

The Ellul Forum

Number 62 Fall 2018

Reminiscences des L. Kello
~~l'air de l'air~~
J'ai poursuivi mon rêve au cœur d'élégantes villes,
Sillons des fleurs de faits et des traces de ciment.
Tout est naturel et simple et mon rêve ~~semblait~~ filer
devant des yeux tout faits par sens - coeurs d'amants -
un faitan - tout s'éclaircit et le ciel devient large
Large a vrai dire étirement large sur la cité
Et a ciel ou plus un seul des oiseaux ne bouge
semble un sol ou quelque iroquois immense à laquelle
L'iroquois, est ce moi? L'Honneur? (Et le grand H)
La machine? le fluide? ou peut-être le ciel?
Je ne sais - je vois et je mâcho et remâcho
Celle découverte comme un garçon au mill
un rêve sans ciel? quelle plaisanterie
Je veux bien m'accrocher aux "civilisations"
Mais qu'elles ~~ne~~ donnent donc des fleurs même flétries
quelque chose d'humain - pas une déception
cependant les bas - très bas (un glas d'âme)
un ganne tout seul se traîne dans un feu clair
~~Et~~ dans une vibration dense - tout rousse -
les murs de marbre blanc - ~~et~~ d'événements giles

après ce

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The **Ellul Forum**

About

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a French thinker and writer in many fields: communication, ethics, law and political science, sociology, technology, and biblical and theological studies, among others. The aim of the *Ellul Forum* is to promote awareness and understanding of Ellul's life and work and to encourage a community of dialogue on these subjects. The *Forum* publishes content by and about Jacques Ellul and about themes relevant to his work, from historical, contemporary, or creative perspectives. Content is published in English and French.

Subscriptions

The *Forum* is published twice a year. Annual subscriptions are \$40 USD for individuals/households and \$80 USD for institutions. Individual subscriptions include membership in the International Jacques Ellul Society, and individual subscribers receive regular communications from the Society, discounts on IJES conference fees, and other benefits. To subscribe, please visit ellul.org.

Submissions

The *Forum* encourages submissions from scholars, students, and general readers. Submissions must demonstrate a degree of familiarity with Ellul's thought and must engage with it in a critical way. Submissions may be sent to ellulforum@gmail.com.

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Editor's Letter

Welcome to the newly reinvigorated *Ellul Forum*. With this issue, the International Jacques Ellul Society relaunches the *Forum* as a printed journal, published twice yearly and mailed to subscribers. Subscription to the *Forum* is via membership in IJES. To subscribe / become a member, please visit ellul.org. Back issues will continue to be made available freely at our website but after a delay of some months.

The essays published in this issue by A. F. Moritz and Kelsey L. Haskett are based on their respective presentations at our Ellul and the Bible conference that was held in June 2018 in Vancouver, British Columbia. These scholars pay welcome attention to Ellul's poetry, a relatively underexplored area of his work.

Frédéric Rognon's article is also based on his presentation at the conference. It addresses a fundamentally important question: How did Ellul read the Bible, and what can his manner of Bible reading offer us today? Daniel Cérézuelle's explication of Ellul's concept of technique was originally written as the foreword to *The Technological System* reprinted by Wipf and Stock in 2018. It not only describes the evolution of Ellul's thought on this central theme but also reveals that Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau developed their ideas about technique very early in their lives.

Book reviews serve to bring attention to some of the many interesting works currently being published on themes relevant to Ellul's thought. We provide two reviews in this issue, by J. Peter Escalante and Jonathan A. Tomes.

We express our gratitude to Lemon Press Printing for its assistance in producing this issue.

Jacques Ellul's Apocalypse in Poetry and Exegesis

A. F. Moritz

Although not published until 1997, Jacques Ellul's book-length poem *Oratorio: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* was written in the 1960s (publisher's jacket copy), and thus it seems to antedate the composition of his 1975 exegetical work *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement*. Both works center on the relationship of the human word to God's Word and the struggle of the best speech amidst babble and falsehood; together they throw great emphasis on the centrality of these themes in Ellul's thought. The poem presents in a white-hot fusion the dialectical ideas, including those regarding the word and communication, that become a basis of Ellul's exegesis of the Apocalypse of John.

We can see this in two essential and related elements of *Oratorio*: the image of the mendicant, and the idea of the presence of the end in the beginning and throughout history. In Ellul's poem, the wandering beggar is the Word of God in the world, powerless unless it is received, constantly appealing for love. Similarly, the end that is already present in history is the Word that needs and begs to be heard. This idea of the end in the beginning, which is Ellul's radical eschatology, is expressed both in the mendicant and in the very structure of *Oratorio*, which in turn mirrors the structure of the Apocalypse as Ellul analyzes it. Both poems—for so Ellul terms the Apocalypse (259)—use a symmetrical form to symbolize that the basic structure of history is the hidden presence of the Eternal in Time, which makes an appeal, as the mendicant does, eschewing power until a response of love shall be given.

Throughout *Oratorio* the mendicant appears in various guises and is particularly expressive of the humility and humiliation of the word, which is

everything—creation and salvation—yet which is nothing if not received. The wandering beggar who constantly knocks, constantly appeals, is made fundamentally identical by Ellul's poetry with the hiddenness of eternity in time and of glory in failure. For Ellul, the end that is in the beginning is not a goal or place but a living, overlooked person always coming toward us. The obscurity of Ellul's beggar combines in a single image the Second Person, and poetry, and the intellectual, around the theme that powerlessness is love's only power, because the word is its only possible means.

The figure of a poor wanderer appears in the poem variously as beggar, as pilgrim, as an absent outcast merely implied by a human sob or plea, and even as the white horseman of the Apocalypse. The white horseman is for Ellul the word of God, and in "Part One" of *Oratorio* this horseman speaks and calls himself a pilgrim, becomes a pilgrim:

And I will be the hand stretched out for alms
the gaze of the defeated one begging to live
the step of the condemned man who stumbles and pleads
and I will be the cry of all people dying . . . (19)

This is echoed at the end of "Part Two: The Horse of War," where the white horseman suddenly appears again, must wander all the roads, and becomes a beggar who "knocks at your door, trying your refusal." As "Part Two" concludes, the poet transforms this "vagabond of the end of the world" back into "the white horseman [who] triumphs in his misery" (60).

In the opening of "Part Five," the poem's last part, this vagabond figure is the pilgrim, as earlier, but here he is also, for the first time, the Wandering Jew:

Trudge, O pilgrim, all through the agèd times of history
Haggard, O Wandering Jew, trudge through the newborn times . . .

Can you find any other trace in the dreary past
than the horses' iron prints engraved in the clay
the broken bones of the Farnese marbles
and the printed witnesses of a divided word? (81)

In this figure Ellul converges Christ the Word with humanity seen in Christ. That is, humanity is here symbolized in its best possible representative within the reality of the broken world: the one who hungers and thirsts for justice and truth, the one who relentlessly searches and appeals, the one who is truly poor. For Ellul's poem, Christ is well depicted as the Wandering Jew, the one forbidden to rest, as in the legend, and forced to walk undyingly through the painful world. Although Ellul transforms the legend such that the Wandering Jew is not cursed by Christ but is Christ, nevertheless the Wandering Jew remains also exactly the figure of the legend: the Word of God in submitting to what man has decided submits all human beings to it, by enduring it in powerless love and refusing to end it by power. Thus, as we shall see, the Wandering Jew as Christ, at the poem's end, is a symbol deepening the vision of the very beginning of *Oratorio*.

At first, "Part Five" sounds the dark note of the triumph of the three horsemen who bring tribulations ("The horses' gallop has ringed life in / there is nothing beyond their seduction / war and blood-passion . . . // Power that pleases our desiccated heart" [81–82]). Then, the second section of "Part Five" is an appeal; the beggar is reduced to his sob:

O Lord Sabaoth of the subtle ear, discern this sob
this moan suffocating in these tumbled ruins and rolling barrages
this sob, this moan of the human heart and all creation . . .

But you don't bridle the wandering horses and put an end to the adventure
Why do you wait so long to judge, disappointing so much hope (87)

In the fourth section of "Part Five," God speaks and addresses himself to the sorrowing, yearning voice that has sung the previous sections, calling the singer a "Seer / Voyant" (89). God speaks and includes this seer among those "to whom this fog," human history, "serves only in that it divulges the single Light." God says,

Listen to them singing—I hear and grasp the song better than you—
"what good is this retinue and array
what good is this glory
what good are these twistings and turnings
when a name, a single name, satisfies our memories
when a day, a single day, satisfies our love?" (91)

Here we find a meta-poetry, in which Ellul imagines God quoting but transforming to a greater clarity and a greater music all that his poem and his life's work have seen and expressed. In this way the poet and intellectual are taken up and affirmed in the powerless power of the word. "Part Five," and thus *Oratorio* as a whole, ends in a one-page section that returns to the

homeless beggar [who] roams the borders of History
and raps at the door seeking alms
the beggar the presence unacceptable at all times
raps at every door, a tireless knocking
and stretches out a hand for grace, bread, a piece of fruit,
mysterious pulsing sun (94)

These lines, which are nearly but not quite the last in *Oratorio*, lay strong emphasis on an Ellulian cluster of themes: human exclusion, the basic and underlying glory of existence, and the duty of the one who must bear witness and ask for love, must ask that there be love. It is history—human exclusion—that seems impregnable. *Oratorio* gives full attention to the nightmare of history, and, following it, *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement* affirms that "the world is going to belong to the autonomy of humans." But also as in *Oratorio*, this is because of "the decision of God to adopt . . . the way of nonpower, of incognito, of humility, of the renunciation of his power in order to be nothing more than love" (79, translation altered). In face of human autonomous recalcitrance, "the sole victory of God is the fact of his word. . . . He has no other weapon" (109), and

without this Word of man ["who bears witness"], there is no Word of God either. The Word of God falls in the void if there is not an ear to hear it. And the Lord evokes that ear . . . (103)

Hearing and responsiveness are key, for the "end" is not a time or a goal but a person who acts and communicates. Ellul calls God the one who "comes, but he embraces all, the totality of time and events," and states that

The future is not an emptiness of time, indeterminate, unknown: the future is that which comes; it is filled (like our past) with the presence and action of the one who traverses this future toward us from the end of time. (101–02)

This concept of one who comes and who embraces the totality of time and events, expressed conceptually in the later exegetical work, is already

present in every aspect of *Oratorio's* form, whether we examine the details of its verse or its overall structure. Looking first of all at the verse, we see Ellul immediately start with the end in the beginning. The opening eight lines present an origin story with the timelessness of archetypal myth but express it in a way that is also a concrete, if allusive, analysis of the historical genesis of human violence and the way it is interlaced with an ever-present activist hope of peace. The opening lines, like the whole poem, portray this interlace as the structure of time and history and of any ordinary earthly moment in our lives.

The first two lines set out the end and beginning of human existence and the history that connects them:

Blood poured out when history was closed
and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist . . . (9)

This asserts that violence, and perhaps sacrifice, was in the beginning of history, and also at the end. The moment “when history was closed” was and is “the beginning of the world.” When history became exclusion supported with violence, the result was spilled blood . . . and this is human history. The beginning of our world was the clenched fist of exclusion, threat, and violence, and so it remains. The syntax makes the “whens” of beginning and end the same. If this “when” seems momentarily to belong to a timeless myth-time, and if it seems to determine a fate, that doesn’t last long, not even to the end of the sentence, for the continuation is something unexpected, an irruption of freedom and beauty into the scene:

Blood poured out when history was closed
and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist,
uncontrollable measure of the delight of loving
where freedom alone opens its rose . . .

No sooner do we learn that the beginning was already the disastrous end, the mutual destructive violence of beings closed to each other, than we find out that this very same reality was a measure of love’s delight, where lonely freedom dwells and opens a rose. The rose, symbol of beauty, sexuality, freshness, and renewal, is made a symbol of the same history that has just received the opposite characterization. With the rose, the verb tense abruptly, “illogically,” switches to the present. Freedom causes the begin-

ning and end to be transformed in the now; their fear and horror are subsumed in the opening rose and the delights of love.

Thus, end and beginning are so fused that they are revealed to be one thing. Ellul's full opening passage continues this procedure and confirms this reading:

Blood poured out when history was closed
and the beginning of the world was a clenched fist,
uncontrollable measure of the delight of loving
where freedom alone opens its rose

and freedom alone demanded total love.
Love alone was free and the blood flowed
before creation—from which nothing had been excluded—
sang for its first and its final recourse.

Here we find that freedom was alone in the beginning, that it alone can open the rose of creativity, that it demanded total love. This idea has two elements. Firstly, a demand requires a scope for action. Time, history, and progress are implied: a direction and meaning for time. Time and history are given as possibility, and their use for love is enjoined. Love demands a work of transformation, by which the beginning and end of clenched fist and spilled blood will no longer be the beginning and the end. Ellul's line "et la liberté seule exigeait tout amour" means that freedom both demanded to be loved and demanded of all things that they love. The second element is expressed in the verb "exigeait," "demanded": the past tense now returns, showing that freedom's "now" has transformed the past, creating a new origin from which a going-forward is now possible.

"Love alone was free" begins a second sentence, occupying lines six to eight. The personified freedom that was acting in lines four and five is revealed to be "Love." Ellul fits his sentence into the three verse lines in such a way as to convey that the spilled blood was also, and first, Love's blood, and it flowed temporally before and spatially in view of the creation. Thus, the word "creation" is made to mean at once the human creation of violently spilled blood and an anterior, more fundamental creation that subsumes it, a creation in which the spilled blood is already transformed into Love's self-sacrifice. Love was free, the lines tell us, and its blood poured "before"

creation, that is, in its view. But the syntactical jolt at the turn of lines seven and eight stresses the sense of “prior to”: Love was alone, and was free and gave its blood prior to the moment when creation sang for deliverance from the violent history it had just constituted itself as.

Turning from particular verses to the poem's totality, we find that Ellul has given *Oratorio* a symmetrical form, consonant with his visionary sense of the perennial total presence of the end in the beginning, with the disregarded word being the real presence of freedom, life, and peace. The poetic form he creates resembles the one he perceives in the Apocalypse as analyzed in *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement*. That book's major point concerning structure is that the Apocalypse is best understood from the center outward, five sections arranged around the third central section, which he calls the “keystone,” Apocalypse 8–14:5. Ellul finds that the Apocalypse is a progressive narrative and argument, a vision of history, but simultaneously, through its symmetrical aspect, it expresses the eternal. He finds this dual structure to be one with the poem's meaning. He writes that

The Apocalypse does not describe a moment of history but reveals for us the permanent depth of the historical: it is, then, one could say, a discernment of the Eternal in Time, of the action of the End in the Present. (24)

The structure of *Oratorio*, developed years earlier, is strictly symmetrical and embodies this same meaning. The book is in five parts, the central three parts concerning the three horsemen of the Apocalypse (6:3–8) that in Ellul's view are destructive yet constrained to be ultimately beneficent by God's plan. The central section, “Part Three: The Black Horse,” is the longest and most complex and concerns the horse that Ellul aligns closely with his analysis of technique, politics, the state, and human self-deception and self-aggrandizement. It is flanked by “Part Two: The Horse of War” and “Part Four: Death,” which mirror. This structure corresponds to the poem's vision of history, which can be summarized in three points: 1) War is the most horrible expression of death but not the whole of it. 2) Death is the ultimate reality of human works; it is their end but also stands at their origin and is constantly present within them. 3) The basic reality of death is the rejection of God, the self-assertive pride endemic to human works. The poem's symmetrical structure places the last point, the basic one, in the central position.

On either side of these three parts lie “Part One: The Word of God,” in which the Word is largely represented as the white horseman of Apocalypse 16:2 and 19:11, and “Part Five,” untitled, which can be characterized by a phrase from it: “morning comes, / borne by the First, the horseman of the dawn.” These two parts, like Parts Two and Four, mirror each other. In Part One, the Word of God must set out on its painful course through human history. In Part Five, there is a more complete revealing of the Word’s permanent success and agony and of its way of existing for us in history. Part Five focuses on the accomplishment of what is announced as plan in Part One and becomes crisis and death in Parts Two, Three, and Four. It’s important to keep in mind, though, the constant and extreme paradoxical interminglings of Ellul’s verse. Anyone will be bewildered who expects a pure presentation in each section of one stage, the discourse then moving on to the next stage. There is scarcely an exultant line that does not contain its charge of deathliness and desperate challenge; there is scarcely a cry of despair that does not imply hope and the redeeming if hidden action of divine love.

True poetry always comes up against the inexpressible, and perhaps most essentially here, where the task is to see the hidden in the obtrusive, the eternal in time. *Oratorio*’s final stanza sings a visionary future in which suddenly the three terrifying horses gallop away and vanish and the permanently present reality always advancing toward us is indeed fully here:

All you who so often felt their hatred
and shivered at their hoof beats, you frail catkins of the green ash tree,
look—look, the morning comes,
borne by the First, the horesman of the dawn
at last known by all who come to open and to close
the black doors of fate
to give the Beggar’s glory back into his hands. (94)

This great final passage can be compared with lines from *The Apocalypse: Architecture in Movement* that describe God’s ever-present eternity in concepts that catch up the poem’s glancing and profound images of nature—the fruit, the mysterious pulsing sun, the spring catkins of the ash tree likened to human beings and to the coming of dawn and of a beautiful horse:

The eternity of God is not an immobility; it is a perpetual beginning, a newness always being born, an absence of custom, necessity, destiny; an absence of repetition. . . . And eternity is a spring gushing with non-predetermined instants, always fresh, new, surprising. . . . That is what our text calls Life . . . a love that does not wear out, . . . always as full, as stirring, as surprising as on the first day. (216, translation altered)

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Ellul's City in Scripture and Poetry

Kelsey L. Haskett

In the summer of 2017 I had the privilege of visiting the Ellul family at their home outside Bordeaux and of examining some of Jacques Ellul's archives with them, in particular a number of handwritten poems that had never been published. As a professor of French literature I was drawn to the poems and eager to help with transcribing them into typewritten form and then translating them into English. The first four poems that we reviewed were poems Ellul had written to accompany the publication of his book *The Meaning of the City* but that the editor had declined to publish at the time. It is evident from our current vantage point that these poems not only enhance the substance of Ellul's book, but that their very personal meaning also sheds light on the author himself, who dared to expose his emotions and experiences in a way that reveals both his profound engagement with this topic and, indeed, a part of his inner life that he may not have divulged elsewhere. While the book explains theologically the essential concepts of Ellul's city, it is in the poems that he explores his own experience of living in the city, with a parallel unfolding of themes.

Anyone reading these poems without being familiar with the book would certainly be surprised, if not perplexed, by the vehemence of the author in his condemnation of the city. Although his verse is metaphorically very graphic and convincing in conveying the failure of the city to meet human needs, the reasons for his consistently negative stance are not fully revealed in the poems themselves. It is only when they are read in conjunction with the book that the basis for the poet's attitude is disclosed. Thus, I would like to briefly review the major themes of the book pertaining to an understanding of the poems, before turning to the poems themselves.

The Meaning of the City, as a theological work, analyses the role of the city as portrayed throughout the Bible, with tremendous scope and originality—with the city’s development being used as a metaphor for the trajectory of humankind, from its rejection of God to its final redemption through Christ. Instead of focusing first on humanity’s origins in the Garden of Eden, Ellul begins with man’s revolt against God and its manifestation in the building of the first city by the first murderer, Cain, thereby conferring on the city from the outset the notion of spiritual rebellion that Ellul sees as its root. Condemned to be a fugitive and a wanderer for the sin of having killed his brother, Cain flees from the presence of the Lord and builds a city, in an attempt to end his wandering and establish a secure place, a home, which in fact he never finds. For Ellul, “The seed of all man’s questings is to be found in Cain’s life in the land of wandering” (3). His relationship with God now broken, he finds no comfort in the mark of protection God puts on him. Ellul affirms,

The city is the direct consequence of Cain’s murderous act and of his refusal to accept God’s protection. . . . For God’s Eden he substitutes his own, for the goal given to his life by God, he substitutes a goal chosen by himself—just as he substituted his own security for God’s. Such is the act by which Cain takes his destiny on his own shoulders, refusing the hand of God in his life. (5)

Ellul sees in Cain’s creation of the city the beginning of all civilization. He goes on to elucidate the origins of basically all the significant cities in the Bible, stating that, “All the builders were sons of Cain and act with his purpose” (10). Tracing the steps of Nimrod and other builders, he examines the multiple purposes of the city as it develops, including the role of Nineveh as an agent of war, Pharaoh’s cities as economic strongholds, and Babylon as the synthesis of civilization, showing that there are spiritual powers behind each of these. Spiritually speaking, the kings of Israel fare no better than their pagan counterparts, despite having been chosen by God. Beginning with Solomon, they succumb to their desire for power and riches and put their confidence elsewhere than in the Lord when they decide to build their cities. The central problem the city represents for Israel, according to Ellul, is the clash between the spiritual power of the city and the spirit of grace that God wants to bring to bear upon the city. There is a fundamental op-

position between the Lord and the city, and a “consciousness . . . of the city as a world for which man was not made” (42).

The Meaning of the City thus provides the theological underpinnings for Ellul's depiction of the city in his poems. For Ellul, “The city is cursed. She is condemned to death because of everything she represents” (47). Ellul cannot do otherwise but reject the city in his poetry, just as he sees God doing in his theology. The reason for this divine rejection, Ellul maintains, is that “[i]nto every aspect . . . of the city's construction has been built the tendency to exclude God” (53). This would seem all the more so in the modern city, where natural beauty has been replaced by lifeless artifice, and human agency by technological progress. Before touching on the final destiny of the city, as it unfolds at the end of Ellul's book, let us now turn to the poems Ellul wished to incorporate into his exegesis of the city, considering not only their poetic value, meaning, and relation to the book, but in particular their revelatory value as it applies to Ellul's life, emotions, and personal spiritual journey, as a man living in the city, like most of us are compelled to do.

Ellul's City in Poetry

Poem 1 - Lights over the City

I followed my dream in the heart of strange cities
Amid cast-iron flowers and cement tree trunks.
Everything is natural and simple and my dream rushes
Past hearts completely mass-produced—hearts made of magnets.

A button—everything lights up and the sky becomes red
Red that is truly astonishing—red over the city
And this sky where not a single bird still moves
Seems to be a piece of ground where some enormous drunk has vomited
The drunk, is it me? Man? (with a capital M)
The Machine? The fluid? or perhaps heaven?
I do not know—I see and continuously chew on
This discovery like a honey-filled candy
A dream under heaven? What a joke

I certainly want to hang on to “civilizations”
But let them produce flowers, even faded ones
Something human—not excrement

However over there, very far away (a bell tolls)
A man alone finds himself in a bright fire
And a dense vibration—everything purrs
The walls of white marble—of gray everite
A rough cement ground and the opal window panes
with a faint glimmer coming from the rust-colored copperware.
Everything purrs—and vibrates—strange pale coloring
Which slowly coats and then swallows everything.
In the middle, without a sound—without moving—without life
Black transformers crouched down every evening
strive—without passion (a man watches them closely)
And without knowing why—to flood the black sky.

“Lights over the City” is a very personal poem, as the first-person pronouns “I” and “my” immediately reveal. We begin with the poet following his dream, which turns out to be more a nightmare, as it thrusts him into the heart of the city, where all is false, just like the hearts of the people who live there. The industrial forms of cast-iron and cement that replace the natural vegetation in the city’s landscape reflect, in fact, the inhabitants’ hearts made of magnets. Forged in the hardest of materials, incapable of expressing true emotion or individuality, these hearts have all come out the same, and their force of attraction is anything but human. Ironically everything appears to be natural and simple, as if it has always been this way; it is only the poet who is not duped by what he sees.

In the sky, a simple button turns everything to red, and through artificial illumination, alluded to in the title, nature is once again obliterated; and just as there is no natural vegetation in the city, there are no birds flying in the sky. The metaphor used to describe the sky is as repulsive as the poet can possibly make it: it is nothing but an ugly stretch of ground, entirely vilified by the vomit of an enormous drunk.

Through this and the other images in the poem, the senses of the reader are attacked by the portrait of the city that emerges: the stench of vomit

fills our nostrils like the foulness of the pollution that blankets the modern city; visually speaking, everything is artificial—from the industrially made imitations of plants and trees to the red, electric light; on a tactile level, everything is hard and cold, including people's hearts; and the absence of birds moving in the sky, while suggesting the death of nature, reinforces the sense of immobility in this stifling atmosphere.

These impressions of the city are followed by the poet's interrogations as to the source of the vile substance that now transforms the sky—not only destroying the natural canopy of light but figuratively, one might add, obscuring our dreams of truth and beauty, freedom and dignity, and highlighting the city's failure to produce anything of worth for humanity. Does the responsibility lie with the individual, the society, the technological world we have created, or elsewhere? the poet ponders. While not rejecting human civilization outright, he nevertheless condemns in the strongest possible terms our modern relinquishment of all that is human for the sake of a society that produces nothing but dung, nothing but a betrayal of all that we are.

The last verse of the poem depicts again a presumably red light, a bright fire, now accompanied by the dense vibration of an electrically charged environment permeating the whole cityscape. Everything is swallowed up by the strange pale coloring that fills the atmosphere, emanating from black transformers crouched down in the night like beasts in the jungle, flooding the black sky with their abnormal light. An absence of passion typifies this electrically controlled world, overseen nevertheless by man, and evoking once again the city dwellers' hearts of magnets, suggesting now the possibility of electromagnets, running on electricity and manipulated by its current, reinforcing the absence of the human and the power of technology in this strange city humankind has built for itself.

Poem 2 - Streets

Oh streets, empty streets, streets muddy with people and mud!
Streets that swallow up women, drunkards, and madmen
Streets I so often walked
And where for a long time I searched

In vain
Something that was me!

Ah, streets! Polished and mundane levelers
Where I must walk at the same pace, at the breakneck speed
Of everyone, of all!
Of all those who are not crazy!
And I am
All that which is not me!

Neither I! Nor you, nor anyone, nor even (not even) shame
Draws attention in the street which comes, goes, descends, and rises
Because it's all the same
From the marvelous awakening
of the rooster
Until evening when I sleep—

Everything is meaningless in the street, especially life
Everything is hidden under a respectable veil, and envy
Shakes amiably, callously, the hand
Of vice, only to choke tomorrow
And at daybreak
Reappear around me

Ah, streets, I hate you in my heart, great swallower of souls
Breathing your skillful, artificial, and shameful flame
into uneven walkers of your polished paving stones
into walkers that your paving stones render polished
too,
And empty, just like me

In Ellul's second poem, "Streets," he opens up on an even more personal level, situating himself in the city in a very tangible way. Like the "strange pale coloring" in the previous poem, the streets swallow up the passers-by, especially the vulnerable. The poet's familiarity with these streets is accompanied by a sense of alienation that runs throughout the poem, although it is not technology that alienates him this time but the superficiality of the people who walk the streets and the absence of meaning that char-

acterizes their lives. The poet seeks his identity in streets he cannot relate to, although the reader may sense they are simply a catalyst for his intense self-searching that will never find answers here, having little to do, in reality, with the streets themselves.

The pressure to conform is revealed in the second verse, where the poet is reduced to the common level of the masses, advancing at the same pace as they, unable to maintain a distinct identity, and turning into something he knows is not he. Nothing stands out in the crowd, either positively or negatively, because “everything is meaningless in the street, especially life.” The poet’s existential crisis is lived in the street, heightened by the banality and the pretense of the people around him, arousing his hatred for all that is false, all that is polished and artificial in society. The streets are also a “swallower of souls,” because everyone has, in effect, sold their soul to the mediocrity of the city, renouncing a higher way and ending up empty, just like the poet. This emotional poem, replete with exclamation marks, evidently reflects a time in his life when Ellul was searching for truth and meaning and when nothing on the human level could satisfy his deepest longings, least of all the activities of the city played out in the lifeless streets he was obliged to travel.

Poem 3

In the stench of urine and gasoline and sewers
And in the horrible drama of my tempted soul
And in the obscure words, remarks thrown up
To heaven, of hatred, fury, love

I saw randomly and wretchedly
Against the sky reeking of factories and vices
Two naked, straight, and harsh branches of winter
In the shape of a cross—a star in the background was looking on—

For the first time a ray of hope appears in the third poem, standing out against the vileness of the city, portrayed once again by images that irritate our senses. The poet himself is in the throes of a personal drama, as his soul wrestles with temptation—but this time he throws up some reckless words to heaven, the prayer of a desperate man, and in the midst of his hopeless-

ness appears a sign: the symbol of the cross, etched across the sky by two lifeless branches but infused with hope by the star looking on, signifying through the verb an animate being, a Being who cares and who sees our plight.

Poem 4

Light on the eyes, light in the sky
nothing rumbles or passes by disturbing the light
and the serenity of things is first
before all-powerful and all-existential
rustling of a leaf in the sun that envelops it
smothering of the soul in the hands of the living God
bitter sorrow endured within the trembling
fulfillment of the eyes covered with light

I only knew this in a brutal world
chaos of crushing iron, stone, and steel
where the flowers and fruit are forged from the abnormal
where abstraction escapes and the deformed creates
intoxicated with the averagely hideous city
what is the despair that came looking for me
what grandeur in this destiny that oppressed me
what madness in the passions, actions, thoughts—all shameful?

You alone, you know, oh God who was seeking me
despite myself, against myself, who came and loved me
for the sake of your love, your will, your very name
and who knew how to find within my feeble cowardice
the pure gold that you yourself put in the mud

In the mud of the city with narrow windows
where nothing is seen but a star-shaped lamp
as false as virtue, as mediocre as vice
where nothing is disclosed to astonished eyes
of the clear light purely poured down from your heaven, oh my God

Thus you found me—you loved me so much
that despite my fury and my taste for suicide
despite my strong desire to no longer be lucid
I had nothing left but a single port—all others being closed
by you yourself Lord who directed this struggle—
it was to recognize at last that this fall,
mortal, dreadful, to the chasm that you open
was the only view that you cover from my eyes

Oh last judgment!
last day that we live in the city of men!
city of factory smoke, of offices
that open at eight o'clock and smell of stale tobacco
city of hospitals where the patient is a number
city of prisons where the drama is words

Oh last judgment that descends in silence
on this man walking among other men

This final poem represents a drastic change in tone for the poet. Artificial light now changes to God's pure light, as he relates a spiritual experience that has radically transformed his life. Having opened the door a crack to the hope of the cross in the previous poem, he now throws it wide open, flooding the first verse with light. In lines slightly reminiscent of Blaise Pascal's "Memorial," in which he begins the description of his dramatic conversion experience with the exclamation "Fire," Ellul focuses on the light that has opened his eyes to the truth of the gospel: "Light on the eyes, light in the sky / nothing rumbles or passes by disturbing the light." Serenity and nature replace the negative emotions and images of the previous poems, turning the "bitter sorrow endured within the trembling" to the "fulfillment of the eyes covered with light." Just as the personal God Pascal discovers at the time of his conversion is not the God of "philosophers and scholars," Ellul's God is not, first and foremost, "all-powerful and all-existential" but rather a loving God who seeks out the individual and guides him into his light.

This discovery has not come easily for the poet. Having endured in the "brutal world" of the city the "chaos of crushing iron, stone, and steel where

the flowers and fruit are forged from the abnormal,” he realizes nonetheless that God was seeking him, despite his thoughts and actions, despite himself, and indeed against his own natural tendencies to reject God. It is God’s love, described here in the most tender of terms, that made all the difference for Ellul, winning him over in the midst of his painful emotions, including suicidal thoughts and a desire to escape from reason, maybe even into madness. He understands that God was searching within his frail frame of dust the “pure gold” God himself had placed there, seeing both his eternal value and his rich potential in this life. He knows it was God who directed his struggle and led him to Himself and has protected him from the dreadful consequences of the Fall that he will never see, being covered by God’s love.

This last thought leads Ellul to a sudden consciousness of the day of judgment, coming to end life in the city, or the world, where ordinary lives are being lived out in total oblivion to their current degradation or impending doom. The last two lines, somewhat surprising, suggest to me the poet’s awareness of human destiny, which abruptly descends on him with the grim realization that there are others in this world who have not yet seen the light and whom he cannot forget as he goes about living in their midst. His description of God’s love and grace throughout the poem seems too poignant for us to think that he now fears judgment for himself, I would submit, but points rather to his quickened sense of responsibility for the rest of humanity who have yet to experience this love.

My interpretation of these lines is reinforced by a chapter in *The Meaning of the City*, which, after an extensive discussion of God’s condemnation of the city throughout the book, opens with the following words: “But it is in these cities we must live” (72). Ellul then quotes Jeremiah’s injunction to the captives of Israel being carried off to Babylon: “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare will you find your welfare” (Jer 29:7). God will carry out his own judgment, contends Ellul, but he asks us to participate in the life of the city and to seek her welfare, praying for her and warning her of judgment. It is with this in mind that I read the concluding lines of Ellul’s last poem, where the awareness of the coming judgment falls upon the poet who knows, in the end, that he must reach out to the city.

I believe this poem is particularly significant in that it expresses in a very intimate way what Ellul was reluctant to discuss throughout the rest of his work. In *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, he does provide some insight into his conversion in his conversation with Patrick Chasteney, saying of his encounter with God,

I knew myself to be in the presence of something so astounding,
so overwhelming that it entered me to the very center of my being.
That's all I can tell you. . . . Afterwards I thought to myself, "You have
been in the presence of God." (52)

He also asserts that he has "never written about [his conversion] and ha[s] no intention of doing so," but adds, "As I have already explained for my poems, they give away too much about me" (53). It is only through his poetry, then, that Ellul is able to overcome his scruples and invite his readers into his private world.

Before concluding his book, Ellul examines the role of Jerusalem in the world and the watershed moment of Christ's coming in history, presenting finally the miracle of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city that transcends all that exists in the world. God does not restore his original order at the end, explains Ellul, but creates another, where he makes all things new. Man wanted to create a city where God would be excluded, but God will create a city where he will be all in all. It is here that Christ's final victory will be realized and where God himself will fulfill all the hopes of his people.

As we study the poems Ellul has produced to accompany this book, we see a progression from the themes of dehumanization and alienation to a gradual revelation of hope and finally transcendent love. In tandem with the book, the poetic themes of depersonalization, degradation, and despair are intersected by a ray of hope that converges with the poet's search for something more. While the book devotes a chapter to the transformation Christ's life brought to the world, Ellul's final poem relates the transformation of his own inner life through his encounter with Christ, powerfully contrasted with his earlier poems and concluding with his return to the needs of the city and a realization of his new role. His poetry does not develop the latter themes of the book, because it stops with his own personal story. But through his poetry he opens up his life in a way that makes his

theology come alive and convinces us that it has much more to do with his own personal reality than with theory and exegesis alone.

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The “Analogy of Faith”: What Does It Mean? Why, and What For?

Frédéric Rognon

As a diligent reader of the Bible, Jacques Ellul placed scriptural revelation at the heart of his work, and in particular, his ethical works. It is thus that he can write,

The criterion of my thought is biblical revelation; the content of my thought is biblical revelation; my point of departure is furnished by biblical revelation; the method is the dialectic according to which biblical revelation is given to us; and the objective is the search for the signification of biblical revelation for ethics.¹

Ellul’s ethical thought is thus “scripturo-centric,” conferring a singular status on the biblical text. How, in effect, did Jacques Ellul read the Bible? And in what manner is his reading original, singular, and capable of renewing current interpretations?

To respond to these questions, we will proceed in four steps. First, we will indicate the critique that Ellul addressed to exegesis. Next, we will present the core principles of the Ellulian approach to the Bible. In the third step, we will pause on the method *par excellence* recommended by the professor from Bordeaux: “the analogy of faith.” And we will conclude with four examples of biblical texts interpreted according to the analogy of faith.

Critique of Exegesis

Ellul addresses lively critiques toward historical-critical exegesis as well as structural exegesis. He does not consider them to be false or vain, as they are doubtless exact and useful for the nature of the science,

but they do not take one step towards the ultimate. Certainly, they are in the service of exactitude, but they say nothing on the subject of truth and do not permit it to be glimpsed but perhaps hide it.²

It is thus the tension between Reality and Truth that is invoked here to disqualify scientific and technical exegetical methods, a tension that recurs throughout the Ellulian oeuvre. Ellul particularly reproaches these methods for stripping the biblical text of any spiritual dimension and reducing it to nothing more than a text like any other (similar to a work of Homer or Plato). To treat the Bible like an inert object would be like surgeons forgetting that the patients on whom they are operating are alive, performing a dissection or an autopsy instead of an operation that would save them.³

This accusation recalls Søren Kierkegaard's polemical and sarcastic charge against those who pretend to read a love letter with an arsenal of dictionaries, concordances, and encyclopedias.⁴ Now, the Bible is a love letter, sent by God to his readers, to touch their hearts and address the most intimate areas of their existence.

Ellul equally critiques the marxist exegesis that was fashionable in the 1970s, and notably that of Fernando Belo, who purported "to read Mark via Marx."⁵ The professor from Bordeaux catalogs the innumerable historical errors that permit Belo to integrate the gospel into the marxist schema⁶ and particularly reproaches him for performing a materialist and political reduction of a text that, precisely, refuses any materialist interpretation of life.⁷

What, then, is the alternative that Jacques Ellul proposes to these exegetical impasses?

The Core Principles of the Ellulian Approach to the Bible

If Ellul refuses the scientific approach to the Bible, it is in order to oppose it to meditation inspired by Kierkegaard. This latter approach amounts to considering biblical revelation as addressing the very existence of the subject. But in this regard, he inverts the contemporary perspective, notably in Protestant milieus, that consists in opening the Bible each time that we seek a response to our questions (whether ethical, social, or existential). Ellul clearly does not conceive of the Bible as a recipe book, nor even as a

book of responses to our questions. The Bible is not a book of responses but a book of questions, which God poses to the believing reader.⁸ If we come to the Bible with questions, these will find no response here; instead, they will undergo a displacement, a decentering, and we will come away from the Bible with our questions renewed and with new questions posed to us.⁹ It is therefore up to us to respond to them, that is, to be responsible in assuming our responses.

The Bible is thus a book that directs man to his freedom and responsibility. A believer's reading is a listening, since faith is revitalized in silence.¹⁰ The Bible poses us three principal questions.¹¹ It poses a confessional question, “Who do you say that I am?”¹² an ethical question, “What have you done with your brother?”¹³ and an existential question referring to our quest, “Who are you looking for?”¹⁴ We are thus interrogated and invited to give a confessional response, an ethical response, and an existential response, by the word and by our life. Cain, for his part, refuses to respond to the question of God and thus assume his “responsibilities.”¹⁵ We often pose questions to the Bible or about the Bible; too often, we forget to receive the questions that the Bible itself poses to us.¹⁶ Instead of posing questions to the Bible, as the believer ordinarily does, and instead of posing questions about the Bible, as the exegete does, with both cases starting from extra-biblical concerns, at risk of instrumentalizing revelation, it is a matter of letting the Bible pose questions to the world and to believers. It is thus a matter of having a freedom as robust toward the assumptions of the world as it is toward the given revelation.¹⁷

“The Analogy of Faith”

The royal method that Ellul proposes, in order to escape both literalism and textual critique, is that of the “analogy of faith.” This expression comes to us from the apostle Paul, who employs it only once (it is thus a *hapax*) in the epistle to the Romans¹⁸: κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως in Greek, *fidei analogia* in Latin. It is situated in a passage dedicated to different qualities that are given to different people in the heart of the Church: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, direction of the community, mercy.¹⁹ The analogy of faith is attached to the persona of the prophet:

Since we have different gifts, according to the grace that has been accorded to us, let the one who has the gift of prophecy exercise it according to the analogy of faith.²⁰

John Calvin borrowed this Pauline expression in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*²¹ (in his exegesis of Rom 12:6) and in several places in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.²² In his commentary, Calvin pleads in favor of a broad conception of prophecy, understood not as the gift of predicting the future but as a right intelligence of Scripture and a capacity to explain it clearly. It is thus to seek to accord all doctrine taught from Scripture with the foundations of the faith.²³ In *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin mentions the analogy of faith beginning in his address to the king of France that introduces the work. Against his adversaries who accuse him of turning the Word of God from its true meaning, the Reformer recalls this:

When St. Paul wanted every prophecy to be conformed to the analogy and likeness of faith, he gave a most certain rule for testing every interpretation of Scripture (Rom 12[:6]). Now if our teaching is measured by this rule of faith, we have the victory in hand.²⁴

In the main body of this voluminous treatment, John Calvin has recourse to the concept of the analogy of faith on the subjects of the baptism of children and the communion meal. Infant baptism is not explicitly affirmed in the Bible, but a silence does not imply a censure; otherwise, women would not be permitted to take communion. On the other hand, there is a question of the baptism of entire families; it is thus conforming to the analogy of faith that we can lay biblical foundations for the baptism of children.²⁵ By the same token, the Reformer defends his comprehension of the mystery of the holy supper based on the methodological principle of the analogy of faith.²⁶ According to Calvin, the analogy of faith thus consists in interpreting Scripture by Scripture, allowing Scripture to interpret itself: to dig deeply into each text to make it cohere with the other texts of the Bible.

Ellul joins Calvin in his understanding of this rule of reading, while still slightly demarcating his own position. In the second part of *To Will and To Do*,²⁷ posthumously published in French and currently under translation into English, the professor from Bordeaux devotes long passages of his writing to the analogy of faith.²⁸ Following Karl Barth, while polemically

disagreeing with him, Ellul begins by clearly distinguishing the *analogia fidei* from the *analogia entis*, a concept that is situated at the base of natural theology in the style of Thomas Aquinas.²⁹ His critique directed towards Barth consists in saying that the theologian from Basel ceded to the temptation that he denounced himself (of resorting to the *analogia entis*). Ellul then distances himself from Calvin in limiting the analogy of faith to the exercise of prophecy in the strict sense, in place of making of this rule a very general principle for the interpretation of all biblical texts.³⁰ He nevertheless understands the prophet’s mission as being properly ethical—that is, as consisting of enunciating an ethic, under the inspiration of the Spirit, and in guaranteeing its objectivity by confronting it with Scripture:

If, then, prophecy consists in this formulation of a moral here and now, inspired by the Spirit of God, departing from and relating to Holy Scripture, we understand that the analogy of faith in question here effectively concerns the interpretation of biblical texts, and that is a matter of a guarantee of objectivity.³¹

This does not prevent Ellul from implicitly positioning himself close to the broad conception of Calvin in applying this method to numerous texts, in which he believes he discerns an ethical intention: “There cannot be a formulation of a moral for Christians based on the deep comprehension of ethical texts unless the analogy of faith can be applied,” he declares.³² He defines the analogy as “a relation between elements of different natures or dimensions”³³ but also as “the comprehension of the *reason*”³⁴ for this relation. The interpretation of Scripture therefore consists in understanding the gap between biblical revelation and the contemporary moral of an era, in order to reproduce the same gap in our own milieu, without adopting in a literal manner a statement that is outmoded today. It is the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ that constitutes the objectivity of the very heart of revelation. The entire Bible points to Jesus Christ and designates him as Lord and Savior. Consequently, Jesus Christ must be the constant in relation to which the analogy of faith must be established.³⁵ And if a passage of the biblical corpus seems to depart from the image and the face of the God of love that Jesus has revealed to us, it must be worked on, to the point of discerning what can be made consistent with this kernel of revelation.

Examples of Applying the Method of the Analogy of Faith

We will take four examples of difficult biblical texts that the method of the analogy of faith will allow us to clarify, by hearing them in echo with other texts, in a harmonious symphony. We present them by relying on Ellul's commentary but also by extending it beyond what Ellul wrote concerning these texts.

Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is the biblical book that Ellul loved the most: "There is probably no other text in the Bible that I have so probed, from which I have received so much—that has affected me and spoken to me so much."³⁶ He therefore devoted a work of meditation to Ecclesiastes, *Reason for Being*³⁷—a book that he considered to be the conclusion to the whole of his work.³⁸ For his study, our author affirms to have chosen a path that inverts the academic method, departing from the Hebrew text itself and not from commentaries.³⁹ He similarly refuses to consider the Bible as equal to any other literary text, since it is the bearer of revelation.⁴⁰ That is why Ellul seeks a textual coherence beyond apparent contradictions: for example, between "all is vanity (including wisdom)" and "seek wisdom (because it comes from God)." And he orients this coherence in a dialectical movement between "Reality" and "Truth." The Reality is that all is vanity, and the Truth is that everything is a gift of God. Reality prevents the Truth from being an evasion, while the Truth prevents Reality from being hopeless.⁴¹

All commentators of Ecclesiastes have been disconcerted by the absence of a logical plan and have generally searched to identify different authors and different editorial layers. According to Ellul, the coherence does not come from a plan but from a weave, like a threading of reflections that become entangled, echoing one another. The dialectic between vanity and wisdom finds its end in God: wisdom makes the vanity of everything apparent, but wisdom is itself vanity, and yet vanity is overtaken by wisdom. And nevertheless, the book of Qoheleth does not end in this immanent circle, because of the reference to God, which is central and decisive because it ties together the dispersed factors. The contradictions are not gross errors of forgetfulness, as the exegetes say, but one of the keys of the book: "The

principle of non-contradiction is a principle of death. Contradiction is the condition of a communication.”⁴² The work of Kierkegaard was decisive for Ellul’s discernment of the dialectical movement at the heart of the book of Qoheleth. And it is equally in reference to the Danish thinker that our author finally pleads in favor of a subjective and intuitive approach:

above all, to let oneself be seized by the beauty of the text, to receive it first of all in emotion and silent listening as with music, and to allow one’s sensitivity, one’s imagination, to speak before wanting to analyse and “understand.”⁴³

Ellul synthesizes his approach by a spiral schema,⁴⁴ thanks to which we can traverse the apparent contradictions of the book of Qoheleth in following the movement of the text. We are not dealing with a book written by three authors: the one, skeptic and disillusioned, seeing in all things only vanity; the second, rich with experiences, considering a wisdom without God as an art of living with realism and lucidity; and the third, who confesses his faith in God. It is a matter here of one author, who departs from vanity (1:1–11), responds to it with wisdom (1:12–18), but falls again into vanity since wisdom itself is vanity (2:1–11). This vicious circle finds its opening in God (who appears for the first time in 2:24); it is “before God” that everything takes on meaning, because everything is a “gift of God” (3:10–17; 5:17–19); therefore, “fear God” (5:6). And God has the last word (12:10–13). It is indeed a matter of applying the method of the analogy of faith, for God is the beginning, the center, and the end of the Bible, all converges toward him, and consequently every text that would seem to neglect him can be clarified if we dig to the point that, finally, we find God therein.

The Parable of the Wedding Party⁴⁵

Our second example will be that of the parable of the wedding party.⁴⁶ We are within a parable of the Kingdom. These parables of the Kingdom are spread all along the Gospel of Matthew, from chapter 13 until chapter 25, with each one giving us an image of the Kingdom of heaven: “The Kingdom of heaven is like. . .” Like a man, a mustard seed, yeast, a hidden treasure, a merchant, a net, a king. Here, in our parable, the Kingdom of heaven is similar to a king. This king organizes a wedding feast for his son. Once the feast is put in place, he sends his servants to call those who were

invited. These invitees were thus aware of the invitation, they knew that the wedding feast was going to take place and that they were invited. And yet, they make excuses and decline the invitation, too occupied with their fields and commerce. The invitees seize the servants, insult them, and kill them. So the king takes his vengeance by making them perish. Then he tells his servants to go and invite everyone they can find, in the streets and cross-roads: “wicked and good,” the text specifies. Wicked and good, all are invited. This seems to be a first decisive element.⁴⁷ And the wedding hall is full of guests. Now, one man has not worn his garment for the wedding feast. Only one in the whole crowd: this is a second determining element.⁴⁸ The king asks him how he entered, and he remains silent. So the king says to his servants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The king behaves in the manner of a tyrant. Ought we therefore identify the king with God, as is often done? Must we identify the indifferent guests with believers who are a bit too lukewarm, and the poorly dressed guest as the unbeliever, the incredulous one, the infidel, the one who does not live according to the gospel, as we often do? Must we therefore see in this parable a means of terrorizing bad believers by threatening them with hell, as has often been done? Is this the image of the Father that Jesus came to reveal to us, when he addressed himself to us in an uncoded manner outside of the parables?

Let us therefore reconsider the elements that constitute the point of the text: wicked and good share the feast, and only one is thrown into the darkness, punished and tormented. Even the indifferent guests are not thrown into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. They are killed, they are dead, but they are not submitted to these torments. Nothing is told us about what happens to them after their death. There is only one here who is condemned, expelled, tormented for all. Who is this one if not Christ himself? This man who is thrown out, without a wedding garment, it is Jesus himself! This man who stays silent when interrogated and threatened, it is Jesus, who remained silent before Pilate! All the others are clothed in a wedding garment, the wicked and the good, everyone! For it is Jesus who took on himself our faults and was condemned for us, in our place! This is what the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians in a text just as enigmatic and scandalous: “The one who knew no sin, God made him be-

come sin for us, so that we could become in him the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). He did not become a sinner; he became sin! And he paid for us. He was cast into torment, weeping and gnashing of teeth: he “descended into hell,” as the Creed says. All this was done for us. And this is consistent with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

So then, we might say: But this God is cruel, who casts his son into torment! It is here that I see the whole interest of believing in the Trinity. If we believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, if Jesus Christ is none other than God, God as the Father is God and as the Holy Spirit is God, then this is not a god who cruelly casts a man, *a fortiori* his son, into torment. Let us not be prisoners of a literal or allegorical reading of the parable, according to which a king expels a guest. The king does not represent the Father; he represents the Kingdom, since it is the Kingdom of heaven that is like a king. No, according to the trinitarian faith, it is God as Jesus Christ who gives himself fully for us: it is a gift of self and not the sacrifice of someone else. God gives himself fully to suffering and torment, to weeping and gnashing of teeth, so that we who are sinners may be freed, saved from these troubles. And this is in coherence with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

The parable ends thus: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Here again, the formula is strange. The parable has just told us that the wedding hall was full of guests, yet the lesson of the parable consists in telling us that there are many called, but few chosen. We thus cannot reasonably identify the guests, who are innumerable, with the chosen, who are very few. Perhaps the guests are the called rather than the chosen. This final formula cannot signify that very few will be saved at the end of time.⁴⁹ “Few are chosen” can mean, by euphemism: “none are chosen, not one chosen.” This formula signifies thus that we are not worthy of being saved, not one among us, but that Jesus alone has paid so that we might be saved. This formula signifies the infinite love of the Father without which we can do nothing by ourselves. And this, too, is in coherence with the whole of the gospel message, according to the analogy of faith.

The Parable of the Judgment⁵⁰

Our third example is that of the parable of the Judgment. This text poses a certain number of problems. It seems to go against the idea of salvation by grace and to defend the idea of salvation by works. Moreover, it raises the question of hell⁵¹: those who have accomplished works of mercy (the sheep) will be blessed and will enter into the Kingdom, and those who have not accomplished these works (the goats) will be cursed and will go into eternal fire. For those who have given food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, those who have welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner, have served Christ himself. They therefore have the right to eternal life. But those who have not done all this have not served Christ. And consequently, they will go to eternal punishment.

But there is a small detail here that has too often gone neglected: the sheep are all surprised to learn that they have served Christ in serving their neighbor; by the same token, the goats are all surprised to learn that they have not served Christ in not serving their neighbor. They discover this only after the fact. Thus they are unaware, at the moment of their encounter with their neighbor, that Christ identified himself with the littlest person, that he was, literally, this little one. In other words, those who appear in Matthew 25 have not read Matthew 25! And for good reason! This effect of surprise is the first decisive element. For we see thus that the sheep have acted in this manner not in order to be saved but because they let their hearts speak. The attitude of the sheep, like that of the goats, was linked not to salvation but to the capacity or incapacity to love the neighbor in distress. It is the opening or closing of the heart that is in question here, the opening or closing of the heart before the concrete situation and the immediate needs of the littlest one there is, quite simply.

It is in this manner that a second small detail, still more decisive, must be noticed. First of all, what the Son of Man really says to the goats is that “in the measure where (ἐφ’ ὅσον) you have not done this for one of these little ones, it is for me that you have not done it.” It is a question of one of these little ones. This means that it suffices to neglect one little one, only one, to be damned! Even if you help 99 little ones, if you leave one of the hundred aside without regarding them, you are damned! But this signifies therefore

that we are all damned, for we have all neglected our neighbor at least once. We are all condemnable. This is the logic of the Law of the First Testament: it suffices to have broken one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, all while having accomplished the other 612, to have sinned against the entire Torah. But now if we look at what is said to the sheep, we observe that the same thing is said—the same, but inverted—on the subject of the sheep: “In the measure where you have done this for one of these little ones, it is for me that you have done it.” This means that it suffices to have served one little one, only one, to be saved! Now, we have all helped our neighbor at least once. Even one time! Thus, we are all saved! Or more precisely, we are all at once condemned and saved, or rather, condemnable and acquitted, for we are all, every woman and man among us, simultaneously goat and sheep. Each one of us is at once a goat and a sheep.

It is here that the point of our text is situated: in this paradoxical knot between what we have not done, even if only once, and what we have done, even if only once. In our condemnation, which we all merit, and our salvation, which none of us merits but which is offered to all. And this paradox invites us to turn towards grace. All condemnable, we cannot live except by the grace of God. And in this, this text echoes in every gospel, in the epistles, and in the whole of the New Testament, according to the analogy of faith. For this parable is made to bring us to commit ourselves into the hands of grace.

Men and Women⁵²

Our fourth and final example concerns what the apostle Paul says about women and to women. Generally, we have an image of Paul as a conservative phallocrat, which we illustrate by citing the famous formula, “Wives, be submitted to your husbands!”⁵³ But how can we understand this injunction, which contradicts the liberating work of Christ for women, these first witnesses of the resurrection, which is to say, the first witnesses of what is at the very heart of our faith⁵⁴ (which is absolutely unique among all religions), and which contradicts even the word of Paul that affirms that “there is neither man nor woman”?⁵⁵ How may we interpret this verse according to the analogy of faith? First of all, Paul does not say, “Wives, be submit-

ted to your husbands!” We must return to the preceding verse, to read, “Be submitted to one another!”⁵⁶ And verse 22 continues, “In the same fashion, wives, towards your husbands!” Thus, wives are invited to do regarding their husbands what everyone does (men included!), one to another, at the heart of the Church. Additionally, Paul addresses husbands, saying, “Husbands, love your wives!”⁵⁷ employing the verb *ἀγαπεῖν*, which does not designate conjugal love but unconditional love, the love with which God loves us. And there is a further addendum to this addendum: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her!”⁵⁸ Thus, Paul asks of men something much more demanding than he asks of women: to be ready to give their life for their wife.⁵⁹ And this is in coherence, according to the analogy of faith, with what biblical revelation says about women and about relations between men and women, including Paul, who affirms in the first epistle to the Corinthians, “The body of the woman belongs to her husband.”⁶⁰ This conforms completely to the mentality of the era, but he hastens to add, “and the body of the husband belongs to his wife.”⁶¹ This is absolutely inconceivable, unheard of, revolutionary, subversive, both in Paul’s time and today: complete equality between men and women, even in bed. The method of the analogy of faith allows us to see that Paul, far from being a frightful misogynist, is a man of the avant-garde.

Conclusion

Throughout these four examples, chosen from among many others, Jacques Ellul invites us to rediscover the Bible as a love letter from God to men, including in its most enigmatic aspects. Such is the potential for the renewal of traditional readings that the method of the analogy of faith offers us.

Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique théologique de la morale* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, [1964] 2013), 19.
2. ———, *Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1975] 2003), 17.
3. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1975), 210.

4. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, “Pour un examen de conscience recommandé aux contemporains” (1851). *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 18 (Paris: Éditions de l’Orante, 1966), 83–87.
5. Cf. Fernando Belo, *Lecture matérialiste de l’évangile de Marc. Récit, pratique, idéologie* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1974), 18.
6. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L’idéologie marxiste chrétienne. Que fait-on de l’évangile ?* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1979] 2006), 113–53.
7. Cf. Ellul, *L’idéologie marxiste chrétienne*, 148–50.
8. Cf. Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, 1:203, 2:164, 181–82; *La foi au prix du doute : « encore quarante jours... »* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1980] 2015), 147–52; « Karl Barth et nous », *Bulletin du Centre protestant d’études* 37:4–5 (June 1985): 5–12 (here, 7); *La Genèse aujourd’hui*, with François Tosquelles (Le Collier: Éditions de l’AREFPPI, 1987), 214; *Mort et espérance de la résurrection. Conférences inédites de Jacques Ellul* (Lyon: Éditions Olivétan, 2016), 53; *Les sources de l’éthique chrétienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, introduction and notes by Frédéric Rognon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2018), 57–58; Gilbert Comte, « Entretien avec Jacques Ellul : “Je crois que nous sommes dans une période de silence de Dieu” », *Le Monde* (8 novembre 1977): 1–2 (here, 2).
9. Cf. Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, 2:164; *La Genèse aujourd’hui*, 214.
10. Cf. Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute*, 151–55.
11. Cf. Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute*, 135–37.
12. Matt 16:15, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20. The range of Peter’s responses could support the Ellulian reading of the Bible as a book of questions. The responses can thus vary from one person to another, but also with one person according to their stage in life.
13. Cf. Gen 4:9–10a. More specifically, the text says, “The Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He replied, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ Then he said, ‘What have you done?’”
14. John 20:15.
15. Cf. Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, 2:181–12.
16. Cf. Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, 1:203.
17. Cf. Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, 1:205.
18. Rom 12:6b.
19. Cf. Rom 12:4–8.
20. Rom 12:6.
21. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament*. Vol. 4, *Épître aux Romains* (Aix-en-Provence / Fontenay-sous-bois: Éditions Kerygma / Éditions Farel, 1978), 292–93.

22. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne* (Aix-en-Provence / Charols: Éditions Kerygma / Éditions Excelsis, 2009): « Au roi de France », xxx ; book iv, chap. xvi, §4, 1252; book iv, chap. xvi, §8, 1256; book iv, chap. xvii, §32, 1321.
23. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament*. Vol. 4, *Épître aux Romains*, 292–93.
24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 8. For the French, see Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, xxx. (Translator's note: my own translation of the French varies slightly: "When Paul declared that all prophecy ought to be interpreted according to the analogy and the similitude of faith (Rom 12:6), he pronounced a rule sure to apply to all interpretation of Scripture. If then our doctrine is examined according to this measure of faith, we have the victory in hand.")
25. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, 1252, 1256.
26. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, 1321.
27. Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*.
28. Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 287–311.
29. Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 281–85.
30. Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 292.
31. Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 293.
32. ———, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 297.
33. ———, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 297.
34. ———, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 297.
35. Cf. Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne*, 308–11.
36. Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Écclésiaste* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987), 11.
37. Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'être*.
38. Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'être*, 13–14.
39. Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'être*, 11. This remark betrays deep prejudices as to the exegetical methods taught and practiced in the faculties of theology.
40. Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'être*, 16–18.
41. Cf. Ellul, *La raison d'être*, 42.
42. Ellul, *La raison d'être*, 52.
43. ———, *La raison d'être*, 323.
44. ———, *La raison d'être*, 40.
45. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, comp., ed., and trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 188–95.
46. Cf. Matt 22:1–14, Luke 14:16–24.

47. Cf. Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 191.
48. Cf. Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 191, 194.
49. Cf. Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 193–95.
50. Cf. Matt 25:31–46.
51. Ellul points out that there is no question of hell except in the parables, because these are not lessons of doctrinal teaching. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ce que je crois* (Paris: Grasset, 1987), 257–58; *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, 157.
52. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (Paris: La Table Ronde, [1984] 2011), 122–24; *The Subversion of Christianity*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 78–79.
53. Eph 5:22.
54. Cf. Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, 120; *The Subversion of Christianity*, 77.
55. Gal 3:28.
56. Eph 5:21.
57. Eph 5:25a.
58. Eph 5:25.
59. Cf. Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, 123; *The Subversion of Christianity*, 79.
60. 1 Cor 7:4a.
61. 1 Cor 7:4b.

« L'analogie de la foi » : qu'est-ce que cela signifie ? Pourquoi et en vue de quoi ?

Frédéric Rognon

Lecteur assidu de la Bible, Jacques Ellul a placé le donné scripturaire au cœur de son œuvre, et notamment de son œuvre éthique. C'est ainsi qu'il peut écrire :

Le critère de ma pensée est la révélation biblique ; le contenu de ma pensée est la révélation biblique ; le point de départ m'est fourni par la révélation biblique ; la méthode est la dialectique selon laquelle nous est faite la révélation biblique ; et l'objet est la recherche de la signification de la révélation biblique sur l'Éthique¹.

La pensée éthique de Jacques Ellul est donc « scripturo-centrée », tout en conférant à la Bible un statut bien singulier. Comment, en effet, Jacques Ellul lit-il la Bible ? Et en quoi sa lecture est-elle originale, singulière, et susceptible de renouveler les interprétations courantes ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, nous procéderons en quatre temps. Nous indiquerons tout d'abord quelles sont les critiques que Jacques Ellul adresse à l'exégèse. Nous présenterons ensuite les grands principes de l'approche ellulienne de la Bible. Dans un troisième temps, nous nous arrêterons sur la méthode par excellence que préconise le professeur de Bordeaux : « l'analogie de la foi ». Et nous terminerons avec quatre exemples de textes bibliques interprétés selon l'analogie de la foi.

Critique de l'exégèse

Jacques Ellul adresse de vives critiques à l'encontre de l'exégèse historico-critique comme de l'exégèse structurale. Il ne les considère pas comme fausses ou vaines, car elles sont sans doute exactes et utiles pour le jeu de la science, « mais elles ne font pas avancer d'un pas vers l'ultime. Elles servent assurément l'exactitude mais ne disent rien au sujet de la vérité, et ne per-

mettent pas de l'entrevoir mais peut-être la cachent »². C'est donc la tension, récurrente tout au long de l'œuvre ellulienne, entre la Réalité et la Vérité, qui est ici convoquée pour disqualifier les méthodes exégétiques de type scientifique et technique. Jacques Ellul leur reproche tout particulièrement de dépouiller le texte biblique de toute dimension spirituelle et de le réduire à n'être qu'un texte comme un autre (à l'instar d'une œuvre d'Homère ou de Platon). Prendre la Bible comme un objet inerte, c'est ressembler à un chirurgien qui oublierait que le malade qu'il opère est vivant, pour le disséquer ou pratiquer une autopsie au lieu d'une opération qui le sauverait³.

Ce grief rappelle la charge polémique et sarcastique de Søren Kierkegaard contre ceux qui prétendent lire une lettre d'amour avec un arsenal de dictionnaires, de concordances et d'encyclopédies⁴. Or, la Bible est une lettre d'amour, envoyée par Dieu à son lecteur, qu'elle touche au cœur et au plus intime de son existence.

Jacques Ellul critique également l'exégèse marxiste, en vogue dans les années 1970, notamment celle de Fernando Belo, qui prétendait « faire lire Marc par Marx »⁵. Le professeur de Bordeaux inventorie les innombrables erreurs d'ordre historique qui ont permis à Belo de faire entrer l'évangile dans le schéma marxiste⁶, et lui reproche tout particulièrement d'opérer une réduction matérialiste et politique d'un texte qui récuse précisément toute interprétation matérialiste de la vie⁷.

Quelle est donc l'alternative que propose Jacques Ellul à ces impasses exégétiques ?

Les grands principes de l'approche ellulienne de la Bible

Si Jacques Ellul récuse l'approche scientifique de la Bible, c'est pour lui opposer la méditation d'inspiration kierkegaardienne. Celle-ci revient à considérer la révélation biblique comme ce qui s'adresse à l'existence même du sujet. Mais à ce propos, il inverse la perspective courante, notamment en milieu protestant, qui consiste à ouvrir la Bible chaque fois que l'on cherche une réponse à nos questions (éthiques, sociales ou existentielles). Jacques Ellul ne conçoit évidemment pas la Bible comme un livre de recettes, mais pas même comme un livre de réponses à nos questions. La Bible n'est pas un livre de réponses, mais un livre de questions, que Dieu pose au lecteur

croyant⁸. Si nous entrons dans la Bible avec des questions, celles-ci n'y trouveront pas réponse, elles y subissent un déplacement, un décentrement, et nous ressortons de la Bible avec nos questions renouvelées et de nouvelles questions qui nous sont posées⁹. C'est alors à nous d'y répondre, c'est-à-dire d'être responsables en assumant nos réponses.

La Bible est donc un livre qui renvoie l'homme à sa liberté et à sa responsabilité. La lecture croyante est une écoute, puisque la foi se ressource dans le silence¹⁰. La Bible nous pose principalement trois questions¹¹. Elle nous pose une question confessante : « Qui dites-vous que je suis ? »¹², une question éthique : « Qu'as-tu fait de ton frère ? »¹³, et une question existentielle quant à notre quête : « Qui cherches-tu ? »¹⁴. Nous sommes donc interrogés, et invités à donner une réponse confessante, une réponse éthique et une réponse existentielle, par la parole et par notre vie. Caïn, pour sa part, refuse de répondre à la question de Dieu, et donc d'assumer ses « responsabilités »¹⁵. On pose trop de questions à la Bible ou sur la Bible, et l'on oublie trop souvent de recevoir les questions que la Bible elle-même nous pose¹⁶. Au lieu de poser des questions à la Bible, comme le fait d'ordinaire le croyant, et au lieu de poser des questions sur la Bible, comme le fait l'exégète, dans un cas comme dans l'autre à partir de préoccupations extra-bibliques, au risque d'instrumentaliser la révélation, il s'agit de laisser la Bible poser des questions au monde et aux croyants ; il s'agit donc d'avoir une liberté aussi grande envers le donné du monde que celle à laquelle nous prétendons vis-à-vis du donné révélé¹⁷.

« L'analogie de la foi »

Mais la méthode royale que propose Jacques Ellul, afin d'échapper à la fois au littéralisme et à la critique textuelle, est celle de l'« analogie de la foi ». Cette expression nous vient de l'apôtre Paul, qui l'emploie une seule fois (c'est donc un *hapax*) dans l'épître aux Romains¹⁸ : *κατά τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως* en grec, *fidei analogia* en latin. Elle se situe dans un passage consacré aux différents charismes qui sont donnés aux uns et aux autres au sein de l'Église : prophétie, service, enseignement, exhortation, générosité, direction de la communauté, miséricorde¹⁹. L'analogie de la foi est attachée au charisme de prophète : « Puisque nous avons des dons différents, selon la

grâce qui nous a été accordée, que celui qui a le don de prophétie l'exerce selon l'analogie de la foi »²⁰.

Jean Calvin a repris cette expression paulinienne dans son *Commentaire de l'épître aux Romains*²¹ (dans son exégèse de Romains 12, 6), et à différentes reprises dans l'*Institution de la religion chrétienne*²². Dans son commentaire, Calvin plaide en faveur d'une conception large de la prophétie, comprise non pas comme le don de prédire l'avenir, mais comme une droite intelligence de l'Écriture et une capacité à l'expliquer clairement. Il est donc demandé d'accorder toute doctrine enseignée à partir de l'Écriture avec les fondements de la foi²³. Dans l'*Institution de la religion chrétienne*, Calvin mentionne l'analogie de la foi dès son adresse au roi de France qui introduit l'ouvrage. Contre ses adversaires qui l'accusent de détourner la Parole de Dieu de son vrai sens, le Réformateur rappelle ceci :

Quand Paul a voulu que toute prophétie soit interprétée selon l'analogie et à la similitude de la foi (Romains 12, 6), il a énoncé une règle sûre pour apprécier toute interprétation de l'Écriture. Si donc notre doctrine est examinée selon cette règle de foi, nous avons la victoire en main²⁴.

Dans le corps même du volumineux traité, Jean Calvin a recours au concept d'analogie de la foi au sujet du baptême des enfants et de la sainte Cène. Le pédobaptisme n'est pas explicitement affirmé dans la Bible, mais un silence ne veut pas dire réprobation, sinon les femmes ne pourraient être admises à la Cène ; en revanche, il est question de baptêmes de familles entières ; c'est donc conformément à l'analogie de la foi que l'on peut fonder bibliquement le baptême des enfants²⁵. De même, le Réformateur défend sa compréhension du mystère de la Cène à partir du principe méthodologique de l'analogie de la foi²⁶. Selon Calvin, l'analogie de la foi consiste donc à interpréter l'Écriture par l'Écriture, à laisser l'Écriture s'interpréter elle-même : à creuser chaque texte afin de le mettre en cohérence avec les autres textes de la Bible.

Jacques Ellul rejoint Calvin dans sa compréhension de cette règle de lecture, tout en s'en démarquant quelque peu. Dans la seconde partie de *Le Vouloir et le Faire*²⁷, texte inédit récemment publié en français et en voie de traduction en anglais, le professeur de Bordeaux consacre de longs développements à l'analogie de la foi²⁸. À la suite de Karl Barth, mais aussi en polémique avec

lui, il commence par distinguer nettement l'*analogia fidei* de l'*analogia entis*, concept qui se situe à la base de la théologie naturelle de type thomiste²⁹. Sa critique à l'encontre de Barth consiste à dire que le théologien de Bâle a cédé à la tentation qu'il dénonçait lui-même. Jacques Ellul s'éloigne ensuite de Calvin en limitant l'analogie de la foi à l'exercice de la prophétie *stricto sensu*, au lieu de faire de cette règle un principe très général pour l'interprétation de tous les textes bibliques³⁰. Il comprend néanmoins la mission du prophète comme étant proprement éthique, c'est-à-dire comme consistant à énoncer une éthique, sous l'inspiration de l'Esprit, et à en garantir l'objectivité en la confrontant à l'Écriture :

Si donc la prophétie consiste dans cette formulation d'une morale *hic et nunc*, inspirée par l'Esprit de Dieu à partir de, et par rapport à, l'Écriture sainte, nous comprenons bien que l'analogie de la foi dont il est question ici concerne effectivement l'interprétation des textes bibliques, et qu'il s'agit bien d'un garant d'objectivité³¹.

Il n'empêche que Jacques Ellul se rapproche implicitement de la conception large de Calvin en appliquant cette méthode à de nombreux textes, dont il croit discerner l'intention éthique : « Il ne peut y avoir de formulation d'une morale pour les chrétiens à partir de la compréhension profonde des textes éthiques que s'il peut y avoir analogie de la foi », déclare-t-il³². Il définit l'analogie comme « un rapport entre des éléments de nature ou de grandeur différentes »³³, mais aussi comme « la compréhension de la *raison* » de ce rapport³⁴. L'interprétation de l'Écriture consiste donc à comprendre l'écart entre la révélation biblique et la morale courante de l'époque, afin de reproduire le même écart dans notre propre milieu, sans adopter à la lettre un énoncé aujourd'hui périmé. Or, ce qui fait l'objectivité du cœur même de la révélation, c'est l'œuvre de salut accomplie par Jésus-Christ. Toute la Bible renvoie à Jésus-Christ, et le désigne comme Seigneur et Sauveur. Par conséquent, Jésus-Christ doit être la constante par rapport à laquelle l'analogie de la foi doit s'établir³⁵. Et si un passage du corpus biblique semble s'éloigner de l'image et du visage du Dieu d'amour que Jésus nous a révélé, il s'agira de le travailler, jusqu'à y discerner ce qui peut être mis en cohérence avec ce noyau de la révélation.

Exemples d'application de la méthode d'analogie de la foi

Nous prendrons quatre exemples de textes bibliques qui font difficulté, et que la méthode d'analogie de la foi va permettre d'éclairer en les situant en écho avec d'autres textes, dans une harmonieuse symphonie. Nous les présentons en nous appuyant sur le commentaire de Jacques Ellul, mais aussi en le prolongeant au-delà de ce qu'il nous en dit.

Qohélèth

Qohélèth est le livre biblique que Jacques Ellul affectionne le plus : « Il n'y a probablement pas de texte de la Bible que j'aie autant fouillé, dont j'aie autant reçu—qui m'ait autant rejoint et parlé »³⁶. Il a donc consacré à l'Ecclésiaste un ouvrage de méditation, *La raison d'être*³⁷, qu'il considère comme la conclusion de l'ensemble de son œuvre³⁸. Pour son étude, notre auteur affirme avoir pris le chemin inverse de la méthode universitaire, en partant du texte hébreu et non pas de commentaires³⁹. Il refuse également de considérer la Bible comme n'importe quel texte littéraire, alors qu'elle est porteuse de la révélation⁴⁰. C'est pourquoi Jacques Ellul cherche une cohérence textuelle au-delà des apparentes contradictions, par exemple entre « tout est vanité (y compris la sagesse) » et « recherchons la sagesse (car elle vient de Dieu) ». Et il repère cette cohérence dans un mouvement dialectique entre « Réalité » et « Vérité ». La « Réalité », c'est que tout est vanité, et la « Vérité », c'est que tout est don de Dieu. La « Réalité » empêche la « Vérité » d'être une évasion, tandis que la « Vérité » empêche la « Réalité » d'être désespérante⁴¹.

Tous les commentateurs de l'Ecclésiaste ont été déconcertés par l'absence de plan logique, et ont généralement cherché à identifier des auteurs différents et des couches rédactionnelles. Selon Jacques Ellul, la cohérence ne vient pas d'un plan mais d'une trame, comme un tissage de réflexions qui s'enchevêtrent en échos. La dialectique entre la vanité et la sagesse trouve son issue en Dieu : la sagesse fait apparaître la vanité de tout, mais la sagesse est elle-même vanité, et cependant la vanité est dépassée par la sagesse. Et néanmoins le livre de Qohélèth ne s'achève pas dans ce cercle immanent, à cause de la référence à Dieu, qui est centrale et décisive car elle noue les facteurs dispersés. Les contradictions ne sont pas de grossiers oublis,

comme disent les exégètes, mais l'une des clés du livre : « Le principe de non-contradiction est un principe de mort. La contradiction est la condition d'une communication »⁴². L'œuvre de Kierkegaard a été décisive pour le discernement par Jacques Ellul du mouvement dialectique au sein du livre de Qohélèth. Et c'est également en référence au penseur danois que notre auteur plaide finalement en faveur d'une approche subjective et intuitive :

D'abord se laisser saisir par la beauté du texte, d'abord le recevoir dans l'émotion et l'écoute silencieuse comme une musique, et laisser sa sensibilité, son imagination parler avant de vouloir analyser et « comprendre »⁴³.

Jacques Ellul synthétise son approche par un schéma en spirale⁴⁴, grâce auquel on peut traverser les apparentes contradictions du livre de Qohélèth en suivant le mouvement du texte. Il ne s'agit pas d'un livre écrit par trois auteurs : l'un, sceptique et désabusé, qui ne verrait en toutes choses que vanité ; le second, riche d'expériences, qui considérerait une sagesse sans Dieu comme un art de vivre avec réalisme et lucidité ; et le troisième, qui confesserait sa foi en Dieu. Il s'agit du même auteur, qui part de la vanité (1, 1–11), lui répond par la sagesse (1, 12–18), mais retombe dans la vanité puisque la sagesse elle-même est vanité (2, 1–11) ; ce cercle vicieux trouve son ouverture en Dieu (qui apparaît pour la première fois en 2, 24) ; c'est « devant Dieu » que tout prend sens, car tout est « don de Dieu » (3, 10–17 ; 5, 17–19), c'est pourquoi « crains Dieu » (5, 6). Et Dieu a le dernier mot (12, 10–13). Il s'agit bien de l'application de la méthode d'analogie de la foi, car Dieu est le début, le centre et la fin de la Bible, tout converge vers lui, et par conséquent tout texte qui semblerait le négliger peut être éclairé si on le creuse jusqu'à ce que, finalement, on y trouve Dieu.

La parabole des Noces⁴⁵

Notre second exemple sera celui de la parabole des Noces⁴⁶. Nous sommes dans une parabole du royaume. Ces paraboles du royaume sont égrenées tout au long de l'Évangile de Matthieu, depuis le chapitre 13 jusqu'au chapitre 25, et nous donnent chacune une image de ce qu'est le royaume des cieux : « Le royaume des cieux est semblable à . . . » À un homme, à un grain de moutarde, à du levain, à un trésor caché, à un marchand, à un filet, à un roi. Ici, dans notre parabole, le royaume des cieux est semblable à un

roi. Ce roi organise des noces pour son fils. Et une fois le festin mis en place, il envoie ses serviteurs appeler ceux qui étaient invités. Ceux qui étaient invités étaient donc déjà au courant de l'invitation, ils savaient que les noces allaient avoir lieu, et qu'ils y étaient conviés. Et cependant, ils se dérobent, et déclinent l'invitation, trop occupés à leurs champs et à leur commerce. Et les conviés se saisissent des serviteurs, les outragent et les tuent. Alors le roi se venge en les faisant périr. Puis il demande à ses serviteurs d'aller inviter tous ceux qu'ils trouveraient, dans les carrefours et les chemins, « méchants et bons », précise le texte. Méchants et bons : tous sont invités. Cela semble être un premier élément décisif⁴⁷. Et la salle de noces est pleine de convives. Or, un homme n'a pas revêtu son habit de noces. Un seul dans toute la foule : c'est un second élément déterminant⁴⁸. Le roi lui demande comment il a pu entrer, et il garde le silence. Alors le roi dit à ses serviteurs : « Attachez-lui les pieds et les mains, et jetez-le dans les ténèbres du dehors, où il y aura des pleurs et des grincements de dents . . . » Le roi se comporte à la manière d'un tyran. Faut-il donc identifier le roi à Dieu, comme on l'a souvent fait ? Faut-il identifier les invités désinvoltes aux croyants un peu trop tièdes, et le convive mal vêtu à l'incroyant, à l'incrédule, au mécréant, à celui qui ne vit pas selon l'Évangile, comme on l'a souvent fait ? Faut-il donc voir dans cette parabole un moyen de terroriser les mal-croyants en les menaçant de l'enfer, comme on l'a souvent fait ? Est-ce cela l'image du Père que Jésus est venu nous révéler, lorsqu'il s'adresse à nous de façon décryptée, en dehors des paraboles ?

Reprenons donc les éléments qui constituent la pointe du texte : méchants et bons partagent le festin ; et un seul est jeté dans les ténèbres, puni et supplicié. Même les invités désinvoltes ne sont pas jetés dans les ténèbres où il y a des pleurs et des grincements de dents. Ils sont tués, ils sont morts, mais ils ne sont pas soumis à ces supplices. Rien ne nous est dit sur leur sort après la mort. Il n'y en a qu'un qui soit condamné, expulsé, supplicié. Il n'y en a donc qu'un seul qui paie pour tous. Qui est-ce, sinon le Christ lui-même ? Cet homme débrayé, sans vêtement de noces, c'est Jésus lui-même ! Cet homme qui garde le silence quand on l'interroge et qu'on le menace, c'est Jésus, qui s'est tu devant Pilate ! Tous les autres sont revêtus d'un habit de fête, les méchants et les bons : tous ! Car Jésus est celui qui a pris sur lui nos fautes, et a été condamné pour nous, à notre place ! C'est

ce que dit l'apôtre Paul aux Corinthiens dans un texte aussi énigmatique et scandaleux : « Celui qui n'a point connu le péché, Dieu l'a fait devenir péché pour nous, afin que nous devenions en lui justice de Dieu » (2 Co 5, 21). Il n'est pas devenu pécheur, il est devenu péché ! Et il a payé pour nous. Il a été jeté dans les supplices, les pleurs et les grincements de dents : il est « descendu aux enfers », comme dit le Credo. . . . Tout cela a été fait pour nous. Et cela est en cohérence avec l'ensemble du message évangélique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

Alors, on pourrait dire : mais ce Dieu est cruel, qui jette son fils dans les tourments ! C'est ici que je vois tout l'intérêt de croire à la Trinité. Si nous croyons que Dieu est Père, Fils et Saint Esprit, si donc Jésus-Christ n'est pas un autre que Dieu, mais qu'il est Dieu comme son Père est Dieu et comme le Saint Esprit est Dieu, alors ce n'est pas un dieu qui jette cruellement un homme, *a fortiori* son fils, dans les supplices. Ne soyons pas prisonniers d'une lecture littérale ou allégorique de la parabole, selon laquelle un roi expulse un convive. Le roi ne représente pas le Père, il représente le royaume, puisque c'est le royaume des cieux qui est semblable à un roi. Non, selon la foi trinitaire, c'est Dieu en tant que Jésus-Christ qui s'est donné pleinement pour nous : c'est un don de soi et non pas le sacrifice de quelqu'un d'autre. Dieu s'est donné pleinement à la souffrance et aux tourments, aux pleurs et aux grincements de dents, pour que nous, qui sommes pécheurs, en soyons libérés, en soyons sauvés. Et cela est en cohérence avec l'ensemble du message évangélique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

Et la parabole se termine ainsi : « Car il y a beaucoup d'appelés, mais peu d'élus ». Là encore, la formule est étrange. La parabole vient de nous dire que la salle de noces était pleine de convives. Et la leçon de la parabole consiste à nous dire qu'il y a beaucoup d'appelés, mais peu d'élus. On ne peut donc pas raisonnablement identifier les convives, qui sont innombrables, aux élus, qui sont très peu nombreux. Les convives seraient peut-être plutôt les appelés que les élus. . . . Cette formule finale ne peut pas signifier que très peu d'hommes seront sauvés à la fin des temps⁴⁹. « Peu d'élus » peut vouloir dire, par euphémisme : « pas d'élus, aucun élu ». Cette formule signifie donc que nous ne sommes pas dignes d'être sauvés, aucun d'entre nous. Mais que seul Jésus a payé pour que nous soyons sauvés. Cette formule signifie l'amour infini du Père sans lequel nous ne pouvons rien faire par

nous-mêmes. Et cela encore, c'est en cohérence avec l'ensemble du message évangélique, selon l'analogie de la foi.

La parabole du Jugement

Notre troisième exemple est celui de la parabole du Jugement⁵⁰. Ce texte pose un certain nombre de problèmes. Il semble aller à l'encontre du salut par grâce, et défendre l'idée du salut par les œuvres. De plus, il y est question de l'enfer⁵¹ : ceux qui auront accompli des œuvres de miséricorde (les brebis) seront bénis et entreront dans le Royaume, et que ceux qui ne les ont pas accomplies (les boucs) seront maudits et iront dans le feu éternel. Car ceux qui ont donné à manger à celui qui avait faim, à boire à celui qui avait soif, ceux qui ont accueilli l'étranger, vêtu celui qui était nu, visité le malade et le prisonnier, ont servi le Christ lui-même. Donc ils ont droit à la vie éternelle. Mais ceux qui n'ont pas fait tout cela n'ont pas servi le Christ. Et par conséquent, ils iront au châtement éternel.

Mais il y a là un petit détail qui a trop souvent été négligé : les brebis sont toutes surprises d'apprendre qu'elles ont servi le Christ en servant leur prochain ; de même, les boucs sont tout surpris d'apprendre qu'ils n'ont pas servi le Christ en ne servant pas leur prochain. Ils ne découvrent cela qu'après coup. Ils ignoraient donc, au moment de leur rencontre avec leur prochain, que le Christ s'identifiait à ce plus petit, qu'il était, littéralement, ce plus petit. En d'autres termes, les personnages mis en scène en Matthieu 25 n'avaient pas lu Matthieu 25 ! Et pour cause ! Et cet effet de surprise est le premier élément décisif. Car on voit ainsi que ce n'est pas pour être sauvées que les brebis ont agi de la sorte, mais parce qu'elles ont laissé parler leur cœur. L'attitude des brebis comme celle des boucs n'étaient pas liées au salut, mais à la capacité d'aimer ou à l'incapacité d'aimer le prochain qui se trouve dans la détresse. C'est l'ouverture du cœur, ou la fermeture du cœur, qui est en cause, ouverture ou fermeture du cœur devant la situation concrète et devant les besoins immédiats du plus petit qui se trouve là, tout simplement.

C'est alors qu'un second petit détail, encore plus décisif, doit être relevé. Tout d'abord, ce que le Fils de l'homme dit aux boucs, c'est que « dans la mesure où (εφ' οσον) vous ne l'avez pas fait à l'un de ces plus petits, c'est à

moi que vous ne l'avez pas fait ». Il s'agit bien de l'un de ces plus petits. Cela veut dire qu'il suffit d'avoir négligé un petit, un seul, pour être damné ! Même si vous aidez 99 petits, si vous passez à côté du centième sans le regarder, vous êtes damnés ! Mais cela signifie donc que nous sommes tous damnés, car nous avons tous négligé au moins une fois notre prochain. Nous sommes tous condamnables. C'est la logique de la Loi du Premier Testament : il suffit d'avoir manqué à l'un des 613 commandements de la Thora, tout en ayant accompli les 612 autres, pour avoir transgressé la Thora toute entière. Mais si nous regardons maintenant ce qu'il est dit des brebis, nous constatons qu'il est dit la même chose, la même chose inversée, au sujet des brebis : « Dans la mesure où vous l'avez fait à l'un de ces plus petits, c'est à moi que vous l'avez fait ». Cela veut dire qu'il suffit d'avoir servi un petit, un seul, pour être sauvé ! Or, nous avons tous aidé au moins une fois notre prochain. Même une seule fois ! Donc, nous sommes tous sauvés ! Ou plus exactement, nous sommes tous à la fois damnés et sauvés, ou plutôt condamnables et acquittés, car nous sommes tous, chacune et chacun d'entre nous, à la fois bouc et brebis. Chacune et chacun d'entre nous est à la fois un bouc et une brebis.

C'est là que se situe la pointe de notre texte : dans ce nœud paradoxal entre ce que nous n'avons pas fait, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois, et ce que nous avons fait, ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois. Entre notre condamnation, que nous méritons tous, et notre salut, que personne ne mérite, mais qui est offert à tous. Et ce paradoxe nous invite à nous tourner vers la grâce. Tous condamnables, nous ne pouvons vivre que de la grâce de Dieu. Et en cela, ce texte fait écho à tout l'Évangile, aux épîtres, et à l'ensemble du Nouveau Testament, selon l'analogie de la foi. Car cette parabole est faite pour nous amener à nous en remettre à la grâce.

Hommes et femmes⁵²

Notre quatrième et dernier exemple concerne ce que l'apôtre Paul dit des femmes et aux femmes. On a généralement l'image d'un Paul conservateur et phallocrate, et on cite pour l'illustrer la fameuse formule : « Femmes, soyez soumises à vos maris ! »⁵³. Mais comment comprendre cette injonction, qui contredit l'œuvre libératrice du Christ envers les femmes, premiers témoins de la résurrection, c'est-à-dire premiers témoins de ce qui est au cœur même

de la foi⁵⁴ (ce qui est absolument unique parmi toutes les religions), et qui contredit même la parole de Paul qui affirme qu'« il n'y a plus ni homme ni femme »⁵⁵. Comment interpréter ce verset selon l'analogie de la foi ? Tout d'abord, Paul ne dit pas : « Femmes, soyez soumises à vos maris ! » Il faut remonter au verset précédent, pour lire : « Soumettez-vous les uns aux autres ! »⁵⁶ Et le verset 22 poursuit : « De même, vous les femmes, à vos maris ! » Ainsi, les femmes sont invitées à faire vis-à-vis de leurs maris ce que tout le monde fait (y compris les hommes !), les uns envers les autres, au sein de l'Église. Ensuite, Paul s'adresse aux maris pour leur dire : « Maris, aimez vos femmes ! »⁵⁷, en employant le verbe *ἀγαπᾶν*, qui ne désigne pas l'amour conjugal, mais l'amour inconditionnel, l'amour dont Dieu nous aime. Et il y a d'ailleurs une suite à cette suite : « Maris, aimez vos femmes, comme Christ a aimé l'Église et s'est livré lui-même pour elle ! »⁵⁸ Ainsi, Paul demande aux hommes quelque chose de bien plus exigeant que ce qu'il demande aux femmes : d'être prêts à donner leur vie pour leur femme...⁵⁹ Et cela est en cohérence, selon l'analogie de la foi, avec ce que la révélation biblique dit des femmes, et des rapports entre hommes et femmes, y compris Paul qui affirme dans la première épître aux Corinthiens : « Le corps de la femme appartient à son mari »⁶⁰, ce qui est tout à fait conforme à la mentalité de l'époque, mais il s'empresse d'ajouter : « Et le corps du mari appartient à sa femme »⁶¹. Et cela, c'est absolument inconcevable, inouï, révolutionnaire, subversif, pour l'époque comme pour aujourd'hui : l'égalité complète entre hommes et femmes, y compris au lit. La méthode d'analogie de la foi nous permet de voir que Paul, loin d'être un affreux misogyne, est un homme d'avant-garde.

Conclusion

À travers ces quatre exemples, choisis parmi beaucoup d'autres, Jacques Ellul nous invite à redécouvrir la Bible comme une lettre d'amour de Dieu aux hommes, y compris dans ses aspects les plus énigmatiques. Tel est le potentiel de renouvellement des lectures traditionnelles que nous offre la méthode de l'analogie de la foi.

1. Jacques Ellul, *Le Vouloir et le Faire. Une critique théologique de la morale* (1964), Genève, Labor et Fides, 2013², p. 19.
2. Jacques Ellul, *Sans feu ni lieu. Signification biblique de la Grande Ville* (1975), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°191), 2003², p. 17.
3. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, Genève, Labor et Fides (coll. Nouvelle série théologique, n°27+30), 1975, tome 1, p. 210.
4. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, « Pour un examen de conscience recommandé aux contemporains » (1851), *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, Éditions de l'Orante, volume XVIII, 1966, p. 83–87.
5. Cf. Fernando Belo, *Lecture matérialiste de l'évangile de Marc. Récit, pratique, idéologie*, Paris, Le Cerf, 1974, p. 18.
6. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *L'idéologie marxiste chrétienne. Que fait-on de l'évangile ?* (1979), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°246), 2006², p. 113–153.
7. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 148–150.
8. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté, op. cit.*, tome 1, p. 203 ; tome 2, p. 164, 181–182 ; *La foi au prix du doute : « encore quarante jours... »* (1980), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°404), 2015³, p. 147–152 ; « Karl Barth et nous », *Bulletin du Centre protestant d'études*, 37^e année, n°4-5, juin 1985, p. 5–12 (ici p. 7) ; *La Genèse aujourd'hui* (avec François Tosquelles), Le Collier, Éditions de l'AREFPPI, 1987, p. 214 ; *Mort et espérance de la résurrection. Conférences inédites de Jacques Ellul*, Lyon, Éditions Olivétan, 2016, p. 53 ; *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, Introduction et notes de Frédéric Rognon, Genève, Labor et Fides, 2018, p. 57–58 ; Gilbert Comte, « Entretien avec Jacques Ellul : “Je crois que nous sommes dans une période de silence de Dieu” », *Le Monde*, 8 novembre 1977, p. 1–2 (ici p. 2).
9. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté, op. cit.*, tome 2, p. 164 ; *La Genèse aujourd'hui* (avec François Tosquelles), Le Collier, Éditions de l'AREFPPI, 1987, p. 214.
10. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La foi au prix du doute : « encore quarante jours... »*, *op. cit.*, p. 151–155.
11. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 135–137.
12. Matthieu 16,15 ; Marc 8,29 ; Luc 9,20. La diversité des réponses de Pierre pourrait étayer la lecture ellulienne de la Bible comme livre de questions. Les réponses peuvent ainsi varier d'une personne à l'autre, mais aussi chez une même personne selon les étapes de la vie.
13. Cf. Genèse 4,9–10a. Le texte dit plus précisément : « Le Seigneur dit à Caïn : “Où est Abel ton frère ?” Il répondit : “Je ne sais pas. Suis-je le gardien de mon frère, moi ?” Alors il dit : “Qu'as-tu fait ?” ».
14. Jean 20,15.

15. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, *op. cit.*, tome 2, p. 181–182.
16. Cf. *ibid.*, tome 1, p. 203.
17. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Éthique de la liberté*, *op. cit.*, tome 1, p. 205.
18. Romains 12, 6b.
19. Cf. Romains 12, 4–8.
20. Romains 12, 6.
21. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Tome quatrième : Épître aux Romains*, Aix-en-Provence / Fontenay-sous-bois, Éditions Kerygma / Éditions Farel, 1978, p. 292–293.
22. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, Aix-en-Provence / Charols, Éditions Kerygma / Éditions Excelsis, 2009 : « Au roi de France », p. xxx ; livre iv, chapitre xvi, §4, p. 1252 ; livre iv, chapitre xvi, §8, p. 1256 ; livre iv, chapitre xvii, §32, p. 1321.
23. Cf. Jean Calvin, *Commentaires de Jean Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament. Tome quatrième : Épître aux Romains*, *op. cit.*, p. 292–293.
24. Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, *op. cit.*, p. xxx.
25. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1252, 1256.
26. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 1321.
27. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *Les sources de l'éthique chrétienne. Le Vouloir et le Faire, parties IV et V*, *op. cit.*
28. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 287–311.
29. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 281–285.
30. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 292.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 297.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 308–311.
36. Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être. Méditation sur l'Ecclésiaste*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1987, p. 11.
37. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La raison d'être*, *op. cit.*
38. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13–14.
39. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 11. Cette remarque trahit de graves préjugés quant aux méthodes exégétiques enseignées et pratiquées dans les Facultés de Théologie.
40. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 16–18.
41. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 42.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
45. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, Compiled, Edited and Translated by Willem H. Vanderburg, Toronto / Buffalo / London, University of Toronto Press, 2010, p. 188–195.
46. Cf. Matthieu 22, 1–14 ; Luc 14, 16–24.
47. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
48. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 191, 194.
49. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193–195.
50. Cf. Matthieu 25, 31–46.
51. Jacques Ellul signale qu'il n'est question d'enfer que dans les paraboles, car celles-ci ne sont pas des leçons d'enseignement doctrinal : cf. Jacques Ellul, *Ce que je crois*, Paris, Grasset, 1987, p. 257–258 ; *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
52. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme* (1984), Paris, La Table Ronde (coll. La petite Vermillon n°145), 2011³, p. 122–124 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eugene (Oregon), Wipf & Stock (The Jacques Ellul Legacy Series), 1986, p. 78–79.
53. Éphésiens 5, 22.
54. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 120 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
55. Galates 3, 28.
56. Éphésiens 5, 21.
57. Éphésiens 5, 25a.
58. Éphésiens 5, 25.
59. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *La subversion du christianisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 123 ; *The Subversion of Christianity*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
60. 1 Corinthiens 7, 4a.
61. 1 Corinthiens 7, 4b.

Jacques Ellul: From Technique to the Technological System

Daniel C  r  zuelle

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) had a lifelong concern with what he called “Technique.” Over the course of four decades, he published three major books on the role of technology in the contemporary world: *The Technological Society* (French 1954, English 1964), *The Technological System* (French 1977, English 1980), and *The Technological Bluff* (French 1988, English 1990). These books are not disconnected but represent a constant deepening, by a mature thinker, of earlier intuitions.

In 1935, Jacques Ellul and Bernard Charbonneau, then just 23 and 25 years old respectively, composed a document that they called “Instructions for a Personalist Manifesto.”¹ In this text of about 15 typewritten pages, they protested the depersonalizing nature of modern daily life. The increasing power and concentration of vast structures, both physical (the factory, the city) and organizational (the State, corporations, finance), constrain us to live in a world that is no longer fit for mankind. Unable to control these structures, we are deprived of freedom and responsibility by their anonymous functioning; and thus we have all become proletarians. “Man, who has everywhere only a small and specific job to perform, and in which fate, rather than man, has become the manager, is made into a proletarian.” “In a society of this kind, the type of man who acts consciously becomes extinct.”

Charbonneau and Ellul were not content only to denounce this sorry condition of modern man. To improve it, they also pointed to its underlying cause, which they believed it was necessary to act upon. This cause is the uncontrolled development of Technique, and during the past two centuries it has become a determining social force. “Technique dominates man and

all of man's reactions; against it, politics is powerless." Technique's increasing power also abets totalitarianism and the wanton destruction of nature. It is urgent therefore to put Technique in its proper place, so that it might be managed by a commanding power.

This "necessary revolution" is assuredly not simple, for what Ellul and Charbonneau called Technique is not only machines but also the pursuit of efficiency in every field: "Technique is the means of producing concentration; it is not an industrial process but a way of acting in general." It is thus not only our tools and methods of production that must be changed but also our institutions and our style of life. Against the technicist and productivist ideology of their day, it was in the name of an objective of personal freedom and autonomy that our two young thinkers advocated for a limitation to our technological and economic power: "an ascetic city, so that man might live."

Charbonneau and Ellul did not invent the concept of Technique to describe the unified process of social transformation whose overall effect eludes our choices. From the close of the First World War, various thinkers had been sensing that something new was transforming the human world: Spengler, Berdayev, Junger, Huxley, Valéry, Bergson, and others. Yet our two "Gascon personalists" were probably among the first, long before Heidegger, to give Technique a central role in the transformations of the modern world and to perform a radical critique upon it in the name of a demand for freedom. The technicization of the world, just like the unfolding of capitalist logic, takes place beyond our control and sometimes even beyond our awareness. It proceeds according to its own logic, which confers on it a broad autonomy. This idea of an autonomy of Technique, just like an autonomy of the State, was common to Charbonneau and to Ellul. They both engaged in a critique of the State and of Technique, and often in the same terms. In a lecture given in 1936, Charbonneau explained that "our civilization is not identified by an 'ism.' It cannot be categorized; it is born of an age of technological changes."² In another talk given in 1945, a few months after Hiroshima, he invited his listeners to notice "the autonomy of technique" as the first step toward achieving a "control over techniques."³

Ellul later recounted that immediately following the Second World War, in a social context of euphoric fascination with State-directed economics and technological progress, the two friends decided to undertake an in-depth critique of the State and of Technique. As a legal scholar of the history of institutions, Ellul would have preferred to study the State, but Charbonneau had already begun to prepare a work on this subject and asked Ellul to start instead upon the part of their common program that had to do with Technique. This is how Ellul developed in *The Technological Society* a systematic analysis of Technique's decisive role in contemporary society.⁴

Ellul's analysis owed much to the influence of Marx, which Ellul always acknowledged. But whereas in the 19th century Marx had insisted on the role of capital, and on the autonomous logic of its development, to explain the social disorganization (general proletarianization) and political disorganization (revolutions) of his day, Ellul believed that for the 20th century it was Technique that had become the primary factor determining social life. Technique develops according to its own logic, which confers on it an autonomy analogous to that of capital in the previous century:

Technique conditions and calls forth the social, political, and economic changes. It is the driver of everything else, despite appearances and despite man's pride, which claims that his philosophical theories still have determining power and that his political regimes are decisive for progress. Technique is no longer determined by external necessities but by internal ones. It has become a reality in itself, sufficient unto itself, with its particular laws and its own decisions.⁵

This affirmation of Technique's developmental autonomy in modern society (and in this society alone) led to misunderstanding and numerous misinterpretations. In reading Ellul we must bear in mind that for him autonomy does not mean independence, and he never forgets that Technique develops in a society in which other non-technological forces are also at work. Ellul made use of the metaphor of cancer: this proliferation of harmful cells occurs according to a specific logic of self-generating growth. Biologists study its mechanism, and its results can be fatal to the organism in which the cancer develops. But the life of this organism, without which the cancer would not exist, follows another very different logic, and this logic can obstruct the cancerous cells' proliferation in such a way that many early cancers do not develop further.

For Ellul, Technique cannot develop except within certain social and cultural conditions. For Marx, economic laws are historically determined. Over the course of history, various societies have been acquainted with currency, banking, and private property, and yet they were not subject to the logic of what Marx calls “Capital” that characterizes industrial society. In the same way, for Ellul, Technique is not individual techniques. He distinguishes carefully between the technological *operation*, which is inseparable from man’s mode of being in the world and is a sort of anthropological constant (which is why it is absurd to accuse Ellul of technophobia), and the technological *phenomenon*, which is specifically modern and might just as easily have not come to pass. Technique’s autonomy is not a permanent and necessary attribute of all Technique; it is a social fact that is historically determined, particularly by the attitudes and values of men. “The technological phenomenon is the preoccupation of the great majority of the men of our day to seek out in all things the absolutely most efficient method.”⁶ Ellul’s formulation is striking: he does not say that the technological phenomenon “requires” the preoccupation of men, but that it *is* this preoccupation. This preoccupation is inseparable from a conviction, namely, that all increase in the power to effect (efficiency) is good for man. But this is true only for our day; it was not always thus and may change again.

We find the same idea in *The Technological System*: “Self-generating growth rests upon Technique’s *a priori* justification in the consciousness.”⁷ But it is clear that if for Ellul this is the conviction of our day, it may disappear, and the technological phenomenon may disappear with it. Autonomy is not an intrinsic and permanent characteristic of human Technique. It is relative to a particular state of the society and to the mindset that prevails in the civilization at the present time. This is why this alleged partisan of technological determinism writes, “There is no Technique in itself, but in its implacable advance it requires man’s participation, for without him it is nothing.”⁸ Man’s consent is what drives Technique’s domination. So although relative, this idea of autonomy enables us to explain some of the difficulties that we all encounter in our individual and collective life. Technique is not a tool that we can use as we wish and that remains subject to our intentions. Rather, it has its own force of expansion and its own effects, whether social, cultural, political, or ecological. In particular, “it bends in its particular di-

rection the wills that use it and the goals that are proposed for it,”⁹ and our passion for technological power involuntarily brings into being particular situations that are especially hard to remedy. Without an understanding of this domination’s overall logic, our specific actions will not succeed in freeing us from it.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Technological Society*, Ellul felt it necessary to complete and update his analysis, for the situation had gotten worse. Not only do we have techniques at our disposal that are more and more numerous and powerful, but the development of the electronic techniques of information and communication confer on the autonomy of Technique dimensions that are qualitatively new. Of course, such novelty is not absolute. When he first published *The Technological Society*, Ellul emphasized the tendency of modern Technique to eliminate human interventions, and he stressed the importance of the computer’s appearance, which he called the “mathematical machine.” The computer was enabling the development of servo-mechanisms capable of performing more and more subtle tasks, previously performed by men, by inserting into the machine the ability to recognize feedback action. Ellul warns the reader, “This is a beginning; all cybernetics is oriented in this direction,”¹⁰ and it makes possible the rise of mass unemployment, which is a factor of war; but he does not extend his analysis of the role of informatics further.

In addition, Ellul clearly identified how technological systems tend to become constituted. Four years before the publication of Gilbert Simondon’s book *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*,¹¹ Ellul pointed out that one of the factors of Technique’s autonomization is the tendency of technological elements to become constituted into groups and systems:

Technique obeys its specific laws, with each machine in functional obedience to the others. Thus each element of the technological whole follows laws that are determined in relation to the other elements of this whole, laws that are thus internal to the system and cannot in any way be influenced by external factors.¹²

In the context of the 1950s, Ellul did not feel the need to take these prescient remarks further. In hindsight, with the rise of the computer, they took on a new meaning and needed to be deepened. *The Technological System* updated and renewed Ellul’s reflection on the autonomy of Technique

by drawing on the ideas of technological environment, information, and system, which thinkers such as Simondon and Leroi-Gourhan had been developing in the intervening years.¹³

Ellul shows first that the objective of mastering Technique is all the more difficult to attain because Technique has become man's environment. In the technological society, technical mediation becomes all-encompassing; it determines the relationship not only to nature but also to other men; it disqualifies the symbolic mediations that man had patiently built up. "Technique therefore forms a continuous interface on the one hand, and, on the other, a generalized mode of intervention."¹⁴ With regard to this technological environment that orients his perception of reality and his desires, modern man has great difficulty maintaining a critical distance. This enfolding is all the more troubling given that Technique tends to transform itself into an overall technological system, whose different parts are in increasing functional interrelation and interdependence due to techniques that permit the constant treatment and exchange of information. On the one hand, this technological system is in permanent expansion and cannot be stabilized, and on the other, the informational integration of the technological holism produces a tendency to self-regulation and a level of complexity and inertia that makes correction more difficult.

To reorient this technological system by criteria that are no longer technological but ethical or spiritual seems more difficult than ever. Yet to interpret Ellul's analyses as a justification for fatalism would be to misunderstand him. On the contrary,

My attitude is no more pessimistic than that of a doctor who examines a patient and diagnoses a cancer. I have always tried to warn, to issue the alert. I am still persuaded that man remains free to initiate something other than what appears inevitable.¹⁵

To conclude, one could apply to this Ellulian analysis of Technique what Jacques Ellul said of Charbonneau's analysis of the State¹⁶:

Bernard Charbonneau seems to describe an abstract mechanism, the State, that functions on its own, has its own consistency, its motive for development, its coherence. As if there were a cancer developing in society, in itself, on its own, beyond man's control. And this is the first impression that may arise when we read this subtitle: "By Force of Circumstance." I therefore am not involved. The avalanche is ac-

cumulating on the heights, but I am in the valley. There is nothing I can do about it. Yet it is precisely this illusion and this justification above all that Bernard Charbonneau is denouncing throughout this book. The State has developed on its own exactly to the extent that man has given in—and more: that man has wanted it this way. “Force of circumstance” functions blindly, to the precise degree to which man gives up. Power grows implacable because no man is capable of the smallest act of freedom. In other words, as the reader reads of this growth of the coldest of all cold monsters,¹⁷ he stands before the mirror of his own complicity, his own irresponsibility. And this is why we have a book that takes up a position verging on the unbearable.¹⁸

Notes

1. Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, “Directives pour un manifeste personneliste” (Bordeaux, 1935). Reproduced in Bernard Charbonneau and Jacques Ellul, *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous: Textes pionniers de l'écologie politique*, intro. Quentin Hardy, texts transcribed Sébastien Morillon, corr. and annot. Christian Roy (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014). Quotations from sections 17, 21, 25, and 26.
2. Bernard Charbonneau, “Le progrès contre l’homme.” In Charbonneau and Ellul, *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous*, 96.
3. ———, “An deux mille.” In Charbonneau and Ellul, *Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous*, 202, 208.
4. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1954). *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964).
5. ———, *La technique*, 121.
6. ———, *La technique*, 19.
7. ———, *Le système technicien* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977), 241. *The Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Continuum, 1980). Italics mine.
8. ———, *La technique*, 203.
9. ———, *La technique*, 128.
10. ———, *La technique*, 124.
11. Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris: Aubier, 1958). It is unlikely that Ellul was aware of Simondon’s work before 1954.
12. Ellul, *La technique*, 125.
13. André Leroy-Gourhan, *Milieu et techniques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1945) and *Le geste et la parole* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964–65).

14. Ellul, *La technique*, 44.
15. Jacques Ellul and Patrick Chastenet, *À contre-courant* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1994), 75. *Jacques Ellul on Politics, Technology, and Christianity*, trans. Joan Mendès France (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).
16. Bernard Charbonneau, *L'État* (Paris: Economica, 1987). When this book was first circulated in 1951 as a mimeographed document, its full title was *L'État: Par la force des choses* (The State: By Force of Circumstance).
17. Friedrich Nietzsche's definition of the State in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.
18. Ellul, "Une introduction à la pensée de Bernard Charbonneau." *Cahiers du Sud-Ouest* 7 (January–March 1985).

Jacques Ellul : de la Technique au Système technicien

Daniel Cérézuelle

En 1935, Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul (ils avaient vingt cinq et vingt trois ans) rédigèrent un texte d'une quinzaine de pages dactylographiées, intitulé « Directives pour un manifeste personnaliste »¹. Dans ce texte ils s'élèvent contre le caractère dépersonnalisant de la vie quotidienne moderne. La montée en puissance et la concentration des structures démesurées, matérielles (l'usine, la ville) ou organisationnelles (l'État, les entreprises, la finance), nous contraignent de vivre dans un monde qui n'est plus à hauteur d'homme. Sans prise sur ces structures, privés de liberté et de responsabilité par leur fonctionnement anonyme, nous y sommes tous prolétarisés. « §25. L'homme, n'ayant partout qu'une petite tâche bien déterminée à accomplir, est partout remplacé dans la direction par des fatalités ; il est prolétarisé ». « §26 Dans une telle société, le type d'homme agissant consciemment disparaît ».

Charbonneau et Ellul ne se contentent pas de dénoncer cette triste condition de l'homme moderne. Afin d'y remédier ils en indiquent aussi la cause profonde sur laquelle il leur semble nécessaire d'agir. Cette cause, c'est le développement incontrôlé de la technique qui est devenue depuis deux siècles une force sociale déterminante. « §21 La technique domine l'homme et toutes les réactions de l'homme, contre elle la politique est impuissante (...) ». En outre la montée en puissance de la technique favorise le totalitarisme aussi bien que le saccage de la nature. Il est donc urgent de la remettre à sa place afin que de force dominante elle devienne dirigée.

Cette « révolution nécessaire » n'est certes pas aisée car ce qu'Ellul et Charbonneau appellent « La technique », ce n'est pas seulement les machines mais la recherche de l'efficacité dans tous les domaines: « §17 Le moyen de

réalisation de la concentration est la technique : non pas procédé industriel, mais procédé général ». Ce ne sont donc pas seulement nos outils et nos manières de produire qu'il convient de changer mais aussi nos institutions et notre style de vie. Contre l'idéologie techniciste et productiviste de leur temps, c'est au nom d'un objectif de liberté et d'autonomie personnelle que nos deux jeunes penseurs prônent une limitation de notre puissance technique et économique : « une cité ascétique pour que l'homme vive ».

Charbonneau et Ellul n'ont pas inventé la notion de *la technique* pour caractériser l'unité d'un processus de transformation sociale dont l'effet global échappe à nos choix. Dès le lendemain de la guerre de 14/18 divers penseurs ont senti que quelque chose de nouveau transformait le monde humain : Spengler, Berdiaïef, Junger, Huxley, Valéry, Bergson, etc. Cependant nos deux « personnalistes gascons » ont été probablement parmi les premiers, bien avant Heidegger, à donner à la technique un rôle central dans les transformations du monde moderne et à en faire une critique radicale au nom d'une exigence de liberté. La technicisation du monde, tout comme le déploiement de la logique capitaliste s'effectue hors de notre maîtrise, et parfois même hors de notre conscience, selon un processus qui a sa logique propre, ce qui lui confère une large autonomie. Cette idée d'une autonomie de la technique, tout comme de l'État, est commune à Charbonneau et à Ellul. Ainsi tous les deux procèdent à une critique de la technique et de l'État, et souvent dans les mêmes termes. Dans une conférence de 1936 Charbonneau explique que « notre civilisation ne se désigne pas par un "isme", elle est inclassable, née d'un siècle de changements techniques »². Au cours d'une autre conférence prononcée en 1945, quelques mois après Hiroshima, il invite ses auditeurs à constater « l'autonomie du technique », premier pas pour accéder à une « maîtrise des techniques »³.

Ellul raconte qu'au lendemain de la guerre, dans un contexte social de fascination euphorique pour le dirigisme d'État et le progrès technique, les deux amis décidèrent de procéder à une critique approfondie de l'État et de la technique. Juriste spécialiste de l'histoire des institutions, Ellul aurait préféré traiter de l'État, mais Charbonneau avait commencé à rédiger un ouvrage sur ce sujet et lui demanda de mettre en œuvre la partie de leur programme commun qui concerne la technique. C'est ainsi qu'Ellul dével-

oppa dans *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*⁴ une analyse systématique du rôle déterminant de la technique dans la société contemporaine.

Cette analyse doit beaucoup à l'influence de Marx, influence qu'Ellul a toujours revendiquée. Mais alors qu'au dix-neuvième siècle, Marx insistait sur le rôle du capital et sur la logique autonome de son développement pour expliquer la désorganisation sociale (prolétarianisation de masse) et politique (révolutions) de son temps, Ellul pense qu'au vingtième siècle c'est la technique qui est devenue le principal facteur qui détermine la vie sociale. Elle se développe selon sa logique propre, ce qui lui confère une autonomie analogue à celle du capital au siècle précédent :

La technique conditionne et provoque les changements sociaux, politiques, économiques. Elle est le moteur de tout le reste, malgré les apparences, malgré l'orgueil de l'homme qui prétend que ses théories philosophiques ont encore une puissance déterminante et que ses régimes politiques sont décisifs dans l'évolution. Ce ne sont plus les nécessités externes qui déterminent la technique, ce sont ses nécessités internes. Elle est devenue une réalité en soi qui se suffit à elle-même, qui a ses lois particulières et ses déterminations propres⁵.

Cette affirmation d'une autonomie du développement de la technique dans la société moderne (et dans cette société uniquement) a suscité l'incompréhension et de nombreux contresens. En lisant Ellul il ne faut pas oublier que pour lui l'autonomie ne veut pas dire l'indépendance et il n'oublie jamais que la technique se développe dans une société où d'autres forces, non techniques, sont également à l'œuvre. Ellul utilise la métaphore du cancer : cette prolifération de cellules malignes s'effectue selon une logique d'autoaccroissement particulière dont les biologistes étudient le mécanisme et dont les conséquences peuvent être mortelles pour l'organisme dans lequel il se développe. Mais la vie de cet organisme, sans lequel le cancer n'existerait pas, suit d'autres logiques très différentes qui peuvent faire obstacle à la prolifération des cellules cancéreuses, de sorte que beaucoup de cancers embryonnaires ne se développent pas.

Pour Ellul la technique ne peut se développer que dans certaines conditions sociales et culturelles. Pour Marx les lois économiques sont historiquement déterminées. Il y a eu au cours de l'histoire des sociétés qui connaissaient la monnaie, les banques, la propriété privée, sans pour autant être soumises à la logique de ce que Marx appelle « Le Capital », qui caractérise la société

industrielle. De même, pour Ellul *La technique*, ce n'est pas *les* techniques. Il distingue soigneusement entre l'opération technique, inséparable du mode d'être au monde de l'homme, une sorte d'invariant anthropologique (c'est pourquoi accuser Ellul de technophobie est absurde), et le phénomène technique qui, lui, est typiquement moderne et aurait pu aussi bien ne pas apparaître. L'autonomie de la technique n'est pas un attribut permanent et nécessaire de toute technique, c'est un fait social, historiquement déterminé, en particulier par les attitudes et les valeurs des hommes.

Le phénomène technique est la préoccupation de l'immense majorité des hommes de notre temps de rechercher en toutes choses la méthode absolument la plus efficace⁶.

La formule d'Ellul est saisissante : il ne dit pas que le phénomène technique « requiert » la préoccupation des hommes, mais qu'il *est* cette préoccupation. Cette préoccupation est inséparable d'une conviction, à savoir que toute augmentation de la puissance opératoire (l'efficacité) est bonne pour l'homme. Mais cela ne vaut que pour notre temps : Il n'en fut pas toujours ainsi et cela peut changer.

On retrouve la même idée dans *Le système technicien* : « L'autoaccroissement repose sur la légitimation *a priori* de la Technique *dans la conscience* »⁷. Mais il est clair que si pour Ellul cette conviction est celle de notre temps, elle peut disparaître, et avec elle le phénomène technique. L'autonomie n'est pas un caractère intrinsèque et permanent de la technique humaine, elle est relative à un certain état de la société et des représentations qui prévalent dans la civilisation actuelle. C'est pourquoi ce prétendu partisan du déterminisme technologique écrit « Il n'y a pas de technique en soi, mais dans sa marche implacable elle se fait accompagner de l'homme, sans quoi elle n'est rien »⁸. Le ressort de la domination de la technique, c'est le consentement des hommes. Ainsi, quoique relative, cette notion d'autonomie permet d'expliquer des difficultés que nous rencontrons tous dans notre vie individuelle et collective. La technique, ce n'est pas l'outil dont on se sert comme on veut et qui reste soumis à nos intentions. Au contraire, elle a une force d'expansion et des effets propres, qu'ils soient sociaux, culturels, politiques ou écologiques. En particulier « elle infléchit dans son sens spécifique les volontés qui l'utilisent et les buts qu'on lui propose »⁹ et notre passion pour la puissance technique engendre involontairement des situations particulière-

ment difficiles à corriger. Sans une compréhension de la logique globale de cette domination, nos actions particulières n'arriveront pas à nous en libérer.

Vingt ans après la publication de *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, Ellul a ressenti la nécessité de compléter et réactualiser ses analyses, parce que la situation a empiré. Non seulement nous disposons de techniques de plus en plus nombreuses et puissantes mais le développement des techniques électroniques de l'information et de la communication confèrent à l'autonomie de la technique des dimensions qualitativement nouvelles. Bien entendu cette nouveauté n'est pas absolue. Dans son livre de 1954 Ellul avait signalé la tendance de la technique moderne à éliminer les interventions humaines et il soulignait l'importance de l'apparition de l'ordinateur, qu'il appelait *machine mathématique*, permettant de réaliser des servo-moteurs capables de se substituer à l'homme pour des travaux de plus en plus subtils par l'insertion dans la machine de la capacité de tenir compte de l'action en retour. Ellul avertit le lecteur : « Ceci est un commencement, toute la cybernétique est orientée dans ce sens »¹⁰, ce qui risque d'engendrer un chômage de masse, facteur de guerre ; mais il ne pousse pas plus loin son analyse du rôle de l'informatique.

De même Ellul avait bien identifié la tendance à la constitution de systèmes techniques. Quatre ans avant la publication du livre de Gilbert Simondon *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*¹¹, Ellul signalait qu'un des facteurs de l'autonomisation de la technique, c'est la tendance des éléments techniques à se constituer en ensembles et en systèmes :

La technique obéit à ses lois spécifiques, comme chaque machine obéissant en fonction des autres. Ainsi chaque élément de l'ensemble technique suit des lois déterminées par la relation avec les autres éléments de cet ensemble, des lois internes au système par conséquent et nullement influençables par des facteurs étrangers¹².

Dans le contexte des années cinquante, Ellul ne ressent pas le besoin d'approfondir ces remarques prémonitoires. En revanche, avec l'arrivée de l'ordinateur, elles prennent un sens nouveau et demandent à être approfondies. *Le Système technicien* réactualise et renouvelle la réflexion sur l'autonomie de la technique en s'appuyant sur les notions de milieu, d'information et de système, développées entre temps par des penseurs comme Simondon et Leroi-Gourhan.

Tout d'abord Ellul montre que l'objectif d'une maîtrise de la technique est encore plus difficile à atteindre parce que la technique est devenue le milieu de l'homme. Dans la société technicienne la médiation technique devient totale ; elle détermine non seulement la relation à la nature mais aussi aux autres hommes ; elle disqualifie les médiations symboliques que l'homme avait patiemment tissé. « La technique forme alors un écran continu d'une part et d'autre part un mode généralisé d'intervention »¹³. A l'égard de ce milieu technique qui oriente sa perception de la réalité et ses désirs, l'homme moderne a beaucoup de mal à prendre une distance critique. Cet enveloppement est d'autant plus préoccupant que la technique tend à se transformer en un système technicien global dont les différentes parties sont en interrelation et en interdépendance fonctionnelle croissante grâce aux techniques qui permettent le traitement et l'échange constant d'informations. Or d'un côté ce système technicien est en expansion permanente et ne peut se stabiliser et d'un autre côté l'intégration informationnelle des ensembles techniques produit une tendance à l'autorégulation et un niveau de complexité, de lourdeur et de viscosité qui rend la correction plus difficile.

Réorienter ce système technicien en fonction de critères non plus techniques mais éthiques ou spirituels semble plus difficile que jamais. Toutefois ce serait commettre un contresens que d'interpréter les analyses d'Ellul comme une justification du fatalisme. Bien au contraire :

Mon attitude n'est pas plus pessimiste que celle d'un docteur qui, après examen d'un patient, diagnostique un cancer. J'ai toujours essayé d'avertir, de mettre en garde. Je suis toujours persuadé que l'homme reste libre de commencer autre chose que ce qui semble fatal¹⁴.

Pour conclure, on pourrait appliquer à cette analyse ellulienne de la technique ce que Jacques Ellul disait de l'analyse charbonnière de l'État :

Bernard Charbonneau a l'air de décrire un mécanisme abstrait, L'État, qui fonctionne par lui-même, qui a son poids, sa raison de développement, sa cohérence. Comme si l'on avait un cancer qui se développe dans la société, en soi, par soi, hors des prises de l'homme. Et c'est la première impression que l'on peut avoir lorsque justement on lit ce sous-titre « par la force des choses ». Je suis donc hors de question. L'avalanche s'accumule sur les sommets, moi qui suis dans la vallée, je n'y peux rien. Et précisément c'est avant tout cette illusion et cette justification que Bernard Charbonneau dénonce tout le long

de ce livre. L'État s'est développé par soi exactement dans la mesure où l'homme a cédé, bien plus : a désiré qu'il en soit ainsi. La force des choses fonctionne, aveugle, dans l'exacte mesure où l'homme démissionne. Le pouvoir grandit implacablement, parce qu'aucun homme n'est capable du plus petit acte de liberté. Autrement dit, le lecteur en lisant ce développement du plus froid de tous les monstres froids, est devant le miroir de sa propre complicité, de sa propre lâcheté. Et c'est pourquoi nous avons un livre qui se situe à la limite du tolérable¹⁵.

Notes

1. Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul : « Directives pour un manifeste personaliste ». Bordeaux, 1935. Reproduit dans *Bernard Charbonneau et Jacques Ellul : Nous sommes des révolutionnaires malgré nous ; textes pionniers de l'écologie politique*. Introduction de Quentin Hardy, textes transcrits par Sébastien Morillon, corrigés et annotés par Christian Roy. Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2014.
2. Bernard Charbonneau, « Le progrès contre l'homme ». *Ibid.*, p. 96.
3. Bernard Charbonneau, « An deux mille ». *Ibid.*, p. 202 et 208.
4. Jacques Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*. Paris, Librairie Armand Colin, 1954.
5. *Op. cit.*, p. 121.
6. *La technique*, p. 19.
7. *Le système technicien*, p. 241.
8. *La technique*, p. 203.
9. *La technique*, p. 128.
10. *Op. cit.*, p. 124.
11. Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*. Paris, Aubier, 1958. Nous ne savons pas si Ellul avait eu connaissance avant 1954 des travaux de Simondon.
12. *La technique*, p. 125.
13. *Op. cit.*, p. 44.
14. Jacques Ellul et Patrick Chasteney, *À contre-courant, entretiens*. Paris. La table Ronde, 1994, p. 75.
15. Jacques Ellul, « Une introduction à la pensée de Bernard Charbonneau ». *Cahiers du Sud-Ouest*, n°7, janvier-mars 1985.

The Crisis of Modernity **by Augusto Del Noce**

J. Peter Escalante

Del Noce, Augusto. *The Crisis of Modernity*, edited and translated by Carlo Lancellotti. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014. 336 pp.

Augusto Del Noce (1910–89) was a professor at La Sapienza University of Rome and a distinguished philosopher, political thinker, and public intellectual. He was deeply influenced by Jacques Ellul. Carlo Lancellotti is a professor of mathematics and a member of the graduate faculty in physics at the City University of New York (College of Staten Island).

Lancellotti has done a great service in translating the essays of Augusto Del Noce collected in *The Crisis of Modernity*. The essays are rich in insight, but their value is not only in what Del Noce saw but also in how he saw it. One expects a book from a conservative author with a title such as this to take one or both of two very predictable lines: an activist call to ideological arms, or an analysis of the “crisis,” consisting largely or wholly of genealogizing in the history-of-ideas style. Del Noce’s approach is different.

Del Noce does offer some genealogies of ideas, and the lines of influence he draws are similar to those drawn by Eric Voegelin or Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn. His affinity with Voegelin is especially close; in one of the book’s appendixes, which consists of an engagement with Voegelin, Del Noce affirms Voegelin’s definition of modernity as an immanentization of the Christian eschaton, an attempt to have the world-consummating eucatastrophe without God. Like Voegelin, his analysis is really more psychological, one might even say spiritual. He sees ideas as manifestations of the soul’s relation, either healthy or unhealthy, to the world, a world whose

order reflects its eternal Origin. The titular crisis of modernity is for him a spiritual crisis, a state of widespread apostasy from reality.

But Del Noce does not offer a pseudoprophetic jeremiad in response, and this is because he does not reduce “modernity” to an inexplicable defection. His approach is profoundly philosophical, and the essays in the book are all devoted to illuminating explication. The book begins right away with an extremely acute definition of the modern sense of “modern,” and the arguments of the rest of the essays proceed from it; “modernity” for him is the practical corollary of C. S. Lewis’s “chronological snobbery.” For Del Noce, modernity in the modern sense is by definition, then, the state of being “on the right side of history.” But this “right side” is not devoid of ideal content. Rectitude, on its terms, is devotion to the project of radical self-creation, what Del Noce considers to be the praxis of atheism.

To this, Del Noce opposes a Catholic sense of truth, of conformity to reality. Although he identifies marxism as the purest form of atheism in action, he resists identifying political theism with the *ancien régime*, and he thoroughly critiques certain kinds of modern conservatism and “Right” movements. His critique of modern “permissivism” names “neo-capitalism” as a prime beneficiary, and his attack on the various forms of fascism is as radical as his attack on communism.

Students of Ellul’s work will be happy to see that Del Noce engages admiringly with Ellul in several places, and in doing so Del Noce cites him in criticism of both revolution and permissive consumer society. Modernity—atheism in action—for Del Noce has both “left” and “right” forms. But the way beyond “modernity” includes the positive aspects of both progressive and conservative ways of thinking; in the very last lines of the book’s final essay he says that true progressivism—his definition of that is very positive—is possible only on truly conservative grounds, that is, fidelity to perennial principles.

The essays are all profoundly thoughtful considerations of their topics, and though there is some overlap of theme and repetition of argument, it never strikes the note of redundancy but rather of reinforcement. In his reading of texts, Del Noce can sometimes be surprisingly beholden to old stories. For instance, he names Martin Luther as a nominalist progenitor of marxism

(204), but this always-dubious position of Luther as nominalist protorevolutionary is even less tenable now. Too, Del Noce posits an “abyss” between Marsilius of Padua and Dante (57), contra the Soviet critic Leonid Batkin, but it has long been fairly obvious that Marsilius is more “religious” and Dante more “secular” than has been commonly maintained, and some especially acute authors have also seen an affinity between them (see Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation?* and George Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and “the Truth of History”*). But these little limitations do not really detract from the merit of the essays.

This book is also useful for its indirect introduction to a number of Italian thinkers largely unknown to Anglophones and for its glimpse into the intellectual history of modern Italy. Lancellotti’s excellent introduction assists with this, and the interview with Del Noce published as an appendix is of special interest in this regard.

Bibliography

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Technology and the Virtues

by Shannon Vallor

Jonathan A. Tomes

Vallor, Shannon. *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 309 pp.

Shannon Vallor is the Regis and Dianne McKenna Professor in the department of philosophy at Santa Clara University. She is also a consulting artificial-intelligence ethicist supporting Google Cloud AI and a member of the board of directors of the Foundation for Responsible Robotics. In *Technology and the Virtues*, she proposes a strategy for a good life in a global technological society. Science and technologies shape moral and intellectual habits, skills, and virtues, but the technological society has long lacked the moral disposition to wisely invent and appropriate new technologies. Moral laws and principles have not proven capable of meeting yesterday's challenges, let alone today's and tomorrow's. The future is cloaked in a techno-social fog, and technologists prove incapable of seeing through the technical opacity in order to construct a satisfying ethical framework. Against this long trend, Vallor proposes a virtue ethics strategy for cultivating the moral dispositions necessary to cope and flourish under any technological condition. After developing her account of techno-moral virtue ethics, she applies her strategy to social media, surveillance, robots for care and for war, and human-enhancement technology.

Vallor subjects her strategy for techno-moral cultivation to a comparative analysis in the classical texts of Aristotelian, Confucian, and Buddhist philosophical ethics. The seven core elements that she discerns in these three traditions are moral habituation, relational understanding, reflective self-examination, intentional self-direction of moral development, perceptual attention to moral salience, prudential judgment, and appropriate extension of moral concern. For each of these elements, she offers a reflec-

tion on its importance for global techno-moral virtues and practices. Her comparative synthesis is admittedly thin. These three traditions provide the thin moral concepts for the essential structure of her global virtue ethics. After establishing her framework, she develops the unique virtues for techno-moral flourishing: honesty, self-control, humility, justice, courage, empathy, care, civility, flexibility, perspective, magnanimity, and wisdom. These are the virtues that direct, modulate, and integrate virtuous action to meet the demands of the technological situation. They enable the person to not only think and act rightly but also feel and want rightly with respect to technology. Such excellence is the necessary condition for living well.

The good life, according to Vallor, is the kind of life worth choosing from among the many ways of living in the world. A good life is a life worth living, a life lived well. Any conception of a good life today must explicitly consider life lived with technology. This worthy life is apparently known according to its opposite: a good life is one other than the life we commonly recognize as not worth choosing. Human excellence, or virtue, is necessary to living this good life. The techno-morally virtuous person is capable of doing the right thing with relative ease and joy. Beyond these possible good lives there is not, for her, a singular conception of the good life except that of the common and shared aim of living well with one another. She insists that the active flourishing of the virtuous person is not a subjective appearance and that her account is incompatible with moral relativism. While rejecting an essential realism and natural teleology, she affirms that the virtues are rooted in cognitive, emotional, and perceptual capacities and vulnerabilities deep within the human organism. Of course, if this is true, then one would expect a more thoroughly grounded pluralism than what Vallor provides—the good life behind the many good lives.

Techno-moral excellence answers to the problem of technological opacity and convergence. Technologies merge in unpredictable ways, magnifying their influence and power over our lives and institutions. As policies and rules to safeguard human life will never keep up with the technological phenomenon, virtue formation aims to develop people capable of flexible and creative responses to new (and old) challenges. Unfortunately, Vallor's discussion of technology and the virtues explicitly excludes Heidegger, Ellul, Marcuse, and Mumford's work as rather pessimistic philosophies of

technological determinism. In the face of such a monolithic technological force, there is apparently little left to say about ethics.

Vallor's virtue ethics holds real promise for coping with the present technological system, but, as is usually the case, virtue ethics cannot stand alone as a strategy for flourishing in any particular society. It is also not clear that the various human-rights groups and aid associations—or any other group spread across the nations—constitute real virtue communities, regardless of social media and moral extension. Her discussion is vulnerable and weak insofar as she bypasses the effects of technique and efficiency on human freedom exercised in a recognizable and tangible community. This lacuna sets practitioners up at best for a merely apparent virtue and apparent flourishing, and at worst for a greater vulnerability in the face of technical deception and illusion. Techno-moral practices are morally undone and twisted by the principles operating under the surface of hopeful appearances. The technological illusion is only amplified when virtue ethics is removed from a particular way of life and discourse and given a global view from nowhere. The questions of human nature, freedom, and technique are simply too great to ignore.

About the Contributors

Daniel Cérézuelle is an independent scholar in Bordeaux, France. He is the executor of the literary estate of Bernard Charbonneau and a board member of the Société pour la philosophie de la technique. He is the author of *Écologie et liberté : Bernard Charbonneau précurseur de l'écologie politique* (2006).

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Extending a Critique. Ellul is best known for his penetrating critique of *la technique*, of the character and impact of technology on our world. The Society seeks to extend his social critique particularly concerning technology.

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