

JACQUES ELLUL ON REVOLUTION

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By

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A recurrent theme throughout the writings of Professor Jacques Ellul, a prominent Protestant theologian and social thinker, has been the need for revolutionary action in the modern world. This thesis will first explicate what he means by calling Christianity a revolutionary faith. Then it will outline his social thought concerning the theory and practice of revolution. Finally, it will show how the two accounts fit together within his total plan. The main argument will be that his social analysis concerning revolution is directly dependent on his revolutionary theology.

PREFACE

Most of the content for this thesis has come from Ellul's material that has been translated into English or articles that he has written himself in English. Throughout, I have used the standard translations as are noted in the Bibliography. The main exception to this general practice comes when Autopsie de la Révolution provides the source, for at the time of writing, there was no translation of that book, nor of a number of Ellul's articles. In these instances, I have quoted directly from the French. Since many of the references do come from Ellul's various writings, for the sake of convenience, I have used certain abbreviations for those cited most often. They are as follows:

<u>AR</u>	<u>Autopsie de la Révolution</u>
<u>Critique</u>	<u>A Critique of the New Commonplaces</u>
<u>J of J</u>	<u>The Judgment of Jonah</u>
<u>M of C</u>	<u>The Meaning of the City</u>
<u>PI</u>	<u>The Political Illusion</u>
<u>The Presence</u>	<u>The Presence of the Kingdom</u>
"La Technique"	"La Techniques et les Premiers Chapitres de la Genèse"
<u>TS</u>	<u>The Technological Society</u>
<u>To Will</u>	<u>To Will and To Do</u>

Finally, I would like to thank the members of my supervisory committee for their help and encouragement during the various stages of writing. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. G. P. Grant for introducing me to the problems with which Ellul is concerned, and for guiding my work to make this thesis possible.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Jacques Ellul, a member of the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences at the University of Bordeaux, may well be the most powerful spokesmen alive who advocates orthodox Protestantism for the modern world. Born in 1912, he was converted at the age of twenty-one from Marxism to a Calvinist form of Christianity. Far from detaching himself from the political realm, he has continually remained active - engaging in the French Resistance, campaigning against French participation in the Algerian War, and serving as deputy mayor of Bordeaux. His continued involvement in practical affairs is a sign of his insistence on the social and political significance of Christian belief. Within his religious tradition, Ellul can be compared only with Karl Barth. In fact, he can be called 'pop-Barth', for recently a growing number of New Left, North American radicals, with no specific religious affiliations, have latched on to his social analyses. That title however, would not mean that his basic theology is any more palatable for popular acceptance than Barth's. The comparison is made because each is concerned primarily with the arbitrary judgment and mercy contained in the direct

revelation of the Word of God in Christ. In my view, even though Ellul's theology is not systematic, he is at least as important as Barth, for he does analyze the social and political aspects of his world, and is willing to confront theologically, that reality.¹

Que la constatation des faits soit nécessaire pour le chrétien, cela me paraît une certitude car c'est la seule chose qui puisse nous faire sortir de l'abstraction.²

He therefore considers it important to describe, as accurately as possible, the situation in which he finds himself. This is no minor task for him and he has written a number of massive descriptions of various aspects of modern society. His most comprehensive book on social issues, The Technological Society, has provoked controversy in the fields of sociology and social philosophy because of its stark and sweeping analysis of the forces dominating modern society. The basic thesis of the book is that in modern society (dating approximately from the end of the eighteenth century), technique has become an automatic, self-legislating, self-perpetrating force that imposes itself on all spheres of contemporary life, disallowing any alternative. He maintains that this is the case not only in advanced

¹For an indication of the difference between Barth and Ellul, see p. 11, footnote 10.

²Jacques Ellul, "Le Réalisme Politique", Foi et Vie, November 1947, p. 723.

industrial areas, but also in more traditional societies where the modernization process is making the technological society universal. By technique, he means,

the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity.³

In short, the 'one best way' takes precedence over any other consideration. The consensus concerning this work was an admiration for some of his insights, but finally a rejection of his alleged pessimism about the ability of man to find his way out of this situation. The debate however, has suffered from the fact that even those who have taken Ellul seriously as a social critic, have not given his other works, both theological and social, the attention they deserve. His social writings are not isolated, but they form an integral part of his religious orientation -- a perspective put forward most explicitly in To Will and To Do and The Meaning of the City. These books attempt to clarify for modern man, the significance of the revelation given in the Bible. For Ellul, that revelation is prior for a correct understanding, and his bibliography shows no sequence from social to biblical themes. He is not primarily a sociologist who is later trying to fit his insights into a framework which somehow he can then label as

³Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: 1965), p. xxv. Hereafter this book will be referred to as T.S.

Christian. Rather, he appears to have a comprehensive vision that is gradually unfolding in his various works, and only the theological writings can clarify what he means by technology, statism, propaganda etc.

For Ellul, Christian faith, if it is not lived out in the world (in our case, the technological society), is meaningless. Within this perspective, his account of contemporary society as governed by his faith, implies and indeed includes, a response to that situation. According to Ellul that Christian response should be different from all accepted forms of social and political action. Yet at the same time, it will be totally revolutionary, for it will be based on a realistic analysis and an overcoming of the technological society, rather than on an unexamined retreat. As early as 1948 (The Presence of the Kingdom), Ellul formulated a theology of Christianity as a revolutionary faith that "alone permits them [Christians] to escape from the stifling pressures of our present form of civilization".⁴ One of his most recent books, Autopsie de la Révolution, analyzes and criticizes the concept and practice of revolution, particularly as it appears as a modern phenomenon. It would appear therefore, that contrary to 'popular opinion', a dominant theme running throughout Ellul's writings has been the notion of a revolutionary

⁴ Jacques Ellul, The Presence of the Kingdom (New York: 1967--originally published in French in 1948), p. 60. Hereafter this will be referred to as The Presence.

response to the technological society.

My thesis will concentrate on what he has said, both socially and theologically, about revolution. The purpose of choosing this one subject is to provide a starting point, or a way of entering into Ellul's thought as a whole. Hence by concentrating on the single topic of revolution, one can begin to see the unity in his theological and social writings, and to appreciate that he does have a vision of the whole. The particular theme of revolution is useful on two different levels. In the first place, the idea of revolution is very much in vogue in current political and social discussions; therefore, in light of his earlier critiques of society, Ellul's comments about this field are pertinent. As an example of the manner in which he can relate his Christian faith to a particular issue, they are important in their own right. Secondly, when one looks at the recurrent notion of revolution in his writings, it becomes apparent that by 'revolution', he ultimately means the content of the proper Christian response to the world. Understood in this way, the theme goes beyond being merely one among many to which Ellul points as symptomatic of our world: it is at the heart of the matter.

II Preliminary -- Ellul's Dialectic

It is important that the reader understand the schema within which Ellul views the vast body of material that the Christian intellectual should encompass. Despite the fact that he divides his bibliography into 'historical', 'sociological', and 'theological' works, in the final analysis, he does not consider them as completely distinct entities. He sees them as two types of studies (the socio-historical studies being grouped together) locked in a constant tension in which both he and the reader are inextricably bound. Commenting on his own work, Ellul has said:

I always thing 'at grips' as it were, with my surroundings--sometimes in protest against what is happening, but always taking account of it. I make no claim to being a philosopher or a dogmatician. I can never look at anything sub specie aeternitatis. Whatever I think, do, write as a Christian, I think, do, write it in relation to a specific setting.⁵

This is his conception of his role as a Christian intellectual. The only thinking that he considers important is that which sheds light on our own specific situation. Even his historical studies serve basically either to strike a contrast to the present, or to trace the roots of what has come to dominate. Similarly, some of his scathing criticisms stem, not from a view of history as a whole, but from what he thinks needs attention now. For example, in A

⁵Jacques Ellul, "Mirror of These Ten Years", Christian Century, 87 (February 18, 1970), p. 200. Hereafter this will be referred to as "Mirror".

Critique of the New Commonplaces, he underlines the need to criticize different aspects of society in different ways at different times. The link between his specific setting and his work as a Christian goes a long way to explain both the insistence on his type of social analysis and also the vehemence of his conclusions.

a) As central to his total view of what it means to be Christian, Ellul says that one must highlight the contradiction between the forces of our society and the force of the will of God for man which is revealed in the Bible. For clarity of expression, he refers to the former as 'reality', and to the latter as 'truth'. In his writings as a whole, Ellul has set up a principle of confrontation between the two. As a result, it is his practice to write a theological book corresponding to each study of society; for example, The Meaning of the City corresponds to The Technological Society, and Violence ^(seems to) correspond to Autopsie de la Révolution.

The only thing that will be of any use is not synthesis or adaptation, but confrontation; that is, bringing face to face, two factors that are contradictory and irreconcilable and at the same time inseparable.⁶

Ellul sees the confrontation as forming a dialectic in which one cannot legitimately disregard either pole. This formulation though, in no way constitutes a Manichaeian dualism. In fact, it does not even mean finally that the

⁶"Mirror", p. 201. Here he also speaks of the correspondence between his sociological and theological analyses.

two poles of the dialectic have comparable power at all. God's truth is prior, sovereign, triumphant. Moreover, according to Ellul, the central revelation of Jesus Christ tells man that the forces of reality have been defeated, for He showed what it would mean not to give allegiance to them. On the other hand, knowledge of the victory of Christ and the sovereignty of God does not totally extricate man from his real position. He is not exempted from the struggle, for the forces of reality are still exercising control over man. This conclusion is also part of the biblical revelation from which the Christian cannot legitimately escape. The dialectic describes the situation of man enmeshed in the order of reality, confronting the revelation of God's will for man. No human synthesis can resolve the contradiction that man faces between truth and reality. Because of the Incarnation however, (the only time when truth and reality have been united) Ellul says the Christian cannot avoid any aspect of the contradiction and the confrontation.

For it is only out of the decision he makes when he experiences this contradiction--never out of adherence to an integrated system--that the Christian will arrive at a practical solution.⁷

The reason that Ellul sees the relationship between truth and reality in terms of dialectic, as well as of

⁷ "Mirror", p. 201.

confrontation, lies in the inseparability of the two poles.⁸ There are not two separate spheres that happen to be in conflict. Nor, according to Ellul, should one merely choose between truth and reality with an accompanying rejection of the other. The reality of the world can be seen lucidly only in the light of the biblical revelation; otherwise, the various facts achieve no true significance.

And this revelation provides us with both a means of understanding the problem and a synthesis of its aspects as found in the raw data of history and sociology. ...so it is with the reality of human problems in general and with our particular aspect of life. Revelation-- which was not given with this in mind, but which incidentally serves in this way--enlightens, brings together and explains what our reason and experience discover. Without revelation all our reasoning is doubtlessly useful but does not view reality in true perspective.⁹

Furthermore, there is no aspect of life, whether economic or political or scientific or technical, that is autonomous from the judgment and grace of God. All is subject to the Lordship of God. It is fairly clear then, why Ellul says that reality should be considered only in its relation to the biblical revelation. On the other hand, if man were totally in communion with the will of God, as in the Edenic state, then there would be no reality at all. For that matter, there would be no biblical revelation either, for

⁸This is clearly a different meaning of the term 'dialectic' from the way it is used by Hegel or Marx.

⁹Jacques Ellul, The Meaning of the City (Grand Rapids: 1970), p. 153. Hereafter this will be referred to as M of C.

it is intended only for the salvation of man in revolt from God. It is therefore directed to man who, as a result of the fall, is caught in reality. Since this is the case, one cannot aspire to a pure knowledge of the biblical revelation as an expression of God's holy will, as a thing on its own, apart from the 'here and now' situation. Thus, even the biblical revelation cannot be examined adequately if it is severed from the concrete setting to which it is directed. For instance, the true significance of The Technological Society can be seen only in The Meaning of the City: but also, The Technological Society is necessary to document for now what is said biblically (i.e. for all times) in The Meaning of the City. The technological society is the reality to which that book is now speaking. Ellul insists on both of the foregoing aspects when he places his overall enterprise in a dialectic. When reading his more detailed and specialized works, particularly those in the social realm, one should remember that each one is a partial statement of only one half of the dialectic.

b) Since, in the totality of his work, Ellul refuses to separate the two poles of the dialectic, it is legitimate to ask why he does create the radical split when carrying out his plan. Is this not rather deliberately misleading? There is no doubt that on one level, he intends books such as The Technological Society and Autopsie

de la Révolution, to stand alone as complete. He wants them to be assessed on their own merits according to whether or not they are accurate accounts of the social or historical facts. In this respect, it is not quite fair to refute critics by saying, 'Well, he really means these books in an entirely different perspective!', as if one were pulling a rabbit out of a hat. On another level though, if he were to say that anyone with sufficient intellectual tools and perceptiveness could reach the same conclusions socially, then social thought would indeed be cut off from the revelation. Does not the very undertaking of separate social writings enhance the prestige of the modern sociological enterprise as something valid on its own hook? Or, to put the question from the other direction, what could an objective social analysis add to what we are told definitively in the biblical revelation and in obedience to the will of God?¹⁰ These are serious questions that arise from Ellul's principle of selection for his books--

¹⁰This is a similar objection to that Barth makes against Brunner at the end of their debate on "Natural Theology" when he discusses the problem of Christian education. Barth would probably say that if one is obedient to the Word of God, then it would be unnecessary to engage in sociological studies. This is not to say that Barth was unconcerned with the Christian response to the world, but he would not think that the Christian thinker need work on independent social writings. Doubtless, despite the similarities in their theological stances, Barth would level the same type of criticism against the framework within which Ellul works out his overall position.

questions that cannot be easily ignored. The consistent separation of his social and theological works however, does seem defensible on at least three related grounds.

First (and least important), for practical purposes he cannot discuss everything in every book, so that he must develop some consistent principle of division.¹¹ He is not working from a void towards a total view, but he is elaborating a prior vision. In the effort to clarify that view, Ellul's method allows him to work in detail on fairly self-contained subjects, one at a time, without violating his overall plan. The second justification might be called in Buddhist terms 'skillful means'. His penetrating social analyses without any overt reference to his faith, can attract certain readers who would normally dismiss out-of-hand, any theological treatise. They are forced to come to terms with what he describes as modern society, or else refute him. Since his accounts are in language that modern commentators can understand, they cannot easily dismiss them on a charge of dogmatism. If he himself did not take his social writings with utmost seriousness, one might be tempted to suggest that he seems to speak to Philistines

¹¹In this respect, it is interesting to look at The Presence which gives the impression of being far-ranging, but at the same time disjointed and almost frenetic. One can see his subsequent books as a working out in more detail and more coherently, the themes introduced in that book.

in the language of Philistines! This would be in the attempt to focus attention on the most important issues, rather than on peripheral or false ones. His descriptions of society may not be able to give an ultimate account of their own significance. They may however, clear away false notions to make it easier for modern men to hear the content of the biblical revelation. (In doing so, he does of course run the risk that the description will not lead to an openness to his solution, but to a resignation to that which is reality.) Whether or not this policy is deliberate, it is certain that many readers come to Ellul's religious thought via the route of taking his social insights seriously. Most important of all, Ellul sees it as the duty of the Christian intellectual to spell out as clearly as possible what it means to be Christian in the modern world. It is perhaps possible to live in a response of obedience to the will of God without a pre-requisite of analytical social research. Christian realism however, does require that one be aware of the enemy. If the Christian intellectual is to put forward an articulate formulation of what it could possibly mean to incarnate faith today, then he must be able to delineate a clear assessment of the forces of the opposition. Ellul has described his task as follows.

We must seek the deepest possible sociological understanding of the world we live in, apply the best methods, refrain from tampering with the

results of our research on the grounds that they are 'spiritually' embarrassing, maintain complete clarity and complete realism--all in order to find out, as precisely as may be, where we are and what we are doing and also what lines of action are open to us. The Christian intellectual is called frankly forced to face the sociopolitical reality. This is one demand on the Christian intellectual. The other is that he develop and deepen his knowledge in the biblical and theological fields. But he must beware of 'inflecting' theology for the sake of the 'cultural'.¹²

Ellul sees that his task as a whole is to carry out the two demands¹³ in order to make the confrontation as dramatically and starkly as possible. If one rejects this double task as being superfluous in the light of the revelation, he would then have to argue that speculative theology is sufficient to clarify the Word of God in the specific situation the Christian has to face. If this argument is pushed to the extreme, there is no place for the Christian

¹²"Mirror", p. 201. Ellul consistently advocates realism -- the perception of the world as it is, without illusions or preconceived definitions. It does involve a recognition of reality not as good, but merely as it is. From the previous discussion of Ellul's dialectic, I conclude that he would think that partial 'realism' is possible within a purely social analysis of facts. On a commonsense level, anyone can look at the world with many or few illusions. In the final analysis however, he would see 'complete realism' as possible only in the light of the biblical revelation. For his view on realism, and also why he sees social analysis as desirable, see "Le Réalisme Politique".

¹³The starting points both theologically and socially for the studies and revolution will be examined separately in Chapters I and II respectively.

intellectual at all, for people should simply read their Bibles more closely. If one does accept Ellul's description of his task, it bears repeating that the dialectical aspect of the whole enterprise should remain in the foreground. Also, it is important to note that the Christian commentator cannot initiate a response to the confrontation he poses. In the end therefore, Ellul would have to take the position that any suitably equipped reader can check the examples used in the descriptions of modern society, but only with reference to their factual accuracy. The significance of those descriptions however, and any of his programmatic suggestions cannot be understood within the social books themselves. If the fact that Ellul proceeds in this manner upsets some readers, there may be many explanations, such as their own preconceived ideas or the directness of the biblical challenge or error in Ellul's interpretations. It would not seem fair however to say that the reason stems from any deceitfulness of purpose on his part.

III Basic Themes and Approaches Throughout Ellul's Works

In order to see how he can manage to maintain this somewhat uncommon stance, we should examine in a general way how he goes about carrying out this task.

a) To mention that this principle of confrontation is not the usual starting point for a contemporary theorist is

surely an under-statement. Even a casual reading of any of his works gives a different impression from the judgment of fact that provides the criterion for most social scientists today. Within the scope of this thesis, it is impossible to investigate in depth Ellul's relation to the mainstream of sociology since Max Weber. I shall merely try to highlight the sense in which he speaks from within modern thought and the point at which he breaks with it. Quite obviously Ellul is concerned to know about the facts of social reality (a characteristic that does not distinguish him from social scientists of any era).

We encounter facts in the political world. The facts are concrete and real; we can have direct knowledge of them and test them. But surprising as this may be, political facts have different characteristics than they had in another day.¹⁴

It is this conviction with regards to facts that leads in part to his advocacy of social nominalism (see chap. II). One can argue that Ellul does fit into the context of modern social sciences to the extent that he denies that reason alone can determine the goodness of a fact. Reason is only a tool to establish the veracity of a fact or perhaps to pursue the logical consequence of facts. To Ellul, the only criterion of judgment remains the revelation of God's will which is not subject to nor accessible

¹⁴ Jacques Ellul, The Political Illusion (New York: 1967), p. 97. Hereafter, this book will be referred to as PI.

to man's reasoning. In this respect, he is able to speak a language that is much closer to modern value-free vocabulary than would more traditional philosophers who would understand the relation between fact and reason differently.¹⁵ For example, in an assessment of his straight social thought, Ellul would probably accept generally the principles of modern analytical philosophy. Furthermore, to a large extent, he does accept Max Weber's format as a description of the state of the modern world.

Despite all criticism that can be leveled at Max Weber, his theory of the tension between facts and values (as a belief, not as a metaphysic) is not only useful but certainly valid. No matter how shocking or unlikely this may appear, the man of our day, indifferent to values, has reduced them to facts.¹⁶

As a final note, Ellul also clearly accepts Weber's account of modern rationality as the most accurate description of what the modern world has become as it unfolds its own internal logic. Part of the appeal of Ellul's works therefore, lies in the fact that he provides an overall critique of modern society, but it is a critique that somehow seems to lie within modernity itself.

¹⁵For an article showing the link between the empiricism which is the basis for modern natural and social sciences (which Ellul attacks) and the recovery of the theology of revelation as initiated by Karl Barth, see Martin Jarrett-Kerr, "Scepticism and Revelation", Theology, Vol. 52, 1949, pp. 410-16.

¹⁶PI, p. 30.

Having taken into account his affinity with modern thought, one must not forget that for Ellul, neither a value-free science, nor social objectivity is a beginning or an end in itself. "'Fact' is very important to Ellul, but only as experienced in the context of the whole."¹⁷ As tools to help one grasp social reality as a whole, he rejects the most common methods of behavioural social sciences--mathematical, statistical, experimentally controlled, microscopic studies. He says that such work can produce impressive results, but that finally they tell us very little about the subject allegedly under consideration. In any case, the nature of the sociological realities that define and dominate man cannot be measured by either a limited public opinion poll or a study of one segment while holding other factors constant. Because the social realities hold a total grasp, one can gauge them only from the standpoint of the whole. To him it is clear

how the extrapolation of the results of microscopic analysis leads to a strange world in no way coinciding with political reality. Attempts such as these impose certain images on political reality and try to establish certain patterns, but without ever coming to grips with genuine political matter: some essential element is always lacking, some basic aspect is always neglected! The discursive method, though seemingly less precise is, in

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TS, p. xv. (John Wilkinson in "Translator's Introduction").

the end, more exact.¹⁸

This method tries to focus the diverse facts of social reality as it is now, such as it is experienced in toto. Basically Ellul starts from premises and then marshalls the concrete evidence in support. The principle remains, that if the experience of sociological reality does not in fact, fit the premise, then it is the premise and not the evidence, that must be abandoned. The validity of the premises can in one sense be checked by other observers: they can be challenged though only on the grounds of the evidence and not on the premises themselves. If this is an accurate account of his approach to looking at society, then it would appear to be a reflection of his extensive legal training. In this way, he tackles the difficult task of trying to remain empirical and wholistic at the same time. It is also his approach to doing 'objective' social writing, while still remaining held by the biblical revelation.

Ellul also opposes a second trend that he discerns in modern research as it adheres to the fact-value distinction. He maintains that the current confusion between facts and values has led to a state where the two have become one. As a result, the establishment of a fact seems

¹⁸PI, p. 5. For further discussion see also Jacques Ellul, Propaganda (New York: 1965), p. xii and Appendix I.

to become a justification in itself--there is no rebuttal of a fact. In almost a caricature of this position, he has said:

After the uncertainties of language and thought, the fact gives me every guarantee of existence, certainty, objectivity, permanence etc. Recourse to the fact is an admirable solution--convenient, simple, flexible.¹⁹

Ellul takes just the opposite view. To know a fact is not sufficient and a collection of facts, no matter how large, cannot give itself coherence or significance. One must be concerned with as many facts as possible, but the necessity of any facts can never establish their legitimacy. In accordance with his theology, Ellul would maintain consistently that it is the very necessity of the facts of social reality that the Christian must confront. In short, Ellul's desire for clarity stands again only in light of the biblical revelation: this provides his radical break with other people's studies of society.

One of the best descriptions of the contrast between his theologically based framework and that of other sociologists, comes in Ellul's comments on the city, as outlined in The Meaning of the City. These are hardly standard urbanology! Here he maintains that most modern research into cities is hopelessly weak, for it is dominated only by the objective, technical study of the city,

¹⁹Jacques Ellul, A Critique of the New Commonplaces (New York: 1968), p. 203. Hereafter this will be referred to as Critique.

if that study is foreign to us.²⁰ Such an approach could never ascertain the significance of those objects. A proper science, on the other hand, has to be built around a plan, or what he calls a spiritual nucleus. That is to say, the social and historical facts should radiate around this nucleus and find their true significance in its aura.

If we accept this, then what we learn to know about the city, by natural means, by history and sociology and about man in the city, by psychology and the novel, must be connected, co-ordinated, strongly knotted together because of the spiritual nucleus.²¹

In a comparable way, other people would say that the essence of science should not be empirical, or that the essence of technology should not be technical. Even though it would be possible to construct false sciences revolving around false nuclei, the results would have to distort reality if it tried to maintain consistency. The nucleus of the true science is not subject to man's caprice. Since the biblical revelation is complete, we can know the meaning of the facts--the judgment and grace pronounced by God. "The result is that our natural sciences are dependent on

²⁰ I think that this approach applies equally well to The Technological Society, despite perhaps, his disclaimers in the Introduction. The book is 'objective' in the sense that the examples he uses to demonstrate the central themes can be challenged, or else new and contradictory ones introduced. In his total picture however, even this book maintains his spiritual nucleus in an unwavering way.

²¹ M of C, p. 18.

revelation."²² Ultimately for Ellul, the science of the city is one in which WE are involved in the struggle to grasp the revelation of God's will for man. This overall attitude, as exemplified in his approach to the city, could well be a source for a rejection of many of his studies. At the same time, it provides not only his firm conviction of the error inherent in modern thought, but also the key to his own thought.

b) Within Ellul's thought, there are some interpretations that are consistent throughout his works. As a backdrop for the material discussed in this thesis, I shall mention some of these distinctive features. Their implications for what he has to say about revolution should become clearer in the body of the thesis. A basic thread running throughout is his concept of the relation between social reality and the individual.

To me the sociological does not consist of the addition and combination of individual actions. I believe that there is a collective sociological reality which is independent of the individual. As I see it, individual decisions are always made within the framework of this sociological reality, itself pre-existent and more or less determinative.²³

The sociological reality, at any given time in history, defines what man is, unless in the freedom of Christ, he

²² M of C, p. 148.

²³ TS, p. xxviii.

acts to shatter those determinations. It is the sociological equivalent of his biblical stance of saying that one has to

fight not against flesh and blood, but against
'the principalities, against the powers,
against the world-rulers of this darkness'.²⁴

Viewed in this light, the struggle then is to save the individual. He emphasizes the uniquely personal claims of Jesus Christ, and the need for an individual response to individuals, and a rejection of the possibility of social structures to answer the needs of society. Ellul does use the word 'person' frequently. Still, he is careful to point out that he is not speaking of personality in the modern jargon of psychology and advertising--a concept that screens people from both the reality of the technological society and the truth of the biblical revelation.

²⁴ Presence, p. 8. The same idea appears in M of C, p. 15. The expression 'principalities' used in connection with 'powers' appears only once in the Old Testament (Jer. 13:18) and, apart from the letters of St. Paul, only once in the New Testament (Titus 3:1). In the majority of cases, the words signify superhuman agencies either angelic or demonic. They are established in a hierarchy with respect to their degree of defiance to God. St. Paul sometimes implies that they should be annihilated and sometimes that they should be brought under man's control, for his use. (The Greek word in question is arche - rule.) It would appear that the usage is not consistent enough to justify entirely Ellul's call for the total destruction of the forces. On the other hand, his interpretation is not unfounded. It is also a dramatic and consistent rhetorical device to describe the task that he sees both socially and theologically.

Il n'est donc même pas question de la personne, représentant un ensemble de superstructures philosophiques, mais du fait le plus simple et le plus brut de l'existence de l'homme, seul en face des autres, de son destin, de son milieu--qu'il se sache seul-- et qu'il juge de tout à sa mesure. S'il n'y a pas cette visée-là, rien d'autre n'est possible--et les discours institutionnels ou économiques sont des fuites et des alibis.²⁵

Not only does Ellul oppose any reliance on social entities, but he also rejects any notion that natural law, morality, reason, philosophy, culture, civilization etc., can lead men to God, or can show them what God's will is. All of these are part of the 'principalities' against which the Christian must struggle. Usually in a masterful way, Ellul rules out any such attempts to approach questions of Christian faith. Understandably, he has been called "mightily iconoclastic".²⁶ By revealing the limitations of various other positions that currently hold sway, he hopes to clear the ground of what he considers to be gross misconceptions. This type of via negativa does not result simply from ill humour, but it comes from a passionate stance for man to be truly free. Similarly, it would be facile and misleading to dismiss Ellul on the charge of

²⁵ Jacques Ellul, Autopsie de la Révolution (Paris: 1969), p. 330. Hereafter this will be referred to as AR. See also Critique, "Cultivate Your Personality: Be a Person!", pp. 268-79.

²⁶ Gabriel Vahanian, "Technology, Politics and the Christian Faith", Introducing Jacques Ellul (Grand Rapids: 1970), p. 53.

undue pessimism. To do so would mean either a serious misuse of the word, or an ignorance of the basis of his thought. With reference to his social writings, surely the only question is their accuracy. Is his description of society true or false? Theologically, he is in no way pessimistic, for he believes in the sovereignty of God and in the Resurrection.

"I am neither by nature, nor doctrinally, a pessimist, nor have I pessimistic prejudices. I am concerned only with knowing whether things are so or not." "My pessimism is theologically based...but along with it I experience the absolute joy of the redemption and the Resurrection."²⁷

IV Emphasis in this Thesis

Either as a single example of his thought, or more important, as the outcome to which he is pointing in every other description and exhortation, a study of the subject of revolution in Ellul brings all of these beliefs to light. No attempt is made in this thesis to evaluate his underlying convictions, nor to assess his total thought. Furthermore, I shall not draw any programmatic conclusions beyond what he himself has written.

The writing I had undertaken in a tentative frame of mind assumed a progressively better structure. ... But the system and conclusions to be drawn therefrom will appear only at the

²⁷ TS, p. xxvii. "Mirror", p. 203.

end of my work, if God permits me to
arrive at the end.²⁸

More simply, I shall first outline what he means by calling Christianity a revolutionary faith. Then alongside, I shall examine his critique of the current accounts of revolution as determined by the analyses of Karl Marx. Finally, by bringing the two sections into contact with each other, the Conclusion will concentrate on Ellul's description of the type of revolution needed in our era. The underlying argument will be that his social thought concerning revolution is directly dependent on his revolutionary theology.²⁹

²⁸ Jacques Ellul, "Mirror", p. 201.

²⁹ Although Ellul's is a genuinely revolutionary theology, one should not be misled into thinking that it bears any resemblance to the currently popular 'theology of revolution'. For his devastating analysis of this particular trend, see AR, pp. 254-71.

CHAPTER I

CHRISTIANITY AS A REVOLUTIONARY FAITH

In order to understand his claims concerning the revolutionary implications of Christianity, we have to see how Ellul views the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This chapter will highlight the principal tenets which constitute his exegesis of that central revelation of the Christian Bible, and how men ought to respond to it.

I Introduction

- a) Man cannot live without light, guidance, knowledge; only through knowledge of the good can he find the good he needs. The fundamental question, therefore, is whether men can acquire that knowledge of the good without which they cannot guide their lives individually or collectively by the unaided efforts of their natural powers, or whether they are dependent for that knowledge on Divine Revelation. No alternative is more fundamental than this: human guidance or divine guidance. The first possibility is characteristic of philosophy or science in the original sense of the term, the second is represented in the Bible. The dilemma cannot be evaded by harmonization or synthesis. For both philosophy and the Bible proclaim something as the one thing needful, as the only thing that ultimately counts, and the one thing needful proclaimed by the Bible is the opposite of that proclaimed by philosophy: a life of obedient love versus a life of free insight.¹

¹ Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: 1953), p. 74.

The two strands of Greek philosophy and biblical revelation (or various attempts at synthesis) have dominated the whole of the Western tradition. Within current thought, Ellul is the one who enters the debate most decisively on the side of the uniqueness of revelation. He would agree totally that there is a fundamental and unbreachable dichotomy between the two approaches to knowledge or wisdom.

We absolutely do not deny the grandeur and the value of the Platonic ideal. We say only that it is in no way Christian and that it is in no way compatible with Christianity. All efforts at conciliation have only ended by diluting the substance of Christianity.²

He would go even further to claim that the biblical revelation is not only the way by which he himself came to know what is good, but also it is the ONLY way to know it. As a result, he makes no apology for the methodology that he employs, for to him, it is the only genuine one.

I therefore confess that in this study and this research, the criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics.³

With the starting point of a vision focusing on the biblical

²Jacques Ellul, To Will and To Do (Philadelphia: 1969), p. 74. Hereafter this will be referred to as To Will.

³To Will, p. 1.

revelation, there are certain implications for his thought.

b) A primary assumption implicit in the grounding of his theology solely on the biblical revelation, is the belief that one can obtain unequivocal propositions from that material. In other words, he is able to discern a large number of assertions which he claims are inherent in the writings, without any other philosophical formulation or interpretation. One can state and comment on these propositions, but apart from the revelation, thought cannot lead one to their truth. Furthermore, in the final analysis, there can be absolutely no role for thought as a guide to obedience to the biblical revelation. In his own terms, then, thought or reason can only remove any false understandings in order to clear the way for the full impact of the Word. Thought cannot instigate that revelation, nor a response to it.

What the church ought to do is to try to place all men in an economic, intellectual, yes, and also in a psychological and physical situation which is such that they can actually hear this Gospel--that they can be sufficiently responsible to say 'yes' or 'no', that they can be sufficiently alive for these words to have some meaning for them. The secret of their choice belongs to God,⁴ but they should be able to make a decision.⁴

This account leaves a strictly limited role for human reason, a role that rejects the philosophic tradition

⁴Jacques Ellul, The Presence, p. 142.

entirely. One notes however, that even in Ellul's formulations of the propositions, human reason does in fact come into play. The purpose of his scriptural exegesis is to carry the biblical material faithfully to its logical conclusions that pertain to contemporary man--he does not separate the propositions alone from the application of logic to them.⁵ It is beyond the scope of this thesis not only to assess his use of a seemingly modern, Western concept of reason as a valid tool in this context; but moreover to discuss whether in principle, this attempt is distinct from the use of reason in the philosophic tradition in theology which he categorically dismisses. One could argue that Ellul's application of logic seems to contain many hidden philosophical assumptions that he has yet to examine. For example, within the propositions that he derives from the biblical material are concepts that, at first glance, are not biblical in origin; for instance, history and technology are ideas derived from the philosophical tradition. Although he does not present the same confusion as do many other contemporary theologians, nevertheless, he does find it necessary to employ philosophical terminology even to think the biblical propositions. Again one can ask, 'To what extent does his

⁵If he were to make such a separation, I think that he would meet even more problems, similar to those involved in Bultmann's distinction between kerygma and myth. I think that Ellul would firmly reject that type of solution to the understanding of the biblical material.

'philosophical' (as distinct from his religious) stance have the same source as all modern thought which is itself inextricably bound up with technology?' His rejection of the tradition of philosophy seems to be on the practical grounds of the abuses in the past, and the false claims made for reason in the apprehension of the revelation. As a result, one could accuse him of an injustice, both to the best of a tradition which he tends to judge by its aberrations, and also to his own writings which do encompass a philosophical framework.

c) Secondly, in this introduction to the significance of using the biblical revelation as his criterion, I shall consider, very briefly, his general approach to the field of biblical scholarship. Even though he himself sees an incontestable account of revelation, other interpreters find different propositions and draw different conclusions from them. Basically, Ellul opposes any modern exegesis that does not concern itself with the spiritual significance and purpose of the Bible, and then an examination of what is being asked of man. That is to say, he rejects exegesis that does not take the Bible as the Word of God. He does not undertake scholarship for the sake of scholarship, but only in the light of salvation. This central understanding of the purpose and mode of such research can be illustrated by mentioning three inter-related strands of his biblical thought: i) the theological understanding of myth, ii) the

role of prophecy, and iii) the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

i) Ellul recognizes the ambiguity involved in using the word 'myth' in any context at all. The ambiguity for him however, does not lie in the accounts themselves, but in the murky work that historical and linguistic schools of biblical criticism have perpetrated. These writings can tell the reader everything, except what the 'myth' means; as a result they are useless. His understanding of myth follows:

When I use the word [myth] I mean this: the addition of theological significance to a fact which in itself as a historical (or supposed to be such), psychological or human fact, has no such obvious significance. Its role therefore is to make a fact 'meaningful', to show it up as bearing the revelation of God, whereas in its materiality it is neither meaningful nor of the nature of revelation.⁶

Thus in the analysis of biblical myth, he is not at all preoccupied with historical authenticity (e.g. Is there a record of the conversion of Nineveh?), nor with relationships with other similar legends, nor with the plausibility of detail (e.g. Whom did Cain and Abel marry?), nor with contrived explanations to make the account palatable (e.g. Was Jonah perhaps picked up by a ship and not by a big fish?), nor even with the morality of the myths.

We have here not moral idea, but teachings about man's relations with God and God's

⁷M of C, p. 18.

dealings with man. That is, to say, it is
in very truth a revelation.⁷

Again, for Ellul, the spiritual meanings of myths are clear propositions whose implications can be drawn without being side-tracked into irrelevant issues.

ii) No matter how Ellul is classified by commentators, he is not primarily a politician, a social theorist, a revolutionary, or even a theologian. His statement of the dialectic of the fallen state of modern man is more within the prophetic tradition. At least one could say that the figure of the prophet looms large for Ellul in all aspects of his thought. This conclusion seems to be valid not only for his Old Testament studies, but also for his New Testament scholarship. His concept of prophecy influences the model of discipleship that he presents as the correct Christian response in the world. In the Old Testament, he sees the prophet as a concrete, living figure whose teachings referred to the specific historic situation. God (whom Ellul always sees in terms of holiness rather than morality) spoke to the prophet, who became the medium for expressing clearly God's will in that situation. Furthermore, the prophecy was directed ultimately to the people of Israel and was based on the covenant. This meant that the prophet was speaking language that the people

⁷ Jacques Ellul, The Judgment of Jonah (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1971), p. 11. Hereafter this will be referred to as J of J.

understood, for he recalled them to the covenant of which they were a part. Thus, Ellul finds that he must reject any notion that prophecy was a current of ideas or a philosophy in which later people corrected earlier errors.

The prophet is characterized not by ideas, but by the fact that God's word is addressed to him and is to be conveyed by him.⁸

Although Ellul notes the exception of the final section of Isaiah, he primarily sees prophecies as revealing God's combination of judgment and mercy concretely towards His people. This means that prophecy was not symbolic, but it was God's 'here and now' will.⁹ In this respect, the prophetic role was never divorced from the political realm. In doing so, Ellul tends to ignore the ecstatic element in all prophecy and the experience of theophony not explicitly related to judgment. It is therefore possible to criticize him on the grounds of maintaining a somewhat simplified, very Protestant view of prophecy for his own purposes. He would perhaps assume that such action could result only from communion with, or worship of God, but he does stress God's assessment of the situation and the concrete action inherent in prophecy. Ellul never wavers from adherence to this kind of action, but at the same time, his exegesis at

⁸J of J, p. 14.

⁹Ellul does note in passing that "[t]he prophet may perform symbolic acts like Ezekiel, but the book itself does not contain symbol. Prophecy does not proceed in this indirect way in its books. In this respect it differs from the historical books." (J of J, p. 15.)

its core is, Christocentric. He says therefore, that for the Christian, prophetic writings are such only by their relation to Jesus Christ. This is an aspect of prophecy distinct from the fact that it is the Word of God to Israel at a specific time and place. He says that the exegete should sort out these two separate elements.

They [prophecies] may be self-sufficient even though they derive their true reference from Jesus Christ and prophetic fulfilment. The patent meaning does not always lead to the second meaning, nor does the latter necessarily qualify the former.¹⁰

Even though Jesus Christ provided the complete fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Ellul does not conclude that the figure of the prophet then became out-of-date or irrelevant. It was given a new direction and a fuller application.

[T]he prophets of Israel always had a political part to play, which in connexion with their civilization was genuinely revolutionary. Every Christian who has received the Holy Spirit is now a prophet of the return of Christ, and by this very fact, he has a revolutionary mission in politics; for the prophet is not one who confines himself to foretelling with more or less precision an event more or less distant; he is one who already 'lives' it, and already makes it actual and present in his own environment.¹¹

Ellul would maintain that the model of prophecy presented in the Old Testament is given its fullest Christological explanation and focus in the commandment to the disciples.

¹⁰J of J, p. 14.

¹¹The Presence, p. 50.

Christ sent them to the cities of Israel, which he interprets as the heart of man's autonomy apart from God. They are told to preach the Word there, at the centre of the battle, until the Son of Man comes again. Since Jesus Christ was the complete revelation of the will of God for man, the call to proclaim God's judgment and mercy in a given situation is no longer directed to a select few prophets. It is now given to the whole church, all of whose members are called to be witnesses or disciples or prophets of the new era.¹² The model for action remains the same for Ellul. Part of what he is attempting to do in all his works, in the original prophetic tradition, is to remind the people of God; i.e. the Church, that they must return to the new covenant. The other part of what he advocates is a new direction for the tradition, for the disciples are not told to address their words only to the Church, but in Ellul's terms, to the city, to all men at the core of their disobedience.

The word that we have constantly found spoken

¹² It is interesting to compare the relationship of Christians to prophecy as outlined by Ellul, with the notion of Ignatius in the Letter to the Philadelphians 9:1-2. "He [Christ] is the door to the Father, through which enter Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the Prophets and the Apostles and the Church. All these things are joined in the unity of God. But the Gospel has somewhat of pre-eminence, the coming of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, his passion and resurrection. For the beloved prophets had a message pointing to him, but the Gospel is the perfection of incorruption. All things together are good, if you hold the faith in love."

to the city, containing both judgment and grace is the word of the cross. It is because of it that he is in fact able to say to the city, man's world that 'the kingdom of God has come near' (Luke 10:11).¹³

Because of the promise of the return, the Christian not only witnesses, but he lives in constant expectation. This is what Ellul means by the apocalyptic vision and the urgency for revolutionary change at every moment.¹⁴ This notion of prophecy and discipleship is not only central for his biblical concerns, but also they provide an important link with his social thought.

iii) Ellul's understanding of prophecy is also a clear example of how he views the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to say that he does not see a radical break between the two accounts of God's dealings with the world. God does not break the covenant, nor does His decision for man change. Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, was the Word of God from the beginning and His Incarnation and Resurrection gave to man the full revelation of salvation. In that sense, the Gospel is the fulfilment of the Old Testament in which the latter's significance is fully revealed. It is to be noted that this approach is a controversial one in the field of biblical studies;

¹³ M of C, p. 82.

¹⁴ See The Presence, p. 32.

nevertheless, it is an essential one, if one wishes to grasp Ellul's understanding of Christianity as a revolutionary faith.

This somewhat long introduction has been an attempt to provide a perspective in which one can appreciate Ellul's acceptance of the criterion of the biblical revelation as the basis for his work. We will now look at the content he discerns there.

II The Place of Necessity and Power in the Biblical Revelation

To grasp Ellul's central thought about the need for revolution, one will first have to comprehend his account of the condition in which man finds himself. In an effort to see this situation, I shall outline briefly what he says concerning (a) the condition of Adam in Eden, (b) necessity as the result of the fall, and (c) the sin of Cain.

a) Creation and Adam in Eden

[K]nowledge of the creation and of the original nature can only be had in Jesus Christ in whom all things were made.¹⁵

An important aspect is that creation cannot be known in any

¹⁵To Will, p. 73. In a less sustained or thorough way, Ellul's doctrine of creation is virtually the same as Karl Barth's in Church Dogmatics, Vol. 3, but that work will not be summarized here.

way except as an article of faith. In fact, one cannot understand creation apart from redemption in Christ who is and always has been the Word of God--the original creative act. It follows then, that outside of the covenant that creation itself established, there is no point in asking why God decided to create in the first place.

We can begin to apprehend only from the moment when a relation is set up between God and us, when he reveals his decision concerning us.¹⁶

One should bear in mind Ellul's starting point, for human reason can ask only certain questions of creation, and those, only after it is an established fact. He sees an added problem in that people tend to describe creation in terms of how they would have created if they had been God! We can however, never know the true conditions of Eden, for we are ourselves products of the fall. As a result, we make the mistake of imagining Eden from the point of view of our own fallen nature and not from the perspective of perfection. With the help of a careful reading of the biblical texts though, (basically Genesis, chap. I, II) Ellul maintains that we can glean some idea of the original creation and the original decision of God for man.¹⁷

¹⁶ J of J, p. 21.

¹⁷ He would agree with Barth that we can know of the original state of man only through knowledge of Christ, but in that light, there are also some intimations in these chapters.

God's creation, according to this exegesis, was complete and perfect,¹⁸ so that there could be no question of Adam as a co-creator or as a completer of God's work. Similarly, there would be no room for progress when creation was perfect. No work, no toil, no anxiety, was present, for nature gave man what he needed--spontaneously. All creation, including Adam, was a unity; that condition is exactly what we cannot grasp now, for we can see only the shattered fragments of the original creation. In Eden however, nothing came between Adam and the rest of creation in that all relations were direct and unmediated. This unity was not merely a synthesis of separate parts, but it was a totality.

*La relation à l'intérieur de cette création était, comme à l'intérieur de la Trinité, une relation immédiate d'amour et de connaissance.*¹⁹

Ellul thinks that there has been a great deal of confused thought about the position of man in creation. Adam's mastery of the rest of creation did not come from an external position, as in modern sciences, but within the ordered unity of God's plan. There was an ordering, but

¹⁸He cites Genesis 2:2 and 1:31. I will not go into the controversy over this interpretation which many scholars think is simply wrong. The comments that follow about the situation in Eden before the fall derive largely from Ellul's article "La Technique et Les Premiers Chapitres de la Genèse", Foi et Vie. 1960:2, pp. 97-113. Hereafter, this will be referred to as "La Technique".

¹⁹"La Technique", p. 103.

it contained no mystery, no division, no distinction between ends and means. Within this understanding of the first two chapters of Genesis, Ellul considers it absurd to think of techniques as an integral part of creation. There was absolutely no need for means (the essence of techniques) in the totality of Eden. In order to discern what such a different situation might mean, one could look at the commandments 'to subdue the earth', 'to keep the garden', 'to have dominion', 'to name'. Ellul says that the first two had nothing to do with toil or war, but were merely admonitions to preserve God's order of things as created: there was no outside agent from which it had to be defended. In the same vein, the latter two were synonymous, but they had nothing in common with the domination that is technology. Adam dominated creation in that he discerned the spiritual realities and presented them to God.

Assigner un nom, c'est discerner une réalité spirituelle, c'est assigner une valeur spirituelle, c'est tracer un rôle, un destin, c'est établir une relation pour Dieu.²⁰

The domination was not exercised by techniques, but by 'the word', spoken by Adam, analogous, not to techniques, but in accordance with the Word through which God created. Ellul sums up the difference by saying that

la parole est l'expression de la supériorité

²⁰ "La Technique", p. 106.

spirituelle de la direction qui laisse
 pourtant l'autre intact (ce que ne fait
 jamais la technique) et libre dans sa
 décision.²¹

It is in this spiritual sense that Adam was the crown of creation and responsible for it to God. In short, creation was a whole in which the fulness of God filled everything. God gave to Adam and Adam received from creation.

The relation between Adam and God was different from that of Adam with the rest of creation. Adam was made in the image of God; that is to say, according to Ellul, the relation of love between them was perfect. Nothing came between them, so that once more, one can describe the relationship as immediate and without mystery. Adam was in total communion with the will of God which he reflected for the rest of creation. This is not to say that Adam, as finite man, created within the limits of time and space, was in unity with God, or that he knew the content of the will of God, for

this will of God is characterized throughout the Bible as 'holy' will; that is to say, set apart--in the last analysis, intimate, autonomous, now radically separated from man who is not holy.²²

As long as Adam loved God, he had an existential communion with the good, but he could neither determine the content of God's will, nor have any knowledge of it in any analy-

²¹"La Technique", p. 107.

²²To Will, p. 8.

tical sense. The relationship of man to God was foremost one of complete obedience. This is an essential difference between the biblical and the modern concepts of freedom: in the former, obedience is the prior condition of liberty.

The latter always tends in the direction of a greater mastery of self, of individual autonomy, while the Christian life is an ever deeper belonging to God.²³

Now in Ellul's account of Adam before the fall, this obedience was not one of duty or restraint. Rather, it was the spontaneous play of the creature responding to the freedom of creation -- "the offering of a joyful life in response to the gift of life which had been given beforehand."²⁴ For Ellul's thought, it is important to note that before the fall, he sees liberty as obedience in love, and not as the independent choice between two possibilities after a thorough deliberation. That notion of freedom came only after the fall had taken place. One should bear this idea in mind when he says that the freedom of man before God meant that Adam could love or cease loving God. This merely underlines the spontaneity of man's response -- man who was created as an entity separate from God. Adam could give either a 'yes' or a 'no' response to the order of God's gift of life. Again, this is not the modern

²³ To Will, p. 84.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

sense of choice, but it does mean that Adam was capable of rejecting obedience which never was an automatic device. To reject the life lived in communion with the will of God was not to accept an alternative, but to smash the original relationship: in turn, this would break the unity of creation, since it was Adam who provided the direct link. Rejection or disobedience would mean annihilation of creation. It is in this perspective of the relationships among God, man, and the rest of creation in its original state, that Ellul views the doctrine of the fall with its results.

b) Necessity as the Result of the Fall

In the biblical account, the one act forbidden to man was to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ellul interprets this prohibition as meaning that man by himself cannot know or determine the content of good and evil, for the good is only the will of God.

In the Bible, the good is not prior to God. The good is not God. The good is the will of God. All that God wills is good, not because God is subject to the good, obedient to the good, but simply because God wills it.²⁵

Since man is not holy, but finite, he cannot know the good outside of the decision of God. In other words, to know the good, man must be in communion with or obedient to the will of God. God warned Adam that altering the proper relationship of obedience and love would result in death.

²⁵ To Will, p. 6.

Since separation from God IS death, God's warning was not so much a threat as it was a statement of fact. The very existence of the tree and of God's sanction were themselves a sign or reminder of man's finitude, but also of the possibility that he may very well reject it in an attempt to pass beyond himself. As long as man was in communion with the will of God, this position posed no problem at all. Very soon however, man recognized (was told by the serpent as an intermediary of Satan)²⁶ that despite his exalted position within the unity of creation, there were limits--he was not God, so that he was not able to actualize himself. As soon as man achieved this self-awareness, he became dissatisfied with his position and it did begin to pose a problem. He desperately wanted to define himself completely apart from God; that is, to have the same power as God to determine the content of good and evil with regards to himself. (The wish can also be described as disobedience, will-to-power or pride.) For man as creature, this endeavour was what was precisely

²⁶The role of the serpent as an intermediary of Satan before the fall poses a difficulty for Ellul's theology, but he does not go into the question in any further detail. One possible explanation is that Eve, by talking to the serpent, came to realize that man was the crown of creation, and then, wondered why if God had given man this much power, why could he not have even more to decide for himself the content of good and evil. This interpretation gives a very passive role to the serpent--an interpretation that seems at odds with the spirit of the text, as well as with most traditional accounts of that passage.

impossible: this was the fall. The important aspect for Ellul is that, on man's part, it broke the communion between man and God.

For the very act by which man wants to decide what is good, wants to know the good by himself, constitutes the sin.²⁷

The fall and its results form one of the foundations for both Ellul's theology and his social thought.

Initially, because of the fall, the communion with God ended; consequently, so did the unity of creation. As we have seen above, all creation owed its unity and its very existence to the fact that as a whole it conformed to the will of God. That unity is now shattered like a broken mirror, so that it is no longer recognizable. When he hid from God, Adam wrecked creation. Then there was the break between Adam and Eve when he accused her, and a similar rupture between man and nature when she accused the serpent. They learned fear and shame. Everything in creation became separated, isolated and objective, so that various means of contact became essential. In the attempt to regain some rapport with an external power that could help him, man instituted religion, sacrifices and eventually magic. In order to obtain what man needed physically, techniques and work became mandatory, for

la nature qui produisait tout en abondance pour

²⁷ To Will, p. 13.

la nourriture et la joie d'Adam devient une nature qui se refuse ingrate et rebelle...il connaît la nécessité dont les faits que nous rappelions plus haut ne sont que des aspects.²⁸

Man now had to struggle against the rest of creation in a hostile, vicious way. In other words:

Once love has disappeared through the will to power, the significance of everything changes. The order established by God ceases to be a free gift and becomes an external restraint.²⁹

The second general result of the break with God was that the prediction of the serpent that men would become like gods, in fact did come true, but in the form of a lie. From that point, men would have to decide what is good. Since he has broken with the only true source of good, his own decisions can never be good in themselves. That was the terrifying and lonely position in which Adam and Eve found themselves. Ellul points out that the fall did not consist in breaking a moral code; quite the contrary, it was the desire to determine a morality. The result was that liberty became the construction of false moralities, the choices between such alternatives as man could devise alone, and judgments with no possible guidance except ignorance of the only good. The will of God was expressed after the fall through the law of Moses and through the

²⁸ "La Technique", pp. 110-11.

²⁹ To Will, p. 60.

prophets, but there has been no possibility for goodness on a human scale. That interpretation shows why Ellul does not centre his thought on morality, but on salvation.

One could well ask at this point, why there was not a total annihilation of creation, since Adam's break brought only negation and chaos. Ellul makes it clear that it is true that creation would disappear if it were not stringently maintained by God.

God does not abandon humanity even in its most rebellious state and at the focal point of its sin.³⁰

God never changes His decision nor His will for man. It is never God who breaks the covenant. He maintains creation despite man's disobedience and break. In order to preserve creation, there was the transition to the order of necessity. One can generalize to say that the order means 'that, other than which, the world cannot do, if it is to continue'.³¹

³⁰ To Will, p. 92.

³¹ He plays on the word 'necessity' by using it also in the sense of an imperative. Theologically, there is the obligation that stems from obedience to the order of Christ. In this way, he could speak of 'the necessity to overcome the order of necessity. He uses a slight variation of the second usage in his social writings. For example, in AR, he speaks of "La Révolution" in terms of "un impératif moral" (p. 273). Since Ellul includes morality within the order of necessity (see To Will, pp. 59-72), he becomes somewhat inexplicit here. Roughly, by that phrase, he means 'what will be required if one does not like the present situation'. It is an attempt, in a social writing, to use commonly accepted vocabulary without resorting to

Such is the order [of necessity] which is not that of God's love, but which he maintains anyway, because it is preferable to nothingness, the negation of God.³²

For Ellul, one could almost say that God allowed the order of necessity as a holding measure to keep things together in the face of man's destruction of the true meaning of creation. God's creative word remained constant, and it is the order of necessity that shows the union of God's judgment and mercy and constancy.

Rather than chaos, but also in contrast to true liberty, necessity became the general rule--physical, moral, biological, psychological, sociological necessity. ("As a matter of fact, reality is itself a combination of determinisms."³³) All of these aspects have the same origin as a result of the fall. There is a uniformity in the totality of all of the order of necessity, so that, in Ellul's terms,

[T]he tiniest atom of liberty threatens the very existence of the world.³⁴

At the same time, he does maintain that there is a hierarchy of importance and directness of these determinations. For example, if one tries to avoid biological

theological terms. Within his whole thought however, the phrase "un impératif moral" would actually imply the obligation to overcome the order of necessity.

³²To Will, p. 61.

³³T.S., p. xxxii.

³⁴To Will, p. 60.

laws, one dies immediately. To break a moral law though, is not as individually direct, for the moral law is of the order of necessity for the survival of the group or society. In the final analysis, however, each is completely within the strictest order of necessity. Even though God still maintains creation, death is inevitable because man is separated from God. In other words, despite the fact that the determinations are forces to hold the mutilated creation together, they also lead eventually to death. In this connection, it is interesting to note Ellul's interpretation of the subsequent prohibition against eating of the tree of life.

When God decided to prevent Adam from laying his hand on the tree of life, it is an act of grace: for if that situation had been eternal for Adam, it would have been beyond any kind of solution and then would have been the very situation of the demons.³⁵

This view implies that even the consequence of death for man's disobedience was not separated from the mercy that allowed for the possibility of the overcoming of death.

Finally, for the purposes of this study, one should note that Ellul is not saying that techniques, nor any other necessity, nor even death, is an evil or a sin. He is not even saying that techniques are contrary to the will of God. Rather they are all products of the situation in which man found himself as a result of sin.

³⁵ To Will, p. 11.

Et il faut bien saisir que la prolifération des moyens caractérisant notre temps n'est pas une sorte de progrès en germe dans la situation d'Adam en Eden. Elle est rendue nécessaire justement parce que cette situation n'existe plus.³⁶

Ellul's focus of attention remains on man in his relationship with God. All the elements of the order of necessity are important only in this light, as a description of the real forces with which man must deal after his separation from God.

c) The Sin of Cain

In his writings, Ellul distinguishes between various techniques and technique itself, which he equates with the collective forces of the combination of techniques, which, if taken together, constitute a power over and above the separate means. In his biblical exegesis, he does not mention technique in this sense until after the murder of Abel. Adam, it seems, accepted the necessity of working, tilling, keeping flocks, but he limited techniques to agriculture and the wresting from nature what they needed for survival. Adam continued to view these necessities as the dire consequences of sin. In no way did he consider them to be good. Even though Adam was separated from the will of God, he still recognized that the only way to continue was to accept God's decree. The components of the order of necessity had not yet become spiritual

³⁶"La Technique", p. 109.

powers in the radical sense that one would give total allegiance to them. Cain too was acting within the order of necessity, even though it was a new form, for he committed the first violence recorded in the Bible. "[I]t can be no other way. Cain could not help being himself. From the very beginning, he had to kill Abel."³⁷ Unlike Adam though, Cain rejected the protection offered by God, for he could find no semblance of security in it. Instead, Cain preferred to search for his own well-being. "The city is the direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and of his refusal to accept God's protection."³⁸ The sins of Adam and Cain are distinct, but in Ellul's theology, they cannot be understood separately. Adam had known communion with God, whereas Cain's actions were inevitable from somebody who had not. Cain had no example of what it would mean not to be bound by the order of necessity. Although it is Adam's sin that is called 'the fall', the two sins are so intricately bound together that they must be considered almost as a unit.

Now it is no longer only the situation brought about by Adam's fall, a situation bearable through patience, a situation where Adam's security was assured by a natural order which Cain was to disturb. Now it is absolute

³⁷ M of C, p. 8.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

insecurity, man's situation to the absolute degree.³⁹

In Cain, Ellul sees what happened when man did seek his own security and a definition of the good outside of any obedience to the will of God. In order to avoid the results of his sin and to seek his own security, Cain turned from God to obey the only alternative. Man is finite and he cannot create a good; therefore he must turn his attention to something beyond himself, in order to find a content for it. After Cain's refusal, he had to turn elsewhere, to the order of necessity, to determine what would be good for him. He not only accepted that order, but he loved it as the source of power for his independence from God. In this way, he made the order of necessity into a spiritual power that could direct and control man's life. He submitted to the order of necessity in an attitude of worship: he built the first city. To Ellul therefore, the city represents not merely a collection of many buildings, but moreover the introduction of power alien to God, in order to secure man's autonomy.

History and civilization began with the building of the city, for at that time Eden was relegated completely to the realm of legend. The city represents all the aspects that go to enhance man's greatness, including economics, war, self-realization, the conquest of time

³⁹
M of C, p. 4.

and space and nature, all culture, the increase of political domination, ideology, and the greatest of all -- technique. The order of necessity cannot be understood apart from techniques, so that when Cain gave his allegiance to that order, technique became the greatest spiritual power. Babel became the central symbol of the city, for according to Ellul, she represented all of man's search for security. Also though,

Resen "is the great city in the sense that she represents the human power glorified in her. She is the city of technique, of invention, of domination over nature."⁴⁰

This statement implies that technique was not originally synonymous with the meaning of the city, but in the human attempt to be free from God, technique was the greatest single force. The point is that the force of technology is in no sense new to the world, and Ellul makes it clear that technique is no sign of 'man's coming of age'. In a quite opposite view, he links modern technology to the primal sins of Adam and of Cain. He is also careful to point out that the spiritual powers of the city are not included in the mercy of God. He never breaks His covenant with the men who live in the city, but He does reject the order of necessity being made into principalities and powers. What most modern men consider to be absolute goods are the powers which God in His judgment has cursed.

⁴⁰M of C, p. 14.

A central theme running through Ellul's social writings (especially, The Technological Society and Autopsie de la Révolution) is the recent advent, historically, of modern technique and statism. If the biblical revelation contains the true significance of the rise of power, then it must be able to account in a theological way for the relatively recent emergence of the society Ellul describes in detail. In The Meaning of the City, he gives a clear account of technique as one of the spiritual powers of the city. Still he tends to give the impression that the modern city is exactly the same as the first city. "Babylon, Venice, Paris, New York -- they are all the same city, only one Babel always re-appearing."⁴¹ In the course of this same book, he does give two indications why it is also true to say that modern technique (including statism) has a tighter grasp than in the ancient situation.

The first aspect concerns the fact that technique, as seen in the biblical comment on Resen, was the single most important weapon for security in the spoiled creation. The internal law of technique (efficiency) corresponds rather closely to the meaning of the order of necessity (that, other than which, man cannot do). This correspondence is heightened, when one remembers that man's love of necessity is nurtured by his desire for security. Surely the most security possible, apart from God, comes from knowing

⁴¹M of C, p. 181.

'the one best way' of efficiency. That also solves the problem of defining the good! Thus, as man followed the order of necessity, the city developed to the depths of its potential. Man followed, as the city unfolded its own internal forces without much hindrance. It would seem then, that technique, the means at the disposal of necessity, would eventually include and subsume the other powers. Within this understanding, all the historical factors that Ellul includes in his social writings, as well as the indissoluble link he now sees between technique and statism, would both be theologically consistent. The historical evolution is not a progress, nor even a real change in the basic reality: it is an unfolding of the implications of what man was doing. It follows therefore, that Venice, Paris, and New York are basically the same as Babylon, but pushed to its logical limits. This process was given a further impetus, when any restraints, resulting from a residual faith in God, were removed in the modern world. Ellul sees this truth as a central implication of the biblical revelation and in no way an addition to it.

In that sense, the biblical revelation is truly prophetic. Working with what was not yet the monster city, the Holy Spirit brought to man's knowledge the reality of what he was undertaking which was to become a reality centuries and centuries later.⁴²

⁴² M & C, p. 42.

The difference between ancient and modern technique for Ellul therefore, is not a qualitative one, except in the sense that eventually quantitative change creates something qualitatively different.

This account still does not seem to provide the total explanation of why modern technology is becoming more and more frenetic in a way that remains much different from what one would expect from merely an historical unfolding of the implications. At this point, one must turn again to the clearly Christocentric nature of Ellul's theology. The actual force of modern technique is evident for him, only in the light of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. We are told, not only that God's curse is on the powers, but also that Jesus Christ defeated them in overcoming death. To Ellul however, it is equally clear that Christ did not completely annihilate the powers: man can still be bound by them. God effected His judgment in Christ, but to any outside observer, the powers still appear to be free. This will continue to be the situation until the Second Coming.

Virtually conquered, they still have their power to act and to fight and in the last days they actually manifest a superabundant amount of activity.⁴³

Ellul sees this action in full force in every sphere of the city -- in war, in ideology, in materialism, in state

⁴³M of C, p. 167.

power. Before the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the powers maintained a certain restraint, but now they are filled with the energy of despair. They are fighting more violently than ever, marshalled, of course, by technique with its inherent efficiency. Not only can the Christian observe this trend in the light of faith, but also he has been warned in Matthew 24, and Revelation 20, that these events will happen. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Ellul takes the position that Christians must live as if each moment is apocalyptic: we are now in the last days. As in the case of creation, this argument can be known fully only in faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ. By using this starting point, Ellul does show that his social writings do have a spiritual nucleus located in the biblical revelation revolving around the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. He shows beyond any doubt that he does not speak loosely or metaphorically about his acceptance of the biblical revelation as the only basis for Christians to think about the world. Although his account in terms of apocalypse, judgment and mercy is neither easy nor entirely obvious, it is nevertheless, consistent with his own statements concerning his methodology and epistemology. Ellul may be incorrect in some of his interpretations, but he does present this challenge to modern Christian believers.

c) Will

To end this section on the order of necessity in distinction from God's order, I will focus on a summary of Ellul's use of the word 'will', for it is central in his theology. In most modern accounts of the Western tradition, will has been associated in some way with the self-actualization of possibilities, decisive acting, the choice between alternatives, creating history in which man makes himself. Historically, will is considered pivotal in man's advance--among other things, the domination of nature through acts of will has accounted for the rise of technology. For clarity about Ellul's thought, one should try to see the connection between his usage and the more conventional, if somewhat disparate, uses of the word will.

It is clear that according to Ellul, will is the main attribute of God. Or, more precisely, what finite man is capable of grasping about God comes only from a functional knowledge of God, that comes as a result of the exercise of His will. This does not mean that God is only will, nor even that God's essence is His will. In fact, one is told that God is love. As creatures, men cannot comprehend the essence of God, because of the complete transcendence of the holy. Rather, it is a question of what man is told about God and in what manner. One indicator that points to the primacy of will is that the Bible is a record of events and actions rather than a philosophical

treatise. Ellul's position would be that all we do know of God, comes from His act of redemption and grace in Christ. This action reveals the full significance and content of God's will for man as expressed through His other actions, for example, in creation and in prophecy. It is only God's will that has the true power to create or to actualize or to produce its intentions in an autonomous way.

It [the Word of God] is a power which exists and manifests itself. That is why when the word is thus revealed to a man, he is not at all in the situation we imagine: a subordinate receiving orders from a superior; a subordinate who ought to fulfil the order as though it is just a collection of words...so that in a large measure the subordinate is free: he may obey or disobey. The word of God is not at all like this. It is power and not just discourse. It transforms what it touches. It cannot be anything but creative and salvific. It never fails to take effect.⁴⁴

Now God's will is completely free and independent, and it alone defines the good. The fact that God's will is free from any limits external to itself, does not make it absurd, capricious, or tyrannical; furthermore, the will of God does not alter, nor does one act willed by God contradict any other, even though these acts may be beyond human ability to fathom their direction. At the same time, God's will can in no way be confined or limited or catalogued. In the final analysis, Ellul's description can only characterize the will of God, for any knowledge of the content comes only from obedience to the revelation of that

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J of J, p. 21.

will for a specific time and place.

Man is not God and as a result, he cannot create from his own will. Ellul would say that any understanding of man's will as analogous to God's will is a false one that could arise only as an aftermath of the fall. As mentioned previously, to say that man was made in the image of God does not imply that man was given an independent will. Rather it means that man was in accord with God's will. If will could be ascribed to man at all within this perspective, it would mean a continued orientation of complete obedience to the will of God which alone creates and sustains. The fall was the impossible desire to have a will similar to God's. This wish brought about the order of necessity, but it did not give man an autonomous will. Therefore, the 'will-to-power' for security could lead man nowhere except to put his confidence in the order of necessity. Unlike the Word of God, this order has no true power, but it achieves the force of power because men trust in it. From that time on, there is a complete perversion of anything that could previously have been labelled as will. There is no remnant of the original image: one could almost say that man became the image of the order of necessity.

Not until men came to love the order of necessity did history and civilization begin.⁴⁵ In short, to account

⁴⁵M of C, p. 6. History began with the murder of Abel, and civilization with the building of the city.

for the triumph of technology as the supremacy of will, is partially accurate within Ellul's biblical framework -- as long as one recognizes that it is not the will of God or anything analogous to it. The account of will in history stems from the rejection of obedience to the will of God. What modern man considers to be the height of his own will in self-definition is actually an enslavement to the order of necessity. This is the exact meaning that Ellul attaches to the powers of the city and the rise of technology until it is supreme and all-embracing. Man's belief in his own autonomy will continue to cause him to be bound by necessity until he is re-created, or to use New Testament language, until he is born again. In general, for Ellul, man's so-called will consists in conformity with what he accepts as good. Submission to the order of necessity results in the formation of the concept of will that is the main morality of history and technology. Thus, a genuine revolution can take place only in terms of emancipation from this enslavement.

The big question remains that of will in the sense of the original fundamental choice. This has nothing to do with choice within the order of necessity which Ellul sees as being sin itself.⁴⁶ The question does refer back to the problem of why Adam ceased loving God in the first place.

⁴⁶ See To Will, p. 261.

At one level, he did not make a choice between alternatives, but only took a step towards complete annihilation. At a commonsense level though, Adam in effect did make a choice. That was not will in any creative sense, but nevertheless, it was a change in orientation for which man was responsible. Similarly, Cain too made a choice to build a city rather than to accept God's protection. Then finally, there is the continuing determination (granted, carried out in ignorance, but still effective in the reality of history that Ellul describes) to hold to that order. Within Ellul's position, perhaps the only notion of will that one can ascribe to man is the determination of which order to follow. The content or the mechanism of the original choice away from God can be described only generally as pride or disobedience, but it cannot be further articulated. In a sense though, this is the only choice that man makes by himself--the impossible will-to-will. Because of the totality of the fall, the mechanism of the choice to turn away from the order of necessity and back to obedience to God, can be spelled out even less clearly. For eventually, the content of repentance and a re-orientation to God is not entirely an act of the will of man. Again, a choice is in some sense implicit, but it is in response to the true power of the revelation. That turning around is grounded in the mystery of redemption. To Ellul, the act of redemption is entirely external to man's own doing -- it is the act of God's redemption in

Christ and finally the creation of the New Jerusalem.

III Redemption in the Biblical Revelation

Over that work God pronounces the No of death, but in the same breath (over man in Jesus Christ) he pronounces the Yes of the resurrection, by creating the unique city, the answer to all our questions and to all our hopeful attempts, the heavenly Jerusalem.⁴⁷

Ellul's description of the technological society is often rejected as too bleak, too monolithic, too pessimistic. In terms of his total theology however, such an assessment would be a partial and distorted view, based on a separation of the judgment from the mercy or the grace of God-- an impossible separation in the light of the biblical revelation. His ultimate joy is based primarily on his knowledge of God's constancy as He acts in history to bring about His goal of the salvation of man. This knowledge in turn centres on the revelation of the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection of Christ. These two aspects, eschatology and the event of Jesus Christ, which are essential for Ellul's vision of redemption, cannot in truth be separated: yet for analytical purposes, they can be divided for discussion.

a) Eschatology

The fall of Adam and the sin of Cain show man's total rejection of God and His protection. Yet Ellul also

⁴⁷ M of C, p. 172.

gives the reminder that one must not forget that God does not separate Himself from man. His goal for man remains constant and He does not withdraw nor negate His own will. Man has tried to exclude God from this 'counter-creation', but God still continues to intervene at the very source of opposition in the world. God continues to meet man, even though it is on the grounds that man has chosen. Because God will not desert man, He adopts the works of man into His plan for salvation, despite the fact that these works can in no way bring about salvation in themselves.

The eschatological dimension of God's judgment and mercy towards the works of man, Ellul sees signified in the biblical revelation concerning Jerusalem, in that the selection of that city reveals God's attitude towards man. Originally God chose Jerusalem because David first chose it. In so doing, God

brings it truly into his plan of salvation and into every aspect of the history of a people whose march toward the Messiah he is guiding.⁴⁸

This is an act of love on God's part. Jerusalem as a city is indicative of the crossroads situation between judgment and mercy. The great condemnation against her because of her idolatry is not revoked; at the same time, God's adoption makes her a holy city. God does not purify or transform Jerusalem, but He does insist on being present. In this way, Jerusalem is representative of standing between

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M of C, p. 96.

two realms, and therefore, she points to what is coming because of her elevation to the status of the holy city.

In fact, this situation in Jerusalem shows us that God is really present in the work made by man.

This is a mystery and it is useless to try to explain it. ...And he [God] lets man's work go on. He lets him build immense necropolises. He let the angels revolt who have embodied themselves in cities. But he is there, not excluded, present also in this work as Jerusalem is there to attest.⁴⁹

The fulfilment of God's promise for Jerusalem is not neglected, but Ellul says it takes place in a way that man could not foresee. The significance of that promise is revealed in Christ who introduced the first fruits of what the Kingdom will be. Finally with respect to Jerusalem, in the eschatological passages throughout the biblical material, Ellul notes that the indications of paradise are different from those of any other tradition. It will be neither a retreat to the golden past of Eden, nor nature perfected as in Islam, nor even a heaven. When history comes to an end, it will be a perfected city that descends.⁵⁰ Ellul sees this indication as a sign that the new creation will take into account all of man's works: it will not take place as if they never existed. This is an incredible revelation in a tradition that also emphasizes God's curse on the powers

⁴⁹ M of C, p. 102.

⁵⁰ In the Gospels, there is no precise description of what comes after the Judgment, but all indications in the prophecies and in Revelation are in terms of a city.

of the city. The New Jerusalem however, will not be the natural end of the city, but will come only from God's intervention which will be a break with history.⁵¹

But then this contradiction arises: the Judaeo-Christian conception which shows that all of man's works, summed up in the city, are included in the glorious new state of re-creation, also shows that it is not by man's works that this event will come about.⁵²

Holding together both sides of the contradiction is the continual task for Ellul, not only for his eschatology, but also in his account of the Christian response. What could such a statement possibly mean? In Ellul's terms, it means that God will dissociate man's works from the spiritual power that binds them: this will be an entirely new act of creation or of re-creation, for it is not the work itself that constitutes the fall. This is a difficult distinction to grasp, but it is the spiritual forces and man's worship of them that God rejects, and not man himself. Only God's action can accomplish that separation. In choosing the city as the end point for the communion between God and man, God reveals that He will save all men at the heart of their rebellion. Finally, for Ellul, the fact that God does not ignore or reject the history of man, even in rebellion, is a supreme statement of God's love for and patience with man.

⁵¹ See M of C, p. 162, for the influence of this notion on Karl Marx. The essential difference is that he sees the seeds of the new city already inherent in the old.

⁵² M of C, p. 163.

God in his love, because he is love, takes into account man's will, takes into account his desires and his maddest intentions, understands his wildest revolts, takes into account all his endeavours. God does not want to save an abstract man, but you and me, each man in his particularity. God did not love Man in Jesus Christ, but every crushed and miserable soul in the midst of the wandering crowd. And God has kept his records throughout history. Certainly not an account of merits and demerits, of sins and good works. All that has already been taken care of in the pardon streaming from the cross. His accounts are those of suffering and hope, the inventions and the refusals, the desires and the gropings that man has experienced throughout history. And God keeps it all in order, so as to respond to them all, so as to do what man has been trying to do, so as to give an answer where man did not ask for help, but tried to go it alone. God assumes to himself every man's revolts and transforms them, remakes them. Progressively then, God assumes all of man's work. This is the meaning of God's creation, for man, of the new Jerusalem.⁵³

Ellul maintains that in this decision, God does not relinquish any of His rights. Doubtless, he would deny that his formulation bears any relation to what is called 'process theology', or to any theology that gives the impression that God does not have total control or that He is somehow dependent on man for the evolution of His own biography, knowledge, and therefore of His plan for man. I can only re-iterate two general directions in which this characterization would not be an accurate description of Ellul's eschatology.

- i) The essence of God which is holy, and the will of God which is revealed to man, both of these remain un-

⁵³
M of C, pp. 174-75.

changing. The goal remains the same. There is a difference between saying that God will adapt His plan to suit the doings of man, and saying (as does Ellul) that God will adopt the works of man to incorporate them into His plan. Ellul clearly admits that how this will be possible remains a mystery, but it is the revelation that he sees in the eschatological passages.

This is no place to get caught up in the ridiculous problems of God's knowledge and omnipotence, and all the casuistry having to do with man's liberty in regard to God's will. Once and for all, we must finish with man's absurd pretension to fathom the mysteries of God's will. If God is truly God, he is outside the reach of our intelligence; if God is true God, our intelligence can never grasp anything but a falsification of his true nature.⁵⁴

ii) By the same token, Ellul also rejects any notion of man determining God's will. The fact that God does not divorce Himself from man does not mean that man becomes the decisive component in the formation of God's will. Man can do nothing to bring about the New Jerusalem. Even in the perversion of man's will, God is somehow in charge.

No human greatness can serve in the plan of salvation because some part of what is purely and exclusively God's work might then be attributed to man.⁵⁵

One can be tempted to push the isolated passages concerning the New Jerusalem too far. If one wants to consider what

⁵⁴M of C, p. 174.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 138.

is given to man, about God's plan for man, then Ellul says that the only place to look is the revelation in the person of Jesus Christ.

b) The Fulfilment -- Jesus Christ

The Christological basis for the whole of Ellul's theology is self-evident -- the occurrence of the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, culminating in the Resurrection, is the cornerstone around which everything else is built, both explicitly theologically and implicitly socially. It is nevertheless interesting to note that to date, he has devoted comparatively little space to a specific or systematic explication of his Christology itself. This observation is not to undermine the centrality of Jesus Christ for Ellul, but it is merely to point out a difficulty in elaborating the underlying and unifying theme. In this connection, he has also not yet produced a full account of his doctrine of the Trinity, apart from a number of isolated statements. This is in spite of the fact that the three persons of the Trinity figure more prominently in his work than in most current theology. One should remember that he has never claimed to be a systematic theologian after the manner of Barth. This section therefore, can be only a preliminary gathering together of some of his major themes regarding the person of Jesus Christ. In the first place, when Ellul speaks of Him as redemption, he seems to include the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection as

all constituting inseparable components, without making clear distinctions between first and second order statements. The most that one could say in this regard is that the significance of the Incarnation and of the Cross cannot be seen except in the light of the Resurrection. In speaking in this manner, he does not forget that Christ, as the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God, was present from the beginning. It was the achievement of Jesus Christ though, that was the decisive revelation and still is the act of redemption. The thrust of Ellul's vision can be seen in three general directions which reveal God's purposes for man -- (i) Jesus Christ as fully man, (ii) Jesus Christ as the Word of God, and (iii) Jesus Christ as giving power to man. In making this division in order to facilitate a discussion of Ellul's position, I am not implying that the three strands can be separated and analyzed truthfully as isolated components. All three form the sum of the truth manifested in the event of Incarnation and Resurrection.⁵⁶

- i) But Jesus took the full condition of man.
Totally man except for sin. But that means

⁵⁶It is interesting to compare Ellul's position with Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics Vol. IV on Reconciliation. A summary of the three dominant strands in that volume appears in Helmut Gollwitzer, Church Dogmatics: A Selection Introduction, p. 24. Barth speaks of the Event of Jesus Christ - language Ellul employs very rarely (see Presence, pp. 129-31), but also language which is not foreign to his meaning.

that he had to accept the consequences of sin. We are well aware of it when we contemplate the cross.⁵⁷

Put briefly, Jesus Christ was the second Adam and the second Cain.

The voice of Jesus Christ at the same time that it is the voice of God, is also the voice of man...who accomplishes in obedience to his Father what Adam wanted to accomplish in disobedience.⁵⁸

As a man, it is important that Jesus Christ did not reveal the law, but He fulfilled it. According to Ellul, He did not modify the Old Testament message about the will of God as announced in the law and by the prophets. He showed the full significance, by showing what it would mean for the man who lives fully in accordance with God's will. He was the second Adam, but unlike Adam, He chose to love God, rather than to cease loving Him. Although Jesus was also tempted to define the good for man apart from God's will, this self-awareness in no way led to a separation from God, as had Adam's. Since Jesus was innocent of the sin of disobedience, He could overcome the inevitable necessity of death. In His life, He signalled a return to live in the image of God. He spelled out the end of will as perversion, or one could say, the end of will as it is known in history as leading to the technological society.

⁵⁷M of C, p. 122.

⁵⁸To Will, p. 28.

He was successful, not through autonomous good works, but because He did not worship the powers of the order of necessity. ("The Christian is not characterized by good works, but by salvation."⁵⁹) Jesus showed what salvation would mean by showing the proper orientation of one's life. One cannot will salvation, but the power of the proper use of will is salvation. At the same time, Ellul makes it clear that Jesus did not carry out this activity by repeating the Edenic state, for, as man, he had also to bear the consequences of sin. The revelation would be meaningless for man if it were apart from the situation in which man has been enmeshed since Cain. Ellul makes this point in various ways. For example, Jesus showed the destiny that would have been Cain's if he had risked accepting God's protection, rather than seeking his own security in the city.⁶⁰ More important, He showed that submission to the order of necessity would not be the definition of man in communion with God. The power of the order of necessity was shattered, even in a world still characterized by disobedience. Although it was not good action that provided the starting point, He showed that obedience to the will of God would mean breaking out of the search for one's own security. He regained the possibility for a true encounter with others--the possibility of serving and

⁵⁹ To Will, p. 43.

⁶⁰ See M of C, pp. 120-23.

loving others.⁶¹ (This was the mode by which Jesus expressed obedience to God in a world where the powers have not yet been annihilated.) Finally and above all, Jesus had to die. This action was necessary in order to reveal that obedience to the will of God is the opposite to death. In a world of sin, He had to defeat death, which is the automatic consequence of sin. This final victory showed the final impact of what it would mean if men were to live in the image of God.

- ii) It is because the world is radically, totally evil that nothing less would do than the gift of God's son.⁶²

According to some accounts, merely by obeying the will of God, Jesus Christ revealed what that will was. To a certain extent, that would be true according to Ellul's account as well. In the above description of Jesus as the fully perfect man, there should nevertheless, be no confusion that Ellul thinks that it might be the full revelation of Christ. Nowhere does Ellul take the position that Jesus became the Son of God because He was a man who happened to manage to avoid sin. To say that He was only the new Adam would imply that He achieved only a communion of obedience to the will of God, but Adam never was God, nor

⁶¹ To Will, p. 267.

⁶² Jacques Ellul, Violence. (New York: 1969), p. 26.

did he know the content of that will. There always remained an unbridgeable gap between God and Adam even in the unfallen state. When Ellul calls Jesus Christ the Son of God, he means that Christ is part of the unity of God. The Incarnation was the creative Word of God made flesh, acting decisively in history. Only as such, could Jesus Christ reveal, once and for all, God's will for man. Once again, since Ellul does not give a systematic Christology, one can point only to examples of what it means to say that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

With reference to the biblical revelation concerning redemption, Ellul says, "It is in Jesus Christ that God adopts man's works."⁶³ In other words, in the Incarnation and Resurrection, God effected the separation of man from the spiritual powers that he had unleashed on himself. Two examples that Ellul uses to show this as the truth of God's will can be found in Jesus's attitude towards the city and the crowd. In the first example, Ellul makes a distinction between the texts in the Gospels directed at the city, and those addressed to the inhabitants. Remaining faithful to the Old Testament tradition, He had no pardon for the cities. The same was not true

⁶³M of C, p. 176.

however, for men to whom grace and salvation were given, along with the judgment. In short, His judgment is for man to help him to put his confidence in God, and it is against the powers of the city. This is something that man could never do by himself, for "[t]he city is an almost indistinguishable mixture of spiritual power and man's work."⁶⁴ That Jesus Christ did have the power to make this separation was signified when He Himself did not accept the lure of the city -- it was necessary for people to come out of the city to hear His words. Ellul interprets this as meaning that the truth can draw man away from the power of the city. Furthermore, in the final enactment of His death, He was expelled from the city, for the power of the city and the power of God are always incompatible. The rejection of the power of the forces of rebellion is clear to Ellul.

When Jesus obeys the law, he is expelled from the city which cannot take possession of Christ. ...Thus, Jesus in his very person and in his entire life shows himself to be a stranger to the world of the city. In no way does he participate in this work of man, he who in all other aspects participated fully in man's life. And it is precisely because he took on the fulness of human life that he refused this false remedy, this false source of help, this false greatness. And it is because he was establishing the Kingdom of Heaven in the midst of the world that he totally rejected man's counter-creation.⁶⁵

⁶⁴M of C, p. 169.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 124.

God in Christ showed the significance of the possibility of the separation.

Ellul's second example of the crowd is important to show that Jesus Christ never included man himself in the defeat of the powers. His attitude towards the crowd is one indication of how this goal could be accomplished -- again by God in Jesus Christ. Ellul points out that the crowd (including those portrayed in the Gospels) is a psychological, sociological, and spiritual reality under which a man is subjected to anonymous control; also the crowd is a thing that never knows what it is doing, nor clearly what it wants to do.

"Miserable crowd -- not only because of the men making it up, but in itself, in the body it forms whose tendencies and impulses are infrahuman, but which nevertheless prove to extremely active and powerful."⁶⁶ Christ showed compassion on the crowds and suffered with their misery. By taking their condition, but with awareness and compassion, He attacked the very core of the crowd's being.

Everything incoherent and senseless in the mass is found torn to pieces by the presence of awareness itself. The being that the crowd is cannot contain Jesus Christ and is thus transformed.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ M of C, p. 127.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

It ceased to be a crowd in the spiritual sense, in that its members were no longer held by it. This act of love was an act of salvation. Jesus Christ dispelled the crowd in order to deal with each individual member. Each person was separated from the mass to experience healing and wholeness after the sickness and distress that came from putting his allegiance elsewhere. The final step was that Jesus Christ always sent the people back to their towns so that they could work further to end the control of the spiritual powers, for each person who had encountered Christ would no longer be held by them completely.

The examples of the city and the crowd are both integral parts of the revelation of the will of God: their full meaning however, comes in the light of the Resurrection. There, the most necessary result of sin was shattered in an act that could be accomplished only by the Son of God. The Resurrection was the overcoming of death, the forgiveness of sins and the proof that the ultimate plan of God for man is not the annihilation inherent in death, and finally that this plan is not oblivious to concrete man.

iii) The third direction of Ellul's thought regarding Jesus Christ lies in His impact and power for those who have encountered Him.

Only the death of the very son of God is
sufficient to change the facts of history.

Only the resurrection is sufficient to disposses the demons of their domain.⁶⁸

The victory over history that Jesus Christ achieved was the break with the order of necessity. Overall, God in Christ neutralized the powers of the world, so that men could be free again in obedience to God. In Jesus Christ man also was given this power -- not because He was a powerful example, nor because His doctrines have an irrefutable intellectual appeal. Rather for Ellul, the essential thing is that the Incarnation of Jesus Christ provided the only occurrence in history when truth and reality became one. Then the Resurrection was the victory of the truth of God in that confrontation with the reality of the world. The two are inseparable. Since Jesus Christ was unique, the Christian can participate in the confrontation between truth and reality only to the extent that he is in communion with His person who remains a living 'truth-in-reality' through the clarity of the Holy Spirit. Again, this does not mean that man, having been given an ideal, can now work on his own any more than he ever could. It is still only in communion with Jesus Christ that man can regain a communion with the will of God. Recognition of Christ, according to Ellul, is no guarantee of goodness for the Christian, for he is in no way immune from the powers that are still fighting. Furthermore, Ellul

⁶⁸M of C, p. 170.

never fails to remind the reader that even communion with the person of Jesus Christ will not hasten the final Kingdom.

We said that God by his act in Jesus Christ made the city into a neutral world where man finds possibilities for action. But it is no holy world. Let there be no confusion: there is no use expecting a new Jerusalem on earth. Jerusalem will be God's creation, absolutely free, unforeseeable, transcendent.⁶⁹

In His life and death and overcoming of death, Jesus Christ showed the world as it is, but also revealed the first-fruits of the new creation. This strange tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet' characterizes not only salvation in Christ, but also the requirement of the Christian response. This constitutes the revolutionary nature of Christianity. The final victory of Christ has been indicated and eventually promised in the Second Coming. Jesus Christ is the central affirmation of the judgment and salvation pronounced on the world of men.

IV The Christian Response

a) A key observation concerning the actions implied by these doctrines, is the requirement to hold together continually, two sides of a contradiction. Not by an autonomous decision, but because they are sent there by Christ, Christians must continue to live at the heart of the city. Because God will adopt man's work, they must

⁶⁹ M of C, pp. 170-71.

remain there and even strive to make the city livable.⁷⁰ Unless God directly orders a Christian to leave, then he should not make any attempt to retreat from the centre of technique and state power. At the same time, he is told clearly that he cannot expect to improve the situation or to perfect the city by his own efforts or even by joint and corporate efforts. His work cannot, in the final analysis, be successful. The difficulty of holding two contradictory beliefs together as true, leads to a number of different temptations even for the believer. Basically, these temptations are to cling to one or the other side of the paradox. There is the attempt to steer clear of any involvement in the world, since it is evident that man cannot do anything anyway. On the other hand, some are apt to give in to the comforts and the conformity of the world, on the grounds that God has promised His pardon for the works of man. Another version of this temptation is to use the forces of the world because Christ is Lord over the whole world. Ellul maintains that any such stance shows a total misunderstanding of the judgment and pardon of the biblical revelation.⁷¹ Does this mean that theologically, Ellul has closed the door on all possible modes of action that a Christian could follow? This leads

⁷⁰ To Will, pp. 77-80.

⁷¹ For further elaboration of his reasoning, see M of C, pp. 179-80.

us directly to the question, 'How does the Christian in fact respond to the biblical revelation?' He cannot ignore the world, he cannot escape it, he cannot seek further victory over it (for the Christian cannot expect to do better than Christ did), and he cannot accept it.

Ellul has stated the case for a biblical Christianity and an ethics of exegesis and exposition. It remains to see whether everything will come together in a culturally (incarnationally) constructive sense.⁷²

b) In the first place, Ellul reminds us that time and space were the first creations of God, so that it is not a result of the fall that man is so limited.⁷³ As a result, it is imperative that the Christian be concerned with acting within the limits of the very specific place and time in which he finds himself. He must fulfil his role of prophecy or discipleship by confronting his own particular situation with God's judgment and mercy.

[L]e chrétien est donc appelé à concevoir qu'il n'a pas un privilège mais une fonction et le premier élément de cette fonction est justement d'être le lieu où la rencontre se produit--le lieu où la liberté de la grace rencontre la

⁷² Stephen Rose, "Whither Ethics, Jacques Ellul", Introducing Jacques Ellul, p. 133.

⁷³ See "Notes en Vue d'une Ethique du Temps et du Lieu pour les Chrétiens", Foi et Vie. 1960:5, pp. 354-74. In fact, Ellul sees it as a result of the fall that man constantly wants to go beyond the limits of time and space to a different order from that of creation.

nécessité des choses, où la gratuité de la révélation rencontre l'implacable enchaînement des temps.⁷⁴

This is what Ellul means by saying that the Christian's main task is to represent God at the heart of the city. This requirement is also what is meant by being 'in' the world, but not 'of' the world. To acknowledge God's revelation in Jesus Christ means to witness to the fact that the powers of the world can be defeated by the love which shatters the forces of necessity. Jesus Christ summarized the law by the commandment to love God, and, using this as a paradigm, to love one's neighbour. This love, which is the self-giving love of Agape rather than that of Eros,⁷⁵ is a revolutionary force that alone can alter the forces that dominate the world.

It is only by love that is total, without defence, without reservation, love that does not calculate or bargain.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ "Notes en Vue d'Une Ethique", p. 362.

⁷⁵ See Violence, p. 167. This is the only explicit reference that I have found to these exact terms. It would appear that Ellul accepts Anders Nygren's account of Eros (see Agape and Eros, pt. 1, trans. by A. G. Herbert (New York: 1932)), as the upward movement of the soul to find the divine of its own accord. This may or may not be an accurate description of the Greek meaning of Eros. It is however, the one that Ellul seems to accept. Doubtless, he understands Eros as a powerful force in the seeking of man's security, but man cannot find God by himself; therefore Eros has no place as part of the call of the biblical revelation.

⁷⁶ Violence, p. 174.

This is the true meaning of charity. It is not a general or abstract system, but rather it has meaning only in the concrete 'here and now' situation of the individual Christian.

c) The second general point concerns the impossibility and the necessity of a Christian ethic. More than two-thirds of To Will and To Do is devoted to the thesis that it is impossible and indeed sinful to formulate a more systematic, universally valid Christian morality than that outlined in the preceding paragraph. Anything else would be an attempt on the part of man to define the good by himself, and once more, that is the essence of the fall. Elsewhere, Ellul says,

Christianity does not offer (and is not meant to offer) a solution for social, political, economic problems (or even for moral or spiritual problems!). God in Jesus Christ puts questions to us -- questions about ourselves, our politics, our economy.⁷⁷

There are no such things as Christian solutions in general, to which one can appeal as an objective standard. There are only Christian people who respond in obedience to the 'here and now' will of God that is revealed to them. Even the sermon on the mount and the ten commandments do not provide a standard for behaviour or a Christian ethic, for taken in themselves, the commandments make no sense apart from the expression of the will of God.

⁷⁷ Jacques Ellul, "Mirror", pp. 200-201.

These decisions are contrary to instinct, to impulse, to the demands of natural man. The whole Sermon on the Mount is there to attest to that. The requirements which Jesus places are not justified by any ethical reasoning. They are not moral decisions. And just for that reason, we cannot use them as the basis for a formal ethic. We cannot put an ethic together out of a systematic contradiction of nature without its being nothing but an asceticism and a fresh distortion of Christian morality. As Karl Barth has said, what man should do and should not do is not described for him by the ten commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, but he must hear it by a personal order of God.⁷⁸

There is much controversy about a hic et nunc ethic of obedience, such as Ellul's. In general, it appears to be an individualistic, antinomian, anarchistic position with all the dangers that kind of divinely inspired ethic entails. Ellul would remind us however, that even though the will of God can go beyond regular human reason,⁷⁹ it is never absurd and it is always constant. As a result, there cannot be a welter of contradictory responses to the will of God. That truth, at the basis of his thought, is what makes individual and corporate life in Christ possible, without merely chaos.

⁷⁸To Will, pp. 221-22.

⁷⁹When he says that God's will is never absurd, but that it may go beyond the reasoning of regular human morality, Ellul is taking a position similar to that of Kierkegaard. In one key respect, this ethic is different from what is called 'situational ethics' which seems to have a strong dose of reasoned calculation about what should be done in any situation, and the 'loving act' can be figured out. This is not at all similar to an act of obedience that may require going beyond human reason.

By the end of To Will and To Do, Ellul argues equally forcibly that Christians can in no way ignore completely the realm of ethics: this is another example of holding opposites together.

One can understand under these conditions the temptation of some truthful Christians to reject ethics altogether and to fall back solely on obedience hic et nunc to the current word of God. However, that attitude is not entirely just. It is partial.⁸⁰

Christ's revelation of salvation does not work automatically, nor are men made perfect yet, so that it is still possible to be dominated by the powers. One must remember that the church remains a human society that will be held together by some morality. If Christians are not aware of this fact, and of the morality which they wish to shape them, then they are liable to fall prey to any sociological fad that may or may not bear a relation to the uniqueness of their faith. There is the danger of jumping on to the latest bandwagon and labelling it Christian. He sees this as the commonest fault of socially active Christians who have not considered the basis of their action; in particular, he sees the theology of revolution as making this error. At the other extreme, if in favour of direct revelation Christians refuse to consider ethics at all, then they run the risk of indifferentism and the refusal to attempt to incarnate their faith, in the world as it is now. Those who would escape from all morality should

⁸⁰
To Will, p. 205.

remember that morality is of the order of necessity, and even though it comes from the fall, it is still existent in order to preserve the mutilated creation. As a result, it is impossible for the Christian to flaunt on whim, all morality within that order. Because of the situation of Christians within the world, they must continually attempt to clarify some tentative ethics as a help in the formulation of a specifically Christian response to an increasingly complex society. This stance is important if simply to maintain the relativity of all moralities. It is the constancy of God's will that provides the link to make a tentative Christian ethic possible. No matter how such a necessary ethic is brought together though, it must be (i) relative, (ii) humble, (iii) aware that in itself, it is under the judgment of God, and (iv) in the service of the faithful, rather than imposed on them. Even though the specific will of God can never be catalogued in advance, the following examples provide indications of the general stance Ellul thinks that Christians should adopt with respect to the world in which they live.

d) The first duty is realism: one must know the facts of the situation and the probable consequences of one's actions. Both socially and theologically, this means that one must look directly at the situation with no illusions. This may be extremely difficult, but Ellul argues that

this is something that only the Christian can do. The light of the biblical revelation provides the proper perspective within which one can understand the true meaning of what one discerns from studies in history, sociology etc. Secondly, the promise of the Second Coming and the revelation that Christ has defeated the forces of the world, provide the courage to confront contemporary society. One does not have to gloss over or ignore any aspects of his situation, for it can no longer threaten or dominate him. Indeed Ellul goes so far as to say that, because of the clarity of the revelation about the world;

I believe the Christian is able to perceive things that others do not yet consider important. His role is to discern the problem at its birth.⁸¹

The Christian realist will provide insight in advance of others. This is an attempt neither to preclude the work of the Holy Spirit, nor to know God's will through reason. Rather, Christian realism prevents silly naiveté that can later be disguised as good intention.

True the Holy Spirit--who is clarity itself--may propel us to the greatest imprudence, but then we shall know about it.⁸²

Since the Christian must participate in the world, then if he does wish to maintain his liberty, "[f]irst, we

⁸¹ "Mirror", p. 201.

⁸² Violence, p. 83.

must be able to inject humour into the situation".⁸³ Humour will allow the Christian to remain in the world, but it will prevent his efforts from degenerating into idolatry. The irony of faith (and faith in irony) prevents a person from putting his heart into building the city. In another writing, Ellul refers to the same virtue as the passion for play,⁸⁴ which can be the only basis for participation in a group. If there is play, then the activity is free, and it adds a certain zest to the group.

Another aspect of a helpful response to the technological society is the refusal to adapt normally to its forms and forces. Adaptability and normality are considered prime virtues, but the Christian must struggle against them: acceptance of the world as it is would be a rejection of the biblical revelation. Far from advocating that the Christian withdraw into spiritualism, he suggests a number of directions for action. In The Political Illusion, he discusses the formation of tension groups that will offer an opposite pole to that of the state which has politicized every single possible aspect of life.

What is needed is groups capable of denying the state's right--today accepted by everyone--

⁸³M of C, p. 181.

⁸⁴Jacques Ellul, "Between Chaos and Paralysis", Christian Century, June 5, 1968, pp. 747-50.

to mobilize all forces and all energies of the nation for a single aim such as the grandeur or efficiency of that nation.⁸⁵

Also in the social realm, a Christian can actively expose the powers, such as war or technology, for what they are. Even though men may still be bound by them, some of their force may be slightly diminished, so that the world will be at least a bit more livable. Recently, Ellul seems to have reached the position that there is less and less that one can do politically; but he speaks rather of the passion to create a distinctive life style for oneself. This is not in the same sense of 'creation' as in reference to God's powers, but rather to the adoption of activities that cannot be taken over by society.

[E]very individual must become the creator of his own life, for he will have to oppose the forces of conformity while working within society.⁸⁶

Perhaps none of these attitudes or stances in isolation, seems to be Christian per se, but they do help the Christian to see society in an active way, without being engulfed by it.

⁸⁵Jacques Ellul, P.I., p. 222. His notion of church has not been elaborated in this thesis, but it would be reasonable to say that such tension groups would be part of the social role of the church.

⁸⁶"Between Chaos and Paralysis", p. 750. For his comments about creating a new life style, see The Presence, p. 147. The confusion of the use of 'creation' with reference to man may well be a question of translation. The word 'créer' can mean either 'to create' or 'to bring out'. The second meaning would be more appropriate here.

e) Central to any attempt to think a specifically Christian ethic (no matter how tentative), is the tenet that Christ reconciled all men to God, but not the world. In his life the Christian must witness that

the crucifixion and the resurrection signalize the defeat of the powers (which nowadays wear the form of money, state productivity, science, technology etc.) but not of men... [T]o reject the theology of reconciliation in favour of the theology of revolution is in fact to reject the Incarnation.⁸⁷

Specifically, Christians are told to be with the oppressed and suffering, but this action must not result in the exclusion or hatred of any other person. This is one reason why the Christian must reject violence, for it can be based only on hatred of the enemy. Since the Christian should express his faith in God through men and not through institutions or structures, he should represent the oppressed to the powerful concretely and on an individual level.⁸⁸ He can never cut the lines of communication with opponents, even if he is working mainly within one group. While doing this work, he must remain a perennial critic of the movement he is in, he must oppose any goal

⁸⁷ Violence, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁸ This is not a tactic in the hopes for immediate success in the sense that it could be changed when a more efficient method is found or could be discarded when one got discouraged with the paucity of results. Further, a Christian can witness to a non-Christian, but he cannot expect the latter to act as a Christian.

of material well-being as a final aim or any means of violence, and finally he must continue to witness to the reconciliation of Jesus Christ. Eventually, the Christian will have to risk unpopularity by changing sides frequently, for once the oppressed achieve their goal, they tend to become the oppressors themselves. Ellul gives one other note of caution that the doctrine of reconciliation does not mean the adoption of merely popular or fashionable causes, but it means serving and being with all the oppressed. In fact, in accordance with his notion of Christian realism, Ellul maintains that the Christians should see problems in advance, so that if a situation reaches violent proportions, then they have failed in their mission of reconciliation. Once an issue becomes popular (assuming that issues do not become popular before they become violent!), the Christian withdraws from the cause, for all he can then do is to pray and to repent for all.

f) In summation of the response inherent in Ellul's theology, I would point out again that the basic revelation in the Gospels is salvation rather than action. There can be no Christian response on one's own, but only in obedience to the will of God. Since obedience to the order of necessity is contrary to the will of God, salvation is manifested in the overcoming of the forces of necessity.

This is another reason, for example, why the Christian should reject violence--exactly because it is inevitable. All the arguments, both theological and secular, about the prevalence of violence, only prove to Ellul that it must be rejected, or at least, the use of violence must never be justified by the Christian.

Il faut seulement prener garde, que libérés par Christ, nous ne nous soumettions de nouveaux à ces esclavages.⁸⁹

In the final analysis, a Christian can fulfil his proper function in the world, only through concrete obedience to the will of God, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and in prayer. Only in prayer is the communion between God and man re-established, so that it is then possible to obey. "Prayer is the only possible substitute for violence in human relations."⁹⁰ Only this kind of action in the world can provide the alternative to the order of history or the unfolding of the 'meaning of the city'. Action that breaks those determinations rather than submitting men further to them, is the only kind of action that is truly revolutionary--it breaks out of the ways of the world.

For ever since society came into existence
[after the murder by Cain] the revolutionary

⁸⁹"Notes en Vue d'Une Ethique du Temps et du Lieu pour les Chrétiens", p. 374.

⁹⁰Jacques Ellul, Prayer and the Modern Man (New York: 1970), p. 173.

spirit, which is a necessary part of social life, has always been the affirmation of a spiritual truth against the error of the moment: a truth which is called to incarnate itself in society, not in any automatic, mechanical way, but by the desperate sacrificial effort of man.⁹¹

Given this account of Christianity as a revolutionary faith, we will now turn to Ellul's analysis and critique of revolution as described socially and historically. This analysis will lead to the attempt to determine whether that account does in fact correspond to his vision of the biblical revelation.

⁹¹The Presence, p. 40.

CHAPTER II

ELLUL'S SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL THOUGHT ABOUT REVOLUTION

I Introduction

Une définition [de la révolution] ne suffit pas et surtout celles des dictionnaires. On la vit, on y croit, on y plonge, on la fait: chaque époque, chaque milieu humain a les siennes toujours différentes et pourtant chaque fois unique comme l'amour. Faut-il renoncer à en parler pour éviter d'en faire un objet de consommation?¹

Despite the passion with which Ellul describes the spirit of revolution, it is patently obvious, even from the title Autopsie de la Révolution that the answer to his own question will be "No!". The title indicates that he intends a thorough and exact analysis -- 'what makes (or made) it tick' -- with the impersonal commitment to accuracy of a post-mortem. This is a long way from the involvement he correctly ascribes to the act of revolution. Furthermore, the word autopsie signifies that the object of the study has already died, but that it is crucial to understand the causes for the future well-being of people and for the possible prevention of the disease or infirmity. Ellul's major social writing to date on revolution does include all the elements of an autopsy. It is a

¹ AR, p. 11.

critical, detached examination that might dismay many contemporaries who would insist on total and spontaneous action only. Both on theological and social grounds, he thinks that it is necessary to make this rigorous analysis of what has happened. The Conclusion of this thesis will discuss what he is saying theologically about social revolution. For now though, it is sufficient to point out that he sees historical revolution as a human activity with nothing sacrosanct about it. Therefore he wishes to strip away the religious aura that now seems to make revolution into an idol or a crusade. On the strictly social plane, he has demonstrated previously in A Critique of the New Commonplaces, that the slogan 'No more words -- give us acts!' (a slogan which is the same as the refusal to discuss revolution for fear of jeopardizing it) leads to the crazed violence and insanity of fascism.

For a society impatient for proof and achievement, it is only the act that counts. And because only the act counts, henceforth the clamor of the active idiot will fill the sky alone.²

The important thing then is to bring the act of genuine revolution and the words concerning revolution together in a way that he claims is totally absent from most modern thought. This is the only way to prevent the further debasement of revolution as a whole: this is the goal of his writing.

²Critique, p. 201.

b) Autopsie de la Révolution then, contains not only his social and historical reflections in order to reveal revolution as it has been discussed and actually practised, but also his tentative understanding of what revolution should be. Certainly other books complement the insights contained here; for example, he seems to take it for granted that the reader is familiar at least with The Technological Society and The Political Illusion. This book nevertheless, is not a mere repetition, for it focuses strictly on revolution. Specifically in this work, and within the framework of his whole thought, Ellul adheres to the methodology I have outlined in the Introduction. In his Preface, Ellul maintains that he will be bound by a strict nominalism that accepts as revolution whatever men have called revolution, rather than working deductively from a prior definition. One has to be clear as to why he insists on such a position as the starting point for his sociological studies. He wants to see what happened as the participants themselves understood those events and not from the presuppositions of modern observers.

Il faut recevoir la réalité historique telle que les hommes du moment l'ont sentie, crue, et nous l'ont transmise.³

This view of history stems largely from his profound distaste for modern assumptions and therefore from his desire

³AR, p. 11

to show the differences between traditional and modern views on revolution. His is largely an attempt to show the deficiencies of the latter. In this field especially, he wants to avoid starting with the unproved belief that history has a discernible direction and he can achieve this goal only by maintaining a strict nominalism.

Nobody doubts that history has a direction. Nobody, that is, except historians! A serious historian is obliged to say, "That's the way it happened" -- period.⁴

More important, this view of the study of history results from the need for Christian realism as part of his dialectic. This presupposition is not evident in AR, but as we have already seen, it is inherent in his overall task. One must know the facts of the situation, and one must be able to look directly at a situation with no illusions. That is the ultimate basis of his socio-historical nominalism. A reader should not be confused when, in his last chapter, it appears that Ellul did in fact have a prior definition of revolution, a definition which is intrinsically tied to his theology of revelation. In his social writings, he does not ever refer to the criteria laid down in The Meaning of the City and in To Will and To Do. By adhering to a social nominalism⁵, he wants to demonstrate in his

⁴ Critique, p. 30.

⁵ For now, it is sufficient to note that in To Will p. 268, he speaks of a theological nominalism which is of course related to, but not identical with social or historical nominalism.

sociology that what is true theologically is also valid if viewed historically or socially. When looking at Ellul's studies on revolutionary activities, one can see that they can be assessed within that discipline, independent of their ultimate significance within the dialectic confrontation. This approach is more powerful than virtually any other Christian theologian currently writing on revolution. It should be noted however, that theologically, Autopsie de la Révolution should be read specifically in conjunction with Violence and Prayer and the Modern Man, for taken alone, a social writing can state only one half of the dialectic.

c) In the attempt to understand the general context of this study, I shall now comment on Ellul's social use of the word 'myth'. He puts forward his concept of the myth of revolution itself in AR (cf. p. 102 ff.), but his most comprehensive social analysis appears in "Modern Myths". In short, myth is an interpretation of reality that explains to man his place in it--

It is the image deep within his mysterious self of his confrontation with a given reality,⁶

Myths enable man to become an integral part of his civilization because they "express the very existence of the collective civilization in which we live".⁷ Or, to put it

⁶ "Modern Myths", Diogenes 1958:23, p. 25.

⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

another way,

A unique definition of myth robs it of the very thing that makes it myth: the interpenetration of a very direct relation between man and the temporal structure of his life.⁸

Seen in this light, the fundamental myths for modern man, according to Ellul, are history and science, from which come all the beliefs, ideologies, actions, and sentiments of our age. For example, from these two basic myths, spring the beliefs and images of work, technology, happiness, progress, as well as the secondary myths of actualization, such as Marxism, the nation, revolution. Without further analysis, it is enough to say that these myths are the all-embracing, motivating foundations of our lives. As such, they have the qualities of religious fervour, and it is this aspect that makes it almost impossible to challenge myth. Awareness would weaken certitude "and man with his blinders removed would have to face an excruciating reality".⁹ This challenge however, is exactly the one that Ellul attempts to make in all his social writings, including this one on revolution. He wants to bring people face-to-face with reality other than the myth, so that a genuine confrontation between reality and the truth of revelation can be possible. The step of revealing social and historical myths is just as necessary

⁸ "Modern Myths", p. 25.

⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

as a proper theological interpretation.¹⁰

But we should not have any illusions; this will be a grave crisis, comparable with the religious crisis of the fifteenth century... for men will have the feeling that a future is no longer possible and that nothing makes sense. He will experience immense frustration. Nevertheless, this crisis is the condition for a balanced development of human society.¹¹

Autopsie de la Révolution is his attempt to unmask the secondary myth of revolution.

d) Because he always thinks 'at grips' with his present surroundings, Ellul says also in the preface that this will not be a straightforward historical or sociological treatise.

L'étude historique ou sociologique ne peut m'être qu'un point d'appui pour une réflexion concernant la situation de la révolution aujourd'hui et l'éventualité d'une révolution à faire.¹²

In other words, history is interesting only insofar as it helps to diagnose the present ills. This concern leads to

¹⁰ Ellul's social account of myth corresponds to his biblical account of myth in the same relationship as reality and truth. The modern myths of history and science give a social meaning to the changing physical setting; the biblical myths give the true meaning of the facts in question. (See my Chap. I) Without a careful reading, one could be misled by his use of the same word in each case.

¹¹ From a letter to "Playboy Forum" from Jacques Ellul, Playboy, March, 1971, pp. 55-56.

¹² AR, p. 11.

a double construction within the book which can be divided into four sections two different ways -- either historically (before 1789, the developments of the French Revolution, revolution since 1789, and possibilities for the future), or else conceptually (the relationship between revolt and revolution, revolution put into an intellectual framework, revolutions seen within the meaning of history, and the meaning of revolution for Ellul). Bearing in mind this double structure, for the purposes of this thesis, I shall elaborate the three main themes he puts forward. First, revolution is a new concept of modernity. Second, the significance of Marx's interpretation of history and revolution colours all contemporary understanding. Third, considering the banalities surrounding so-called revolution today, the concept may in fact be dead, or even counter-revolutionary. These three threads do not encompass every detail of the book, for much space is given to a discussion of various other theories. They do however, draw together Ellul's own thoughts on revolution in its present socio-historical sense.

II Revolution as New to Modernity

a) Before the modern era, virtually every civilization, using different modes, viewed history and society as a sacred organism. "L'ordre était en même temps naturel,

social, sacré."¹³ There was no possibility of changing society or of making a new future. Put very simply, men had two alternatives -- either to accept the inevitable, or to say a desperate and defiant "No". The refusal is what Ellul means by revolt. "Il conçoit alors son histoire comme une fatalité, un destin--et c'est dans le désespoir qu'il dit non".¹⁴ A revolt then was characterized by the feeling of life being unbearable, so that the only meaning for liberty would be escape. This meaning bears little resemblance to the modern connotations of freedom as a creativity that defines man and that in itself solves social problems. If indeed revolt had any purpose at all, it was always a reactionary attempt to go back to old ways in the face of seemingly inevitable innovations. Normally though, revolts broke out when death became preferable to the predictable course of life. The belief that there was no chance of changing the course of events and no chance of success explains, according to Ellul, the ill-planned nature of earlier revolts, and also the passivity of people when they were brutally suppressed. Since revolts would never change historic reality, it was as if a revolt were a desperate move to the traditionally mythic end of time, an attempt to bring about the

¹³ AR, p. 130.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

apocalyptic event.

Seule une grandeur incommensurable à l'action
peut consoler de la réalité d'une action
issue de la nécessité absolue, mais en elle-
même sans espoir.¹⁵

Three clear examples of revolts of this type were those of Spartacus, the Etruscans, and the Mayan Empire. Closely linked with the refusal of the intolerable was the mark of direct accusation. Revolt was against the 'powers-that-be', namely the state as the source of the intolerable. More accurately, there was a blind accusation against the nearest agent, for the state as a whole was too abstract a concept to cause the eruption that made up a revolt. Similarly, the idea of social class never played a large role. In fact, Ellul says that a proper study of history shows class conflict to be a modern notion altogether. "L'idée que toutes les révolutions ont une cause sociale est un pur et simple préjugé du marxisme."¹⁶ It was the very specific situation and not the structures in general, that caused people to lash out at the nearest culprit to bring about revolt.

b) In addition to showing the traditional notion of revolt, he also uses historical examples to indicate the difference between revolt and revolution. He sums up that

¹⁵AR, p. 20.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 32.

difference by saying,

[L]es révolutions sont toujours des actes remplis d'espoir. La mort peut y survenir, elle est accidentelle. Dans la révolte, la mort est au coeur même de ce soulèvement.¹⁷

A revolution can still be against the foreseeable course of events, but it becomes something entirely different from revolt. It may spring from revolt, but the difference is neither the degree of violence, nor the success, nor even the spontaneity. On the other hand, two specifically different elements in revolution are theory and institutionalization. Both of these aspects stem from hope and they imply a doctrine or plan with intellectual lines of force that are entirely lacking in a revolt.

"Au contraire, la révolution comporte une idéologie concrète et non pas un millénarisme exacerbé."¹⁸ The hope consists in the belief that there will be a new beginning which will provide the absolute answer for history, and this is the case whether revolution is against the tide of history or whether it is trying to speed up history. Once more Ellul speaks of the mythic aspects, only this time surrounding revolution itself. Rather than being a defiant move to bring about mythic time, the revolution takes on its own mythic proportions to become an object of faith to bring in the new beginning. It becomes almost participation in

¹⁷AR, p. 17.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 57.

a sacred drama. We shall see this different characteristic of revolutionary activity demonstrated most clearly in the French Revolution. The theory, in whatever form, is conceptualized and verbalized as the preparation for the great revolutionary event. It is at this point that the spontaneity question becomes pertinent. Since there is now always a prior formulation of theory for the event, there can no longer be pure unalloyed spontaneity. Similarly, one cannot speak of revolution as distinct from revolt until the leaders attempt to institutionalize the achievement. "C'est au moment où ils entreprennent la construction de l'oeuvre que la révolte devient révolution."¹⁹ This change brings many further problems, for the movement must be into the hands of the managers (gérants) of the revolution who do not always create the original doctrine. Basically however, revolt is an anarchistic movement, whereas the hope inherent in revolution means that at some stage it must end the violence and create a formal structure. One example is that the first concern of the American Revolution (leaving aside whether or not it was a genuine revolution) was a constitution to institutionalize liberty. At this point, Ellul accepts almost verbatim the distinction between revolt and

¹⁹ AR, p. 62.

revolution made by Hannah Arendt in On Revolution.²⁰

c) The components of theory and institutionalization surely do not constitute definitions of revolution, nor do they exhaust its characteristics. They do however, demonstrate the element of hope that distinguishes revolution from the traditional meaning of revolt. On a first reading, Ellul seems to be less explicit about the essential difference between the earlier and the later conception of revolution itself. At one point, he indicates that the revolution of the Gracchi brothers was the single genuine attempt before the modern age. Yet elsewhere, he refers to other early revolutions, such as the medieval Communes, or the English Revolution of 1640. This apparent contradiction can be explained only if one realizes that he is referring to revolution alone, in contradistinction to revolution arising by chance out of revolt. Before modernity (except for the Gracchis) only the latter was conceivable. Very seldom did a spontaneous revolt progress far enough to bring forth the hope necessary for genuine revolution. Or, sometimes, from the beginnings of a revolt, a few men would try to turn it into a revolution, but it would be only by chance that they would succeed. It is the element of a calculated hope in the possibilities of revolution by itself, without any link to the irrational

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York, 1965) circa p. 140.

protest of revolt, that Ellul claims was new in the modern world. Also this aspect led to the idea of revolution within the meaning of history, rather than revolution against history -- an idea that was not articulated unequivocally at any time before Marx. In terms of revolution, Ellul dates the modern era as post-1789. It is also interesting to note, in terms of the totality of his thought, that this date corresponds to what he previously described as "the sudden blossoming of technique in the nineteenth century".²¹

C'est seulement en fonction d'un certain type de société que la révolution peut devenir un fait historique global que l'on définit la révolution pour qui le modèle devient possible.²²

Ellul can state definitely the conditions necessary before modern revolution is thinkable -- (a) an awareness of social injustice combined with (b) an awareness that society can be put into question. The first condition had existed in varying degrees throughout history, but as we have seen before the late eighteenth century, man considered his fate inevitable. Despite its apparent emphasis on de-sacralization of the world, and on linear time, Ellul points out that Christianity had little impact in instilling these ideas in the order of society. Man's fate was in the hands of God, so that it could not possibly be explained in human terms. This was the cast of

²¹TS, p. 47.

²²AR, p. 134.

mind similar in principle, if not detail, to that of all other traditional civilizations. Two fundamental questions immediately arise. What conditions came to be at that particular time to make the new concept of revolution possible (to say nothing of its commonplace acceptance merely two hundred years later)? Secondly, how does Ellul account for the fact that these conditions arose when they did?

Without much supporting detail, he simply enumerates the factors that coincided in the late eighteenth century to permit a climate of opinion conducive to revolution in a modern sense.

i) The supremacy of science in the form of belief in the conquest of nature became widespread to the extent that even society became viewed as a part of nature. Once the realm of the new science was expanded to include even human things, then men came to see society, like physics, as obeying certain laws that are controllable by technique. At that stage, politics began to be conceived as rational in a scientific way that could be dominated by men.

ii) The appearance of belief in progress made it possible to see revolution as the sole act required to remove the obstacles to bigger and better things.

iii) There existed a certain type of individualism (largely from the bourgeois part of the economic system) that could produce the necessary revolutionary heroes. At

the same time, the great explosion of energy within the short time of the revolution seemed to reinforce the original individualism.

iv) This time marked the culmination of the loss of faith in Christianity. "The disappearance of the Eternal Father from our mental horizon had left a large void."²³ Even though the fundamental beliefs in Jesus Christ and Christian dogma were rejected, the images used in former teaching remained indelibly fixed. As a result the images of judgment and paradise for example, were transposed to earth to be caught up in the myth of the revolution in order to introduce the golden age. This could not happen though, as long as the majority of men were held by the content of the original dogmas.

These various and inter-related doctrines that came together at more or less the same time, did not result from the works of single men such as Voltaire or Rousseau;²⁴ rather all were part of the change in general belief.

²³Critique, p. 28.

²⁴Ellul does not discuss Rousseau's direct influence on the French Revolution, or at least not his influence on how some of the leaders saw themselves. For example, rightly or wrongly, Robespierre saw himself as carrying out directly Rousseau's theories. In terms of his own advocacy of social nominalism, Ellul seems here to underestimate the force of individual figures. In defence of Ellul, one could argue that it was the person of Rousseau that was responsible for the impact rather than the actual content of his philosophy.

Except analytically, there is no distinction between the process that created the myth of revolution and the process to create receptivity for such a myth. Furthermore the myth of revolution was created partly within the very revolutionary process itself. In short,

pour qu'un mythe existe, il faut une sorte d'alchimie collective: il n'est jamais le fruit d'une invention individuelle, d'un créateur bien déterminé. Il me semble que le mythe a pu se créer par la rencontre de deux circonstances favorables: il y a eu d'abord un long temps de maturation doctrinale de préparation idéologique. Il y a eu là-dessus une brusque contraction d'événements fulgurants, c'est ce double mouvement qui a permis la synthèse mythique qui s'est effectuée dans la révolution et qui a provoqué la réception du mythe dans les consciences.²⁵

Ellul makes clear his belief that the various strands or components of the new myth could not come together completely until after the events starting in 1789. Again, his main point is that our whole notion of revolution is a recent one that should not be read back into any earlier history.

d) What Ellul seems to fail to answer in any complete way is the second fundamental question of how the various factors arose and came together at the particular time they did. In general terms, it is the question of why the events of 1789 and of no other date, were crucial for the arising of modern myths. Perhaps he might reiterate that he is not writing a history for its own

²⁵AR, p. 108.

sake, so that his analysis of the components as they now are, is satisfactory. Still, one feels that his insistence on the newness of the concept requires some further explanation or analysis of the way in which myths change. On the other hand, he might take the same position he did in The Technological Society -- "But why were the first steps taken? We will never know, and in any case, that is not the purpose of this investigation."²⁶ Although this question is a difficult and profound one, it would not appear to be a mysterious one, beyond the scope of historical investigation. In his own language, it is part of human reality, neither sacred nor untouchable. Although he has written a number of historical studies, perhaps his nominalism makes the question less than vital to him. The Technological Society²⁷ seems the only social treatise where he attempts to give any kind of analysis at all, of the rise of the modern phenomenon. Even there, he handles the difference between ancient and modern technique less fully than any other issue. Also in "Modern Myths", he makes another partial analysis of their rise. In view of the fact that Ellul himself has not dealt with the subject in a sustained manner, one can indicate only generally the direction in which his thinking would appear to be pointing, particularly in relation to certain other major

²⁶TS, p. 44.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 23-60.

accounts.

Summarily and without specific reference, he implicitly dismisses the theses of Max Weber, Michael Foster and Leo Strauss. In the first place, with reference to Weber's The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism he points out that there was little evidence of the spread of modern myths of technique in the seventeenth or sixteenth centuries -- a fact which calls into question the direct link that Weber traced. Ellul concedes that many barriers were broken down during the time of the Reformation, but

even then, it was not so much from the influence of the new theology as from the shock of the Renaissance, from humanism and the authoritarian state, that technique received a decisive impetus.²⁸

He finally dismisses the argument as hardly worthy of consideration except for the points at which it is obvious. Ellul indeed sees it as self-evident that there will be links in some manner between present and former beliefs. He would make the connection however, in a way entirely different from Weber, who is bound by his fact-value distinction. As a result, it would be difficult for the latter to distinguish between original Calvinism and a perverted, rejected Calvinism. At most, Weber can discuss latent and manifest functions of a religion, but for Ellul

²⁸
TS, p. 38.

the core of the problem goes far beyond that kind of description.

A point can doubtless be made of the effects of the Reformation, but the economic consequences of this movement have been singularly exaggerated.²⁹

Even more firmly, he would reject any hypothesis such as the one put forward by M. B. Foster in "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science",³⁰ that the biblical doctrine of creation led directly to modern science. Ellul does show most clearly the integral connection between modern science and modern technique: at the same time, he sees Christianity as one of the strongest forces tending not to produce technique. Historically, the only era in which the West was specifically Christian (the fourth to the fourteenth centuries) was also a period of technical relapse and the breakdown of Roman technique. He maintains even further that the de-sacralization of nature resulting from the doctrine of creation mitigated against the advance of technique.³¹ So also did the necessity for moral judgment on all of men's works in Christian theology. In other words, within

²⁹ T. S., p. 35.

³⁰ Michael Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science", Mind XLVIII:172, pp. 446-68.

³¹ As noted above, Christianity had no influence on de-sacralizing society or the notion of history.

the biblical tradition, there could be no appeal to the gods within nature to support any attempted technical applications. Furthermore, as an added deterrent, any such technical activity would be judged by criteria other than those of techniques themselves. Both of these factors put limits on the possibilities for an autonomous technique. It was only after the decline of Christianity that technique reached its present status. To the extent that he sees the rise of the modern world flowing from a rejection of the tradition with its restraints, Ellul's position would be closer to that of Leo Strauss in Natural Right and History, than to that of any proponents of immanentized Christianity. He would take issue with Strauss though, on the question of the role of the political philosophers. One can see this by default, for he never mentions, for example, Hobbes, Rousseau, or Nietzsche in reference to the rise of modern technique. In the same vein, his two references to Machiavelli demonstrate that he is not much predisposed to the Straussian position that the modern world resulted from the turning around of political philosophy.

In spite of the frequent mention of Machiavelli's Prince, the truth is that until the beginning of the twentieth century, no one ever drew the technical consequences.

I purposely do not cite Machiavelli because his theories were never applied.³²

³²TS, p. 232, and p. 284. To say the least, these

Clearly, he questions the possibilities of any myth-making influences from political philosophers. In considering the explanations of the rise of modernity that Ellul does not find totally acceptable, one can discern some intimations of his own argument.³³

Basically for Ellul, the rise of the modern myths is a religious question. Starting slowly at approximately the time of the Renaissance when Christianity became controversial and hedged about by other influences, the Christian God was worshipped less and less. This process spread until the eighteenth century and became complete in the nineteenth century. As belief in Christianity held less force, the spread of techniques was able to multiply in the sense that the restraints were removed and the external criteria for judging were also removed. There were no social or religious forces to provide any reason

are rather categorical statements. He would have to prove that there is no common thread running between Machiavelli and later thinkers such as Bacon and Locke, or that Thomas Cromwell was not influenced by Machiavelli in practical politics. Also, he would have to show that philosophers such as Locke did not eventually influence public opinion deeply. Since Ellul in many respects is near to Strauss, this lack of attention to his work shows Ellul's (i) French centredness to an extent that he underestimates both the English and American contributions to modernity, and (ii) constant and sustained rejection and lack of interest in the philosophical tradition.

³³ Obviously it is beyond the scope of three theses to evaluate Ellul's rejection of Weber, Foster, and Strauss. I have given them very little attention, only because they do not loom large in Ellul's own writings.

to control the spread of techniques. Whatever men could do, he should do in order to secure his own well-being through his own efforts. In fact, techniques would be encouraged for control over nature and rational efficiency in all spheres remained the only security for people who had rejected traditional faith in God. Through the emancipation of technique, there was produced a drastic change in man's actual setting. (It was so radical that Ellul claims it was the first real change in man's situation since the beginning of the historical era). Man's understanding had to come to terms with the new situation, characterized by the independence of various new forces.

But to find oneself alone in the possession of this power, to know that one is responsible for every decision and that one's own strength is all that can be relied upon, amounts to an intolerable situation.³⁴

The loss of Christian faith left a void to be filled by a substitute. The new interpretation however, was no longer in terms of the origins of the world, nor the gods, nor agriculture, nor the traditional questions of wisdom and virtue. Rather it had to be an interpretation of the reality that was beginning to engulf and to haunt man -- the machine, the conquest of nature, abundance. Without many supportive details, Ellul would probably claim that was the reason for the emergence of the new myths of history

³⁴
"Modern Myths", p.26.

and science. As has been mentioned previously, the images that had formerly expressed Christian dogmas still remained. It is however, only echoes of those images, but not in the least their content, of which one finds traces in modern myths. For example, the notion of history as progress is plausible only after one no longer believes in Christian eschatology: the link is undeniable, but it is one of rejection. How far one can see modernity in a direct line with the biblical tradition depends on the following question. To what extent is the content of a new form of belief defined in the very terms of that which is rejected? Ellul sees the fundamental opposition as being more significant than the similarity in images employed because of proximity.

Clearly the two currents of a loss of faith in Christianity and the new physical setting were inseparable in any time sequence, and each one supported the other. It was not until the late eighteenth century though, that this process was forceful enough to manifest itself in new myths to which men gave their full allegiance. Only when men accepted history and science as the explanation of the given reality, could the powers of technique and statism evolve unhindered until they become completely autonomous. According to this perspective, there were significant precursors to modernity, but they did not become important on the corporate level of civilization until men gave them

full allegiance -- in fact, not until the nineteenth century.

Today our zero point in the Western world is to be found in the period around 1780, that marvellous era when all the latent forces of nature were to be unleashed by a sort of magic for the benefit of man.³⁵

Specifically in terms of revolution, Ellul sees the initial stages of the new myth in the French Revolution. From then it has evolved by its own logic to the current post-Marx definition of revolution.

II B The Pivotal Role of 1789

a) From all that has been said about the novelty of the concept of revolution and the emergence of new myths, one uncontested thesis does emerge from Ellul. The events of the French Revolution marked the turning around of thought about revolution so that it became a desired goal. Also, it was the first totally comprehensive revolution that, as a whole, made a unique impact on the hearts and minds of men. For this reason as well, a specialized study of this revolution takes on a singular significance.

[L]a Révolution française, celle-ci a eu un prestige unique. Elle a frappé les hommes plus que toute autre... Aucune autre n'a eu autant de conséquences... On ne peut pas négliger ce fait d'impression d'opinion. Il ne sert à rien de dire que ce fut une erreur d'optique historique: même s'il en est ainsi

³⁵"Modern Myths", p. 39.

cette erreur d'optique fait partie de l'histoire.³⁶

The unsurpassed influence of the French Revolution on public opinion has made it more important than the American Revolution and that is reason enough to examine the former in detail. Furthermore, in the theoretical sphere, the French Revolution made such an impact that it crystallized the formulation of the great new myth of history.

Dans la théorie, il ne faut pas oublier, que toute pensée sur l'histoire créée par, puis dérivée de Hegel, est le produit de la Révolution de 1789.³⁷

Or, as Hannah Arendt makes the same point,

Theoretically the most far-reaching consequence of the French Revolution was the birth of the modern concept of history in Hegel's philosophy.³⁸

This is a crucial factor in the analysis of revolution, for she also observes that all revolutionists since,

even if they did not learn their lessons from Marx (still the greatest pupil Hegel ever had) and never bothered to read Hegel, looked upon revolution through Hegelian categories.³⁹

Finally, the Marxist fusion of the practical and the theoretical also uses the model of the French Revolution explicitly -- even beyond the general influence of Hegel

³⁶AR, pp. 80-81.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 137-38.

³⁸Hannah Arendt, p. 45

³⁹Ibid., p. 47.

on his philosophical framework. Later in this chapter, there will be a discussion of the significance of Marx, but here it is sufficient to say that

à partir de la pensée de Marx, il est vrai qu'elles [les révolutions] se situent de cette façon. C'est n'est donc pas une affaire intellectuelle, ce n'est pas un débat de philosophe.⁴⁰

These considerations therefore, make it essential to look at the main features of the French Revolution as it provides the transition from traditional to modern thinking, and as it lays the foundation for Marxist thought.

b) Ellul's first observation is that the French Revolution was originally a reactionary movement in exactly the same genre as all previous revolts and revolutions. It opposed the way things were going. Ideologically, there was a bias towards the past -- the desire to return to a state of nature,⁴¹ plus a deliberate appeal to the Roman legends of antiquity, and those concerning the beginnings of society. This was not merely romanticism, but a reaction against the present, in a conservative manner.

⁴⁰ AR, p. 138.

⁴¹ With reference to footnote No.25, Ellul does recognize that the desire to return to a state of nature was "[s]ous l'influence d'un rousseauisme plus ou moins mal interprété". (AR, p. 84.)

Elle [la révolution] se trouve des racines à la fois mythique et historiques. Elle ne prétend pas se river vers le futur, mais incarner un plus authentique passé.⁴²

It is interesting to note one factor that definitely was new in this ideological reaction. It was linked with legends of new beginnings rather than a new creation, and these new beginnings were within history rather than beyond the realm of history. Still in either instance, the notion of novelty was absent from their own formulations at the beginning. In the practical realm, Ellul says that one has only to look at the records of the Estates-Général to see that its leaders⁴³ did not want to destroy the old order, nor did they question the monarchy as a regime in itself: they wished to restore it, but free of certain abuses. There is no mention of socio-economic changes, except perhaps for more freedom in commerce.

Cette timidité des cahiers révèle leur caractère conservateur. ... Ce mouvement qui menait à la révolution n'était pas révolutionnaire.⁴⁴

⁴²AR, p. 138.

⁴³As for the followers, the sans-culottes, most of them joined the revolution in a very traditional act of revolt.

⁴⁴AR, p. 84.

Ellul then quotes Michelet, writing in a manner closer to the revolutionaries themselves, who said, "Je définis la révolution: l'avènement de la loi, la résurrection du droit, la réaction de la justice".⁴⁵ The first part implies the removal of any obstacle existing in the way of the new beginning in which the rule of law would dominate. The second part implies a return to a previous historical moment. The commencement of the rule of law was a new concept, but even it was, above all, a reaction against the way things were.

La raison commande et non plus l'histoire. Car il y a contradiction radicale entre les deux. Parce que la maîtresse de toute conduite humaine est la raison, on répudie l'histoire. On ne s'inscrit pas dans le cours d'une histoire mais dans un commencement ou un recommencement, et la suite n'est pas non plus envisagée en tant qu'histoire, mais en tant qu'Apocalypse ou bien entrée dans la cité absolument bonne: il ne devait pas y avoir de suite--parce qu'une telle vision comporte seulement Concorde, Bonheur, Solidarité, Harmonie: le fait n'a plus droit à la médiocrité. Nous ne sommes pas en présence d'une révolution qui se veut dans le sens de l'histoire: cela n'intéresse aucun révolutionnaire de 1789 à 1798.⁴⁶

c) The second important feature Ellul notes about the French Revolution, one that shows clearly how 1789 marks a

⁴⁵ Michelet, Histoire de la Révolution française, Introduction. Quoted in AR, p. 85.

⁴⁶ AR, pp. 88-89. This rejection of history in favour of rationality, originally a reaction 'against', finally resulted in the new conception of history that has characterized modern thought.

dividing line, was that it was a bourgeois revolution. This fact was also present in every previous successful revolution, for the bourgeois are the only ones capable of organizing the new social schema, the doctrines, the institutions that separate revolution from revolt.⁴⁷ According to Ellul, this is no evidence that the bourgeois appropriated the movements for their own devices, for the organization is an integral part of the revolution. Otherwise the events of 1789 would have been merely another riot or upheaval. What was new in the French Revolution, was that the group that assumed control of the management of the revolution was held by the new myths of science and history rather than the older ones. The bourgeois at this particular time had become pragmatic, rational and progressivist. The inevitable and necessary leadership had already accepted these ideals, so that they were determined that rationalism would dominate in every sphere, to ensure progress. Once more Ellul passes over the explanations of why the myth of progress arose as a bourgeois ideology, except to refer to Georges Sorel's Les Illusions du Progrès. Apart from that reference, he

⁴⁷ He uses the word 'bourgeois' in its original meaning to designate citizens or freemen of a city, as distinguished from the peasants or the gentlemen. This is different from Marx's description of the bourgeois as a new class that emerged only during the French Revolution.

passes off their rationalism to the same factors listed above on pp. 109-110. . . None of this material quite adequately explains why the bourgeois of this era differed so radically from the bourgeois who had led other revolutions. The contribution of the bourgeois in the French Revolution however, did provide the new element of projection into the future to speed up the rate of progress. Rather than the tragedy of the refusal involved in revolt, revolution became optimistic and good, for it was in the direct line of progress. This belief paved the way for the concept of the necessity of revolution, and then in turn, to revolution as historic necessity. This development will be discussed more explicitly with reference to Marx.

d) The specific rationality of the bourgeois management had certain repercussions leading to further new concepts that contradicted previously held assumptions about revolution. Most important, the French bourgeois rationalism led to a new concept of the state. Before this time, revolution had of course involved the state, but in a negative way that opposed its growth and increased organization. The French Revolution eventually reversed this position because of the rationalism that abstracted concepts. Man was abstracted into citizen, concrete liberty into civil liberty, and the process involved even the abstraction of the administrative system. This mode of

thinking culminated in the notion of the homogeneity of the body politic -- a body composed of abstract units that need a regulatory organ, i.e. the state.

[I]ls avaient compris et voulu l'Etat comme conséquence de l'application de la Raison a la Société. Il fallait un pouvoir abstrait, rigoureux, géométrique, à qui tout aboutit et de qui tout dérive. Sans passions et sans préjugés. Un pouvoir qui ne repose pas sur l'homme toujours faillible, ni sur Dieu trop lointain. Aussi exacte qu'une balance, aussi simple qu'une équerre. Un état qui joue le rôle dans la société du cerveau dans l'être vivant.⁴⁸

The state then was considered the goal and the product of revolution rather than its enemy. Similarly, the state with its institutions grew to be viewed as the bastion in which liberty was enshrined, rather than the power from which one wanted to be liberated.

La liberté se trouve ainsi victime à la fois de la rationalité (on fait entrer dans le plus rationnel des systèmes) et de l'abstraction.⁴⁹

To the extent that the state came to embody liberty, the revolution itself became an absolute. For the first time, the goal of a revolution went beyond attaining concrete liberty to become the solution for social problems and the triumph of virtue. No longer was revolution localized, but it became all-embracing. Man was to become completely new, with the state as the rational guarantor. Thus the universal power of the state became indissolubly linked with the

⁴⁸ AR, p. 96.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 99.

absolute nature of revolution.

L'une est absolue parce qu'elle aboutit à l'Etat. L'autre est universel parce qu'il est le produit de la révolution.⁵⁰

Every change and innovation brought about by the French Revolution led to the growth of the state, and this aspect was absolutely new at this stage of history. Furthermore, the post-1789 events seemed to start an irrevocable process, for every revolution since, no matter what the ideology, has only increased the power of the state. In this position, Ellul does not concentrate on the formal element of dictatorship: he means that every revolution results in institutional changes to form a state that is more rational, more total, better organized, more powerful, with a greater capacity for oppression. In this way, the French Revolution became an indicative signal of the way in which events would develop.

Finally, with the French Revolution came for the first time the tendency to praise revolution for itself. There had been ideologies surrounding revolutions before, and we have seen above that the hope involved in revolution led to the sense of participation in a sacred drama. Never before, though, had a revolution surpassed even that stage to take on an absolute value in itself. During the French Revolution, it seemed as if there were a new religion of which the state was the high priest, and in which revolu-

⁵⁰ AR, p. 101.

tion was the absolute moment when freedom and goodness would come to men. Ellul says revolution became an experience equivalent to the religious one of mysterium tremendum.

Voilà le problème posé au centre de ces dix ans--le projet révolutionnaire devient moins important que le fait révolutionnaire recu comme image notrice glorifiée.

La révolution triomphante devient objet de foi, et demande à l'homme une croyance absolue, une adhésion sans réserve.⁵¹

The fact that revolution itself took on such proportions cannot be accounted for solely by the vast propaganda machine of the French Revolution, for it could touch only an already receptive audience. During the events of the French Revolution he sees the formulation of the modern conception of revolution that, since then, has come to be taken for granted. In those events, revolution became an integral and accepted part of the myths of science, history and progress that were gaining ascendancy. Those myths could be later interpreted in various ways, but they were firmly established by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Revolution, the means by which progress was to be inaugurated, became entrenched in history as an end in itself. This incorporation reminds one of the supremacy of technique even in the mythic consciousness!

⁵¹ AR, p. 104.

e) By revealing the decisiveness of the events of 1789-99 for man's understanding of the meaning of revolution, Ellul shows only the radical newness of the myth. He does not thereby produce a definition of revolution, nor a model of its characteristics since 1789. The attempt to delineate a model for revolution is an intellectual exercise that is different from belief in the myth. He shows the difficulty involved by revealing the drawbacks of the major attempts to do so. In short, none of them reveals the diversity of the phenomena of revolutions, and any abstract schema makes revolution seem 'de-natured' when it is removed from the concrete. Following his usual approach, Ellul clears away much of the debris he sees cluttering clear thinking about the definition of revolution. He dismisses the ideas of industrial revolution, radical social, economic or structural changes, the aspect of the speed of change as being decisive, or the solely ethical connotations of some writers. Despite the inadequacies of these attempted definitions and models however, they do show the change in the images of revolution since 1789. Clearly though, the single most important and influential interpretation since the French Revolution, remains that of Marx.

En Marx, mythe et modele étaient étroitement liés, de même étaient unis la considération intellectuelle et le but d'intervention. La première servant la second. Je ne reprendrai

pas la construction du modèle révolutionnaire par Marx, il est trop connu.⁵²

What Ellul does want to show is the elements of Marx's thought that are significant for, and that have affected the interpretation that is currently prevalent.

III The Significance of Marx's Interpretation of History and Revolution

a) The question 'Why Marx?' never arises in most quarters, for revolution has become in fact synonymous with a Marxist interpretation, and never with any other form such as anarchy or fascism. Almost everybody, including the bourgeoisie itself, and even opponents of Marxism, has adopted what Ellul calls the orientation and the commonplaces of the socialist outlook.

This becomes even more accentuated when we realize that the ready-made ideas of our day, the sociological assumptions, the common stereotypes are all by-products of Marxism.⁵³

For him, it is even accurate to say that alternate pathways for the discussion of revolution have been more or less blocked. More clearly than most of his contemporaries, Ellul recognizes that there are other forms of revolution, and of these, he seems most pre-occupied with Nazism. Not only does he claim that it was a genuine revolutionary attempt in modern Germany, but also he adds that students

⁵² AR, p. 110.

⁵³ Critique, p. 18.

of revolutionary tactics err if they do not examine Hitler's methods along with those of Mao and Trotsky. Finally he warns against a recurrence of the phenomenon that could well result from Marcusean exhortations. There are nevertheless, basically two reasons why he centres on Marxism, neither of which implies that he accepts it as self-evidently true. First, the most important thing for him is to identify the unitary nature of all modern revolutionary forms; for example, both fascism and socialism are subsumed under the same myth, and each leads to the same results. He would say that they have more in common with each other than either does with true revolution. Since it is the latter contrast that he has set out to show, then he must make his analysis of modern thought on revolution at its height. This he sees as Marxism.

It seemed to me that the method of Karl Marx (but not of Communists) was superior to all that I had encountered elsewhere.⁵⁴

Secondly, he chooses Marxism, precisely because it has become a new commonplace. In The Political Illusion, he shows how easily Nazi doctrine could have reached a similar place if Hitler had won. To attack Naziism now though, proves little for virtually nobody is defending it. Because Marxism has such a firm hold however, it is necessary to expose what it is really saying and to what end it

⁵⁴ Jacques Ellul, Introducing Jacques Ellul (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970), p. 5.

is leading.

b) Before moving directly to Marx's works, one can speak generally about his role as a persuasive advocate of the new myths discussed above. Until after the French Revolution, only the bourgeois were held strongly by them, and that group dominated because of its position in the revolution. The wage-earners etc. however, really did not share the enthusiasm for work as a value in itself.

He [Karl Marx] was an extremely coherent interpreter of the bourgeois myth of work and because he was a socialist, became one of the most active agents in disseminating this myth among the working classes.⁵⁵

In doing so, he linked work to happiness and in turn to the fundamental myth of science. In a similar way, Marx also provided the overall meaning that men could attribute to their specific revolutionary acts which were indeed different from those of the past. This is not merely a philosophical question, for after Marx, the approach to revolution did change towards a future orientation and towards a new synthesis of society. Again, this was not Marx's sole responsibility, nor was that meaning inevitable. Still it is true that whereas the French Revolution came to see revolution within the course of history, after Marx, revolutionaries felt that they were part of the very meaning of history itself. In this way, he linked revolution also

⁵⁵ "Modern Myths", p. 29.

with the great myth of history. As far as one person could be, he was the missionary to the masses of the new religion.

c) There are currently several different interpretations of the formation of Marx's position, but Ellul accepts the one that says he [Marx] was impressed by certain events in history, notably the French Revolution, which he duly interpreted. Then he grafted this interpretation to the philosophy he had derived from Hegel. Ellul maintains that Marx's apprehension of the French Revolution was correct, but that his final understanding of those observations was incorrect. Marx was accurate when he saw that the bourgeoisie filled the revolutionary role in France. He also saw clearly that the bourgeoisie wanted to seize power in order to align society (and particularly the political realm) in relation to the new economic forces it controlled. Finally, he was equally right to show that it was largely a question of conflict among different social groups with varying interests. From this reading of historical events though, Ellul feels Marx made the basic error of generalizing from the particular case.

Il en a conclu à la prédominance du pouvoir économique à l'alignement des structures politiques après que celle-ci auraient donné à la classe montante toutes ses chances de développement.⁵⁶

Also, in order to show that it was not intrinsically only

⁵⁶ AR, p. 94.

the bourgeoisie who could make a revolution, Marx concentrated on the theory of class struggle. What Marx did not understand was the unique position of the bourgeoisie at that particular time, and that their own prime concern was the spread of rationality to all areas, but particularly to the state. In short, according to Ellul, Marx could have chosen between two different interpretations of the French Revolution -- either that of class conflict and economic materialism etc., or else that of the growth of the power of the state. At the time when Marx decided, there were no firm grounds for one choice over the other. Since then however, the former interpretation has become dominant, while Ellul feels that the latter is correct: his thesis concerning Marx's account of revolution and history can be summed up in the following way.

Or, il faut bien prendre conscience de ce que à partir du moment où l'on démontre dans une construction dialectique que la liberté est le fait de la nécessité, à ce moment est plantée la semence de la trahison de la révolution: devenue le fruit de cette dialectique historique, la révolution ne peut plus être que trahie.⁵⁷

d) In order to understand why he believes that revolution is inevitably betrayed within the very doctrine of Marx, one must look at Ellul's account of what follows from the two main aspects of Marx's thought that have influenced the principle tenets ever since. The first of these is the

⁵⁷AR, p. 138.

notion of the objective situation. According to Marx's thought, there is always one particular point where the forces combine best to enable the provocation of a crisis to bring about the classless society. Conversely, without the necessary convergence of forces, no action can be effective. Thus in Marxist terms, it is a question of the proper evaluation of the situation in order to destroy the oppressors, but not in the hopes of changing the basic elements. The second important aspect of the application of the dialectic to history is a certain automatic quality to the revolutionary process. The dialectic establishes a double relationship between the past and the present -- one of continuity and one of discontinuity. In terms of the revolution itself, Marxists really do not wish to choose between the two.

[T]antôt il parle de la révolution comme d'une vague qui prend le Parti et le Proletariat où ils sont et les porte au-delà de l'obstacle, tantôt au contraire il la met au-delà de tout ce qui existe, dans un avenir qui est la négation du présent, au terme d'une épuration infinie.⁵⁸

In either case, the roles are fixed in advance and clearly a necessity functions with respect to the role of the proletariat. Naturally, this automatic quality guarantees the success of the enterprise. That is why Marx could say that although all previous revolutions had failed, now that

⁵⁸ AR, p. 141, quoted from Merleau-Ponty, Les Aventures de la Dialectique, p. 126.

the scientific forces of history were known, the revolution would succeed. Obviously, it would also follow that a failed revolution could not be a proper revolution at all, but only a mistake.

1) The first conclusion Ellul maintains must be drawn from these two premises is that the revolution must be totally rational, in order to achieve the required success. This tenet in turn puts the notion of revolt with its depth and spontaneity into question. There is a relentless rigour in Marxist logic that does not totally exclude revolt as a tool, on the condition that it become something other than itself. In the final analysis, it does not matter what the proletariat think, for they have a fixed part to play, and any revolt would have to be guided carefully into the revolutionary state. Spontaneity is suspect for it does not discern the meaning of history beyond itself. The problem is then raised of whether the basic themes can be imposed on the proletariat, or whether that would negate the idea of the objective situation.

Lénine analyse longuement cette relation et comment le théoricien marche en avant, mais d'un pas seulement.⁵⁹

However the question of spontaneity may be explained in terms of the dialectic, Ellul maintains that it is a far cry from any concrete man in a state of revolt.

⁵⁹
AR, p. 144.

Les hommes révoltés sont bien, en fait, malgré les explications théoriques une simple masse de manoeuvre et leur révolte ne doit pas être prise en considération pour elle-même.⁶⁰

He goes on to argue that in excluding spontaneity, Marx also excluded what is the most human. That omission explains why Ellul says that Marx's work finally appears as a game between philosophy and socialism, in abstraction from human beings.

ii) The second conclusion from the original premises of the application of the dialectic to history is that the conception of revolution must exclude value other than itself. Marx himself often said that as a scientist, he had no interest in liberty or justice or any other ideal. His task rather was the working out of a scientific theory. Even though Marxists resist describing Marx's works as such, and there are passages where Marx clearly does not want to be totally mechanistic, Ellul sees no other logical conclusion. Man also loses all value, for history becomes the sole judge, but only after the fact. Marx, it is true, did have a vision that the final outcome of history would be moral, and there is also the conviction that one should affirm what seemed to be moving in that direction. Yet at the same time, success come only if one has made the correct calculations of the objective situation.

⁶⁰
AR, p. 145.

On nous annonce alors que, à la fin des temps, tout se découvrira: je saisis mal ce qu'est cette fin des temps «historique-metahistorique», alors que le présent est si rigoureux que l'on peut scientifiquement déterminer l'action utile. Dans cette perspective, il est clair que la révolution devient à son tour un «en soi». Elle est un facteur indispensable de l'histoire, et reçoit de celle-ci sa justification. Elle est «la locomotive de l'histoire».⁶¹

It is not merely the changing of personnel, nor the speeding up of the process already started. Rather the revolution will lead men to a totally new and radically different era that cannot be described. Because of the completeness of the change, revolution becomes the final word, the only ultimate value that one can utter. It is necessary for the revolution to succeed no matter how many lives it costs. In this respect Ellul sees no contradiction between Marx and Stalin, for the sacrifices are themselves conditions for success. Also the revolution must be irreversible -- it can be the revolution only if it reaches a point of no-return. One cannot help but recognize that "le seul facteur irrécupérable est le massacre".⁶² Marx never reached this conclusion himself, but Ellul sees here a contradiction between the thought expressed by Marx and the unavoidable conclusions from his presuppositions.

La révolution doit être inexpiable, ou elle n'est qu'apparence, c'est-à-dire réformisme. Tel est le point d'aboutissement inéluctable

⁶¹AR, pp. 150-51.

⁶²Ibid., p. 152.

de l'inscription de la révolution dans
l'histoire.⁶³

e) From this analysis of the essential features of Marx's new conceptions, Ellul moves on, to his analysis of what happens when such a schema becomes the raison d'être of men of action (Interestingly for those who see Marx as a prophet of immanentized Christianity, throughout this section, Ellul draws an analogy between the Christian Church until the time of the Reformation and the course of Marxism to date.) Possibly the most significant element in Marx's scientific socialism is his inseparable unity between the theoretical and the practical. Obviously, after the rejection of the spontaneity of revolts, there can be nothing left but theory and practice, but Marx could consider neither one alone. The doctrine takes on an increasingly important role as a prelude to revolution in that it can expose and de-mystify current ideologies. At the same time, because history is the judge, it is absolutely essential to discover the rule of praxis. Marx's thought is inconceivable without this unity of theory and tactics. In general, Ellul concludes that

l'homme est tel qu'il ne peut pas d'avantage
rester longtemps sur les sommets respirer l'air
raréfié de l'exigence révolutionnaire en Marx
et qu'il cherche nécessairement des accommodements,

⁶³AR, p. 153.

ce qui entraîne la dégradation et de la
théorie et de la tactique.⁶⁴

It is not simply the fact that Marx's doctrine was too 'idealistic' for mere mortals to carry out, though certainly lesser men than Marx have taken over his work. Also, it is important to see that the very application of the dialectic to history leads inevitably to a betrayal of revolution. To demonstrate this relationship, Ellul first shows that history does in fact indicate that the idea of revolution was badly betrayed. This is a step preliminary to showing that the process was bound to happen right from the beginning. He starts by tracing rather briefly the degeneration both on the side of the theory and the tactics.

Since Marx, it would appear that the doctrine has undergone four transformations. Shortly after Marx died, disputes broke out both over what he had actually said, as well as over the nature of the given situation. The various versions became increasingly obscure until the basis of the doctrine became primarily a verbal discourse. Then in reaction to the apparently infinite number of subtleties, the doctrine became formulated into a kind of catechism that everyone could learn, even though such a simplification clearly abused the complexity and the greatness of the original thought. This was the stage that brought in the dimension of ideology. Once the doctrine had been simply

⁶⁴ AR, p. 173.

schematized, there was a need for strict orthodoxy, even if it contradicted the facts. At this third stage, the formulations were quite at odds with the doctrine of Marx. How can there be a just praxis when certain facts are denied? The final stage is the one in which Marxism is currently bogged down. The doctrine has become a given, unreflected presupposition. Now one starts from the doctrinal position that socialism is a good in itself and that any situation is objectively ready for revolution. The culmination of the process leads to a situation where doctrine has become meaningless except as an article of blind faith. Even for leading figures such as Franz Fanon or Regis Debray, doctrine is now never a question, but it has become almost a fetish. As a result of this degradation of doctrine, the only other significant aspect of Marxism remains tactics, pure and simple and alone.

f) He maintains that a similar process has taken place with regards to tactics. The kind of analysis originally demanded was simply too difficult, so that eventually Marxists became preoccupied with other people's tactics that had worked before, rather than with their own situation. Lenin, for example, made a brilliant analysis of the tactics needed for Russia, but these came to be seen as a technique or a guaranteed recipe for others to follow. Lenin had showed the basic formula, while Stalin added bureaucracy to it.

Then there existed only one agency capable of executing that particular set of tactics -- the Party, so that eventually everything except the Party line lost any importance. In this way the tactical thought of Marx was also emasculated, with the result that the Party became the whole of Marxism. Since there developed such a low level of analysis concerning tactics, it became necessary to compensate for that fact with the indiscriminate use of force. The degradation of Marx can be seen most clearly in the resulting view of violence. For both Marx and Lenin, violence was to be necessary for the revolution, but it was to be measured and calculated. Once the doctrine became debased, there could be no tactic except terrorism. This outcome did not spring from the doctrine itself, nor from Marx's primacy of praxis. Rather, it came from the self-contemplation of the Party, with a resulting lack of regard for the facts. Terror was a simplistic alternative to a well-calculated tactic. After all, if one has power, why not get faster results without all the subtle analysis? Thus by this stage, any studies that are made, concern when, how and where to use violence,⁶⁵ but never studies of the enemy nor of the meaning of the revolution in a particular setting. As in

⁶⁵Interestingly enough, this is one of the commonplaces taken over by non-Marxists and non-revolutionaires (except in the most banal sense). See for example the position on violence taken by D. Gill of the World Council of Churches in In Search for a Theology of Development.

the case of theory, this tendency can be seen most clearly in the writings of Debray and other contemporary Latin American Marxists.

Et dans la violence d'expression de ces écrits on sent l'exigence mystique de ceux qui sont exaspérés par la lenteur et les tergiversations de partis communistes sud-américains.⁶⁶

Once again, Ellul reaches the same conclusions and traces them to the same source.

La révolution est trahie quand elle perd son objectif, quand elle se réduit à un système, elle est trahie quand elle est devenue un phénomène normal de et à l'histoire.⁶⁷

g) At this stage of his argument, Ellul must show that the betrayal of revolution was inherent in the very pre-suppositions of Marx; otherwise it becomes merely an unfortunate fluke of history. Put very briefly, by making revolution rational and by definition successful because it is part of the direction and course of history, Marx betrayed revolution into serving the needs of state power which is the antithesis to any proper understanding of revolution. The results are also diametrically opposed to what Marx envisaged, but they do derive from his original assumptions. Ellul outlines the two definitive aspects of the spread of Marxism that have been essential for its

⁶⁶
AR, p. 171.

⁶⁷
Ibid., p. 173.

alleged success, but which also led to the growth of the power of the state. The first concerns the conditions under which the Marxist revolutions have taken place; that is to say, that they have all occurred in areas clearly not matured in the dialectic outlined by Marx. In his own terms, one could not even consider the communist revolution without the stage of industrial capitalism with its creation of the bourgeoisie, the industrial proletariat etc. Ellul points out that in reality a different situation exists. He argues that one has only to look at the successful communist revolutions to see that none of the prerequisites has been in operation. Success, which should be automatic if these are true revolutions, comes in entirely different circumstances. To account for the success then, there has been a re-alignment in the explanatory doctrine, so that, for example, imperialism or unequal development becomes the substitute for Marx's dialectical materialism, class is now read as nation, and the poor become the equivalent of the proletariat. No longer does one look for the objective situation, for any situation is revolutionary. Tactics become a matter of strategies to overthrow a particular state or regime in order to accelerate the modernization process. This result has nothing to do with Marx's analysis of already industrialized nations, and nothing in common with his view of the meaning of revolution. Yet in order to be a successful revolution within the course of

modern history, this route was the only possible one. Now revolution has come to consist of the taking over of a political power by a different group.

Alors que dans cette perspective, le tout est de vaincre les tenants du pouvoir, de s'emparer de l'appareil étatique, d'occuper les postes: le reste de la révolution se fera par la suite et par le moyen de l'Etat. Des lors, la technique révolutionnaire n'a pas tellement à se situer par rapport à une société globale à ses buts profonds, à ses structures économiques, mais par rapport à un Etat donné.⁶⁸

The take-over of the state by a superior power means that the existing structures become even more powerful.

The other prerequisite for success in Marxist revolutions, another aspect that shows the inevitable trend towards the state, has been the dictatorship of the proletariat. This section of theory was never completely developed in Marx's writings, but one theme did stand out. The dictatorship would not be permanent, for the revolution would spell the end of the state. The history of successful communism however, has indicated, that far from being destroyed, the state is strengthened indefinitely. Again there was an attempted justification in Lenin's "The State and the Revolution", but once more Ellus considers that it bore little resemblance to what Marx envisaged. The state became increasingly powerful, but in the process the leaders were following the only way possible to effect the revolution.

⁶⁸
AR, p. 178.

[I]l est apparu un fait évident à ceux qui agissaient... que seul l'Etat permettait l'action, qu'il était l'instrument le plus adapté--et réciproquement il présentait une telle force universelle dans la société que l'on pouvait bien s'en emparer mais ni le détruire ni l'arracher du corps social.⁶⁹

The monolithic structure of the Party was both necessary and deadly for successful revolution. Because of the nature of power, after political success, it can no longer criticize itself or carry on a dialectical process, and to think that might be possible, as did Trotsky, is to misunderstand the state.

Croire que la dictature est la transition vers la liberté, c'est faire un acte de foi absurde, sans aucune espèce de raison valable intellectuellement, ni aucune référence de fait, ni aucune base sociologique, c'est idéologie de propogande à l'état pur.⁷⁰

It is this mistake about the nature of state power that is the crucial factor in the betrayal of the revolution.

Marx did not always present a consistent view of the state, but generally he saw it subsumed under class struggle. In other words, he saw the state as part of the superstructure and not as part of the substructure. On the other hand, when Ellul looks at history, he can see no motif that is always the same. The only generalization he makes, following the analysis of de Jouvenal, is that

⁶⁹ AR, p. 182.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 189.

one can see the uninterrupted growth of power, which in concrete form, has culminated in the modern state. Yet, it is also an error to equate the modern state with political power as it has always been. The modern state, the product of the past two hundred years, is an ever-expanding power, independent of anything else and obeying its own laws. Ellul's thesis says it is totally wrong to think that the various structures of the state will be different under a socialist system than a capitalist one. The state is not subordinate to any system at all: rather the structures of the state will change the new regime or ideology. "En effet, cet Etat impose la loi et son ordre à ceux qui l'utilisent."⁷¹ Ellul's most complete analysis of the modern state which is the same under any ideology is in The Political Illusion. In Autopsie de la Révolution, there is only a summary of that position which he does not and cannot repeat in full. He accepts entirely the Weberian thesis concerning bureaucracy, and then he characterizes the state in three different ways -- (a) it takes charge of all activities within society, (b) it becomes more and more abstracted from the individuals composing it, and (c) even when protesting the use of power, men still put their faith in the state to find a solution. These characteristics, for Ellul, cannot be the goals of revolution, no matter how these have

⁷¹AR, p. 197.

been stated. They are nevertheless the results when revolution is rationalized and put within the meaning of history.

Ellul does not hesitate to claim that every single revolution in modern history has furthered this growth of the tyranny of the state over every domain. We are now at the point where revolutions take place only when the state fails to ensure that everything will run properly. In the final analysis then, revolutions mean no more than the breaking down of a weak power and the setting up of a stronger one with more control. As for the state itself, there are no more rules or limits. This, for him, is the course of recent history rather than the way of class struggle.

Ainsi les faits nous obligent à conclure à une erreur totale de Marx sur l'Etat et, par conséquent, sur le sens de l'histoire.⁷²

Not only did Marx make a mistake, but he also contributed to the expansion of this vise-like power. He successfully imbued all modern revolutionaries with the idea that revolution must take place within the dictates of history, rather than with the traditional concept of revolution against history. To do this, he insisted that revolution must be rational and successful within history. Because these basic dogmas have been accepted, Marx inadvertently (but with

⁷²AR, p. 199.

no alternative) put revolution within the real meaning and direction of history at this time; i.e., the growth of the state, which because of its totality renders any genuine revolution impossible. If Marxists had really opposed the state in the name of doctrine, the results would have disregarded the objective situation, and in any case, they would never have been successful for that stance would have been against the current of history. The reason that Marxist revolutions have been successful lies in the fact that the doctrines concerning the taking of power and also class struggle, increase directly the power of the state even more rapidly than might otherwise have been the case. Once one sees the true nature of the state, Ellu would stress that one also understands that anything tending towards its growth is a betrayal of revolution. It would be a betrayal even of the older idea of concrete liberty or freedom from oppression, to say nothing of the idea of revolution to bring about a radically new phase of history as the end of history.

Mais à partir de l'erreur d'interprétation, la révolution faite en fonction de sa doctrine ne pouvait plus être qu'une révolution trahie: il n'y avait aucune autre issue, aucune autre chance.⁷³

⁷³ AR, p. 201.

h) In considering this central section of Autopsie de la Révolution in which Ellul makes his most complete analysis to date of Marx and Marxism, arise several basic questions that cannot be fully exhausted in this thesis, arise. (a) Is this account of Marx correct in terms of what he really did say? (b) Is Marx or Ellul correct? (c) What are the results in Ellulian terms? The third question will be taken up again in the Conclusion which will examine what Ellul considers to be the essence of true revolution. On a fundamental level, the most important point of issue between Marx and Ellul is the relationship between freedom and necessity. The history of Marxist interpretation shows that the relationship Marx had in mind, especially in the final classless society, is not obvious.⁷⁴ For now, it is sufficient to say that Ellul is of the school of thought that interprets Marx as saying that freedom and necessity are in a dialectical process, so that freedom will arise from necessity. Therefore, in order to gain freedom man must submit himself to the order of necessity. It is this point in Marx that is central in the Ellulian interpretation. The second question is beyond the

⁷⁴ The following are merely three ways in which that relationship can be stated in the Marxist tradition. Freedom will dominate necessity, so that work will no longer be alienating. Freedom will absorb necessity until the latter no longer exists as a separate force. Freedom and necessity will become one. Each of these statements gives a different content to that relationship.

scope of this work which is merely to examine Ellul's view of revolution (including Marx's stance) and to determine whether this view is consistent with his theological understanding of revolution. The first question is significant in terms of this paper, for Ellul recognizes the deep impact of Marx on modern thought. Needless to say therefore, if his interpretation of Marx is completely faulty, then so is his critique of contemporary notions of revolution. In this connection, I would say that whatever position one takes with reference to this interpretation of Marx, one must remember that Ellul's powers of understanding the modern situation and modern writings on it are superb. In other words, I would argue that he may make major errors, but these would never result from either sloppy reading or shallow comprehension. It may be essential to recall again that Ellul does not undertake 'objective' studies in the manner of North American political science. Autopsie de la Révolution does not include Marx for the sake of Marx or Marxism alone; rather the book is for the sake of clearing the ground in the interests of Christian realism in confrontation with the biblical revelation. Now, this is a legitimate approach, as long as he does no injury to the internal coherence of Marx, nor to the historical material. The critique of Ellul on Marxist thought can come from three different approaches, two of which would involve the attack that his is only a partial account.

The most serious issue would be that Ellul attacks a caricature of Marx and not the real product. This questioning would be on the grounds that he concentrates on selected passages, and to them he applies the strictest logic, ignoring the most human elements that do in fact exist. He could also be accused of adding further to the caricature by seeing the whole doctrine through the reasoning of analytic philosophy a priori rather than through Marxist dialectic reasoning. He takes scientific socialism strictly at face value, picking up those aspects of Marx's writings that emphasize the mechanistic meaning and order of history while denying any interest in liberty or social welfare. By concentrating on this ironclad logic, Ellul might be accused of isolating his comments from the context in which Marx lived and wrote. In this respect, I think it is safe to say that Marx was taken up with the good society and the eradication of evil as the basis for his whole work. Hannah Arendt has made this point abundantly clear,⁷⁵ or else it can be stated in this way.

No thinker ever had a more passionate hatred of the evils men inflict on each other, nor a greater yearning that such evils should cease.⁷⁶

Similarly, although it is true that the French Revolution formed the paradigm for Marx's interpretation of history, this study was inseparable from his own awareness of early

⁷⁵See On Revolution, pp. 55-61.

⁷⁶George Grant, Philosophy in the Mass Age (Toronto: 1959), p. 57.

industrial Germany and his work in Britain. Finally, even though Ellul notes the ambivalence in Marx's own works about the mechanisms of history, he tends to underplay it. In another writing, Ellul himself asserts that the goal of Marxism is consistent with that of social justice.

But if I attack the left in its commonplaces, that does not mean I am against the left. On the contrary it is because I believe in values only the left has stated, elucidated and partially adopted (without acting on them), because the left has sustained the hope of mankind, because the left has engaged in the struggle for justice, that I cannot tolerate the absurdity of the present left.⁷⁷

This would appear to be a direct contradiction to the thrust of his argument in Autopsie de la Révolution, which truly does view Marxism in mechanistic categories. This apparently wilful misreading of Marx can be understood from two different perspectives. First of all, Ellul wants to look at the doctrine itself as it stands, without psychologizing it into something different. He assumes that for the large part, Marx knew exactly what he wanted to say and said it clearly in his outline of scientific socialism. The root of the problem therefore, lies not in the notion that Marx was unaware of social justice, but from what he saw as the solution for the social evils. For Marx that answer would come from following the dictates of history. Ellul wants to show that the inner logic of Marxism is consistent, but

because of a misinterpretation of history, it has led to a result different from what Marx had in mind. Similarly, Ellul describes the present situation in Weberian terms, not because they provide the only definition of reason and organization but because they are the result of accepting the myths and the course of history in the modern age, rather than battling against it. The good intentions and the dialectical mode of reasoning of Marx and his followers are now less important than the factual situation to which their interpretation of the good society has led. The real situation to which men have been led by following these myths, according to Ellul, was described more accurately by Weber than by Marx. On the other hand, perhaps ironically, Ellul claims that he has not set out to expose Marx's view of history or revolution as such, but merely to show how new it was, and what its impact has been on contemporary self-understanding. Ellul argues that by putting revolution within the meaning of history, men have since felt that they will be successful in revolution through rationality. It is this factor that has led the strengthening of modern statism. In order to refute that argument, one would have to postulate some aspect of Marx other than belief in his scientific socialism or his dialectical materialism as significant for subsequent Marxist revolutions. It may well be that only his passion for social welfare and not his proposed solution has inspired all modern Marxists. That

argument would imply though, that all Marxists after Marx, have themselves indulged in a caricature of Marx! It seems to me that Ellul's starting point takes Marx very seriously in that it accepts the presuppositions as given, and then examines both their logical consequences and what they have produced in history.

A second major critique concerning this section of Autopsie de la Révolution, would centre on the fact that it is also a selected account of Ellul's total thought on the subject. This partial rendition may leave the reader somewhat in the dark, for he cannot discern the other aspects necessary for a total account of what is possible and what is not possible for Marxism, according to Ellul. Not only is his specific theological basis missing, but also in conjunction with his account of Marxism, one must read Violence for his understanding of the order of necessity on the social plane, and the five laws of violence which is itself of the order of necessity.⁷⁸ There, one can see more clearly his opposition to the Marxist doctrine of theory and tactics. For example, Marx and Lenin's view of limited, calculable violence is simply not possible! There is obviously a danger in missing the full import of what he is saying, if one studies a single social work in vacuo, and one can get the impression that Ellul is taking

⁷⁸ Violence, pp. 93-108.

advantage of this situation. This danger and difficulty seem to be inherent in the principle of confrontation he has set up and in his separation of social from theological works. For the sake of maximum clarity however, and in order to study different aspects of modernity in detail, it is difficult to see an alternative. The same comment about missing links in the argument does not stand as strongly, when one considers his works in toto.

The last major question that arises from this account of Marxism concerns the unitary and total nature of all modern phenomena. This is a problem that cannot be resolved completely at this time, for it recurs in all Ellul's writings. On the one hand he says that all forms of modern revolution lead to identical results that are so all-embracing, that virtually any effort to break statism and technique only make them more powerful. This doctrine taken alone would be a powerful impetus to inactivity altogether, unless one puts it together with a theological doctrine of the overcoming of necessity -- and that impetus cannot be generated in the purely social realm. On the other hand, there are passages where, for example, he clearly admires Marxism more than Nazism, or where he prefers the goals of the left to those of the right. In the final analysis, the social forces with which man has to contend remain equal in effect; yet they are hierarchical in importance at any one time. Again it would appear that this

seeming contradiction results from the confrontation between the transcendent, eternally judging revelation, and the 'here and now' of the concrete environment. In any case, one comes back to the position that it is impossible to accept or reject one aspect of Ellul's thought, except within the totality of the whole.

Whatever obstacles may block the acceptance of his commentary on Marx, it is true that Ellul's analysis of the modern material is brilliant. His thought touches not only the logical outcome of what he has questioned in Marx, but more so the meaning of the events themselves. Furthermore, Ellul provides one of the most striking critiques of widespread popular thinking about society and politics. As one would expect from his previous writings, Ellul is in top form when he exposes scathingly the forces and myths and commonplaces of the contemporary preoccupation with revolution. In the last section of Autopsie de la Révolution dealing strictly with the social and historical significance of modern revolution, he traces the current banality in virtually all comments on revolution today. By the end of the chapter "La Révolution Banalisée", he has left little doubt about his third central thesis in this area.

IV The Epitome of the Betrayal Lies in the Banality of
the Meaning of Revolution Today

a) Because of the great physical changes brought about by the technological society, combined with all the talk about revolution, it seems as if we live in the midst of a revolutionary age. Ellul argues from exactly the opposite point of view that revolution has merely become another object for consumption in a society that wants increasing excitement. "La révolution est le pain quotidien de la société d'abondance et de consommation."⁷⁹ The final results of accepting revolution as part of the normal course and meaning of history, rather than as a desperate cry against the way things are, lead to revolution as a common, but empty cliché. Since everybody believes in revolution, and since everything worth speaking about has become revolutionary, even the modern myth of revolution either has been rendered meaningless or else it has become totally divorced from reality. Even worse, the assimilation of the notion of revolution by the bourgeois is in reality counter-revolutionary, for people believe that great and genuine change is taking place. Even in places where the technological society is not yet fully-blown, as is the case in Latin America for instance, people think that great change is about to take place. Because this belief is pre-

⁷⁹ AR, p. 204.

valent, the basic structures are being conserved from any genuine attack. As a result, technique and statism are evolving by their own internal law without rejection from any quarter. In short, when revolution stops being an irrational protest and becomes part of a calculable system or process, it can become only meaningless, for it is absorbed into the totality of that system. To illustrate just exactly how widespread is the triteness about revolution in present society, Ellul discusses his assessment of the broad aspects of rhetoric and politics. These two, taken together, prove that in effect no idea of revolution remains at all.

Modern acceptance of revolution has diluted the language of revolution to the point where it is applied to the most banal categories imaginable. Any change in society, no matter how important or trivial, is labelled as revolutionary -- decolonization, evolution, industrial change, or even a new product on the market. This becomes such an abuse of terminology that it verges on the absurd. One only has to see an advertisement for 'a revolutionary new deodorant' to see the force of this argument. "Mot de la prostitution intellectuelle de ce temps."⁸⁰ On a more serious level perhaps, to equate de-colonization for instance, with revolution is to obscure the real nature of the

⁸⁰ AR, p. 231.

forces at work and to confuse the possibilities for newly independent areas. In either case, the rhetoric both symbolizes and contributes to the debasement of the notion of revolution. Both these tendencies of absurdity and confusion are manifested in the general cultural fields of art, theatre, and literature. Here any new form is hailed as a revolutionary break with the tradition. This kind of art can take various forms, including that of straight propaganda for contemporary movements. Since propaganda itself is the epitome of the alienation of the human spirit through controlled mechanisms, it can hardly be an effective tool in the strike against alienation. If art and theatre are something other than propaganda, they now take forms that are equally non-revolutionary. One way to be called 'revolutionary' is to predict and to cater in advance to the ever-escalating aspirations of bored people. This style merely covers up the source of meaninglessness in modernity. Another possibility for art is to take on an esoteric development that needs a constant explanation apart from its own expression -- a need that undercuts the claim to art. Finally, a third direction he sees for non-propaganda art is to experiment with ever new and different techniques. With this approach, art becomes a representative servant to glorify the technological society. All these so-called revolutionary aspects of art do nothing to frustrate the aims and workings of their society. Ellul would see this

process as inevitable, for on closer scrutiny, art has ceased to be revolutionary at all. According to him, surrealism was the only genuine recent reaction against the modes of expression of society, but the important thing to remember is that authentic surrealism was eventually pushed into silence. The same is not true of any supposedly revolution art today! Within the twentieth century (and he does not generalize beyond this era) according to Ellul art either expresses society, or else it acts as a safety-valve to let off pressure, so that the basic mechanisms can work without interruption. Although the medium of literature might seem a more viable one to express revolutionary ideals, here the tendency to think of fiction as reality itself only exacerbates the confusion between rhetoric and reality. The final result in all cases is that the present structures of society are only strengthened.

b) It would be fatuous to indicate that modern thinkers do not talk about revolution in the political realm, nor does Ellul ignore it. Once again though, when revolution becomes common talk, it becomes abstracted from the concrete. One does not become a more pure revolutionary at all, but the philosophizing has removed all the painful aspects of killing and blood. Instead, revolution is idealized to sound communal and fun. One can trace this abstraction and idealization again to Marx, who described the required

violence as a sort of antiseptic surgical operation that would bother nobody except perhaps the oppressors. In this way the revolution becomes in itself a festival with no more horror involved in it than in a boy-scout exercise

Cette description de la fête est erronée, elle peut servir d'appât de propogande, mais elle empêche ensuite l'acte révolutionnaire d'aboutir, car il ne débouche finalement que sur une vaste surprise-partie, puisque c'est cela même qu'on avait promis à ceux qui s'y on engagés. Cette théorie est par conséquent profondément démobilisatrice.⁸¹

The talk about revolution as a political issue seems the most profound and occupies a lot of space in journals and newspapers, but that talk is equally corrupted. It reveals that revolution has been tamed and assimilated, and by that token, it has become a popular object for mass consumption.

All that remains in his discussion of the use of vocabulary surrounding revolution today is his account of the wide appeal of these trite generalizations. At this stage in modern myths, revolutionary language is popular with even the most non-revolutionary types of people and that example is typical of the final betrayal of revolution. All the reasons are interdependent and are also inherent in what he has already said about revolution within history. Basically, Ellul argues that the calibre of life in the technological society is so mediocre, that there is a craving for excitement and a need to feel as if one is

⁸¹ AR, p. 230.

breaking out of the dull confines of existence. Revolutionary talk fills this need, but with the added seal of approval that it exists in the name of progress which everyone accepts as an article of faith. Not only is revolution the instrument of progress, but also there is no longer any suffering involved. One can get the desired excitement without pain and without giving up one's conformity or one's need for order and stability, for everything is in the plan of things. Thus seemingly contradictory desires are satisfied with no price to pay and no questions asked about the basis of modern beliefs. The assimilation of revolution goes beyond the fact that its very notion has become verbally bankrupt, so that people no longer know a meaning for the word. At worst, that situation would be a question of semantics that conceivably could be remedied to make the word apply to the correct phenomena. In actual political life, in whatever way it is verbalized, Ellul maintains that the whole thrust of the revolutionary concept has also been absorbed into the given structures of the state.

Politically in the past, revolution was always against the state as the enemy. Only with Oliver Cromwell, and later with Robespierre and Saint-Just did it become even conceivable to link the two together in the most extreme circumstances. It required two modifications to produce the complete about-face in that orientation. The

first of course, was Marx's making revolution part of the meaning of history. The second was the discovery that, contrary to the hopes of Marx, there would be a long stretch of time between the political revolution and the final socio-economic revolution leading to the classless society. During that interim period, the organization necessary to produce the final stage would be in the hands of the dictatorship of the proletariat (i.e. the Party). The state itself becomes revolutionary for it is in the hands of the revolutionary class. Ellul re-iterates that even though this connection is a total fiction, it derives its power from the fact that it is believed. Thus in a complete reversal of the traditional relation, the state becomes the sole acceptable definition of revolution.

[L]a plus grande admiration doit provenir de cette remarquable inversion selon laquelle l'Etat qui a toujours été l'objet de haine des révolutions est devenu purement et simplement en lui-même la révolution absolue.⁸²

This tendency is particularly noticeable in Communist regimes, but it is equally true of almost all states. The argument becomes clearer when one considers how many governments, of either the left or the right, claim to be revolutionary. Particularly when a new government is formed, belief in revolution passes beyond being merely a good, to being a profound expression of the will of the

⁸²AR, p. 242.

people. This conviction combines with the truism that the state has no validity unless it expresses the collective will of the people. Therefore no state appears legitimate, if it does not seem to be founded on a revolutionary act. Furthermore,

si la révolution est la volonté du peuple,
l'Etat qui fait la révolution se trouve en accord
permanent avec son peuple.⁸³

Although the state represents perpetual revolution, it has the added advantage of controlling the wild and hysterical aspects of revolution, in the interests of order, planning, and stability.

Ainsi par cette voie, la révolution devient
l'essence même de l'Etat. Mais cette
identification témoigne en meme temps de cette
dilution révolutionnaire, vulgarisation,
banalisation, inversion.⁸⁴

The identification of revolution with the state (or an alternative state) in the popular view, demonstrates how all real revolutionary activity has been assimilated and neutralized out of existence. For Ellul, it is a contradiction in terms to say that the state manifests the true revolution. By its very nature the state can never be revolutionary, but only counter-revolutionary. The only concern of the modern state is to endure and to expand itself over the social order which produced it and to

⁸³ AR, p. 245-46.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 246.

dominate anything that threatens to put it into question. This is what power is and to date the state is the most complete product. By definition, Ellul concluded that the state and revolution cannot become one, unless one ignores completely the reality of the modern situation.

The emptiness of the current talk about revolution, the co-opting of revolution to serve the needs of the state, and the resulting absence of any truly revolutionary action -- all these point out dramatically that a new definition, a new understanding of revolution must come forth, if it is to retain any social significance at all.

c) There is very little to add to this scathing analysis of the level of contemporary thinking about revolution. What he says is self-evidently true: if one doubts it, he should look at any 'with-it' periodical, or any revolutionary tract. In fact, for a North American, the scene could be considered even more bleak where the order of revolution lies in the popularity of The Greening of America, or articles in Readers' Digest. Or from a different point of view, one can see every day, the increased power of the state in reaction to any suspected threat or even questioning from any group within it. Only the hope, perhaps irrational, remains that the commonplaces accepted by most people do not represent every possible position within modern thought. Is there no profundity

deeper than this level of inanity which is obviously prevalent? If there is not, then to what can this book alone appeal? To ask this niggling question is not to take refuge in shallow optimism, nor to put one's trust in the redemptive quality of the very act of modern revolution in the manner of Fanon. In his righteous anger, Ellul does not leave any room at all for working within modernity from a motivation of the charity the biblical tradition. In short, he has no interest in taking as deeply seriously the point of Marcuse and others that modern technology could overcome suffering that results from scarcity, if men really wished to do so. In light of Matthew 25:36-45, this seems too powerful an argument for the Christian to dismiss lightly. The question of the role of modern revolution in a modern context is a more specific one, but it does involve one's whole response to modernity. A most striking example is the life and death of Camilo Torres. His political platform was firmly within the modern revolutionary framework, but it would be grossly unfair to imply that his working within general modern myths was not motivated by the desire for charity. This is why it is not possible to condemn a man

who truly wished to give his life for his brothers and who knew no other way to do it save by joining his life to theirs and making their cause his own.⁸⁵

⁸⁵Dorothy Day, preface to Camilo Torres: Priest and Revolutionary (London: 1968), p. 32.

Surely his life was a long way from the banalities of modern advertising. It is true nevertheless, that the motivation for charity does not in itself define charity. For this reason, Ellul saves his strongest attack to denounce the popular fad of the theology of revolution which in its various forms accepts the assumptions of modern thought as given truths. As a sociologist, he considers their work to be shoddy: as a Christian, he finds their theology repulsive. To his mind they invert all the Christian principles to glorify the modern powers. Since he considers that Christians are the very ones who should expose these powers, he is the least sympathetic to that work. At this point, one must turn again to Ellul's theology to discover the roots of his beliefs that the current attempts to understand revolution, or to improve the technological society on its own terms, are a complete betrayal of a truly revolutionary Christian charity.

CONCLUSION

WHAT WOULD BE TRUE REVOLUTION?

I In Ellul's analysis of Marxism, he isolated two basic foci for his social criticism. In the first place, Marx did not trace correctly the forces that would dominate the modern world. Ellul would argue that although Marx's account was not entirely ill-founded for the time he was writing, he did not put proper emphasis on the real trends. Marxist analysis is not at all a propos for these times when technique combined with statism, rather than class struggle, is central. Here Marx made a fundamental practical error, for it is of paramount importance to know clearly what the real enemy really is, before giving any prescription of what the revolution will be like. Secondly, Ellul says that Marx's theoretical error about the nature of revolution served only to compound the danger of his misreading of the forces in modern history. That is to say, by placing revolution within the course and meaning of history, and not against the foreseeable sequence of events, Marx betrayed any possibility for a genuine revolution. According to Ellul, far from reversing the situation this mistaken belief has led to a tightening of the vise-

like grip exercised by technique and statism. If one wishes to examine Ellul's own conclusions concerning what would indeed constitute a genuine revolution, then it is essential that he bear in mind both of these points about Marxism. Ellul does not assume that revolution will inevitably erupt: in fact, before a true revolution is even conceivable, two rather specific conditions must prevail -- (a) man must sense that he can no longer continue in his present pattern, and (b) the structures of society must be totally incapable of change that would provide any means even of starting to move towards a different way that would be more conducive to human purposes.

que les structures fondamentales de cette société soit bloquées, c'est-à-dire, qu'elles ne puissent pas évoluer dans le sens de la satisfaction des besoins ressentis, dans le sens d'une ouverture vers un possible.¹

Otherwise, any action is merely within the present structures to serve to strengthen them. Ellul then asks whether or not these two conditions are actually established, to any significant degree, in our world.

a) Does man feel he can no longer go on?

Despite all the current revolutionary rhetoric, this remains a highly ambiguous question. However much one may criticize the short-comings of the modern world, one should also consider the good aspects of modernity that

¹AR, p. 279.

are usually labelled 'progress'; for example the comforts he would have to give up, if he were to reject the technological society. How many people really feel that modern life is intolerable? Furthermore, Ellul underlines the possibilities that, with the forces of modern techniques, men are on the verge of resolving many of the injustices and physical distresses in the world. Experts will be able to deal with most problem situations, merely by allowing the present forces to continue to unfold themselves. He does not underestimate the importance of the struggles against colonialism, starvation, disease, futile wars etc., but he does point out that economically and technically such problems as these are practically solved.

Mais je suis obligé de dire que«tout cela» ne correspond à rien de sérieux quant à la révolution nécessaire, c'est-à-dire quant à cette révolution qu'il faut faire pour changer effectivement le destin de l'homme de ce temps.²

There are a few signs of discontent, but they are concerned more with the speed of change, rather than with the direction of man's destiny as a whole. The only real protest arises occasionally in the question 'What is the meaning of it all?'. The existentialist reply has not proved to supply a solution, for an individual creation of meaning does not finally satisfy.

²AR, p. 276. (My underlining.) Here he is using the word nécessaire in the sense of being morally imperative, and not in the sense of being of the order of necessity, as outlined in Chapter I, page 48, footnote 31.

Le sens de notre vie ne peut pas être imagination personnelle, il repose forcément sur une oeuvre en commun sur des croyances communes, il doit être communicable pour être assuré.³

On the collective level of understanding, Ellul puts the question quite simply.

La productivité lui [l'homme] permet de survivre. Mais, à quel prix? Peut-être bien pourrait-on même dire que le condamné à mort des sociétés antérieures vivait bien plus pleinement que l'homme de ce temps.⁴

This kind of protest, on either an individual or a collective plane, is at best, intermittent. Ellul illustrates his argument that there is very little outcry against the way things are, by showing the tendency in international affairs to equate economic growth, development, and progress. To use these terms as synonyms reveals the collective belief that conformism to the forces of the technological society constitutes the only desirable path. As a result of these reflections, Ellul concludes that a compelling urgency for a revolution against technique is surely not immediately self-evident within modern society.

b) Are the structures of present society blocked?

It is not possible here to outline in detail Ellul's arguments about the all-inclusive tendencies of technique.

³ AR, p. 282.

⁴ Ibid., p. 284.

For his most complete statement of his view of the totality of the determinations, one should see The Technological Society. Fundamentally, he would maintain that technique informs the basic structures of society; also, it is unfolding only according to its own inherent logic. Even though the technological society may give the impression of creating revolutionary changes, it in fact operates by its own evolution that rules out any alternatives to itself. Ellul also makes it clear that he does not see the present state as external to technique in any way. The state is neither an adjunct to technique, nor a parasite feeding off its fruits, nor the controller of technique. As distinct from its predecessors, the modern state has become an integral, fundamental component of the all-embracing force dominating society. In this respect, one can encapsulate Ellul's assessment of the situation, by quoting his own summary.

Notre société est fondamentalement technicienne et étatique. Tous les caractères de notre société aboutissent là;... Dans la mesure où les deux phénomènes tendaient l'un et l'autre, à recouvrir l'ensemble de la société, ils se sont nécessairement rejoints et se sont assimilés. On ne peut pas davantage aujourd'hui considérer que la politique commande toujours à la technique, qu'évacuer l'Etat dans les superstructures de classe. Les deux ensembles ont été modifiés l'un par l'autre. La technique est devenue la condition de toute politique. L'Etat s'est profondément technisé. Il n'y a pas de révolution contre l'Etat qui ne soit obligée de s'attaquer en même temps à la technique. Il n'y a pas de révolution contre les dangers et les servitudes de la société technicienne qui n'implique la tentative de

destructurer l'Etat. ...Car, celui-ci [le système] se trouve structuré à deux niveaux. Le niveau spontané, inconscient: celui de la croissance des techniques qui se répercutent et s'engendrent mutuellement, sans volonté sous-jacente de faire une société donnée. Le niveau conscient et volontaire: celui de l'Etat qui organise cette société pour la meilleure coordination et utilisation des techniques.⁵

The combined force of technique and statism has virtually complete control over society, a control that precludes any forms of life outside their confines. Anyone who attempts a revolution without seeing this combination as the real enemy is deluded into making the situation even worse. Ellul's account of Marxism is an attempt to demonstrate this argument. It is within this perspective that he maintains consistently that, despite all talk about rapidly changing societies, the fundamental structures of the technological society are indeed blocked.

His answers to his own fundamental questions show that Ellul firmly believes that a revolution is necessary in our age; yet at the same time, this revolution would have to take a form different from the commonplace talk about revolution. On the other hand, he warns that one should be under no illusions that the revolution against the dictatorship of technique and statism is bound to take place, for the instincts of conformism and security are against it. For Ellul, revolution is an urgent requirement

⁵AR, pp. 314-15.

for the escape from domination, but it is not an inevitability. No guarantee exists that man, either now or in the future, will take up the true revolution. It is neither an instinct nor a basic need, but it is a choice, or an absurd wager to reject all the forces that now control man. The wager is absurd for it is not now possible to explicate any apparent alternative. Ellul considers that at the present moment, very few people have the awareness and courage to accept the necessity for revolution.

Il n'y a plus de nécessité révolutionnaire immédiate. Elle peut être vue comme nécessaire seulement par ceux qui ont pratiqué une longue ascèse et exercé une sévère volonté-- sinon: ou bien l'action «révolutionnaire» ne sera que le résultat de propagandes, ou elle sera l'«action»⁶ mais point du tout révolutionnaire.

This assessment of society, one that sees revolution as absolutely necessary, but also highly unlikely is significant on a strictly social level of thought. Ellul's account provides a sharp contrast with other theories of revolution, and any action based on his analysis would differ from practice stemming from other formulations. As a result, anyone concerned with making a genuine impact on society, would have to look closely at his world to determine whether or not what Ellul has said contains any validity. In this light it would appear that his social writings on revolution are noteworthy, even if they are not regarded in

⁶AR, p. 313.

the light of his theology.

c) It is significant, nevertheless, that his description of the forces against which man must struggle, manifests a direct and concrete reflection of his total religious perspective which defines what he finally wants to say. The reality of the combination of statism and technique forms the present stage reached in the unfolding of the order of necessity. It is the culmination to date of the consequences of the sin of Cain -- the giving of allegiance to the order of necessity rather than obedience to the will of God. The control exercised by statism and technique is the modern reality of the principalities and powers -- the forces that were defeated by Christ, but that were not completely annihilated. It is not surprising therefore, that the structures are blocked from alternative action, for they represent the apex of the order of necessity -- that other than which man cannot do.

[I]l n'y a pas l'ombre d'un indice de régression de cette structure, que l'Etat de demain ne se présente pas, dans l'évolution historique, comme très différent de celui d'aujourd'hui, sinon au niveau des rêves et des espérances. En effet, cet Etat impose sa loi et son ordre à ceux qui l'utilisent. ... Ceux qui prennent l'appareil sont obligés progressivement d'en accepter la loi.⁷

This is Ellul's description of the state as one of the powers of the order of necessity, with laws which man cannot

⁷AR, pp. 197-98.

control, but can only obey. Similarly, it is not surprising within Ellul's vision, that these forces are not recognized by most people as being contrary to man's true interests. First, the powers of the order of necessity do provide the maximum of security for the man separated from God. Second, the true meaning of the forces is not evident from within their own activity, but only from the standpoint of the judgment and mercy of God as announced in the biblical revelation. Ellul's understanding of the forces of society shows the indissoluble link between his social and his theological thought. In the same way, his views concerning the major characteristics of the necessary social revolution would ultimately reflect his faith concerning the proper Christian response to the world.

II (a) The true revolution to change man's destiny then, will not be of the Marxist variety. It will reject any notion of being an intrinsic part of the meaning of history in which men must merely participate. The rejection of Marxism however, in no way implies that he thinks that the necessary revolution will be outside of history or on any plane different from the world in which we live. What is significant on this score is what one means by and how one evaluates 'the direction of history'. Ellul notes one tendency that is prevalent, and that is the conclusion that whatever events take place, do so inevitably without

any possibility for deviation. On one level, there is a logic in such a position as this one, but the whole attempt of revolution in Ellul's mind, should be to reverse that seemingly immutable law. In any case, one can discuss the determination of events, only after that they have taken place.

Pour ceux qui l'ont entreprise, pour ceux qui l'ont achevée, rien ne permettait de dire qu'elle était dans le cours de l'histoire qui s'est effectivement réalisée. Et les calculs des marxistes dans ce sens sont parfaitement fallacieux. La seule question que l'on puisse poser concerne le sens probable, prévisible des événements qui surviendront vraisemblablement si rien ne vient les empêcher.⁸

Ellul argues that we can see a direction in human affairs only by a projection of the powers and forces that are now operative. The question for him finally centres on the question of whether revolution should try to accelerate those trends or try to impede them. Both choices remain within the sphere of man's historical life, but the latter is the cry of freedom against domination.

Le mensonge radical est de vouloir intégrer l'explosion sauvage de liberté de l'homme dans le cours nécessaire des événements.⁹

⁸AR, p. 291. This statement may seem contrary to what he says about the necessity of the order of necessity. It is however, the most that he can say while remaining solely within the language of social thought. Finally, he says that those forces can be opposed only by obedience to the will of God. One must not forget though, that the response in that obedience will still take place within this world.

⁹AR, p. 291.

In the same vein, Ellul argues that the revolution must come in terms of the real structures of this present society. Even though the revolution will reject these structures, it must come from their very centre. Therefore, the analysis cannot be in terms of a past state of affairs, even as recent as the French Revolution. Nor can the analyst afford to concentrate on peripheral aspects of society. Here, Ellul means that revolutionary awareness must come from a radical clarity about the technological society. Since the Western world, and North America in particular, is the model for the evolution of all societies in our age, the revolution must strike at the roots of the problem, by taking place in the West. This is another way of saying that the necessary revolution will be not only on the historical level, but also that it will be concrete, direct, and realistic.

b) The true revolution will resemble all traditional revolutions in the sense that it will be against the predictable course of events. In brief, it will be 'anti' three major forces or mechanisms that make up the 'powers-that-be' in the technological society.

1) Statism in all its manifestations. For Ellul's complete account of what statism has become, one should see The Political Illusion. In Autopsie de la Révolution, he sums up the thesis of his earlier book, by saying,

L'étatisme sous toutes ses formes est destructeur

de la personnalité. L'Etat devient plus oppressif au fur et à mesure qu'il est plus abstrait. Et l'homme se démet au profit de l'Etat du soin de résoudre tous les problèmes de la société actuelle aboutissant par la même à un désordre sans issue par la construction d'un ordre rigoureux mais décidément inhumain. Tel est le problème--et il n'y a pas à espérer qu'un jour un Etat se repentirait, deviendrait libéral ou personnaliste, se soumettant à l'homme.¹⁰

ii) More and better organization. This attack will have to go beyond merely the systems of bureaucracy (which is the easiest mechanism to criticize) to strike at all the means employed to strengthen the operation of society as it now stands.

iii) The society of the spectacular. The revolution will oppose the systems of social relationships that lead to dehumanization and alienation. Although he uses the same words as Marx did, he sees these systems operating in a way that is different from the Marxist critique. To illustrate what he means in this regard, Ellul merely lists some of the major components contributing to the society of the spectacular -- (i) the growing hold of groups over men, (ii) the psycho-sociological manipulation which is associated with ever-increasing spectacles, (iii) a culture in which art and intellectual activity have been replaced by consumption, triviality, and diversion, and (iv) the domination of man over man, in all facets of life.¹¹

¹⁰AR, p. 317.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 322-27.

c) As in the past, revolution will be a negative act of rupture: yet considering the nature of the technological society, true revolution today will have to be much more total and comprehensive than was required in the past. It is easy to underestimate the total grip and the absorptive powers of technique and statism. Almost any action can be incorporated into their grasp. Since this is the situation, Ellul maintains there can no longer be any hope for the success of a partial revolution. A global society, such as he describes, simply cannot be stamped out in portions. Similarly, despite the fact that the revolution must fight for the re-discovery of individual autonomy against the pressures of groups, still the action will not be successful, if it is undertaken only by isolated individuals. The revolution will have to be a corporate endeavour. Ellul recognizes that a major criticism of his insights regarding revolution will come from the fact that he has given only negative goals for the required action. How can he expect total and corporate revolution when he can give no description at all of the new order? Ellul does give three reasons why he cannot give a blueprint for action. In the first place, he mentions that one betrays revolution altogether, if he asks what are the goals, for the whole thrust of Ellul's concern is for whom the revolution is necessary. He does not make his scathing attacks on the modern world for his own academic aggrand-

ization, but in order to uncover the tyranny and destructiveness being carried out against the individual. His primary focus remains the person caught in the mechanisms of modern society.¹² Secondly, he has become convinced that the manner of thinking within the framework of technique has come to dominate all possible means conceivable for every action with which we are now acquainted. The result is that any planned programme that could now be spelled out would do nothing but fall into the trap of strengthening the forces of technique. One can define nothing except the need to react against those powers. The third reason follows from the second one: because the technological society has become almost universal, there can be no ordinary political or social approaches for the attempt to work for its downfall. The solution must come from a knowledge of the modern world, but in a uniquely different, and undefinable way. In defence of his position that genuine revolution must always be 'anti', he uses the analogy of the doctor.

Le médecin qui lutte contre une épidémie fait-il oeuvre négative parce qu'il est contre? Dans la mesure où ce contre quoi j'appelle la révolution est négatif, je crois que la lutte contre, elle, devient

¹² This concern is not in contradiction with his contention that most people gladly accept the technological society. Part of the task he sees, is to convince people that the modern world is not a force of liberation and that they are not free.

positive. Il n'y a donc, pour être positif, ni valeur nouvelle à formuler, ni programme à concevoir.¹³

The very immensity of the task appears to make it impossible. Certainly, Ellul does run the risk of being dismissed for demanding an unrealistically Herculean task. From where does one get even a toe-hold to begin to think about the revolution or to begin to act in any kind of significantly revolutionary way? A possible impact of the monolithic scope of Ellul's vision of modern society could be resignation to the fact that ALL roads are blocked. Do the aims and characteristics of the required revolution compel the reader to concrete action or to passive lethargy? One can see why many people refer to Ellul as a 'pessimist': the view is stark, and the solutions are at best sketchy and negative. Taken in itself, Autopsie de la Révolution could lead one to argue that the requirements are so gigantic,

that the result for man turns out to be something akin to inertia if not resignation. So also with certain [e.g. Ellul's] forms of revolutionary thought. If one argues that nothing at all can be accomplished before the seizure of state power, in fact that everything else is a counter-productive sop, one has a neat chic-radical excuse for doing nothing at all. He serves best who merely sits and bitches, or perhaps at best spreads the revolutionary word and shoots down any incremental step as

¹³
AR, p. 328.

'objectively reactionary'.¹⁴

Despite Cox's assessment, it is very hard to say that passivity strikes a dominant note in any of Ellul's works, particularly when he is speaking in the following manner.

Il s'agirait alors de retrouver une souplesse, un jeu par rapport à ces organisations précises, ce qui implique l'intrusion de deux facteurs toujours récusés, parce que suspects: l'arbitraire du jugement individuel, le passionnel vécu. Il est bien certain que ce sont des expressions parfaitement a-techniques qui pourraient peut-être avoir un sens vraiment révolutionnaire. Et ce sont ces deux voies qui, l'une dans le champ intellectuel, l'autre sur le plan sensible, peuvent avoir ce sens. Mais cela implique un retour rigoureux à la décision individuelle, à l'histoire personnelle et un risque évident de régression collective.¹⁵

d) In the final section of Autopsie de la Révolution, Ellul does give some hints of the focus of action in the necessary revolution, but these suggestions remain somewhat fragmentary, and definitely unclear. The three orientations he puts forward follow directly from all his previous social analysis. The first of course, is the re-discovery of the individual. This aspect has been discussed previously. Despite the danger that the readers will view this proposal as a form of decadent nineteenth century thought, Ellul claims that properly understood, it is the

¹⁴Harvey Cox, "The Ungodly City: A Theological Response to Jacques Ellul", Commonweal, July 9, 1971, pp. 354-55.

¹⁵AR, p. 310.

first prerequisite for a proper revolution in these times. The second orientation is the development of awareness or consciousness of what is really happening. For Ellul, this goal cannot be reached by an emancipation of the irrational elements of man as an antidote for the rationality of technique.¹⁶ The revolution must be based on a knowledge of reality that requires an even more rigorous discipline and analysis than the enemy can possibly muster. Presumably, he sees his own books partially, as making a contribution in this direction. More important, he gives a brief insight into the source of consciousness, when he alludes to the need for contemplation as the opposite of frenetic action.

Si vous voulez être véritable révolutionnaires dans cette société (une fois de plus, je ne prétends ici ni une valeur permanente ni une vérité éternelle), soyez des contemplatifs: alors, de la sortira la puissance de l'individu pour ébranler le système.¹⁷

Finally, awareness of the situation cannot, by itself, be taken as the full solution. The last step is an incredibly

¹⁶At this point, Ellul is directing his remarks towards Marcuse whom he views as not only wrong, but pre-eminently dangerous.

¹⁷AR, p. 335. "Contemplation" is a strange notion to use in one of his books of social analysis, for it can have little meaning apart from the theological pole of the dialectic; it has no commonsense meaning in the other context alone. For a glimpse of what he means by the 'contemplation', one should see Prayer and the Modern Man. There it seems to mean communion with and obedience to the will of God.

difficult one, and it is in no way an automatic course to follow. It is a decision. These three orientations are not at all separate entities in Ellul's thought, for they are all inter-connected and each one flows from the others. In short, Ellul advocates a revolution of awareness and transcendence, through an act of freedom.

One draws the conclusion that for Ellul, revolution is not a particular offensive strategy that will take place at an opportune moment in the future to change the world. Rather the required revolution means to live every moment in a different way. Despite his attempt to illustrate what he means by referring to the movements of personalism and situationalism, even by the end of Autopsie de la Révolution, he is not successful in demonstrating completely what he has in mind. One senses that, even though he prefers an earlier model of revolution to the Marxist one, it too would be inadequate for what has to be accomplished. It would appear that Ellul is being somewhat unfair to his readers, for he does not reveal his total vision in this work. He does give some veiled hints when he speaks of the need for awareness, contemplation, will, acts of freedom, unique responses to the world etc. The difficulty arises because he does not explain his use of these words and phrases -- meanings that would be different from common parlance. At this point, we come back to the discussion, in the Introduction of the thesis, of his overall framework. Ellul's

analysis of revolutions in the past, and the failures of Marxist interpretations, can be assessed factually without a complete analysis of any other dimension of his thought. In light of the whole analysis of what ought to be done however, this social account of revolution remains a description of only one pole of the dialectic. It is one of his accounts of the situation towards which the biblical revelation of the relation between God and man, is currently directed. The final understanding for a response to that situation can come only in obedience to the will of God. Thus, when he outlines even briefly, a somewhat programmatic answer, he cannot be complete, since he has chosen to limit himself to purely social studies. For a description of what revolution truly means within his total thought, we shall have to turn to the theological pole of the dialectic. The theological counterpart to Autoopsie de la Révolution is presented, more clearly than anywhere else, in Violence.

III (a) In Violence, Ellul focuses on the reality of violent action as the modus vivendi of men in the order of necessity. Then he uses this description as a case-in-point to present an outline of the significance of the Christian response to the world. As outlined in Chapter I, he argues that there are only two orders to which men can adhere--the order of necessity and the order of Christ. The basic point is that the two, in the final analysis, are mutually exclusive. "[T]here is no escaping the absolute

opposition between the order of necessity and the order of Christ."¹⁸ This echoes somewhat the position he took in To Will and To Do, when he said,

But the Bible instructs us to the contrary, that there is a holy and a not holy. There is no degree of the holy, no border zone, no approximation since that which is holy is, in point of fact, that which is separated.¹⁹

It is the task of the Christian then, to be obedient to the order of Christ, a task that demands the struggle against the powers of the order of necessity. The absolute dichotomy that Ellul sees between the two orders helps to explain his intransigence against all forms manifested in the modern world, and his refusal to accept any compromise as an ultimate answer to the human situation. It is also within this perspective that he refuses to admit any shades of worth within the political realm. One can see two examples of this particular stance when he claims that there are no basic differences among all the revolutions ~~in~~^{since} 1789, and when he says that the modern state is always the same.

¹⁸ Violence, p. 130.

¹⁹ To Will, p. 31. The two presentations are not identical. The holy and the not holy are two states of existence -- God and His creation (even before the fall). The two orders are significant, for each indicates an orientation of allegiance towards one of the states. Only in Christ can it be said that God (the holy) became man (by definition, not holy). The order of Christ implies obedience to the holy, and allegiance to the holy in the not holy world. Man himself will never become holy.

Non, tantôt l'un, tantôt l'autre, mais toujours le primat de l'Etat, toujours le même qu'il soit monarchiste, fasciste, républicain, communiste. En tout cas, par lui même jamais révolutionnaire, malgré ses déclarations.²⁰

The state in any form is one of the powers of the order of necessity, so that the state can never be good in itself -- in any ultimate sense of being of the order of Christ. To avoid erroneous conclusions about his position concerning the two orders, one should consider two other theological tenets that Ellul sees as prominent in the biblical revelation.

b) In the first place, it would be a denial of the fact that the Incarnation took place, if the Christian attempted to carry out the struggle on any level other than the historical plane of the order of necessity in his own world. This is why Ellul maintains his fervent interest in social and political questions. One cannot conclude that since the two orders are completely distinct, Ellul should or does consider the order of necessity as unimportant or irrelevant. Obedience to the order of Christ requires that action be carried out where Christ Himself worked -- at the very centre of the world as it is in revolt from God. This understanding of Christian duty also explains what he has said about the concrete and realistic demands if a true revolution is to come into the world. A Christian cannot

²⁰ AR, p. 242.

separate himself from the work of Christ. With the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the powers were defeated, but they were not annihilated, so that the battle still continues with ever-increasing vigour. At the same time, Ellul would remind Christians of a second truth found in the biblical revelation. They are still human and as such, they remain subject to the order of necessity. Since that order came into being in order to preserve the shattered creation from annihilation (as a result of God's judgment and mercy), the Christian cannot in any way ignore his world or escape from it. He must work to make the world livable, without giving it his total allegiance. He must be concerned with issues such as developing a provisional morality, improving life in the city, and opposing specific political regimes that do not contribute to the preservation of human existence. The Christian will join causes as do other men, and Ellul clearly does see some regimes as more preservative than others. For example, he was very active in the French Resistance, and he considers that the goals of fascism are not even worthwhile discussing. What he means by this apparent contradiction emerges most clearly when he discusses "The Impossibility and the Necessity of a Christian Ethic" in To Will and To Do (pp. 199-267). His objection comes when Christians try to justify an action that is merely a following of the order of necessity at its height, because nothing else can be done.

Violence, for example, is inevitable, but Ellul's whole theology indicates that this is no reason to justify the use of violence.

He must struggle against violence precisely because, apart from Christ, violence is the form that human relations normally and necessarily take. In other words, the more completely violence seems to be of the order of necessity, the greater is the obligation of believers in Christ's Lordship to overcome it by challenging necessity.²¹

Even in obedience to the order of Christ, the Christians, however numerous, will not be successful in bringing in the final and complete revolution against the domination of the order of necessity, for only God's action will bring in the New Jerusalem. This is the paradox that Ellul emphasizes in The Meaning of the City -- a paradox that he believes cannot be resolved, and from which the follower of Christ cannot escape.

c) The need to oppose the order of necessity is the basic reason for Ellul's opposition to Marx's attempt to put revolution within history as its inevitable outcome. Not only was Marx mistaken about the forces dominating modern history, but even his theory about how revolution might come about, was false. In Ellul's theology, there is no possibility of change, if one submits to the order of necessity. In his rejection of Marx's view of revolution,

²¹
Violence, pp. 127-28.

Ellul tends to uphold the traditional notion of revolt as outlined in Chapter II. This idea appeals to him for it is an absurd outcry against the controlling forces, and such a rejection is a cornerstone of his own thought on revolution. In his total statement though, this kind of action cannot constitute true revolution either, for it is also strictly in accordance with the order of necessity.

We must understand that when a man considers violence the only resort left to him, when he sees it, not as a remedy and the harbinger of a new day, but as at least an indictment of the old, unjust order, when he thinks of violence as a way of affirming his outraged human dignity (his pride!) -- in all these cases he is yielding to a normal urge, he is being natural, he is, though he is outside the law, at least being truthful.²²

Ellul cannot condemn a response such as this one in the same way that he does Marxism. Still, the blind response does not attack the real problem, and it is incapable of taking a stance that could alter human destiny. Giving into the powers cannot be a starting point for overcoming them. According to Ellul, there is only one way to reverse the reality of technique and statism -- an altering of the will from obedience to the order of necessity to obedience to the will of God.

d) With respect to Ellul's conclusions about what a genuine revolution would involve, I would underline two central concepts, outlined previously in Chapter I. First,

²² Violence, p. 132.

the act of redemption by which man can alter the orientation of his will is the mysterious act of salvation that comes from outside man. Despite all that he says in Autopsie de la Révolution, Ellul does not believe that any truly revolutionary action can be initiated without the prior revelation that man cannot achieve alone, no matter how much analysis he undertakes. In the second place, along with Ellul's emphasis on the individual, the reader must also remember the conviction of the constancy and consistency of the will of God. This belief relates to the statements that true revolution does not mean either the emancipation of man's irrational passions, nor solely individual action. Ellul's overall conception of obedience to the 'here and now' obedience to the will of God does not result in anarchistic inspiration, nor in conflicting responses that would destroy indiscriminately. The facts that God's will never wavers and that God does not break His Word; these make possible the call for clarity, discipline, and corporate action. On the corporate level, the Church must make it possible for men to hear the Word of God given in the Bible, for only Christian action can shatter the fatalities of the world. This is the job of the Church, for it would be a denial of the very principles of faith, if one were to expect non-Christians to behave in the same manner as Christians who have been given the power of Christ.

Only Christians can contend against the

powers that are at the root of the problem. The state would be powerless and unimportant were it not for the something-more-than-itself that resides within it. And to contend against institutions or against the men who serve the institutions (the police for instance) is useless. It is the heart of the problem that must be attacked. And the Christian alone can do that-- because the others know nothing about all this and because only the Christians receive the power of the Holy Spirit and are required by God to do these things.²³

e) Ellul always adheres to the belief that the requirements of God do not allow a retreat to an isolated, spiritual realm; at the same time the Christian must fight only with spiritual weapons. (It is interesting that Ellul describes the kind of action called for in terms of 'violence' and 'combat'.)²⁴

But as Rimbaud told us 'spiritual warfare is just as brutal as human warfare'. We know what price Jesus paid for waging his battle spiritually. But this spiritual contest is concerned only with the incarnated powers. ...The spiritual warfare we are summoned to is concerned with human realities -- with injustice, oppression, authoritarianism, the domination of the state by money, the exaltation of sex, science etc.²⁵

The only weapons for the Christian are antithetical to those that the world accepts as normal and effective. All he can rely upon is the Word of God, especially as revealed in the life of Christ, the power of prayer in which he is in com-

²³Violence, p. 164.

²⁴See the last chapters of Violence and Prayer and Modern Man respectively.

²⁵Violence, pp. 164-65.

munion with the will of God, and self-giving Agape that reconciles all men. These weapons may seem remote from the concrete world with which Ellul deals in Autopsie de la Révolution, but he says that is a false impression. For example he points out that if only the commandment 'Thou shalt do no murder' as interpreted in the sermon on the mount were taken seriously, the result would have a revolutionary effect on all existing social and political structures. That revolutionary action is possible only with spiritual strength flowing from communion with the will of God. It would not bring in the Kingdom of God, but it would certainly alter the condition of the world. The tough demands of fighting with weak and defenceless love²⁶ would undermine all the shackling and oppressive forces.

One central practical question arises when one considers the brutality of the modern world. Is this answer livable? The simplest answer to that question is that it is not entirely a legitimate one to ask. Christians do not enter the fray of their own accord, but only because God sends them. Christians know that they can do nothing to hasten the Second Coming, and beyond even that limitation, they have to be prepared to be rejected from the city, if they so much as attempt to follow the example of Christ.

²⁶ To see the same argument that the central message of the Gospels is contrary to what is normally considered effective action, see David Jenkins, "The Power of the Powerless", In Search for a Theology of Development.

God may order a particular Christian to leave the city before he is destroyed, but this is no independent principle by which God is bound, nor in which the Christian can take false refuge from the world. There is the guarantee of faith in the Resurrection, but it does not give physical immunity here and now. Since the power of the city, as described by Ellul, is now almost universal, rejection is the virtually certain fate for the Christian. Perhaps all the practical questions can be spoken to in the following way.

Whoever takes up the sword shall perish by the sword. And whoever does not take up the sword (or lets it go) shall perish on the cross.²⁷

Ellul's ethic is an ethic of crucifixion -- but one must remember that for him, the Crucifixion was inseparable from the Incarnation and the Resurrection. It is only within the revelation of Jesus Christ and the response to it, that one can understand what Ellul is saying at the end of Autopsie de la Révolution. The path towards true revolution is not being undertaken in any significant manner within the technological society. The way can come only from a constant re-assertion of the wills of men, at every moment, towards the order of Christ.

[I]l faut alors une énergie farouche de refus

²⁷ Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 79.

et d'affirmation de soi complètement renouvelée par rapport au vieil individualisme périmé et à tout ce qui fut jusqu'ici désigné comme révolution. Nous ne sommes plus héritiers de personne: tout est à commencer.²⁸

²⁸ AR, p. 352.

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