

## The Lure of *Technic* in Current “Leadership” Fascinations

by Arthur Boers

Arthur Boers ([aboers@tyndale.ca](mailto:aboers@tyndale.ca)) holds the RJ Bernardo Family Chair of Leadership at Tyndale Theological Seminary (Toronto, Canada). A priest in the Anglican Church of Canada, he is the author of over half a dozen books including: *Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions* (Brazos 2012), *The Way is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage Along the Camino de Santiago* (InterVarsity 2007), and *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Alban 1999).

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Contemporary leadership discussions are everywhere. During a Toronto sanitation workers’ strike, media complained about the mayor’s missing leadership. Some years ago, nasty political ads suggested that our prime minister did not look like a leader because of a facial defect. When things go awry in congregations there is frequently talk about “failure of leadership.”

Leadership obsesses us. Degree-oriented leadership programs are on the rise.<sup>1</sup> Barbara Kellerman, at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, writes of “the burgeoning of the leadership industry with its countless centers, institutes, programs, courses, seminars, workshops, experiences, teachers, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, videos, conferences, consultants and coaches, which all claim to teach people how to lead ... .”<sup>2</sup>

There are usually leadership books on best-seller lists. Such literature often dwells on corporations, sports, and the military, mostly reinforcing status quo perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Many are the glowing accounts of Disney, Southwest, Shell. There is vastly more emphasis on methods, programs, and “best practices” than on moral formation or spiritual practices; seldom is character discussed.<sup>4</sup> Much literature emphasizes achievement, e.g. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Even Christian books use such terminology: *Effective Church Leadership*.<sup>5</sup> Yet Sarah Coakley cautions:

business models ... are usually presented in a packaged, pragmatic form that can be very efficacious. But there is little analysis of the secular presumptions that animated them. We should ask critically, and maybe also appreciatively, what vision of power, persons and community lies behind whatever business model we consider using.<sup>6</sup>

Evangelical Christians are preoccupied with leadership, even describing winning conversions as “leading people to Christ.” Numerous parachurch ministries are named after founders. Books boast specific sure fire steps to success: *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love or Life* or *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders*. The most famous is *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*.<sup>7</sup> Yet one is reminded of Jacques Ellul’s sober assertion “that the different methods of forecasting meet with almost constant failure.”<sup>8</sup>

It is human nature to admire the famous and the powerful, to look for heroes and adulate “stars” up front and in the know, those who wield power.<sup>9</sup> Yet questions must be raised. It appears oddly difficult, for example, to settle on a leadership definition. Joseph Rost argues that most literature does not define the

term.<sup>10</sup> Warren Bennis encountered 350 definitions!<sup>11</sup> When I took on an endowed chair in *leadership*, I interviewed key people who dreamed up the position. I asked for a definition and heard: taking responsibility; facilitating the fulfillment of the purposes of persons, groups, or organizations; helping people see reality and inspiring them to move to possibility; discerning one's time and context; suggesting or setting a vision and moving a group to long term results and satisfaction; exercising authority in managing resources to accomplish common good; influencing people to do what is needed; stewarding influence.

These ideas posed by thoughtful, intelligent Christians did not indicate anything explicitly *Christian* but describe *any* commendable leadership. No one offered a Christian perspective without prompting. When I pressed subjects on what is uniquely *Christian* about leadership or whether there is a distinctive Christian form, there was hesitation. One person noted that we lead as Christ led. Another that Christian leaders “serve the purposes of God for his people in time.”<sup>12</sup> Do these ideas go deep enough, especially when leadership is so faddish?

### **Biblical Perspectives on Leadership**

Scripturally speaking, there are problems in unduly emphasizing leaders. Luke recounts Jesus' birth and names leading luminaries of the day – Augustus, Herod, Quirinius. These are newsmakers, the ones in charge. But marginal folks – Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph – are God's unexpected channels, the *real* sphere of God's transformation, where *good news* is discerned, found, embodied. Ellul observes: “God chooses some men among others.... Not the most qualified, the most informed, the most worthy, the most alert.”<sup>13</sup>

When we adulate leaders, Ellul warns that in the Bible “good and faithful kings were regularly defeated and ... glorious monarchs” acted wickedly.<sup>14</sup> Power, victory, effectiveness, are not the fruit of faithfulness. After all, the cross exemplifies not “a *powerful* political leader,” but rather

the weakness and humility of God.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God choosing what is weak and humble to represent him (the stammering Moses, the infant Samuel, Saul from an insignificant family, David confronting Goliath, etc.). Paul tells us that God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.<sup>15</sup>

God's reign prioritizes “humility, poverty, freely giving” not

authority, spectacular conversions, breakthrough works, a strong organization of the church, miracles, or anything of this kind. The kingdom of heaven knows no efficient means, as we have seen in the parables. The kingdom grows differently from any power in the world, and certainly not by the way of efficiency<sup>16</sup>

Positive *leader* terminology is scant in the scriptures. Few office holders are regarded favorably. Official rulers usually look out for interests contrary to God's purposes; their characters are deficient. Good rulers are exceptions. When asked whether God intervenes in history, Ellul notes that God did so through

faithful individuals but “not necessarily ... through political action. It can also be done through the preaching of the word of God.”<sup>17</sup>

Scriptural leadership references are predominantly negative. Jesus’ warns about “blind leaders” (Mt. 15.14, *KJV*) and disparages Gentile “rulers” (Mk. 9.42).<sup>18</sup> Old and New Testament counsel against wanting or emulating leaders “like other nations” (1 Sam. 8.5) or Gentile authorities who “lord it over” others (Mt. 20.25). Christian leadership programs aiming to be biblical, then, would focus proportionately more on avoiding leadership deformations, pitfalls, dangers, and temptations rather than on glorifying the possibilities and potentials of leadership.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus certainly had different priorities than having us *lead*. “Follow” comes up often in the gospel. Discipleship is about *following*. Never telling us all to be leaders Jesus says we are all to be servants.<sup>20</sup> Sarah Coakley cautions against blithely accepting leadership presumptions: “What Jesus has to say about authorities and power, and what he demonstrates in his own acts of witness and in his passion, are absolutely crucial.”<sup>21</sup>

### Reading Ellul to Interpret Leadership

Ellul’s notion of *technic* is relevant to pondering leadership. Technic refers “to efficient methods applicable in all areas (monetary, economic, athletic, etc.);” its characteristics include “precision, rapidity, certainty, continuity, universality.”<sup>22</sup> It prioritizes “immediate needs,” shows “obsession with change” and “the myth of progress,” and promotes “growth at all costs.”<sup>23</sup> James Holloway notes that technic is evident in “the proliferation of *administration* in education, church, science, government, business, industry, etc., ... so that administration is now *an end* itself...”<sup>24</sup> Technics is “the determining element in the creation of ... value.”<sup>25</sup> Not that technic is evil yet it is deeply problematic when technic becomes “the *mediator of everything* ...”<sup>26</sup> I often hear complaints about how the CEO is now a primary model for pastors.

Leadership connection to technics is reflected in titles: Peter Drucker’s *The Effective Executive* and *The Effective Executive in Action* and evangelical author Leith Anderson’s *Leadership that Works*.<sup>27</sup> We prioritize leaders as technicians.<sup>28</sup> With the right mayor there would be no strike; with a leaderly looking prime minister our nation would be affluent; with a good pastor there would be no church fights. Christians too fall for such longings.

Ellul counsels reticent humility about claiming to effect God’s purposes: “man does not recognize in advance whether or not he is entering into God’s plan.”<sup>29</sup> He warns against predicting consequences of actions and against naive optimism about what humans can achieve. “There is no progress that is ever definitive, no progress that is only progress, no progress without a shadow.”<sup>30</sup> We cannot effectively attain or achieve God’s kingdom.<sup>31</sup>

When I ask seminarians to define leadership two terms consistently come up: *influence* and *followers*. (Think of the self-help classic, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.) Students hope to learn “hard skills” of running the show: manage people (“human resources”<sup>32</sup>), coordinate teams, oversee budgets,

deal with conflict, lead change, build collaboration, raise funds. These obviously important tasks are all practically oriented and in the spirit of our times.

In reality, we are obsessed ... by the views of our age and century and technology. Everything has to serve some purpose. If it does not, it is not worth doing. And when we talk in this way we are not governed by a desire to serve but by visions of what is great and powerful and effective. We are driven by the utility of the world and the importance of results. What counts is what may be seen, achievement, victory, whether it be over hunger or a political foe or what have you. What matters is that it be useful.<sup>33</sup>

Ellul hopes rather that we be prophets. A prophet “announces and can bend or provoke, but there is no necessity or determination.”<sup>34</sup> Effective influence is not assured. Prophets are often marginalized and isolated. Some are not heard until long after they die; some never at all.

A leader, in many students’ opinions, influences others and wins followers. Yet I begin each class by reading a brief account of an exemplary Christian from history and offering a prayer in that person’s memory. More often than not, that person was not famous in his or her day, had no followers, was rejected, or was martyred. His or her influence was negligible.

As the world sees it, action which is faithful to God will always fail, just as Jesus Christ necessarily went to the cross. Such action always leads to a dead end. It is always a fiasco from the standpoint of worldly power. But this should not worry us. It does not mean that our action is in truth ineffectual. Efficacy measured in terms of faithfulness cannot be compared at any point with efficacy measured in terms of success.<sup>35</sup>

Christian faith gives a counter-witness to believing that “Everything that succeeds is good, everything that fails is bad.”<sup>36</sup> Ellul sounds much like Martin Buber who wrote: “The Bible knows nothing of this intrinsic value of success.” Buber demonstrates that key Old Testament leaders had lives consisting “of one failure after another ...,” referring especially to Moses and David. This is, in short a “glorification of failure [that] culminates in the long line of prophets whose existence is failure through and through. They live in failure ... .”<sup>37</sup>

One modern failure was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He never completed his most important book, led a brief fledgling seminary, did not persuade many Christians to reject Nazism, was part of an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler’s, and was wastefully executed shortly before the war’s end. In his lifetime, he had little influence and few followers. He was not surprised. He was clear that the Christian (like Jesus) does not just suffer and endure the cross, but experiences rejection, the opposite of influence just “Jesus is the Christ who was rejected in his suffering.” When the “circle of disciples” try to “hinder” this rejection their hindrance was “satanic.” Yet the church itself from the earliest of days also avoided this “kind of Lord.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, even in the church Christ does not necessarily have influence! Was Bonhoeffer a leader? Does the answer matter? As I. F. Stone used to say: “If you expect to see the final results of your work, you have not asked a big enough question.”<sup>39</sup> Ellul wrote a prayer that counsels against thinking too highly or confidently about our influence or our effective accomplishments:

All the acts which I have done expressly to serve thee, and also all the acts which I believe to be neutral and purely human, and also all the acts which I know to be disobedience and sin, I put in thy hands, O God, my Lord and Savior; take them now that they are finished; prove them thyself to see which enter into thy work and which deserve only judgment and death: use, cut, trim, reset, readjust, now that it is no longer I who can decide or know, now that what is done is done, what I have written I have written. It is thou that canst make a line true by taking it up into thy truth. It is thou that canst make an action right by using it to accomplish thy design, which is mysterious as I write now but bright in the eternity which thou has revealed to me in thy Son. Amen.<sup>40</sup>

Christ's power and sovereignty are "not of the order of means that are effective."<sup>41</sup> We act in hope and on the basis of God's promise but have no guaranteed outcomes or results. Ellul would make short shrift of the claim that the obligation to be responsible entails proper techniques.

The freedom of God finds expression also in the choice of the means he employs. Samaria will be saved, but to accomplish this God neither uses nor relies on the courage of the soldiers, the skill of the generals, the politics of the king, or the return of all the people to virtue and morality. God will save Samaria by ... the most ridiculous, empty, and illusory miracle, by a noise, a wind, an echo, by an illusion which makes a victorious army flee. This is an illustration of the fact that God chooses "things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:28). But it also shows how much noise and how little weight or worth or significance there is in what man does. I think that we who take our politics and bombs and elections so seriously should take this seriously too.<sup>42</sup>

Most famously, Ellul cautions against worshipping efficacy:

that which has its own high degree of efficiency should not become legitimate in our eyes for that reason. It is not enough that a means be effective for us to employ it. We must not subordinate the choice of means to intrinsic or specific efficacy.<sup>43</sup>

Scriptures caution against relying on technics. "How many times has God told and retold his people by the prophets that they should not rely on human means."<sup>44</sup> Ellul cites examples: manna which was not to be saved, rejecting large armies or strong weapons, Gideon's troop reduction, David battling Goliath without usual weapons, a widow relinquishing dwindling food. "In spite of every secular argument to justify money and the state and science and technology, to show that we are right to use these things, it is quite unbiblical to appeal to these agents of political power. To do so is defiance of God *par excellence*."<sup>45</sup>

Yet "man is much more controlled by ... means than ... ends. He is much more involved in a causal process."<sup>46</sup> We desire means that are "important, demanding and efficacious."<sup>47</sup> Our one end, however, must be "the coming kingdom of God" and all means subordinate to that priority.<sup>48</sup> Ellul laments the "penetration of Christianity by technology ... ."<sup>49</sup> This is not to dismiss appropriate means, but to make sure that they are in their proper place, not ends in themselves. He is not contending for incompetency.

If the efficacy of the man of God comes to a halt, all is lost. Jeroboam ruined the kingdom of David. If Apollos had not watered, what Paul had planted would never have grown. Every Christian, then, is strictly accountable.... When a Christian quits, he annuls ... all that preceding Christians have been able to do. Efficacy is written in the history of the church as well as the world. It implies that everyone play his part in the life of the church and be prepared to carry on whether or not there is any tangible proof of results.<sup>50</sup>

None of this justifies inaction. "When we say 'since God does everything, he has no use for my puny efforts and my tiny works; so I will do nothing,' we show our hypocrisy and cowardice. The Bible never validates such an attitude, teaching rather that although God does everything, he chooses human beings to accomplish it!"<sup>51</sup>

### **Critiquing Institutional and Organizational Implications of Leadership and Technics**

I frequently encounter a bias toward leadership understood primarily as running institutions. Ellul anticipated that technics would inform organizational administration.

Research on rational efficient methods ... covers and has gradually come to encompass all human activities.

By this, I meant that there is now a precise knowledge of how a group or a society is constituted, evolves, and how one can organize to achieve a certain result. Sociology and psychology supply us with means to obtain the best returns from a work team, to "place" individuals in a given spot at a meeting in order to increase or decrease their influence, ... and so on. These are simple examples of ... the technologies of organization in a society. They have been widely applied in human relations, public relations, and the army.<sup>52</sup>

He claims: "A genuine revolution is called for today against increased and improved organization."<sup>53</sup> He warns and worries: "Once a movement becomes an institution, it is lost."<sup>54</sup> He is concerned when the church prioritizes "developing and strengthening itself institutionally" as if "Without administration, nothing works."<sup>55</sup> Christians are now unduly interested in "worldly matters" such as "administration."<sup>56</sup> Institutions cannot offer ultimate security, protection, predictability, preservation; such aspirations are perilous and idolatrous.<sup>57</sup>

Ellul has little hope for reforming organizations.<sup>58</sup> Influenced by Ellul, Will Campbell used to say: "All institutions are after our souls" and "Institutions institute inhumanity."<sup>59</sup> Ellul cautions against embracing the "perversity of power."<sup>60</sup> He goes so far as to say that more dangerous than the nation state is the "omnipotence and omnipresence of administration."<sup>61</sup> Lest we not get the implication: "it is impossible for ... an institution to be Christian."<sup>62</sup>

Ellul objects theologically whenever we "put ... confidence elsewhere than in the Lord."<sup>63</sup> He is concerned when the church embraces "forms of security offered by human wisdom against the security of faith."<sup>64</sup> As for the hope of "improving the world," he dismisses this as purely "illusion" and "confusion."<sup>65</sup> This is not how the gospel advances.

The kingdom of heaven knows no efficient means, as we have seen in the parables. This kingdom grows differently from any power in the world, and certainly not by the way of efficiency. The only means to the kingdom of the poor in spirit and of those who are persecuted for justice is their lives as lived in communion with Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup>

He approves Ecclesiastes' assertion that "all power is vanity, oppression, and foolishness – without reservation or shading!" He shares "Qohelet's utter pessimism concerning power."<sup>67</sup>

### **Agenda for Christians who would be Leaders**

Our existence is more than technics. Edwin Luttwak says: "everything that we value in human life is within the realm of inefficiency – love, family, attachment, community, culture, old habits, comfortable old shoes."<sup>68</sup> Some leadership authors acknowledge this. Ronald Heifetz warns against the "myth of measurement" because: "Meaning cannot be measured." While useful, measurement "cannot tell us what makes life worth living." He cautions religious organizations that weigh success by "'reaching more people,' as if souls were a measurable commodity."<sup>69</sup>

We have rarely met a human being who, after years of professional life, has not bought into the myth of measurement and been debilitated by it. After all, there is powerful pressure in our culture to measure the fruits of our labors, and we feel enormous pride as we take on "greater" responsibility and gain "greater" authority, wealth, and prestige. ... You cannot measure the good that you do.<sup>70</sup>

Ellul agrees that human life is more than technics. "It has room for activities that are not rationally or systematically ordered." Such priorities are threatened; "the collision between spontaneous activities and technique is catastrophic for the spontaneous activities."<sup>71</sup>

Wallace Stegner wrote about losses that developed from damming a remote canyon river for accessible recreation: "In gaining the lovely and the usable, we have given up the incomparable."<sup>72</sup> Such tragic trade-offs echo Ellul's concerns that nothing "lovely" is gained in prioritizing technics: "everywhere technique creates ugliness."<sup>73</sup> The ugliness includes erosion of traditional societies.<sup>74</sup> "Technological activity ... waters down all serious things..."<sup>75</sup> It suppresses and "destroys values and meaning"<sup>76</sup> and anything else viewed as "useless."<sup>77</sup>

Technic priorities become their own magical cult. "Facts" have a quasi-religious authority that cannot be questioned.<sup>78</sup> Yet Christian practices are relegated to irrelevance. Prayer is ridiculed and downplayed as unreliable, non-efficacious, unpredictable, ineffective.<sup>79</sup> (Allegedly effective prayer is celebrated; remember the best-seller, *The Prayer of Jabez*.)

[W]e can supply no demonstration of the necessity for prayer, or even of its usefulness. It is futile to pretend that prayer is indispensable to man. Today he gets along very well without it. When he does not pray he lacks nothing, and when he prays it looks to him like a superfluous action reminiscent of former superstitions. He can live perfectly well without prayer. ... No one can

demonstrate to him that he really needs it although not realizing it, nor that he would be so much better off if he prayed. There is no reason, no proof, no motive to be invoked.<sup>80</sup>

By the relentless criteria of technic, prayer is downgraded even dismissed. Ellul hopes to redirect attention to “the meaning of life.”<sup>81</sup> This is key agenda for Christian leadership.

According to Aldo Leopold’s land ethic: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”<sup>82</sup> While “biotic” refers to the living parts of an ecosystem, this discerning principle could apply to other networks and communities too, not just biological ones. And Ellul would surely approve.

The most important things Christians do – worship, prayer, theology, service – are “useless,” serving “no purpose.” Yet they are “testimonies to grace and ... an expression of freedom.”<sup>83</sup> They are promising and hopeful.

I cannot help thinking of the enormous number of useful actions that push us closer and closer to disaster. Then I remember those other gestures (made by hippies and nonpolitical pacifists, for example) which are considered futile: prayers and “useless” solitary self-sacrifice. These acts enable our world to survive.<sup>84</sup>

We must insist on God-given practices with no measurable worth. Prayer is “a renunciation of human means.”<sup>85</sup> It reveals radical reliance on God and helps us escape our technic-dominated milieu; it gives other perspectives.<sup>86</sup> It promises deep change; it is a

radical break, a more fundamental protest.... All further radicalism, of behavior, of style of life and of action, can only have the prior rupture of prayer as its source. Precisely because ... technological society is given over entirely to action, the person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical.<sup>87</sup>

In our age of “frantic activity,” contemplation is “a truly revolutionary attitude ... .”<sup>88</sup> He continues: “If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* ..., be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system.”<sup>89</sup>

Ellul worries about Christian leaders who prioritize technics; “the Church’s responsible people (pastors, etc.), feel very much debased in a world of technique since they are not themselves specialists, and especially not technicians.” Consequently, “embarrassed pastors also want to become technicians. They therefore practice psychoanalysis, group dynamics, social psychology, information theory, etc.” Ellul insists on aspects of pastoring that are now often downplayed: “To obey a calling and then to preach, to direct a congregation, to take time for soul-searching – all this seems frivolous in a world of engineers and producers.”<sup>90</sup>

Frivolous perhaps. But not as vain as all too many contemporary leadership emphases.

<sup>1</sup> Dennis C. Roberts, *Deeper Learning in Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 16ff, 30ff. Scholars abroad tell me that leadership as an academic subject is a North American preoccupation.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Kellerman, "Leadership: Learning to Lead the Old-Fashioned Way," *Strategy and Business*, Winter 2011, Issue 65, 71.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Preskill and Stephen D. Brookfield, *Learning as a Way of Leading* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 2

<sup>4</sup> Two recent books offer a counterbalance but are anomalies. Michel Villette and Catherine Vuillermot, *From Predators to Icons: Exposing the Myth of the Business Hero*, trans. George Holoch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Nassir Ghaemi, *A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links Between Leadership and Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989).

Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Jason Byassee, "Sarah Coakley: Living prayer and leadership," *Faith and Leadership*, 18 August 2009, [www.faithandleadership.com](http://www.faithandleadership.com).

<sup>7</sup> Henry Cloud, *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love or Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007); Reggie McNeal, *Practicing Greatness: 7 Disciplines of Extraordinary Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); John C. Maxwell, *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 80.

<sup>9</sup> See Mark Van Vugt and Anjana Ahuja, *Naturally Selected: The Evolutionary Science of Leadership* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2011) and Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Leadership from Inside Out* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 128.

<sup>12</sup> I define Christian leadership as: Inspiring, challenging, or empowering people and groups to join God's mission of redemption and healing.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, trans. and ed. By Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 62.

<sup>14</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 140. See also Jacques Ellul, *Anarchism and Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 123.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, ed. and trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 205-6.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Ellul, *In Season Out of Season*, trans. Lani K. Niles (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 92-3.

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>19</sup> Narcissism and leadership are often intertwined. Thomas E Cronin and Michael A. Genovese, *Leadership Matters* (Boulder CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 55-6, 137, 138, 170-1, 173, 263.

<sup>20</sup> Siang-Yang Tan, "The Primacy of Servanthood," in *The Three Tasks of Leadership*, ed. Eric O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 78.

<sup>21</sup> "Sarah Coakley: Living prayer and leadership," [www.faithandleadership.com](http://www.faithandleadership.com).

<sup>22</sup> Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 109. There are extensive debates about how to translate Ellul's French term: *technic*, *technique*, or *technology*. I opt for the unfamiliar, "technic." The usual English meanings of "technology" and "technique" are hard to overcome; the unfamiliarity of "technic" gives the reader pause and helps one remember Ellul's distinct emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 69, 223, 224.

<sup>24</sup> James Y. Holloway, "West of Eden," in *Introducing Jacques Ellul*, ed. James Y. Holloway (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 24. Italicization is Holloway's.

- <sup>25</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, ed. William H. Vanderburg (Toronto: Anansi, 1981), 33.
- <sup>26</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990), 92.
- <sup>27</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2007); Drucker and Joseph A. Maciariello, *The Effective Executive in Action* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); Leith Anderson, *Leadership that Works* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2001).
- <sup>28</sup> Ellul writes that “technocrats” now “constitute a new ruling class, and we are actually living under an aristocratic regime. Technocrats are the *aristoi*, the best people.” These “*aristoi* have the greatest technical competence . . . .” *The Technological Bluff*, 25.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 19.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 71.
- <sup>31</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Seabury, 1967), 48.
- <sup>32</sup> Marguerite Shuster writes: “the very category ‘human resources’ gets it exactly wrong . . . . It places people made in the image of God right alongside two-by-fours, power generators, and textbooks as material needed to get the job done: human beings become more or less useful instruments in service of reaching a particular end. Their worth is not intrinsic but relative to the goal at hand.” “Leadership as Interpreting Reality,” in *The Three Tasks of Leadership*, ed. Eric O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 19.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 197.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 21.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 140.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 70.
- <sup>37</sup> Martin Buber, “Biblical Leadership” in *Biblical Humanism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (), 142-3.
- <sup>38</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, eds. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 85.
- <sup>39</sup> Cited in Jeff Gates, *Democracy At Risk* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 241.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 72.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 137.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 61.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 134.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 147.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 147.
- <sup>46</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 135.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 136.
- <sup>48</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 136.
- <sup>49</sup> *Perspectives On Our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*, 99.
- <sup>50</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 139.
- <sup>51</sup> *Reason for Being*, 136.
- <sup>52</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 37. See also Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980), 176
- <sup>53</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, trans. Patricia Wolf (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 273. While writing here about the nation state, the dynamics are just as true for other organizations, including corporations and churches.
- <sup>54</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 24.
- <sup>55</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 190.
- <sup>56</sup> *The Subversion of Christianity*, 21.
- <sup>57</sup> “Cain will spend his life trying to find security, struggling against hostile forces, . . . taking guarantees that are within his reach, guarantees that *appear* to him to be genuine, but which in fact protect him from

- nothing.” Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 3.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 71-2.
- <sup>59</sup> Cited in Arthur Boers, “Will Campbell: In the Great Company of God’s *Grace*, *The Other Side*, September, 1987, 43, 40.
- <sup>60</sup> *Anarchism and Christianity*, 13 footnote 3. “What I really want to point out ... is not that Jesus was an enemy of power but that he treated it with disdain and did not accord it any authority. In every form he challenged it radically.” *Anarchism and Christianity*, 56.
- <sup>61</sup> *Anarchism and Christianity*, 16.
- <sup>62</sup> *Anarchism and Christianity*, 28.
- <sup>63</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, 32.
- <sup>64</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, 34.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Meaning of the City*, 37.
- <sup>66</sup> *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 206.
- <sup>67</sup> *Reason for Being*, 84.
- <sup>68</sup> Cited in Janice Gross Stein, *The Cult of Efficiency*, (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2001), 1.
- <sup>69</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 212.
- <sup>70</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, 213-4.
- <sup>71</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 82-3.
- <sup>72</sup> Wallace Stegner, “Glen Canyon Submersus,” in *Nature Writing*, eds. Robert Finch and John Elder (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 509.
- <sup>73</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 40.
- <sup>74</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 44-45.
- <sup>75</sup> *The Technological System*, 10.
- <sup>76</sup> *Perspectives on Our Age*, 50.
- <sup>77</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 65.
- <sup>78</sup> *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 38. Janice Gross Stein makes a similar point in her Massey Lectures, *The Cult of Efficiency* (Toronto: Anansi, 2001), 3-4.
- <sup>79</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1970), 76-79.
- <sup>80</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 99.
- <sup>81</sup> *The Technological Bluff*, 358.
- <sup>82</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 224-5.
- <sup>83</sup> *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, 197.
- <sup>84</sup> *Reason for Being*, 191.
- <sup>85</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 30.
- <sup>86</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 172.
- <sup>87</sup> *Prayer and Modern Man*, 174.
- <sup>88</sup> *Autopsy of Revolution*, 285.
- <sup>89</sup> *Autopsy of Revolution*, 286.
- <sup>90</sup> Jacques Ellul, “Work and Calling,” trans. James S. Albritton, in *Callings!*, eds. James Y. Holloway and Will D. Campbell, (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1974), 32.

## ***Theology and Economics: The Hermeneutical Case of Calvin Today***

**by Roelf Haan**

Wellington So. Africa: Bible Media, 2012. 181 pp; [www.bybelmedia.co.za](http://www.bybelmedia.co.za)

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### **Reviewed by David W. Gill**

David Gill is Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston MA.

Roelf Haan is a native of The Netherlands and has a PhD in economic sciences. He has worked for the Ministry of Finance in The Hague and the IMF in Washington DC. He is Professor of Economics at the Free University of Amsterdam and is the author of many books including *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Money and Property*. He is a long time student of Jacques Ellul's thought and a member of the IJES.

John Calvin, argues Roelf Haan, has been wrongly blamed (or credited) with modern capitalism. In part because of Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Calvinism*, 1905) and R. H. Tawney (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1926) it has been assumed by many that modern capitalism has its roots in Calvin. Drawing on both the work of Calvin expert Andre Bieler, *The Social Humanism of John Calvin*, and on Calvin's own writings, Haan makes clear that contemporary capitalism has little or nothing in common with Calvin's economic thought. What we actually need is more of the real John Calvin's thought to counter the dysfunctions of our era.

We do, of course, have a hermeneutical challenge in reading Calvin five centuries later, in a very different context than his Geneva. Still there are some key contributions Calvin makes to economics. Here are some of the points Haan brings out of Calvin (with many quotations!):

1. Economics is not about personal gain or profits but about the common good
2. Markets are not "self-regulating" but need to be subordinated to the Word of God
3. History is dynamic not static and the Christian ethic gets worked out in life more than in theory
4. The natural environment must be cared for as God's stewards, not abused and exploited
5. Wealth is a blessing from God if it does not harm others or become idolatry for those who have it
6. Property is not a purely individual thing; all property belongs to God and should be stewarded responsibly
7. The poor should be cared for, not rejected or scorned
8. Work is or ought to be participation in the work of God in the world; the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is a good example
9. Work is not determined or legitimized by having an income attached to it
10. Trade is good but must resist fraud, robbery, and deceit.

Haan devotes a whole chapter to Calvin's approach to usury (charging interest on loans) with comments on how mortgage practices and international debt plague our world today. There is, Haan argues, ample reason to return to this ancient debate. In short, Calvin does not suggest that all interest should be banned but that justice must prevail and no exploitation of the poor should be tolerated. It is a very different thing for the well off to borrow and pay interest for their investments or luxuries.

Haan reflects on the evolution of Reformed economic thought and practice over the succeeding centuries with figures like Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Jacques Ellul appearing in his pages. Ellul's chronicle and assessment of the technological revolution is largely affirmed by Haan. Haan closes with some comments on what theology (and Calvin) can bring to today's economics. He quotes Einstein's famous saying that the thinking that created a problem is unlikely to be able to solve it. Economics needs the input of theology.

*Theology and Economics* could have benefited from a copy editor and designer to get chapter and page numbers in place, eliminate Roman numerals in footnotes, etc.. But this is a welcome contribution from a fine thinker, well experienced in the trenches of economics and extremely literate in history and theology. This book is a much needed corrective to the mythology of today's Christian capitalists and a great companion piece to Ellul's writings on money and economics..

***Jacques Ellul: L'espérance d'abord***

**by Stéphane Lavignotte**

Lyon: Editions Olivétan, 2012. 105 pp. pb. [www.editions-olivetan.com](http://www.editions-olivetan.com)

**Reviewed by David W. Gill**

David Gill is Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary near Boston MA.

Stéphane Lavignotte is pastor of Maison Verte, a Reformed Church of France congregation in the 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris. Before becoming a pastor Vignotte was a journalist on radio, television, and in print. He has been especially concerned and active in caring for the environment and assisting undocumented folk in Paris. This little volume subtitled “First of all, hope!” is not available in English --- but just maybe it should and will be some day. It is part of a series of books “Figures protestantes” which includes Bonhoeffer, Calvin, Luther, Zinzendorf . . . pretty famous company!

Lavignotte locates Ellul’s work in its historical, biographical, ecclesiastical, and social/cultural context. He does a good job distilling down Ellul’s thought into chapters on Technique/technology, Money/mammon, Propaganda/information, Hope/contradiction, and Ethics/life-style. Lavignotte probes and interacts with about twenty of Ellul’s books and several articles and some important secondary sources by Jean-Luc Porquet and Patrick Chastenet. I did wish for some reference to Ellul’s work on politics and his important books on the *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Ethics of Freedom* but otherwise this is a very nice introduction within the 100 page space limitation.

Lavignotte is deeply appreciative of Ellul’s thought and sees him as a prophet and an iconoclast, challenging us to dethrone all idols and break with the closure of this technological world. What I also valued from Lavignotte was his refusal to elevate Ellul to untouchable sainthood but rather to question and disagree where he felt it necessary. Two examples of this were homosexuality and Islam. Lavignotte scolds Ellul for some rash comments about AIDS as the penalty for an obsession with sex by gays. So too, Ellul suggested the expulsion from France of immigrants promoting Islam (pp. 17, 73-74). These brief comments don’t do full justice to Lavignotte’s discussions. But I certainly agree with him that Ellul sometimes wrote too harshly and perhaps was not consistent in the application of his views. What we have here is an engaging, thoughtful introduction to Jacques Ellul by a caring friend.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Propaganda: Thoughts from an Ellulian Perspective

by **Randal Marlin**

Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Randal Marlin has taught in the Department of Philosophy at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, since 1966. In 1979-80 he won a Department of Defence Fellowship supporting a year at the University of Bordeaux where he studied under Jacques Ellul. In 1982 he translated and published *FLN Propaganda in France During the Algerian War* (By Books, Ottawa). His earlier career path took him from Princeton (B.A., 1959) to McGill (M.A., 1961) to Trinity College, Oxford, the University of Aix-Marseille, and Toronto (Ph.D, 1973). He is the author of *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* (Broadview Press, 2002; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2013) and editor of *Propaganda and the Ethics of Rhetoric* (Ottawa: Carleton Centre for Rhetorical Studies, 1993). He served as Guest Editor of the on-line *Global Media Journal – Canadian Edition*, Vol. 3, No 2, December, 2010. His “Propaganda and the Ethics of WikiLeaks” appeared in the 2011 issue of *Global Media Journal – Australian Edition*, Vol 5 No 3. He continues to be active locally in community affairs and civil liberties issues.

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Just as Jacques Ellul presented himself in many different guises to the public, so also there are many different ways to be “Ellulian” in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. One could do the work of a sociologist, theologian, historian, political scientist, newspaper columnist, local activist, and in each case adopt recognizable patterns of thought and action that harken back to Ellul’s own work and thought. “Ellulians” are attracted to his thought for different reasons. For some of us it is the breadth and scope of his vision of the world, integrating science with religion, law with morality, teaching with social work, while always preserving a concern for the individual, caught up in so many modern systems with their dizzying demands on our daily lives, snuffing out our spontaneity in the process.

There is no one thing identifiable as “Ellulian” unless it is, paradoxically, a resistance to any form of cookie-cutter identity, including that of slavishly conforming one’s activity to some supposed model of behaviour or thinking identified with Ellul.<sup>1</sup> He has certainly provided us inspiration for the new century, and many of the problems he observed in his own time and predicted for the future are with us now, some of them more urgently than ever before. There are many different perceptions as to how one might be “Ellulian,” but it would be a great mistake to think that one could reasonably regard oneself as “Ellulian” simply because one agrees with his diagnosis of what is wrong with the modern world. There is the further question of how to act, about which he had very definite things to say.

Take for example the case of Ted Kaczynski, the so-called “Unabomber,” who killed people by letter bombs starting in 1978. Unquestionably, he echoed some of the ideas of Ellul concerning the technological society and he specifically mentions having read *The Technological Society*.<sup>2</sup> Had Kaczynski also read Ellul’s *Violence*, he would have seen how, despite a large measure of agreement about how the technological imperative has shaped our modern consciousness and turned us into willing slaves, sending letter bombs to kill or maim those taking part in that imperative was not an appropriate response.<sup>3</sup> The main and simple reason is the Christian premise underlying all of Ellul’s thought. But there was also Ellul the sociological and political analyst, who saw that such acts, far from damaging the technological system, only strengthen its worst aspects. Just as with the events of 9/11, the result is to

induce fear and create support for new security initiatives, new technological devices to further reduce the scope of human freedom.

So we have one very clear idea of how *not* to be Ellulian in the 21<sup>st</sup> C. Kaczynski, though a brilliant mathematician, appears to have been short on sociological and moral perception. His killings were supposed to awaken a public consciousness that would turn against modernity and view favourably his own back-to-nature vision of how to live. But his actions showed little empathy for his victims, suggesting a defective moral awareness, and his aim of transforming society was not achieved. To the extent he thought his actions would succeed he demonstrated inadequate sociological understanding.

To be a true Ellulian, then, requires not just an understanding of his diagnosis of what is wrong with the world. It also demands at least a minimal respect for the constraints he places on morally acceptable action. Based on the teachings in *On Violence*, there is no justification for killing people as Kaczynski did. Where is the love shown to the victims of Kaczynski's bombings?

Whether one chooses to identify with institutionalized religion or not, the message of love, so central to Christianity, is essential to the message that Ellul has tried to impart, both through his writings and the example of his civic engagements. To be an Ellulian means to involve oneself in social action in a way appropriate to one's abilities, guided by a realistic assessment of the problems of one's time and the likely chances of succeeding with this or that well thought-out response. But this has to be combined with a love even for the perpetrators of the evils one sees around us. The American cartoonist Walt Kelly famously had one of his Pogo characters say "we have met the enemy and he is us," and it is true that in the course of raising a battle-cry against the perceived social villains of our time we may be contributing to the very evils that we see around us. We may decry the producers of waste products and climate warming gases, but if our habit-formed needs provide a market for such services we share the blame.

My own interest is primarily in Ellul's insights into the phenomenon of propaganda, and I will pursue here three themes. The first is how propaganda in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century shows few signs of slackening in kind or quantity compared with the previous century. The second is that despite all the tools available for combating corporate and political propaganda there is evidence of age-old human weaknesses working against the successful use of these tools for bringing about a better and more just world. The third is a question: how should a conscientious person act to counter harmful propaganda? Is it sufficient to educate people, to let them know about the forms of manipulation so they can resist their influence? What are some of the pitfalls that prevent or undermine effective social action?

## I

The word "propaganda" needs first to be defined. I use the term here in somewhat negative sense to refer to communications by an organized group designed to influence the thought, actions and attitudes of others in ways that suppress or bypass their ability to view what is conveyed from an adequately critical, rational standpoint. As a matter of usage, the word "propaganda" has a neutral as well as the somewhat pejorative meaning in the definition I have just given. In the neutral sense one simply talks about propaganda as getting messages across and influencing the public with nothing to suggest any kind of deception. But the word has come to take on sinister connotations, and I want to provide a definition that

accounts for the negative perception of the word. Ellul captured an important strand of negativity by linking the word to communications aimed at gaining or maintaining power over others. This definition has its own valuable insights, but I want to emphasize the aspect of dupery as distinct from control, even though the two may go hand in hand.

The use of propaganda is no less evident in today's world than it was in the last century. Governments and corporations have numerous advisers to help with marketing of products and policies. The electoral appeal of a political candidate, party or policy is measured carefully by widespread use of polling techniques. All that Ellul noted in the way of government by imagery is no less true today. Currently in Canada there is outrage over the use of "robocalling" (automated telephone messages) to influence and in some cases suppress votes for given candidates on election day. Voter suppression works by determining which voters are likely to vote for a rival party, and then pretending to be calling from the rival party's headquarters with an insulting and annoying message, perhaps deliberately waking up the targeted person at night. It is a way of disaffecting such voters and getting them to decide not to vote for that rival party and perhaps not to vote at all. Another tactic is to pretend to be an elections officer informing all voters in a given area that the polling station has changed its location.

Analogous techniques were used to get Richard Nixon elected in the previous century, as Republican "dirty tricks" operatives such as Donald Segretti would discredit rival candidate Edward Muskie by sending out slanderous messages purporting to come from his office, so that he was viewed as the author of the slanders.

In today's world the computer-assisted knowledge about people's tastes and proclivities, derived from search engines and robotic recording of the sites visited through the use of a given computer allow for sophisticated profiling where a person and a given computer can be matched. Use of Facebook, Twitter and the like provide those with the appropriate technical knowledge the opportunity to build profiles of individuals that can be used for targeting them with messages designed to appeal to their profile for commercial or political purposes.

In 1980 Ellul lectured about the coming recording of human deeds and misdeeds in a way that would never be effaced, and how this might affect human behaviour. He saw a time coming when "happy forgetfulness" would be a thing of the past. Today already some Facebook users have reason to worry about how some earlier indiscretions, recorded for amusement among friends, might be used by hostile groups to discredit them later should they seek political office. Politicians have had reason to regret some of their Twitter messages that later became public. Hostile propaganda can be expected to seize upon anything that will discredit individuals seen as a threat to powerful interests. Eventually the effect of such propaganda will be to reduce our ability to communicate spontaneously with our friends, especially so as the post 9/11 mood has allowed governments to practice unprecedented surveillance on ordinary citizens.

Not only governments, but unscrupulous private hacking of telephones and computers has given media owners great power to destroy the reputations of politicians or other individuals when they see it as in their interest to do so. The unfolding saga of Rupert Murdoch's power through his huge worldwide media holdings is providing insight into this, as the scandals associated with *News of the World* have come to light and an embarrassed Murdoch directed the paper to cease to exist.

There are other areas where age-old propaganda techniques reappear in a way adapted to the latest technology in the current century. Product placement, the practice of including products in a movie or television production so that viewers will unconsciously link the product to the setting, and presumably become favourably disposed to it, is widespread in North America today. The practice of government or corporations making videos that have the appearance of independently produced news reports but are actually tilted to favour the government department or corporation in question is another example of a surreptitious way of influencing the public. The Tea Party movement in the United States, very conservative-libertarian, may have the appearance of a spontaneous, grass-roots movement, but behind it is funding by the Koch brothers, David and Charles, who have energy and other interests that they would like to see protected from adverse government regulation or taxation. The general practice of using other organizations as a front for one's own interests began already in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but as the public relations industry has grown and prospered, so has the practice of disguising sources of information and persuasion.

The flip side of positive propaganda is the negative one of curtailing information that might adversely affect a corporation's fortunes or a government's ability to rule in ways that it sees fit. Currently in Canada the federal Conservative government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper has clamped down on access of journalists to government scientists – so much so that recently it came to light that “minders” would be assigned to them when they attended conferences and the like where they might be interviewed by media. One may recall how during the Cold War I.F. Stone thwarted government attempts to persuade the U.S. public that a test ban treaty with the USSR couldn't work because too many listening posts would be required to detect an underground test. Stone interviewed a government seismologist who showed how one such test was in fact picked up by their own listening posts at over a thousand miles distance, completely discrediting the official story.

The force and techniques of propaganda are still around and evidently increasing since the last century, as many other examples could show. But so also are techniques for combating this propaganda. The question, to which we now turn, is whether the latter can and will be effectively employed. Once again, Ellul has some sobering thoughts to bear upon his question.

## II

In the 20<sup>th</sup> C. much effort was expended among progressive groups to counter the trend toward monopoly or oligopoly of the major news media. These efforts largely failed and Rupert Murdoch has gained enormous influence in Britain and the United States with ownership of the high-end *Times* of London and the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as the low-brow but mass appeal media that include the *Sun* and the *News of the World* in Britain and Fox News in the U.S.

The arrival of the Internet has given a widespread opportunity for voices dissenting from mainstream media to be heard. Some impressive work has been done on sites like Truthout, Alternet, Consortium News, TomDispatch and by individual bloggers to counteract the pictures of reality supplied by the dominant media. As an example, one regularly sees in the mainstream press discussion of a pre-emptive Israeli attack on Iran, without serious questioning of the assumption that Iran is seeking to build a nuclear bomb. The assumption deserves to be questioned, as the International Atomic Energy Agency report of

November, 2011, stops well short of such a conclusion. The translation or mistranslation of one of Ahmadjinedad's statements, that Israel was destined to be "wiped off the map," is likewise misleading in sounding like a call to arms rather than a prediction of what fate has in store.

The hold of the major media on younger people of university age has decreased over the decades, as social media take up more of their attention. The power of independent communication methods made itself felt with the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in September 2011. Major media ignored the movement until sheer numbers and police arrests forced them to cover the actions. Protests were directed against an array of injustices, among them a system where banks and the investment community can get bailouts when they are financially over-extended as a result of gambling with fancy packages of mixed risk mortgage-backed securities. Ordinary investors were misled about the degree of risk, and pension funds suffered losses, whereas the financial industry in some cases profited from the collapse of poisonous mortgage securities by engaging in bets against them through a device known as "credit default swaps."

The problem, well recognized by Ellul, is in sustaining people's attention. The injustices of the financial system have been described but as Ellul noted in *The Political Illusion* the pure fact has no power on its own. It has to be "elaborated with symbols before it can emerge and be recognized as public opinion." As Ellul observed "Only propaganda can make a fact arouse public opinion, only propaganda can force the crowd's wandering attention to stop and become fixed on some event..."<sup>4</sup>

Back in 1980, Ellul drew attention in his IEP lectures to the difficulty of sustaining the momentum of environmental concerns. As he pointed out public opinion comes and goes in waves, like fashion, and the petroleum shortage scare in the early 1970's did not prevent the arrival of gas-guzzling SUV's in the 1980s and 1990s.

It seems then that Ellul's diagnosis and prognosis of social action to bring about a more just and sustainable society has to involve the kind of image-making and duplicity that those who profit from socially dysfunctional activities engage in. This conclusion is unwelcome, because it suggests an end-justifying-the-means approach that is ethically unsatisfactory. Several things need to be said about this:

1. Not all image-making is unacceptably and misleadingly simplistic. The Occupy movement's attention to the apparently different rules for the 1% as against the 99% is an effective attention retainer that has a reasonable basis in reality.

2. Abandonment of the high ground in the unequal battle by seekers of justice against exploiters is tactically inadvisable, because the privileged class will seize upon any moral deviousness and compromises to discredit the reformers. Sure, they may be much more devious themselves but who will tell the people about this? You may reach a few with your message, but your opponents will reach many more. The example of Julian Assange has shown how the messages of the WikiLeaks that he created can be drowned out in the media by attention to his own reported improprieties or worse in his private life. The ability of the dominant powers to repackage imagery of a given kind in ways that have an opposite impact should not be underestimated. The WikiLeaks revelations allegedly made by PFC Bradley Manning, dealing with U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan gave viewers a glimpse of the sordid side of

such actions, as video footage (later dubbed “Collateral Murder”) from an Apache helicopter showed the shooting and killing of civilians, including news reporters, a woman and two children, one of whom was to survive. The WikiLeaks commentary accompanying the sequence has been faulted on the ground that it did not give adequate attention to background context and to an exchange of gunfire that had taken place earlier and not far from the shown shootings. In this way the footage can be claimed, with some justification, to be propaganda (in not telling the full story). WikiLeaks has also been blamed for revealing the names of people working in secret to bring democracy in Zimbabwe, thereby putting their lives at risk and setting back the chances for democracy in that country. Manning and anyone following in his footsteps has then to face the branding of himself as a traitor to his country. Curiously, the public appears able to accept Daniel Ellsberg as a hero for leaking the Pentagon Papers revealing the deceptions about the prospects for victory in Vietnam, whereas that possibility for Manning and his similar revelations about Afghanistan and Iraq seems to have been thoroughly suppressed in mainstream media discussions.

3. There are alternative, clearly ethical strategies for combating unethical propaganda. One of these is education. Informing young people especially about the different ways in which people are duped and enslaved by the well-developed techniques of propaganda is an important step towards liberation. Propaganda unmasked is to a large extent propaganda that has been neutralized. A lot can be accomplished through education, but the educators will have to be alive to the latest techniques and strategies employed by the propagandists, and this will involve time and effort.

Another ethical strategy is the formation of educational groups. One person is less effective than a group at analyzing propaganda and communicating the results to wide audiences. Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau are good role models for this kind of organization as well as for their teachings and writings. The opportunities in today’s world for communication through social media are enormous, and a perceptible change has taken place in the information and propaganda environment as a result. What the mainstream media may choose to ignore can be archived and re-accessed on one of the alternative Web sites.

But as people enter into a world of mass communication through their own networks it is important for them to learn some principles of ethical communication if their influence is to have lasting value. Ellul has very interesting things to say about this, couched in the language of what a good Christian should do, but non-believers should have little difficulty in adapting his insights to fit their own religious faith or lack of such.

### III

Some remarks Ellul makes in *False Presence of the Kingdom*<sup>5</sup> are interesting for their bearing on ethics in propaganda wars. A central principle of persuasive rhetoric is to provide a credible source in support of one’s claims. For this reason it has become fairly common practice for pharmaceutical companies, to take one example, to seek some reputable scientist sign his or her name to a scientific study endorsing a new drug, even though the scientist may have had minimal involvement in the study. Hence the rather scandalous reference to “author to be determined” in the case of some studies.<sup>6</sup> Naturally, anyone who

can plausibly show that God endorses some plan or policy will have a lot of persuasive power among believers in God. Yet Ellul emphatically denounces the practice of bringing religion into politics in this way.

There are too many ways in which reasonable and good people can differ in their judgments about the best principles or policies to apply in governing a country. To present religion in a way that makes it seem to provide unequivocal support for one and only one of a contested set of political choices would be to falsify religion. As Ellul remarks, “The Church, and Christians generally, have clearly no competence in economic and political problems properly so called.”<sup>7</sup> The strategic move of enlisting Church authority may achieve some success at gaining followers for a cause, but it mixes up the proper roles of both religion and politics when this is done. Policies are disputable, but a commitment to the basic premises of a given faith is all or nothing. The effect of treating politics as one would religion is to demonize those with whom one disagrees. This prevents proper dialogue from taking place. How do you reason with the devil? Similarly, treating religion as one would politics turns the religious so-called commitment into something less than full commitment. It is of course important to have a dialogue about religion as well. But it is not the kind of thing that lends itself to continual reassessment in the light of changing fortunes, as we may infer from the case of Job.

A central passage where Ellul sets out his teaching on Christian duty in connection with the use of agitative propaganda for advancing a cause is the following:

The appeal to public opinion looks like a good tactic. As a matter of fact, it always results in the frightful entangling of political situations, for when public opinion is aroused by means which are nothing more than propaganda it is no longer capable of rendering political judgment. All it can do is follow the leaders.<sup>8</sup>

It is normal, he writes, for those who see the “struggle of interests and classes not only as a fact but as something to be desired, as something favourable, as an instrument of war” to want to stir up public opinion. But “for those who are exercising on earth the ministry of reconciliation [this tactic] is inadmissible.”<sup>9</sup>

These are strong words, telling the Christian that propagandistic methods to advance a cause about which he or she may be passionate are not permissible. Ellul realizes that by denying his Christian audience the path of propaganda he will be interpreted as a defender of the status quo. His defence against such a charge is that there are other avenues for bringing about liberating political changes, or as he puts it “another mode of entry for Christians.” Here it is important to recall the context of his writing, which was in the immediate aftermath of the bloody Algerian war of independence, in 1963. The passions set in motion by unrestrained propaganda by the different factions supporting or opposing French domination there became an obstacle to finding a solution with hope of a lasting peace. In that light the passion of his following statement becomes understandable: “That is where we should apply *all* the thought, all the charity, all the creativity, all the insight of which Christians are capable.”<sup>10</sup>

As I understand Ellul, he is not saying that the Christian should eschew effective rhetoric for awakening public opinion to injustices. On the contrary, it is important to speak out against trends that may have disastrous outcomes, to warn people when they ignore dangerous looming threats to future wellbeing. All of this is a matter of enlightenment. The problem comes at the point where the public has become engaged and passions are taking over on a given issue. At that point the role of the Christian (and, I would say, decent people whether or not they happen to embrace the Christian faith) should be to preserve the openness and respect toward those one judges to be “the enemy” on a given social issue, with a view to ensuring that a full dialogue is preserved and an opponent’s position is not misconstrued.<sup>11</sup>

The foregoing remarks are of a general nature, and it will be helpful to illustrate some of the problems of engaging in ethical persuasion, as against unethical propaganda, with reference to a particular example. I choose that of bottled water, a matter of considerable environmental concern, because of the difficulties posed by empty plastic bottles accumulating in landfill, producing chemicals than can leach into and contaminate a water supply. There are also costs of collection, transportation, and in the case of recycling the costs of transforming the plastic into the same or some other usable product. While there may well be occasions for legitimate need for bottled water, in most industrialized countries the water can be more efficiently delivered, and in a more environmentally friendly way, by a system of pipes from water source to treatment centre and from there to homes, schools, office buildings, etc.

With this very brief background, I want to turn to a recent exchange in a magazine and widely circulating newspaper in Canada in which the Roman Catholic faith and its post-2007 teachings were brought into play in controversy regarding the purchase of bottled water. It started with the perception by a philosophy professor at a British Columbia Catholic college that those opposed to the use of bottled water provided by private companies for profit were demonizing those who make and consume these products, and that this was not appropriate charitable behaviour for a Christian. Treating water consumption from plastic bottles as heinous and sinful as distinct from an unsound ecological choice was excessive, in his view. This seems like a good Ellulian move, but he took the further step of making some tendentious interpretations (to my mind, at least) of a passage in scripture to support his case. His argument was picked up by an executive in a water bottling company, Nestlé Waters, in Toronto, where attempts were being made to ban bottled water from Catholic schools. He used those arguments in a letter to the Toronto *Globe and Mail* with the evident intention of promoting a more favourable view of his company’s products. I then reacted to what I saw as propaganda supporting an environmentally unsound activity and had my own letter published the next day. This led to a direct response by the executive to me, in a letter delivered by snail mail, with a copy sent to the publisher of the *Globe and Mail*. I responded by e-mail to the executive and the newspaper publisher, citing information about the harms of plastic bottles in landfill, costs of recycling etc. The executive has promised information about how recycling in Canada is superior to that in other places, and I await that information before saying anything more about the substantial, underlying issue.

I use the example to illustrate Ellul’s point that while strong moral suasion might be important and justifiable in a case such as this, the enlisting of the religious language of sin to demonize opponents crosses a line that should not be crossed as long as the issue is sufficiently confused in people’s minds that they are unsure about the facts and rightly see their individual action as affecting the public good only in a very minor way. Quite apart from the matter of charity and simply from a practical point of view, one

is likely to be a more effective persuader if one treats an opponent as a good, decent person who happens to be informationally challenged on a particular issue than if one treats the person as evil and sinful.

The passage from scripture that the professor, C.S. Morrissey, chose to cite was about Jesus accepting water from a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn. 4-5, 15). He was breaking a Jewish taboo in doing this but in Morrissey's view if Jesus's request has any political implication, "it would be that Jesus respects private property."<sup>12</sup> In the same way that Jesus broke the taboo of his time, Morrissey says, "we should not endorse the bottled-water crusaders' misguided notion that to drink from a corporate bottle makes us despicable and ritually impure." As a check on the tendency of people to condemn others, this seems to me defensible.

But to quote Morrissey's remarks, as did John B. Challinor, Director of Corporate Affairs for Nestlé Waters Canada, in the context of a policy decision by a local school board seems to me to go beyond the meaning and intention of those remarks.<sup>13</sup> He quoted Morrissey as referring to how the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church said that the provision of water may be justly "entrusted to the private sector." That says nothing about the specifics of bottled water delivery and the selective presentation of this one fact gives the impression that Church teaching is on Nestlé's side, when a full appreciation of the ecological facts might well lead to the opposite conclusion.

Looking at this situation, and wanting to put readers straight on the matter of this distortion, what is an Ellulian to do? I believe Ellul himself was sufficiently concerned about the limited space and energy on our planet to want to encourage measures that would preserve and conserve our land for productive use, reduce air and water pollution, etc. So much so that, while combating religious zealotry on a policy matter such as anti-bottling, he might otherwise have favoured strong habit-cultivating measures such as the Toronto School Board was considering. For those who want to learn more about the specifics of this issue some information published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* should be interesting and useful.<sup>14</sup>

The lessons I want to draw from this exchange are the following. First, in today's highly propagandized environment, knowledgeable people may need to be careful how they argue, because their remarks may be seized upon by special interest groups to promote business or political activities that their arguments were not intended to promote.

Secondly, before challenging the spokesperson for a major corporation make sure that you don't misstate any facts or make false claims, because any such mistake will be seized on and your credibility will be destroyed. Fortunately, the Internet has provided the huge service of making a super-abundance of factual material available. How long this will last, I don't know, but while the Internet is as it is the ordinary citizen finally has an effective way of countering propaganda of many different kinds and from many different sources.

Thirdly, do not overstate the religious dimensions of a given issue. I believe that a good Christian should have as an ideal that of promoting the common good, and it does make sense to encourage others to make less use of plastic bottles, but turning users into subjects fit for ostracism strikes me as at odds with Christian charity and excessive. As in so many things the best approach is to create awareness of the facts pertaining to such use. Kierkegaard was very clear about this. You don't engage in effective persuasion

by telling another person that they sin when they drink bottled water. Much better to talk about so-and-so who discovered certain environmental costs to bottled water and who as a result reduced his or her consumption of it.

Behind all this trend toward bottled water consumption is the propensity of propagandees to be mesmerized by brand names, like Nestlé, that have become so much a part of their lives. The myth of progress colours their thinking to the point where they feel that somehow, science will find a solution to landfill problems, to pollution and contamination problems. Bottled water is indeed a convenience, so that there is a desire among users to believe that no harm is caused from its use, and statistics about recycling efforts give a further sense that science is solving whatever problems bottled water caused some time in the past or in some other country. Ellul knew all about the myths and preconceptions favouring the propagandee's acceptance of consumption practices that run counter to the public good. His views are helpful for counteracting propaganda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century no less, and possibly more than, the previous century.

I've chosen this example because provides an illustration of some of the pitfalls of engaging in public controversy on a matter where propaganda plays a role. Some of the lessons can usefully be applied to other issues of even greater moment, such as those of war and peace in the Middle East, injustices in Israel-Palestine relations, etc. Here Ellul may be right to see the more fundamental question as one of the ability to avoid demonizing opponents as a way of coming to a measure of understanding and empathy, and from there to possible solutions. It helps, to do this, to reflect on how we would react to someone else demonizing us when we happen merely to lack some vital bit of information on an issue.

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### Notes

1. The paradox I refer to has been commented on many times, recently by Frédéric Rognon, "Jacques Ellul: Une pensée en dialogue," (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2007) 19.
2. From *The Atlantic online*, June, 2000: "After he graduated from Harvard, Kaczynski encountered a book by the French philosopher Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (1954) ..." Kaczynski recalled: "Here is someone who is saying what I have already been thinking."
3. Perhaps he did read "Violence" but disagreed with it. I have no knowledge, one way or the other.
4. Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, (New York: Random House Vintage Edition V-812, 1972), 184.
5. Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972).
6. A Carleton University philosophy colleague, Rebecca Kukla, brought this issue to my attention in her 2007 Marston LaFrance lecture at Carleton.

7. Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, 184.

8. Ibid., 194.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 194-5.

11. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century cleric and philosopher Richard Whately had similar views about the ethical conduct of controversial discourse. I describe his ideas in *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*, (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 164 ff.

12. C.S. Morrissey, “Confusing economic ideology and the Church’s social witness,” *B.C. Catholic*, December 11, 2010.

13. John Challinor, “Water into wine,” letter, *The Globe and Mail*, April 20, 2012. See also: Randal Marlin, “Bottled Sin,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 21, 2012. In response, John Challinor II sent a letter by regular post to Professor Randal Marlin, April 23, 2012, received April 30, 2012.

14. Jared Blumenfeld & Susan Leal, “The Real Cost of Bottled Water,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, February 18, 2007.

<http://www.commondreams.org/views07/0218-05.htm>

See also Ecology Center, Berkeley, “Seven Misconceptions about Plastic and Plastic Recycling.” Downloaded May 2, 2012. Available at: <http://www.ecologycenter.org/ptf/misconceptions.html>.

***A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals.***

**Edited by Tripp York & Andy Alexis-Baker**

Cascade Books, 2012. 183 pages, pb

**Reviewed by Cristina Richie**

Boston College

*Cristina Richie is an ethicist and theologian in the Boston area. Her work primarily focuses on sexual ethics, ecology and bioethics. In 2013 her essay “Building a Framework for Green Bioethics: Integrating Ecology into the Medical Industry” won the Catholic Health Association (CHA) Annual Theology and Ethics Colloquium graduate student essay contest. Ms. Richie has been published in over half a dozen peer-reviewed journals and she regularly presents her work at conferences. She has previously worked as a lecturer in Bioethics at Tufts University (Medford, MA.) and is currently pursuing a PhD in theological ethics at Boston College.*

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“Meat is murder, milk is rape” is the rallying cry of radical vegetarians and vegans in the developed world. Although the contributors to *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals* never use this phrase, it captures the overall sentiment of the second volume in The Peaceable Kingdom Series by editors Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker.

The premise of this book is laid out in the subtitle “addressing commonly asked questions about Christian care for animals.” More specifically, the book focuses on common questions modern Christian vegetarians receive about their choice to not eat meat. The book does not cover issues of animal “care” relating to the living conditions of endangered animals or circus animals; creatures bred for pets or held in captivity; protocol surrounding animals kept for experimentation; or even the mass manufacturing process of dairy farms in the United States. Instead, attention to dietary choices comes across passionately throughout the chapters. Authors are careful to delineate between factory farmed animals slaughtered and consumed and wild animals killed and consumed by indigenous populations who have no other means of survival (p. 68). The authors build their argument for moral, religious vegetarianism using Scriptural exegesis as the starting point.

The injunction to a plant-based diet in Genesis 1:29 is a staple of Christian vegetarian apologetics. Notably, all the authors who make use of this Genesis text take it as a literal record of what actually transpired at the beginning of the world. This is surprising considering the ramifications of interpreting other neighboring parts of Genesis literally, such as the possibility for rampant procreation and planetary domination (Gen. 1:28); male headship (Gen. 3:16) and, of course, the difficulty in reconciling Darwinian evolution with God’s compartmentalized creation (Gen. 1). Building a case- for or against- vegetarianism based on select passages in the Bible is problematic because of a profound cultural distance between biblical times and our own world.

While trying to push a vegetarian ideology into Scripture has made some chapters into a sort of interpretive gymnastics (ch. 5), pushing a carnivorous agenda into Scripture is equally absurd. The latter is addressed in chapters refuting claims to meat eating based on the Hebrew sacrificial system (ch. 3), the maritime Galilean community (ch. 6) and St. Paul's words regarding weak faith (ch. 8).

It would seem that in terms of diet, both carnivores and herbivores come out scratch when looking to the Bible for justifications of their eating habits. On both counts Christian ethics cannot rest on Scripture alone when Scripture does not specifically address the complexities of modern food choices. The difference in the use of animals for sustenance occasionally and by a small number of people, who slaughtered their own livestock in the Bible, is not equivalent to the mass-produced animal bodies for food consumed by nearly the entirety of the developed world today. Nonetheless, Christians have very good moral, rational reasons for opposing the slaughter and consumption of animals aside from Scripture. These arguments emerge in the brightest chapter in the book and are especially appealing to vegetarians who most often are advocating and defending their pacifist food choices against secular society, not fellow Jesus-followers.

The most impactful chapter comes late in the book and should be read first in the collection of essays since it contextualizes the urgent situation in which vegetarians- Christian and non- are writing from today. Chapter 11 focuses on animal suffering and factory farming, guiding the reader through the grisly trek that a pig makes from factory farm to dinner plate. Using Catholic social thought to make an argument against cooperation with wrongdoing, John Berkman writes with a prophetic conviction, calling a spade a spade. After enumerating the conditions of animals in factory farm he plainly states, "There's simply no moral justification for continuing to buy and consume cruelty pig meat. Doing so is ignorance, laziness, or gluttony, or perhaps all three" (p. 136). In addition to Berkman's chapter, an essay on ascetic vegetarian practices (ch. 14) round out a Bible-heavy book. Utilizing Scripture, reason and tradition to build a case for vegetarianism balanced the book while also allowing Christians from any denomination to identify with the overall objective of the collected essays. Yet the vegetarian who is already convinced of her position will be left with many questions.

Some topics that were missing in this edited volume included a serious interrogation of Christian vegetarians on points of the tension between "hospitality" (ch. 7) towards a carnivorous pet and the morally objectionable practice of purchasing pet food with meat in it; the line that each vegetarian draws between creatures we care for and those we kill (i.e. bugs or insects); the implications of a plant-based diet both for the environment, since rice is a major contributor to carbon emissions, and for the often unjust working conditions of other humans that harvest grain, vegetables and fruits to be exported to the developed world. Deep reflections are often beyond the questions Christian vegetarians field when defending their food choices and therefore this book cannot be culpable for what it did not set out to do, but vegetarians and vegans need to ask themselves further and more reflective questions. Moving beyond defense and towards offense would have been a boon to persuasive arguments for carnivores to become vegetarian and for the vegetarians reading the book- who are surely a majority of the audience- to re-evaluate their

commitment to animal care. These perhaps could be addressed in another volume and have certainly been picked up in the various publications of the authors as a collective.

Overall, the book accomplished its goals on several fronts. Its short chapters were easy to read and the bibliography helpful; it covered a breadth of troublesome biblical passages and balanced biblical ethics with reason and tradition; and it had an impressive diversity of established and new scholars and intellectuals from a variety of racial and denomination backgrounds. This book is a step towards the difficult and emotional discussion of animal treatment in the developed world. Especially where Christians are concerned, a faith that looks first to the God-ordained meaning of each creature, rather than an anthropocentric (or even biocentric) view of creation is essential. The pilgrim journey to Christ cannot be strewn with the dead bodies of sentient beings consumed and discarded for human convenience. Instead, a gradualist or virtue ethics approach allows each disciple to move closer to moral betterment. It is time for Christians to reflect: “if we have been made ‘in God’s image,’ may we not be expected to live by the law God gave us, rather than pursue the cannibalistic patterns loose in Nature?” (p. 147).

## ***Understanding Jacques Ellul***

by Jeffrey P. Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, & Noah J. Toly

Cascade Books, 2012. 184 pp. pb.

### **Reviewed by Jacob Van Vleet**

*Jacob Van Vleet is Professor of Philosophy at Diablo Valley College in northern California. He earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy and Religion from the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco with a dissertation on Jacques Ellul's dialectical thinking (forthcoming in 2014 from Fortress Press). His primary academic interests include Asian and Western comparative philosophy, particularly ethics and the philosophy of technology. He is the author of Informal Logical Fallacies: A Brief Guide, a critical thinking textbook used at various colleges and universities.*

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Three Wheaton College (Illinois) professors, have provided us with the latest contribution to Ellul scholarship, in their book, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*. This work is intended as an introduction to Ellul, written for those first encountering him. In a systematic and clear manner, Greenman, Schuchardt and Toly offer some of the most important themes weaving throughout Ellul's sociological and theological writings. The work is presented in eight chapters, each representing a key concept, theme, or cluster of ideas essential to understanding Ellul.

Chapter one gives a succinct overview of Ellul's life and thought, highlighting his conversion, political and ecclesiological involvement, and his academic career. There are two particular strengths of this chapter. First, the authors correctly present Ellul as one who was equally influenced by both Karl Marx and Karl Barth. This influence cannot be underestimated, and is absolutely vital when approaching Ellul. Second, the authors remind the reader that Ellul was and is considered an "outsider" to academic philosophers, sociologists, and theologians. His work, though scholarly and profoundly insightful, is unorthodox, idiosyncratic, and always challenges the status quo. For these reasons, the authors remind us, Ellul ever remains on the "margins" of institutional academia.

In the second and third chapters, Ellul's understanding of technique, media, and propaganda are introduced, along with their ethical and spiritual entailments. When explaining concepts such as these, it is necessary to provide updated examples and illustrations that clarify Ellul's arguments and worldview. The authors succeed brilliantly in this regard, showing us that Ellul's thought is more relevant now than ever.

Ellul's sociological and theological conclusions regarding the city, politics, and economics are presented in the fourth and fifth chapters. In their discussion of the city, the authors rely primarily on Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, while utilizing a "miracle and martyrdom rubric" as well as an insightful distinction between "faithfulness and success" as explanatory tools. By employing these tools, Greenman, Schuchardt and Toly provide much needed clarity and insight into Ellul's understanding of the city. The authors also explore Ellul's analyses of political and economic systems, explicating his views on capitalism, socialism, and the relationship between the political and economic spheres. The high point of

this section is found in the discussion of the relationship between money and necessity, a helpful but all too brief consideration.

In the sixth chapter, Ellul's view of scripture is examined. Here Ellul's idiosyncratic and unpredictable hermeneutical methodology is explained in the best of all possible ways: by using various examples from Ellul's own work. This gives the reader an illuminating glimpse into Ellul's understanding of the Word as *living* and *active*; as the spoken and existentially encountered Word, which continues to transgress traditional hermeneutical boundaries.

Ellul's views on morality and ethics are the subjects of the seventh chapter. The strength herein is the discussion of Ellul's distinction between "technological morality" and "Christian ethics." The first is a moral system bound to quantification, instrumental human value, and ultimately, necessity; the latter is guided by faith, intrinsic human worth, and is motivated by an absolute freedom in Christ. The authors explain: "Following Barth's lead, Ellul affirms that genuine freedom is always freedom for God and is always oriented toward service of God" (135).

*Understanding Jacques Ellul* concludes with a discussion of "exotic involvement" as an explanatory descriptor for Ellul's unique life and work. For the authors, "exotic involvement" is comprised, on the one hand, of Ellul's outsider approach and reception in academia and activism. On the other, it suggests an unconventional posture toward the world, including a radical openness to the voice of God, "...allowing God, and not the world, to set the agenda for reflection and action" (160).

Greenman, Schuchardt, and Toly have provided the reader with a highly useful and insightful presentation of key themes, concepts, and arguments found in Ellul's work. The primary criticism of this engaging book is that it is too brief, often merely scratching the surface. The authors don't interact much if at all with Ellul's many essays and articles and their discussions do not acknowledge or build on the widely available work of Ellul scholars such as David Gill (Ellul views on Scripture, ethics), Carl Mitcham (technology), Cliff Christians and Randal Marlin (communications, propaganda), Darrell Fasching (religion, ethics), Bill Vanderburg (technology), David Lovekin (philosophy, technology, methodology), Daniel Clendenin (methodology), Andrew Goddard (ethics), Patrick Chastenet (politics), et al. Furthermore, the authors do not discuss Ellul's views of universal salvation, non-violence and they only superficially discuss Ellul's concept of dialectic – ideas I believe are fundamental to Ellul's work.

Criticisms notwithstanding, the authors succeed in leaving the reader wanting more discussion and explanation of Ellul's ideas and theories. And this was precisely the authors' intention: to encourage the reader to excitedly delve deeper into Ellul's inspiring activism and prophetic scholarship. Undoubtedly, *Understanding Jacques Ellul* accomplishes this important task.