Presence in the Modern World

Jacques Ellul
translated by Lisa Richmond

foreword by Ted Lewis

afterword by David Gill

Presence in the Modern World is Jacques Ellul’s most foundational book, combining his social analysis with his theological orientation. Appearing first in French in 1948, it has reached the status of a classic that retains all of its relevance today in the face of the challenges that beset us. How should we respond toward such complex forces as technology or the state? How can we communicate with one another, despite the problems inherent in modern forms of media? Do we have hope for the future of our civilization? Ellul responds by describing how a Christian’s unique presence in the world can make a difference. Instead of acting “as sociological beings,” we must commit ourselves to the kind of revolution that will occur only when we become radically aware of our present situation and undertake “a ferocious and passionate destruction of myths, intellectual idols, unconscious rejections of reality, and outmoded and empty doctrines.” In this way, says Ellul, we become the medium for God’s action in the modern world.

This 2016 edition presents a fresh translation along with new footnotes, an introduction to Ellul’s life, and a complete bibliography of his books in English and French.

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a French law professor, social theorist, and lay theologian. In addition to Presence in the Modern World, his best-known works include The Technological Society, Propaganda, The Humiliation of the Word, and Hope in Time of Abandonment.

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