

# The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

## *Reading the Bible with Ellul*

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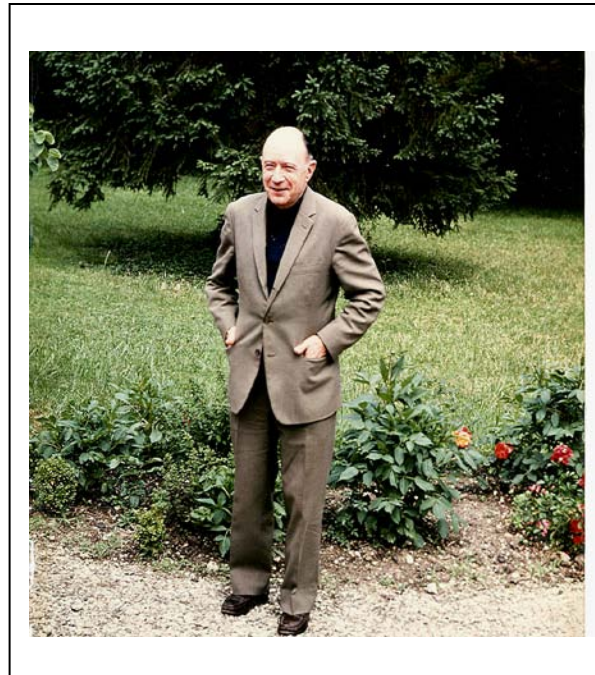
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*"[T]he criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics.*

*"This rigor in no wise implies that this is a book for Christians. To the contrary, I would expect all its value to come from a confrontation. . . Every man in our decaying Western civilization is asking questions about the rules of his life. Still less, finally, is the biblical revelation limited to the narrow circle of the elect. It speaks first about all the others."*

**-Jacques Ellul**

**To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians (1969)**

# **The Ellul Forum**

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# *From the Editor*

The special focus of Issue 36 of *The Ellul Forum* is Jacques Ellul's use of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The quotation that graces our cover, from the beginning of Ellul's introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do*, provides a typical sample of Ellul's passion for the message of the Bible. And yet, as the quotation makes clear, Ellul never thought the Bible was simply for the edification of some holy club withdrawn from the world.

Although Ellul published many studies of biblical themes and passages, he remains much better known for his sociological critique of technique (and its implications for politics, economics, social change, communications, etc.) than for this side of his work. But, just as we don't fully understand Kierkegaard's philosophical works without his edifying discourses (and vice versa), the living dialectic between Ellul's theological and sociological works cannot be ignored.

Ellul's biblical studies are always provocative at the same time they are extraordinarily learned. Many of his readers attest to an experience of finding themselves in disagreement with Ellul on various points---and yet naming him the most helpful, illuminating Bible teacher they ever knew. It is almost impossible to ever view a biblical text the same way after Ellul gets done with it. The secret? Ellul gets us to a place where we can truly hear the text, where the living word comes through the forms of the written word.

We are honored to have a wide range of contributors in this issue, several for the first time. These authors come from very different places but all have an informed, critical appreciation of Ellul's biblical studies. Both older and younger scholars are represented, clergy as well as laity, Christian and otherwise. Their articles and reviews range across many different studies by Ellul. We have also included reviews of theological and biblical studies by four of Ellul's own favorite discussion-partners and fellow students of theology and Scripture: Claude Tresmontant, Gabriel Vahanian, Alphonse Maillot, and André Chouraqui.

After volunteering to "guest edit" this issue for our intrepid Editor, Cliff Christians, I can only say "welcome back" to Cliff. He and Darrell Fasching before him have performed an awesome service to us all these past 18 years as editors of *The Ellul Forum*. I can hardly wait to have only my "Associate Editor" and "publisher" hats on again.

*David W. Gill, Associate Editor*

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# Jacques Ellul as a Reader of Scripture

*by Anthony J. Petrotta*

**Re-view of Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans, 1990), translated by Joyce Main Hanks from *La Raison d’Être: Méditation sur l’Éclésiaste* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987).**

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When I started my studies at Fuller Seminary nearly thirty years ago, I took an elective class, “The Ethics of Jacques Ellul,” taught by David Gill, then finishing his Ph.D. studies on Ellul across town at USC. At that time I was taking classes mostly in Semitic Languages and wanted to go on in Old Testament studies. Ethics and theology were “recreational” reading for me. I had some interest in Ellul since a friend was urging me to read his books and the class fit my schedule. I managed to talk Professor Gill into allowing me to write a paper on Ellul’s hermeneutics and he enthusiastically—as David often does!—accepted my proposal.

I found Ellul to be not only a sociologist, ethicist, and theologian, but somebody who had a deep interest in the biblical text and was conversant with the field. I found that a number of his concerns about interpretation were also being voiced by prominent biblical theologians (in particular, Brevard Childs).

Now, a generation later and with all that has gone on in the field of biblical studies, how does Ellul stand as an exegete, as a reader of Scripture?

I want to center my thoughts on Ellul as a reader of Scripture by looking at *Reason For Being*, his “meditation” on Ecclesiastes. Ellul says that Ecclesiastes is the book of the Bible that he has explored more than any other book. It is a book he read, meditated upon, and taught for more than fifty years. I also want to compare what Ellul has said against two more recent (and more traditional) commentaries on Ecclesiastes: Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* and Michael Fox, *Ecclesiastes*.

Ellul begins by reflecting on his reason and method for writing *Reason For Being* in his “Preliminary, Polemical, Nondefinitive Postscript,” which, of course, appears as Chapter One, an instance of paradox that fits with Ecclesiastes’ program of throwing contradictions together for the effect and truth they create. This chapter is very instructive; he reveals a lot about *how* he reads, and by

implication, reveals some of what he considers the shortcomings of commenting upon Scripture in the modern sense of the term (Ellul *is* polemical).

Ellul is keenly aware that he is not going about his task as an academician might. He has not compiled an extensive bibliography and he has not interacted with the literature on Ecclesiastes during his writing of *Being*. That is not to say, though, that he has not done the requisite work for writing an informed book on Ecclesiastes. Over the years he has read important studies on Ecclesiastes, and he notes those. More importantly, he “slogged” through the Hebrew text and *nine* other translations as he was writing. After writing *Being* he went back and read through the literature again on Ecclesiastes and though he saw no reason to change what he had written, he did check his thoughts against others who also have studied and written on the book. His reactions to these “historians and exegetes” he put in footnotes after the manuscript was completed.

Ellul says: “This approach seemed to me to be consistent with Ecclesiastes: once you have acquired a certain knowledge and experience, you must walk alone, without repeating what others have said” (p. 3).

I’m not sure that Ellul has “walked alone,” at least in this sense: he has read the studies by those who have spent a lifetime reading Ecclesiastes (Pedersen, von Rad, among others). But I think his point is well taken. Ellul has absorbed the thoughts of others *into his thoughts*, arranged them, and set them down through his own extensive—and slow! (“slogged”)—reading of the text itself. Ellul is not simply writing what he “feels” but what he has experienced as a reader; his experience of the text itself involves listening to those who have read the text and written through their knowledge and experience. Ellul is in a company of readers, but writing out of his own voice. The distinction is important because he thus steers clear of merely reflecting the studies or opinions of others or lapsing into a pietism.

In an important footnote, Ellul spells this approach out a bit more by invoking the Jewish tradition of four kinds of interpretation: literal, allegorical, homiletical, and the “seed of life, from which new mysteries of meaning continually spring up.” He believes that Qoheleth (the Hebrew term for the “preacher” and the name of Ecclesiastes often used in Jewish writings regarding this book) has given us a text where “new mysteries of meaning spring up, with or without new scientific methods” (p. 7). Here quite clearly Ellul points to what he considers the limits of modern commentary and hints at why he writes without those aids ready at hand. Ellul recognizes that however important philological and historical research is, and he clearly values these researches, a text is brought to life as readers open

themselves to the forms and thought of the book, and then respond thoughtfully.

The point that reading a text is more than simply understanding the words on the page is worth belaboring a tad. Nicholas Lash talks of “performing” Scripture, of taking the marks on the page and making them alive in our life much as a musician takes the notes of a sonata and realizes them in a recital. “The performance of scripture is the life of the church” (2). Ellul does not use this language, but it is implicit in his reading. In his discussion of this point, Lash similarly adheres to the importance of the historical-critical method, but also its limitation. Ellul and Lash (and others) see the reader doing more than making critical notes on a biblical text; as readers of Scripture, we move beyond simple comment to truths that must be lived out in our lives.

It is worth noting that both Davis and Fox make similar assertions about the role of interpretation. Fox, interacting with the tradition of Jewish *midrash*, recognizes that one role of an interpreter is to draw out “the fullness of meaning potential” in a passage (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. xxii) (3). Davis speaks of the medieval practice of “chewing” on the words of scripture. She wisely writes, “We are now a society that ‘processes’ words rather than one that ponders them” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 3). They are, however, more restrained in their comments than Ellul, as we shall see, but this is an editorial constraint I suspect, more than an authorial one.

An example might help show how the subtle differences between Davis, Fox, and Ellul play themselves out. Ecclesiastes 12: 12-14, the “epilogue” to the book, poses problems. For one, Qoheleth is spoken of in the third person and no longer in the reflective first person that we find throughout most of the book (e.g., Ecclesiastes 1:13-14). There are also interpretive problems, what certain words mean in this context, and what they refer to beyond simple translation of a term.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul all agree that these verses are not a “pious” conclusion that is tacked on to an otherwise radical book, as has often been a line of interpretation with the rise of historical criticism (4). Rather, these words are in keeping with the scope of the book; fearing God and God’s judgment are not alien to the book. Fox cites Ecclesiastes 3:17 and 11:9 on the judgment of God and 5:5 and 7:18 on the fear of God. In adopting this approach, all three are trying to come to terms with the complexity of the book as a literary document, but also the complexity of the thought of Qoheleth.

To what, however, do the words “they were given by *one shepherd*” refer? The translation is transparent (there is nothing ambiguous about the words). But to whom do they refer? We find different ways of explaining the “one shepherd” in Davis, Fox, and Ellul. Davis appeals to the shepherd as a moral authority, one who “goads” the sheep to new pastures where they will thrive and not overgraze the very ground that feeds them. She goes on to ask who might fulfill this role in our society. She answers, “Few teachers or clergy, or even fewer politicians” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 226). She reflects on the role advertising has had on our attention to words and how slogans, euphemisms, and so forth have

curtailed our ability to grapple with the complexity of truth, and to change our way of thinking and acting. These reflections, I think, would delight Ellul, though it is not the line of interpretation that he takes with this passage.

Fox has a rather lengthy discussion of “shepherd.” In the traditional interpretations of the rabbis, the term almost always referred to God. Even, Fox informs us, the words of someone as unconventional as Qoheleth derive from God, say the rabbis. The rabbis often have this “extraordinary openness” to different interpretations of *Torah*. Fox questions this interpretation, however. Rather, the metaphor of shepherd usually refers to protecting and providing, not the giving of words. The words of the wise are not, in Fox’s view, like that of law or prophecy. Fox settles on “sages” (not God) prodding people; hence the warning that follows: be careful, sages can overwhelm you with all their ideas (vs. 12). This interpretation is similar to Davis in saying that the “shepherd” are the sages, not God, but differs in that Davis is lamenting the lack of sage advice in our society, whereas Fox focuses on the warning of endlessly listening to other people’s advice. Ellul, I think, would find this last part sage advice from Fox, but again, this is not the approach that he takes.

Ellul goes in another direction. He focuses on the words “all has been heard,” and interprets this line in two ways and at considerable length. First, God has heard all and “collects” these words, for which you will be judged (citing Matthew 12:37). Second, all has been heard, we cannot go beyond the words of Qoheleth; we have reached “Land’s End.” From this interpretation, the injunction to fear God and keep his commandments is all that need be said, and Ellul reflects on what “fear-respect” and “listening-obedience” mean for the Christian. It is from these two poles that “the truth and being of a person burst forth” (p. 299).

However, in a footnote (presumably written after Ellul’s initial meditation on the text), Ellul draws upon a doctoral dissertation by Jacques Chopineau who ties the phrase *one shepherd* to Ps 80:1, “O Shepherd of Israel, hear . . .” and interprets the reference to God (as in the traditional interpretation). Ellul admits that he “spontaneously wanted” to interpret these words as a reference to God (and, hence, God’s revelation), but felt “uncertain” and therefore did not mention that in the reflection proper (p. 291-2, n. 56).

Ellul then goes on in the footnote to reflect on this interpretation (5). If God is the *true* shepherd (“one”; Hebrew *echad*), then this ties and contrasts with Abel/*hevel* (“vanity”), Abel being a shepherd also. God, the true shepherd, is the opposite of *hevel/vanity*. The book is thematically structured around the various vanities, but God is opposite by giving us his commandments, which constitute the “whole person” when we live by them. Chopineau, thus, gives Ellul further support for his interpretation of the Epilogue as a whole, that fear-obedience, the encounter with God, and our listening-obedience liberates our whole being. God as the One Shepherd gives us the commandments. In this respect Ellul goes beyond both Davis and Fox, though Davis might be more sympathetic to the revelatory nature of the shepherd/sage and the connection with the commandments.

Davis, Fox, and Ellul agree that fear of God and keeping commandments are the sum of the teaching of Ecclesiastes. Davis concludes her comments by invoking the *Book of Common Prayer*: “Therefore, orienting our lives toward the commandments enables us, ‘while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those who endure” (Davis, *Proverbs*, p. 228; the citation comes on p. 234 of the *Book of Common Prayer*). Ellul would quite agree, and Fox says, “The book allows readers to probe the ways of God and man, wherever this may lead, so long as we make the fear of God and obedience to the Commandments the final standard of behavior” (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 85).

To answer my question at the beginning, how does Ellul stand the test of time, the answer, I think, is that he stands rather well. Granted, in picking Davis and Fox I am perhaps not being entirely fair since they are both interested in writing for the laity and clergy of the Church and Synagogue, but that is Ellul’s audience as well.

Ellul lingers more in his reflections than either Davis or Fox. His is, after all, a “meditation” and not a commentary in the narrow sense. Ellul, though, stays close to the text, the Hebrew text in this case. Even in his “gut-level” interpretation of “shepherd” as God, he relegates his comments to a footnote; he is fully aware that this interpretation is not universally accepted, but still in consonant with critical possibilities (a point that Fox makes more sharply than Davis).

I do find it a bit curious that Davis and Fox do not entertain the shepherd-God connection more than they do. That the shepherd is described as “one” seems suggestive in a book that uses words carefully and even “playfully” in the sense that Qoheleth wants to tease the reader to consider that the obvious and the not obvious can occupy the same space. Certainly God as the shepherd is not obvious or necessary; but the fact that commentators have long split on this issue keeps it as a live option to consider. Curiously, Barton notes the options and says that since “shepherd” is usually an epithet of God, it is “probably so here” (*Ecclesiastes*, p. 198).

A final note on my reading of Ellul this time. In my journey as a reader of Scripture, I have found that good readers of Scripture are often those who have honed their skills as readers generally, not just those who are trained to do exegesis in the narrow sense that is taught in books on exegesis for seminary students. What I mean is that a good reader is one who is not just a technician, but one who has, as Proverbs teaches, learned to “acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles” (Proverbs 1: 5b-6). Ellul weaves into his meditations thoughts and interactions with biblical scholars (Christian and Jewish), as we should expect, but philosophers, anthropologists, novelists, poets, and so forth. Ellul’s reading experiences are wide and that is why he can bring his experiences to the task of writing on Scripture, and write with the depth and thoughtfulness that he does.

Ellul’s skill as a reader comes out again in his “Preliminary, Polemical, and Nondefinitive Postscript.” Ellul objects to commentators that *must* find a “formal, logical coherence” in Ecclesiastes. This text is not like any

other; scholars treat works on Roman law with more “congeniality” than many biblical scholars treat Ecclesiastes. The scholars would have a “purer, more authentic text” than the one we have received in Scripture (I think Ellul has his tongue firmly in cheek at this point!) (6).

Ellul does not say it this way, but the issue at stake is *receiving* this text as a Hebraic text, I think, and not as a Western text. However much Qoheleth may be interacting with Greek philosophical thought, he is still very much a Hebrew and employs Hebrew forms and Hebrew “logic.” The ability to receive a text as it is written is a skill that most of us need to develop as readers of the Bible, especially since our current translations often go out of the way to obscure the differences between the world of biblical texts and our world (7). We need to learn the language, structure, forms, conventions, and so forth before we can become competent readers of Scripture (8).

The end of the matter is this: Ellul is a model reader for all of us, though he would be disappointed if we merely repeated what he has taught us and not built upon his work.

### End Notes

- (1) Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004). These commentaries are not randomly chosen. They are commentaries in a more traditional sense than Ellul’s study, but both authors are writing for lay people, pastors, and rabbis, and I know both to be very good readers of Scripture.
- (2) Nicholas Lash, “Performing the Scriptures,” in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 43.
- (3) *Midrash* refers to both ancient Jewish writings on Scripture and to a method of interpretation.
- (4) See, for example, G.A. Barton, *Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908). Barton calls the whole section a “late editor’s praise of Qoheleth, and the final verses as a “Chasid’s [a pious person’s] last gloss” (p. 197).
- (5) It is not clear to me if this reflection is part of Chopineau’s interpretation or Ellul carrying it forward in his own inimitable way. I suspect the latter.
- (6) See pp. 6-16, *Being*, for a fuller treatment of Ellul’s objections to some of the critical stances by biblical scholars.
- (7) Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*. (NY: Schocken, 1995), is a wonderful counter example to the trend to be “contemporary.”
- (8) I am thinking here not so much of form-criticism but Hebraic rhetorical forms of narrative and poetry. Form criticism often becomes reductionist rather than illuminating the poetic elements in a psalm, for example.

# Ellul on Scripture and Idolatry

*by Andrew Goddard*

*Andrew Goddard is Tutor in Christian Ethics and a member of the Theology Faculty at Oxford University. His Ph.D. dissertation was published as Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul (Paternoster Press, 2002).*

One of the distinctive features of Ellul's theological work is his conviction that it is Scripture that enables us to see the world aright. Rather than "demythologizing" the Bible, the Bible is the means by which God "demythologizes" our world. The classic example of this approach is undoubtedly his canonical, Christocentric study of the city in Scripture, *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970), but the same approach underlies his approach to many other phenomena. This article provides a brief introductory overview of how Ellul's reading of some biblical texts shapes his understanding of idols and idolatry and how, in turn, that understanding leads to a critique of certain attitudes to the Bible and explains the heart of his biblical hermeneutic (1).

Ellul's biblical discussion of idols and idolatry is not as thorough and focussed as his study of the city but it is particularly in *The Ethics of Freedom* and *The Humiliation of the Word* that we find his interpretations of key texts in – as one would expect from Ellul – both Old and New Testaments. Of particular interest is one Pauline text that shapes his account of the idols in relation to the powers (2). On first glance, we Christians may want to treat idols and powers as synonymous terms and it must be admitted that Ellul himself (here, as in many other areas) is not always consistent and does not always strictly follow his own distinctions that he draws from the biblical text. Nevertheless, when he is careful, he does distinguish his understanding of these two phenomena and he does so because he believes Scripture does so.

The crucial biblical text for Ellul is Paul's discussion of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8, especially verses 4 to 6. There the apostle writes, "Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one.' Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth-- as in fact there are many gods and many lords-- yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Ellul takes great care in his analysis of this text, drawing attention to the paradox that Paul here seems to say both (a) that no idol really exists and (b) that there are many

gods. Rather than dismiss Paul's statements as incoherent and confused, Ellul seeks to clarify why Paul affirms both these statements. He claims that gods exist in the following sense: "They are part of the powers that claim to be all-powerful or salvific, etc, and that attract people's love and religious belief. They exist. And they pass themselves off as gods" (*The Humiliation of the Word* (Eerdmans, 1985), p 89). Thus Ellul believes that in order to understand the text and the world we have to see that the language of 'gods' is equivalent to (or, perhaps better, a subset of) the category of the powers. As a result, Ellul insists – against the demythologizers and with such writers as Caird, Berkhof, Wink and Stringfellow – that there are real, spiritual powers and forces which influence human lives and societies. These, we learn from Scripture, set themselves up as powerful and redemptive and, by being viewed as such by humans, they stand as a challenge to the one true God.

In his interpretation of Scripture on the powers, Ellul rejects the Bultmannian demythologization project (that dismisses the language of powers as a worldview we must now reject in the light of modern knowledge) but he also refuses to embrace the common popular evangelical and fundamentalist belief in traditional demons that is often understood as the main alternative. Instead he moves between two other ways of interpreting this biblical language of "gods" and "powers." At times he views them as "less precise powers (thrones and dominions) which still have an existence, reality, and...objectivity of their own." Here they are seen as authentic, spiritual realities which are independent of human decision and whose power is not constituted by human decision. At other times – particularly in his later writings – the powers are viewed more as "a disposition of man which constitutes this or that human factor a power by exalting it as such" (*The Ethics of Freedom* (Eerdmans, 1976), p 151) and so "not objective realities which influence man from without. They exist only by the determination of man which allows them to exist in their subjugating otherness and transcendence" (*Ethics*, pp. 151-2).

Ellul's concern in this understanding is to avoid the idea of powers or demons doing their own work apart from human beings. He therefore stresses that the powers find expression in human works and enterprises. It is this important link between the spiritual powers and the material world, especially of human works, that helps us to understand his view of idols. "The powers seem to be able to transform a natural, social, intellectual or economic reality into a force which man has no ability either to resist or to

control. This force ejects man from his divinely given position as governor of creation. It gives life and autonomy to institutions and structures. It attacks man both inwardly and outwardly by playing on the whole setting of human life. It finally alienates man by bringing him into the possession of objects which would not normally possess him" (*Ethics*, pp 152-3).

These powers are the false gods that Paul says in 1 Cor 8 really exist. But what are "idols" and why does Paul say that they do not exist? The key feature of idols – in contrast to the powers to which they are linked – is that they are visible and material entities. Although this would seem to give them a more substantial existence, Ellul argues that idols do not exist because "the visible portrayal of these powers which is perceived by the senses, has no value, no consistency, and no existence" (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Any idol is really just "a natural, social intellectual or economic reality." It is strictly a material object under human control. Ellul therefore believes that Scripture distinguishes false gods from idols because the latter are simply "a creation of man which he invests with a value and authority they do not have in themselves" (*Ethics*, p. 156). Idols, according to Scripture, are simply part of the visible created reality and though linked to the gods or spiritual powers they are to be distinguished from them.

In explaining how it is that, in Paul's words, "no idol in the world really exists," Ellul gives the example of money. He claims that money as a power (Mammon) certainly exists. However, a banknote – the material means by which the power works - strictly does not exist because "it is never anything but a piece of paper" (*Humiliation*, p. 89). Here we see a central paradox: idols seek to make the invisible false gods and powers visible and concrete but by this very fact of seeking to mediate a spiritual power in the material world they do not themselves exist. We may today think of the Nike Swoop, the McDonalds Golden Arches or other symbols and logos as contemporary idols which on their own are meaningless and powerless but are mediators of some of the global powers of our age (3).

Faced with them we need to remember that idols are not only part of the ancient biblical world but still a reality in our post-modern "secular" world and to recall Ellul's judgment based on Paul's words: "They exist neither as something visible and concrete (since in this sense they are really nothing) nor as something spiritual... (since they cannot reach this level). They have no kind of existence precisely because they have tried to obtain indispensable existence beyond the uncertainty of the word" (*Humiliation*, p. 89).

Idols therefore, according to Scripture, lack existence per se and are the attempt by humans to domesticate and bring into the visible, material world the invisible spiritual powers that do exist. "Idols are indispensable for mankind. We need to see things represented and make the powers enter our domain of reality. It is a sort of kidnapping. False gods are powers of all sorts that human beings discern in the world. The Bible clearly distinguishes these from the idol, which is the visualization of these powers and mysterious forces . . . Things that can be seen and grasped are certain and at our

disposition. It is fundamentally unacceptable for us to be at the disposition of these gods ourselves, and unable to have power over them. Prayer or offering cannot satisfy, since they provide no sure domination. If, on the contrary, a person makes his own image and can certify that it is truly the deity, he is no longer afraid. Idols quiet our fears" (*Humiliation*, pp. 86-7).

This linking of idols to the material or visual, as distinct from the spiritual powers, leads to the second emphasis in Ellul's interpretation of the biblical witness: the priority of listening over seeing.

Ellul reads the narrative of humanity's primal rebellion in Genesis 3 as demonstrating the significance of this – the spoken word is doubted and visible reality is taken as the source of truth (see *Humiliation*, pp. 97ff). The same problem is repeated within God's people Israel. Here Ellul's interpretation of the narrative of the golden calf (Exodus 32) is of crucial importance. It also illustrates that, although (as in relation to 1 Cor 8) Ellul can take great care and wrestle with the literal or plain sense of the biblical text he is also willing to offer a more spiritual interpretation in order to discern Scripture's message. Thus, drawing on a study of Fernand Ryser (a French translator of two of the great influences on Ellul's theology and biblical interpretation – Barth and Bonhoeffer), he highlights that a source of the gold for the calf is the Israelite's ear-rings (v2). He quotes Ryser, "Aaron dishonours the ear; it no longer counts; now just the eye matters. Hear the Word of God no longer matters; now seeing and looking at an image are central. Sight replaces faith" (*Humiliation*, p. 87). It is this attempt to argue for a biblical basis for the priority of the word and hearing over the material image and sight that is a central theme of *The Humiliation of the Word* as a whole and of its exegesis of key biblical passages.

Finally, Ellul's claim for a biblically based prioritization of hearing over seeing must also be applied to the Bible itself. Although Scripture and biblical interpretation play a central part in Ellul's theology and ethics he is clear that Scripture, as a permanent, written record has the ambiguity of all written words Drawing on the biblical narrative of Moses breaking the stone tablets (Exodus 32.19), Ellul is adamant that this challenges a common Christian attitude to the Bible for the Bible "is never automatically and in itself the Word of God, but is always capable of becoming that Word – and as a Christian I would add: in a way denied to all other writings" (*Living Faith* (Harper & Row, 1983), p 128).

Rather, than treating the Bible as a visible divine word Ellul insists that "The destruction of this single, visible, material representation of God ought to remind us continually that the Bible in its materiality is not the Word of God made visible through reading. God...has not made his Word visible...The Bible is not a sort of visible representation of God...God's Word must remain a fleeting spoken Word, inscribed only in the human hear . . ." (*Humiliation*, p. 63).

Of course, as Ellul acknowledges elsewhere, God has in fact made his Word visible but he has done so uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ and it is, therefore, Christ the incarnate Word who is the key to the Scriptures.

Ellul, therefore throughout his interpretation of biblical texts works with a thoroughly theological and Christo-centric hermeneutic and a relative disregard for the tools of historical-critical study (4).

Ellul's biblical interpretation of some texts relating to idols and idolatry demonstrates that although Scripture plays a central role in his theology, his theological interpretation of those texts also makes him aware of the danger that Scripture may itself become an idol, a means of escaping the spoken Word of the living God. Ellul therefore challenges us to take Scripture seriously but not ultimately seriously, for ultimate seriousness is to be paid to the Word become flesh to whom Scripture – the Word written – bears witness and it is the living Word not the dead letter that is to be our concern. As a result, Christians are called to participate in a believing and attentive listening to hear the Word of God address us in and through the words of Scripture and to be confident that that Word is one which

liberates us from the powers and unmasks all our idols as simply “the works of our hands”.

#### End Notes

(1) For a fuller discussion of this, on which this article partially draws, see my forthcoming article in Stephen Barton (ed), *Idolatry in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity* (T&T Clark, 2005).

(2) The powers are a subject on which Ellul wrote much more extensively and which, particularly through the work of Marva Dawn, have become prominent in recent Ellul studies.

(3) I am grateful to Alain Coralie for his work on Nike Culture that has helped me make this connection.

(4) For Ellul's fullest account of hermeneutics see his “Innocent Notes on ‘The Hermeneutic Question’ in Marva Dawn's translation and commentary on a number of Ellul articles, *Sources and Trajectories* (Eerdmans, 1997), pp 184-203.

## If You Are the Son of God!

*by Andy Alexis-Baker*

**Review of Jacques Ellul, *Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jésus*. Paris: Centurion & Zurich: Brockhaus Verlag, 1991. 110 pp.**

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*Si tu es le Fils de Dieu: Souffrances et tentations de Jésus (If You Are the Son of God: The Sufferings and Temptations of Jesus)* is probably one of Jacques Ellul's least read works. A search through the WorldCat database indicated that only fifteen libraries worldwide own a copy. When I went to the Notre Dame library, which has a copy, I found it snug in the shelf, with crisp clear pages, as if it had never been moved since initial shelving, let alone read by a single soul. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that this work has never been translated into English. I have taken up that task and have completed a version and hope to get it published before long. I will be using my own English translation when I quote Ellul in this review.

Having lived with this work for some time now, I am convinced that it is one of Ellul's most important works. First, this book is his most extended meditation on the life and work of Jesus Christ. Second, this particular meditation on the sufferings and temptations of Jesus provides some

rather unique biblical interpretations that add a lot to our understanding. Finally, this book makes a great introduction to Ellul's thought. All of the themes found in his other works are found here: technique, arguments for a kind of biblically based anarchism, placing Jesus at the center of every thought, personalism, etc.

The book is divided into three parts: Introduction; Sufferings; Temptations. At the outset of the book, Ellul claims that Christians have not retained the “total life and teachings of Jesus, the reality: He suffered.” This can be seen for example in the way we recite and write down the Creed. We say that, “He suffered under Pontius Pilate” (p. 9). But Ellul claims that this is a distortion of the Latin construction and theologically unsound. The Latin construction is: “He suffered; under Pontius Pilate he was crucified.” This reading brings out the fact that Jesus was the Suffering Servant throughout his life. Our version makes suffering a momentary event for Jesus, that is salvific in and of itself.

But Ellul's purpose in this meditation is not to create a “theology of suffering.” For Ellul it is not a question of us participating in Jesus' sufferings, but of Jesus participating in ours. A theology of suffering leads to a kind of “morbid orientation” in Christianity: we focus on the gore of the cross and make Jesus into an ethereal creature who could endure great suffering, suffering which in and of itself saves us.



For Ellul, salvation comes through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in its entirety. So he directs most of his attention to the life of Jesus and the ways he suffered throughout his life. He focuses on the way Jesus suffered because of rejection, being the object of ridicule, and the ways in which he suffered through the normal pain of living, such as hunger. For Ellul it is important that Jesus experienced and lived a truly human experience.

Suffering is fundamentally changed by Jesus in two ways. First, when we suffer we can know that we are not alone in our suffering any longer. Lest we think Ellul is engaging in some sentimentality, he likens this knowledge to a friend who stays at the death bed of another and holds their hand until they pass. This is an act of profound mercy and comfort. God is that friend at our death bed.

The second way suffering is actually changed by Jesus' actual sufferings is that suffering is no longer a condemnation but a fact of material forces and absurdities. Jesus took on the real significance of suffering so that we no longer have to live in the shadow of eternal damnation. Our suffering takes on a temporal aspect, some of which we can overcome but some of which we must learn to live with and become more like Jesus.

Ellul's meditation on Jesus' temptations is just as insightful and relevant. All temptations boil down to two main categories as revealed in the Gospels: Covetousness, or greed, and lust for power. These two temptations are bound up with one another. We can only overcome them by a radical reading of the Gospel and following Jesus' way of "non-power."

For Ellul, all temptation is about humanity tempting God. We tempted Jesus precisely because he was the son of God: He had power and an ability to increase his earthly power; therefore we demanded that he use it. In doing so we tempt the God of love not to be the God of love anymore, but a God of terrible violence.

This book provides a welcome correction to many theological and popular meditations on Jesus and his suffering and temptation. Theologians are loathe to remember that Jesus refused to take power to rule over others, and that he demanded that his disciples do likewise. Ellul does not shy away from this aspect of Jesus but points out that it is central to his mission. It might be helpful to put Ellul in dialogue with a friendly reader such as John Howard Yoder who also examines the three temptations of Jesus in the desert in terms of their political and economic significance.

Yoder wrote that "all the options laid before Jesus by the tempter are ways of being king" (*The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1994), p. 25). For Yoder, Jesus' temptation was to set up a kind of welfare kingdom, in which he would rule as a benevolent head of state. But Ellul, goes farther than Yoder does, and examines this temptation in terms of techniques of production. Since Jesus had the ability to satisfy his hunger, we therefore demand that he use his power for himself. Thus Jesus is tempted to prove his divinity in the same way we today "prove" our own divinity: through production. We think we are divine because we are able to transform raw materials to satisfy needs that are also created. "By the miracle of production

humanity *proved* that it was divine!" (p. 73). So the temptation for Ellul is both Yoder's welfare king, and also a temptation to power that is godlike and therefore religious.

Likewise, Ellul goes beyond Yoder when he examines the way in which Jesus is tempted to political power. Yoder comments that the temptation to "bow" before Satan is a discernment of the idolatrous nature of state politics. Ellul makes a similar claim but in much more stark terms: "all those who have political power, even if they use it well . . . have acquired it by demonic mediation and even if they are not conscious of it, they are worshippers of *diabolos*" (p.76).

Ellul provides helpful corrections to popular understandings of the sufferings and temptations of Jesus as well. Mel Gibson's recent film, *The Passion*, perhaps exemplifies popular treatments of the sufferings of Jesus: a fixation on gore and a view of suffering as salvific in and of itself. Jesus is thereby reduced to an entertaining and momentary event, who is less than God but not quite human. Ellul's entire work provides a correction because he examines Jesus entire life rather than just the passion narratives. How much did Jesus suffer when his own family misunderstood him? How much must Jesus have suffered when his own disciples repeatedly tempted him to power, misunderstood him, and finally left him alone and abandoned? Ellul examines in detail how Jesus experienced physical, moral and psychological sufferings throughout his entire life. The cross was merely the culmination of a life of suffering and temptation.

I cannot resist mentioning one point in his treatment on suffering that brought up contemporary images for me. In his reflection on the way Jesus was ridiculed and mocked, Ellul points out that the soldiers who mocked him at his arrest, put a veil (a hood) over his head and then proceeded to punch him, all the while taunting him to do a superfluous miracle...to simply tell them which one just hit him, knowing he could not see. The images of Iraqis in American-run prisons in Iraq immediately comes to my mind. "When we are tempted to make fun of our fellow people, we should always remember that Jesus was the object of mockery" (p. 55).

This is a valuable book. It deserves more attention than it has heretofore been given: this work deserves and needs an English translation. This book might introduce Ellul's thought to a wider Christian audience, and provide a powerful tool for dialogue with others for those of us who believe Ellul's works are still of contemporary importance.

# Ellul's Apocalypse

## by Virginia W. Landgraf

**Re-view of Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: the Book of Revelation*** (Seabury Press, 1977), translated by George W. Schreiner from *L'Apocalypse: architecture en mouvement* (Desclée, 1975).

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Jacques Ellul's eschatology deserves to be better known, because it offers an alternative to some popular eschatologies which seem to negate either the truth of God's love for humanity and creation in Jesus Christ or the reality of God's judgment. However, the style in which Ellul's commentary on Revelation is written may be forbidding to a newcomer. (A more prosaic exposition of some of his eschatological beliefs is available in *What I Believe*). It could be termed "prismatic," because he tosses up multiple meanings for a given symbol depending on the angle from which it is viewed. The French subtitle, "architecture in movement," indicates that the five sections into which he divides the book – of seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, and seven visions of the new creation, framed by doxologies – are in dynamic relationship with each other.

Appropriately, the book is written not as a verse-by-verse commentary from beginning to end, but starting at the middle, where he thinks that the meaning of the work and person of Jesus Christ are shown "as in silhouette." The sections on either side – of the church with its Lord, of the meaning of history as revealed only by Jesus Christ, of divine judgment (yet executed by the Son of Man!) as stripping human beings of their works, and of the new creation – are inexplicable without this core. He presumes that the author of Revelation meant to write "a theological book" which is "a Christian book," saying that the relative absence of Jesus Christ in this section shows precisely God's non-power in history. One may doubt that such a move makes exegetical or theological sense. Yet the vision of eschatology which follows is worth wrestling with, because it is more compelling than some others which have either popular Christian or secular currency.

*First*, Ellul's eschatology can provide a healthy antidote to premillennialist eschatologies which emphasize the "rapture" of the church away from the earth and God's destruction of creation. Such an eschatology seems to go against both the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and the Noachic covenant. Often these theologies are associated with a belief in Revelation as a chronological prophecy of future events. By contrast, Ellul sees Revelation as

expressing a recurring dialectical movement of witness, judgment, and new creation, made possible by the atonement achieved by Jesus Christ. The catastrophes in Revelation are not primarily inflicted by God upon humanity but arise because of creation's shocked reception of the news that God has become human and because people are so bound up with works and powers and principalities which are destroyed by God's judgment. The church and Israel (the two witnesses) are separated from the world not to escape worldly tribulation in a physically removed heaven but to witness to God's truth within a world which rejects them. The New Jerusalem is not a substitute for the old creation but God's assumption of those human works which are fit to enter it (a motif which Ellul developed earlier in *The Meaning of the City*).

*Second*, Ellul's doctrine contrasts with an eschatology of human progress, whereby human beings incrementally build up God's kingdom on earth and derive meaning and optimism from this task. Whether in the Christian form of "postmillennialism" or as a secular doctrine of progress, this kind of belief seems to contradict the reality of radical evil. Advances in healing power may be accompanied by advances in killing power, and so forth. Ellul rejects a doctrine of progress and disconnects hope from optimism (a theme he took up in *Hope in Time of Abandonment*). He sees Revelation as "the unique example . . . of the meaning of the work of humanity and, equally, of its nonmeaning." There is no sure way to know which human works will go into the New Jerusalem. But that is not to say that they should not be done; he compares them to eating, which should be done, but is still "strictly relative."

History, Ellul believes, does not reveal any meaning by itself. This revelation must be provided by Jesus Christ, who comes from outside this history to reveal the catastrophes that would have had to occur upon the world if he had not taken God's judgment upon himself. Only because witnesses to the Word of God testify to something from beyond the play of forces in history can they introduce freedom into history. Similarly, Ellul distinguishes hope (contrary to visible evidence) from optimism about the products of human effort. (This contrast reflects his distinction between truth, communicable by the Word, and reality, manifested by visible evidence, which he treated most fully in *The Humiliation of the Word*). It is precisely because God seems to be absent in the central section of Revelation (punctuated by the seven trumpets) that Ellul can call this a section expressing hope. The "pessimistic" stance of Ellul's sociological works, which often show vicious cycles that seem closed in terms of worldly developments (of technique, politics, religiosity,

revolutions, etc.), does not contradict this hope but rather provides a context for it.

*Third*, Ellul's theology provides relief from belief systems (whether religious or secular) that try so hard to be non-judgmental that they cannot acknowledge the existence of personal or structural sin in the world. When these kinds of doctrines predominate among Christians, they often take the form of ignoring eschatology entirely, perhaps seeing Revelation as a book whose catastrophic visions are strictly the result of historical persecutions. This kind of theology does justice neither to prophetic calls for repentance and promises of liberation throughout the Bible, nor to persons' and systems' real needs for repentance and redirection, nor to the impossibility of achieving the repentance needed without God's action. Against this impasse, Ellul strictly distinguishes judgment from condemnation. Judgment is an expression of God's love and is liberation, because human beings will be stripped from the works by which they have tried to save themselves and the powers which enslave them. The spirit of rebellion against God and trying to save oneself, the subordinate powers which it breeds (political power, sexual lust, etc.), and the historic incarnations of these powers (such as political empires) will be condemned. But all of the people and some of their works (without the people's previous relationship of idolatry vis-à-vis their works) will be taken into the New Jerusalem. He sees mentions in the text of people left outside the new creation as referring to their *previous conditions* as idolaters, fornicators, etc., not to the people themselves. (Ellul believes in universal salvation, but he identifies this belief as a "conviction," not a "doctrine" – meaning that his position on what the church should teach as doctrine is perhaps closer to what George Hunsinger calls "reverent agnosticism" with regard to salvation – universal salvation is possible, but the decision belongs to God).

*Fourth*, Ellul's thought contradicts any tribalism or theology of political conquest, whereby the people on "God's side" will win over "God's enemies" and establish the kingdom of God on earth politically. Such a doctrine – rarely held so simplistically by serious Christian thinkers (e.g., careful liberation theologians) as their ecclesiastical opponents would have us believe – risks denying the universality of sin, the universality of God's love, and the limits of the ability of external structures to change the heart. Not only does such a doctrine raise some of the same problems as the doctrine of progress treated above, but in Ellul's thought, *all* people are in need of judgment. *No* human beings can be presumed to be condemned. God may surprise us by taking some works which we frowned upon as good religious or political people into the New Jerusalem (which is not an excuse for license in things which do not build up – cf. Ellul's dialectic between "All things are permitted" and "Not every thing builds up" in *The Ethics of Freedom*). In fact, according to Ellul, it is as non-power that God enters history and introduces freedom into history. Political conquest can never bring freedom. Empire building, by whatever side, is not the way to defeat the "axis of evil" but feeds into it. (The absolute contrast between freedom and love, on the one hand, and power, on the other

hand, does raise problems which will be addressed below.)

*Fifth*, Ellul's doctrine of judgment breaking into history contrasts with simplistic popular misunderstandings of Christian eschatology which one might label "creeping works-righteousness" even if they are not based upon external works. In these schemas, God keeps a balance and rewards people after death based on various criteria: their works, or right beliefs (faith as works), or perhaps right religious experiences (although any of these might be alternatively seen as gifts within this life from an arbitrary God who rewards some people and not others). By contrast, for Ellul, works do not save, either in this life or the next. Faith is witness to the living God and a relationship venturing forth with this God, and it is not reducible to a set of static beliefs (although, despite his contrast between belief and faith in *Living Faith*, one can analyze Ellul's beliefs about God and find that they do have cognitive content – which he seems to have admitted by writing *What I Believe*). God's decision to seem particularist in choosing Israel and the church is not a matter of saving some and not others, but of revealing God's self to some so that they can witness to others. And the new creation is not something to be hoped for only beyond death but may break into our life here and now, although it is not presumed to be a completed process in this life. Jesus Christ has already won the victory, and it is that from which we are to live; yet we are still in a world which, by visible evidence, is in bondage to the spirit of power and its consequences.

Thus a sketch of Ellul's eschatology can be drawn by means of contrast (for the full prismatic treatment, which is rewarding not only as an intellectual but also a devotional exercise, read the book). It should take its place with serious Christian alternatives to the popular eschatologies listed above. Yet its attractive features do not mean that it does not have problems. One searches in vain for a systematic resolution of the already and the not yet. Is it in the future? Ellul denies that the sequence in the book of Revelation is meant to be chronological, so the new creation does not occur at some future end time. Does it occur after death? Ellul might dismiss such a presumption, or even the wish for such a resolution, as speculation not provided for by the biblical witness. A more problematic issue for this-worldly ethics is the absolute contrast between love and freedom (which are of God, and of witnessing to God's Word in the world) and power (which is rebellion against God and enslaves both its exercisers and their victims). As this essay is being written, physical, technical power is badly needed to restrain flood waters on the United States' southern coast. It may be true that God appears in history as non-power, but does that mean that God never wants technical power to be exercised? Is there not a third option between love which can only witness, waiting for a free response, and power which crushes – something akin to artistic creation respectful of one's materials? (The argument that human beings should have built in a way more respectful of wetlands' capacity to act as flood buffers comes to mind.) Such are the questions raised by Ellul's treatment of the Apocalypse. Nevertheless, we are all in his debt for a beautiful, provocative book.

# Is God Truly Just?

*by Patrick Chastenet*

**Re-view of Jacques Ellul, *Ce Dieu injuste...? Théologie chrétienne pour le peuple d'Israël* (Paris: Arléa, 1991; Réédition Poche/Arléa, 1999)**

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“For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.” (Romans 11:32)

Why, if God determines everything, would He punish those forebears he himself created to serve as witnesses to his wrath? If God, exercising his sovereignty as he thinks best, “saves” some and “rejects” the others, how can we accept that those foreordained to be irresponsible should suffer damnation? If God is good, He can do no evil; if he allows evil to be done, he is not good.

But can we really measure out God’s goodness or justice? God is “arbitrary,” just as love is “arbitrary.” To claim that God is “unjust” would imply that there are values over and beyond the values of he who was characterized by Kierkegaard as the “Unconditioned One,” the “Wholly Other”: God, in other words, is not God.

The Bible, however, makes plain that what is good is wrought by God alone --- as Jacques Ellul, the non-conformist Protestant theologian, reminds us in the last book he was to publish during his lifetime. Making full use of all his finely-honed dialectical skills, he develops a masterly analysis of three of the most neglected and misunderstood chapters 9-11 of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.

In *Ce Dieu injuste ...?* Ellul does not forget that he is also -- perhaps even primarily -- a historian and sociologist. His exegesis, in sum, eschews the purely intellectual exercise. What Ellul sketches out here amounts, instead, to a Christian theology for the people of Israel, in which he confronts the spiritual roots of anti-Semitism: a highly useful project indeed when we realize that certain sectors of the Catholic Church have still not relinquished their old demons.

What has become of the Jewish people? Has it been cast aside ever since the coming of the Messiah? No! Far from being deicidal, the people of Israel serves as the bearer of God in Jesus Christ. The chosen people remains the “chosen” people. This, however, does not mean “saved,” but

specially “set apart to bear witness,” to confirm that the God of the Bible is One, that he is the Lord of the Ages, and that his love is the only truth. Israel’s vocation, therefore, is to live out, in accordance with the Law, a historical adventure whose goal is the desire to change the world.

There have, however, been three errors: (1) The Jews have mistakenly considered that the Torah embodies God’s will and justice, though God himself refuses to be imprisoned within any text. His justice is not some perfect recompense for “pious deeds,” nor can his will ever be fully known. (2) Though entrusted with proclaiming that God’s liberation includes everyone, they forgot just how universal this message was. (3) The Jews reserved the Revelation, Covenant and Election for themselves alone.

Hence the “temporary, partial” rejection of Israel which, found wanting in the divine plan to broadcast God’s will to set all people free, was replaced by Jesus Christ, the ultimate “remnant of Israel.” Whereas the Torah itself is set aside for the Jewish people, Jesus Christ, the Torah’s fulfillment, is a gift offered to all people. However, even if it still refuses to consider the Lord as the “Eternal One,” Israel--chosen by God for its weaknesses and not its virtues--is not guilty, according to Ellul.

It was, indeed, the “fall” of the Jews which was to bring about the salvation of pagans. “There, where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.” Isaac and Ishmael, Moses and Pharaoh, the “Yes” and the “No”: each complements the other. Israel is always both simultaneously chosen and rejected: the “positivity of negativity,” as it were, inasmuch as such disobedience serves God’s ultimate design. If most Jews have not recognized the Messiah in Christ, it is so that all shall know divine grace and election.

The onus now is on the church to stir up Israel’s jealousy by proclaiming an ethic of human liberation. But, as Ellul has previously demonstrated, as long as Christians continue preaching morality, dogmatics, constraint and austerity, instead of salvation, joy, freedom and love, the Jews can legitimately refuse to recognize in Jesus the Son of God.

The Holocaust must force us to undertake a radical rethinking of the whole of Christian theology, condemned to remain a very rickety construct if Israel is left out. Ellul goes on to conclude by establishing a link between Judaism and the end of time: the Jewish people is, “willingly or unwillingly, the wedge lodged within humanity’s heart of oak, and it will stay right there until that selfsame heart of oak has been changed into a heart of flesh.”

# Dieu et-il injuste?

*by Patrick Chastenet*

**Jacques Ellul, Ce Dieu injuste...? Théologie chrétienne pour le peuple d'Israël** (Paris, Arléa: 1991; Réédition Poche/Arléa, 1999).

« Car Dieu a enfermé tous les hommes dans l'infidélité afin de faire miséricorde à tous » (Rom. XI, 32).

Si Dieu décide de tout, pourquoi punirait-Il ceux qu'Il a créés d'avance pour témoigner de sa colère ? Si Dieu - absolument libre dans sa souveraineté - "sauve" les uns et "rejette" les autres, comment accepter que de tels irresponsables soient damnés? Si Dieu est Bon Il ne peut faire le Mal, s'Il laisse faire le Mal c'est qu'Il n'est pas Bon.

Mais pouvons-nous juger de la bonté ou de la justice de Dieu ? Dieu est "arbitraire" exactement comme l'amour est arbitraire... Prétendre que Dieu est "injuste" signifierait qu'il existe des valeurs au-dessus de celui que Kierkegaard nomme précisément *l'Inconditionné*; ce qui reviendrait à dire que Dieu n'est pas Dieu !

La Bible nous montre que le Bien c'est uniquement ce que Dieu fait, rappelle Jacques Ellul qui tente de sortir de cette série de contradictions logiques par une pensée dialectique déjà solidement éprouvée (Cf. notamment *La raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Ecclésiaste*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, réédition Seuil, 1995). Ce théologien protestant non conformiste a consacré le dernier livre publié de son vivant à l'analyse des trois chapitres (IX, X, XI) de l'Épître de saint Paul aux Romains les plus ignorés ou les plus mal compris.

Ellul dans ce texte n'oublie pas qu'il est aussi -et peut-être avant tout- historien et sociologue. Son exégèse a donc fort peu à voir avec un simple exercice intellectuel. Il s'agit ni plus ni moins dans ce texte d'esquisser une théologie chrétienne pour le peuple d'Israël et de combattre les racines spirituelles de l'antisémitisme. Projet particulièrement utile lorsque l'on sait que certains secteurs de l'Eglise catholique n'ont toujours pas renoncé à leurs vieux démons.

Que devient donc le peuple juif depuis l'avènement du Messie ? Est-il rejeté? Loin d'être décisif, Israël est le peuple porteur de Dieu en Jésus-Christ. Le peuple élu reste le peuple "élu". Ce qui ne veut pas dire "sauvé" mais « mis à part pour témoigner ». Sa mission est d'attester, que le Dieu biblique est unique, que ce Dieu est maître de l'Histoire et que son Amour constitue la seule vérité. Ainsi la vocation d'Israël est de vivre selon la Loi une aventure historique caractérisée par le désir de changer le monde.

Mais trois erreurs ont été commises : 1) les juifs ont confondu la Torah avec la justice et la volonté de Dieu, or Dieu ne se laisse pas enfermer dans un texte. Sa Justice n'est pas l'exacte rétribution des "oeuvres" et Sa Volonté est impossible à connaître dans son entier 2) chargés de la proclamation du Dieu libérateur pour tous,

ils ont oublié l'universalité de leur message 3) les juifs se sont appropriés la Révélation, l'Alliance et l'Élection.

D'où le rejet « temporaire et partiel » d'Israël qui a déçu le projet divin de transmettre Sa volonté libératrice à tous, et son remplacement par Jésus-Christ : l'ultime reste d'Israël. Alors que la Torah est réservée au seul peuple juif, Jésus-Christ est un don offert à tous les hommes, autrement dit la Torah accomplie. Malgré cela les juifs refusent toujours de considérer le Seigneur comme l'"Eternel". Choisi par Dieu pour ses faiblesses et non pour ses vertus, Israël n'est pas coupable selon Ellul.

La "chute" des juifs a en effet permis le "salut" des païens. « Là où le péché a abondé, la grâce a surabondé. » Isaac et Ismaël, Moïse et Pharaon, le "oui" et le "non", vont de pair. Israël est toujours et en même temps le peuple élu et rejeté. On peut alors parler de "positivité de la négativité" dans la mesure où cette désobéissance même sert le dessein ultime. Si la majorité des juifs n'a pas reconnu le Messie en Christ, c'est pour permettre à tous les hommes de connaître la grâce et l'élection.

Il revient donc à l'Eglise, aujourd'hui, de susciter la jalousie d'Israël par une éthique d'homme libéré. Or, comme l'avait déjà montré (Ellul *La subversion du christianisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1984 ; réédition Paris, La Table Ronde/ La petite vermillon, 2001), tant que les chrétiens prêcheront une morale, une dogmatique, une contrainte, une austérité en lieu et place du salut, de la joie, de la liberté et de l'amour, les juifs pourront légitimement refuser de reconnaître le Fils de Dieu en Jésus.

La Shoà doit nous conduire à penser autrement toute la théologie chrétienne, théologie à jamais bancal sans Israël. Et l'auteur de conclure en établissant un lien entre le judaïsme et la fin de l'Histoire : qu'il le veuille ou non, le peuple juif « est le coin enfoncé dans le cœur de chêne du monde et il y restera jusqu'à ce que le cœur de chêne soit changé en cœur de chair ».

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# Ellul's God's Politics

## by Chris Friesen

**Re-View of Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*** (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972*), translated by G. W. Bromiley from *Politique de Dieu, politiques de l'homme* (*Paris: Nouvelle Alliance, 1966*).

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Once a person has tasted some of Jacques Ellul's biblical interpretation, he or she looks to another of his studies with the expectation, Okay, he's going to crack this text open for me. He's going to think through it as far as anyone can and press beautiful new meanings out of it, some of which will become lodged in my own imagination as the actual Word of God contained in this or that biblical passage. Yes, I'm going to have to read and re-read to keep pace with the surge of his rhetoric, and I'm going to raise an eyebrow here and there, sometimes even become downright annoyed, but in the end he's going to win me over to many of his interpretations because of the vibrant God- and neighbor-loving place at which they arrive.

In all these respects, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* does not disappoint. It is in fact a classic example of Ellulian hermeneutics. The same familiar features are here: the non-negotiable (though not unnuanced) high view of the text's origin and authority, the trans-canonical reasoning, the robust Christocentrism, the constant thrust of existential application. Jacques Ellul takes the Bible as a richly-intertwined, self-illuminating unity of divine revelation intended to speak concrete direction to the desires, decisions, and actions of individuals and communities today the same as ever; with Jesus Christ, and God's saving work in Jesus Christ, as primary interpretive key.

Ellul's essential method of study in this volume, an idiosyncratic commentary/meditation on the Old Testament book of Second Kings, is outlined in an early footnote: "We shall adopt the simple attitude of the believer with his Bible who through the text that he reads is ultimately trying to discover what is the Word of God, and what is the final meaning of his life in the presence of this text" (p.12). Readers are advised to listen for some polemical tone in and around that statement. Ellul had little patience for either the methodological dogmas of historical and form criticism or the orthodoxy of skepticism embodied in Rudolf Bultmann's program of demythologization. Thus, although he gives the nod here and there to historical approaches and has clearly enriched his own store of knowledge by them, Ellul in the

main handily sets aside a scientific orientation as he does his own critically incorrect work of extemporizing (so it seems) on the narrative as if his life, and ours, depended on it.

The particular aspect of life's meaning that Ellul as believer constantly chews on is the possibility for authentic action in this world on the part of both individual Christians and the gathered church. What is to be done? How is it to be done, and why? What can it accomplish? What is the world's typical mode of action, especially in its politics? What is God's? If God in Christ has already done everything, what is left to do? What is life for, anyway? These are the questions that drive Ellul's "simple" turning to the text of Second Kings in *The Politics of God/Man*. (Incidentally, for a consideration of similar issues from a secular, sociological perspective, an inquirer should turn to this book's antecedent companion volume, *The Political Illusion* [Knopf, 1967]).

The introduction of *Politics* identifies the primary revelatory significance of Second Kings as twofold. Firstly, as "the most political of all the books of the Bible," Second Kings specially demonstrates the interventions of God in, and the judgment of God upon, human politics (defined by Ellul as, properly, "the discharge of a directive function in a party or state organism"). Secondly, Second Kings displays a live-action, historical elaboration of the old problem of human freedom within and over against divine sovereignty. The main body of Ellul's work investigates these two elements, politics and freedom, in a selective study of major personalities in Second Kings, which, for its part, presents a theo-historical narrative of Israel and Judah's international relations from the death of Ahab to the Exile, in counterpoint with the activity of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Ellul reflects deeply upon the careers of Naaman, leprous general of Aram; Joram, abdicating and faithless king in besieged Samaria; Hazael, scourge of Israel; Jehu, genocidal "religious cleanser"; Ahaz, pragmatic political deal-maker; Rabshakeh, Assyrian propagandist; and finally Hezekiah, paragon of prayerful humility. Interspersed throughout the virtuosic demonstration of paradigm-oriented hermeneutics (type three of ethicist Richard Hays' four modes of appeal to Scripture; cf. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* [HarperCollins, 1996]) are reflections on the crucial role of the prophet within and beside the maelstrom of political events, as well as dense excursions on themes such as the ultimate salvation of those undergoing judgment in earthly life ("They are put outside God's work but not his love" [p. 54]), the problem of Christian efficacy ("We have simply to be...a question put within the world and to the world" [p. 141]), and the role of the supernatural

in history (“All other miracles receive their significance from this...that God enters into the life of man even to the point of this death” [p. 186]). The book concludes with a brief “Meditation on Inutility” that flirts with the pessimism of which Ellul is prone to be accused but ultimately issues in an encouraging affirmation of the true character of Christian freedom.

Of particular interest in the series of personality studies is the chapter on Jehu, both for its occasional hermeneutical fragility (e.g. the attribution of Jehu’s whole murderous career to the supposed unauthorized modification of Elisha’s message by an intermediary) and for its poignant relevance to our own time. “[Jehu] is a man of God, but he uses all the methods of the devil” (p. 99), judges Ellul. “He wants to do what God has revealed but he confuses what God has shown will come to pass with what God really loves” (p. 115). Indeed, we meet in Jehu the prototype of religious voluntarism who substitutes his own efficient means for God’s, who “uses prophecy in the interest of politics while pretending to use politics in the service of prophecy.”

Notwithstanding Ellul’s convincing reading of the man, however, Jehu’s adventure poses a significant interpretive challenge for Ellul because of his equally strong convictions about both biblical authority and violence. Ultimately, his attempt to insulate Elisha and God from specific responsibility for Jehu’s purges retires to a daring theodicy, in what is one of the most memorable passages in the book: “When Jehu fulfilled the prophecy, it was on God himself that his violence fell. It was God whom he massacred in the priests of Baal, none of whom was a stranger or unimportant to God, since the Father had numbered all the hairs of their heads too. All the violence of Jehu is assumed by Jesus Christ...It is in this way and in these conditions that Jehu does the will of God. In his zeal for God, it is God himself that he strikes” (p. 110).

How does Ellul resolve the focal issue of his study, that is, the question about the interaction of human and divine freedom? Does the God of Second Kings boss people and history around? In paraphrase, the richly-argued sequence of positive and negative character paradigms comes together to communicate the following: God does indeed act (God’s “politics”!) within human history, but not in a coercive manner and rarely even in an obviously supernatural manner. Rather, God relies on a whole nexus of real human decisions taken in the presence of his sometimes ambivalent and always contestable word (which, for its part, can be transmitted by the humblest of folks). Many human acts done according to purely human calculations (e.g. the reconnaissance of the Syrian camp by the four lepers) accomplish “just what God had decided and was expecting,” while many others, particularly those which aim for assured results and appear most successful (e.g. Ahaz’ adoption of an Assyrian altar) accomplish nothing at all and are swallowed up in the crushing fatality of history. Nevertheless, “in this medley, this swarm, this chaos, this proliferating incoherence of man, there is a choice that is God’s choice” (p. 70); and so, like Elisha and Naaman and Hezekiah, we must make it, accepting the humble means of the kingdom and leaving the results to the Holy Spirit.

Particularly for the Christian this choice has become authentically possible. For through the once-for-all-time, redounding Event of the cross, Jesus Christ has shattered fatality and set in motion the power and possibility of true freedom within the course of history. A preeminent sign of its appropriation, surprisingly enough, will be the apparent uselessness of actions subsequently undertaken. Ellul avers, “To be controlled by utility and the pursuit of efficacy is to be subject to the strictest determination of the actual world” (197). By contrast, “To do a gratuitous, ineffective, and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last” (p. 198). Thus, in the teeth of a world that values only the measurable accomplishment, Christians perform their childlike acts of prayer and witness with the joy of unconcerned, freely chosen obedience, living out a love that does not seek “results.” Life exists to provide scope for this freedom in love.

To whom would I recommend this book? I should confess that, in terms of my own ongoing sojourn as a believer trying to discover the final meaning of his life in the presence of the Bible, it was an interesting time to read both Second Kings and Ellul’s meditation on it. I found myself continually distracted by critical concerns in my preliminary study of the Old Testament chapters: Who wrote these things down? When and why? How did they come to know or conceive of the events and explanations they related? Underneath my fitful deconstructive speculation ran the unspoken question, What can be trusted in all this? What is really true here? I realize these are the typical and chronic symptoms of that modern affliction, “looking at the beam” (cf. C. S. Lewis’s “Meditation in a Toolshed”), but it seems to happen all by itself. Nevertheless, forthwith Ellul comes along and says, by his own example, Look *along* the beam. The story itself can be trusted. The story is true. As a heuristic discipline, give the narrative the benefit of the doubt, taking it on its own terms. In its movement “we are in the presence of life itself at its most profound and most significant. We must not let it slip away from us” (p. 16). In this way Ellul refocuses one’s literary attention to a depth of field closer to the surface of the text, making the narrative itself sharp for real-time signification.

That being said, I do have a persevering critical question. That is, If God really deals with human beings in the way Ellul describes (and I believe that God does), then did not the same flexibility, the same tolerance for error, the same non-coerciveness, the same incomprehensibly humble willingness to adapt to human choice and preference and to assume human attempt and aspiration, obtain for those human beings who spoke and inscribed the words of human language which have become our Scripture? Saying so would not be to imply that those words can’t limn our faith and practice reliably, can’t witness to capital-T truth and capital-D doctrine; but it would be to imply that the absolute non-negotiable of Revelation which often gives Ellul’s interpretive debate a certain punch might need to be held a little more loosely. Is there authentic Christian faith that takes the Bible less as an unbreakable rock and more as a kind of river or wind or vegetable garden? What does such faith look like in practice? I’m not exactly sure, but I realize

that Jacques Ellul acts as a kind of helpful tether on my leg as I wander out and back trying to find examples.

I need to tie up my earlier question: Who should read *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*? Remember, one doesn't pick up one of Ellul's biblical studies for a careful reconstruction of historical and redactive contexts or a catalogue of alternative critical perspectives autographed with his own judicious vote; one picks it up to see just what variety of narrative details will get caught in his widely-flung, imaginative hermeneutical net and how he will gut, fillet, and fry them up in a vigorous flurry of argument that never fears to imply, "Thus saith the Lord." Therefore to "Who should read?" I would answer, in

partial echo of Ellul himself, both Evangelical deists who fancy themselves saving souls from eternal hell while the Father files his nails in the study, and all manner of other good-hearted people strung out on too much responsibility for establishing the shalom of the kingdom. I would also answer, Bible-olatrous theocrats pulling strings to get the right flags saluted in the public squares of villages local and global. And I would especially suggest, people like me, who may experience Holy Scripture's Word-of-God-ness as a variable phenomenon and who are always deeply grateful when a flaming mind like Jacques Ellul's takes the text and reveals revelation in it once again.

## Judging Ellul's Jonah

*by Victor Shepherd*

**Re-view of Jacques Ellul, *The Judgment of Jonah*** (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971*), translated by G. W. Bromiley from *Le Livre de Jonas* (Paris: Cahiers biblique de Foi et Vie, 1952).

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Repeatedly Jacques Ellul's *Judgment of Jonah* reflects his characteristic love/grief relationship with the church, the church's lack of discernment, and an ecclesiastical agenda that finds the church somnolent, feckless and desultory. As sad as he is scathing, Ellul notes, "A remarkable thing about even the active Christian is that he (*sic*) never has much more than a vague idea about reality. He is lost in the slumber of his activities, his good works, his chorales, his theology, his evangelizing, his communities. He always skirts reality....It is non-Christians who have to waken him out of his sleep to share actively in the common lot" (p.31).

More foundationally, *Judgment* exudes Ellul's characteristic conviction concerning the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ. While the book of Jonah is deemed "prophetic" among Jewish and Christian thinkers, Ellul understands prophecy strictly as an Israelite pronouncement fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

As readers of Ellul know from his other books (e.g., *Apocalypse* and *The Political Illusion*, commentaries on the books of Revelation and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings respectively), Ellul has little confidence in the expositions of the "historical-critical" guild of exegetes insofar as their preoccupation with speculative minutiae blinds them to the substance of the text; namely, the word that God may wish to speak to us through

that text. . Unlike many in the the professional exegetical guild, Ellul sees Jesus Christ present in the Older Testament. Ellul regards the guild's preoccupation with the history of the formation and transmission of the text as a nefarious work wherein the guild "dissects Scripture to set it against Scripture".(p.74) Exegetes often deploy their "expertise" just as the Bible describes the tempter in both the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness---undermining its status as God's word. In light of this it's no surprise that only three-quarters' way through *Judgment* Ellul left-handedly admits that the book of Jonah was "rightly composed to affirm the universalism of salvation" (p.77), when exegetes customarily insist that the sole purpose of the book of Jonah was to protest the shrivelling of post-exilic Israel's concern, even to protest the apparent narrowness, exclusiveness and concern for self-preservation found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

If what is crucial to most is peripheral to Ellul, then what is the epicentre of the book of Jonah? It is certainly not a compendium of moral truths, let alone a test of credulity (which test Christian apologetics paradoxically attempts to eliminate by finding rational explanations for the miracle of the great fish). Neither is the book an extended allegory; nor even an instance of the prophetic literature found in Scripture since the book shares few of the concerns of the prophetic books (e.g., no prophetic address is spoken to Israel) while features of the book aren't found in prophetic literature (e.g., the books named after Jeremiah and Amos don't feature biographical portrayals). The core of the book lies, rather, in its depiction of Jonah himself as a figure, a type, of Christ. Having argued for this position, Ellul brooks no disagreement: "If one rejects this sense, there is no other." (p.17)

As *Judgment* unfolds it reflects the major themes of



Ellul's social and theological thought as well as aspects of his own spiritual development. With respect to the latter, Ellul's understanding of Jonah's vocation mirrors his own self-effacing, autobiographical statements in *In Season, Out of Season* and *What I Believe*: "Everything begins the moment God decides to choose...We can begin to apprehend only when a relation is set up between God and us, when he reveals his decision concerning us" (p21).

As for characteristic aspects of Ellul's thinking, *Judgment* re-states and develops them on every page. For instance, those whom God summons are freed from the world's clutches and conformities in order to be free to address and spend themselves for a world that no longer "hooks" them even as the same world deems them "useless" to it. In this regard Ellul writes of Jonah, "The matter is so important that everything which previously shaped the life of this man humanly and sociologically fades from the scene....Anything that might impel him to obey according to the world has lost its value and weight for him" (p.21). In other words, any Christian's commission at the hand of their crucified Lord is necessary and sufficient explanation for taking up one's work and witness.

While vocation is sufficient explanation for taking up their appointed work, Christians cannot pretend their summons may be ignored or laid aside, for in their particular vocations all Christians have been appointed to "watch" in the sense of Ezekiel 33. Disregarding one's vocation is dereliction, and all the more damnable in that the destiny of the world hangs on any one Christian's honouring her summons: "Christians have to realize that they hold in their hands the fate of their companions in adventure" (p.35).

Readers of Ellul have long been startled at, persuaded of, and helped by his exploration of the "abyss," the virulent, insatiable power of evil to beguile, seduce, and always and everywhere destroy. (See *Money and Power* and *Propaganda*). Ellul's depiction of evil in terms of death-as-power – rather than in terms of "a kind of lottery...turning up as heart failure" (p.51) -- finds kindred understanding and exposition in the work of William Stringfellow and Daniel Berrigan.) The "great fish" sent to swallow Jonah (God uses evil insofar as he is determined to punish) is a manifestation of such power.

While in the "belly of the great fish" Jonah is subject to God's judgment upon his abdication as he is confronted defencelessly with the undisguised horror of the abyss. Awakened now to his culpable folly, Jonah understands that even as he is exposed to "absolute hell"(p.45) he hasn't been abandoned to it. At no point has he ceased being the beneficiary of God's grace. Now Jonah exclaims, "Thou hast delivered me" – i.e., before the "great fish" has vomited him to safety. Deliverance for all of us, Ellul herein announces characteristically, occurs when we grasp God's presence and purpose for us (and through us for others) in the midst of the isolation that our vocation, compounded by our equivocating, has brought upon us. Percipiently [new word?] Ellul adds, "[T]he abyss...is the crisis of life at any moment."(p.52)

Typically Ellul points out ersatz means of resolving the crisis: we look to "technical instruments, the state,

society, money, and science...idols, magic, philosophy, spiritualism....As long as there is a glimmer of confidence in these means man prefers to stake his life on them rather than handing it over to God."(p.57) While these instruments can give us much, they can't give us the one thing we need in the face of the all-consuming abyss: mercy. No relation of love exists between these instruments and us; they merely possess us. The person who "loves" money, for instance, is merely owned. The crisis is resolved incipiently when we "beg in any empty world for the mercy which cannot come to [us] from the world."(p.58) The crisis is resolved definitively as we hear and heed the summons to discipleship and thereafter obey the one who can legitimately (and beneficently) claim us inasmuch as he has betaken himself to the abyss with us.

Here Ellul's Christological reading of the book of Jonah surfaces unambiguously: "The real question is not that of the fish which swallowed Jonah; it is that of the hell where I am going and already am. The real question is not that of the strange obedience of the fish to God's command; it is that of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and my resurrection."(p.63)

Just because the book of Jonah is a prolepsis of Jesus Christ, the book is full of hope. To be sure, signs of grace come and go in all of us – even as grace never disappears. (Recall the gourd given to provide shade for Jonah, even as the gourd soon withered.) While God's people frequently and foolishly clutch at the sign instead of trusting the grace therein signified, the day has been appointed when the sign is superfluous as faith gives way to sight and hope to its fulfilment. At this point the "miracles" that were signs of grace for us will be gathered up in "the sole miracle, Jesus Christ living eternally for us".(p.67)

The note of hope eschatologically permeating the book of Jonah (and Ellul's exposition of it) recalls the conclusion to *The Meaning of the City*. There Ellul invites the reader to share his vivid "experience" of finding himself amidst a wretched urban slum in France yet "seeing" the city, the New Jerusalem. While Ellul's "exegesis" of the book of Jonah will be regarded as idiosyncratic in several places, its strength is its consistent orientation to the One who remains the "open secret" of the world and of that community bound to the world. For decades Ellul's own life illustrated a statement he made in *Judgment* concerning the prophet Jonah: "Everything circles around the man who has been chosen. A tempest is unleashed"(p.25). Ellul's writings indicate *passim* that as much characterizes all who discern their vocation and pledge themselves to it without qualification, reservation or hesitation.

# In Review:

## Tresmontant, Vahanian, Mailot, & Chouraqui

**Claude Tresmontant, *The Hebrew Christ: Language in the Age of the Gospels*** (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1989); Trans. By Kenneth D. Whitehead from *Le Christ Hebreu: La Langue et l'Age de Evangelies* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1983).

### Reviewed by John L. Gwin

John Gwin lives in Beloit, Wisconsin, where he does some building security and maintenance work while pursuing his interests in language and culture.

By the fall of 1990 I had read and admired Jacques Ellul for perhaps 20 years and had occasionally corresponded, asking questions about his works and related topics. He graciously responded, often taking the time to answer my questions. With the buildup for the Gulf War nearing completion, and concerned that it might lead to a world war, I decided to take a week off work, and bought a cheap, night flight, round trip ticket to Paris.

An interesting side note to this, which reflects poorly on me, but favorably on JE, is that after I bought my ticket, I wrote to him of my plans and asked if I might visit him. He responded by return mail, "No, do not come. My wife is ill, I am busy with preparation for a conference that weekend, and with the hierarchy of the protestant denomination that has closed our little congregation. Can you please rearrange your visit for another date." My ticket, being non refundable, I quickly wrote him back asking if I might attend the conference, but for the whole month preceding my scheduled departure. I heard nothing. I chose to take the flight anyway, and arrived at about 8AM on a Thursday in Paris. I made my way to the little Librairie Protestante which was going out of business, and they so kindly, without charge, made several long distance calls. One was to Prof. Ellul to arrange for me to attend the conference on "Man and the Sacred" at the Andre Malraux Center in Bordeaux. The second call was to Dr. Brenot, chairman of the conference. "We have around 1000 signed up for the 800 openings. What's one more?" was his generous verdict.

At the conference I met a number of very kind and gracious people. At the book table on Sunday, the last day of the conference, Prof. Ellul invited me to meet with him the following day. During our 2-hour visit at his home, professor Ellul spoke with me at length. He introduced me to his wife, who had recently had a stroke. He also gave me copies in

French of two books of his, *L'impossible prière*, *La genèse aujourd'hui*, and a copy of his friend Bernard Charbonneau's book, *Je fus, essai sur la liberté*, for which he had arranged the printing. Professor Ellul also recommended that I get a copy of a new book by Claude Tresmontant, entitled *Le Christ hebreu*. While in Bordeaux, I picked one up at the Librairie Mollat. I worked through it in the next few months, and located by library loan a copy of Tresmontant's retroversion and notes of *L'Evangile de Jean*. I was delighted by what I found.

Contrary to that which is taught in Sunday School, and in New Testament classes in college and seminary, Tresmontant presents an alternative hypothesis as to the origins of the gospels that makes such perfect sense that I wonder why I had never heard it before.

We know that those who first heard Jesus of Nazareth included at least a few scribes, and Pharisees. Why have we assumed that no one took notes? According to the teachings of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century form critical school in Germany, a long oral tradition of 40 or 50 years preceded the step of setting pen to papyrus or parchment to record the memorable words of this most unusual rabbi. Does it not tax the imagination to think of the People of the Book waiting years before actually writing something down! The prevalence of anti-Semitism in Europe of that time provides a perhaps, more or less, unconscious motive for impugning the accuracy of the writing of the gospels and epistles, and the belief in a long oral tradition removing the written record farther from its Source could serve this end.

Tresmontant presents evidence for the hypothesis that the gospels were written first, and early, in Hebrew and almost simultaneously, and literally, into Greek. This was done, not esthetically to please the Greek ear, but literally, to accurately convey the original meaning to the Diaspora readers no longer fluent in Hebrew.

Jean Psichari, Professor of Greek in the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes, himself of Greek origin, described the literal Greek rendering of the Septuagint as very different from the normal Greek of that time. In his *Essai sur le Grec de la Septuagint* he writes, "It is not just the syntax, it is not only the word order that follows Hebrew use. The style itself is perpetually contaminated. It is not Greek."

Tresmontant has proposed that the translators of the Gospels into Greek of the First Century AD used essentially the same Hebrew/Greek lexicon used by the translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek of the Septuagint. He proposes that the Gospels were derived from notes of Jesus' talks taken during or shortly after they were spoken, and

later assembled into collections by various members of His audience, and almost immediately translated into Greek for the Diaspora.

Tresmontant, in four separate volumes translates in reverse the Greek of each of the gospels into Hebrew using the corresponding Hebrew words from which the Greek of the Septuagint was translated and then into French using the insights and meanings gleaned in the process. The wealth of meaning restored to, and depth of insight into long familiar as well as difficult passages; the great amount of information restored to the sacred text, and even the accuracy of words used to translate are all part of what is gained in this process.

Tresmontant compares the effect of this uncovering of the Hebrew meaning to uncovering a work of art. "If you put the Venus de Milo beneath a covering, it is difficult to see her form. Passing from the modern (French or English) translations to the originals, that is of the Greek Gospels is a first uncovering. When one uncovers the Hebrew that one finds beneath the Greek translation, one has made a second discovery. The equivalent of the living woman who sat as model for the Venus de Milo" (*Le Christ hébreu*, p. 36).

Several years ago, I found that *Le Christ Hébreu* had been published in English in 1989, the year before I visited Prof. Ellul, as *The Hebrew Christ* (trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead; Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press).

Tresmontant has done a remarkable work of service both to the world of biblical scholarship and to all those interested in the content of the gospels and related writings. His *Evangile de Matthieu: Traduction et Notes*, is also available in English as *The Gospel of Matthew, Translation and Notes* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1986). A volume containing his French versions of all four gospels was published by F.X. De Guibert/ O.E.I.L. but is now out of print,

In at least two of Tresmontant's other major works, *Essai sur la pensée hébraïque*, and *L'histoire de l'univers et le sens de la création*, he compares and contrasts Greek and Hebrew philosophy, and posits that the predominant and continuing dualism of Western (Greek) thought includes a total misunderstanding of the Hebrew ideas of creation, incarnation, freedom, etc. The former philosophy, fostering an ongoing devaluation of the physical world seen as illusory, evil, "descended" from and a shadow of the "Ideal" and resulting in a more or less low-level depression, frustration, and lack of hope for anything new and "creative" in the future. The latter, Hebrew revelation, with its understanding of all things as "created" and declared to be "good" by a transcendent Creator, gives life an ongoing "real" meaning and content and hope of a future completely new and unexpected.

In *The Hebrew Christ*, Tresmontant mentions several other authors, including John A. T. Robinson, whose *Redating the New Testament* is "absolutely decisive" in its argument for the earlier dating of the New Testament texts, and Fr. Jean Carmignac, whose *Naissance des évangiles* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984; ET: *Birth of the Synoptics*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1987) presents arguments also supporting the Hebrew origins of the NT.

While translating the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jean Carmignac frequently noticed connections with the New Testament. Upon completion of the translation he had so many notes of correlations that he thought of making a commentary on the NT in light of the Dead Sea documents. Beginning with the Gospel of Mark, and in order to more easily compare the Greek Gospels to the Qumran Hebrew, he began on his own to retranslate Mark into Qumran Hebrew. He became convinced of Mark's derivation from a Hebrew original. Not knowing Hebrew well enough to be incapable of making errors, and so that competent scholars would not dismiss his effort, he had to assure himself that no errors of Hebrew usage got by him. To do this he decided to compare his work of retroversion with many other translations of the NT into Hebrew, beginning with Delitsch's of 1877. Carmignac also began editing and publishing a multi-volume series of Hebrew translations of the New Testament. He died in October of 1987 hoping that this work would be taken up by others.

All this seems to be an example of certain Catholic theologians paying close attention to the Scriptures in ways that perhaps many Protestant theologians, taking these Scriptures for granted, had not considered. This is reminiscent of the favorable reception by many Roman Catholic theologians of the work of Karl Barth, especially his enormous *Church Dogmatics*. And in a similar vein, I am grateful for Karl Barth's reminder in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, that no age is ever "dead." "There is no past in the Church, so there is no past in theology. 'In him they all live.'... The theology of any period must be strong and free enough to give a calm, attentive and open hearing not only to the voices of the Church Fathers, not only to favorite voices, not only to the voices of the classical past, but to all the voices of the past. God is the Lord of the Church. He is also the Lord of theology. We cannot anticipate which of your fellow-workers from the past are welcome in our own work and which are not. It may always be that we have especial need of quite unsuspected (and among these, of quite unwelcome) voices in one sense or another."

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## Gabriel Vahanian, *Anonymous God*

(Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 2001)

### Reviewed by Darrell J. Fasching

Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida,  
Tampa; founding editor of *The Ellul Forum*.

From his earliest best seller at the beginning of the 1960s, *The Death of God*, through *God and Utopia* (1977) to his most recent *Anonymous God* (2001), to name three of his many books over the last forty years, Gabriel Vahanian's message has become consistently clearer, more forceful and more poetic. In the first we learned of our "cultural incapacity for God" in a scientific and technological civilization. In the second we learned that biblical faith is capable of migrating from one cultural world to another in its journey toward a new heaven and a new earth. This journey of faith can carry us beyond the death of God through its utopian capacity to transform human self-understanding, whether that understanding is in terms of nature (ancient & medieval), history (modern) or technology (postmodern).

Now in *Anonymous God* (translated by Noëlle Vahanian), Gabriel Vahanian teaches us how to be poets, speaking a new language of faith, a technological utopianism. *Anonymous God* is both a translation and revision of his 1989 book *Dieu anonyme, ou la peur des mots* (Desclee de Brouwer, Paris 1989). It is a fearless poetic exploration of the utopianism of our humanity in trinitarian terms, unfolding in four densely packed stanzas (or chapters) over one hundred and fifty-five pages. Chapter One explores the iconoclasm of language in relation to technology and the utopianism of faith. Chapters Two, Three and Four show how this iconoclasm of the word -- in which we live, move and have our becoming -- is one yet three as we move from "Language and Utopia: God" to "Salvation and Utopia: The Christ" to "Utopianism of the Body and the Social Order: the Spirit."

"The Bible," says Vahanian, "is not a book to be read but to read through" like a pair of glasses (xv). The task is not to accommodate our selves to some foreign and long gone cosmology that asks us to choose the past over the future but to see in our present world in a new way, in an iconoclastic way that will allow us to invent our humanity anew. Whether we are speaking of the ancient, medieval, modern or post-modern worlds -- the world is always in danger of becoming our fate—a prison from which we can escape only by changing worlds. The task today is to do for our technological civilization what those of the first century's eschatologically oriented biblical communities did for theirs, open one's world to an "other" world, a new world rather than "another" world. In any age, we can only be human, Vahanian seems to say, when we have the imagination, courage, ingenuity and grace to invent ourselves anew and so end up changing the world to facilitate our humanity rather than giving up and seeking to

change worlds. This biblical eschatological task is the utopian heritage of the West -- "eschatology prevails over cosmogony, even over cosmology. And, in short, utopia prevails over the sacred" (xviii).

As human beings, our capacity for technology is given with our capacity for language, which is to say, for God. Faith has no language of its own (27) and so in every age must iconoclastically appropriate what is available, whether it be the medieval language of metaphysics, the modern language of history or the postmodern language of technique. The advent of technological civilization, Vahanian seems to say, in important ways makes this task easier rather than more difficult. For far from being totally alien to the eschatic orientation of Christian faith, technological civilization has a greater affinity with it than either the medieval language of metaphysics or the modern language of history, for technology like eschatology shares the utopian orientation toward making all things new. And utopia is not some impossible ideal but the iconoclastic possibility of realizing the impossible, of reinventing one's humanity in any world, especially a technological one.

This utopianism is predicated on an understanding that always and everywhere -- in the beginning is the word and the word is God. God is given with our capacity for language. God is the God who speaks. We do not claim language, language claims us. "We do not speak for God but are spoken for" (2). Metaphor is not one type of language, language is metaphor -- using and yet contesting established meanings to invent the new, and so give birth to a language without precedent. Such language unleashes the utopian possibilities of the human that body forth into culture, making all things new.

Prophecy, *poesis* and *techne* are but three faces of the same capacity, the capacity to invent our humanity and in the process reinvent the world as a new creation -- the word made flesh. Being "spoken for," Vahanian tells us, we must "speak up." We must speak up prophetically to change the world, and yet must do this poetically. The poet, as the ancient Greek language testifies, is a wordsmith, someone who has the *techne* (technique or skill) "to make or do." Our humanity comes to expression in and through the word, and is not so much natural or historical, or even technological, as it is utopian -- a new beginning that encourages us not to change worlds but to change the world.

This "good news" is not news reserved for some sacred saving remnant but rather given once for all. It is good news for the whole human race. All language, says Vahanian, presupposes otherness. The appeal to any god who excludes others is an appeal to an idol. Whenever and wherever language is iconoclastic, there is no other God than the God of others. Indeed, being "in Christ" is just having this God in common so that Christ "is the designation of our common denominator instead of only the Christian's mere Jesus" (91).

For Vahanian, the God of the biblical tradition is a God who can neither be named or imaged and so remains always "anonymous" -- the God of others and the God for others. And so for him, "Christ is much less a believer's Christ than he is a Christ for the unbeliever" (82), for every person whose flesh is claimed by the iconoclasm of the word

that makes the invention of our humanity ever and again possible as the “worlding” of the word – the Word made flesh in the structures of our world (87). When the word is made flesh the kingdom of God draws near and God reigns, all in all.

For Vahanian eschatology prevails not only over cosmogony, cosmology and the sacred but also over soteriology. Far from being a religion of salvation, he argues, Christian faith liberates us from obsession with salvation, to embrace our new humanity and new creation, here and now. Christ cannot be reduced to Jesus any more than Jesus can be identified with God. For Vahanian, Jesus is no half-god-half-man but rather, as the Council of Chalcedon insisted, without confusion or mixture Christ is where the radical alterity of God and humanity meet, giving both the words “God” and “human” their authentic meaning (97). “God is the measure of humanity even as our humanity is the measure of God” (96).

When the church assumes its iconoclastic and utopian vocation as body of Christ it becomes the “the laboratory for the kingdom of God,” desacralizing both the world and religion. As such its liturgy or “public work” invites both believer and unbeliever to bring to this new world their talents. The public work of the church is to create jobs that hallow and therefore desacralize the social order, and so further social justice by making the invention of our humanity once more possible. Even as the church once created monasteries, hospitals and universities that transformed the human landscape, so today, far from being asked to reject or escape our technological civilization, the church, is called to embrace those “skills and crafts through which the human being is being human” (134) and so demonstrate that even (or especially) in a technological civilization our humanity can be reinvented. The biological process of evolutionary hominization, says Vahanian should not be confused with the utopian project of humanization. Indeed, only by continual reinvention, he suggests, can we really be human.

This is not a book for the theologically timid who only want to think “orthodox” thoughts and so betray the tradition by repeating it instead of continuing it. To repeat the tradition is to bring it to an end and make it seem as if our only option is to “change worlds.” But Abrahamic faith is, after all, a setting out on a journey without knowing where we are going (Hebrews 11: 8). Vahanian’s iconoclasm overturns everything in such a way as to make possible the tradition’s continuance and in the process encourages us to change the world instead of abandoning it.

The theologically adventurous will find this a book rich with insight. From this perspective, I have only one quibble with Vahanian’s poetic adventure – he is more convincing in what he affirms than in what he sometimes denies. His occasional comparative reflections are not nearly as nuanced as those aimed at Christianity. He tells us, for instance, that “the Western tradition is beckoned by the utopian paradigm of religion, in its Greek as well as in its Hebrew (Judeo-Christian) version. While for Eastern religions the spiritual life aims at exchanging worlds, the West, for its part, came and still comes under the preview of

a diametrically opposed approach which aims at changing the world” (xvii-xviii).

Later in his argument he makes this observation specifically with reference to Buddhism. Such large contrasts ignore the profound shift from an “otherworldly” to a “this worldly” orientation that came fairly early with the shift from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism and is also typical of Neo-Confucianism in China. To make his claim work, even for Western religion, Vahanian has had to elevate the eschatological strand and reject the soteriological within Christianity, but he does not seem to see similar strategies at work in other traditions. For example, I think one could argue that Thich Nhat Hanh’s “socially engaged Buddhism” does in its own way for Buddhism what Vahanian does for Christianity.

*Anonymous God* is an extraordinary poetic work of metaphorical transformation. The words are all familiar and yet what is said is quite unfamiliar, new and unprecedented. In a typical book, one might expect the author to offer one, two or possibly three new insights per chapter. In this book one finds one, two or three per paragraph. The poetic density therefore is at times overwhelming. One feels the need to stop frequently and come up for air, lest one get dizzy from an overload of insight. It is a book that is best read slowly and then revisited if you wish to avoid the vertigo that comes with having everything that seems so familiar rendered unfamiliar too suddenly. The final outcome of that patience - - startlingly illumination of the new world that surrounds us -- makes it all worth while.

## International Jacques Ellul Society

[www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org)

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The IJES (with its francophone sister-society, L'Association Internationale Jacques Ellul) links together scholars and friends of various specializations, vocations, backgrounds, and nations, who share a common interest in the legacy of Jacques Ellul (1912-94), long time professor at the University of Bordeaux. Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

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**André Chouraqui, *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui: Dix Paroles pour reconcilier l'Homme avec l'humain*** (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000).

**Alphonse Maillot, *Le Decalogue: Une Morale pour notre temps***  
(Paris: Librairie Protestante and Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1985).

**Reviewed by David W. Gill**  
President, International Jacques Ellul Society

In my recent book *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), the two authors with the most citations in my author index were Alphonse Maillot (37 citations) and André Chouraqui (34 citations). *Doing Right*, part two of my introduction to Christian ethics, is structured around the Decalogue, seen through the lenses of the double Love Commandment and the biblical calls to justice and freedom. I see the Ten Commandments as the ten basic ways to love either God or a neighbor (“made in God’s image and likeness, therefore...”), the ten basic principles of justice, and the ten fundamental guidelines in a life of freedom.

During my 1984-85 sabbatical in Bordeaux I actually started working on this project (sidetracked a lot by other projects for fifteen years but picked up again with passion and attention during a study leave in Bordeaux the first half of 2000---there’s something about Bordeaux and ethical research, I have to conclude!). I shared some of my early chapter drafts with Jacques Ellul during our Friday afternoon meetings at his home that year. I specifically remember him urging me to start acquiring and studying the writings of Alphonse Maillot. In subsequent years, Ellul also mentioned André Chouraqui to me. These authors became two of the three most important modern sources for my understanding of the ethics of the Decalogue (the other was Czech theologian Jan Milic Lochman).

Alphonse Maillot (1920-2003) was a pastor and theologian in the Reformed Church of France. He published several biblical commentaries, including three volumes on the Psalms, a major study of Romans, and a brilliant little work on the Beatitudes.

*Le Decalogue: Une morale pour notre temps* begins with Maillot rejecting the simplistic and false association of the Decalogue with a legalistic attitude. “We forget that legalism was not created by the Decalogue but by the listener . . . Above all we forget the liberating character of the Decalogue: promise, future, and joy. The Torah (I reject the term ‘Law’) is not only holy and just, it is *good*. Good for us. It is this liberating goodness of the Decalogue, expressed in particular by the first commandment, that I

don’t find very often among the commentators” (pp. 7-8; my translation).

Among Maillot’s emphases as he works his way through the Decalogue: this is guidance addressed to laity, not just clergy; there is no separation between the religious or worship side of life and one’s affairs out in the world---and Maillot warns against a too-strict division of two table in the Decalogue, something that has always seemed misguided to me as well; despite an initial impression of negativity (“Thou shalt not”), the Decalogue opens up a hundred positives for every negative; while the Decalogue is given to the Covenant people liberated from Egyptian slavery, and it must never be imposed on those around us, the message is for “all who have ears to hear”; the first command (“no other gods before me”), is the critical foundation---the next nine spell out the implications of have Yahweh as God.

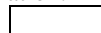
In discussing the command against idols and images Maillot shows how far-reaching are its implications---rejecting our theological and philosophical images of God as much as our physical ones, and warning against viewing people through images and stereotypes. It is a question of life and vitality being replaced by narrow, lifeless substitutes, for God or for others.

In every discussion, Maillot shows his grasp of the historical and linguistic issues but then he takes his readers to the heart, the essential message, of each commandment, both in its negative and positive reach. His discussions and applications are brilliantly insightful and even exhilarating. I never got to meet Maillot in person but I did have the pleasure of reaching him by telephone at the retirement home where he spent the last years of his life, and thanking him for his extraordinary gifts to his readers.

In February of 2000, taking a short break from my work in Bordeaux, on a visit to Sarlat, east of Bordeaux, I was surprised to see in the window of a little book store the title *Les Dix Commandements Aujourd'hui*. This is not a popular theme of retail books in France (or the USA!). I was further surprised and pleased to see that it was written by André Chouraqui, whose name I knew thanks to Ellul.

Chouraqui (born 1917 in Algeria) studied law and rabbinical studies in Paris and worked with the French Resistance during WWII. He settled in Jerusalem in 1958 and served as an advisor to David Ben-Gurion (1959-63) and later in the 60s as elected Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. Chouraqui is the only person to have published original translations of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Koran. He is the author of many other books.

*Les Dix Commandements* is a remarkable study by any measure. Chouraqui was friends with René Cassin, the primary editor of the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights and dedicated this book to him. Chouraqui says that we need a declaration of universal human *duties* to go along with the *rights*---and the Ten Commands serve that purpose. Chouraqui reviews how each of the ten has been interpreted and applied in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam---and how each could help us today. The Decalogue should be a helpful foundation for common understanding and reconciliation. This is a brilliant and wise contribution.



# News & Notes

## ✍ JEAN-FRANÇOIS MEDARD

Professor Jean-François Médard died on September 23, 2005, at the age of 71. Médard was a student of Jacques Ellul and later a colleague at the Institute for Political Studies at the University of Bordeaux. He was an expert in sub-Saharan African history, politics, and culture, as any bibliographic or web search will quickly show. He was the founding president of the local "association Jacques Ellul" and, more recently an active member of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. The conversation and debate were animated and the welcome warm for legions of visitors to the home of Jean-François and his wife Burney over the years. Our sincere condolences go to Burney and the family.

## ✍ JACQUES ELLUL, PENSEUR SANS FRONTIERES

A collection of articles from the fall 2004 colloquium at Poitiers on Jacques Ellul's thought and its continuing importance, ten years after his death is now available for purchase from Editions l'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Send 21 euros plus 5 euros for shipping and handling.

Edited by Patrick Chastenet, the collection includes "Jacques Ellul's Ethics: Legacy and Promise" by David W. Gill, "Some Problems in Ellul's Treatment of Propaganda" by Randall Marlin, "Peut-on lire sans trahir" by Didier Nordon, "La Technique et la chair" by Daniel Cerezuelle, "Jacques Ellul et la décroissance" by Alain Gras, "L'Idée de révolution dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Ellul" by Liberté Crozon, "Le Droit technicien" by Claude Ducouloux-Favard, "Critique de la Politique dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Ellul" by Patrick Chastenet, "L'historicité de l'ère technologique: convergences et différences entre Ellul et Illich" by Jean Robert, "La Pensée juridique de Jacques Ellul" by Sylvain Dujancourt, and other essays. This is an essential volume for students of Ellul's thought.

## ✍ WIPF & STOCK TO PUBLISH ELLUL SERIES

Wipf & Stock Publishers (199 W. 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene OR 97401, USA) has recently published the first two volume of their project "Ellul Library" series. Patrick Chastenet's interviews of Ellul are now available as *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2005) after being expensive, unavailable, or very difficult to find for several years. Marva Dawn's translation and edited introduction to *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul That Set the Stage* has also

been reprinted by Wipf & Stock (previously published by Eerdmans).

The IJES is working with our friends at Wipf & Stock to return as many Ellul books into print as possible. Stay tuned for further announcements.

## ✍ DOES YOUR LIBRARY SUBSCRIBE TO THE ELLUL FORUM?

Does your library subscribe to The Ellul Forum? Princeton Seminary, the University of South Florida, and Wheaton College all have ongoing subscriptions (among others). But what about Penn State? Cal Berkeley? Notre Dame? Illinois? Scranton? Ohio State? Fuller Seminary? What about your school library? Your alma mater?

Many schools have a standard form for faculty members to submit a request that the library subscribe to a publication. Another strategy would be to donate a subscription for two or three years to help them get the habit.

## ✍ HOMMAGE À JACQUES ELLUL

Dominique Ellul, with the help of Jean-Charles Bertholet, has now published a beautiful little 100 page volume entitled *Hommage à Jacques Ellul*. The occasion was a conference in May 2004, ten years after Ellul's death. Included are reflections on Ellul's importance by Michel Leplay, Michel Bertrand, Sebastien Morillon, and Jean Coulardeau. Yves Ellul provides some introduction to Ellul's long---and long-awaited---ethics of holiness, on which manuscript Yves has been working for several years. Brief testimonials are included from Jean-Francois Medard, Alphonse Maillot, André Chouraqui, Elizabeth Viort and others.

For more information contact: [diffusion.ellul@wanadoo.fr](mailto:diffusion.ellul@wanadoo.fr).

# Resources for Ellul Studies

## **www.ellul.org & www.jacques-ellul.org**

### **Two indispensable web sites**

The IJES/AIJE web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) news about IJES and AIJE activities and plans, (2) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (3) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (4) a complete index of the contents of all 36 issues of *The Ellul Forum*, and (5) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The new AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) offers a French language supplement.

## **The Ellul Forum CD: 1988-2002**

The first thirty issues of *The Ellul Forum*, some 500 published pages total, are now available (only) on a single compact disc which can be purchased for US \$15 (postage included). Send payment with your order to "IJES," P.O. Box 5365, Berkeley CA 94705 USA.

Back issues #31 - #35 of *The Ellul Forum* are available for \$5 each (postage and shipping included).

## **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

### **Pour Une Critique de la Societe Technicienne**

The annual journal, *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, is edited by Patrick Chastenot and now published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, distributed by Presses Universitaires de France; write to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. The theme of Volume 1 was "L'Années personnalistes" (cost 15 euros); Volume 2 was on "La Technique" (15 euros); the current Volume 3 focuses on "L'Economie" (21 euros). Next year's volume 4 will focus on "La Propagande" (21 euros). Shipping costs 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

## **Jacques Ellul: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary Works**

by Joyce Main Hanks. Research in Philosophy and Technology. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. \$87. ISBN: 076230619X.

This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. This may be one of the more expensive books you buy for your library; it will surely be one of the

most valuable. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

## **Alibris---used books in English**

The Alibris web site ([www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com)) lists thirty titles of used and out-of-print Jacques Ellul books in English translation available to order at reasonable prices.

## **Librairie Mollat---new books in French**

Librairie Mollat in the center of old Bordeaux ([www.mollat.com](http://www.mollat.com)) is an excellent resource for French language books, including those by and about Ellul. Mollat accepts credit cards over the web and will mail books anywhere in the world.

## **Used books in French: two web resources**

Two web sites that will be of help in finding used books in French by Jacques Ellul (and others) are [www.chapitre.com](http://www.chapitre.com) and [www.livre-rare-book.com](http://www.livre-rare-book.com).

## **Reprints of Nine Ellul Books**

By arrangement with Ingram and Spring Arbor, individual reprint copies of several Ellul books originally published by William B. Eerdmans can now be purchased. The books and prices listed at the Eerdmans web site are as follows: *The Ethics of Freedom* (\$40), *The Humiliation of the Word* (\$26), *The Judgment of Jonah* (\$13), *The Meaning of the City* (\$20), *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (\$19), *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* (\$28), *The Subversion of Christianity* (\$20), and *The Technological Bluff* (\$35). *Sources and Trajectories: Eight Early Articles by Jacques Ellul* translated by Marva Dawn is also available (price unknown).

Have your bookstore (or on-line book dealer) "back order" the titles you want. Do not go as an individual customer to Eerdmans or Ingram/Spring Arbor. For more information visit "Books on Demand" at [www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com).

## **Ellul on Video**

French film maker Serge Steyer's film "Jacques Ellul: L'homme entier" (52 minutes) is available for 25 euros at the web site [www.meromedia.com](http://www.meromedia.com). Ellul is himself interviewed as are several commentators on Ellul's ideas.

Another hour-length film/video that is focused entirely on Ellul's commentary on technique in our society, "The Treachery of Technology," was produced by Dutch film maker Jan van Boekel for ReRun Produkties (mail to: Postbox 93021, 1090 BA Amsterdam).

If you try to purchase either of these excellent films, be sure to check on compatibility with your video system and on whether English subtitles are provided, if that is desired.



