, realities which are independent of man's decision and inclination and whose force does not reside in the man who constitutes them. Nothing that I have read to the contrary has had any great cogency for me. Neither the appeal to Gnosticism nor reference to the cultural background seems to me to explain the force and emphasis of the New Testament writers in this area. In particular the opposite view has to follow the common practice of ignoring certain essential passages where Paul cannot be adequately demythologized

On the other side, however, the powers do not act simply from outside after the manner of Gnostic destiny or a *deus ex machina.* They are characterized by their relation to the concrete world of man. According to the biblical references they find expression in human, social realities, in the enterprises of man. In this sense the occasion of their intervention is human decision and action... [T]he world of which the New Testament speaks is not just a spiritual and abstract reality but one which is identical with what man in general calls the world, i.e., society (152).

Specifically, Ellul asserts that the way in which the powers transform "a natural, social, intellectual, or economic reality into a force which man has no ability either to resist or to control" and the way in which this force "gives life and autonomy to institutions and structures" or "attacks man both inwardly and outwardly" and "alienates man by bringing him into the possession of objects" correspond to biblical passages such as Ephesians 6:12 (152-3). Consequently, Ellul continues as follows:

> Political power has many dimensions, e.g., social, economic, psychological, ethical, psycho-analytical, and legal. But when we have scrutinized them all, we have still not apprehended its reality. I am not speaking hastily or lightly here but as one who has passed most of his life in confrontation with their question and in their power. We cannot say with Marx that the power is an ideological superstructure, for it is always there. The disproportion noted above leads me to the unavoidable conclusion that another power intervenes and indwells and uses political power, thus giving it a range and force that it does not have in itself.
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> The same is true of money...[and] technology (153-4).

Ellul's own insistence that he speaks out of a lifelong confrontation with the question of the powers raised for me the issue of how this notion was manifested in his immense and diverse corpus. Especially by means of some of his earliest writings in which he links spiritual causes with economic and political problems, I discovered that from the beginning Ellul's separate tracks of theology and *sociologie* had a profoundly deep connection, that the biblical notion of "the principalities and powers" is that correlating link. His sociological assessments of the all-encompassing influence of such contemporary forces as technology, politics, and economics undergird the intensity of his ethical calls to Christians to be "sentinels on the walls" recognizing and warning of the dangers. Ellul wanted the hope and grace of his theology to be related to the concrete situation of the powers at work in the world. On the other hand,

he insisted that only on the basis of true freedom through faith was he "able to hold at arm's length these powers which condition and crush me ... [and to] view them with an objective eye that freezes and externalizes and measures them..." (228-33). One of the goals of my dissertation, consequently, was to demonstrate how the concept of "the powers" thoroughly grounded — and thereby could help us understand -Ellul's thinking.[2]

In my work of leading clergy conferences transdenominationally I have found that pastors and other church leaders find this "principalities and powers" language extremely helpful for understanding the forces that make their work difficult — such as the passivity fostered in our culture when persons are bombarded by such large amounts of information that they feel incapacitated or immobilized.[3] Learning that the obstructions to ministry are not mere "flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12), but larger forces often interrelated enables my colleagues to ask better questions to discern what is inimical to the gospel, what should be resisted, what can be modified. The terminology also provides immense hope, since Christians believe that Christ has triumphed over the powers by exposing and disarming them; my teaching and writing can thus offer not only the unmasking of such forces, but also biblical tools for standing against them.[4]

Money as *Mammon*

Ellul's insights into the principalities have not only undergirded my teaching; his perceptions have also shaped my personal life. Though I had already been asking critical questions about such forces as technology and money in my daily life, Ellul's article, "L'Argent," and its larger development in the book, *Money and Powers,* influenced my decisions about my salary and book royalties. In these works Ellul insists that money becomes a god in more ways than we customarily realize.[5] I had always thought that I was safe from its seductions since I didn't have too much (to be, therefore, tempted to hoard it), nor too little (and thus tempted to chase after it). Money, I presumed, was an area of life over which I had sufficient control.

But Ellul blasted me out of that complacency with his discernment that we sometimes sacrilize money by being such a good steward of it that we aren't generous. I felt compelled to go to the person whose study carrel was next to mine and whose husband was unemployed to ask her if she would help me desacralize what remained in my grocery budget that month by taking it off my hands. She answered that she would never have accepted my gift (it was only $10) if I had offered it as such, but that she would gladly help me de-divinize that money. The delight and laughter of the occasion helped me recognize the freedom inherent in Ellul's astuteness.

Now married to a man who shares my desire to desacralize money, I experience the same freedom in not requiring more income than his work as an elementary school teacher provides. Not needing royalties, which are given away, I can write books out of passionate concern for the Christian community and without cares about the market. The Board of "Christians Equipped for Ministry," under which I freelance, similarly shares Ellul's perspective and helps decide where our income tithes should be sent and to which places, such as Mexico and Poland, I can go to serve for free. Of course, Ellul was primarily concerned with economics on the global scale, but his constant invitation to "act locally" invites each of us to counteract the world's constantly expanding "need" for more stuff and larger incomes (to prove our worth?) by de-divinizing money in our own lives and in our churches.

The Subversion of Christianity

The work that I had already been doing as a freelancer was confirmed and intensified as a result of Ellul's works on faith and ecclesiology — works which have not received due attention, perhaps because of his penchant for overstating his case to make a point. Particularly *The Presence of the Kingdom* (and *False Presence)* and *The Subversion of Christianity* heightened my efforts to encourage pastors to resist the unbiblical advice of the church marketers and the economic and political pressures that pervert the gospel — though I disagree with how Ellul in the latter book limits his definition of the powers to six functions in a way that contradicts his earlier elaborations, especially in *Money and Power.*

My disagreement on that issue also aided in developing for me a new independence in my scholarship; not having any real mentors for the kind of work that I do, I had often experienced difficulty previously relying on my own work when I found myself objecting to ideas or methods in thinkers whom I trusted. Ellul's constant insistence that he didn't want "disciples," but that he intended to motivate more thorough thinking gave me permission to protest his conclusions while still acknowledging my intellectual inferiority.

One of the main weaknesses in Ellul's work is his lack of attention to the Christian community — a weakness that he blamed, in conversation, on his own bad experiences with church bureaucracy. Convinced that the deficiency of true community is a major source of churches' lifelessness, efforts to equip church leaders with biblical resources for building it comprise a principal portion of my teaching and writing.[6]

Hermeneutics

Ellul's widely ranging books on biblical texts accentuated my need to discern when I can agree with him (or, more exactly, when his astuteness opens texts for me in entirely new ways!) and when he stretches texts beyond faithfulness to their intent to make his point. I can't say that Ellul's book on the *Apocalypse* affected my own writing on the subject since my book was fleshed out (though the final polishing took twelve years!) before I read his, but his attention to large themes rather than to precise interpretations of minute symbols seemed to support my own approach to the book as a perfect vehicle for encouraging those who suffer handicaps and chronic illness.[7]

Ellul's biblical books which influenced me most were *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (on II Kings), *The Meaning of the City,* and *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes.* The first is one of the finest expositions of the dialectical tension between God's sovereignty and human free will that I have ever found, and the second awakened me to the broad sweep of God's grieving over the rebelliousness of human beings which I had never before seen in connection with all the scattered references to cities in the biblical narratives.

Ellul's book on Ecclesiastes has become helpful for my critique of postmodernism in that Ellul deconstructed the myth of progress from *within* the metanarrative of the Bible. His "Preliminary, Polemical, Non-definitive Postscript" joins his "Notes innocentes sur la 'question hermeneutique,"[8] in reproaching those exegetes who judge the text instead of letting

it judge them. I first read the latter article at a time when I was deeply disturbed by the ways academia so often begins studying biblical texts with a presupposition against their credibility. Since I serve the Church rather than academia, I see the destruction of such extreme "hermeneutics of suspicion" (which often become instead "hermeneutics of blatant rejection"), and I find that pastors especially need the encouragement of Ellul's insistence for our hermeneutical methods that we cannot understand anything of any Signifier, whatever it might be, "if [we] do not receive and believe the Revealed [One]."[9]

Doing Ethics as a Lutheran

In the field of ethics Ellul primarily influenced me by making clear the reason that Lutherans (the tradition in which I was raised) have not been particularly good at doing ethics. In his insistence that we must have an ethics of freedom and in his claim that we destroy ethics by turning it into a system Ellul is especially faithful to Martin Luther and antagonistic to his Calvinist roots. If we begin with grace and understand questions of ethics as Holy Spirit-inspired responses to that grace, then it is impossible to legislate moral behavior.

Consequently, as I presently work on my own ethics textbook, I am developing a model of nurturing Christian character by means of immersion in the biblical narratives so that moral behavior will be the (unlegislated and unsystematized) result. Ellul's influence will be apparent throughout, though, at the current stage, I am only wishing that I could produce books as quickly as he did.[10]

Meeting Ellul

Finally, I must comment on the influence of meeting Ellul personally in the summer of 1987. I had already been surprised by his graciousness in responding to the letters of an unknown graduate student and was further amazed that he would take the time to meet with me. Due to his decline in health, he had written that he would limit the time of our conversation, but then when that time was spent he continued to talk and afterward his lovely wife served raspberries from their garden. Some of my Ellulian colleagues seemed to be frustrated with me that I did not spend my time asking Ellul about his future writing projects, but for me it was far more valuable to discuss his life patterns rather than his work (although we did do some of that, especially concerning his ideas about the principalities and powers). Professor Ellul asked questions about my work, too — especially about some articles I had written on teaching ethics to children in Lutheran schools. This stands out in my memory because for me Ellul served as such an excellent model of a profound scholar who is also able to relate well to other people. Concerning the common split in theologians between the head and the heart he said, "it is contrary to the Gospel."

We talked about many practical issues that day — the situation in South Africa, the ecology movement, U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. caring for the poor and the handicapped, euthanasia. As would be expected, Ellul stressed the importance of avoiding propaganda and political games, of thinking about each problem as a whole (thinking globally), and of seeing what we can modify practically in our own communities. He urged the U.S. to fight with economic justice rather than armies and to help the poor not only materially, but also with fellowship, spiritual security, and support in their anguish. Though Ellul often can seem harsh in his writings, his personal presence was of the utmost gentleness and profound sincerity, the generous character of a deeply committed Christian.

When we discussed presenting our work in publishable ways, Ellul said that he had created his own market, but that it had taken a long time. When I responded that I'm too impatient, he replied, "you must *always* be impatient." Both of those points have been constructive for me since my work as a freelancer has had to create its own market over time.

I wanted to know Ellul as a person encountering, in the struggle to live out faith and ministry, typical obstacles — such as the one we acknowledged in common of dividing our time between study and relating to people when involved in speaking engagements. He revealed himself as I expected — a wonderful model of a gracious man incarnating the Gospel in practical ways, a brilliant man choosing carefully the values of the kingdom of God.

Notes

1. trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 151-2. Page references to this book are given parenthetically in the following text. I have chosen not to muddy quotations by changing Ellul's use of "man" to inclusive language.

2. See Marva J. Dawn, "The Concept of 'the Principalities and Powers' in the Works of Jacques Ellul" (Notre Dame: Ph.D. dissertation, 1992) and also Marva J. Dawn, trans. and ea., *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul that Set the Stage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997). The commentary in the latter attempts to overcome some of the barriers to reading Ellul's work and to introduce new readers to Ellul's larger corpus

3. See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985) and *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

4. See, for example, Marva J. Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997).

5. "L'Argent," *Etudes Theologiques et Religieuses* 27, 4 (1952), 29-66, and *Money and Power,* trans. LaVonne Neff (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984).

6. See, for example, Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992).

7. See Marva J. Dawn, *Joy in our Weakness: A Gift of Hope from the Book of Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994).

8. The latter is published in L'Evangile, trier et aujourd'hui: Melanges offerts au professeur Franz J. Leehardt (Geneve: Editions Labor et fides. 1968), pp. 181-190, and translated in Sources and Trajectories, pp. 184-203.

9. Sources, p. 192.

10. See Marva J. Dawn, A *World of Difference. Biblical Ethics for the Daily Life of Common People* (forthcoming from Eerdmans).

All That Counts

Daniel B. Clendenin

The summer of 1981 was an important time for me. I had finished seminary in June and then married two weeks after graduation ceremonies, It was also the summer that one of my closest friends in seminary, David Werther, gave me a copy of a book by an author I had never heard of —*The Technological* Society by Jacques Ellul. By the end of that summer I had fairly well decided that I wanted Ellul to be the focus of my doctoral studies. Four years later I had finished my dissertation on Ellul's theological method, and perhaps one of the greatest tributes I can make to the impact he has had on my thought and life is to say that I never grew bored, as so many do, with my dissertation topic, either back then or even today. Since that summer when my friend David introduced me to Ellul, he has always been a living and active force for me.

What attracted me to Ellul or, in a more academic yen, what was the true nature of his genius? No doubt his provocative writing style, which in the long run clearly decreased the size of his potential reading audience and the extent of his influence, was attractive. In the academic world where nearly every sentence must be qualified with a tip of the hat to the experts, it was life-giving read someone who wrote almost without nuance. But style alone would hardly commend a lifetime of influence, and to be sure, entertaining writers are a dime a dozen.

The breadth and depth of Ellul's knowledge was amazing, and is often touted, but, by itself, that is not really too unusual in the university or intellectual worlds. And even if he was in a class by himself in this regard, so what? What has the world gained by someone who is nothing more than a mere intellectual titan? As Paul Johnson has shown in his depressing book, *Intellectuals*, mere intellectual brilliance can sometimes be a sorry measure indeed by which to measure a life. 1 am not suggesting that this aspect of Ellul was unimportant—far from it—only that he was much mare than a "mere" intellectual giant, and that for me personally, intellectual brilliance by itself is not very interesting, and that sometimes is both dangerous and deforming.

Like many people, I found a number of Ellul's signature ideas to be extremely fertile and provocative — the nature and threat of technique, the propagandistic effect and ultimate powerlessness of all politics regardless of their content, the anarchist nature of Christian discipleship, his critique of the mind numbing contemporary "commonplaces", the new demons of our resacralized world, his unapologetic faith in biblical revelation, and so on. But are these ideas so very unusual? I think not. Other authors have explored similar themes. Perhaps Ellul was a man before his time, in that he wrote about some of these issues before others had discovered them or made them popular, but I think one could easily show that many other authors have explored these same ideas with a similar depth, breadth, and provocative nature.

Ellul has had a singular impact on me, I think, for a different reason. As was his explicitly stated intent, when I read Ellul, he somehow seemed to articulate — albeit in an intellectual manner — what I experienced as an ordinary person in everyday life. Put in Kierkegaardian terms, Ellul captured me, his reader, as that "single individual" whom he hoped to move to action. Every time I read Ellul, I felt like I alone was that "single individual" for whom he wrote.

In the spring of 1985 I was in Bangui, Central African Republic. As when my friend gave me a copy of *The Technological Society*, I have a very vivid memory of the exact time place and setting of a conversation I had with an American missionary scholar who had spent much of his life in francophone countries — and thus, I figured, he would be interested in Ellul. I had given Jack a book or two hy Ellul to read, and his analysis of them that day was short but profound. I still remember his exact words: "He writes about what I experience."

Ellul understood as Paul Johnson put it, what intellectuals a too often forget, that people are more important than ideas, or better yet, that people of ideas must somehow connect with the normal everyday world of common people (the theme of Richard Mouw's little book *Consulting the Faithful*). Ellul joined the world of ideas to the world of the ordinary person and he did this both in the books he wrote but, perhaps even more significantly, in the way he lived his own life for others.

How many intellectuals of Ellul's caliber can we think of today who spend significant personal time, energy, creativity and the like with disenfranchised people, as Ellul did with street gangs (long before it was a fashionable cause), to the extent that a national organization was formed to help these people? Or how many professors of whatever religious persuasion have the vision, the personal skills and the commitment, not to mention the interest, to hold regular church services in their home for blue collar people, preach, and, when the group expanded to four services, because so many people were coming, donate the financial resources for the church to build their own building? Or we could mention Ellul's political activism (at least early on as deputy mayor of Bordeaux, before he grew totally disillusioned with all politics), his environmental causes, work with his Reformed denomination for two decades at the national level, mountain hiking with his students, his remark that above all things he was a man of important friendships, and the like.

When I interviewed Ellul in 1985 he told me the story of a young woman and child who approached him after he had delivered a paper at some conference. "You don't know me, do you?", she asked. Ellul said no, and the young woman went on to remind Ellul who she was and how that ten years earlier he had counseled her not to have an abortion. She then delivered a one-liner that I will never forget: "I wanted to show you the child you saved. "For me, Ellul remarked in the interview, "it was extraordinary." An extraordinary experience, to be sure, but rather typical for the way Ellul lived his life and wrote his books.

Ellul's ability to connect both in an intellectual manner and in practical ways with the normal human experiences everyday people is, I would argue, at the center of his overall vocation as he understood it. As he says in *In Season, Out of Season,*

> We are touching on a trait that I consider important: I never write ideas. I have always attempted to transmit exactly what I have experienced, in objectifying it. I have always thought on the experiential level. And my wife has had a considerable influence in this. I was, before her, pretty much a bookworm; I relied heavily on categories and concepts. She continually brought me back to the living reality which is all that counts. From that point on, my thinking was guided by concrete experience. I tried to think only in relation to what I had experienced and to transmit only what I was capable of living. That is why my work is inevitably incomplete and does not appear to be very systematic. I have never tried to make a theoretical system conceived in itself and for itself.
>
> I claim to be an ordinary man, and I am absolutely convinced of it. it I have always seen myself as an ordinary man, immersed in the same environment as everyone else At the movies, I am an ideal spectator. I laugh when everyone laughs, cry when everyone cries; I am emotional. I am not aloof; I only become aloof later. After returning home, I say to myself, "you reacted in this spot and in this way and here is how the others reacted." And I carry out a minute notation of all that happened. But I am really a split personality. The one watches a play at the theater, and the other observes the setting. A recollection: I told you that I was trained in painting, but I had no musical education. I had never heard the least bit of music before the age of twenty or twenty-one. One evening, I decided to go to a concert. I felt almost nothing, followed nothing understood nothing. I was completely bored. But what was passionately interesting to me was the audience, and I spontaneously began to do a psychological study of the audience as a whole and of the individuals as I could obserave. I learned a lot that evening. And music seemed like a strange magic to me.
>
> The exact same thing happened when I went to political meetings or mass marches. I was the typical participant and later the analyst of what happened.
>
> The proof that I am indeed an ordinary man is that there are always a lot of people who tell me, "What you write there is exactly what we felt." The only difference is that I have this ability of verbalizing, of intellectual analysis, that they have developed less than I. That is the only difference."

A similar way to express this idea is t say that Ellul lived a holistic life, rather than a life that is deformed by an unhealthy absorption with only one area of life — in the instance of intellectuals, too often, nothing more than ideas and books Marva Dawn captures this nicely when in the dedication of her collection of early articles by Ellul *Sources and Trajectories* (1997) she honors Ellul for who he really was — not merely a brilliant intellectual with fascinating ideas about important matters but as a "Prophet, Social Critic, Scholar, Bible Study Leader and Preacher, Nurturer of Young People, Professor, Advisor, Writer, Resister, Farmer, Environmental Activist, Model, Mentor, Sage Admonisher, Questioner, Sufferer, Friend to Many, Faithful to Vocation and Revelation."

In Galatians 5:6 the Apostle Paul writes that "the only thing that matters is faith working in love." This is incarnation, living out one's faith in what Ellul describes above as "the concrete reality" which, in the end, is likely to be "all that counts."

Reflections on Ellul's Influence

By Gabriel Vahanian

If nothing else, the table of contents of my various books should suffice to give an idea of' the extent to which, in fact, Ellul has accompanied me for the last fifty years, and shaped my own thinking for the better part of my life, though I wouldn't, of' course, attribute to him whatever defects still linger on in the subsequent evolution, whether of' my commitment to theology or of my academic career. Needless to say, without his support, I would not have been elected to a professorship in Strasbourg; nor would I, without his influence, have been able to deepen and broaden in the first place the problematic of the death of God. Which brings me back to the 'table of contents'.

Jacques Ellul has left at least two full length manuscripts. Under the title of *e'thique de la sanctification,* one of them deals with the ethic of hallowing. The other deals with theology and technology, and I have known its existence for almost a quarter of a century. He had told me about it, and told me also that, somehow as a matter of habit, he, so to speak, kept certain manuscripts on reserve. And, so to speak again, but to me more important, the reason for this disclosure had to do with the publication in 1977 of my book enticed *God and Utopia,* upon reading which, he added, he had signif'icantly had to revise his own manuscript on the same subject. The table of contents does indeed show that he had wrestled with *God and Utopia.* In our conversation, he had also remarked in passing that, if people should think this was a difficult book, it would be because they simply would not want to understand it lest they should discard a number of comfortable beliefs. Ellul knew, as I hoped he would, that though we were not cast in the same theological mould, we nonetheless were fellow-iconoclasts.

No, he did not have major difficulties with my theological reformulations', and, so far as I was concerned, I could put up with his own substantially conservative approach. Surely, and why should I not acknowledge that, at a deeper level, he continued to intrigue me. I hold from him just about everything I know about technology. And that is exactly where the question, "What Ellul has meant for me, personally" bursts forth in a manner few would suspect, considering the critical stance which I have on occasion displayed if only because I deemed him not only *worthy* of it but calling for it. After all, one can only tackle a giant. No matter how rough my remarks could be, they never allowed me to lose sight of that. So much so, that what he has meant for me could and should probably be best answered by, chronologically, Jim Holloway, Darrell Fasching, Sylvain Dujancourt, and Andrew Goddard — to wit.

Outside of the New York Times Book Review, the first notice of *The Death of God* was given by Duncan Taylor-Norton in his introduction to *The Space Industry,* a collection of articles written by the editors of *Fortune* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1962). Whether this was to be taken as a nod towards Ellul, the fact is that, ever since, I have for my part understood technology as being neither more nor less than our new *milieu* instead of, though not exclusive of "nature" or 'history". The rise of technology has been tied in and woven with the death of God as a cultural phenomenon: the term "post modern" has today become quite fashionable and fashionably acceptable: In those days I used to say "post-christian'.

I still remember Jim Holloway's phone call. He wanted an article for his journal *Katallagete,* and explained that the reason for this request was simply the fact that his attention had first been drawn to Ellul by reading *The Death of God.* Holloway had no doubt that accordingly I had taken Ellul most seriously: there must be a connection between theology and technology, since they both deal at bottom with our mode of being.

Why conceal It? I have always been skeptical of the Barthianism that infested Ellul's own theological endeavors. Had he not himself' once told me that he had swerved away fromBarth's political commitments, adding that the great trouble with Barth was that he knew nothing about politics? That did not prevent him, however, from remaining — by and large faithful to the framework of' Barth's theology. Ellul would certainly not have written, as I did, an article enticed "From Karl Barth to Theology — which in part, at least on the continent,explains why I 'have mostly fallen on deaf ears; why, as Ellul said, they would not understand me: French protestant theology has become frozen with Barth

In spite of that, Ellul had not shied away from admitting to a certain connivance between us. He had been on the main *rapporteur* during the oral examination I underwent for the "super-duper" — and for that matter now defunct — French degree known as *doctoral d'Etat.* In fact, that was the only time Ellul and his wife were to come to Strasbourg in many decades. Nor would he do so again in spite of my stubborn efforts. He traveled by train and now, because of his declining health, even that became for him unbearable — just as previously he had always turned down my repeated invitations to come to Syracuse: he would not take an airplane.

Ultimately, the reason I took Ellul most seriously or switched from Barth to Ellul is, simply, because unlike Bultmann, Barth never talked about technology. And, though with Ellul theology and technology tend to look like Luther's two kingdoms, here was at least a theologian who did not pursue his task in total abstraction from our inescapably technological milieu. I could not but take him seriously. And the extent to which I did so is, I surmise, is still remembered by Darrell Fasching and Sylvain Dujancourt if not Martin Kastelic, if only because of the number of times they had to revise their respective dissertations. Not that such revisions are what I systematically expect whenever Ellul is the subject-matter: Andrew Goddard was spared from that, but then, at Oxford, the thesis director— which I wasn't— never is the examiner, which I was.

Undoubtedly, whether the two manuscripts I know of will ever be published depends on Ellul's children and those that advise them. All I know is that Ellul appreciated my efforts such as *God and Utopia* and even warmed up to the notion of utopia, while in other respects he always spared me from the sharp criticisms he leveled at various exponents of the death of God.

(*continued next page.*)

Jacques Ellul Was the First

Pieter Tijmes

For me Jacques Ellul was the first author who has introduced me into the field of philosophy and technology. That is the reason why I am grateful to him. Even possibly justified criticism of him provokes defensiveness in me. This is a sign of my warm feelings for Ellul who was, in my view, carefree yet pessimistic. His political engagements were not crowned with success, but nevertheless he continued his way whistling. In a sense, he was unassailable and had a firm confidence in the successful outcome of everything in the world, in the end. It was a Barthian spirituality that guaranteed this trust. Concrete obstacles he was confronted with in his career as political activist were treated as minor details. I do not know Jacques Ellul in person nor have I ever talked with him, but I read and have read his books on technology in this mood. I would not like to see things differently, but what I do not like might be necessary.

His books *La technique ou l'enjeu du siecle* and *Le Systeme Technicien* were fascinating. He did not claim to be a philosopher but always emphasized his sociological approach. Strange to me was his claim to be inspired by Marx. Unfortunately, I could not find a spark of the Marxian tradition, but afterwards I realized that he said so during the climax of the cold war which was evidently a sign of his independent way of thinking - and most independent of Marx, in my view. I was impressed by the way he explained that technology was the decisive characteristic of our contemporary and future life. His typical slogan of "autonomous technology" did its work on me. He showed quite clearly that modern technology was a new phenomenon not to be compared with traditional forms of technology and that this technology evoked a technological universe. I became still more convinced of the symbolic fall-out of technology, to use an intriguing Illichian expression. It is unnecessary to explain all these insights in ***The Ellul Forum.***

In the last book of his trilogy on technology *Le Bluff technologique* he holds the conviction that each phase of technology provides more problems than solutions. Technologists are simply deceivers by bluffing. Ellul is merciless in showing that the view that unexpected and undesirable side effects can be overcome in a technological way is absolutely false. This book in comparison with the other two was still more massively negative and more somber with regard to the irresistible and enslaving power of technology — it was, even for me, too much. The book also irritated me methodologically, because any viewpoint was embraced on the condition that it was blacker than black, even when the insight did not fit Ellul's own frame of reference. He spoke about technology's ambivalence but in fact he meant technology as *massa perditionis*. Ellul's joy of discovering new insights, in my perception,was gone in this book. And he was repeating his original and impressive insights in an inelegant and sometimes boring way. I was relieved to have reached the last page of the book. In a certain sense it was unmanageable to me. To be honest, I was not allowed to cherish such a vision on technology as a protestless consumer of flights and computers.

Nor did I have the courage to tell my students that they were blindly promoting the evils of technology. In my opinion this Ellulian track was not fruitful for me any more. This is my memory but I know that memories are very manageable by people. The first two books had a freshness of saying new things to me, the last book of the trilogy could be said in fifty pages as for me. His Calvinistic ethos that sought its fulfillment in writing books turned out to be as counterproductive as technology. But why pass a negative sentence on an author of whom the last book turns out badly?

Still, as the readers of Ellul Studies know, I did my best to defend Ellul's vision of technology as a legitimate vision of an outsider. His vision should be complemented with a point of view of an insider or actor (*Ellul Forum*, Jan 1995). As (Durkheimian) outsider you are allowed to speak about the autonomy of technological decisions, etc., but as an actor or insider you know better, or more precisely you have other insights. The problem how to integrate the truths of the outsider's perspective and the insider's perspective I gladly leave to sociologists. It is the question how to exorcise Durkheim's spirit. On the other hand, it is also an existential question how to lay bare relevant moments of decisions in the technological process.

In short, Ellul was a good beginning for me, and I am interested how people explore his possibilities to continue Jacques Ellul's line of thought. In this formulation it is clear that I do not consider this explorative work with Jaques Ellul as a point of departure to be my task. In the philosophy of technology there are on this moment more interesting starting points. I have to make here a great reservation. Ellul's theological passion was not a secret but I do not possess an intimate knowledge of it. I am open to be instructed that the theological insights on the technological universe are more revealing than what is brought into the open from other point of views. I am open to it, but I have not had that experience up to now.

Vahanian continued

Was not his subsequent notion of the "silence" of God" his way of coping with the cultural demise of the ontotheistic notion of God?

I have in front of me notes I took on the 6th of June 1946 during a lecture Ellul gave on Communism in Basel. No wonder, I had awaited the publication of his *La technique or l l'enjeu du siecle b* Duntil *1954*. Subsequently, thanks to Enrico Castelli and his series of colloquiums, we had met regularly at the University of Rome La Sapienza. For many years we also met just about every six months to discuss the 'fate' of *Foi et Vie*, the journal of which he was the director until his resignation for reasons of health.

No wonder, either, I myself cannot tell what that giant of a man has really meant for me, personally.

Book Reviews

Andrew John Goddard. "The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul with Special Reference to His Writings on Law, Violence, the State, and Politics." Ph.D. thesis, Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford, 1995. Pp. 495.

Reviewed by Joyce Hanks

Andrew Goddard's dissertation makes a refreshing and much-needed contribution to Ellul studies. Once published, I believe it will prove indispensable, both for those in need of a careful explanation of Ellul's fundamental theological and sociological concepts, and for those who desire to know more in detail about his life and work.

One of the study's many excellent features is the manner in which it integrates matters too often separated in works on Ellul: his life and his theoretical stances (see p. 285 on anarchy, for example, and p. 217 on his involvement with the "Associations Professionnelles Protestantes"), his "dialogue" with Karl Barth at different stages of his life, and, especially, his sociological and theological writings. Goddard outlines Ellul's concerns for society as manifested in both his works and his experience.

Like most dissertations that treat Ellul as their central subject, this one gives an overview, as suggested by its title. But, with the possible exceptions of Bill Vanderburg's *Perspectives on Our Age* (trans. Joachim Neugroschel; Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corp., 1981), and the translated interviews in *In Season, Out of Season* (interviews by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange; trans. Lani K. Niles; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), I cannot think of any work in English that begins to offer the wealth of biographical information we find here. Goddard appears to have read and digested everything imaginable on Ellul in French and English. Patrick Chastenet's *Entretiens avec Jacques Ellul* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), was published too late to permit the incorporation of its revelations into the body of this dissertation, but Goddard has made very detailed reference to it in his footnotes.

Goddard has made extensive use of the Ellul collection at Wheaton College's library and other sources, incorporating many course outlines and unpublished articles by Ellul into his analysis, and confronting these writings with each other (as well as with Ellul's published books and articles). This early, unpublished material proves especially valuable as Goddard traces Ellul's thought on society prior to the publication in French of *The Technological Society* (1954).

Following his initial, insightful biography chapter on Ellul, the author considers Ellul's theology (the keys to which for Goddard are the Fall, or the "rupture," and communion with God) and ethics, and then his sociology (in which the concept of "civilization" plays a central rôle, along with Technique and modernity). The focus on Ellul's theology and sociology separately, and then in dialectical tension, constitutes the structure of virtually the entire dissertation.

Readers will find this arrangement especially illuminating, I believe, in connection with the three "case studies" examined in depth by Goddard in the second part of his study: law, violence, and the State and politics. To deal with each of these themes, Goddard devotes first a chapter to Ellul's sociology as related to the topic, and then a chapter devoted to his theological treatment of it. But throughout, Goddard shows how the two kinds of writing relate with respect to the question at hand. I found Goddard especially provocative on this fundamental issue of the separation and relationship of Ellul's two approaches (see, for example, p. 164, where he ties Ellul's proposed reforms for seminary studies to this dialectic).

Goddard's treatment of Ellul on law may prove rather challenging to non-specialists, but it constitutes a major contribution to Ellul studies, since this significant aspect of Ellul's work has received so little attention in published articles. Goddard offers a welcome explanation for the difficulty many find as they attempt to understand Ellul's *Theological Foundation of Law* (trans. Marguerite Wieser; New York: Doubleday, 1960; French edition 1946), and summarizes the book carefully (along with several of Ellul's articles on law).

Goddard also shows how Ellul's technical studies on law relate to his writings on the theology of law, and explores the relationship of Christian believers with law and institutions. Throughout the dissertation, especially in his chapters on law, Goddard routinely incorporates relevant material from *Histoire des institutions* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-; multiple editions, usually in four volumes), customarily ignored in studies on Ellul. The author traces in detail what he believes are essential changes over time in Ellul's theological approach to law. Another significant change in Ellul's theology as seen by Goddard surfaces often in the dissertation: the disappearance in later works of Ellul's early insistence on a "divine order of preservation" of the world.

Although Goddard finds Ellul less original when he writes on violence than on law or the State and politics, he calls violence "the one subject where theological concerns are unambiguously the context for the presentation of Ellul's sociological reflections" (p. 248). He shows how violence, in Ellul's view, stems from humanity's broken relationship with God, and thus relates to the deepest layer in society's structure, forming a constant throughout our history.

Leaving some questions relating to Ellul and the State unresolved, particularly the theological issues, this dissertation outlines a convincing relationship between Ellul's experiences in the 1930's and 1940's and his view of politics (especially anarchy). Goddard offers a helpful distinction between the personal power wielded by governmental authorities, as seen in Romans 13, and the abstract power exercised in modern states, under the domination of the "powers," with a view to explaining Ellul's varying positions with respect to Biblical passages on Christians' relationship with authority.

Goddard has helpfully divided his dissertation into clearly differentiated sections within each chapter, building to significant conclusions throughout. Readers will also discover more

than thirty pages of substantive quotations from difficult-to-find works by Ellul in French, organized in an appendix of endnotes. Goddard mentions several misleading English translations in Ellul's books, and spots errors in bibliographies of Ellul. His bibliography runs to more than 100 pages.

We should all hope that publishers will vie with each other to obtain the right to bring this important study into print—with the addition of an index, and references to English editions of Ellul's works, where possible. We would profit from future "case studies" of Ellul on art, the church, propaganda, revolution, the sacred, etc., pursuing the lines of Goddard's approach. Ellul himself would urge us, however, to go beyond understanding what he has to say, in order to apply his principles and insights to matters he did not address.

Joyce M. Hanks

For readers wishing to purchase *Silences*, it sells for 75 French francs through Éditions Opales, 13 Cours Gambetta, 33400 Talence, France (Telephone/FAX: 011-33-557-96-93-28).

Jacques Ellul. *Silences: Poèmes*. Talence, France: Éditions Opales, 1995. Pp. 92.

Reviewed by Olivier Millet, editor of Foi et Vie

(originally published in *Foi et Vie*, vol. 94, no. 3 (July 1995), p. 109. Translated and published here with permission.)

Poems by Ellul: the reader may be surprised, especially to learn that shortly before Ellul's death, he expressed a desire that they be published. His modesty, as a man and as a thinker, undoubtedly caused him to delay their disclosure.

But reading these poems now, after his death, we realize that the work of Ellul the thinker and the theologian was rooted in an experience and in writing that accompanied the "public" forms of his expression. His deep inner life and his lyricism are located behind his ideas and his witness, or go beyond them. This is probably the meaning of the title, *Silences*.

This volume does not offer us unveiled secrets, but rather visible flashes, rhythmical impulses, and verbal signs that are rich in imagery and in evocative allusions. Showing through them we can sense an inner life that has both a serious and a gratuitous side (Ellul goes so far as to use nursery rhyme forms).

This inner life is both moral and witty: Ellul's irony with respect to the world and life (understood as a pathos-filled and humorous game), and his humor with respect to himself, do not seek to impress or captivate us. Far from it. Instead, his irony and humor extract from successive moments both the ephemeral and the promise-filled portions contained within the concrete existence of a man. Ellul as poet in this volume reaffirms himself as the reader-exegete of Ecclesiastes we have admired

Waves, flames, fountains of water—these are momentary visions stemming from Ellul's poetics of vicissitude. Often in a very simple way, sometimes with a rather rare charm, by means of syntax and vocabulary, these images evoke the strangeness of the world (whether natural or civilized) for humanity, or the strangeness of humanity for this world.

To live freed from vanity and concern for self, and to stand in Hope: these constitute the two main poles of this lyricism, which does not seek to coordinate them by means of any discourse.

Instead, the poet records the tensions and the deep currents of his sensitivity, unable to separate Spirit from flesh. Such knowledge is not destined for human beings:

> No one will notice my wretchedness any more
> dedicated will I be to the works of prayer
> in the mortal secret of who I am.

A single poem ("Pèlerinage à la civilisation de la mort" [Pilgrimage to the civilization of death]) mentions the collective world that Ellul took pains elsewhere to analyze, in its socio-technological ins and outs. But he describes it as a sort of Apocalypse, sombre and syncopated, from which the Sun of Justice is still absent.

Translated by Joyce M. Hanks