

# The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Issue 50

Fall 2012

Reflections on Jacques Ellul  
On the Centenary of his Birth

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## Legacy & Promise: Reflections on the Jacques Ellul Centennial



Jacques Ellul 1912 - 1994

*The Ellul Forum Turns 25  
& A New Era Begins*

# The Ellul Forum

For the Critique of Technological Civilization

Founded 1988

*The Ellul Forum* has been published twice per year, in the Spring and Fall, from 1988 - 2012. Its purpose is to analyze and apply Jacques Ellul's thought to our technological civilization and carry forward both his sociological and theological analyses in new directions.

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# From the Editor

Two thousand twelve (2012) is the centenary year of Ellul's birth (6 January 1912) and by chance also the 25<sup>th</sup> year of publication of *The Ellul Forum* (1988 – 2012).

Darrell Fasching, just now retired from the faculty of the University of South Florida, brought together a small team of writers and reviewers, including many of us still involved, and launched the publication in 1988 and pretty much single-handedly kept it going for the first 25 issues (12-1/2 years). I agreed to succeed Darrell in 2000 and have served as its Editor for issues #26 - #50. At the time of that editorial changeover, David Gill was organizing the International Jacques Ellul Society which (who!) became the publisher and enabled us to expand and improve our journal. The three of us have been a team for 25 years and want to express our deep gratitude to all of our contributing editors, writers, reviewers, subscribers, and donors.

To mark the centenary of Jacques Ellul and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Ellul Forum* we managed to persuade seventeen veteran Ellul scholars and writers to reflect on Ellul, his legacy, and their personal interaction with him and his ideas. The good thinkers represented here show us the stunning range and depth of Ellul's influence. Several have written doctoral dissertations on him, many teach courses on technology that are primarily Ellulian, and everyone attests to essays or books of Ellul as an intellectual turning point. Those involved in public service are inspired for a lifetime by Ellul's thinking and activities, and celebrate his teamwork with Charbonneau and other activists, on environmental protection, youth delinquency prevention, and educational reform.

Ellul's own faith commitment was transparent, but he is unusual in his appeal across the religious spectrum. The prophetic character of his ideas attracted the secular mind because they rang true and were grounded in prodigious scholarship. But the reminiscences that follow from religious thinkers carry a double appreciation, with their faith renewed and deepened by him while their mind was enriched. Ellul's biblical and theological repertoire are an extraordinary achievement for a historian and sociologist of institutions, and several writers call for this generation and the next to pay explicit attention to them.

Gabriel Vahanian of the University of Strasbourg passed away as this issue was being born. A personal remembrance by Darrell Fasching, on behalf of the IJES, begins on p. 20. Vahanian was a Contributing Editor to the *Forum*, a member of the IJES, and an active contributor to the Centenary Celebration of Jacques Ellul at Wheaton College in July. His friendship and debates with Ellul sharpened them both.

IJES President David Gill provides some perspective looking back and looking forward on p. 23.

*Clifford G. Christians, Editor*

# Ellul Challenges & Illuminates

*Mark Baker*

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I lived in Honduras in the early 1980's. During a visit to a refugee camp in August 1982 El Salvadorans told me stories of civilian massacres, suffering and destruction. I came face to face with the horror of war. At a gut level I became a pacifist, but in my head I had questions: how could I expect a nation to not, at times, use force? I thought it was necessary to affirm one side as better, but I felt both wrong. Previously I would have shown no interest in Ellul's book *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*. A few days out of the refugee camp the title grabbed my attention and I eagerly borrowed the book. My experience of war-torn El Salvador had converted my "guts;" Ellul's *Violence* converted my head and challenged my life.

A year later I participated in the Oregon Extension study program. Doug Frank gave a lecture, based on Ellul and Peter Berger, contrasting religion and faith. He described religion as a human construction, a nest of security, and faith as a condition of restlessness. It rang true, and shook me to the core. It also excited me with new possibilities. I left the lecture consumed by the question, what does this mean for ministry, for doing church?

I read Berger and devoured the Ellul book Frank referred to, *Living Faith*. Excited, challenged and grasping to understand I also read *Perspectives on Our Age* and *In Season, Out of Season*. I wrote a paper on the topic, but I had only begun to answer my question. Ellul and the contrast between enslaving religiosity and the liberating gospel of Jesus was a central element in my doctoral dissertation in theology at Duke University (1996). It was published in 1999 as *Religious No More: Building Communities of Grace and Freedom*. I continue to ponder the question, write and teach about it.

I first brought specific questions to Ellul, but as I read those few Ellul books in the fall of 1983 the tables turned. Ellul started asking me questions, and on a wide variety of things. A few years earlier I would have either not understood or dismissed his dialectical approach, but the complexity of life in impoverished and war-torn Central America left my linear thinking and neatly packaged answers in a shambles.

Ellul's dialectic not only helped me make sense of the world, it also helped me live in the midst of these complexities. I began reading any Ellul book I could get my hands on. My interest in Ellul led me and my wife to become students at New College Berkeley in 1987. It was a rich time of reading and discussing Ellul with Prof. David Gill and other students, and taking road trips to southern California to discuss Ellul with Vernard Eller.

Some Ellul books were long and dense. Yet I continued reading Ellul because at some point in every book, and often more than once, he would grab me and shake me up in a way that demanded reorientation, a different way of living or led me to experience God's grace afresh in a deeper way. Ellul has stimulated me intellectually, but what I value most is the way his writing has interacted with my daily life.

Ellul was part of the discussion as I reflected on how to do evangelism through a campus ministry at Syracuse University or begin an alcoholic rehab program in Honduras. Ellul influenced how I did fund raising as a missionary, and continues to influence how I use and relate to money. I could list many more. Perhaps most significant today is in relation to the theme of technique and efficiency. Introducing students to Ellul's work on this theme leads me, with the students, to evaluate the pervasive role of technique in our lives, and not just to evaluate, but take steps of resistance.

Although the context has changed and many of the examples in Ellul's books are dated, the themes that grabbed me are still pertinent today: violence, religiosity, an ethics of freedom, Mammon, the political illusion, and technique. Ellul continues to illuminate and challenge.

# Encountering Ellul

*Stephanie Bennett*

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The first time the name Jacques Ellul came into my view was as a small footnote in one of Neil Postman's books while working on my master's thesis at Monmouth University. Postman's mention was so compelling that it pushed me to dig deeper into Ellul's corpus. As I did, I realized that his critique of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century mass-mediated culture confirmed my own concerns about the way digital media were beginning to shape the communication landscape of the new century.

The following year I attended an NCA convention and heard a presentation about Ellul's work. The speaker was Clifford Christians; I was hooked. Dr. Christians graciously directed my attention to the Ellulian texts that might best advance my thinking. For the next two years I carried a paperback copy of *The Technological Society* in my oversized purse, reading and re-reading it several times. Concurrently, I imbibed *The Humiliation of the Word* and *The Subversion of Christianity*, both of which helped me see a parallel between the forces that drive the church and other societal institutions.

When I came upon *The Presence of the Kingdom*, it was the clincher. Never before had I read a treatment of the place of the church in society that comported so well with Biblical accounts of its first century roots. Ellul presented an alternative approach, one that attended to the ways that communication culture helps shape the perception and practice of one's faith and values.

For students newly embarking on Ellulian study, one of the most significant areas of encounter with him is likely to involve his ideas about the unforeseen consequences associated with technology. When viewed through the prism of history the many unforeseen consequences linked to technological advance typically do not become evident until after a major shift in societal norms has already taken place. By then, it is usually too late to reel back the line and

make necessary adjustments for the good of humanity.

Ellul teaches that media include a built-in bias, independent of content. Over time, these media of communication engender as much (or more) influence on the way society is structured than what they make possible by way of convenience, comfort, or other immediate benefits. That is, the technological changes do much more than add something new to our lives; they become part of the ecological framework of society. Ellul deftly points this out through historical and critical analysis, providing fodder for reflection and hope for those seeking to preserve those cultural goods that are worth preserving – community, family, dialogue, and so forth..

Delving more deeply into Ellul during my dissertation, I applied his ideas concerning technique to the emergence and proliferation of mobile media. Instead of enriching the art of conversation, the continuous tethering of one person to another through a digital devices works to shape the way conversation, hence, relationship is perceived and valued.

One example of this is that mere talk is no longer a precursor to deep conversation, but has in many ways become a substitute for it through social media and texting. Another example is the current thinking about online education. Whereas distance education has been with us for centuries in different forms, the rhetoric surrounding online education today promotes it as a necessity. In fact, if educators are not thinking about online education or practicing it, they are considered anachronistic and out of touch.

Part of Ellul's richness is that he offers no easy answers but pose important questions – questions that few are asking. My hope is that today's generation will discover Ellul anew and apply his thinking to the quandaries and challenges faced by living in a world where unprecedented speed and acquiescence of technological progress easily usurp human values and ethics. My dream is to one day teach a course on the history and philosophy of Jacques Ellul, helping students investigate more thoroughly the ramifications and ethics of dialogue. My joy is to live at such a time as this, when there yet remains an opportunity to preserve some of the precious human behaviors and values that have long made civilization possible.

# Reading & Re-reading Ellul

*Arthur Boers*

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As a nerdy young man, I never paid attention to the cover of *Rolling Stone*. But *Sojourners*? Ah, that was another matter; my early theological education mostly came from that periodical. When it featured unfamiliar Jacques Ellul in 1977, I took notice. I went to the university bookstore, bought a copy of *The Presence of the Kingdom* for \$2.50, and was electrified by it. (I am unsure how many times I've read it since then – now battered, highlighted, marked up throughout). In following years, other authors that influenced me – Will Campbell, William Stringfellow – also noted their indebtedness to Ellul.

I have read and re-read Ellul all my adult life – as a social activist, pastor in inner-city and rural settings, seminary professor. He is always significant, whatever my context or situation. Three themes in particular are never far from my mind and ministry.

First, Ellul demonstrated that Paul's notion of powers and principalities is not abstract and spooky. The demonic is related to so-called mundane realities, including money, *technic*, government, the city, and so forth. Ellul helps us understand the intransigence and intractability of many issues and problems. It prevents us from putting too much faith in technological solutions or indeed any solutions at all. Even electing people of character and virtue offers little hope of substantial change.

These implications tempered anger and frustration when I worked as an activist and ministered as a pastor, witnessing few results and the elusiveness of progress. Or saw good initiatives that went awry. Or marveled at how tightly people cling to priorities that caused great pain or damage. Or wondered why "Christian" institutions employ unchristian means and serve unchristian ends. Or seen that every organization ultimately serves its own survival and promulgation, no matter the cost to others. The

powers are always active in the world and we can only resist what we know how to name. But they are always beyond our reach or control. Thus prayer and worship are crucial to the Christian life because ultimately, as Paul says, we struggle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Second, Ellul convinced me that *technic* is our age's prevailing principality. As the decades have passed the conviction grows deeper, reinforced by what I saw around me as a pastor and professor. My latest book, *Living into Focus: Choosing What Matters in an Age of Distractions* (Brazos, 2012), makes an Ellul-influenced move: I want to help people explore the obvious ways that our interaction with technology harms us. Something's not working. "Labor saving" devices make us busier. The faster computers go, the more time we give to them. As highways and cars improve, we drive farther and vehicles become increasingly expensive. Email speeds communications but eats up greater amounts of time.

Even as we learn about environmental issues, our destructive ecological impact mounts. With the ongoing invention of "essential" devices (even energy efficient ones), our homes consume growing quantities of power. When I teach along these lines, many people automatically react and say that I must be "against technology" and thus suspiciously "Amish" or a "Luddite." People are baffled by questions about such givens as the effects of TV, cars, or smart phones. It is hard to conceive of doing things differently. *Technic* is our principality, idol, sacred cow.

Third, Ellul argued that reading reality is eminently hopeful not pessimistic. Knowing and naming truth frees us to act. He bolsters our courage to speak truth – even to and about the powers. Here I am also somewhat ambivalent about him. His writing was often too dense, complex, and, at first glance dark, to share with others, even graduate students. As a pastor, I found congregants incapable of taking in his devastating critiques and analyses. Ellul informs my thinking, but I often keep him in the background.

I doubt he would mind. He did not set out to start a movement or have his ideas institutionalized. Still, it was good to meet him on that magazine cover all these decades ago.

# My Encounters with Jacques Ellul

*Daniel Cérézuelle*

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Becoming an “Ellulian” happened to me more by fate than by choice. It is the consequence of a family story. My father Henri Cérézuelle had befriended Ellul since 1936 and had participated in most of the camps which Ellul and Charbonneau organized from the late thirties to the sixties.

During the Second World War my aunt Edith Cérézuelle had participated with Ellul in a resistance network which helped save the lives of many Jews. Ellul was one of the rare men whose authority my mother would not challenge. And I remember very clearly, I was then fourteen or fifteen, when Jacques Ellul, his wife Yvette and their daughter Dominique came for lunch to our home one Sunday. He explained to my mother which part of a leg of mutton should be cut lengthwise or sidewise, and how to do it properly. I was very impressed.

Later, during the summer 1966, I was then 17 years old, I read *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (ET: *The Technological Society*) which was on my parents' bookshelves, since Ellul used to send them an author's copy of most of his books. Reading this book was a turning point in my intellectual life. It helped me put into words my uneasiness with many aspects of the world I was discovering. During those years I would often ride my bike to Pessac in order to attend the informal “cinéclub” which Ellul ran for the youngsters of his parish. His skills for interpreting a movie were so overwhelming that often further discussion with him seemed pointless.

By that time I had decided to study philosophy at Bordeaux University, and I would often visit Ellul's home, and very often I would return home with books which he let me borrow from his library. In 1970 I did my master's dissertation on the philosophy of technology, and I followed at the Institute of Political Sciences Ellul's courses on technology in contemporary society and on the history of political ideas. We had many discussions and he introduced me to the works of the French philosopher Jean Brun, whom he appreciated very much.

Then I decided that the issue of modern technology was too neglected by young French philosophers and that I should do my PhD dissertation on this topic. Jean Brun, who was teaching at Dijon University, agreed to be my advisor. Since this issue was not considered as legitimate in French departments of philosophy it was difficult to get the necessary financial support, and I was advised to do my research in the United States. Ellul suggested that I should get in touch with a young American philosopher, Carl Mitcham. Carl gave me valuable advice and we became friends. In 1972 I obtained a Fulbright grant which allowed me to spend two years in New York to study at the New School for Social research under Hans Jonas. When I returned from the States, Ellul hired me as his teaching assistant, and he was on the jury when I defended my PhD dissertation at Dijon University.

In 1973, Charbonneau and Ellul had created the Comité de Défense de la Cote Aquitaine for opposing at the local level the French State's policy of large scale touristic development. Charbonneau was the first president and my father was the secretary of this Comité which met for several years in our house, rue Saint Joseph, where I live today. A few years later Ellul became president and I took over the role of secretary. At that time, the regional “establishment” was in favor of the policy carried by the French administration, and opposing it required courage and determination. I could see that Ellul and Charbonneau had plenty of both and took very seriously action at the grass roots level. A few years later, Charbonneau and Ellul launched the Groupe du Chêne, an unsuccessful attempt at creating a think tank for the French ecological movement. Again, I served for several years as secretary of this group and had many occasions to collaborate with Ellul and Charbonneau.

Since the eighties, I have tried to develop Ellul's legacy in two directions. In the field of social studies, Ellul had been very much concerned with the problem of deviant youth in the new urban environment. I have spend a lot of time studying how new forms of poverty and cultural disorganization result from the technologization of life. (See Daniel Cérézuelle, *Pour un autre développement social* (Paris : Editions Desclée, 1996) and Daniel Cérézuelle & Guy Roustang, *L'autoproduction accompagnée, un levier de changement* (Toulouse: Edition Eres, 2010)).

In the philosophy of technology I have especially focused my research on the subjective dimensions of the autonomisation of technique and the study of the “technological spirit” which underlies technological acceleration (See Daniel Cérézuelle, *La technique et la chair, essais de philosophie de l technique* (Lyon : Editions Parangon , 2011)).

# Ellul from 1973 to the Future

*Patrick Troude-Chastenet*

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Like many things in life, my meeting with Jacques Ellul owes much to chance. Living in La Rochelle, I wanted to be a journalist and I had been advised to first study political science in Bordeaux. That was in 1973, and at the time, I figured I would only remain in that city for three years. I knew nothing of the author of *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, published in France in 1954, when I first saw, making their appearance in the hallways of the Institut d'études politiques, the American students who had come all this way just to be able to hear him. This made me think that, if his fame had reached the universities of California and Colorado, surely this professor must have had something special going for him, which the others lacked.

I had to wait until the following year to attend his courses, and from the first one, "The Philosophy and Thought of Karl Marx", I was not disappointed. At the same time, I had registered at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and I had discovered the first volumes of his monumental *Histoire des institutions*. Shortly after getting my degree, the director of the IEP asked me to do the orals for the students who followed Ellul's courses and to also be his tutor (*répétiteur*) for the American students. Which I did for several years, and did the same for another three courses of his: "Propaganda", "Technological Society", "Successors of Marx".

I believe I read *Trahison de l'Occident* in 1976 and the reissue of *L'Illusion politique* in 1977. But it was only after I completed my doctorate in 1981 that I started systematically reading his work, writing reviews of it and doing interviews with Ellul, some of which would be published in the national press before they were gathered in a book that came out a few months after his death. I had the good fortune of living less than 10 kilometers from him and he was happy to receive me. He had written me a very flattering letter after the publication of a long interview that had made the first page of the Sunday supplement of *Le Monde*: "Jacques Ellul : avec Dieu sans maître" (13/9/1981), for which he gave me all the credit, explaining that the quality of the answers was due to the judiciousness of the questions. According to his wife, he wrote me, it was his best interview.

It was at that time that I made Ellul's thought my new research topic. I had devoted my thesis to a neo-Poujadist movement whose discourse would be called populist today, being reminiscent of that of the Tea Party. Ellul then became,

for better or for worse, an essential part of my life. For better, inasmuch as I could use him as a reference in my teaching and he provided me with a fantastic interpretive framework that allows me to this day to make sense of the contemporary world. For worse, since he—inadvertently—harmed my academic career, given the fact that French political scientists can be divided into two categories: the first one, more numerous, does not even know he exists, or is pretending not to, while the second has a very bad opinion of him as a person or of his work, when not of both.

He has no doubt also contributed to a pessimism that did not come naturally to me and that is more a function of what I would call frustrated optimism. These two aspects can be found in my action within associations. My old friend Sylvain Dujancourt and I wanted to launch a review of Ellul studies. David Gill came to Bordeaux and he was able to convince us to begin by organizing together twin associations: IJES and AIJE. Our collaboration since 2000 has been most fruitful and we have both fulfilled our mission of spreading Ellul's thought among our respective publics. As for the *Cahiers Jacques-Ellul*, they were born in 2003 and are still available in bookstores. Since 2007, the University of Bordeaux has allowed me to devote an entire course to Ellul's thought, to organize a big international conference in June 2012, and to go abroad for courses or conferences about Ellul.

I hope that, in an era characterized by the sacralization of technique and fascination for the latest technological gadgets, there will always be a fringe of people who resist this potentially totalitarian hold. Ellul has underscored the basic ambivalence of technique. His discourse cannot be reduced to that of Luddites. Young generations should therefore avoid the two dead ends of technophilia and technophobia.

Secondly, while he did denounce *the political illusion*, he did not call on us to desert the public square, but to think globally in order to act locally. Although he is not the author of this formula, he has embodied it all his life and I am glad to see it being taken up here and there in today's world. With the exception of future apparatchiks, young people no longer expect much from traditional parties. Ellul's thought is making its way among the alterglobalist, ecological, degrowth movements and is unfortunately even recuperated by the *Nouvelle Droite*. If I still have a soft spot for *Anarchie et christianisme*, it seems to me that current generations have more to fear from "liberal" globalization, from the uncontrolled power of banks and agencies, of multinational corporations, than from the State that was his main target.  
*(Translated by Christian Roy)*

*Translator's note* : The *Nouvelle Droit* is not to be confused with the populist, xenophobic National Front party non-French readers may be more familiar with, the *Nouvelle Droite* Patrick Chastenet has in mind is an intellectual movement centered on Alain de Benoist's GRECE that arose in the 1970s, and whose eclectic antiliberal critique of Western modernity gravitates around a rejection of Judaeo-Christian heritage and a celebration of every culture's pagan roots. This French New Right, emulated throughout Europe, has also been in close dialogue with the American New Left review *Telos*.

# Jacques Ellul on the Campus

## *Clifford Christians*

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During my doctoral study at the University of Illinois, one of my professors in Communications introduced me to Jacques Ellul. He assigned *Propaganda* and it captured my attention immediately. At that point in the Ph.D. program, Ellul was the only Christian scholar to be assigned—the only one considered intellectually strong enough to be indispensable to the curriculum. From those days until now, I have not been a literary critic of Ellul's work exclusively. Here was a Christian academic with a worldwide reputation who had not cheapened his faith commitment. His career as a professor at a secular university has served for me as a model of Christian scholarship to emulate.

Of the Old Testament prophets, Amos fascinated me particularly, called away as he was from farming to preach against the wealth and indifference of Israel. However, it has never been obvious in my mind how these examples can be translated into the modern university setting. Ellul opened the prophetic door for me through his own Amos-like ministry to contemporary culture. Given my interests in media technology, I had longed to see the Christian mind dominate the discussion about technology today in the same manner Karl Marx dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> century agenda over industrialism.

From *Propaganda* to *The Technological Society*, and then *Humiliation of the Word* and *The Technological Bluff* Ellul unfolded for me a prophetic statement on communication technology that could dominate my field's agenda. In the face of novel and dangerous circumstances of unprecedented magnitude, Ellul's prophetic witness encouraged me to believe that we need not stand by immobilized. He stretches us beyond religious homilies to a bold vision co-extensive with technology's abundant power.

For those of us in an academic world, Ellul makes it clear that the important battles are fought over

content. Certainly a life of integrity is critical. Keeping one's promises, honesty with the data, respect for students, and other such virtues are necessary givens for a Christian teacher and researcher. Certainly active involvement in social causes, and freedom from the demons of careerism are *sine qua non*. Christian institutions warrant support also, as Ellul showed with his support of Reformed seminaries in France; time devoted to them sometimes indicates that the university does not own my soul. But Ellul made it clear to me that all these are insufficient.

The issue in the secular arena is whether a biblical foundation makes any difference in the way we think or shape our disciplines. If, in other words, scholars of faith and the non-religious end up with the same conclusions on crucial issues, and if economic and political beliefs seem finally to carry the greatest weight, then, Ellul showed me, Christianity is unnecessary baggage. He proved to me that on issues that matter, Christianity is a paradigm that warrants allegiance in higher education.

Ellul brought the revolutionary idea up from a footnote for me, developing as he did an approach that is radical enough to make major transformations in the status quo. Ellul made the urgency of revolt and resistance compelling, not just a final chapter or an afterthought after all the other intellectual work has been accounted for. He is too uncritically Barthian at this point for my own taste, presuming Barth's dualism between *Historie* and *Geschichte* and its dialectic between secular and sacred histories. On this view, the latter culminates in an eschatological climax at the final judgment. And given this construct, the apocalyptic end-time moment anchors both freedom and revelation for Ellul.

However, despite the limitations of this formulation, Ellul challenged me with an analysis that confronts our technological era without a hint of compromise, while simultaneously protecting the clear otherness of the solution. His achievement was to eradicate all middle-level compromises within the historical process. He eschewed clinical appeals to reason, demonstrating for me a relentless yearning for justice and meaning that has marked prophetic agents over the centuries. Ellul continues to show the world of scholarship that our thinking about the technological era can be freed from its anti-normative direction.



# From Jacques Ellul to Global Ethics

*Darrell J. Fasching*

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A little over a decade after publishing a version of my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul under the title *The Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Mellen Press, 1981), I published my two-volume work on ethics and public policy after Auschwitz and Hiroshima: *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Fortress Press, 1992), and *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (SUNY, 1993). Then, in 2001, I published the first edition of *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics* (2nd edition, 2011). These texts form the core of my life's work and grow directly out of my work on Ellul, and my attempt to resolve the dispute between Jacques Ellul and Gabriel Vahanian on the significance of the rhetoric of "apocalypse" and "utopia" in a technological civilization.

*The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* was my most ambitious work. The first chapter analyzes the dialectics of the Janus-faced myth of apocalypse and utopia in a technological civilization, in which the very promise of utopia seems to lead to Auschwitz, Hiroshima and nuclear "MADness" (Mutually Assured Destruction). All three volumes have a common core -- the analysis and critique of the role of religion (East and West) in encouraging unquestioning obedience to higher authority, and how this role fed into the techno-bureaucratic moralities that led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

This unquestioning obedience is interpreted through Ellul's understanding of the sacred and is contrasted with his characterization of the experience of the holy as requiring the questioning of the sacred. Ellul enables us to understand how "religion" can function both to promote demonic

ruptures like Auschwitz and Hiroshima, as well as undermine such trajectories toward the demonic by having the *audacity* to call into question the sacred patterns of techno-bureaucratic rationality.

The basis of an ethics of audacity is the experience of the holy (that which can neither be named or imaged) as it can be found in a number of religious traditions around the globe. An ethical coalition for a global ethic can form (and has formed) among those traditions that emphasize hospitality to the stranger. Important biblical traditions of the encounter with the Holy One insist that when we welcome the stranger we welcome God or God's messiah.

To do so is to recognize the humanity of the one who is not "like us" in race, culture or religion. "Human dignity" is a modern name for the experience of the holy, expressed through the mystical language of the *via negativa*. We cannot say what dignity is any more than we can define the holy. We can only say what it is not. We say that our dignity is what we have in common despite all our differences. Dignity does not reside in our gender, or race or social status, or economic status, etc.

These things do not define our humanity. Rather, what we all have in common is our "undefinability." All violations of human dignity begin by defining the other and confining them to that definition (as part of the sacred order of society). That is the basis of all sexism, racism, religious prejudice, etc. But what we all have in common is being created in the image of a God without image, or as Buddhists would say -- all selves are empty.

For me, my life's work was set when Gabriel Vahanian convinced me to write my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul instead of Lewis Mumford. Ellul's book, *The New Demons*, is for me the single most important book he wrote, for it opened up a functionalist model for recognizing the work of the holy across religions and cultures, in the lives of figures like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their work represents the audacity and hospitality that Ellul associates with the work of the holy -- its power to desacralize the sacred orders of societies and their various ethics of obedience in order to protect human dignity.

# Ellul as a Model of Christian Scholarship

*Geri Forsberg*

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I was introduced to the work of Jacques Ellul as a doctoral student in the media ecology program at New York University in the late 1980s. As a student, studying under Neil Postman, I was asked to read *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*. I found Ellul's thinking to be profoundly deep and complex. I admired his ability to analyze the affects of the technological milieu and I was curious about this author. After some hunting, I came across his book, *Perspectives on our Age: Jacques Ellul Speaks on His Life and Work*. As I read it, I excitedly discovered that Ellul was a believer in Jesus. As a Christian student, knowing that Ellul was a scholar who believed encouraged me all the more to consider how faith relates to media studies.

Ellul's work provided a foundational perspective for my doctoral dissertation—*Critical Thinking in an Image World*. His book, *The Humiliation of the Word*, gave me insight into the significance and qualities of critical thinking. Ellul believed that critical thinking in our technological culture was immensely important, though taking a critical stance in our image-dominated culture is very difficult.

According to Ellul, the world of images: advertising, photographs, video, television, film, move us toward an emotional stage of thinking. Reasoning, logic, analysis, critique, requires words. But, words, Ellul explained, are taking a back seat role to images. In his analysis, there are two irreconcilable modes of thinking—word-based thought and image-based thought. Ellul makes a plea for us to uphold language which enables abstract critical thought and reasoning. He believed that only language could help us communicate the Word—Jesus Christ.

Communicating the Word was very important to Ellul. As a protestant lay theologian, as well as a sociologist, Ellul wanted more than anything else to

honor Jesus Christ with his life and scholarship. I believe today's generation of Christian students and professors are looking for help in understanding how to critique, research, write, and live from a faith perspective. Christian professors are asking such questions as: How does faith relate to scholarship? How can one synthesize, or integrate, Biblical perspectives with academic studies? How can one critique prevailing theories from a Biblical worldview? How can we communicate the Word in our, sometimes hostile, academic environments?

Ellul, I believe, provides us with an outstanding role model. His cultural critiques have influenced the thinking of intellectuals around the world. However, many scholars who are aware of his sociological analyses are totally unfamiliar with his Biblical works. Unfortunately, many Christian professors and students are completely unaware of Ellul and his writings.

It is my hope that we can make Ellul's writings known to 21<sup>st</sup> century professors and students. Currently, I am working on an article to introduce Ellul to English education. I would also like to introduce him to Christian professors and students. I would encourage Christians who have never read Ellul to start with *The Presence of the Kingdom*. This book is a wonderful introduction to Ellul. It is here he discusses the role of the Christian in the world; the need for revolutionary Christianity; the main problems associated with our technological society; and, the need for a distinctly Christian way of life.

I would also suggest that Christian professors and students read Ellul's *Perspectives on our Age*. In this book, Ellul shares how he came to know Jesus. He shows that if we are going to be "salt and light" in contemporary culture, we must understand the times in which we live. He believed that our hope is ultimately in Jesus. Jesus allows us to critique our technological system from a unique vantage point outside the system. This, in turn, allows us freedom from enslavement to our technological environment.

Finally, I would recommend his book, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*. Some scholars discount Ellul because they think he is a technological determinist who pessimistically believes technology governs everything. Ellul, however, is most optimistic. He ultimately believes there is freedom, hope, and purpose for our lives in the midst of a technological society.

# The Best Kind of Mentor

*David W. Gill*

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I have often referred to Jacques Ellul as “my mentor” -- which can be defined as “a wise and trusted, usually senior, teacher, counselor, supporter, and guide.” Certainly he was, and in many ways still is, the person who has most fully played those roles in my career for the past forty-plus years. My father and three or four others were also wonderful mentors but in terms of my thought and action, the trajectory of my life and work, Ellul has first place.

As a Berkeley undergraduate in the late Sixties I had heard of Jacques Ellul but it was in Fall 1971 that the journey really began when I reviewed *Meaning of the City* for a small Berkeley radical Christian tabloid. The next summer I published a piece on politics that drew deeply on *Political Illusion, Politics of God, Politics of Man, Presence of the Kingdom, and False Presence of the Kingdom*. I was totally hooked and rapidly acquired and devoured everything I could find by Ellul.

In fall 1972 I decided on a whim to send my reviews and essays to “Prof. Jacques Ellul, University of Bordeaux, France.” Two months later I was shocked to get a hand-written, encouraging letter from Ellul himself. From 1972 to 1982 I exchanged numerous letters with him, read everything I could find, learned to read French, and wrote a PhD dissertation on *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* at the University of Southern California. What fascinated me was his dialectic of sociological criticism and theological-ethical reflection. Life between the two has been my passion and calling ever since.

In summer 1982 I made my first visit to Bordeaux and published my interviews with him. He welcomed me back for a whole sabbatical year in 1984 – 85

when I finally got my French to a serviceable level and met with him at his home for a couple hours at least twice a month. I returned for periods of two to four weeks during several subsequent summers. On the day he died, May 19, 1994, I truly felt the ache of losing a father in my life.

There is almost nothing I have taught or written over the past forty years that is not influenced by Ellul. My biblical studies, such as *Peter the Rock: Extraordinary Insights from an Ordinary Man* (1986; Ellul read my manuscript and gave me encouraging feedback in 1985 while I was meeting with him), are in my view “Ellul-style” commentaries. His ethical works such as *To Will and To Do* and *The Ethics of Freedom* have, of course, been huge influences. My *Becoming Good: Building Moral Character* (2000) interacts a good deal with Ellul on faith and hope.

The reality is that I disagree(d) regularly with Ellul -- for example, concerning work and vocation, Satan and the Devil, ethics and morality, and kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven. But this is where he stands out as a mentor: he welcomed disagreement so long as it was thoughtful. He loved stimulating his students to renewed thinking, to pushing farther down the line. He often said that he didn’t want (mindless) acolytes and followers. He welcomed difference and healthy intellectual combat. He was the most learned, brilliant person I have ever known, always with layers of knowledge deeper than I had visited --- but he humbly, gently, joyfully welcomed disagreement and argument.

There is not one book that Ellul wrote that didn’t challenge me and push me to think better and research more deeply the matter at hand. To me, that is one of his greatest legacies. This is why I can’t identify just one book or idea to preserve and pass on: we need it all.

And, secondly, I love the diversity we have in our community of Ellul scholars. It is a tribute to Ellul himself that we consist of atheists alongside believers, anarchists alongside socialists, all ages, races, both genders, all nations, academics, craftsmen, artists, and laborers. At our recent colloquia in both Bordeaux and Wheaton both the radical diversity and the mutual respect and even love were palpable. Like Ellul we want to be fearlessly committed to the search for truth and reality, for hope and freedom in a world closing in on itself. And we want to respect and enjoy each other along the journey.

# Ellul in Text & Textbook

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During seminary one of my professors suggested that some of us taking a course on “Christ and Culture” might be interested in reading Jacques Ellul’s *The Presence of the Kingdom*. I am not sure if many of my classmates took his advice, but I am grateful that I did. I had never even heard of Ellul before. That book became a deeply formative influence which continues to inform my work as a theologian and Christian ethicist. I consider it a minor classic of 20<sup>th</sup> century theology, eminently worthy of being read and re-read. The opening chapter, “The Christian in the World” captivated me then and still inspires me today. In particular, I have been shaped by Ellul’s central conviction in that chapter that Christians have a distinctive mission which expresses their divinely appointed “function” as God’s representatives, which inevitably involves “living in tension” with the world. His description of an “agonistic” way of life struck a nerve as a fresh and powerful description of the biblical call to discipleship.

He articulated how and why mission is at the heart of the Christian life, an insight that has become a fundamental conviction for me. *The Presence of the Kingdom* set me on a lifelong engagement with the question of the role of lay people in the church and in society, a core question of ecclesiology. Ellul’s ability to express a theological vision for the centrality of the laity in God’s purposes has strongly influenced my teaching and writing as an educator. It was from Ellul that I first understood that the Church is the whole people of God, sent by the Holy Spirit into the world on behalf of Christ and his Kingdom. Later readings in Hendrik Kraemer, Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch and Karl Barth confirmed and deepened the insights that I had first discovered in Ellul.

During my doctoral studies I encountered more of Ellul’s writings, especially his theological and ethical works, most notably *The Ethics of Freedom*, which I consider one of the most significant Protestant texts ever written on the subject. Next I worked through his

books of biblical interpretation, and then studied his sociological works. This is pretty certainly not the sequence of most Ellul readers, especially most non-Christian readers. But encountering Ellul via his theology prevented me from ever thinking that Ellul was just some sort of a grumpy, pessimistic philosopher of technology. No, I always knew that he was a deeply Christian and seriously biblical thinker, working out the implications of his fundamental confidence that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, the Lord and Savior of the world.

I never had considered teaching a course on Ellul until a delightful conversation in a pub on Martha’s Vineyard on a relaxed summer evening. There with my colleague at Wheaton College, Noah Toly, we discovered our common interest in, and great (though qualified) appreciation for, Ellul’s thought. We joined up with another colleague, Read Schuchardt, to offer a multi-disciplinary, team-taught course on Ellul, which we described in *The Ellul Form* (issue 45). While teaching that course, we realized that there was no suitable textbook to introduce Ellul’s thought, and so we decided to write it, not realizing just how tricky it could be to present his ideas fairly and concisely to those with no previous exposure to his thought. Our book, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, appears in 2012, published by Cascade Books. It serves as a companion to that publisher’s valuable reprints of Ellul’s works, and their new translations of his works. We hope that our book serves to make Ellul accessible and appealing to a new readership and helps Ellul to be represented well in college and seminary classrooms.

One area where the next generation of students, pastors and scholars would benefit is by taking seriously Ellul’s work as a biblical interpreter. This dimension of his thought has been almost totally neglected. In my view, by far his best biblical work is *Reason for Being*, his “meditation” on Ecclesiastes, which was the book of Scripture that most deeply shaped his entire outlook. I would venture to say that no one can understand Ellul’s corpus without reading Ecclesiastes, and without reading what Ellul says about Ecclesiastes.

After discovering this work, I thought, “Ah! Now I see why he thinks the way he does. I wish I’d read this earlier.” Ellul’s voice should be welcomed into the conversation about recovering what is being called the “theological interpretation” of Scripture. His critique of the rationalism and reductionism of much contemporary biblical scholarship is incisive if sometimes overstated, but his positive vision of a humble, Christocentric reading of the entire Bible as one cohesive book is an approach that can only help equip to the church for its “agonistic” life as God’s people in the world.

# Jacques Ellul Today

*Joyce Hanks*

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Having read several books by Jacques Ellul, sometime in the 1960's or 1970's, I began to collect whatever I could find that he had written, including his published articles. His ideas seemed terribly important to me, as indeed they still do. At the time, I was teaching French in Costa Rica, and working on a dissertation in sixteenth-century French poetry. Eventually, I decided to spend all the time I could spare working on Ellul bibliography and translation. The relevance of his thought for contemporary society and for Christian thinking made my other academic work seem insignificant.

Ellul graciously accepted my proposal for a series of in-person interviews to take place during the 1981-82 academic year, at his home outside Bordeaux. He had recently retired, and spent most of his time writing. He welcomed me regularly, answering my bibliographical and theological questions with considerable patience, and enabling me to track down many of his articles published in poorly-circulated journals. His kindness extended to inviting my family to dinner at his house, frequent tea breaks with him and his wife, and the suggestion that I attend the Bible study sessions he led in the church he had established, next door to his house.

Although he clearly found it tedious to do so, Ellul continued to respond faithfully to my bibliographical inquiries after my return to Costa Rica. His filling in the blanks enabled me to publish in 1984 the first of several Ellul bibliographies. Once I began translating his books, he also answered my letters requesting clarification of his meaning here and there. Usually I traveled to France annually for the purpose of questioning him at length about translation and bibliography issues. After his death, I sorely missed this regular contact with him, including the opportunity to hear him interpret his writings and share new areas of his thinking.

Encountering Ellul has forced me to think more broadly than I naturally do, considering far-reaching consequences. His views on matters like money and my generation's headlong rush into technology have challenged my personal practice at many points, and have factored into my decisions. His personal concern for students and colleagues offered me a model that I have attempted to emulate. Almost daily, I note an idea or a comment in my reading that connects with Ellul's thinking in some way, often responding directly to his published thought. I feel truly privileged to have had meaningful contact over the years with such a seminal thinker.

As we go forward, I trust that we will apply and adapt Ellul's thought rigorously and sharply, without watering down his principles in order to gain ready acceptance. Ellul did not seek so much to find agreement as to stimulate thinking and consequent bold action. We emulate him best when we think beyond our narrow field of specialization and far from our comfort zone. Like him, we can risk exposing our thoughts to those who think differently from us, and then do our best to understand them and to build something new together.

In our era of increasing specialization and polarization, I believe Ellul's views on violence have special relevance. He wrote that we have unusual opportunities to learn from those who differ widely from us as we have contact with them, especially in the church. In that atmosphere, Ellul believed that we can listen carefully to each other, because what unites us matters so much more than what would divide us. Ideally, he could imagine ecclesiastical contexts—and presumably other contexts—where wildly differing points of view had their proponents not just rubbing shoulders, but talking with each other about their differences, working together in spite of important disagreements.

Ellul believed that, particularly in the church, we have the opportunity to consider difficult situations with utter realism, refusing to kid ourselves or tone down any disaster our world may seem headed for. Then, realizing that we do not know everything and cannot accurately predict the future, he encourages us to abandon despair and forge ahead in hope. We honor Ellul best when we do this with courage.

# My First Encounter with Ellul

*David Lovekin*

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I came to Ellul (or perhaps he came to me) in the late sixties, when all was in revolutionary bloom. I had majored in Philosophy and Literature at Northern Illinois University as an undergraduate. My early training in philosophy was in the grim and humorless wrangling of analytic philosophy, with a few lighthearted moments allowed for “puzzling.” I was lured from this miasma by the study of Whitehead, Bergson, Ernst Cassirer, and Hegel. My master’s thesis, also at NIU, was entitled: “Ernst Cassirer’s Concept of Man,” directed by Donald Phillip Verene. I specifically recall one afternoon when Verene asked me if I had read Jacques Ellul’s *The Technological Society*. I hadn’t, and he suggested I should. I did, and my intellectual life changed.

John Wilkinson’s introduction likened Ellul’s study to Plato’s *Republic* and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*. I proceeded to read *The Technological Society* as the examination of the technological mind that was *writ large* in the state by the end of the nineteenth century. I had understood Hegel’s phenomenology to be inherently dualistic with a synthesis between subject and object only as apparent and provisional, not the usual read. The Absolute was manifest along the way as appearance, which connected with Ellul’s notion that the technical mind attempts to overcome difference (e.g. the gap between my awareness and the object of that awareness) with the “technical phenomenon,” a concept virtually embodied in the technical system devoid of true embodiment.

The technical phenomenon became the false absolute, the false sacred—certainly not the Wholly Other. Technical intention was Cartesian and rationalistic in this regard. This abided with Cassirer’s use of Hegel’s phenomenology as a mapping of spiritual energy as it created symbols in the tensions between subject and object. The symbols of myth, language, and science were just such attempts; the Absolute appeared as Jove in the Greek epics before a science

they anticipated. The gods allowed the first appearances of cause in narratives of fortune and fate.

Cassirer had indicated the possibility of technology as a symbolic form, but beyond a brief essay—*Form und Technik*—did not advance the project. I believed that with Ellul’s help, with his high regard for the symbol, a project was possible that would bring Hegel and Cassirer along. I later added Giambattista Vico to the mix with his study of the imagination in its cultural work as literature and law, also of interest to Ellul. Vico had anticipated the technical phenomenon with his notion of the “intelligible universal.”

My first article for *Man and World* (1978), “Jacques Ellul and the Logic of Technology,” and was followed by essays applying this logic to matters like mystery, science fiction, homelessness, the sacred, etc. My connection of Ellul to Vico was in *Man and World* (1982), “Giambattista Vico and Jacques Ellul: The Intelligible Universal and the Technical Phenomenon,” a paper that was also read in Venice at the international Vico/Venezia conference (1978).

My book *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul*, Lehigh University Press, 1981, pulled together much of this research and ended with an emphasis on the notion of the cliché as the latest manifestation of the technical phenomenon. Here I also argue the importance of reading Ellul philosophically without concluding that he was a philosopher, at least as the term is usually taken. I believe he is a part of the critique of culture that needs greater elaboration and serious speculation above the current blather of deconstructionism and post-modernism, which at present takes the place of such a critique and is instead a manifestation of the problem.

I am currently working through the problem of Ellul’s aesthetics, translating *L’Empire du non-sens*. Aspects of this appear in my recent “Looking and Seeing” for the *Ellul Forum*, Spring 2012 which is being reprinted with corrections and additions in the *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*, vol X, Fall 2012.

We are surrounded by clichés, blather, and bullshit that deafens all meaningful discourse and further humiliations of the word that Ellul challenged, and in his memory we should continue the good fight.

# Ellul on Truth & Propaganda

*Randal Marlin*

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A philosophy graduate student first drew my attention to Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* some time in the early 1970s, when I was teaching in the philosophy department at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. I saw Ellul's ideas as fitting well with concerns about preserving individual autonomy in the modern world, something I explored in a course on phenomenology and existentialism. Ellul brought the added dimension of how human technique compounds the problems. I first instituted a new course, "Society, Value and Technology," using Ellul's book as the main text.

After a few years of teaching this I became sensitized to the question of propaganda. I was attracted to Ellul's *Propaganda* and became more and more interested in developing my thoughts in this area. As an undergraduate I had spent a lot of time on the Princeton student newspaper and I saw how people's words could be twisted and manipulated.

Upon graduation I worked for a metropolitan newspaper in Montreal while pursuing an M.A. degree focused on the philosophy of language. At Oxford I came across work by H.L.A. Hart and P.J. Fitzgerald and developed a new interest in the philosophy of law, later doing a Ph.D. in that area at the University of Toronto. With this background I conceived the idea of a course on Truth and Propaganda, in which I would look at historical, analytical, ethical and jurisprudential aspects of propaganda, but I saw a need to develop more expertise in the historical and factual dimensions of the subject.

Then came a strange opportunity. With a sabbatical coming up, I cast around for ways of supplementing a half-salary to enable me to study abroad. I saw that the Department of Defence advertised yearly Fellowships, one of them very substantial. I hit on the

idea of competing for the big one so that I could work with Jacques Ellul in France.

The competition for this Fellowship would be fierce, and the idea that a philosopher might get it seemed very remote. I read Carl von Clausewitz and saw that his emphasis on morale in winning or losing wars gave me what I needed to impress the military with the need for attending to propaganda. Ellul posed the problem starkly when he said that democracies had to engage in propaganda or risk defeat from external enemies or subversion from within.

But Ellul noted that if they engaged in propaganda they would become the reverse of a democracy. I proposed in my submission that the way out of the dilemma would be by educating people to see through propaganda, thus undermining its power. I would give a course, "Truth and Propaganda" on my return, after getting a first hand view of Ellul's thinking and his reaction to possible solutions of his dilemma.

To my delight I won the Fellowship. In the course of interviewing Ellul during the Fellowship year, he kindly gave me an addendum he had intended to include in a second edition of *Propaganda* that never came to pass. He gave me permission to publish a translation of this, which I did. I also summarized some important ideas from the lectures I attended and had them published, with his permission, in *Futures Research Quarterly*.

I am constantly learning new things from Ellul's writings, more recently his theological studies, and have noticed how features of his writing fit in with a broader communicative purpose. Sometimes his writings are fiercely dogmatic in tone. But his meaning is clear and usually founded on an impressive study of relevant factual material. What they certainly don't lack is the ability to stimulate.

Ellul resembles Kierkegaard in keeping in proper perspective not only the need to communicate objective truth, but also to gauge the ability of an audience at a particular time and in particular circumstances to receive such truth in the right way, with the right effect. I have been delighted to discover that my own involvement in civic affairs has its counterpart in Ellul's, and I look forward to reading more about his activity with Bernard Charbonneau.

# Connecting With Ellul: An Episodic Engagement

*Carl P. Mitcham*

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Getting to know the work and life of Jacques Ellul was a significant part of my intellectual formation. The 1960s were a chaotic time. After finding analytic philosophy wanting and dropping out from Stanford University in Spring 1962 (which was to become the year of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the Cuban Missile Crisis), I crashed in Big Sur for a while, then worked vegetables with a short-handled hoe alongside migrant laborers in the fields around Salinas, California. From there I floated back to the University of Colorado, where I'd been enrolled before Stanford, and became involved with early-stage 1960s student activism. Then dropped out again, hitch-hiked and road rails across the United States, winding up back in San Francisco sometime in early 1964. The Vietnam War was growing larger, and I refused draft induction, expecting to go to jail — but then was not arrested (until five years later, another story). Got married in 1965 and was offered a job as a forest ranger in the Sequoia National Forest.

It was in the context of this typical 1960s itinerary that, wandering through the San Francisco Public Library in 1965, I stumbled on Ellul's *The Technological Society*. After standing and reading only a few pages, I decided I had to have the book and stole it (years later sending the library money to pay for my theft). I took it to the summer mountains of southern California, where I read it by kerosene light in a forest ranger cabin 50 miles from the nearest highway. When the snows came that fall I was still reading and re-reading. It was among the first things that began to make sense of the complex and confusing world in which I was struggling to find myself.

Two years later in appreciation, I reviewed *Propaganda* (1965) for the liberal Catholic quarterly *Cross Currents*, and then in the next decade my first serious scholarly publication — “Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society” (*Philosophy Today*, Summer 1971) — was an analysis of Ellul's argument, especially in relation to the thought of Max Weber and the challenge of instrumental rationality. The effort in this regard also involved trying to understand connections between Ellul, classical political philosophy (as mediated by the work of Leo Strauss), and medieval philosophy (as mediated by Etienne Gilson).

Somewhere along the line the seminal analyses of José Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger also got thrown into the mix. And in an effort to justify my philosophical interest in technology when the American philosophical scene strongly rejected technology as of any philosophically interesting importance, I discovered a tradition of engineering philosophical discourse that arose most prominently in Germany during the first third of the 20th century.

The dialectical tensions between Ellul, Strauss, Gilson, Ortega, Heidegger, and each of their traditions, drove me to read more of Ellul, whose voluminous if sometimes inaccurate footnotes introduced a wealth of literature on technology that influenced both the edited collection, *Philosophy and Technology: Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology* (1972), and *Bibliography of the Philosophy of Technology* (1973). (I should add that all of these initial three publications were undertaken with Robert Mackey, a philosophical colleague from Stanford, who remains a dialectical foil from the realm of analytic philosophy.)

Early in the 1970s, when teaching at Berea College, Kentucky (where, after eventually being arrested for draft resistance, I had been sentenced to alternative service), I met Jim Holloway, co-founder of the Committee of Southern Churchmen. As editor of the radical Christian journal *Katallagete: Be Reconciled* (1965-1991), Jim tutored me in Ellul's Barthian theology. In appreciation I did another review for *Cross Currents*, this time of Holloway's *Introducing Jacques Ellul* (1970). The two *Cross Currents* reviews led to guest editing a special theme issue of the journal on “Jacques Ellul” (Spring 1985), although not before also working (with Kassie Temple, Catholic Worker transplant from Canada who had done a dissertation directed by George Grant on Ellul) to translate and publish some of Ellul's work in *Research in Philosophy and Technology* (1980 and 1984) and in another co-edited volume (with Jim Grote) on *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis* (1984).

It was Holloway, who encouraged me to write Ellul, which led to the translating and publishing in English some of his more philosophical work. And in the mid-1970s Ellul introduced me to his student, Daniel Cérézuelle, who has become a life-long colleague and friend. I helped Daniel arrange to study with Hans Jonas at the New School for Social Research, and Daniel, with his wife, Anita, visited me and my wife and family where, again partly through the instigation of Jim Holloway, I had become involved in a small intentional family religious community loosely associated with the Abby of Gethsemani in Kentucky. (Holloway had known Thomas Merton, Gethsemani's famous monk, who also found *The Technological Society* worthy of notice.) It was Daniel who organized the June 1989 biannual meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Technology to take place in Bordeaux, with Ellul as a plenary speaker.

Since the late 1990s my attention has shifted away from Ellul. He was one of my original entrees into the philosophy of technology and a stimulus for reflection on opportunities for Christian alternatives to the technological way of being in the world. But as I have progressively come to see Christian theology responsible for technology and violence, and not just in Lynn White's form as a dual-use historical stimulus or through Illich's “corruption of Christianity,” my own religious affiliation has departed Catholicism and gravitated toward Pure Land Buddhism. Ellul's approach to the world has become increasingly foreign. Yet, in what is probably a final homage to his work and influence, at the invitation of colleagues Helena Jerónimo and José Luís Garcia in Portugal, I helped organize a reflection that has resulted in a book on *Jacques Ellul and the Technological Society in the 21st Century* as a contribution to celebrating the 100th anniversary of Ellul's birth.



# From Ellul to Charbonneau

*Christian Roy*

*Christian Roy (Ph.D. McGill 1993) is an independent scholar of intellectual and cultural history, an art and cinema critic, and a translator from several European languages. A specialist of the French Personalist tradition, he has published his thesis and numerous articles on the subject, as well as Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia in 2 volumes (ABC-Clio 2005).*

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Around 1985, I became engrossed in the thought of Canadian philosopher George Grant, whose critique of Technique draws from Jacques Ellul's; that is when I read *The Technological Society*, during my graduate work on the origins of French Personalism. Days before flying to Europe to research my history dissertation, Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, the authority on such pre-war "non-conformist" movements in France, pointed out to me that Ellul came from that scene. Delighted to learn of this direct connection between my Grantian concerns and French research interests, I resolved to include Ellul among the Personalist veterans I would interview.

That single meeting in Pessac on July 6, 1988 proved a turning point in my life, as Ellul told me how to make my way off the grid and the beaten path to the Béarn barnhouse of his friend Bernard Charbonneau, whose own work I had just discovered as that of the great unknown prophet of our time —unassuming as he turned out to be in person. I came unannounced, but we instantly became close.

His papers and memories allowed me to reconstruct how, with Ellul's assistance, he invented political ecology as a distinct revolutionary orientation in Southwestern France from the 1930s onward. I first made that case in an environment-themed issue of a Montreal magazine with which I was involved ("Nature et liberté. Le Combat solitaire de Bernard Charbonneau", *Vice Versa*, No. 30, Sept.-Oct. 1990, pp. 12-14), and to which Charbonneau would contribute several original articles at my entreaty, while I also published excerpts of my interview with Ellul (No. 33, May-July 1991, available online at

[www.viceversamag.com/jacques-ellul-a-propos-de-education-transmission-de-la-culture-ou-bluff-technologique](http://www.viceversamag.com/jacques-ellul-a-propos-de-education-transmission-de-la-culture-ou-bluff-technologique)).

Making the case for Charbonneau and Ellul as the true pioneers of Green activism has been a scholarly priority of mine since its fullest, now canonical statement won the Best Essay by a Graduate Student Award for 1991 in the *Canadian Journal of History* (XXVII, April 1992, pp. 67-100): "Aux sources de l'écologie politique: le personnalisme 'gascon' de Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul." I gave the paper "Entre pensée et nature: le personnalisme gascon" at the first conference on Bernard Charbonneau at the University of Toulouse weeks after his death in 1996 (Jacques Prades, ed. *Bernard Charbonneau: une vie entière à dénoncer la grande imposture*. Erès, 1997, pp. 35-49), and "Ecological Personalism: The Bordeaux School of Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul", appeared in *Ethical Perspectives* (Vol. VI, No. 1, April 1999, pp. 33-44); it was summarized as document no. 698481 in Vol. 36 (2003) of *The Philosopher's Index*, and is downloadable at [www.ethical-perspectives.be](http://www.ethical-perspectives.be). I wrote the entries on Charbonneau and Ellul in the *Enciclopedia della persona nel XX secolo (Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, (2008)*, and more recently, online texts on Charbonneau in *Global Media Journal*, *PhaenEx*, and *agora.qc.ca*.

Following a conference at EHESS in Paris in 2011 on dissident voices amidst the long-assumed post-war consensus on France's modernization, a mainstream book on this topic in the works (Bonneuil, Pessis & Topçu, eds.) for La Découverte that will include my account of Charbonneau and Ellul from 1945 to their part in the fledgling ecological movement of the 1970s. My paper for the Ellul centenary conference at the University of Bordeaux covered some of the same material, while the one I gave at its counterpart in Wheaton College presented Charbonneau and Ellul as a tandem of activists and thinkers I like to call the Bordeaux School.

The point I wanted to put across to Ellul's English-speaking admirers on both occasions was that their hero's intellectual mentor can no longer be left in relative obscurity; Charbonneau represents a vast continent of closely related, even more original thought waiting to be discovered in Ellulian circles and well beyond them, as Ellul himself always hoped. As a result, discussions are underway that could lead to my translating Charbonneau as well as Ellul in English.

# Ellul's Books and Mine

*Richard Stivers*

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In a graduate sociology program in the late 1960s, I followed up on a reference to *The Technological Society*. I subsequently read *Propaganda* and *The Political Illusion*. I was then convinced that Ellul's sociological analysis was more or less correct, despite the fact that my teachers seemed oblivious to his work.

One day in the library's card catalogue, I discovered under *Ellul, Jacques* books with surprising (to me) titles such as *The Presence of the Kingdom* and *Prayer and Modern Man*. As a lapsed Catholic I read his Christian books with interest but puzzlement and began to rethink my understanding of Christianity. Ellul's writings on Christianity became the motivation for me to attempt to become a Christian.

Like Kierkegaard Ellul gave the reader an existential kick in the butt: knowledge without practice is worthless. So Ellul had wormed his way into two parts of my life: as a fledgling Christian and a young sociologist. I was taken by his view that Christian intellectuals had an obligation to expose the ideologies and myths that leave us culturally enslaved.

I decided to follow his advice by concentrating on sociological topics that Ellul had not studied in great detail. Ellul discussed technological morality in *To Will and To Do* and elsewhere, but never devoted a book to the topic.

In *The Culture of Cynicism* (1994), I analyzed how the new "lived morality" was an ersatz morality comprised of technical and bureaucratic rules, public opinion, and visual images in the media. I used Ellul's terms the "necessary" and the "ephemeral" to relate technical rules on the one hand to public opinion and to images on the other hand.

In *Technology as Magic* (1999), I attempted to resolve a conundrum about technique. In *The Technological Society*, Ellul mentioned that non-material technique depended on the subjective factor (belief) to be effective, whereas material techniques functioned whether we believed in them or not. I argued that non-material technique works as magic, that is, as placebo or self-fulfilling prophecy. I concluded that we have magical expectations for material technology and have created imitation technologies (non-material) that are based on magic. In this way, as Ellul observes, everything becomes an imitation of technology or a compensation for its impact.

*Shades of Loneliness* (2004) is a study of the psychological impact of technique. The book includes a theory of the technological personality. In the second half of the book I demonstrate how various neuroses and psychosis (schizophrenia) reflect the contradictions of a technological society. For instance, obsessive-compulsive and impulsive disorders reflect the contradiction between the rational and irrational. The more rational society becomes, the greater the need for irrational release (ch. 5, *The Technological Society*).

*The Illusion of Freedom and Equality* (2008) looks at the transformation of meaning in freedom and equality from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Today freedom is ideologically defined as consumer choice, individual right, and technological possibility; equality as plural equality and cultural and communicative equality. The reality of each of these ideological images is the exact reverse. The reality of freedom is forced consumerism, legal process, and technological necessity; the reality of equality is group conformity and competition on the one hand and uniformity on the other. Ideology, as Marx argued, transforms reality into its opposite.

Ellul argued that from the perspective of freedom, propaganda was the worst technique. This technique destroys awareness of our servitude to the technological system and magically transforms servitude into freedom (consumerism). Over the years my students liked *Propaganda* better than any of Ellul's other books. I surmise that it resonates with their experiences and that there still remains a small part of each of us that has not been convinced of our unlimited freedom. Everything we do to allow society to be livable and to minimize harm to the environment depends on our rejection of propaganda.

# Our Civilization's Wager on Technique

*Willem H. Vanderburg*

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When completing a doctorate in Mechanical Engineering during the early 1970s, I came to the conclusion that the world did not need another “regular” engineering professor, but someone who understood how our professional practice contributed to the “production” of our social and environmental crises and who could apply this understanding to make urgently required modifications.

In 1973, I was looking for a postdoctoral mentor; and after reading one and a half chapters of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, I knew I had found him. Implicit in his description of technique was a completely accurate characterization of how my mindset worked. I needed to work out this intuition with him. Ellul accepted me on the promise that I would not ask for more than eight hours of his time per year. By 1978, I had completed what would later be published as *The Growth of Minds and Cultures*, to which he wrote the Foreword. Together we decided that my description of culture was implicit in his work as the way human beings made sense of the world and lived in it prior to technique.

Since much of a culture is implicitly transmitted from one generation to the next, I now had a tool to examine the values, beliefs and myths embedded in “engineering culture” and how this is transmitted through professional education. My research showed that future engineers learn almost nothing about how technology influences human life, society and the biosphere and even less about how to use this understanding to adjust their design and decision-making to achieve the desired results but simultaneously prevent or significantly reduce harmful effects. I had identified the need to transform technique by introducing some negative feedback into it. This led to what I call preventive approaches, set out in my book *The Labyrinth of Technology*.

I also tackled the task of understanding how human lives and societies greatly reduced their reliance on culture as a consequence of the emergence of technique. This was published in *Living in the Labyrinth of Technology*.

Most recently, I explained how the principal characteristics of technique, as well as the brilliant successes of our civilization and its equally spectacular failures, can largely be attributed to the fact that our knowing and doing are organized on the basis of disciplines. It amounts to a fundamental desymbolization of human life and society raising what I believe constitutes the “wager of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Jacques Ellul called technique the wager of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). How far can this desymbolization proceed, since it progressively weakens what has made us human until now? The findings were published in *Our War on Ourselves*, which also includes a prescription of how to resymbolize technique in order to loosen its grip on the modern university.

I would place Jacques Ellul among a handful of the most important Christian thinkers of all times. During a critical mutation in humanity's journey, he discerned the implications, and his predictions have come true with a greater speed than I ever believed possible. Secular myths and the accompanying new religious forms continue to steer humanity in a direction of self-destruction, with one important difference.

The massive desymbolization under the pressure of technique raises the question of whether this will be the century when human life as we have known it thus far will come to an end and an entirely new kind of “existence” of our species will begin.

Worse, the Christian community is so deeply committed to the idols of our time that it has largely been unable to hear Jacques Ellul's warnings. Will faith endure or will it all be turned into religion? Here also, the voice of Jacques Ellul may well turn out to be critically important for the continuation of a faithful remnant.

This brings me to the last component of my work. The year before he died, Ellul gave me permission to publish his Bible studies. The first volume, entitled *On Freedom, Love and Power*, will soon be joined by a second, *On Being Rich and Poor*.

*The International Jacques Ellul Society*

## Gabriel Vahanian:

### 1927-2012

*A Personal Remembrance*

by

*Darrell J. Faschnig, Vice President, IJES*

I first found out that my teacher, mentor and friend, Gabriel Vahanian, had died when David Gill, President of the International Jacques Ellul Society, emailed me a few days ago. Knowing Gabriel Vahanian's age, I knew this day would come, and yet the news stuns me. I want to share a few thoughts on this great scholar and dear friend.

Gabriel Vahanian was born and educated in France and received his baccalaureate from the *Lycee de Valence*. He then came to the United States in 1948 on a fellowship to Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned his M.A. and then completed his Ph.D. in 1958. In that year he joined the religion faculty at Syracuse University. Gabriel Vahanian's rising star was lit when, in 1965, *Time* magazine published an issue on *The Death of God*. The article featured his book by that title, published in 1961, and offered it as a prime example of a new theological movement that included others like William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer. When *The Death of God* first came out, the great New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, compared it to Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans* in its revolutionary significance for contemporary theology. It was a masterful cultural analysis of what Vahanian described as "the cultural incapacity for God of our post-Christian era." It led him to suggest that we *Wait Without Idols* (1964) and have *No Other God* (1966) until we could find an authentic language with which to speak of God again.

Gabriel Vahanian began to explore such a new language in his 1976 book *Dieu et L'Utopie* translated in 1977 as *God and Utopia, The Church in a Technological Civilization*. It launched his experiment in a new poetics of the word that was continued in *L'utopie Chretienne* and *Dieu Anonyme*; also his Kierkegaardian meditations *La foi, une fois pour toutes* and his book on *Tillich and the New Religious Paradigm*. Most recently, in 2008, *Praise of the Secular* appeared. Moreover, there is at least one more book to be released with the working title: *Figures of Christ: From Incarnation to Cloning*.

In addition to being a prolific author who lectured throughout Europe, Asia and America, Gabriel Vahanian was a member of the founding board of the American Academy of Religion (1964). The Academy inaugurated the promotion and professionalization of the academic study of religion in private secular and public state universities in the United States. Then in 1968 he became the founding Director of Graduate Studies in the

Department of Religion at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York. During his tenure at Syracuse University (1958-1983), he held the Eliphalet Remington Chair and then the Jeanette Kittridge Watson Chair. In 1983 he accepted an invitation from the Protestant faculty of the University of Strasbourg and returned to France for the remainder of his career.

Rudolf Bultmann, who so glowingly praised *The Death of God*, was no doubt a major influence in persuading Gabriel Vahanian of the need for such a book. For in *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (1958) Bultmann argued that the Gospel had become irrelevant to modern persons because it was couched in a three-storied mythological worldview that had no relation to a world in which one lighted one's dwelling by flipping the switch on an electric light bulb. Hence, he said, the Gospel needs to be demythologized by being translated into a more contemporary language. Bultmann chose existentialism as that language and argued the Gospel called us to a new self-understanding. The argument was persuasive to many, but it succeeded at the cost of shrinking the cosmic-societal dimensions of the Gospel down to the individual transformation of consciousness. There was the potential for an almost Gnostic disengagement from the larger world in which the human drama is lived out.

Between the publication of *The Death of God* in 1961 and *God and Utopia* in 1976/77, there occurred a major incubation period which gave birth to Gabriel Vahanian's utopian poetics of faith. This poetics addressed the Bultmannian call for a new language of faith, but in a way that was more adequate to the cosmic-societal dimension of human life than existentialism.

I came to Syracuse University in 1969, the second year of its new graduate program and witnessed that poetics being formed in the seminars I took with Gabriel Vahanian over the next few years. In that period I saw Vahanian's interest in Bultmann's reflections about light bulbs and faith transformed into a poetics of technique as the linguistic essence of a technological society. In his seminars on technology and theology, especially, it became clear that Jacques Ellul's sociology and theology of the technological society were becoming a major influence on Gabriel Vahanian's thinking. Following Ellul, he came to see the language of technique as creating a new, all-encompassing environment that replaced the ancient world's language and poetics of nature. Technique as the linguistic expression of our capacity to imagine and create new worlds offers a new and more adequate self-understanding, one that could take one beyond the limits of existentialism into the biblical-eschatological language of new creation -- a language that embraces societal and cosmic transformation.

For Vahanian, if the ideological language of the technological civilization was utopian, as Ellul argued, this was so only because of the Gospel's transformation of Western civilization through an eschatological poetics of new creation -- a "worlding of the word" as Vahanian later called it. Existentialism still suggested the dilemma of the classical world in which nature is one's fate. Each person is a "useless passion" in rebellion against his or her natural

facticity. Jacques Ellul came to understand technological society as our "new nature" promising us liberation from the classical understanding nature as the realm of fate. Yet this "new nature" too became our fate, he argued, imposing efficiency as a necessity upon us. In Ellul's view, it was the utopian promise of technological society to fulfill all our desires through the use of efficient techniques (in all areas of human endeavor) that induced us to treat technology with a sacred awe, and so surrender to the necessity of efficiency.

Gabriel Vahanian agreed with this analysis, but argued that this utopian ideology was itself possible only because of the eschatological poetics of new creation unleashed by the Gospel. For the Stoics, nature was man's fate but for Paul, all of creation is groaning and giving birth to a new creation, the transformative body of Christ in the world. In Vahanian's view, Ellul saw the negative side of utopianism as ideology but he failed to see, at first, that desacralizing this ideological utopianism was the equivalent of releasing the Gospel's genuine utopianism of new creation.

A post-Christian civilization, Vahanian argued, is closer to the Gospel than classical civilization ever was. Utopian hope is possible because a technological civilization is no longer shaped by classic presuppositions of nature as our fate but by the eschatological utopianism of the Gospel. The poetics of the Gospel can redeem the language of utopia and the utopianism of language. The poetics of the holy can redeem the poetics of the sacred to create a world that is rendered secular by the iconoclastic ecclesiology of the church as the body of Christ; a church whose task of continuing desacralization or secularization makes the continual renewal of the world possible. The Gospel is not about changing worlds but about changing the world, utopia is not a destination but an "eschatic" source of continuing renewal. For Gabriel Vahanian, the Gospel is not about taking us out of the world but taking us into the world to be its "salt." It is significant that Vahanian's book, *Anonymous God*, is dedicated to Rudolph Bultmann and devoted to a trinitarian reflection on God and the utopian iconoclasm of language.

Although Vahanian and Ellul were known for their occasional theological sparring, I know from my conversations with both that they were very good friends. Both subscribed to Ellul's distinction of the sacred and the holy. In most of Ellul's work, he tended to see utopianism as an expression of the sacred, an ideology that justifies the world as it is -- making it impossible to change it. In most of Vahanian's work, he tended to see apocalyptic language as an expression of the sacred, inviting escape from this world rather than commitment to changing it. But both of these terms, "apocalypse" and "utopia," can be desacralized and so understood alternatively as expressions of the holy, and when they are, the two terms - "apocalypse" and "utopia" - converge. Ellul's book *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation*, for instance, turns out not to be about changing worlds but changing the world. Ellul views the language of the *Book of Revelation* as a poetic mirror reflecting on the present situation, calling the church to introduce an apocalyptic

transformation into this time and place. In his book, *Ideology and Utopia* (1929, revised in 1936) Karl Mannheim argued that apocalyptic language can be either ideological or utopian. In the first case, it justifies the *status quo*, in the second case it initiates a social transformation of society by breaking with the conventional view of society. It is the second where Ellul and Vahanian's views converge and apocalypse becomes utopian.

### A Personal Reflection

Gabriel Vahanian entered my life in 1967 when I was on the student undergraduate committee that invited him to speak on "The Death of God" at the University of Minnesota. I was so taken with him as a person and a scholar that I ended up entering the Syracuse University Department of Religion graduate program in the Fall of 1969. Over the next several years I eagerly took every one of his seminars, struggling at first to understand what he was doing and then when the light finally came on, I was astonished and exhilarated. Those lectures were a dazzling, transforming experience. As my doctoral advisor, he became the midwife of my doctoral dissertation on Jacques Ellul which I defended in 1978 (later published as *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 1981). Gabriel Vahanian convinced me to do my dissertation on Jacques Ellul, by telling me that in doing so I would be standing on the shoulders of a giant. Ellul laughed when I told him this (being not much over five feet tall) and said "a small giant." Gabriel Vahanian was about the same height. By the time I published my book on Ellul, I realized I was standing on the shoulders of two giants. That book opened doors for me and in 1982 I accepted an offer to join the Religious Studies Faculty at The University of South Florida in Tampa. A decade later, I dedicated my most ambitious work to Gabriel Vahanian -- *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (1993) -- saying in the Preface that my book was possible because "I learned that which can only be absorbed by studying with a master. I learned to think theologically."

The bond I formed with Gabriel Vahanian while I was writing my doctoral dissertation under his direction turned into a lifelong friendship. I had Gaby speak at the University of South Florida many times and he who would usually come to visit me and my wife a couple of times a year in Tampa, only an hour and a half from Winter Haven, Florida, where he had a second home he used when he flew in from France. Indeed, I just had a visit from him this Spring and we talked of seeing each other again at the Ellul Centennial Conference in Weaton Illinois this July. In the intervening time I was hospitalized in intensive care for internal bleeding that almost led to my own demise. Upon release, I ended up emailing him that death was stalking me and was making me too weak to travel. We never had that "last" planned meeting. The unfolding events since then remind me that death stalks us all.

Typically, when Gaby came for a visit he would make it a point to arrive on a Thursday in order to be able to join "the breakfast club" for discussion on Friday

morning. The club is a group of five -- scholars, ministers, even a lawyer. We meet every Friday to discuss the events of the week, the events of our lives, and, yes, even theology. Gaby loved this forum and reveled in the discussion. He always looked forward to it when he came. He had astonishing energy and would keep me up until midnight on Thursday discussing theology and then be fresh to begin again in the morning. By the time he left to return to Winter Haven on Friday afternoon, I would be both exhilarated and exhausted. He was 17 years my senior and I couldn't keep up with him. I will miss his visits but he will always be a presence in my life.

**A Meditation on Language, Time and Eternity  
from *The Confessions of Augustine*:**

*Suppose, I am about to recite a psalm which I know. Before I begin my expectation ... is extended over the whole psalm. But once I have begun, whatever I pluck off from it and let fall into the past enters the province of my memory .... As I proceed further and further with my recitation, so the expectation grows shorter and the memory grows longer, until all the expectation is finished at the point when the whole of this action is over and has passed into memory. And what is true of the whole psalm is also true of every part of the psalm and of every syllable in it. The same holds good for any longer action, of which the psalm may be only a part. It is true also of the whole of a man's life, of which all of his actions are parts. And it is true of the whole of the history of humanity, of which the lives of all men are parts. (The Confessions of Augustine, XI,28,282, Rex Warner translation, New American Library, 1963)*

May God remember his faithful servant, Gabriel Vahanian, whose life is whole and complete.

**Four Final Notes**

1. Gabriel Vahanian is survived by his wife Barbara, his son Paul Michel and his daughter Noelle. Noelle Vahanian, holds a Ph.D. from Syracuse University and teaches at Lebanon Valley College, 101 N. College Ave., Annville, PA 17003-1400. Her email is: [Vahanian@lvc.edu](mailto:Vahanian@lvc.edu)

2. An extensive bibliography of Gabriel Vahanian's work can be found at: <http://gabrielvahanian.blogspot.com/p/ouvrages-de-gabriel-vahanian.html>

3. Those wishing to donate to honor Gabriel Vahanian's memory might consider a donation to the *Gabriel Vahanian Endowed Graduate Support Fund*, Department of Religion, Syracuse University, Syracuse New York, 13244

4. A memorial service was held for Gabriel Vahanian on Friday, September 7, 2012 at Saint Paul's Reformed Church in Strasbourg.

# International Jacques Ellul Society

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

**130 Essex Street, Box 219  
South Hamilton MA 01982**

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

## Membership

Anyone who supports the objectives of the IJES is invited to join the society for an annual dues payment of US\$20.00.

The IJES office can accept payments only in US dollars because of the huge collection fees otherwise charged by US banks.

IJES subscribers outside the USA can go to [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com) and use a credit card to make a payment to "IJES@ellul.org."

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# IJES Ellul Forum Transition Time

*David Gill, IJES President*

For many of us on the masthead of *The Ellul Forum* this has been a forty-year (plus or minus) journey with Jacques Ellul --- and a thirty-year (plus or minus) journey with each other. We old-timers are very grateful for the younger scholars and activists who are stepping up toward leadership in the Ellul studies guild.

After years of discussion and study of the alternatives, we have decided to cease the *regular, twice-yearly* publication of the *Ellul Forum* with this Issue #50. We still prefer reading print material ourselves --- but the growing costs of print and postage and the labor involved, alongside the far greater population coming to our [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) web site, have made it clear that we need to build a truer “Ellul Forum” on line.

Online we can post articles without worrying about length. We don’t need to exclude good articles for lack of space in our 24-page journal; everything fits online. We don’t have to wait six months to publish; we can post articles as soon as they are ready. And online our readers can add their comments and perspectives to the document and interact with the author --- a true “forum.”

Online we can build up a truly valuable storehouse of information and material from and about Jacques Ellul. We hope to become a better clearinghouse for Ellul-related ideas, projects, meetings, research projects, and study/teaching resources.

We have a distribution list of about 350 for online IJES newsletters and announcements. Please register yourself at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) --- or send your preferred e-address to [IJES@ellul.org](mailto:IJES@ellul.org). Please note that *we will not be maintaining a traditional mailing list* any longer. You must access our material on your computer --- or use one at your public library or school --- or ask a friend to connect you. Worst case: ask a friend to print out anything of interest and give or mail it to you. The good news it is now all free! And all accessible to a huge potential audience that never saw our print material.

Now hear this: we are still and forever pushing hard to get more of Ellul’s books translated and published or reprinted. Ted Lewis and Wipf & Stock Publishers have done an amazing job on this with many Ellul works now in print for the first time. Visit their online catalog at

[www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com) --- where you will find at least *seventeen* Ellul titles with more on the way.

We dream of publishing an “Ellul Forum Annual” volume of the best of our online articles. These projects depend more on leadership and personnel than anything else. But do not give up on “Ellul in print.”

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In June in Bordeaux about 150 scholars and friends gathered for a three day colloquium on Ellul’s legacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. AIJE President Patrick Chastenet did an extraordinary job organizing and leading this meeting. Since 2000 Patrick has led the remarkable development of our sister fellowship L’Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. You must visit their great web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org). Patrick’s leadership along with his multiple books about Ellul have made him the unrivaled world expert on Ellul. We are so grateful for his ceaseless labors.

Daniel Cérézuelle, also of Bordeaux, has also done extraordinary work to make available and understandable the works of Ellul’s intellectual partner, Bernard Charbonneau. Other developments: some of Ellul’s old friends and students are in process of turning his Bible study lecture tapes into books (sounds similar to what Bill Vanderburg is doing in Toronto). We have to tip our hat to Dominique Ellul (daughter of Jacques & Yvette) for her efforts to get Ellul’s works reprinted in France. And now to grandson Jerome (son of Jean Ellul) for his efforts to create photography and film related to his grandfather.

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In July in Wheaton, just west of Chicago, about 75 scholars and friends gathered for a three-day centenary colloquium on Ellul. Gabriel Vahanian and Daniel Cérézuelle came over from France. It was a great reunion for us old-timers and a first-time in-the-flesh encounter for many others. The papers and discussions were lively.

Many of the attendees insisted it was “the best conference” they ever attended. I couldn’t disagree! Jacques Ellul continues to draw together the most amazing, diverse, creative, community of scholars and activists imaginable. I am bold to think the world, the academy, and the church, badly need a merry and rambunctious band like this. Let’s keep it going on line – and meet again (in five years?).

# Resources for Ellul Studies

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

The IJES web site at [www.ellul.org](http://www.ellul.org) contains (1) a brief and accurate biography of Jacques Ellul, (2) a complete bibliography of Ellul's books in French and English, (3) a complete index of the contents of all *Ellul Forum* back issues; and (4) links and information on other resources for students of Jacques Ellul. The French AIJE web site at [www.jacques-ellul.org](http://www.jacques-ellul.org) is also a superb resource.

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## **Cahiers Jacques Ellul**

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

An essential annual journal for students of Ellul is *Cahiers Jacques Ellul*, edited by Patrick Chastenot, published by Editions L'Esprit du Temps, and distributed by Presses Universitaires de France. Send orders to Editions L'Esprit du Temps, BP 107, 33491 Le Bouscat Cedex, France. Postage and shipping is 5 euros for the first volume ordered; add 2 euros for each additional volume ordered.

Volume 1: "L'Années personnalistes" (15 euros)

Volume 2: "La Technique" (15 euros)

Volume 3: "L'Economie" (21 euros).

Volume 4: "La Propagande" (21 euros).

Volume 5: "La Politique" (21 euros)

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

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

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

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

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

by Joyce Main Hanks. *Research in Philosophy and Technology*. Supplement 5. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 2000. xiii., 206 pages. This is the essential guide for anyone doing research in Jacques Ellul's writings. An excellent brief biography is followed by a 140-page annotated bibliography of Ellul's fifty books and thousand-plus articles and a thirty-page subject index. Hank's work is comprehensive, accurate, and invariably helpful. Visit [www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com) for ordering information.

## **The Reception of Jacques Ellul's Critique of Technology: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings on His Life and Thought**

by Joyce Main Hanks (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). 546 pp. This volume is an amazing, indispensable resource for studying Jacques Ellul. All the books, articles, reviews, and published symposia on Ellul's ideas and writings are here.

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## **Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul**

by Andrew Goddard. (Paternoster Press, 2002). 378 pp. Ten years after being published, Professor Goddard's study remains the best English language introduction to Ellul's life and thought.

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## **Ellul on DVD/Video**

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

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

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