Technology and the Further Humiliation of the Word

by David Lovekin

Abstract: I continue to read Ellul philosophically without worrying about whether he is a philosopher or not. As David Gill has mentioned to me, he is what a philosopher should be. I continue to track his attack on the symbol by technique, which claims to be rational and all-encompassing. Technique is indeed a form of rationality in denial of what makes rationality possible—the imagination and the capacity to make and to learn from the symbol—the word and the Word-- out of the encounter with otherness. Technique is a denial of otherness in a bad infinity that is clearly observed in the proliferation of clichés and in an advanced form of disregard for the true or the real in a discourse rooted in nothing but itself, in what Henry Frankfurt has termed "bullshit."

Bio: David Lovekin (PhD, University of Texas at Dallas) recently retired as Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Religion and Philosophy at Hastings College in Nebraska. He is the author of *Technique, Discourse and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991) and co-editor of *Essay in Humanity and Technology*. He has published numerous essays on Ellul and Vico and problems in the Philosophy of Culture. He has currently completed a translation of Ellul's *The Empire of Nonsense* to appear in the Papadakis Press.

The question of technology as the accumulation of gadgets and tools perhaps considered as the outgrowth of science and as culminating in the machines of the industrial revolution, avoids a serious question: how did tools and machines and the societies that used them become obsessed with absolute efficiency and with the reduction of means to a mathematics-like exactness?[1] Technology currently determines scientific advance; machines—use itself-- are made regardless of the usefulness that became independent of cultural values. Cultural values, instead, seem determined by the advances of technique. Jacques Ellul, in his 1954 *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* broke with the tradition of seeing technology as present in every culture in any historical moment, in conflating it merely with material advance, and understood it as a specific mentality culminating around 1750, as a technical intention (*une intention technique*).[2] His social and theological analyses came together with the understanding that this intention privileged the image over the word, the concept over the process, and a reconfigured profane that became the new sacred; technique, in Ellul's sense, issued a return to a mythical dimension that belied technology's origins in reason and conceptual analysis. The technological order signaled a return to a sacred order. This return raises an essential mystery, which I do not pretend to solve but only to authenticate.

The mystery is confounded by the marvelous enlightenment claims of reason and the understanding that would enable progress and peace. We may invoke Spinoza's sensibility: do not hate or despise but understand. For him geometrical truths provided the most proximate relation to God's mind and body of which our minds and bodies were expressions. Thus, the otherness between ourselves and the Other disappeared in Spinoza's rational faith but reappeared as reason proved insufficient. Reason could

balance equations but also produce weapons of mass destruction to effect a *jihad* or a preemptive military strike. Flying planes into the twin towers, burning Jews, and bombing abortion clinics, technologically planned and executed, were, nonetheless, faith-based initiatives.

Nonetheless, the enlightenment faith in reason continues, typically finding fault with the non-scientific. In a *New York Times* best seller, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, Sam Harris applies philosophical and neuroscientific skills to the problems of faith operating without the leash of reason. He claims, "Nothing is more sacred than the facts."[3] To his credit, he is no naïve realist who believes in the truly objective not subjectively known. Knowing involves consciousness, which mostly takes place with the duality of subject standing in relation to its object, although the "I" is never purely found; but he adds, ". . . it actually disappears when looked for in a rigorous way."[4] He does not explain for whom this disappearance would take place. Again undeterred, the self struggles with the various objects and contexts to discover and quantify the true, although the work would be hard. With this work, faith is brought to task. He states, "Where we have reasons for what we believe, we have no need of faith; where we have no reasons, we have lost our connections to the world and to one another."[5] Reason occupies a privileged place, which should raise questions. Are facts the new Sacred? Would this be held *a priori?* Is it a fact that facts are sacred? Would reason be able to deter the suicide bomber? If so, we should drop copies of *The Critique of Pure Reason* instead of smart bombs. Kant, however, required a qualified reason, tied to the categories and to the sensuous forms of intuition. Understanding forms of consciousness, I contend, involves more than an examination of reason, with which consciousness is often conflated.

A critique of reason requires a critique of culture. Since Descartes it has become the pattern to identify being with thinking and thinking with reason and rational reflection. Staying to this path would have excluded Descartes' own powerful personae, the Mauvais Génie, or the Evil Genius, which enabled Descartes to imagine the possibility that nothing made sense, which, in turn, led to his first clear and distinct idea—that the I appeared every time he thought/doubted. The I, however, did more than doubt as the history of philosophy after Descartes attempted to explain. The Cartesian philosophy as method was everywhere applied, as Ellul noted, going beyond philosophical bounds, showing that technique was and is indeed a mentality, a Cartesian mentality infinitely applied and mandated.[6]

In his discussion of the historical and sociological dimensions of technique, Ellul does more than history and sociology.[7] Techniques appeared in primitive societies as magic in which, prior to technique, "Everything is of a piece . . . nothing can be meddled with [or] . . . modified without threat to the whole structure of beliefs and activities."[8] The world of the primitive was not without logic and understanding although it was devoid of the assumptions required for technique. Following anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan, "… technique is a cloak for man, a kind of cosmic vestment. In his conflict with matter, in his struggle to survive, man interposes an intermediary agency between himself and his environment . . ."[9] With this agency humanity has protection and defense but also the ability to assimilate and transform.

Ellul offers similar words about the nature of the symbol: "Without mediating symbols, [humanity] . . . would invariably be destroyed by raw physical contact alone. The 'other' is always the enemy, the menace. The 'other represents an invasion of the personal world, unless, or until, the relationship is normalized through symbolization. (. . .) to speak the same language is to recognize the 'other' has

entered into the common interpretive universe . . . "[10] With this separation of subject and object in an imaginative act an "other world" is created.[11]

Thus, otherness and the imagination jump start this creation which takes place in and with language that is at first magical and religious, simultaneously. The wholeness of the world and its transcendent powers that kept technique in check were challenged. Greek rationality, Roman Law, and Christianity were further weights and balances placed on technique that had to be transformed[12] The world and the transcendent were still "Others." Tools and incantations extended human desire and understanding but Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Justice, and God's Word kept them in place. A long period of technical development, a growing population, the invention of economy—money became the medium of exchange and hence a world ordering symbol—and an apparent leveling of traditional social hierarchies helped technical intention and rationality to flower.[13] Technical mentality was more than mental and required otherness to work against to produce the technical phenomenon.

Human history is littered with technical operations that were means to accomplish ends, often characterized by tools extending from the body and the cultures from which they are variously adapted and that were equated with the techniques produced by reason. With the advent of technical consciousness, Ellul insists, "It is no longer the best relative means which counts . . . . The choice is less and less a subject one among several means . . . . It is really a question of finding the best means in the absolute sense, on the basis of numerical calculation."[14] The product was the technical phenomenon, the embodiments of technical consciousness initially appearing as symbolic expressions. The otherness of the body and the world upon which and in which it operated was transformed by consciousness and framed conceptually. Technological culture could then be understood as concepts objectified as natural objects were conceptualized. Qualitative otherness becomes quantitative.

Ellul's notion of technological rationality is crucial in identifying technology in its social order as an altered symbolism. In the following quote I add in brackets a clause that was left out in Wilkinson's translation:

> In technique, whatever its aspect of the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous or irrational. This rationality, best exemplified in systematization, division of labor, creation of standards, production norms, and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of "discourse" in every operation [under the two aspects this term can take (on the one hand, the intervention of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the intervention of means from one term to the other.)]; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments to the schema of logic.[15]

Technical reason requires discourse and method reduced to the schemas of logic. Logic would demand adherence to the principle of identity and non-contradiction. For something to be it must be what it is and not what it is not.

Bodies and other natural objects are often what they are not without the rational gaze. Descartes' burning candle, both gaseous and solid, both liquid and fire, became "extension" with his second clear and distinct idea; extension was what all physical bodies were in essence as a fact for science, although extension was

an abstraction for other eyes, for those trying to read from it. Extension is the object in concept, an identity eschewing difference. It has meaning in scientific and technical discourse. This concept is an identity eschewing all difference.

The logic of technique as Ellul explains in his characterology is to reduce all objects and processes to these essentials, with the resulting irony that this perfection is never fully achieved, by definition. Soap is never fully soap, why grocery aisles are crammed with it; the object is never beautiful enough, useful enough, efficient enough. Absolute efficiency is the goal of the process perpetually unfulfilled. This is the opposite of the physicists' "efficiency" where a minimum of effort produces a maximum of effect. The result is what I have termed a series of bad infinities—the efficient becomes either not this one or not any of them; the former is an endless finitude, while the latter is an empty class. Here, the label or the image becomes the real thing in an attempt to cancel endless finitude or a bloodless category.[16] Recall that "Coke," not the drink, is the real thing. A consciousness examines each process, each object, seeking absolute efficiency it makes the technical phenomenon automatically in a geometric rather than arithmetic growth. No limitations are allowed; what can be done will be done, a mantra known to all cultures, a true universal. Oddly this process becomes unconscious; the object made is no longer known as made. The distinction between the subject and object collapses. Few remember that whipped cream used to come from cows. From Latin we can learn that "fact" comes from "factum," which means "made," something done or performed. We have forgotten this meaning and have reduced facts to truth, to a sacred. Like technical phenomena, they seem to pop directly from Zeus's head. The subject collapses into the object and technical autonomy reigns. Reason has disappeared, with no otherness to confront and to mediate, and so has the symbol.[17]

The language of the ancients, the language of myth, biblical language, comes alive in the symbol and metaphor; myths, for Ellul, are not false stories but instead aim at the true: "When I use the word (myth) I mean this: the addition of the theological significance to a fact which in itself . . . has no such obvious meaning. Its role is therefore to make a fact "meaningful," to show it up as bearing the revelation of God . . . ."[18] God as the Wholly Other resists a mere presence in an image but appears only in the word that suggests his Word. Further, "myth is born of the revealed Word of God, but because it is figurative, it has no visible image. As the highest expression of the word, it reaches the edge and very limit of the expressible, the ineffable, and the unspeakable . . . . "[19] For example, Ellul notes: "The city is *'iyr* or else *'iyr re'em*. Now this word has several meanings. It is not only the city, but also the Watching Angel, the Vengeance and Terror. A strange association of ideas."[20] In the figurative identities are created with important differences, opposed meanings that are meaningful when they are put together. The city had not only material power but spiritual power, which was apprehended in this metaphorical grasp of the imagination in the face of the other.

Ellul reminds: "We forget all too easily that imagination is the basic characteristic of intelligence, so that a society in which people lose their capacity to conjure up symbols also loses its inventiveness and its ability to act."[21] The imagination is embodied speech, he notes, from which I conclude that as the body disappears in technique so it disappears in its bodily expression in metaphors and symbols. One could say that reason as language has its birth in myth and in the force of the imagination where the meaningful first appears as an image or presence that is at the same time more than it appears; in this way the image provides a path for the fact to become the sacred that give birth to religion, art, philosophy, and science,

but which must also be transcended in meaning that goes beyond the moment. When technique becomes the sacred the other forms of knowing have no power. This presence of the technical sacred produces a loss of meaning, which may be why myth and primitive religions gain cultural weight. Ellul insists in this respect that true Christianity is not a religion but is an opposition to meanings that claim to be imminently absolute—a condition held only by God.

Ellul states that two forms of language exist in every state: the language of hearing and the language of seeing.[22] Language begins in the act of pointing to, or seeing what is in the space of the present, in the certainty of the image that inhabits the realm of the real (*le Réel*).[23]   This image is certain. It bears no contradiction. It is what it is.[24] The word, a puff of wind at least, is the domain that surrounds. A strange sound produces anxious eyes.[25] The word is ambiguous, a moment of mystery and intrigue and reaches for the True (*le Vrai*).[26] "The image is nonparadoxical, since it is always in conformity with the *doxa* (opinion). [. . .]   Only the word troubles the water."[27] And further, "Thus visual reality is non-contradictory. You can *say* that a piece of paper is both red and blue. But you cannot *see* it as both red and blue at the same time.*"[28] The philosophical laws of thought, Ellul notes, are visually based;[29] Plato's *eide* related to *eidelon* are cases in point, but as Plato insisted, their ordinary ties to the visual had to be broken. The *Eide* were seen only in a *noetic* reach that was not allowed by technical reason. Reason is confined strictly to the image that loses its purchase, ironically, as its presence as image dissipates.

In the absence of the word and the symbol clichés abound. The cliché is the machine in its new suit. The word inhabits history and place; the image does not. The history of the word cliché is forgotten. According to the OED cliché appeared in 1832 and referred to a stereotype block, a printer's cast or "dab." It began in a visual dimension, but the word was also a variant of *cliquer*, meaning "to click," likely referring to the sound of the lead pieces as they were struck. This auditory dimension is lost in its modern sense, which is no longer the metaphor that was suggested. A worn out expression was left and the truth behind the word abandoned. The cliché appears to be the language of politics and the media and so it is, the fuel of propaganda, but the bad news is not over.

Henry Frankfurt in *On Bullshit* claims that lying and misrepresentation are out of fashion.[30] Politicians and pundits may in fact lie but the lie is not the issue.   Truth or falsity are no longer concerns. Lying or telling the truth are both permitted as long as a favorable impression is achieved. The bullshitter wants to be believed and those susceptible want to believe regardless of the actual truth. Recently Rick Santorum claimed that the elderly in Holland had to wear bracelets to keep from being euthanized. Of course, there were no facts to back this up, and I doubt there was any concern for the truth of the statement. Romney made a statement that was challenged, and he allowed that he didn't recall what he said, but he was sure he would stand by it. I am certain that bullshit transcends party line. Nonetheless, Ellul was close to this with his view of current aesthetics where "*n'importe quoi*" held sway. Whatever! The appeals sometimes made to facts may in fact be bullshit.

Ellul would conclude that life cannot be conducted in the realm of the image that has no history, no place. Truth requires both, which in turn require memory and the imagination. Clichés and bullshit have neither, and I believe this is a fact. Place no longer has place. This is why Ellul finds the commonplace of the common place so important, why the notion of a true that surrounds is worth the reach; even reason comes to a halt in views that have no need or use for argument.

[1] I am paraphrasing Ellul's note to the American reader in *The Technological Society,* trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), XXV, hereinafter cited as *TS.*

[2] *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (Paris:Armand Colin, 1954), 44. Also note "La conscience technique," 49 and "l'etat d'esprit," 31.

[3] (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), 225.

[4] *Ibid.*, 214.

[5] *Ibid.,* 225.

[6] *TS.,* 43.

[7] *TS.*, 23. He clearly states that the full history of technique was yet to be written.

[8] *Ibid.,* 26.

[9] *Ibid.,* 24-5.

[10] Jacques Ellul, "Symbolic Function, Technology, and Society," *Journal of Social and Biological Structures* 3 (July1978) 210.

[11] *Ibid.,* 209.

[12] *TS.,* 27-38.

[13] Ellul sums the sociological components of the 1750 breakout of technique, which, together with technical intention in *TS.,* 38-60.

[14] *TS.,* 21. The discussion of the technical operation and the technical phenomenon is found in *TS.*, 19-22. See my analysis of this in *Technique, Discourse, and Consciousness: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jacques Ellul* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1991), 83-89, hereinafter cited as *TDC.*

[15] *TS.*, 78-79; *La Technique*, 73-73.

[16] See my discussion of this in *TDC*, 98-105.

[17] I have summarized Ch. II of *TS*. For my extended discussion of this "characterology" see my , *TDC, ch. 5.*

[18] *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 18, n. 3, hereinafter cited as *City.* Also note: "God speaks. Myth is born from this word, but rarely is it heard directly and never conveyed just as it is received, because humans cannot speak God's words. Myth is the analogy that enables us to grasp the meaning of what God has said. As discourse constructed to paraphrase the revelation, it is a metaphor that should lead the listener beyond what he has heard." See *Humiliation*, 106.

[19] *The Humiliation of the Word,* trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 106, hereinafter cited as *Humiliation*.

[20] *City*, 9.

[21] *Humiliation*, 257.

[22] *Humiliation*, 43.

[23] *Ibid.,* 27-47.

[24] *Ibid.*, 5-26.

[25] *Ibid., 61.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.,* 26.

[28] *Ibid.,* 11, n. 3.

[29] *Ibid., 37.*

[30] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

The Enduring Importance of Jacques Ellul for Business Ethics

by David W. Gill

Abstract: From at least three perspectives, Jacques Ellul's thought addresses today's business world and its ethics in a profound and essential way. First, he challenges the sacralization and worship of money which have come to dominate the thought and practice of today's business leaders. Second, he challenges us to critical thought and a rediscovery of the individual and the human in a domain enthusiastically and willingly enslaved to technique at every level. Third, he challenges in the name of freedom and vocation the necessity and meaninglessness which dominate today's workplace.

Bio: David Gill earned his PhD at the University of Southern California with a dissertation on "The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul," subsequently published as the first of his seven books on theological or business ethics. He spent several summers and a full sabbatical year (1984-85; later also a six-month sabbatical in 2000) in Bordeaux, meeting with Ellul and many Ellul scholars (notably Patrick Chastenet, Daniel Cerezuelle, Jean-Francois Medard) , the Ellul family and friends. He is currently Mockler-Phillips Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics and Director of the Mockler Center at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston. He is the founding president of the International Jacques Ellul Society (www.ellul.org) and (with President Patrick Chastenet) a founder of the Association Internationale Jacques Ellul. He has served many small and medium-sized enterprises as organizational ethics consultant and trainer (www.ethixbiz.com).

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The first image of Jacques Ellul that comes to mind is not that of someone sitting in the board room of some skyscraper advising the corporate chieftains of our day. No, our Ellul is the little man in his beret emerging from behind his desk in his home study to greet a friend --- or the professor entering the lecture hall to read his latest notes on the successors of Marx.

But it is my contention that our teacher Jacques Ellul is very precisely a voice to which those corporate chieftains would do well to pay attention these days. While he thought and wrote in the second half of the 20th century, his message is only *more* appropriate and necessary in the first half of the 21st century. As a long-time teacher of ethics to business students and ethics consultant to actual business organizations, it is my conviction that there are three particular aspects to the enduring importance of Jacques Ellul for business ethics.

For the most part, business ethics, at least in the USA, is a toothless, dull, and irrelevant enterprise. If I may use one of Professor Ellul's images it is little more than "the colorful feather in the cap" of a tyrant who marches onward unimpeded. As currently practiced, business ethics is either wedded to the hopeless detached, rationalism of Modernity and the moral philosophy of Kant, Mill, and their kind --- or it is drifting at sea in the Post-modern Nietzschean subjectivism of "everyone does what is right in his own eyes." Often giving up on both Modernity and Postmodernity today's business ethics attaches itself to the bureaucratic state and is reduced to little more than legal compliance. Contemporary business ethics communication and training methods typically place employees in front of personal computer screens and

thus habituate their viewers to artificially simple scenarios with clear solutions, to be discovered by individuals interacting alone with their screens. To the extent that real problems are engaged from time to time, this approach amounts to little more than "damage control" of legal, financial, and reputational matters. The causes and conditions that initially give rise to such damage are never addressed. The process of mutual discernment and response goes unattempted.

Today's business ethics is, for the most part, a mess, a waste of time, and an illusion. As I see it, Jacques Ellul's work provides a critical warning and challenge to business ethics at three points: (1) the reduction of business purpose and mission to nothing but a worshipful, addictive quest for *money*; (2) the total subordination of business organization and practice to the ironclad rule of *technique* and (3) the resignation of business personnel to the *necessity* of work and the consequent absence of freedom and vocation.   If business ethics would seriously consider these three points, it could re-acquire a critical and then constructive role in our era.

The Worship of Money

There is a strain of thought that argues that all business is ultimately and primarily motivated by a quest for profit in the form of money. Business is not charity; business is a *for-profit* commercial and economic activity. If you don't make a profit, or at least break even financially, you will go out of business. Actually this is true of non-profit charitable institutions as well --- though they can be salvaged by donors rather than customers or investors. In any case, there is an essential and important financial, monetary aspect to running a business. It cannot be ignored. And no doubt the fear of financial failure as well as the dream of great success and wealth are highly motivating factors in business.

So a business is interested in acquiring your money but (in distinction from theft and begging) it must deliver some service or product in return for which customers are willing to pay it money. A successful business in a competitive economic environment (as opposed to a non-competitive monopoly environment, an unacknowledged reality in many industries and markets today) must keep its focus on delivering that product or service not only efficiently (minimizing waste of time, resources, etc.) but excellently. If the enterprise turns its primary attention to the monetary return, and loses focus on the excellence of the product or service, the money itself may well disappear. This is the simplified common-sense argument for money being very important -- but not *all-important* -- in business.

But in two decisive steps, money has swamped other considerations and become dominant in business purposes and focus today. First, the neo-capitalist "market fundamentalists" of recent decades have boldly proposed that "greed is good," in the famous words of the fictional Gordon Gecko in the American film "Wall Street" (1987). This philosophy is no longer the cartoonish extreme of a movie but the conventional wisdom of the business world: it is good for you, good for the economy, good for the world, for each of us to pursue as aggressively as possible our own self-interest, understood in terms of financial profit and wealth. Well before the movie popularized the notion, Milton Friedman, the Nobel laureate economist of the University of Chicago, famously wrote: "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits."[1] Period. Today's business leadership seems determined to eliminate all regulation and all restraint on the naked, predatory pursuit of money. Of course there are important exceptions but the dominating spirit is the "love of money for me."   The fact that in the 2012 presidential election

financial tycoon Mitt Romney could win the support of almost half the American electorate, despite publically dismissing the interests of the poor and the middle class, indicates the extent to which the "winner-take-all" mentality has captured the masses.

Perhaps a business does deliver excellence in its service or product; perhaps they do treat their employees well; but for today's neo-capitalists such commitments and practices are strictly utilitarian and pragmatic. Excellence, quality, and fairness *only* matter if they can be shown to increase profits. And at the other end of the spectrum, marketing deception, product testing flaws, exploitive wages, dangerous working conditions, harm to the environment, negative social impacts --- these all may be justified as part of the market's "invisible hand" as it eventually brings its bounty to those who deserve it. For business leaders (or workers), it's all about money . . . money-for-me. Now.

The second step in this development is the rise of the financial services industry. The titans of business and industry today are no longer those who create and sell products or services of one kind or another. No, today's richest rewards go to bankers and investment fund managers who speculate on interest rates, debt, risk, investments, and insurance. In today's business world, manipulating piles of money is considered so important that it entitles one to reap vast personal profits, skimming off large portions of peoples' investments and savings. Even when banks and investment firms fail, as they have so miserably in the past several years, their leaders are considered so rare and so important, it seems, that no retention bonus or salary increase is too high to hand over to them. No doubt there is a legitimate role for bankers and investment managers. But many of today's most famous leaders in these fields seem very little more than thieves in well-tailored suits. Money has become everything.

Jacques Ellul's *L'Homme et l'Argent* was first published in 1954. Even then Ellul was predicting the triumph of money, east and west:

> Beginning in the Middle Ages . . . capitalism has progressively subordinated all of life --- individual and collective --- to money . . . . One of the results of capitalism that we see developing throughout the 19th century is the subservience of being to having. . . . It is the inevitable consequence of capitalism, for there is no other possibility when making money becomes the purpose of life.[2]

Ellul goes on to argue that the differences between capitalism and socialism are shrinking and less and less consequential. Certainly it is hard to see any significant differences in attitude and behavior toward money in China by comparison to the USA or France.

Ellul points out that Jesus warned that money could function as the god "Mammon" in peoples' lives, receiving their awe, deference, and worship, occupying the center of their attention and desire, serving as the source of their meaning and value. Money acts as a spiritual "power" (*exousion*). Ellul points out that Mammon can play this central role for the poor, the "have-nots," as well as for the rich, the "haves." But beyond the "spiritual" problem and personal bondage, Mammon does certain things to its devotees.

> This power of money establishes in the world a certain type of human relationship and a specific human behavior. It creates what could be broadly called a buying-selling relationship. Everything in this world is paid for one way or another. Likewise, everything can, one way or another, be bought. . . . The world sees this behavior as normal. . . A related example of the way

money corrupts the inner person is betrayal for money. It is not insignificant that Judas's act is represented as a purchased act.[3]

The point is that when "the love of money" (for my bosses and owners or for myself) drives business and careers it is a "root of all sorts of evil," to cite the famous statement of St. Paul (I Timothy 6:10). Monetizing and commoditizing all things, all relationships, and all transactions necessarily dehumanizes all concerned and blinds us to values and realities that simply cannot be measured by money. "Money reduces man to an abstraction. It reduces man himself to something quantitative."[4] It is a short and logical step to prostitution and even slavery as economic practices. Moreover, the single-minded quest for money leads to profound betrayal in relationships. Loyalty and betrayal are simply about a cost-benefit calculation, nothing more or less.

The question is about the larger purpose of work and business. Do we yield to the propaganda of the Mammon-worshippers? or do we resist and make our own work decisions and our business management decisions in light of other criteria, other purposes? Of course, we do not always or fully get to choose the *telos* and purpose of our company or even of our career or our daily work. It may be that much of the time, for most of the people, simple survival forces us to play the work and business game within the community and culture of Mammon worship. Our individual decisions and acts may appear utterly useless in the larger perspective.

But to the extent that we can find room to resist and to pursue another way, what might we propose? Remember how Ellul in *The New Demons* warns that casting out one demon may make room for seven demons worse than that first one![5] My own approach in working with companies is to focus the mission on innovation, i.e., on creating and inventing products and services that are useful and reliable for people, and even beautiful if that is possible. Or as a second business purpose I suggest the mission to help the hurting, heal the sick, protect the vulnerable, and repair the broken. This sounds terribly obvious: create something good or fix something bad. But I am convinced that it is precisely those two themes that capture the imagination and passion of the worker. Rather than serving Mammon, or still less the Nation, or Race, my recommendation is to serve our neighbors and friends by creating and redeeming the basic, important things in their lives. And by making these the driving purposes of business, money can return to its proper, subordinate place.

So the voice of Jacques Ellul on money is critical for our era. His assessment of its sociological functioning is important. But the fact that his viewpoint is couched in biblical and theological language and in the prophetic warnings again the worship of Mammon means that there may be some leverage to liberate some of today's deluded Religious Right cheerleaders for market fundamentalism to the detriment of all else. Money is an unworthy and savage god. The value system that spins out of a choice to make money our sole mission is not a pretty sight.

The Submission to Technique

There is secondly, an almost complete insensitivity in the business world to the actual role of technique and technology.[6] The standard viewpoint in business is that technology is a set of neutral tools serving our purposes and practices as we determine. Who better than Ellul to remind us of the dominance of

technique: "the totality of methods, rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency for a given stage of development …. "[7] Technique and technology are in no way merely a set of tools serving business. The tools have coalesced into an ensemble that actually runs today's business practices. Ellul explains that technology is "not merely an instrument, a means. It is a criterion of good and evil. It gives meaning to life. It brings promise. It is a reason for acting and it demands a commitment."[8]

For best-selling authors such as Nicholas Negroponte (*Being Digital* (Vintage, 1996)), Michael Hammer (*Reengineering the Corporation* (HarperBusiness, 1993)), and Don Tapscott (*Paradigm Shift* (1993), *Digital Capital* (2000), *Wikinomics* (2006)), the embrace of technology by business should be complete and unreserved. They are among the countless cheerleaders for an unqualified subordination of business to the latest technology, to the maximum extent possible. In their world, technology is on the throne, not in the toolbox, of business. The pressure is irresistible: more technology, all the time, everywhere, no matter what the cost. We must keep up with our competitors and with technological change and innovation. Adopt, support, and upgrade, all the time. Jim Collins's best-selling management book *Good to Great* argues for a more qualified stance --- that truly great companies use technology as an accelerator rather than as a primary driver or steering wheel.[9] But even in Collins's approach, the deep subordination of business to technology is not fully recognized.

Ellul has shown at great length how technique/technology is not a simple "add-on" to business and other human domains. Rather, it constitutes an environment and a milieu; it is self-augmenting and universalizing in its constant growth, extending everywhere and into everything. One technological problem leads to another problem which requires further technological interventions and solutions. The scale and scope of technology in business is remarkable in its own right. There seems to be nothing in the name of which the encroachment of technique should be resisted or refused. Everything, every operation, every person, every moment should be subjugated to technique (much as in the previous section it is monetized).

But beyond this challenge of scope and scale, Ellul calls our attention to the values that are embedded in technology.[10] Where technology dominates, its values dominate. Many companies articulate a list of "core values" to which they aspire. All too rarely do these organizations evaluate these lists or the degree to which their company cultures actually reflect these aspirations. The *actual* working values of any organization dominate by technique/technology were discussed in Ellul's chapter on "Technological Morality" in his introduction to ethics, *To Will and To Do*. What are the basic characteristics of this technological value system? Since technology is precise, exacting, and efficient---it demands of people that they be *efficient, precise* and *prepared*. It is a morality of *behavior, not of intentions*---it is solely interested in *external conduct* (older moralities often addressed intentions and attitudes as well). It is a morality that excludes questioning and rigorously commands the *one best way of acting* (older moralities countenanced the agony of moral quandaries and questioning).

What are the ethical values embedded in technology?
- *Normality*. We are not called upon to act *well* (as in other moralities) but to act *normally*, to be adjusted. To be maladjusted is a vice today. "The chief purpose of instruction and education today is to bring along a younger generation that is *adjusted* to this society" (192).

- *Success*. "In the last analysis," Ellul says, "good and evil are synonyms for success and failure" (193). Morality is based on success; the successful champion is the moral exemplar of the good; if crime is bad it is so because "it doesn't pay," i.e., it is unsuccessful.
- *Work*. With the overvaluation of work come self-control, loyalty and sacrifice to one's occupation, and trustworthiness in one's work. The older virtues having to do with family, good fellowship, humor, and play are gradually suppressed unless they can be reinterpreted to serve the good of technique (e.g., rest and play are good if, and because, they prepare you for more effective, successful work).
- *Boundless growth* ---in the sense of continuous, unlimited, quantifiable expansion. "More" is thus a term of positive value and moral approval, as are the "gigantic," the "biggest." "In the conviction that technology leads to the good" there is no time or purpose for saying "No" or for recognizing any limits or for impeding the forward advance of technology (197-98).
- *Artificiality* is valued over the natural; nature has only instrumental value. We do not hesitate to invade and manipulate nature---whether that is the space program, deforestation and industrial development, animal farming, water resource "management," genetic experimentation, or whatever. We have little respect for the givenness of nature in comparison to our valuing of the artificial.
- *Quantification and measurement.* Despite Einstein's nice comment that "everything that can be counted doesn't count and everything that counts cannot be counted" our technological society insists on quantifying and measuring intelligence (IQ), success (church attendance, salary levels), personality traits (Meyers-Briggs, etc.).
- *Effectiveness and efficiency.* The measurably ineffective or inefficient are replaced or despised. Frederick Taylor and scientific management.
- *Power and speed.* Weakness and slowness are only valued by eccentrics. In today's absolutely frantic society, it is hard to dispute that this has become a virtue and value.
- *Standardization and replicability* Technology demands that people adapt to machines. The universal impulse of technology privileges platforms that link the parts together. The eccentric is only of interest in a museum.

Technological moral values, in general, are instrumental rather than intrinsic. These values become our criteria for decision and action (replacing such maxims as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," "Love your neighbor as yourself," and "Treat others always as ends, never as means"). They become our virtues of character so that the good person is one who is a normal, adjusted, hard-working, successful creator and manager of the artificial (replacing the "just, wise, courageous, and temperate" classical ideal and the "faithful, hopeful, loving" Christian ideal).

Without doubt, in many business operations and practices these technological values can have an important place. But when they are allowed in without a self-conscious and critical awareness, without any limits, their reign can become one of terror. What happens to the value of the eccentric, the mystery, the paradox, the immeasurable?   How do we deal with the long-term and the subtle, the inefficient but beloved? What happens to wild creativity that thrives on openness, risk, conflict, and the lessons only failure can teach? Wisdom loses to knowledge, knowledge to information, information to data. People lose to systems and numbers.

So Ellul's powerful voice is needed more than ever to awaken business folk from their uncritical slumber in the face of technological imperialism. A legitimate human ethics must be asserted over technique, not coopted and tamed by it. The first duty is that of "awareness" Ellul argues.[11] If we proceed blindly in denial of the impact of technique/technology on our corporate culture and values we can and will do nothing to resist it. This awareness of the technological values embedded in all business practices today is a gift to business ethics that Ellul can make, better than almost anyone else.

Dominated by Necessity

The third area in which Ellul has a critical and enduring importance for business ethics is in consideration of the meaninglessness and necessity of work. Historically and sociologically, Ellul argues, work is a matter of toil and necessity for survival. For the vast majority of people through history and even today, it is survival and necessity that dictate whether one finds adequate work, what kind of work one finds, and the generally negative character it then has. It is historically false to view work as a means to freedom or self-expression and fulfillment. It is simply necessary. Ellul rejects the ideological glorification of work by both Marxists and capitalists as simply a tool to reinforce our conformity, subservience, and integration into an economic or political movement. Of course, just because work is necessary does not mean it should be despised or made worse than it is. We should accept our necessity to work and then do it well.[12]

Sociologically, Ellul has often argued that work is a matter of necessity rather than freedom. For the vast majority of the world's people work is about survival, not high meaning and freedom. But even for those privileged to choose their work, the phenomenon remains locked into necessity. "Work is an everyday affair. It is banal. It is done without hope. It is neither a value nor is it creative."[13]

Theologically, Ellul has an explanation for this based on his reading of the biblical creation story. He argues at some length that human work is rooted not in creation but in the fall.[14] Ellul will have no truck with theologians who want to ground the meaning of work in our being created in the image of God or commissioned to serve as co-creators with God. The commission to Adam and Eve to name the animals, till the garden, and be fruitful and multiply was nothing like what we call work, Ellul maintains, because it was an exercise of freedom before God in an unbroken, unified, perfected world. Human work is what is required in a broken world of alienation from God, from the earth, and from other people. Work is fundamentally toil. It is of "the order of necessity." So "calling" and "vocation" in biblical theology are not to be confused with work but are something very separate.

Here is how he explains it:

> It is a very classical idea that work existed in the creation, but it was work in a very different sense there. That is, the work in Genesis 1 and 2 was non-utilitarian. All the trees gave their fruit spontaneously, and although Adam was commissioned to watch over the garden there were not any enemies there. Thus it was good work, a job, but one that was not in the domain of necessity. That is the great difference for me . . .
>
> I don't think you can say that for God the creation was a job or work. The Greeks and Babylonians always considered creation an effort. But the Bible says that it was the *word* of

creation rather than a *work*. It was something more simple. I agree with you that God's act was creative and that what responds in us is word and work. There is a work command but Adam and Eve were then in the presence of God rather than having merely a work or vocation. The idea of work and vocation is always confusing, but I believe that vocation or calling is always, and only, service of God.[15]

For Ellul the challenge is to find a *vocation* that is a kind of dialectical counterpart to our *work*. "We obviously have to discover a form of activity which will express our Christian vocation and thus will be an incarnation of our faith." This vocation is "free and an expression of grace" and yet it "is an equivalent of work." Ellul suggests that his own career as author and university professor was a species of work in the order of necessity. His *vocation,* on the other hand, was his volunteer activity working with the "Prevention Club" for street kids and juvenile delinquents. Ellul acknowledges that "To direct an enterprise of this kind . . . is real work. Yet it forms no part of the necessary work provided by society. It presupposes autonomy, inventiveness, and free choice."[16]

It is at this point that I have to take issue with Ellul's biblical interpretation and application – and his analysis of our actual work experience. In terms of our experience, in *both* the domain of ordinary work *and* that of volunteer vocational service, the experience of necessity, technique, toil, and trouble regularly appear. This is just as true in a church or environmental movement or volunteer youth athletic team as it is in a conventional business. And on the other hand, the opportunity for human kindness and care, for creativity, for meaning and even redemptive impact on others can present itself in business organizations, not just in the volunteer sector. Not all businesses, all the time, crush out human freedom, relationship, and creativity. In fact the best businesses promote such things. It is just not an either/or situation where work is all crushing necessity and external vocation is all freedom and meaning.

And theologically, I would argue that despite his brilliant insights, Ellul's interpretation of the biblical story is unconvincing. His rejection of any notion of work being rooted in creation, and of any survival of creational goodness and freedom after the fall, is unpersuasive. To stipulate that God's own creational activity was not work is unnecessary. To stipulate that the commission to Adam to name the animals and till and keep the garden were not work in any sense is also unnecessary. One reason not to follow Ellul here is The Decalogue --- which is given in two forms. In the Deuteronomy (chapter 5) version both work and Sabbath are grounded, Ellul-style, in liberation from work as slavery in Egypt. But in the Exodus (chapter 20) version, Sabbath and work are grounded in God's example of both in creation. So taken as a whole, work and rest are *both* viewed within a dialectic of good creative work and fallen necessary work. Think also: the Hebrew word *avodah* is used for *both* work and worship, suggesting an affinity Ellul overlooks. Paul challenges Christians not just to carry out their worship and vocations to the glory of God but "whatever you do in word or deed" do it all in the name and to the glory of God. Of course, Jesus Christ called his disciples away from their work --- just as he called them away from their family ties. But then he sent them back, though with a new set of priorities.

So the way Ellul draws the theological and sociological lines on this topic of necessity and freedom in work is unconvincing. But where Ellul is convincing beyond doubt is in his challenge that humans need freedom, meaning and significance and the workplace rarely provides these things. My conclusion is that we should not just acquiesce in this workplace necessity but carry the fight for freedom and dignity

directly into the workplace. For me the challenge from Ellul for business ethics is to go beyond where he ends up and fight for reforms in the workplace so that work is meaningful and not alienated, so that there are opportunities for growth and creativity, so that non-technical values are affirmed, so that human relationships can occur in healthy ways. The reality is that some businesses do succeed more than others in pursuing and achieving these values (e.g., Southwest Airlines, Costco).

We must not let businesses and managers off the hook by saying that mindless and meaningless work is a simple necessity. No, managers must be challenged to provide space for meaning, for good communication, for creativity at work. Nothing will ever be perfect, but that must not prevent us from trying. All of Ellul's challenges to risk and contradiction, to freedom and vocation, should be initiated within the workplace as much as alongside of it.

The enduring importance of Ellul on the question of work, in my opinion, is first of all, to remain ruthlessly realistic and critical regarding the actual experience of work. He does describe the lot of most of the world's workers, most of the time, and we must have no illusions. But secondly, his challenge implies a confrontation of freedom and necessity, an introduction of the Wholly Other into the mundane world of work. Despite his own pessimism about the possibilities within the workplace, Ellul suggests that we should make efforts toward de-institutionalization, de-structuralization and "so acting in the sphere of work that this becomes a setting for human encounter."[17] Moreover, Ellul grants that "When human work produces joy or what seems to be outside the everyday, we have to realize that this is an exceptional event, a grace, a gift of God for which we must give thanks." [18]

So it is, after all, possible for grace to break into our work. And despite his apparent theory of an unbridgeable divide, Ellul himself actually promoted this integrative quest. In the 1982 interview I conducted with Ellul, he described his efforts to help Christians integrate their faith and work:

> My friend Jean Bosc and I started the Associations of Protestant Professionals. We discussed professional problems, concretely, just as they are in life. The theologians would simply describe what the Bible says, without spelling out what the professional should do. That way they were challenged to figure out what to do, what sort of solution to bring to those problems. We had some very different experiences. It was easier for doctors and nurses than for business people. The groups that never went along very well were those composed of bankers and insurance agents. . . . Most of the associations lasted six years, from 1947 to 1953. Problems were submitted by the participants. We tried to get them to reflect on practical problems. There were congresses, study courses, and consultations. A businessman, for example, might submit a business venture for study and discussion by the group. Two groups, doctors and teachers, continue on to the present day, but the others ended.[19]

Forward in Hope

In the end, it is a matter of hope and freedom. In *Hope in Time of Abandonment* Ellul wrote that authentic hope only begins when all seems lost, the walls are sealed off and there is no way out. So it is that in work and business, necessity seems to rule, technique determines our action, and money is the object of worship. But precisely at each of those points we must resist. In the end this resistance may be

against "business as usual" --- but it is for "business as it could be," an enterprise in which human freedom can be expressed, human values respected, and all pretender gods and idols dethroned.

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[1] *New York Time Magazine*, September 13, 1970.

[2] Jacques Ellul, *Money & Power* (ET InterVarsity Press1984), p. 20. *Reason for Being* (ET: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 86-93, has a further discussion by Ellul of the significance and vanity of money.

[3] *Money & Power*, pp. 78-79. See also Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (Alfred Knopf, 1997) which demonstrates this impact in great detail.

[4] Jacques Elul, *Ethics of Freedom* (ET Eerdmans, 1976)*,* p. 24.

[5] Cf. Jesus' parable in Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26.

[6] I will use "technique" and "technology" almost interchangeably here. But I mean submission to a way of thinking and acting --- as well as to the machines and structures created and sustained by that spirit.

[7] *Technological* Society, (ET Alfred Knopf, 1964).

[8] *To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (ET Pilgrim, 1969)*,* pp. 190-91.

[9] Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (HarperBusiness, 2001)*,* Ch. 7.

[10] Ellul's chapter on "Technological Morality" in his *To Will and To Do,* pp. 185-198, is a brilliant account of technological values. My discussion here follows closely my recent article "Jacques Ellul and Technology's Trade-Off" in *Comment Magazine* (Toronto, Spring 2012), pp. 102-109.

[11] *Presence of the Kingdom* (ET Seabury, 1967), pp. 118 ff..

[12] Ellul discusses the concept of "necessity" in *Ethics of Freedom,* pp. 37-50, and *To Will and To Do,* pp. 59-72. In *Presence of the Kingdom* he urges that ordinary work and life must be done well pp. 16-19.

[13] *Ethics of Freedom,* p. 506.

[14] Ellul, "Work and Calling," *Katallagete* IV (Fall/Winter 1972): 8 – 16; reprinted in James Holloway & Will Campbell, eds., *Callings* (Paulist, 1974), pp. 18-44. See also "Freedom and Vocation" in Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, pp. 495-510, Ellul, "Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis," in Carl Mitcham and Jim Grote, *eds., Theology and Technology* (University Press of America, 1984), and the section on work in Ellul's commentary on Ecclesiastes *Reason for Being* (ET: Eerdmans, 1990), pp.93-106.

[15] Interview of Jacques Ellul conducted by David Gill in July 1982 at Ellul's home in Pessac with the assistance of Joyce Hanks; subsequently translated by Lucia Gill and published as "Jacques Ellul on Vocation & the Ethics of the Workplace" in *Radix Magazine* 22.4 (Summer 1994), pp. 12-13.

[16] *Ethics of Freedom,* pp. 507-508.

[17] *Ethics of Freedom,* p. 481.

[18] *Ethics of Freedom*, p. 506.

[19] Gill Interview of Jacques Ellul (July 1982), pp. 11, 28.

On the Lookout for the Unexpected: Ellul as Combative Contemplative

by Sue Fisher Wentworth

Abstract: In his analysis of *la technique*, Jacques Ellul brilliantly names what is going on in our world. His refusal to be prescriptive at the end of this analysis is well known; he does, however, urge his readers to create a new style of life. In the service of this creativity, this essay explores the character and contours of this life as he describes it: as the gift of the Holy; as rooted in prayer, the Spirit's own life within us, which calls for our absolute attentiveness; and as involving the willingness to wait in real darkness. It is a way of life offering an essential counterpoint to technological society's drive for autonomy and self-sufficiency, its absorption in frantic activity, and its demeaning alternatives of despair or false hope. It is also a way of life consonant with what the larger Christian tradition has long referred to as the "contemplative" way; the essay draws on this tradition to shed light on Ellul's thought, and explores the light he brings, as a modern man, Protestant, intellectual, and rabble rouser. Ellul invites us to be "on the lookout for the unexpected," open to the Wholly Other, for the end of human life is the mystery of presence: God's hidden presence ("I AM"), presence before God, presence in the world as leaven, salt, light.

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In his analysis of *la technique*, Jacques Ellul brilliantly names what is going on in our world. When we look to him for guidance on how to move forward, however, we are thwarted. As he says, "At the end of my books, readers are called to take action and make their own decisions, and they surely say to themselves, "This is very annoying. I don't see which action I can take." They would prefer a last chapter in which someone would tell them, "Here is what you must think and do." This last chapter I will never write." (*In Season, Out of Season*, 197)

For many, it is just this refusal to be prescriptive which discredits Ellul. Yet it is exactly here – at the border of what may be called Ellul's silence – that our real engagement may most fruitfully begin.[1] Ellul wants us to stand on Holy Ground, where real freedom and real change alone emerge. His silence is an invitation into Silence, into Real Presence. It is *presence* that is definitive, the "effectual, immediate presence of the Living One, of the Wholly Other, of the Transcendent (with all the reservations which those words call for when applied to the One whom nothing can define)" (*Prayer*, 148). *Presence* matters more than action or thought; it is the source of both.

Ellul *will* urge us to the creation of a new style of life, a new presence, a new way of being in the world. In his seminal book, *Présence au Monde Moderne* (which appeared in English as *The Presence of the Kingdom*), Ellul specifically addresses Christians who would act faithfully, lovingly, and hopefully in the

world: "In order that Christianity today may have a point of contact with the world, it is less important to have theories about economic and political questions, or even to take up a definite political and economic position, than it is to create a new style of life. . . . This problem of the style of life is absolutely central" (*Presence* 119-121). For "true action . . . is the testimony of a profound life. . . . What matters is to *live*, and not to act" (76).

The purpose of this paper is to attend to the contours and character of this profound life to which Ellul bears witness. As we shall see, it is a way of life that contrasts at every point with the way of life pressed upon us by technological society. First, this life is the gift of the Holy; it is a flowing life of exchange and generosity, the life of the Holy Spirit within, in a relationship which establishes selfhood and enables real freedom. Where technological civilization is founded on the drive to self-sufficiency, mastery, and control, this life emerges from the Wholly Other's refusal to be self-sufficient, self-contained, "in control."

Secondly, this life is rooted in prayer, but not prayer as we reflexively think of it. What is prayer for Ellul? What is it not? *This* prayer is powerful enough to be "the exact counterpoint of the rigorous mechanism of the technological society" (*Prayer* 174).

And finally, in a world captivated by a "will to death, a will to suicide," this life is capacious enough, trusting enough, to acknowledge, allow, and endure real darkness without veering off into any form of despair (*Presence*, 19). Only here can authentic Hope emerge.

 Throughout this essay a theme is constant, that this way of life to which Ellul bears witness – which is our primary concern -- is also what the larger Christian tradition has long referred to as the "contemplative" way. To make this association does not make this way manageable; it is not a way subject to domestication. It is illuminating to acknowledge, however, that it is an ancient way of the Body of Christ: the style of life we are creating, which remains ever new, has a long and rich history. What light does Ellul bring as a modern man, a Protestant, an intellectual, a rabble rouser? What light does the larger tradition itself shed on Ellul? Our culture, whether Christian culture or popular culture, has difficulties aplenty with the notion of "contemplation" -- misunderstandings, prejudices, resistances. As we shall see, Ellul shared in these. At the same time, we find him urging in *Autopsy of Revolution*, "If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* . . ., be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system" (286). [2] He will not tell us what to think or do, but he will tell us what to *be*: "Be contemplative."

Ellul was not a "pious" man. He was not a "religious" man. He was a man willing to be before One Who Is, and he invites us to venture the same.

I.
"Ground of being, and granite of it; past all/ Grasp God"
-Gerard Manley Hopkins

 It was August 1930, in Blanquefort, France, not far from Bordeaux. The young man, 18 years old, was on summer holiday, having just finished his secondary school exams. He was alone in a friend's house,

busy translating Faust.   Some seventy years later Ellul reluctantly described to an interviewer what happened next: ". . . [S]uddenly, and I have not doubts on this at all, I knew myself to be In the presence of a something so astounding, so overwhelming that had entered me to the very center of my being. That's all I can tell you. I was so moved that I left the room in a stunned state. In the courtyard there was a bicycle lying around. I jumped on it and fled. I have no idea whatsoever how many dozens of kilometers I must have covered. Afterwards I thought to myself: 'You have been in the presence of God.' And there you are" (Chastenet, 52).

Ellul refers to this event in another context and says that he doesn't wish to relate it, except to mention the violence of the encounter, and his response: he "realized that God had spoken," but because he didn't want God to have him, like Jonah, and multiple individuals before and since, he fled (*In Season* 14). This dramatic experience was for Ellul the self-revelation of the Holy -- totally unexpected, completely unsought, utterly commanding. It was encounter with the Wholly Other. Ellul's reticence in speaking about this personal experience is fitting, a testimony to its authenticity. We stand at the border of Silence.

As Karth Barth frequently said, "God acts first."   This "acting first" – whether it is experienced suddenly, dramatically, and violently, as with Ellul at his initial conversion, and/or over a lifetime of divine faithfulness – is the gift of the Holy. This is the Revelation: this incomprehensible Reality we call "God" wants to pour God's own life into us, not simply to command us to live in a certain way. The life to which we are called, we are given. Our life is I-Thou life, and we are not the "I" in the relation. This encounter with Holiness is a "wild adventure"; it cannot be secured beforehand or possessed after, but only received (*Presence* 109).

Life, for Ellul, begins here for each one of us, with God's self-gift. It is not as if we are alive first, and then meet God, or not. Life is located *here*, in this very meeting, whether we are aware of it or not. We are because God is. Human aliveness is not mere physical aliveness, a beating heart and the fact of respiration; it is not identified with physical health or youth or beauty. Being alive is "above all a fact of spiritual life" (Ibid. 76). "**To be alive means the total situation of man as he is confronted by God. . .**" (Ibid., my emphasis). It is "presence," "*pre*" + "*esse,*" literally "being before," "being in front of": it is "being found" and living together with God in vital relation, being God-breathed.

This I-Thou relationality turns our normal self-centered, self-generated world upside down and inside out. In the work of God, as Ellul observes, the end and the means are "identical": the work of God manifests "a unity of end and means" (Ibid. 64-5). Jesus brought the Kingdom by *being* the presence of the Kingdom. According to Ellul, the "first consequence" of this identity for us is this: "that what actually matters, in practice, is 'to be' and not 'to act'" (PK 74). [3] It is for us

> . . . to manifest the gift which has been given us, the gift of grace and of peace, of love and of the Holy Spirit: that is the very end pursued by God and miraculously present within us. Henceforth our human idea of means is absolutely overturned; its root of pride and of power has been cut away. The means is no longer called to 'achieve' anything. It is delivered from its uncertainty about the way to follow, and the success to be expected. . . . **[W]e must learn that it is not our possibilities which control our action, but it is God's end, present within us**" (67, my emphasis).

For Ellul, this creative Life, the Holy Spirit, "can transform our intelligence, in such a way that it will not be swallowed up by our systems, and that it will be sufficiently penetrating" (*Presence* 103). The Spirit "alone can give meaning, truth, and effectiveness to language" (Ibid.) It "alone can establish the link with one's neighbor" (Ibid. 106). It is the mystery of this divine life, alive in the person, that gives human work "its meaning, its value, its effectiveness, its weight, its truth, its justice – its life . . . " (Ibid. 97).

God acts first, always and everywhere. It is striking, in this context, to hear Jesus' words to his disciples in the Gospel of John:

> Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

As one commentator observes, "[T]he parable of the True Vine is, above all, a contemplative parable. . . . The verb *remain* is a verb of *being* . . . . It is used twice as many times as the verb *bear fruit*" (Cavalletti, 54). The same "sap," the same life, flows through the whole plant. This was the pattern and essence of Jesus' own relation with the one he called "Father": "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works" (John 14: 10).

We hear echoes from the larger Christian contemplative tradition. "God is the center of my soul," writes St. John of the Cross. Jean Pierre de Caussade says, "Divine activity floods the universe; it penetrates all creatures; it flows over them. Wherever they are, it is there; it precedes, accompanies and follows them. We have only to allow ourselves to be carried forward on the crest of its waves" (quoted in Squire, 217). Thomas Kelly, a more recent witness, writes in *A Testament of Devotion*:

> Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. . . It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all. (3).

The new style of life to which Ellul calls us originates in a Life deeper than our powers of self-determination. It flows from the Creator Spirit; it is the gift of the Holy, capable of enlivening dust and resurrecting the dead.

II.
"True love and prayer are learned in the moment when prayer has become impossible
and the heart has turned to stone."
- Thomas Merton

What is our relation to this Gift? We can affirm it; we can reject it. We can, like Ellul for a decade, flee from it, refuse it. In any case, we must decide. If we assent to the Gift, what then? For Ellul, the fruit of

the Spirit's presence is *prayer*. This is a second dimension of the new style of life which Ellul sees must be discovered. "Prayer comes before all the rest in the life in Christ" (*Prayer* 116). It is "the sole necessary and sufficient action and practice, in a society that has lost its way" (Ibid. 175). The church "can only have recourse to God in prayer. . ." (*Presence* 126). "It is, above all, in prayer and meditation that intellectuals will rediscover the sources of an intelligent life rooted in the concrete" (Ibid. 112). "Prayer is the power which exorcises demons, by the Holy Spirit, and is thus the weapon of faith" (Ibid. 16). In the battle against "death and nothingness," it is "the eschatological act of prayer" which enables us "to pick up once again the thread of life" (*Prayer*, 178). "The act of prayer . . . resolves both the problematics of faith and all the impossibilities of human hope" (*Hope* 274).

This "prayer," however, is not what we reflexively assume. For Ellul, true prayer is not only neglected in the church today; it is indeed impossible: L'*impossible Prière* is the title of the French original of the English *Prayer and Modern Man*. Impossible from without, for us as modern people, for whom there is no spiritual dimension, nor is there time or space, but only distraction, being pulled from one thing to another – and impossible from within, for Christians in Christendom, who labor under "a whole set of misunderstandings, of obsolete images, of spurious identifications, [which] rob prayer of all further justification and being, except as a counterfeit" (*Prayer* 64). "It is prayer which should be decisive, but we no longer have any confidence in the extraordinary power of prayer" (*Presence* 16). And then, bluntly, "for man in our society prayer cannot be what it is" (*Prayer* 64).

What does Ellul mean by prayer? We can begin with what he doesn't mean, since the substitutes are legion. We come to prayer with hands bearing "offerings, presents, vows, good deeds," instead of our lives and ourselves (Ibid. 6-7). We want to deal with "the pleasant, the consoling, the sweet, the banal, the ordinary" in our prayer, instead of actually encountering God (Ibid. 8). [4] We approach prayer as a duty; our prayers are rote, or simply emotive. We pray, "Thy will be done" to disown the reality of our own will, not to seek alignment of that very real will with God's. Prayer for us is deformed by a false posture of servility and a false affect of piety.

Most fundamentally, Ellul argues that we labor under the false notion -- one "undisputed, widespread, and habitual in all the churches" -- that prayer consists of us talking to God, that it is a discourse, "a sort of pious language addressed to God" (Ibid. 63). If we think of what happens when someone says, "Let us pray," we see the truth in this: most of us bow our heads, close our eyes, and expect someone to start talking. Generally when we speak of prayer we assume that we will be the ones starting the conversation; that it will consists of words (we "say" our prayers), and that we will be the ones using them; that God is a long way off and must be hailed.

What is true prayer? True prayer is also "impossible," albeit in a more salutary sense of being outside the realm of the merely humanly possible. True prayer, for Ellul, is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a "profound reality," "an "extraordinary explosive force," "outrageous, astonishing," a "miracle" (*Prayer*, 63, *Presence* 77, *Prayer* 26, 9). In this prayer God teaches us God's way, a way "truly impossible to find unless God reveals it, truly impossible to follow with our human power alone" (*Presence* 126). This prayer is first of all the prayer of Christ, the prayer of the Holy Spirit. *That* prayer is *our* life. It is wholly gift: "We are forced to the conclusion that prayer is a gift from God, and its reality depends upon him alone" (*Prayer* 62). This gift establishes relationship, IS relationship with God. It is "living with God," a

"form of life, the life with God"; it is "the life which I receive from him, and which unfolds in a story with Him" (49, 60, 61). It is "real encounter with God"; it "rests on the lived and living contact with the Lord" (Ibid. 119, 100-101). "In prayer God invites us to live with him," as Karl Barth says and Ellul references (Ibid. 48). What matters is life with God.

Here again we note the resonance with the Christian contemplative tradition. As Thomas Merton says, "In prayer we discover what we already have. . . . Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess. . . . Let Jesus pray. Thank God Jesus is praying. Forget yourself. Enter into the prayer of Jesus. Let him pray in you" (quoted in Pennington, 49-50). Dom John Main O.S.B. writes, "in the light of Christ, prayer is not talking-to but being-with" (*Essential Writings*, 67). "We are praying when we are awakening to the presence of the Spirit in our heart. If this is so, there can be no forms or methods of prayer. There is one prayer, the stream of love between the Spirit of the risen Christ and his Father, in which we are incorporated" (Ibid. 88). Brother Roger of Taizé says, ". . .[I]n the depths of our being Christ is praying, far more than we imagine. Compared to the immensity of that hidden prayer of Christ in us, our explicit praying dwindles to almost nothing. That is why silence is so essential in discovering the heart of prayer" (*Songs and Prayers from Taizé*, 17).

We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit does, interceding "with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26b).[5] Our inability is the opening into the power of God. Prayer is never originally "ours." The content of prayer is given by God, in an encounter "which transcends all language," "an encounter between the living God and the living person" which "overflow[s]" into human speech as its "secondary expression" (*Prayer*, 60). Prayer does not begin with us; in prayer we are addressed by God. Ellul quotes Kierkegaard at length here:

> The immediate person thinks and imagines that when he prays, the important thing, the thing he must concentrate upon, is that *God should hear* what HE *is praying for*. And yet in the true, eternal sense it is just the reverse: the true relation in prayer is not when God hears what is prayed for, but when *the person praying* continues to pray until he is *the one who hears,* who hears what God wills. The immediate person, therefore, uses many words and, therefore, makes demands in his prayer; the true man of prayer only *attends* (Ibid. 111).

This prayer is the presence of God, of God with us, "the only vital miracle" (*Jonah* 64). It frees us from a locked-up world. It is this presence, this being with, which Jonah finally understood, according to Ellul, in the belly of the whale. It is God's "staying with man in death and hell (all forms of hell, including those we know on earth)," this fullness of love, which is the very heart of prayer (Ibid. 65).

As Ellul says, "So when prayer seems impossible that is no reason for panic or despair, for making a great effort, for attempting devices or techniques, for awaiting some mysterious and sovereign urge. It is enough to fall back on the most simple and childlike obedience asked of us, that of hearing the word" (*Prayer* 110-111). This is obedience (*obedire*), hearing (*audire*) --- "a pure obedience without an end in sight" (*Hope* 274). It is for us to become hearers, to allow our deepest selves to become listening selves. We must renounce "human means," renounce "the possibilities of my own strength and initiative," renounce the use of power (*Prayer* 30, 6). Prayer for us is "a stripping bare, the abandonment of all human apparatus in order to place myself, without arms or equipment, into the hands of the Lord, who decides and fulfills" (Ibid. 30). We renounce thinking that we either must or even can act first.

Hearing the word, we both get out of the way and become able to respond. This primal attentiveness, I would suggest, is what Ellul means when he writes, in *Autopsy of Revolution*, that we are to "be contemplative." Here is the pertinent text in its entirety:

> It would represent a vital breach in the technological society, a truly revolutionary attitude, if contemplation could replace frantic activity. Contemplation fills the void of our society of lonely men. 'The art of contemplation produces objects that it regards as signs instead of things – signs leading to the discovery of a different reality . . . . I write to discover,' Octavio Paz says, 'because contemplation is the art of discovering things that science and technology cannot reveal. Contemplation restores to man the spiritual breadth of which technology divests him, to objects their significance, and to work its functional presence. Contemplation is the key to individual survival today; an attitude of profound contemplation allows actions to redeem their significance and to be guided by something other than systems and objects.' That is the way man can recover himself *today*. If you would be genuinely revolutionary *in our society* (I repeat that I am not \ disclosing a permanent value or an eternal truth), be contemplative: that is the source of individual strength to break the system (285-6).

Fullness of presence, instead of "frantic activity"; depth and communion, instead of loneliness; signs instead of things; the discovery of spiritual breadth instead of the mere mapping of materiality; profundity; otherness. Contemplation involves openness to a depth dimension, a quieting, stopping, attending to, wondering at – everything technical civilization finds threatening and wishes to distract and hurry us away from. The contemplative makes space and takes time. Time and space -- the very media which technological civilization seeks to annihilate -- are the human media, after all.

Yet as many misunderstandings cluster around the word "contemplation" as around the word "prayer," as evidenced in Ellul's own treatment in *Prayer and Modern Man*. Early in that book he urges the reader interested in a theology of prayer to have recourse to "Augustine or Teresa of Avila, to Luther or Pascal, to John of the Cross or to Barth, to Kierkegaard or to Calvin," many of whom are classically considered "contemplatives" (vii). Yet when he treats of "the experience of the great mystics" he speaks in the voice of a modern man (himself) who associates "mysticism" with extraordinary experiences, speaking in tongues, "a knowledge of inexpressible awarenesses, presences, truths," comparing these to what "the youth of today seek in drugs" (9-10).   This is "encounter with God" which is "fusion with the great All," "the way of the dark night of the soul of John of the Cross, or of the ineffable presence disclosed to Teresa of Avila" (10). And he says, "But in the meeting with God, or in the fusion, there no longer is any prayer properly so called, since nothing in the realm of knowledge or cogency can any longer be said," a "tendency [that] is very foreign to the Protestant mentality, which is always more or less rational" (Ibid.) Later he refers to "the prayer of the mystics, the plunge into the vast silence, into the ineffable, into the incommunicable" (97). Clearly these are a source of discomfort.

He continues: "The mystic experience frightens us. We feel embarrassed to recognize it. We distrust it." "And yet," he says,

> If prayer is indeed a speaking with God face to face, how could we remain
> the forlorn inmates of the commonplace? Why does not this presence of God work a
> transformation within us? . . . . I am not saying, of course, that the mystical experience is the test

of a truly profound prayer, but rather, that our prayer, which assuredly never takes us that far, is the test of an absence of prayer! (10)

He then rejects St. John of Damascus' description of prayer as a lifting of the mind to God, saying this transgresses what only God can accomplish, and he "dispose[s] of the mystical experience of prayer." But the disposal is not complete, for he concludes with this simple and touching observation: "*Perhaps* in that case we are missing a profound truth" (11). He had signaled his ambivalence from the beginning: "Confusedly, but movingly, the experience of the great mystics still attracts us" (9).

This combination of confusion and attraction is something we moderns know well. "Mysticism" seems strange, otherworldly, and "contemplation," rarefied, meant only for special people, "reserved for a small class of almost unnatural beings and prohibited to everyone else" (Merton 7). It suggests withdrawal, removal from the "real world," and is easy to dismiss as deluded or simply irrelevant. Perhaps we agree with Ellul when he flatly writes, "[T]he present-day world is not meant for contemplation," although he also acknowledges that insofar as that assumes silence, peace, and tranquility, neither was the Middle Ages (*Prayer* 171)! At the same time he expresses deep regret that "[t]he intelligence of modern man is no longer nourished at the source of contemplation, of awareness of reality. . ." (*Presence* 92).

Ellul makes a significant contribution here with his refusal to allow contemplation to fade into "tranquility," simply a state of being unruffled – a state which the larger tradition has also registered, and dismissed, as "pernicious peace," "lethal sleep," "holy floating" (Main, 88). No one can mistake Ellul for a proponent of escapism. The contemplative life is at once attentive to the depths and alert, energized, *combative*. Ellul surveys the battlefield and delineates where the battle is joined: combat against the self, against "religion," against falsehood, against evil, with God, against death and nothingness. "Je combattrai, je combattrai . . . ." (*Silences* 15). It is disciplined, not dissipated. The revolution which is served by contemplation needs "every spark of defiance and self-assertion we can muster" (Autopsy, 300).

Ellul reminds us that "being contemplative" is dialectical, dynamic, vital. It is at once impossible and essential. It involves us fundamentally with "a presence. . . whose margins are our margins; that calls us out over our own fathoms" (R. S. Thomas, quoted in Laird, 6).

III

"Wait without hope, for you are not ready for hope. . ."
- T. S. Eliot

Being called out over our own fathoms can be terrifying. And when it is not terrifying, it is radically challenging in other ways to a self, an ego, accustomed to the "stability" of being its own center. In this context, Ellul urges us to "l'espérance oubliée," hope that is forgotten: the willingness to wait in real darkness, the willingness to stay present to the felt absence of God. Just as the Holy One acts first to love the world, forever liberating us from our projections of "God"; just as the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness in prayer, enfolding us into the Divine Life; so we do not "possess" that for which we hope. "Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we

do not see, we wait with endurance" (Romans 8: 24-25).

Ellul sees "waiting" joined with "prayer" and "realism" in realizing the "effective fundamental attitude" (*Hope*, 258).   This "waiting" is active, completely engaging, a decision made again and again; the "person of waiting" -- "stubborn, firm, unassuming" -- "rushes into the dark of God's silence and of the abandonment" (Hope 261).   This waiting is her or his "field of battle"; it is totally focused on "the moment when all will have become possible again" (Ibid.).   Here again we see two decisive energies of prayer -- renunciation and combat – at work.   The person of faith perseveres, remaining steadfast and constant in the face of absence, failure, contradiction, dullness, boredom.   The renunciation of human means, referenced above, extends to a renunciation of attachment to experience.   "We must not build on what happens to us personally" – whether positive or negative, consoling or depressing:

> "We can indeed regard certain things in our lives as signs, miracles, God's particular and personal action on us. But we are then to move on to what is signified by them. We must not cling to the sign itself, even though it be the most beautiful mystical experience [!]. We must leave behind what belongs to the past. . . . [I]t is God who counts and not our experiences" (*Jonah* 85).

We must "leave [our] subjectivity" and "find [our] true and total center in the permanence and faithfulness of the love of God" (Ibid. 86).

Here again Ellul and the larger contemplative tradition shed light on each other, particularly in their shared witness to the spiritual reality of darkness. What Ellul calls "abandonment" others perhaps more trenchantly call "dark night," "desolation," "impasse."   Constance Fitzgerald, a Carmelite sister and student of St. John of the Cross, describes "impasse" as the experience of no way out, of no escape; the person is immured in "disappointment, disenchantment, hopelessness, and loss of meaning" ("Impasse," 94).   Thomas Merton speaks of "a terrible interior revolution":

> Gone is the sweetness of prayer. Meditation becomes impossible, even hateful. Liturgical functions seem to be an insupportable burden. The mind cannot think. The will seems unable to love. The interior life is filled with darkness and dryness and pain. The soul is tempted to think that all is over and that, in punishment for its infidelities, all spiritual life has come to an end" (42).

What is needed now is endurance, perseverance, "revolutionary patience" (Soelle, quoted by Fitzgerald, "Impasse," 114).   Only as this experience is faced, acknowledged, allowed, and mourned -- "if the ego does not demand understanding in the name of control and predictability but is willing to admit the mystery of its own being and surrender itself to this mystery" – can the soul emerge into the wholeness which God alone can give (Ibid. 96-97).   It is only out of this suffering, this dying, that authentic, God-given hope can emerge.

> The soul one day begins to realize, in a manner completely unexpected and surprising, that in this darkness it has found the living God. It is overwhelmed with the sense that He is there and that His love is surrounding and absorbing it on all sides. At that instant, there is no other important reality but God, infinite Love. Nothing else matters. The darkness remains as dark as ever and yet, somehow, it seems to have become brighter than the brightest day. The soul has entered a new world . . . . (Merton, 52-3)

Ellul refers to a time in his own life of a "severe trial in which everything was once again called into question," which "involved not only my deepest personal attachments, and the significance of whatever I might undertake to do, but also that which constituted the very center of my person, or at least which I believe constitutes the center of my person . . . . All was called into question. . . ." (*Hope* v). It was only after this experience of the loss of everything that hope was born; before that, although he had written about hope, he "didn't know what he was saying" (Ibid. vi).

This awareness of the reality of the dark night and the hope which can emerge, "in a manner completely unexpected and surprising," is essential encouragement in our own dark night, whether experienced personally or societally. As Fitzgerald suggests, it would perhaps be helpful to understand our own time as a time of genuine impasse, instead of seeing the only alternatives as the denial of darkness or the succumbing to it. "We are citizens of a dominant nation, and I think that as a nation we have come to an experience of deep impasse and profound limitation. On the other side of all our technology, we have come to poverty and to dark night. We can find no escape from the world we have built . . ." ("Impasse," 105). It is just this impasse which must be brought to prayer. The larger contemplative tradition, with Ellul, bears witness to the radical new life which can emerge, unexpectedly, miraculously, from out of this darkness, for those "willing to be stretched beyond [them]selves toward a new epiphany of the Holy, incomprehensible Mystery" (Fitzgerald, "From Impasse to Prophetic Hope," 42).

IV.

Life with God is not complicated. A child can do it. It is we adults, in a technological society, who have become overburdened with our own capabilities, our own need for validation, our own powers. But the Holy knows no self-sufficiency, and will not leave us to ours. We find we have been given everything, and have nothing to hold on to; we are "out over 20,000 fathoms" (Kierkegaard). Art McGill calls it "receiving without having," "an open poverty that is always waiting to receive" (61, 56). Ellul describes it as "bewilderment":

> In the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit we receive the answer to this work of God, and we are bewildered because we are no longer very sure about the way forward, which no longer depends upon us. The end, as well as the means, has been taken away from us, and we hesitate as we look at this way which lies open before us, whose end we cannot see: we have only one certainty, and that is the promise which has been made to us of a certain order, which God guarantees: 'Seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you' (Matt. 6:33). (*Presence* 78)

Here is the "breach which cannot be closed, [the] 'undermining' which cannot be avoided" (97), the "rupture." We do not "have" faith, in the sense of yet one more possession. We lean, instead, into a radicality of trust, of interior poverty, of being dispossessed. We – the I-Thou – slowly and convulsively discover what it means to *live*.

Ellul is a modern man, post-religious, post-Christian, bearing witness to the Gift of the Holy. He is a Protestant, standing firm with the largely Catholic contemplative tradition to protest any attempt to encompass and "unify" this Gift which can only unify us. He is an intellectual committed to questioning the prevailing assumptions about the meaning and end of human life and the meaning of human activity.

He is a rabble rouser riveted by the depths of Silence. To "be contemplative" is not to be serene and unruffled, but to be engaged, attentive to the depths, willing to wait. Each of us, with the community, must discover the "how" of this life, as the Holy lays hold of us in our practical situation (*Presence*, 115).

This way of life to which Ellul bears witness offers an essential counterpoint to the way of the world. Instead of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of technical man, bent on the control of the material world, it bears witness to the mystery of a living relationship between a loving God and a beloved creation. Instead of noise, distraction, hurry, multi-tasking – the drive to fill every space -- it bears witness to the primacy of listening, of attentiveness. Instead of glittering despair, it chooses trust in the darkness. Ellul invites us to be   open to the Wholly Other, for the end of human life is the mystery of presence: God's hidden presence ("I AM"), presence before God, presence in the world as leaven, salt, light.

The time is ripe for the renewal and rediscovery of contemplative prayer, this presence, this hearing of the word for which we are made. It is ripe personally, communally, ecumenically. We are gifted with an incredibly rich tradition of witness to the power and presence of the Spirit. Let us learn from it.

The time is ripe among faith traditions. Christians are not alone in being encountered by God. There are genuinely contemplative dimensions in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and other faith traditions. What can we learn from each other? In the being of prayer we become able to rediscover the other, to make space for the reality of the other. How can life with God be anything other than a school of humility? Those who genuinely bear witness to God are not self-righteous or self-justifying. We learn from Jonah that "the man chosen by God is far from having plumbed the full depths of God's mysteries. . . . The man filled with the Holy Spirit knows only a small part of the mysteries and even of the action of God. The adventure of Jonah inclines us at every point to humility" (*Jonah*, 84).

When we read Ellul, unexpectedly, we find a contemplative, who invites us to a present life hidden with God, and enlivens and deepens our sense of what that might mean in today's world. This way of life is "on the lookout for the unexpected," much as Ellul and his childhood friend Pierre Farbos were as they roamed the quays of Bordeaux, willing to trust that Life is already there, about to unfold (Ellul and Chastenet, 45). It is a way of life rooted in absolute attention to the Mystery of God. "[T]he person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical. Everything will flow from that" (Ibid. 174).

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[1] Silence is not something usually associated with Ellul, a prodigiously productive writer and an ardent conversationalist. It is worth noting, however, that his poetry, in which he was conscious of having "bared his soul," as he said, and which he gave permission to publish only a few months before his death, was published in a little volume called *Silences*.

[2] My thanks to Arthur Boers for first calling my attention to this text.

[3] We "do not have to strive and struggle in order that righteousness may reign upon the earth. We have to be 'just' or 'righteous' ourselves, bearers of righteousness . . . . Likewise we have not to force ourselves,

with great effort and intelligence, to bring peace upon the earth – we have ourselves to *be* peaceful" (Ibid. 66-76).

[4]As Thomas Merton says, in what could be a mini-version of *Prayer and Modern Man:* . . . [C]ontemplation will not be given to those who willfully remain at a distance from God, who confine their interior life to a few routine exercises of piety and a few external acts of worship and service performed as a matter of duty. Such people are careful to avoid sin. They respect God as a Master. But their heart does not belong to him. They are not really interested in Him, except in order to insure themselves against losing heaven and going to hell. In actual practice, their minds and hearts are taken up with their own ambitions and troubles and comforts and pleasures and all their worldly interests and anxieties and fears. God is only invited to enter this charmed circle to smooth out difficulties and to dispense rewards. (12)

[5]It was in reading Romans 8 that Ellul experienced what he called his "second conversion" (*In Season*, 15).

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