

THE TASK OF JACQUES ELLUL:
A Proclamation of Biblical Faith
as Requisite for Understanding
the Modern Project

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as Requisite for Understanding
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By

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Abstract

This thesis considers the major social analyses and studies of the Bible undertaken by the French scholar Jacques Ellul -- under the rubric of his understanding of the Christian doctrine of the two realms. The first chapter examines Ellul's own perception of his task as an intellectual layman, participating in the work of the Church. Then the rest of the thesis deals with the way in which he proceeds. It is divided into two parts that analyze, in some detail, his approaches to A) proper sociological descriptions of the technological society and B) the Bible which is the source for his comprehension of what is at stake in this society. The two parts come together in his reflections that the Bible does speak to the world that we are currently trying to build.

The purpose of this examination is, first, to clarify what Ellul is attempting to accomplish. Secondly, it seeks to demonstrate the underlying unity that anchors the main strands of his thought. Thirdly, although no complete assessment is intended, the thesis suggests that Ellul's main contribution lies in the challenge he presents to the modern world from the centre of the Protestant sola scriptura tradition.

PREFACE AND ABBREVIATIONS

To facilitate reading the quoted material and the footnote citations in this thesis, the following explanations are in order.

a) Whenever available, I have used the English translations of Ellul's publications. One exception to this policy comes in Les Nouveaux Possédés, for which the translation of The New Demons, tr. by C.E. Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) appeared only during the writing of the final draft. Secondly, I refer to the original texts when the point is clearer in French than it is in the English translation.

b) Since M. Ellul continues to write, some of his most recent material is not cited in this thesis. Due to the vagaries of postal systems, one of his latest books, L'Ethique de la Liberté (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) was not available. Its content, however, does not invalidate the format of my work. Similarly, Trahison de l'Occident arrived only for the writing of the general Conclusion.

c) Certain clarifications of M. Ellul's positions were gained during private interviews in Pessac, France, 19-30 June 1974. References to these discussions will be indicated by saying "In conversation".

d) All biblical references come from the King James translation.

e) The following is a list of abbreviations used throughout the thesis.

i) Works by Karl Barth

Church Dogmatics

Church Dogmatics, 13 Volumes, tr. by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1961). Cited by Volume, section and page.

D in O

Dogmatics in Outline, tr. by G.T. Thomson (London: SCM, 1966).

<u>ET</u>	<u>Evangelical Theology</u> , tr. by G. Foley (New York: Doubleday, 1964).
<u>E to R</u>	<u>Epistle to the Romans</u> , tr. by E.C. Hoskyns (Oxford: OUP, 1968).
<u>H of G</u>	<u>The Humanity of God</u> , tr. by J.N. Thomas and T. Wieser (London: Collins, 1961).
ii) <u>Works by John Calvin and Martin Luther</u>	
<u>Institutes</u>	<u>Institutes of the Christian Religion</u> , tr. by F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950). The original text is divided into chapters and sections.
<u>Luther's Commentary on Galatians and Bondage of the Will</u>	<u>Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings</u> , ed. by John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday, 1961).
<u>Table Talk</u>	<u>Table Talk of Martin Luther</u> , ed. by Wm. Hazlitt (Philadelphia: R. West, 1878 fac.). The original text is divided into sections.
iii) <u>Books by Jacques Ellul</u>	
<u>A of R</u>	<u>Autopsy of Revolution</u> , tr. by P. Wolf (New York: Knopf, 1971). Translation of <u>AR</u> .
<u>L'Apocalypse</u>	<u>L'Apocalypse: Architecture en Mouvement</u> (Paris: Desclée, 1975).
<u>AR</u>	<u>Autopsie de la Révolution</u> (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1969).
<u>Critique</u>	<u>A Critique of the New Commonplaces</u> , tr. by Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1968).
<u>FPK</u>	<u>The False Presence of the Kingdom</u> , tr. by C.E. Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1972).
<u>H et A</u>	<u>L'Homme et L'Argent</u> (Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1954).
<u>Histoire des Institutions</u>	<u>Histoires des Institutions</u> (nouvelle édition) (Paris: PUF, 1962).

<u>HTA</u>	<u>Hope in Time of Abandonment</u> , tr. by C.E. Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).
<u>IP</u>	<u>L'Illusion Politique</u> (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1965).
<u>JJ</u>	<u>The Judgment of Jonah</u> , tr. by G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971).
<u>M du B</u>	<u>Métamorphose du Bourgeois</u> (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1967).
<u>M of C</u>	<u>The Meaning of the City</u> , tr. by Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970).
<u>NP</u>	<u>Les Nouveaux Possédés</u> (Paris: Fayard, 1973).
<u>PI</u>	<u>The Political Illusion</u> , tr. by K. Kellen (New York: Knopf, 1967). Translation of <u>IP</u> .
<u>PK</u>	<u>The Presence of the Kingdom</u> , tr. by Olive Wyon (New York: Seabury Press, 1967).
<u>PMM</u>	<u>Prayer and Modern Man</u> , tr. by C.E. Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1970).
<u>P of G</u>	<u>The Politics of God and the Politics of Man</u> , tr. by G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972).
<u>Propaganda</u>	<u>Propaganda</u> , tr. by K. Kellen and J. Lerner (New York: Knopf, 1965).
<u>T de l'O</u>	<u>Trahison de l'Occident</u> , (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1975).
<u>La Technique</u>	<u>La Technique: L'Enjeu du Siècle</u> (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1954).
<u>TFL</u>	<u>The Theological Foundation of Law</u> tr. by M. Wieser (New York: Seabury, 1969).
<u>TS</u>	<u>The Technological Society</u> , tr. by John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964). Translation of <u>La Technique</u> .

<u>Violence</u>	<u>Violence</u> , tr. by C.G. Kings (New York: Seabury Press, 1969).
<u>To Will</u>	<u>To Will and To Do</u> , tr. by C.E. Hopkin (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1969).
iv) <u>Articles and Parts of Books by Jacques Ellul</u>	
"Actualité"	"Actualité de la Réforme", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 58 (1959:1), 39-64.
<u>Bulletin Sédés</u>	"Max Weber: L'Ethique Protestante et l'Esprit du Capitalisme", <u>Bulletin Sédés</u> 905, supplément 1 (20 Décembre 1964), 4-17.
"C and P"	"Between Chaos and Paralysis", <u>Christian Century</u> 85 (5 June 1968), 747-50.
"Chronique"	"Chronique des Problèmes de Civilisation", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 45 (1946:6), 678-687.
"L'Irréductibilité"	"L'Irréductibilité du Droit à une Théologie de l'Histoire", in <u>Révélation et Histoire</u> , ed. by E. Castelli (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1971).
<u>Katallagete</u>	"From Jacques Ellul", <u>Katallagete</u> 2:3-4 (Winter/Spring 1970) 5.
"KM"	"On Demande un Nouveau Karl Marx!", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 46 (1947:3) 360-374.
"A Little Debate"	"A Little Debate about Technology", <u>Christian Century</u> XC (27 June 1973) 706-707.
"Mirror"	"Mirror of These Ten Years", <u>Christian Century</u> LXXXVII (18 February 1970) 200-204.
"MM"	"Modern Myths", <u>Diogenes</u> 23 (1958) 23-40.
"De la Mort"	"De la Mort", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 73 (1974:2) 1-14.
"Mystère"	"Le Mystère de l'Histoire", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 49 (1950:5) 466-70.

"Notes Préliminaires"	"Notes Préliminaires sur l'Eglise et Pouvoirs' ", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 73 (1974:1) 2-24.
"Note Problématique"	"Note Problématique sur l'Histoire de l'Eglise", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 48 (1949:4) 297-324.
"Le Pauvre"	"Le Pauvre", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 50 (1951:2) 105-127.
"Sur le Pessimisme"	"Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 53 (1954:2) 164-180.
<u>Playboy</u>	"Letter to the Editor", <u>Playboy</u> (March, 1971) 55-56.
"Propositions"	"Propositions Concernant l'Attitude Chrétienne Envers le Droit", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 59 (1960:1) 32-43.
<u>Psaumes</u>	Preface in A. Chouraqui, <u>Psaumes</u> (Paris: PUF, 1969).
"Le Rapport"	"Le Rapport de l'Homme à la Création selon la Bible", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 73 (1974: 5-6) 137-155
"Le Réalisme Politique"	"Le Réalisme Politique", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 46 (1947:6) 698-734.
"Le Sens"	"Le Sens de la Liberté Chez Saint Paul", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 61 (1962:1) 3-20.
"La Technique"	"La Technique et les Premiers Chapitres de la Genèse", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 59 (1960:2) 97-113.
"Du Temps"	"Notes en Vue d'Une Ethique du Temps et du Lieu pour les Chrétiens", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 59 (1960:5) 354-74.
"Du Texte"	"Du Texte au Sermon", <u>Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses</u> (1975:2) 125-38.
"Théologie Dogmatique"	"Théologie Dogmatique et Spécificité du Christianisme", <u>Foi et Vie</u> 70 (1971:5) 139-54.
"W and C"	"Work and Calling", <u>Katallagete</u> 4:3-4 (Winter/Spring 1972) 8-16.
"The World"	" 'The World' in the Gospels", <u>Katallagete</u> 6:4 (Spring 1974) 16-23.

v) Talk by Jacques Ellul

"CP?"

"Croire Pourquoi?", debate with
Robert Escarpit on Emission France-
Culture delivered 25 December 1973.

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INTRODUCTION

If -- say, about the end of the decade -- there be any survivors of the death of American culture, and, should any of them be theological literates, and if, while sifting the rubbish, they happen upon a book or two by Jacques Ellul, they will surely be mystified as to why a message so intelligent and urgent was not more heeded.¹

M. Jacques Ellul is professor of the History and Sociology of Institutions at the University of Bordeaux. Beyond his specific métier, he is one of the most powerful living spokesmen for Bible-centered Christianity as the fulcrum for challenge to the modern world. My thesis seeks to enucleate the writings of this eminent social analyst and Protestant thinker.

For at least twenty-five years, many people have reacted to his far-ranging publications in the fields of sociology, political thought and biblical studies. A number of his sociological books, most notably The Technological Society², have made a great impact among those, especially in North America, who felt a 'gut reaction' against the unquestioned optimism attached to the growth of science and technology. These people welcomed Ellul's lucid and stark exposure of the forces dominating modern

¹ William Stringfellow, "The American Importance of Jacques Ellul", Introducing Jacques Ellul, ed. J.Y. Holloway (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1975), p. 135.

² This book, appearing in French under the title La Technique: L'Enjeu du Siècle, was first published in 1954 (but did not appear in English until 1964) and it remains his most comprehensive sociological writing. Because of the lapse of more than twenty years, he has written an entirely new version which has yet to be published. Although an occasional reference will be made to the new manuscript, arising from conversations with M. Ellul, the original publication and translation will be the source for my footnotes.

society. In these circles, he is often mentioned in the same breath as Marshall McLuhan, Herbert Marcuse and other figures of 'the revolution of the 1960's'.³ Although some of his insights have attracted considerable praise from other quarters, many academic sociologists have deplored the lack of exactitude in his methodology and conclusions. Also, his alleged pessimism and his refusal to spell out solutions repel many commentators. The appearance of his theological reflections has only compounded the mixed reviews. Many (both Christians and non-Christians), who admire his sociological descriptions, are dismayed in the face of his powerful and uncompromising insistence, in a traditional Protestant vein, on the uniqueness of biblical revelation.⁴ Certain other Christians, who share his Barthian orientation in theology, are reluctant to accede to his emphasis on the social and even revolutionary implications of their faith. The general bewilderment is exacerbated by the fact that Ellul tends to elude easy groupings of supporters and detractors. For example, he has been endorsed, at times, both by members of the New Left and also by Katallagete, the periodical of the Committee of Southern Churchmen in the United States. Or, he has been dismissed as being too pessimistic and conservative as well as being too revolutionary and iconoclastic. In short, there is fairly wide acceptance that Ellul is a trenchant thinker, but there is no consensus concerning his final contribution.

³ I do not mean to imply that these writers are in agreement with each other or with Ellul. What they do share is a concern for an analysis of modern society as a totality, concentrating on the implications of technology. Also, they all evoke controversies to the point of notoriety.

⁴ In conversation, M. Ellul affirmed that he deeply admires Karl Barth's positions and, on strictly dogmatic questions, he most often can be aligned with the Swiss theologian. The use of Barth in this thesis is to clarify Ellul's stance on particular issues. The points of difference in purpose and content are noted at the appropriate places.

Although there is always some danger in choosing a living author for a dissertation, the breadth and depth of his work, combined with the vehement and varied rejoinders from those who read him, give sufficient motivation for a serious consideration of Jacques Ellul.

Unfortunately, both the social and religious controversies involving Ellul have been confounded by a lack of careful reading and from a failure to take into account his writings in their totality. These shortcomings often result from the exigencies of producing book reviews or from the mistaken belief that he can be easily put in a slot. Because of these factors, this thesis concerns itself with assisting readers who wish to come to terms with Ellul as an important voice in the twentieth century. It is not a substitute for reading the man himself: its orientation lies in a somewhat different direction. Before one can master the content of his undertaking or assess its success, it is important to start on the right path. How does Ellul perceive his own writings and from what bases does he engage in his endeavours? The answers to these questions, possible only by paying close attention to the texts, seem to be missing from the majority of passing critiques and no comprehensive study has to date appeared.⁵ Furthermore, his thought is much more intricate than the reviews lead one to believe. In order to correct some mistaken notions, I am going to scrutinize Ellul's approach both holistically and in detail. Such an investigation can serve to put the disputes surrounding him into

⁵ Introducing Jacques Ellul is the only published monograph devoted to the interpretation of the French scholar. This study is itself mainly a collection of articles on different aspects of his work, as are virtually all the review commentaries. A good introductory article is David Menninger, "Jacques Ellul: A Tempered Profile", The Review of Politics, Volume 37, April 1975, pp. 235-46. My thesis does not comment on or attack other writers on Ellul. While it takes a tack similar to Menninger's, it is more expanded both in perspective and in detail.

perspective, so that debate about him can be more fruitful.

A variety of factors enter into the picture to make it complex. Indeed, the first problem in deliberating upon his thought as a whole is the sheer volume of his output -- twenty-eight books (with at least three more in preparation) and more than a hundred articles. For his English-speaking audience, there is the added dimension that many of these publications appear only in French. Another complication is the catholicity of his explorations; that is, the fact that he is an historian, a sociologist and an interpreter of the Bible.⁶ Because Ellul goes to some pains, as we shall see, to avoid overlapping and because he insists on the separation of the different spheres, we should be inhibited from constructing a facile system or from cramming the social comments directly into theological categories.⁷ On the one hand, he refuses to be a sociologist who later tries to find within his social observations a schema which he can label somehow as Christian. On the other hand, he also refuses to cull a sociological synthesis from the Bible. It is the purpose of the thesis, in part, to look at the ways in which he handles social and theological questions in independent discussions in which the one is not used as a crutch for the other. The main difficulty at

⁶ This division appears directly in the bibliography which M. Ellul sent to me in 1970 and, in conversation, he confirmed the separation of his books. The reason for the distinction is discussed in Part A, Chapter 2(b). Because of the specific nature of my thesis, I exclude his historiographical studies as such. First, for his overall stance, these detailed histories (none of which is translated into English) can be grouped loosely with the sociological ones under the rubric of his profession as a social scientist. Secondly, his views of the methods of doing history are discussed most explicitly in his other writings. Thirdly, as a result of the other two reasons, these books have correctly never entered into the major controversies.

⁷ Quite a few people have fallen into this trap. See, for example, my own M.A. thesis, "Jacques Ellul on Revolution" (McMaster University, 1970), especially the Conclusion.

this point is that Ellul has not himself devoted a specific writing to drawing together his assumptions and methods. That is not to say that he is unclear, but rather that he is simply not as concerned with methodological treatises as he is with actual descriptions and reflections. His few overt references are scattered throughout the corpus: they are not co-ordinated. In the long run, a sustained account of his approaches, in the fields of both the social sciences and the Bible, must be drawn largely by inference. As a result, it is necessary to peruse a wide body of material in order to draw out the clearest guidelines for reading Ellul. In this thesis, I wish to make a complete analysis in one place, thereby facilitating concentration on the full importance of any particular presentation.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that Ellul always stresses the desirability of seeing things within the context of the whole. Thus, we can conclude that his own diverse reflections are by no means piecemeal or totally divorced from one another. Even though he avoids system building, there is a coherence that provides yet another aspect of studying Ellul -- grasping the form of his work while refraining from the dual dangers of systematization and fragmentation. For an appreciation of the scope of his undertaking, one must see its gestalt -- the interrelationships among the parts and the significance of the totality. Perhaps the decisive and yet most elusive problem here is the recognition of the centrality of dialectics in every part of Ellul's outlook. Most commentators fail to elucidate this dimension, essential to comprehending his view of the world. Although this Introduction is not the place to go into detail regarding Ellul's usage of the term 'dialectics', I do delineate, throughout the thesis and culminating in the general Conclusion,

his underlying discernment of dialectical relationships. One has to retain a complex configuration of relationships among contradictory elements. Otherwise, it is difficult to confront the subtlety of his achievement. The final goal of my exposition is, therefore, to clarify Ellul's effort to disclose the parts without distorting the view of the whole.

To enhance the precision of my thesis, the limitations necessary for achieving its goal should be fixed from the outset. Most important, there is no assessment of the truth or falsity of Ellul's arguments. I start only from the assumptions that he is a cogent thinker whose difficulty is not to be underestimated and that the issues he raises are crucial ones for apprehending modern society and the Western religious tradition. These two positions are taken for granted throughout the thesis and, if correct, they justify reading him within his own context, prior to hasty judgments. Similarly, at every stage, I resist going beyond what Ellul himself has indicated. For example, no itemized ethical plan is formulated, on the grounds that none is included in his enterprise. What he does do is to raise questions about responses to our situation: what I propose is to spell out the stance from which he poses the challenge. Because most interpreters fall short in this respect, this thesis locates the key points that underpin his scholarship, in order to supply a framework for reading such a subtle and complex thinker.⁸ In introducing this framework, I do not set out to construct a theoretical position of my

⁸ As we shall see in Chapter 1, Ellul himself refers to the requirement of sighting the key points of the world. See FPK, p. 184 and, for further discussion, Chapter 1, footnote 49. This thesis applies the same principle to Ellul's own publications.

own. Naturally, there is always an element of personal bias and not all followers of Ellul will agree with my emphases. Nevertheless, I conscientiously refrain from imposing a structure from the outside or from forcing the material into a preconceived mould. Rather, my writing tries to articulate the structure implicit in Ellul's writing -- one that has emerged only gradually and that becomes visible only when the works are read as an ensemble.⁹ The internal contours, not always perceptible on the surface, maintain a balance between the procedures of his individual studies and the connections among them.

A final note is in order with reference to the positive content of my thesis and how its aim is carried out. Ellul sees himself, above all, as a member of the Church in his every activity and discourse. Fundamental to his understanding of what the Church is supposed to be and do is an adequate interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the two realms. What does it mean for Christians to be God's representatives on earth and, specifically, what does God command for contemporary society? Ellul deals extensively with the Church's mission in terms of the concrete social situation of this age. It is around the nucleus of the two realms that all his writings revolve and find their unity. Without this backdrop, they could become disjointed and open to charges of despair. Chapter 1 discusses Ellul's appropriation of this teaching and his own place with reference to it. The main points are the responsibilities of the Church and his own role as a Christian intellectual vis-à-vis theology.

⁹ As an indication that my approach is not a complete distortion of Ellul, the following reference is pertinent. "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 end of my work, if God permits me to arrive at the end." "Mirror", p. 201.

The chapter elaborates the motivations both for his pursuit of value-free sociological descriptions as a contribution to Christian realism and for his biblical reflections on the modern world. Furthermore, it furnishes the foundations of his task -- an account which the rest of the thesis builds upon and refines. From a statement of the unified nature of the job to be done, I move to the development of the separate realms. The basic form of the thesis corresponds to the doctrine of the two realms or, put differently, Part A and Part B parallel the two divisions of his bibliography into ouvrages sociologiques and ouvrages théologiques. Rather than summarize each phase, however, I put into perspective the type of case he makes in each one. The two major parts can be referred to as 'sources for his descriptions' and 'sources for his understanding of that analysis'.¹⁰

Although it is true that the call to Christian realism propels Ellul into massive sociological investigations, this impetus neither guarantees their accuracy nor immunizes them against criticism. As a sociologist, he participates in all the disputes linked with the discipline. As he himself says, ". . . I explicitly take a partisan position in a debate between schools of sociology."¹¹ Because Ellul's brand of sociology, influenced by Karl Marx and Max Weber, is at odds with dominant North American trends, some English-speaking readers may not be aware of the distinction and the extent of Ellul's view of the science. As a result,

¹⁰ Ellul's distinction between analysis or description and understanding will be discussed in Chapter 1, footnotes 48 and 120 and it remains crucial for the separation of his studies, as we shall see in Part A, Chapters 2(d) and 3(b).

¹¹ TS, p. xxviii. Many people make the error of assuming that one has to be a Christian to accept Ellul's sociological positions. Yet, as we shall see, he definitely wants to be assessed as a sociologist, without pulling in theological premises.

Part A concentrates largely, though not exclusively, on discussions of purpose and the methods that characterize his studies of society. Of necessity, the terminology leans towards that of the social sciences. Nevertheless, since the emphasis is on the realm of the world, the repercussions of his comments on human tendencies, equipment and knowledge are felt throughout his work. For example, his presuppositions about the uses of human reason apply equally to social analysis and looking at the Bible. The references to biblical readings in this part do not constitute a mixing up of disciplines; on the contrary, I give instances of what Ellul thinks human beings can know on their own. From the standpoint of his profession as a sociologist (as well as an historian), he brings out the possibilities for human beings to exist collectively in the world and looks at the ordering of their lives. He thinks that both Christians and non-Christians share in society and in any use of human opportunities open to all. Part A gives an overview for a reading of this aspect of Ellul.

Part B, on the other hand, inspects what he means by the duty of the Christian intellectual to "deepen and develop his knowledge of the biblical and theological fields".¹² Here, it is suitable to use somewhat more theological language, as it relates more directly to his ideas in the area. That is to say, we move from the plane of Part A dealing with strictly human possibilities to the theological plane of the biblical revelation concerning God's relationship with man. Because of the inherent problems, the second part is sub-divided into two sections and is much longer than the first. Section 1 of Part B demarcates Ellul's

¹² "Mirror", p. 201. See also Chapter 1, footnote 120.

standards for dealing with the Bible as God's book received by human beings. Apart from the absence of a collected analysis of Ellul's exegetical principles, this aspect is muddled by the disputes that swirl in the field. One problem for Ellul is the defence of a certain theological approach in a time when often very different methods of biblical science hold sway. Section 1 collects the strands of Ellul's place within the major quarrels. Then, Section 2 concentrates on the principal contents of what he reads in the Bible -- those dimensions which are the touchstone for his theological reflections. Whereas he abstains from systematic theology, his frequent allusions to a fairly well-defined position require that one take some heed of the strictly dogmatic matters indicated throughout Ellul's meditations on the Bible. He writes within a distinctly Protestant tradition (also exemplified by Karl Barth and Kierkegaard) and constantly draws upon it -- often without explicit acknowledgment for readers who may or may not be familiar with it. As a result, this cornerstone is the one with which they may need the most assistance. Still, Ellul does not slavishly draw on what has gone before and is always conscious of living in a setting different from that of the past. Thus, it is advantageous to present his theological stance as the fountainhead for his vision of what is at stake in the technological society.

Finally, after the central portion has discussed Ellul's sociological and theological pursuits, the Conclusion returns to what is implied in the title of the thesis. It brings the two parts back together again by asking the question, 'How does Ellul think the Bible can illuminate our world?'. It centres on the dialectical relationships upon which he focuses and which unite his doctrine of the two realms. Throughout, it must be remembered that, for Ellul, the Bible can speak to contemporary people just as surely as it did to the Greeks, to medieval

Christendom, to the Reformers or to any other age. Rooted in his beliefs about the city of man and the city of God, Ellul seems to possess a marked ability to question many assumptions about the world, about Christianity and about the relationship between them. Perhaps, he sees that challenge as the sum total of his written venture, for he maintains that anything further is not up to him.

CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR JACQUES ELLUL

A brief look at Ellul's bibliography has shown his writings spread over a broad spectrum: indeed one of the main aims of this thesis is to demonstrate the final unity of the diverse strands. From the outset, I wish to emphasize his own conception of his task -- an undertaking with several facets which emerge in different aspects of his work. In brief, he is committed as a Christian intellectual layman, participating in a portion of the calling of the whole Church.¹ His definite stance in no way weakens his arguments, but it does distinguish him from other, allegedly detached, observers of the religious, social and political fields.

The intellectual who does this work cannot do it in the way in which the intellectual Liberal of the nineteenth century used to work. He cannot regard himself as a spectator, free to 'look on' at life -- free from men and society, indifferent to and detached from material conditions and only admitting his personal passions or his own observations.

The work of Christian intellectuals is not done in the abstract, it is effective participation in the preservation of the world and in the building up of the Church. That is why we cannot act here simply in a free way; this is not an intellectual gymnastic to which we are called; it is above all in prayer and meditation that intellectuals will rediscover the sources of an intelligent life rooted in the concrete.²

¹ The word 'intellectual' is open to many interpretations, but it is Ellul's own choice. See for example, the quotation in footnote 2 or "Mirror", p. 201. This foundational chapter outlines how he envisages this task to distinguish his work from other tasks. For his account of the faculty of the intellect, see Part A, Chapter 3 (b).

² PK, pp. 121-2; p. 136. He has always emphasized that involvement rather than detachment is required for seeing and describing and understanding things clearly. This theme will recur throughout the thesis.

In order to clarify Ellul's self-understanding, I shall look at the two components separately -- a) the calling of the Church, and b) Ellul as a Christian intellectual.

a) The Calling of the Church

Introduction - Definition and Authority

Nowhere has Ellul spelled out completely his doctrine of the Church, but he does speak of it often enough to draw some conclusions. Typical of his few explicit references are "a people apart"³, "a holy nation"⁴, "a visible sign of the new covenant which God has made with this world in Jesus Christ"⁵, "the body of Christ"⁶, "the community of believers"⁷, "ambassadors from another Kingdom"⁸. Taken alone, these characterizations are not very helpful in expounding exactly what Ellul means. They do, however, point in the direction of a unique being whose uniqueness entails a task. Virtually every definition of the Church places the accent either on her being or on her task: for Ellul, it is most definitely on the latter. There is no doubt, however, that he

³ FPK, p. 64.

⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵ PK, p. 9.

⁶ FPK, p. 93. See also, "Le Pauvre", p. 119 for a discussion concerning why he thinks that the Church can never totally be identified with the body of Christ.

⁷ PMM, p. 17.

⁸ PK, p. 58. These expressions indicate how he characterizes the Church. For his most detailed elaborations of the Church, see "Note Problématique", pp. 310-314 and L'Apocalypse, pp. 131-48.

also insists on the unique being of the Church, for the task comes into existence only as the result of the divine calling into being. For example, he does not define the Church as a group of people who have decided to work together for good deeds or as some purely social agency. In fact, one gets the impression that "the theological being of the Church"⁹ is an assumption not seriously enough questioned to be a matter of contention. From within the Reformed Church of France, he basically accepts a Reformation account of the Church, and particularly that of Calvin, without the need for much further elaboration.¹⁰ Because of his awareness of the inseparability of the being and the task of the Church, he places particular stress on the visible Church.¹¹ Like Luther, he leans towards the idea of community or congregation to stress a people of God rather than a system of beliefs. In this respect, he follows Karl Barth's statement as a good account of what he himself wishes to say about the institution.

Since here and there through the Holy Spirit men meet with Jesus Christ and so also with one another, Christian community visibly arises and exists here and there. It is a form of the one, holy, universal people of God and a communion of holy men and works, in that it submits to sole rule by Jesus Christ, in whom it is founded, that it also aims to live solely in the fulfilment of its service as ambassador, that it recognizes its goal solely in its

⁹ FPK, p. 5. The word 'theological' here refers to the source as the calling of God.

¹⁰ See Calvin's Institutes, IV 1.

¹¹ See, for example, To Will, p. 75.

hope, which is its limit.¹²

Ellul's explicit use of the image of the ambassador gives an indication of several themes recurring in different guises throughout his theological writings. First, as an envoy, the focus of the Church's interest is not on herself and her own existence, nor on the peculiarities of her members.

[W]e must admit that it is difficult for a Christian to talk about himself. Not that it is difficult to lay oneself bare (especially in these days of literary exhibitionism). But a Christian ought to know how little interest attaches to him as a person. And he ought to know that it is better to talk about Jesus Christ than about himself.¹³

The only reason to concentrate at all on her own being is the insurance of the sustenance and clarity for the mission. Secondly, the ability of the Church does not come from herself, but from the source. As an ambassador, the Church is an alien force in the world, but is definitely assigned there (until recalled) to look after the interests of the authority or ruler. Thirdly, the figure shows that Ellul's bent is towards the concrete -- a trait that partially explains the absence of

¹² D in O, p. 141. See also Karl Barth, Theology and the Church (Chatham: 1962), pp. 334-7. For an indication of how this view differs from Roman Catholicism, see Ibid., pp. 272-85 and pp. 307-33. This account is similar to Calvin's except that the ambassador image is a bit different from that of the exile. The explicit reference to ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) is taken up by Ellul in PK, pp. 44-46 and "Le Sens", p. 5. See also "Le Rapport", p. 138, where he uses the expressions "lieutenant" and "vice-dominus". All of these reference indicate that the appellation 'the body of Christ' is not understood by Ellul as a form of mystical union, as much as a corporate community called by God to work for Him.

Concerning Barth's specific reference, I shall discuss Ellul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 3(b), and Chapter 6. Until we reach that explicit discussion, it will be sufficient to remember that the appellation 'Holy Spirit', refers to the activity of God by which He includes people in His work in the 'here and now' situation.

¹³ "Mirror", p. 200.

a worked out definition of the Church in vacuo. His main concern is the clarification of what it means to be the Church now. For him, a salutary and instructive definition of the Church will arise only from discussions of her practical obligations. Above all, from this view Ellul also draws the warning that the Church always remains both a human and a divine institution. Her source and direction is the invisible and divine truth, while her visible form is manifested through human activity. The fulfilment of the divine mission is in no sense automatic nor independent of the human medium.

When I speak here of the Church, I obviously am not thinking of the theological being of the Church but of her human reality (albeit I am well aware that the two cannot be separated. Praise God for that!).¹⁴

It is the unique combination contained in the ambassador image upon which Ellul would focus attention.

Before going on to look at the details of what the Church should do, it is significant to look at her authority. Although the Church would seem to have some prestige by virtue of her calling, Ellul emphasizes that it resides solely in what she is a visible means of support to. Her power is totally derivative.

She should base herself entirely on that which makes her the Church, that is, on her election by God and on the revelation committed to her as a precious departure. That alone can be her point of departure. There she must constantly return to find her roots.¹⁵

Every time she deviates, she has no authority at all. More precisely, Ellul's position concerning the revelation committed to the Church is

¹⁴ FPK, p. 5.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

the sola scriptura principle.¹⁶ In summary, it may be formulated in this way. God has communicated His will to the prophets and apostles and, under His over-powering influence, these men wrote down what was revealed to them. Then once again with God's assistance, some people have recognized these writings as showing the true source of understanding and of life. The authority of the Church as the body of these secondary witnessess comes only from the fact that she is rooted in the original, direct witness -- but only as an echo and as a submission to that source of revelation.

Even the smallest, strangest, simplest or obscurest among the biblical witnesses has an incomparable advantage over even the most pious, scholarly and sagacious latter-day theologian.¹⁷

By that reckoning the Church is always judged by God through His revelation in the Bible and never vice versa. When considering the Church as the historical recipients of the authoritative Scriptures, he sees all epochs on an equal footing. Each will see certain dimensions of the Bible more clearly than others and each will make mistakes and distort the Bible in different ways. No single era is authoritative for what comes after, except by way of example of a previous attempt. Each must respond anew to the revelation of the Bible and transmit it to the world. Ellul goes perhaps even further than Barth or Calvin or

¹⁶ Ellul's specific approach to the Bible will be the focus of Part B; for now I introduce the sola scriptura principle insofar as it defines the work of the Church. See, for example, To Will, p. 306.

¹⁷ ET, p. 26. This quotation echoes Ellul's sentiments exactly. Accordingly, the activity of the Church is to be guided by the Bible and God's inspiration in this matter from the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, because the Church is composed of human beings, it will also in fact be governed by sociological trends governing institutions. In conversation, Ellul emphasized that all three aspects will be present in the Church's attempt to be the Church, for she is never free from the world in the doing of God's work.

Luther in his absence of reference to the Creeds when he says, "Today my thinking centers on the search for a Credo for the church of tomorrow."¹⁸ Even the Creeds have no eternal validity equal to the Scripture and they have authority only insofar as they reflect it: they have no status above that of the other witnesses who followed.

At this point, one might argue that Ellul is advocating a not very subtle renunciation of any authority for the institutional Church, in that she can always be overruled by a contrary appeal to the Bible. After all, what standards can humanly determine when and where God has been active? Ellul's thought on this matter, however, is not that simplistic. For him, Israel and the Church have been the only historical media God has chosen for the transmission of what He specifically wants for the world. They are special to God. The explicit witness, no matter how badly mistaken or mutilated, takes place solely in those two bodies. Therefore, the Christian must look to the Church, both present and past, for guidance in taking stock of exactly where he is. The Creeds and theologies of the whole Church are important for they have concentrated on the proclamation of the Bible.

It [the will of God] has to be explained in contemporary terms, but in itself it does not vary.¹⁹

For dogmatics, it is normal and right to consult the earlier theologians and to understand their peculiar expression of the revelation of God.²⁰

¹⁸ "Mirror", p. 204.

¹⁹ PK, p. 27. Ellul's understanding of 'the will of God' will be elaborated in Part B, Section 2.

²⁰ To Will, p. 225. In conversation, M. Ellul paid homage to the early theologians for having raised, from the very beginning, all the really important questions.

These statements imply that studies in Church history are not merely antiquarian, for despite changes in the worldly situation, God remains constant, so that His revelation or inspiration is not simply random. That concern of the Church is the same in all ages. Furthermore, Ellul goes to pains to guard against a Christianity outside of the Church. Two examples come in his discussion of the propaganda speech of *the* Rabshakeh to the people of Israel (2 Kings 18:17-37) and in his attack on those who justify the activities of anti-Christians because of the short-comings of the Church.²¹ Her importance remains intact because of her unique calling. Thus, the whole community, from the earliest fathers (and Israel before them) to the present, maintains an immense influence in its subsidiary but chosen position. Whereas the faithful Church has the highest authority, the faithless Church has no authority at all. Since she is never totally one or the other, there is the need for great vigilance. Despite the exalted expectations for the Church, no single expression is infallible: only God, speaking through the Scriptures and His here and now commandments, is infallible. In short, Ellul definitely asserts the sovereignty of Scripture over all tradition and dogma, but, at the same time, he affirms a continuity and

²¹ For the first example, see P of G, pp. 143-61 and, for the second, see FPK, pp. 34-36. This stance does not mean that he thinks the Church should be oblivious to outside attacks, for they can indicate the failure to live up to her calling. For example, in conversation, he mentioned the salutary effects of the attacks on the Church in the nineteenth century and, as I shall discuss in the Postscript to Part B, Section 1, the good results of historical criticism in biblical studies. For this portion, however, I am looking at his view of the specific requirement for the Christian to work for and within the Church.

affinity with the tradition of the Church throughout the centuries.²²

i) The Doctrine of the Two Realms

The sole duty of the Church (in politics as well as in all else) is to take her stand in relation to the question:

"When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"²³

This deceptively simple formulation of the task requires further explanation in light of how Ellul perceives the doctrine of the two realms.

This teaching has had a long history with so many variations that it is often difficult to distinguish the nuances. I shall not enter here into the controversy, but only state briefly Ellul's specific interpretation that forms the cornerstone of his thought.

[T]he Christian belongs to two Cities. He is in the world, and he has a social life. He is a citizen of a nation; he has a place in a family; he has a situation, and must work to earn money; the setting of his life is the same as that of other men; he lives with them; he shares with them the same nature and the same conditions. . . . On the other hand, he cannot belong wholly to this world. For him this world can only be a "tabernacle", in which he is a "stranger and a pilgrim". For him it is a temporary situation, though

²² Although he seldom appeals directly to the tradition, in conversation, M. Ellul spoke of his great attachment to it and also of the need to look at previous attempts to live the calling of the Church. See, for example, NP, pp. 11-29 concerning medieval Christendom. Although he often criticizes that time, here he discusses what they saw that has since been neglected. He does not ignore the tradition because he thinks it has been surpassed, but because of the 'here and now' calling of the Church to be discussed in the rest of this foundational chapter. He speaks directly to the tradition mainly when he disagrees with what has gone on before as being inapplicable to this age.

As we shall see in sub-section(b), Ellul does not concern himself in his writings with the internal organization or authority structure of the Church. Suffice it to say that such questions have been prickly issues for the Protestants with their acceptance of 'the priesthood of all believers'. See Part B, Section 1, Chapter 6 a (iii), concerning his comments on certainty of interpretation. Beyond that discussion, he would accept the need for internal discipline and guidelines, but they would have to remain relative and humble, open to correction from the source. Here I am referring to his overall definition of the Church as holding authority from having been called forth by God.

²³ FPK, p. 177.

extremely important, because he belongs to another City. He derives his thought from another source. He has another Master.²⁴

This quotation indicates a fairly standard Protestant position and is very much in keeping with the imagery of ambassadorship. Most important is the way in which he sees the actual relationship between the two cities. On this question, he attacks Luther's formulation (or at least the major interpretations of Luther), on the one hand, and, on the other, the medieval Roman Catholic and Orthodox practices. He rejects the Lutheran interpretation on the grounds that it leaves the Church with an inward or spiritual vocation, but with no responsibility for changing the order of the world. For Ellul, the Church must remember that the two cities are co-extensive.

For us there is no division into two domains, into two realms. There is no distinction between public life and private life, etc. There is only one world in which we live with its forms of spirituality also. . . . Within the temporal is found the bearer of the revelation -- and not the spiritual -- and that does not add up to two domains. . . . The Christian faith implies for him transformations within business, politics etc., which are referred to the person of Jesus Christ. Thus the tension is set up in one world (and not a separation), tension which does not mean rupture but not adherence either.²⁵

This argument does not mean that the absolute dichotomy between the two disappears or is in any way diminished. Ellul argues, therefore, that a second fallacy is the source of the error of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. He maintains that they saw an identity between Church and society in which every aspect of society was to be Christianized, submitted to the Christian order.

²⁴ PK, pp. 44-45.

²⁵ To Will, p. 290.

Malheureusement cette volonté de sanctifier la société conduit à un désastre, à un reniement des fondements mêmes du christianisme, par le triomphe de la loi sur la grâce. Et il ne peut être autrement. Car le diagnostic de la Bible reste permanent, tant que la création déchue persiste, le monde reste monde. . . . L'Eglise a été vaincue pour avoir cru possible de christianiser et de moraliser ce qui reste adversaire irréductible -- et pour avoir renoncé à ses véritables armes, acceptant une victoire gagnée par un autre et sans cesse remise en question dans le débat du monde.²⁶

The two cities remain in total opposition, but always set together in one world. They cannot be fused and they cannot be separated except by God.

Ellul makes his point in a number of ways that involve traditional theological categories. For example:

In reality, the two orders of preservation and of redemption are not separated, but they are integrated, the one in the other.²⁷

At all times, there are inevitably two opposites inextricably combined. Man is both sinner and redeemed; preservation and redemption of the world are both part of the Church's job; a Christian ethic is both necessary and impossible; the world must be made livable while pronouncing judgment on it. The Church always has a simultaneous responsibility, because the two orders or cities are in fact never disconnected. As a result, she is not allowed to retreat into an illusory, spiritual domain to glory in her own salvation. The very attempt is betrayal.

²⁶ H et A, pp. 31-32. See also *To Will*, p. 235, still remembering footnote 22. Ellul would also say that Calvin's Geneva tended in the same direction. In theological terms, he criticizes the former view for neglecting the Incarnation and the latter for neglecting the reality of the fall. Since Part B will be devoted to Ellul's theological position, I shall not go into further explanation here, except by way of presenting his doctrine of the two realms.

²⁷ PK, p. 86.

[P]eople argue that nothing matters but the 'interior life'; that is, that to be the 'salt' or the 'light' is a purely spiritual affirmation which has no practical consequences. . . . It turns the living person of Jesus Christ into an abstraction. God became incarnate -- it is not for us to undo His work.²⁸

The practical requirement becomes crucial for the Church set in this unresolvable (in human terms) conflict.

If there is a call from God, we must find a way to express it, that is to incarnate it. But this has now become practically impossible. So calling, vocation, tends to remain something purely inward, purely spiritual. Yet for a faith centred on the Incarnation, this is simply unacceptable.²⁹

The identity and the opposition of the two realms is very much at the heart of the matter. As a result, throughout his works apparent contradictions emerge; nevertheless, he maintains they must be held together or, more accurately, lived together by the Church.

Because of the need to embody faith within the world, Ellul tends to downplay a vision of eternal life. Although he certainly does not deny its importance, he argues that life after death should not be the preoccupation of the present Church.³⁰ Her very existence presupposes salvation and eternal life. Unlike the Reformers, however, he does not equate the election of the Church community to doctrines of eternal salvation or damnation. Rather, he maintains that God has proclaimed

²⁸ PK, p. 86.

²⁹ "W and C", p. 12. In the same article (p. 15), he speaks of the impossibility of repeating the Incarnation of Jesus Christ which he sees as a once and for all event. See also P of G, p. 186, To Will, p. 263 and HTA, pp. 87, 120, 254. At the same time, Christian faith is centred on that Event: it provides the standard. The centrality of the Event of Jesus Christ for all of Ellul's understanding of the Bible as God's revelation will be the major concern throughout Part B. I introduce it here for the focus of the Church.

³⁰ For this point, see, for example, M of C, p. 188.

His decision to save everybody and the special election of the Church is to make known that truth to the rest of the world who have yet to hear and accept it.³¹ Therefore, the Church must remember that she is called to live the doctrine of the two realms without worrying about a final reward of self-glory for her pains. The whole life of the Church should be a visible testimony in this world to her source, which is other than the ways of the world.

Now the Church should be there precisely to affirm that there is another way, that there is an option, unseen by men but infinitely real, that there is a dimension to the affair which is unknown to man, that there is a truth above and beyond the political alternatives which has repercussions on them.³²

³¹ See M of C, p. 173 (footnote) or P of G, pp. 20,54. In conversation, M. Ellul distinguished between salut and r  sponsabilit  .

Interestingly, this position was articulated in opposition to Calvin's more harsh double predestinarianism by a member of the French Reformed Church, Mo  se Amyraut, who put forward the idea of 'hypothetical universal predestination': Christ's atonement was sufficient for all, although only efficient for the elect. This strand, taken up by the Arminians who were considered heterodox to Calvinists, is quite fixed in Ellul's thought. In fact, one could say that for him one of the main biblical proclamations is God's constant will for the salvation of all.

³² FPK, p. 163. See also L'Apocalypse, p. 145. It should be noted that he does not mean that the Church should simply concern herself with ethics as a separate field. The problem of ethics is a pivotal link, but it is not the sum total of Christian life. See, for example, PK, p. 31. Secondly, although he does not think it possible to spell out a blueprint for action, the demand for a lived witness is central in his understanding of the doctrine of the two realms. This argument is central throughout To Will. Thirdly, as I shall discuss in Part B, Ellul believes that prayer, contemplation, repentance are 'practice' more than joining a political party, for they would be more apt to challenge the structures and the ways of the world.

It calls for action -- but of another kind.³³

That affirmation of something else is the special vocation of the Church caught in the two realms.

Considering the single task of the Church, the following distinctions are rather crude, for they run the risk of falsifying Ellul's view of the Church by compartmentalizing it. Still, a look at her three responsibilities will help to put the two realms into context.

The primary responsibility of the Church is towards God. As the people of God, she should never forget her function of praise and worship in which she recognizes the true purpose for all people and the whole world as the reflection of the glory of God.³⁴ Within this goal of turning people to their proper end, the whole life of the Church takes place.

Dieu ne propose nullement à l'ensemble des hommes de faire de la société un paradis terrestre. Mais seulement à des hommes particuliers, appelés à une besogne très particulière, d'accomplir dans ce milieu-là, et non dans un autre, sa volonté.³⁵

³³ Violence, p. 148. In making this statement, he does not forget that the Church, as a sociological body, does not escape the ways of the world. Again, he stresses that both are true at the same time, and he warns against 'angelism' (a phrase borrowed from, but not used in precisely the same way as, Jacques Maritain). It was a central theme in a talk delivered by M. Ellul in Bordeaux, 1974 called "The Future of the Church" where he warned against either an over-estimation or a cynicism about the possibilities of the Church. See also "W and C", p. 13.

³⁴ See, for example, Violence, p. 72, "Le Sens", pp. 11-16, L'Apocalypse, pp. 109, 252, or H et A, pp. 233-39 where he says that the Church must include all of nature and even technology in her reflection of the glory of God.

³⁵ H et A, p. 31. Concerning the question of why some people are chosen and others not, see Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7, footnote 96.

In other words, the Church best reflects the glory of God by doing what He wants done. The main implication is that she cannot choose her own subject matter. Anything else is faithlessness or a lack of hope, an aspect underlined in Ellul's discussion of Jonah.

Jonah, in spite of the spiritual experience he had had, in spite of the knowledge of grace he had gained, in spite of his decision to be faithful, did not become free to select for himself what he would say to men. He did not go to them to tell them about his experiences or the revelations he might have had. He did not decide on the content of his teaching. God did not tell him to go to Nineveh to say what he thought was good. God commanded the same preaching. Thus, no matter what our spiritual development may be, our witness is bound fast by the word of God. The greatest saint or mystic can say nothing of value unless it is based solely on God's word. . . . [W]hat is true in relation to the individual is also true in relation to the Church. The Church is not to choose its preaching. It must simply follow as faithfully as possible the eternal order and the hic et nunc order of its Lord.³⁶

In addition, this obedience is not to be generalized or rationalized. Ellul underscores the specific duty to God when he speaks of the sin of Jereboam.

[T]he sin of Jereboam was precisely that he made theological and religious decisions regarding the true God for political reasons, thus subordinating the spiritual life of the people to political necessity, orienting its worship to the demands of politics, seizing control of the revelation in order to distinguish the true God. . . . It integrates God's work into the imperative of a realistic policy.³⁷

He sinned not so much because he objectively transgressed the commandment, but because his motivation was other than fidelity to the commandment. The Church is to do what she is told, even if obedience requires

³⁶ JJ, pp. 87-88.

³⁷ P of G, p. 125. The relationship between freedom and obedience for Ellul will be discussed in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7. Even though the main point here is the need for obedience if the Church is to be the Church, the two cannot be separated.

going beyond the limits of human calculation.

This responsibility becomes even more acute when Ellul shows that God almost always works through human intermediaries.

At every point we shall see the affirmation of a divine will, but it never acts directly. It transmits, expresses, and executes itself through human intermediaries.³⁸

God is not one who despises man. He is the one who elevates man to the dignity in which he has a part in God's work.³⁹

Because the Church has known what is to be done, any negligence in obedience carries serious repercussions. Since God has chosen to act through people, the ambassador image becomes critical. The Church does not 'take God's place' as a substitute; nevertheless, she is more important than a forwarding office or a faceless civil servant. Only the Church can expressly proclaim and live God's message and reflect His glory, so that the rest of the world will be able to do the same. She has the duty of making known the true good, on God's behalf, and is also answerable for failures to do so.

Israel's situation is even worse than that of the unbelieving because Israel knows what the good is and the other does not. This knowledge is the great difference between them; but Israel, who knows, is fully responsible on that account. Israel is called into judgment before this very good.⁴⁰

³⁸ P of G, p. 16. Ellul goes on to stress that, except for the unusual occasions when God speaks directly, for example, to the prophets or to St. Paul, "this divine will never constrains man to execute literally what it represents". (Ibid., p. 16) Even though disobedience does not render God impotent, for He does find other ways to implement His plan (Ibid., p. 17), still the net outcome is a great responsibility for the Church, involving the highest level of attention.

³⁹ JJ, p. 88.

⁴⁰ To Will, pp. 32-33. This knowledge does not imply that the Chosen peoples are more intrinsically capable of performing the good; it implies that they must make it known. See Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7, footnote 12 for a discussion of the double meaning of responsibility.

The position of the Church, which is the new Israel, gives her the greatest possibilities and the most onerous burdens, for she is accountable for the revelation with which she has been entrusted. This charge explains Ellul's own compulsion to write. His enormous outflow may be totally erroneous, but it cannot be misconstrued as aimed at his own glory. As a member of the Church, it is his contribution to the work of the Church as an instrument of God.⁴¹

As God's representative, the other side of the task of the Church in the two realms is obviously towards the world. In a very real sense, Ellul cannot easily distinguish between the responsibility of the Church towards believers and towards non-believers. As we have seen, believers are not in a special, privileged position: they too must contend with the world as it is. Again the case of Jonah is illustrative of the point.

[W]e oscillate like Jonah between joy and doubt, for we are never certain of what we have lived through or of the interpretation we have given it. We may have conflicting experiences like Jonah. We may thus regard all that is positive in our lives as illusion.

These fluctuations, these dramas, this psychology of Jonah teaches us about ourselves. First, we are brought back, as we have seen, to this co-existence of two men, to the survival of the carnal man in spite of the new birth; we need not pursue this.⁴²

This stand becomes particularly incisive when Ellul also argues that the question 'When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?'

⁴¹ Even in HTA, where he says that the great fear of the Old Testament, that God will turn away from the world, has come to pass in our age, he still thinks that the Church's mission of obedience continues. As we shall see shortly, this new situation puts a stronger requirement on the Church to be alert and faithful to her responsibilities.

⁴² JJ, pp. 85, 84.

implies that, despite the calling of the Church, He may not.⁴³ One major implication is the responsibility of the Church towards believers, simply because they are the Church. Since they are not invulnerable, she has to play a sustaining role.

In passing, Ellul has referred to the ministry and the sacraments, but more often he emphasizes the need for solidarity to support the efforts of individual members. He stresses the Church as a corporate community in which everyone is part of the whole. Although each member has a personal and total relationship with God, not everyone has to perform every single part of the Church's work. To expect an individualistic atomism "is forgetting that the scriptures strictly differentiate the brothers who are 'weak' and that one cannot expect everything of everybody".⁴⁴ Since God seldom speaks directly, the Church must practically divide up the duties and support those who are engaged in any particular aspect. At the same time, she must ensure that each contribution does benefit the whole community, enhance its clarity and participate in the whole job.

⁴³ M. Ellul made this point in his talk "The Future of the Church". One is reminded of the controversy over the irresistibility of grace -- with Ellul leaning, once more, towards the Arminians as opposed to the purely Calvinistic side. The difference may be largely intramural, for both underline the need for the assistance and support of the faithful. (See Institutes, IV 14 1.) Ellul does seem to argue that at least in the short run grace can be denied.

⁴⁴ FPK, p. 84. For example, although each Christian has his or her own spiritual life, not everybody is called to do a theological or a sociological analysis on behalf of the Church. See also PMM, pp. 177, 188. The other side of seeing her as a corporate body as opposed to individualism is "that such a research is necessarily a corporate act. It is impossible for an isolated Christian to follow this path." (PK, p. 149)

This does not imply individualism. Jonah is a member of the chosen people. . . . In fact Jonah represents the whole people of Israel, and if he is quite alone he still represents the whole people, both Israel and the Church.⁴⁵

The solidarity means that the overall undertaking can be divided and also that the individual is, in a sense, the whole. Therefore, not only must the Church unify her work, but also she must not neglect the teaching of the faithful. Only through adequate instruction of all the members can the corporate nature of the Church be sustained. Only then does the task become feasible.

All we have said so far about the Church must be understood by Christians gathered into the Church. . . . [I]t must be done by the entire Christian community, and not at all by some administrative body theoretically representing the Church.⁴⁶

To a large extent, Ellul's theological writings are directed towards that goal of teaching as an aid to believers.

The third area of the Church's responsibility is towards the world in general; that is, towards non-believers. She cannot content herself with sustaining the faith of the faithful: she must incarnate her

⁴⁵ JJ, p. 22. Because of the solidarity, it is understandable that Ellul does not always distinguish between the work of the individual Christian and that of the corporate Church. As we shall see in subsection (b), this lack of distinction becomes central because of his concentration on the laity.

⁴⁶ TFL, p. 137. What he says about the responsibility towards believers comes out most explicitly in HTA. Following the model of Israel in the past two thousand years, he says that in this time of abandonment by God, a great rigour, discipline, support and concentration are mandatory for the mere survival of the Church. During such an age, the discipline and allegiance of the remnant must be a high priority. For this particular topic, see *Ibid*, p. 288ff. He also mentions that he thinks what he is saying is similar to Bonhoeffer's 'arcane discipline'. (See HTA, p. 293.) Finally, nowhere does Ellul indicate when he thinks the age of abandonment began or how long the Church will have to endure without God's sustenance.

faith within an alien world. For Ellul, this dimension is the most misunderstood one in this epoch and forms the heart of his understanding of the doctrine of the two realms. Above all, the Church cannot assume Christian belief or even a predisposition towards it on the part of the world.

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 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, but they should be able to make a decision.⁴⁷

This work involves two related aspects. The first is to show people the world as it really is and in what direction it is headed -- as part of the preservation of the world to allow the possibility of God's work. The second is to set forth the content of revelation in such a way that the choice of redemption is clear to people.⁴⁸

The first objective provides the impetus for all of Ellul's sociological writings. "There are in the world a certain number of key points or pivots around which everything is arranged and functions."⁴⁹ More than simply isolated day-to-day events, these points are the bases

⁴⁷ PK, p. 142. See also HTA, p. 80, where he says, "Where man is not looking for anything, he cannot hear the Gospel." This passage is not seeking a 'point of contact', but rather is a brief reference to the task of the Church.

⁴⁸ This two-fold task is parallel to the distinction he makes in his own writings between analysis or description (sociological writings) and understanding (theological writings). This theme is central for putting Ellul's work into perspective and will be a major pre-occupation of the body of this thesis.

⁴⁹ FPK, p. 184. See also PI, p. 11 and HTA pp. 279-82, where he says that he studies those points midway between current events and the deepest substratum where everything is the same.

from which the details flow. Among them in our age, Ellul includes work, money, propaganda, statism and, above all, technique. He wants to describe those foci that really do dominate contemporary society. In every age, he argues, the Church has a duty to clarify the assumptions of the age and the direction in which society is moving by following them blindly.

Thus the Church should attempt to enlighten man and society on what they are doing and undertaking, not in order to dissuade them, but in order to make things clear, to see to it that the stakes are in full view and that the rules of the game are honest, that there is no self-justification, either in the undertaking or in the results.⁵⁰

Simply by pointing to the actual trends of society and human endeavours, the Church can help prevent paths that lead to the closedness, the domination, the despair arising when people follow false faiths and hopes, and also that make them unable to hear the Gospel at all. As we shall see in Part A, the task of exposing the world for what it is is one that Ellul takes with full seriousness.

The second part of the responsibility of the Church towards the world involves direct fidelity towards her source. The problem is how to make known that she is in fact God's intermediary. The Church must give an account of her origins, if only in answer to questions -- an account that must be spoken as well as lived. In many of his theological reflections, Ellul reminds the Church to use language that people

⁵⁰ FPK, pp. 199-200. For Ellul, this obligation is one that the Church must always perform and, as we shall see in Part A, he believes that it is now the unmasking of the technological society. From the outset, it should be noted that he does not think that this exposé is a purely intellectual matter, for the lives of Christians in every walk of life can contribute to the requisite clarity. Nevertheless, the intellectual clarification is not to be underestimated by the Church and it forms a backbone of Ellul's own endeavour -- as I shall discuss in sub-section (b).

can understand. The scandal or the stumbling-block in Christianity does not come from the difficulties of reading archaic languages: it comes directly from the very content of the biblical revelation. Since he believes that the Gospel can break through even to modern people, he insists that it must be proclaimed in a contemporary manner.⁵¹ That call is easier to say than do. In light of the fact that Ellul understands the ways of the world to be antithetical to Christianity and especially since he sees a complex relationship between Christianity and contemporary society, it is difficult to find a satisfactory language for speaking the truth of the Gospel in the technological society.⁵² The problem for the Church is that she must speak to the

⁵¹ For example, Ellul says that Luther pursued this course in his day. "It is nevertheless true that the external conditions of communication have to be taken into account before the preaching can take place. Luther's teaching was, in spite of everything, in terms of humanist rediscoveries. It was in their terms and yet in tension with them and in conflict with them." (HTA, p. 86.) Although Ellul seems to sympathize with Rudolph Bultmann's attempts to make the Gospel speak to modern people, he would not advocate a policy of apologetics or making the Bible fit into a different framework which then retains priority. As we shall see in Part A, Chapter 2, for Ellul, the Bible destroys the myths of the world and not vice versa. Similarly he rejects the project of Teilhard de Chardin on the grounds that, in order to accommodate the modern trends in science, he must finally de-personalize God and turn Christ into an abstraction. For both these arguments, see FPK, pp. 206-9. Ellul would talk of "translating" the language of the Bible, in the same way that Barth does in D in O, p. 33ff., but not in Bultmann's specific usage. Central to Ellul's position is the belief that the biblical revelation pronounces a judgment (as well as mercy) on every human account of the world, and that many modern 'translators' have neglected that judgment and tension.

⁵² For further discussion of these points, see Part A, Chapter 2, footnote 44 and also Part B, Section I, Chapter 6 b (i) concerning the use of philosophy.

presuppositions that people hold in a particular epoch without falling into any of the following traps: incomprehensibility, irrelevance, a betrayal or an inflection of her source, the acceptance of opposing givens. This combination could be ruled out as impossible, except that it is her raison d'être.

Immediately, a serious question for Ellul's whole account arises. Why does the Church have to worry about the details of describing how the world is headed on its own terms? Does he not thereby enhance the modern sociological enterprise as something valid on its own hook, capable of giving insight apart from revelation? What would an independent social science add to what is said in the Bible or to immediate obedience to God's commandments?⁵³ In answer to these queries, Ellul points to the practical dangers of neglecting the concrete situation -- even for believers.

⁵³ These questions raise the same objections that Karl Barth used against Emil Brunner in Natural Theology (London: 1946). Considering the affinity of Barth and Ellul, Ellul's reply is of interest. In conversation, he said that in this debate he sides entirely with Barth over Brunner concerning the impossibility of a negative point of contact. Nevertheless, he takes issue with Barth concerning the difficulty of the link between the biblical revelation and the ability to incarnate it in the world. He says that Barth tends to indicate that the flow is semi-automatic, whereas he (Ellul) considers the relationship to be more complex and difficult. His precise comments on the link will be discussed in Part B, Section 1, Chapter 6 (b) and in the general Conclusion.

If one were to push Barth's position far enough, one could ask why he himself writes so voluminously. Why not simply urge people to read their Bibles more carefully, so that God can inspire them directly? In that way there would not be any problem, except for the initial conversion. This counter-attack is perhaps a caricature of Barth, but in order to avoid it, Ellul stresses the need for a realistic knowledge of the world the Church lives in -- as part of the biblical orientation.

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. Tant que je me contente d'affirmer in globo que l'homme est pécheur, je ne sais pas que je le suis.⁵⁴

Furthermore, he argues that a vague confidence that God will spread His Gospel without the tangible collaboration of His people betrays a lack of charity towards them. It shows an indifference to their actual situation -- an attitude he finds foreign to that of the Bible.

The Bible always shows us God laying hold of man in his practical situations, in the setting of his own life, enabling him to act with the means of his own time, in the midst of the problems of his own day.

To proclaim the word of God to people in the abstract, to people who are in a situation which prevents them from understanding it, means that we are tempting God.⁵⁵

We come back to his conviction that God works through human intermediaries. Although only He can establish a true contact with people, He works through the medium of the Church. Combined with the biblical emphasis on the real situation, that commandment requires the Church to spell out the concrete world, to raise questions about concrete situations and to preach to concrete people. She cannot simply sit back and relax or preach in vacuo. In the final analysis, the Church must go beyond a mere recording of the situation and a statement of her message. She must also throw into question the activities of the world and relativize them by finding a new way of life that announces her different source.

⁵⁴ "Le Réalisme Politique", p. 723.

⁵⁵ PK, pp. 140, 141.

The Church should always be the breach in an enclosed world: in the world of Sartre's private individual as well as in the worlds of the perfection of technology, the totalism of politics or the strongbox of the kingdom of money. It all amounts to the same thing. Christians have their role to play, which might seem deceptive and harmful, of preventing the world from attaining its own perfection along one or other of its paths.⁵⁶

ii) The Modus Operandi of the Church

A premise of Ellul's doctrine of the two realms is that the Church must live the truth she has received: it follows then that her modus operandi is the test of whether she comprehends the task. His favourite figure for the proper stance in the world is that of the prophet. As one can say, at the very least, that prophecy looms large as his model of discipleship, this discussion will begin by examining the theme. Then it will move on to the complementary activities of hope and reconciliation.

In the Old Testament, Ellul sees the prophet as a concrete figure, enmeshed in his own society, whose pronouncements referred to the specific historical situation. God spoke to him in order to convey His will to that exact time. Also, the prophecy was directed ultimately to the people of Israel as the people of God. As a result, the prophet was speaking a language they understood, for he used them to immediate repentance, not generally but by recalling them to Mosaic Law of which they were a part. In this reading, Ellul finds that he must reject any notion of prophecy as a current of ideas in which later people corrected earlier errors or expanded upon previous philosophies. "The prophet is characterized not by ideas, but by the fact that God's word is addressed

⁵⁶ FPK, p. 209. See also L'Apocalypse, pp. 167, 263. For Ellul, the opening up of closed situations is the unique activity of the Church.

to him and is to be conveyed by him."⁵⁷ Similarly, prophecy was not symbolic, for it expressed God's 'here and now' will, combining judgment and mercy.⁵⁸ In this respect, the prophetic role was never removed from the political realm. If the people were obedient to the prophet's words, then there were direct implications for the politics of Israel. What Ellul stresses overtly is God's assessment of the situation and the concrete response in action demanded from the hearers of prophecy.⁵⁹ Mainly he underlines that the activity in no way resulted from the dictates of the world, but only from the radical otherness of God's direct command. He never wavers from belief in adherence to this kind of affirmation; yet, at the same time, he adds that the prophetic writings are such only by virtue of their relationship to Christ. This aspect of prophecy must be kept sorted out from the fact that it was God's

⁵⁷ JJ, p. 14. This view of revelation rejects Calvin's account of progressive revelation in Scripture. See Institutes II 10 20. This matter will be further discussed in Part B, Section 1, Chapter 5. Secondly, as mentioned in footnote 38, the prophets and apostles are distinctive in that God made His will known to them in an exceptional manner. See, for example, P of G, p. 22. In conversation, M. Ellul said that the Bible does not stress direct revelation from God and he alluded to John 20:29. See also HTA, p. 185.

⁵⁸ Ellul 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." (JJ, p. 15) He also notes the exception (Ibid., p. 11) of the final section of Isaiah. These exceptions, he feels, do not undermine his main argument.

⁵⁹ With his particular emphasis, Ellul tends to ignore the ecstatic element of all prophecy and the experience of being in the presence of God, not directly related to judgment. It is, therefore, possible to criticize him for maintaining a somewhat simplified, very Protestant view of prophecy, for his own purposes. He would, however, take it for granted that prophetic announcements are linked directly to prayer, worship and communion with God. A similar link will be discussed in the section on prayer. See Part B, Section 1, Chapter 6 b (ii).

will for Israel at definite times and places.

Finally the two aspects of prophecy noted (word of God to Israel and intimation of Christ) are not absolutely connected with one another nor necessarily conjoined. In other words, the books have their own significance apart from any intimation of Jesus Christ. They may be self-sufficient even though they derive their true reference from Jesus Christ and prophetic fulfilment. The patent meaning does not have to lead to the second meaning nor does the latter necessarily qualify the former.⁶⁰

Even though Jesus Christ provided the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, Ellul does not conclude that the image of the prophet then became out-dated.

[T]he prophets of Israel always had a political part to play, which, in connexion with their civilization, was quite 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 makes it actual and present in his own environment.⁶¹

Prophecy was given a new impetus in the commandment of Christ to the disciples to go out into the world, to preach there until the Son of Man returns.

If there have been no more prophets, in the Old Testament sense, since John the Baptist, if in the New Testament passages, the prophets have an altogether different charisma, there is still the matter of proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ in a given historic situation, in a world

⁶⁰ JJ, p. 15. For Ellul's description of the relationship between the parts and the unity of the Bible, see Part B, Section I, Chapter 5. I raise the matter here only to complete his understanding of Old Testament prophecy.

⁶¹ PK, p. 50.

which is characteristic and well defined. It is not a question of abstract, generalized or metaphysical preaching.⁶²

The practice of prophecy for the Church becomes more complex, for it is no longer directed to a few select people. It is required of the Church as a whole. In accordance with the original prophetic tradition, the Church must continually remind her members to repent and to reorient themselves to the biblical revelation, in order to recall the requirement to incarnate their biblical faith. Also like the prophets, it is not up to the Church to act herself as a political body: her purpose is to announce God's Lordship in the matter. She should, therefore, only rarely take a direct political stance.⁶³

Ellul argues that such a proclamation is not a non-effective quietism, for it brings the unique component that breaks up otherwise closed conditions. Although the Church herself should not act politically, he

⁶² FPK, pp. 189-90. This calling is not a simplistic harking back to a former Scripture, for the hope of the Church is founded on the promise of the return of Jesus Christ. With reference to the coming Kingdom, Ellul occasionally refers to a non-articulated prophecy of the Kingdom (even by non-Christians). See, for example, "L'Irréductibilité", p. 69 or JJ, p. 103. More explicitly for the Christian task, see HTA, p. 292, concerning living in the order of the Resurrection. If the Kingdom had not in some sense already been initiated, then it would be impossible to speak of any prophetic mission for the Church as a whole -- especially in an age of abandonment. This complex eschatological backdrop in Ellul's thought will be taken up in Part B, Section 2.

⁶³ See, for example, P of G, p. 33, where Ellul notes that Elisha was the only one who did not act; nevertheless, his prophecy did have results. Again, it is a question of what constitutes unique action in the world. When he cautions against political stances, Ellul means that the Church should not take the easy route of following the commonly accepted ways of the world. See, for example, FPK, p. 165. Occasionally, there may be a necessity for a political decision; for example, the Barmen Declaration in 1934. (See Ibid., p. 106.) These times are few and far between and even then the motivation should not be political in the narrow sense of manoeuvring within ordinary channels, but rather speaking of the biblical revelation about political power itself.

does think that each individual Christian is asked to respond in his or her own life. In this way the prophetic pronouncement includes its own enactment. Finally, because the Church believes the Old Testament prophecies have been completed and disclosed for the whole world, according to Ellul, she must speak prophetically to all people and not just to her own.⁶⁴

The need for prophecy for all involves two different but related ways of operating -- being watchman for the world and preaching. The purpose of the watchman is the part of prophecy that includes the sighting of key points, already discussed.

Precisely because the Christian should not be rooted in the current situations of the world, they (and they alone) ought to render the outstanding service of giving warning of political issues to come, which are going to be knotty and are threatening to appear.⁶⁵

Not only should there be a prediction of events, but also a warning of the dangers involved in them. By the time overt violence is unleashed, the Church has failed in her prophetic mission. She can do nothing except be silent, pray and repent for all. Only within the obligation

⁶⁴ See, for example, M of C, pp. 179-82.

⁶⁵ FPK, p. 188. In speaking of the watchman, he cites Ezekiel 3:18 and 33:7-10 and the repeated New Testament injunction to 'watch and pray' as the basis. Among many references to the watchman, see L'Apocalypse, p. 143, "Mirror", p. 201, Violence, p. 69. One concrete example he uses is the Algerian War. The Church should have put the issue before the public as early as 1934, for by 1956 it was too late. See "Mirror", p. 201.

In PI, p. 195, he says that the ability to predict in itself does not require the gift of prophecy, and in FPK, p. 189, he says that foresight and prophecy are not the same but related. Basically, the methods of prediction are the same, but the watchman has a particular calling in the service of prophecy, because he knows what is at stake. For the relationship between the watchman and prediction, see the end of Part A, Chapter 3d.

of being a watchman (which leads him to the social sciences), only within the concern for the preservation of the world for God's work can one fully appreciate what Ellul means when he calls The Technological Society "a call for the sleeper to awake".⁶⁶

The work of the watchman is not self-sufficient: it must be accompanied by preaching. Surprisingly, Ellul does not often speak directly of preaching by name. Part of the reason may be due to the general crisis of language in the modern world and, furthermore, the Church has exacerbated her crisis by a failure of nerve in this area. He thinks that preaching has deteriorated because the ministry no longer knows the actual situation and the laity find it safest to divide their lives into watertight compartments of faith and public activity. Hence, the problem is not a decline in outstanding rhetoric or exegesis: it is deeper.⁶⁷ In keeping with the major Protestant traditions, Ellul gives preaching a wide scope to mean public accountability for the Church's vocation. That responsibility is three-fold --- language appropriate to the subject matter, making that language accessible to the whole world, and action and attitudes corresponding to the language. "[T]here is no separation between the preaching of the Gospel as such and the actualizing of it in political structures."⁶⁸ Although that

⁶⁶ IS, p. xxxiii. Although the source is unacknowledged and, in the context of the book, relatively unimportant, this phrase comes from Ephesians 5:14. I mention it because, for Ellul, this work of being a watchman is part of the work of the Church and is done on behalf of both Christians and non-Christians.

⁶⁷ It would not be correct to say that Ellul denigrates these activities, but he does not think that they pose the major challenge to preaching. Rather, their problems stem from a root cause. For examples of this argument, see FPK, pp. 3-4; HTA, pp. 31-34; PMM, pp. 53-64; "Actualité", p. 60.

⁶⁸ FPK, p. 102. The first and second parts have already been discussed. See also Ibid., pp. 209-10.

statement combines proclamation and action so tightly that one could wonder whether the speaking part could be dispensed with, silence is not enough. "There is no witness through works. There is no witness unless there is union, agreement and interaction between work and word."⁶⁹ When Ellul discusses the question of why simply preaching is not enough, he really is saying that proper preaching would be enough, if the Church took preaching seriously as part of her genuinely prophetic mission.

Hope in Time of Abandonment casts the Church's prophetic modus operandi into the somewhat different perspective of hope over faith. This book does not constitute a repudiation of his earlier writings so much as a shifting of gears about how the Church can live. Certainly, his new direction is moving towards neither a death-of-God theology nor a celebration of man's come of age. In the face of the sovereign decision of God, the Christian and the Church as a whole will surely be devastated by her predicament. On the one hand, she is reduced to an institution just like any other;⁷⁰ on the other hand, she is still the Church with the task of representing God on earth. Although ultimately the two are inseparable, Ellul says that the emphasis of the Church must change from a proclamation of creeds to a demonstration of hope in God's promise. Although this specific way of hope alters somewhat the requirements of prophecy, the framework remains constant. "[I]t is the message of hope, also prophetic in another sense, which

⁶⁹ HTA, p. 289.

⁷⁰ Then he speaks of the churches instead of the Church. See, for example, HTA, p. 295 or PK, p. 58. In L'Apocalypse, p. 81, he distinguishes between a faithful Israel or the Church and self-glorying institutions.

needs to be central."⁷¹ Even in an age of abandonment, Christian hope, as a prophetic witness, injects the possibility of something totally other than the fatalities of the world. In the face of the absence of worldly hope, it is the one possibility of preserving any openness in the situation. Hope in the promise of God also allows for the realism of seeing the world as it is -- without it becoming unbearable and without retreating into illusory hopes. Secondly, the job of the watchman now takes on the added dimension of looking for signs that the night of abandonment might be over. While waiting and watching patiently, the Church must practise an incognito rigour that is different from merely the saying of formulae. The small core of believers is limited to those who have heard the word of God in the past and cling faithfully to what they heard through the Bible, even though God is now silent.⁷² Finally, the most obvious problem in this crisis is the feasibility of preaching, for the Church must beware the danger of the false prophecy, in pretending that God is speaking when He is not. When God is silent, there is nothing for her to say; yet, preaching is necessary for one never knows who might be chosen as the instrument for

⁷¹ HTA, p. 82. As the following arguments run throughout the whole book, they will not be footnoted in detail.

⁷² The question of how the Church can survive more than one generation is not a matter of grave concern to Ellul in the book. All he says is that conversion can take place via the hope of another. (See p. 165.) He also suggests that even though God is silent to the age as a whole, He can still speak to individuals. (See p. 72.) In conversation, he agreed that the continuation of the Church is a more complex question for Christians than for Jews, for one is not born a Christian. He merely said that confidence that the Church will survive is part of the witness of the certainty of hope -- even though no guarantee is given. The faith need be passed on only to a few for the Church to last. Finally, he mentioned that Christians must carry on in hope, regardless of any concerns for the future of the Church.

breaking His silence.⁷³ For Ellul, the surest form of prophecy to the world in our era is still the refusal to become assimilated fully into either the despair or the false hopes of the world.

Israel and the Church have never been efficacious except to the degree that the world has been unable to assimilate them. This is a vocation of the people of God incomparably more authentic than "service" or "works".⁷⁴

In a time of abandonment, this requirement can be fulfilled only by living in God's hope and that very act of hope remains a proclamation within the prophetic tradition.

To complete the emphasis on challenging the world, Ellul always includes the positive witness of the Church in reconciliation. Never does he advocate simply a destructive platform. Quite the contrary, none of the rest of his understanding of the Church can be separated from the fact that all people are reconciled in God's love.

According to the Bible, there is no reconciliation with false gods, with idols, with the powers that rule the world, with the "world" as it is; but there is reconciliation with all men.⁷⁵

For example, the Church is responsible for unity among her own members. Even if they become involved in diametrically opposed factions outside the Church, they must be united in a loving forbearance with those who

⁷³ Ellul is aware of the impression of inconsistency, but he says the paradox of preaching is part of the problem. "We have no excuse for not speaking our hope, yet for living our hope we have only the genuineness of the incognito." (p. 294) See also p. 126.

⁷⁴ P of G, p. 141.

⁷⁵ Violence, p. 73. The challenging of the world and reconciliation are not opposites. They are two sides of the same coin of the unique action of the Church. Also, he does not see the raising of questions about the world as being a negative activity. See, for example, L'Apocalypse, p. 261. Both parts constitute the introduction of something new into the world that opens closed situations and witnesses to the source. See also "Théologie Dogmatique", p. 148.

are opposed. For Ellul, if this level of reconciliation cannot be found within the Church, then it cannot be achieved at all.⁷⁶ Beyond her own confines, the Church can defuse passions and explain opposing sides to each other. This activity is less melodramatic than direct confrontation: still, it is part of reconciliation. The requirement of reconciliation does not mean that they remain oblivious, or wishy-washy about what goes on around them, for the Church also has a mission to "suffer with and for men".⁷⁷ Individual Christians can be a leavening force and a relativizing force in certain political issues and movements. Specifically they are told to be with the oppressed and the suffering, but the fulfilment of this commandment must exclude the hatred of any other person. For that belief, Ellul concludes that the Christian must reject violence from any quarter, for it can be based only on hatred. Since God works through people, Christians should also concentrate on people rather than on institutions or structures. They should represent the poor to the powerful -- concretely and on an individual level.⁷⁸ An individual Christian should not cut the lines of communication, even if he is working within one group, and he must remain a perennial critic of false goals or means of any cause. Eventually, he must risk unpopularity by changing sides frequently, for once the oppressed achieve

⁷⁶ For the argument about what the Church, as a corporate body, should do in reconciling, see FPK, pp. 190-8.

⁷⁷ TFL, p. 135.

⁷⁸ Ellul warns against these suggestions as being tactics in the hope of immediate success, tactics that could be discarded when one got discouraged with the paucity of results or formulated a more efficient means. Secondly, a Christian can witness to a non-Christian, but he cannot expect the latter to act as a Christian. Thirdly, he does not underestimate the immense difficulty in finding individuals responsible to whom one could make representations on behalf of the oppressed. All of these arguments constitute the major theme of Violence.

their goal, they tend to become oppressors themselves. Corporately, although she must be wary of political causes, the Church must support the witness of her members, without a facile excuse of non-involvement and without supporting only popular causes.⁷⁹ Without divine guidance, Ellul would certainly agree that walking such a narrow line between dangers is impossible. That kind of reconciling faith or hope, however, is the sign of the Church's task to take God's part in the world. He sums up what is asked for in the following way.

It is only by love that is total, without defence, without reservation, love that does not calculate or bargain. . . . Christians will be sufficiently and completely present in the world if they suffer with those who suffer, if they seek out with those sufferers the one way of salvation if they bear witness before God and man to the consequences of injustice and the proclamation of God.⁸⁰

Conclusion

From Ellul's scattered comments on the Church, one is constantly reminded of the responsibilities arising from her unique vocation. Yet, there is another strand of a caveat against the Church taking herself too seriously. Despite the strict obligations, there is finally a sense of inutility, for God will accomplish what He wants, no matter what the Church does or does not do. Why then the demands outlined so far?

To what end is all this agitation, to what end these constant wars and states and empires, to what end the great march of the people of Israel, to what end the trivial daily round of the church, when in the long run the goal will inevitably be attained, when it is ultimately God's will that is done,

⁷⁹ Ellul does not mean that anybody should love Humanity as a whole, for Christians are called upon to love their immediate neighbour. See FPK, pp. 67-68. What he means is that they cannot be selective about who is their neighbour. The Church as a whole, even more, cannot be selective in her charity.

⁸⁰ Violence, pp. 174-75.

when the most basic thing of all is already achieved and already attained in Jesus Christ?⁸¹

In the same category, Ellul puts the function of Adam in Eden, Mosaic Law, prayer, human wisdom and preaching -- an impressive array, but all useless service! In answer, he makes three points, all derived from Luke 17:10. Only after the Church has done all that is commanded can she decide on the futility of her work. Otherwise, the assessment remains without substance and then the issue is out of her hands. Secondly, it is people who declare the work useless and not God, for, in an incomprehensible way, God seems to have a different account of efficacy. Since God has chosen to use intermediaries, the decision remains despite their apparent uselessness. Thirdly, the 'utility' of the Church as being a means to an end is not the central issue. At this juncture, we are brought back to the question of whether she is characterized by a unique being or a unique activity, by faith or works, to use traditional Protestant language. The actions stem from God's love, from grace; the works flow from that relationship with God.

To do a gratuitous, ineffective and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last.

This is freedom: man's freedom within God's freedom; man's freedom as a reflection of God's freedom; man's freedom received exclusively in Christ; man's freedom which is free obedience to God and which finds unique expression in child-like acts, in prayer and witness.⁸²

The Church cannot afford the luxury of leaving everything to God, for that course is contrary to His revelation. Nor can she afford the

⁸¹ P of G, p. 190.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 198, 199. For a brief statement of the intimate connection between God's grace and the Church's calling to love, as seen in footnote 80, see L'Apocalypse, footnote 8, pp. 272-3.

vanity of thinking everything depends on her. Within this understanding of the Church of which he is a single member, Ellul sees his own work.

b) Ellul as a Christian Intellectual

To avoid any misunderstanding about Ellul's own conception of his task, a preliminary clarification is in order. Nowhere does he confuse his descriptions or even his understanding of the Church with her actual life. Although his writings are never separated from that life, in themselves they are not a substitute for it. Without setting himself above the Church, he endeavours to play a facilitating role or service.

However stern my inquiry may occasionally seem, it is not carried out in a spirit of condemnation, still less in a spirit of superiority or of an easy conscience. I share in all the Church's errors. I suffer from each one of the lapses and I accuse myself first of all. If I write, it is not in order to wash my hands of the matter and get myself off scot-free. It is rather that, living by the very life of the Church, I feel myself affected by everything which looks to me like compromise or error. If I stood apart I would not suffer nor feel the need to call attention to these dangers.⁸³

Similarly, he distinguishes between the service of his publications and his own Christian life, although, once again, there is not a total dichotomy.⁸⁴ This separation does not imply a discrepancy, but rather a humility about himself combined with a confidence in the commandment of God. In this thesis, I am considering the extent of his work as a Christian intellectual, while in no way considering his own Christian existence.

⁸³ FPK, pp. 4-5. See also HTA, pp. v-x, where he movingly shows the difference between an analysis of hope and the actual achieving of it.

⁸⁴ One can see the difference when one looks at his notion of vocation. With respect to the dividing of the work of the Church, in PK, p. 96, he speaks of the vocation of the Christian intellectual. In one of the rare occasions when he speaks of himself, in the article "W and C", he does not speak of his writings at all.

Introduction -- The Laity and the Doctrine of the Two Realms

Within his understanding of the Church as a whole, Ellul focuses on the often neglected laity. At first glance, it seems odd for a Protestant to make a distinction between the clergy and the congregation. He chooses this word deliberately, however, precisely because laïque has connotations of both 'lay' in the ecclesiastical usage and 'secular' in popular usage. Therefore, the term points directly to his doctrine of the two realms. The laity consists of those Christians who daily must confront the secular world most directly and must constantly wrestle with living their faith in it. In simple terms, they are those Christians not employed full-time by the Church, as for example, are ministers or theologians. Far from being a question of balancing the scales, he sees the laity as decisive because of their relationship with the world. Although nobody in the Church can escape the issue, he maintains its fullest impact hits the layman.

When he 'lives' this tension every day of his life, the fact of his presence leads the Church to recognize the value and truth of the anguish of the world; while the world learns to recognize its real problems, behind the lies which it tries to perpetrate in order to avoid listening to the Word of God. Thus the position of the layman's life is essential, both to the Church and to the world. Consequently it is essential that this position should be clearly seen and understood.⁸⁵

Quite apart from his secular job as a university professor, when he does write about biblical matters he carefully disclaims any qualifications beyond those of any ordinary believer.⁸⁶ Not only does he write

⁸⁵ PK, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁶ At any rate, he refrains from letting the reader know what they may be. See, for example, P of G, p. 12; To Will, p. 2; PMM, p. vi. In all these writings, he indicates that his purpose is meditation and search as a lay reader of the Bible. There is a link between his profession and his work as a Christian intellectual, but not because he is a theologian. Basically, he wants to use the training of his trade, reflection, in the further service of the Church. See To Will, p. 2.

solely as a layman, but also solely about the laity. He seems, self-consciously, to shelve certain issues to concentrate on what he sees as the main problem now facing the Church -- her relationship with the world.⁸⁷ The layman may resolve the conflicting demands through compromise or by forgetting the Church, but he cannot attempt to escape the world. He stands as the direct intermediary between God and the world, so that only through him can the Gospel reach non-Christians and the Church appreciate the world.

Often Ellul leans so heavily on the one aspect that he appears to equate the Church with separate individuals, in a way that moves away from the corporate emphasis discussed in sub-section (a).⁸⁸ Although isolated statements can be misleading, even the somewhat ambiguous selection of the laity underscores a number of motifs that are dominant in his thought about the modern world and the Bible. First, I have already looked briefly at the relationship between the part and the whole. For all of this thesis, it will be important to recognize that

⁸⁷ Despite the fact that he does not belittle the work of the clergy or the internal workings of the Church, the details do not form part of his own undertaking. In fact, his only sustained references to the professional 'clergy' cover a total of about one page. See FPK, p. 192 and "W and C", p. 12. In TFL, p. 131 he dispenses with questions of ecclesiastical or canon law as peripheral to his study. Only in HTA does he indicate that, as a matter of survival, internal organization is becoming vital. Even there, he does not spell out the details. In part, his own emphasis is a matter of the division of labour on behalf of the whole Church. Also, in part, he wishes to underline that all Christians, and not just the leaders, make up the Church. See L'Apocalypse, p. 141.

⁸⁸ In FPK he speaks most consistently about the Church but more regularly he refers to 'Christians'. See, for example, PK, pp. 57; 137, 138; Violence, p. 129; HTA, pp. 291, 293-4. This slant tends to strike an individualistic note. For the requirement the 'I' become 'We', see PMM, p. 177. To state that the entire Protestant tradition has had to deal with the same problem (leaning often towards the individual as does Ellul) is only to reformulate it rather than resolving it.

he holds the two together in a tension, for the individual cannot be defined apart from his relationships nor from the whole in which he is enmeshed. Neither dimension can ever be eliminated. Secondly, his emphasis on the laity demonstrates his conviction of the impossibility of isolating or abstracting the real issues, no matter how complex they may be. Perhaps only the layman can fully grasp the links between Ellul's different types of writing. Perhaps only he can assess the constant holding together of apparent opposites as a description of his life in a non-Christian world.⁸⁹ Ellul's final concern perhaps cannot be broken down into categories in any way other than via the experience of the laity. Thirdly, focusing on the Christian in the world highlights the importance of the political and social realms, properly understood. It is not simply the disagreeable fact that the Church happens to be trapped there nor is it a question of working out an acceptable 'Christian' political system that the world can either accept or reject. The laity have been called by God, not of their own volition, to fight it out in the world. The implications of election are manifested in practical demands and not in separation from them. Because of the concrete view of the calling, his doctrine of the two realms, Ellul always identifies as an active member of the laity. From this status within the Church, his specific purpose is to reflect on their precise position as the contact between the two realms.

⁸⁹ Ellul has posed the problem succinctly. "In that case, how do you live and participate in this pagan world which keeps going on? The same question faces us today, with respect to the neopagan world which is establishing itself. How do we live and participate in it, since it is our factual situation?" (FPK, p. 19) That question is in no sense a hypothetical one for Ellul. It is the framing of the question of the immediacy of the two realms.

He [the Christian intellectual] must think out, very clearly, his situation as a Christian at work in the world, and he must think out his faith in relation with the world. . . . Our task, in effect, is to consider the layman's presence in the world, and not the part he plays within the Church.⁹⁰

i) What Ellul is Not Doing

In carrying out that responsibility, Ellul concedes, one cannot help thinking in theological terms; nevertheless, there is no need to be a specialist. In fact, he makes some rather snarky comments about 'professional theology'.

I make no claim to being a philosopher or dogmatician. I can never look at anything sub specie aeternitatis.⁹¹

I am neither a theologian or philosopher by profession. . . . I am trying only to be a human being.⁹²

Yet, at the same time, one of the major divisions in his own bibliography is ouvrages théologiques.⁹³ In order to clarify exactly what he is doing and what he is not doing, I shall now look at his understanding of theology. The primary aim eventually will be to draw out what is distinctive about being a Christian intellectual.

He does tend to use the term 'theology' differently at different times -- a variation hardly surprising considering its tumultuous

⁹⁰ PK, p. 97.

⁹¹ "Mirror", p. 200.

⁹² To Will, p. 2. See also Critique, p. 253. This method of proceeding negatively is one Ellul uses frequently and it will appear throughout the thesis.

⁹³ Also, there is no doubt that these books are theologically based and that foundation will be the focus of Part B of this thesis. Perhaps his admonition (albeit on a different topic) bears turning back on him. "Yet it would seem to me very essential that one distinguish carefully in a matter so critical and controversial. The ambivalence paves the way for drawing unwarranted conclusion." (FPK, p. 158).

career.⁹⁴ Broadly speaking, he has three strands, sometimes overlapping -- the first, a rare usage; the second, the proper work of theology; the third, his attack on abuses in theology.

In a very few passages, Ellul appears to equate theology with revelation itself. One example comes in an account of biblical myth.

When I use the word I mean this: the addition of theological significance to a fact which in itself, an historical (or supposed to be such), psychological or human fact, has no such obvious significance.⁹⁵

Theological significance is synonymous with revelatory significance: the Bible is theology directly. This interpretation constitutes a literal translation from the Greek. When he uses 'theology' in this manner, Ellul means that the biblical writers were making direct speeches about God -- with no other topic for their discourse, so that

⁹⁴ This foundational chapter is only concerned with how Ellul regards the limits and uses of theology and not with the overall problem. The difficulties for the very existence of this discipline (apart from controversies about its proper content), however, go hand-in-hand with the sola scriptura principle of the Reformation. Since Ellul stands firmly within that tradition, he participates in its dilemma about theology. In short, there simply is no word for anything corresponding to traditional theology in the Bible which supplies the only standard. No external source has authority. At the time, from the beginning of the Bible, there is an emphasis on words and setting forth what God wants -- in human language. There is seldom the temptation to be anti-thought, but the question is 'What kind of intelligibility does the Bible provide without reliance on external criteria?' The question is not one peculiar to modern Protestants. See also Part A, Chapter 3 (b) and Part B, Section 1, Chapter 6.

⁹⁵ M of C, p. 18. Similar uses of 'theology' come in FPK, 5, and L'Apocalypse, pp. 27, 31.

the whole Bible is the theological piece of writing.⁹⁶ One cannot deny that he occasionally does resort to this usage, but very rarely. To avoid an erroneous impression, I shall now turn to his dominant understanding which focuses on the secondary witnesses of the Church.

Normally, Ellul sees the Bible as God's primary revelation and definitely not as theology: quite regularly, he distinguishes the two types of study.⁹⁷ They remain tightly linked, with theology always in the subservient and derivative position. In other words, theology is speeches about the speeches about God.

[W]e see that God does not express his will to us, nor what he has decided to do, in a way which is theoretical, general, and abstract, or, in a word, theological. . . . But because this action is not clear, perspicuous, and without ambiguity, because it allows for man's independence, the action of God has to be explained. We have to demonstrate it to man. We have to put it into language, theory, and theology.⁹⁸

The first and crucial step in theology, thus, is to read the Bible carefully. Theology then attempts to formulate, in understandable

⁹⁶ See again L'Apocalypse, p. 27, where he says "C'est-à-dire un livre qui parle de Dieu, de l'Action de Dieu et de sa relation avec la création." For further elaboration on this aspect which Ellul treats only in passing, see ET, pp. 21-31. There, the emphasis is on the biblical writers as the primary witnesses to God's word and, therefore, the primary theologians. Used in this way, one could say that theology has a meaning close to, but transferred from, the Greek. "The word 'theology' is in fact drawn from the Greeks, but originally meant that aspect of language about the divine which was not capable of an encounter with philosophy. . . ." Ebeling, Luther (London: 1970), p. 81. To call the Bible itself theology is somewhat along these lines -- revelation that cannot be contained in a philosophical system, but only in Scripture.

⁹⁷ Among other examples, see "Mirror", p. 201; PMM, p. vii; To Will, p. 204. Also, in direct contrast to the example of biblical myth, see JJ, p. 11, where he does not speak of the addition of theological significance, but only of revelation.

⁹⁸ P of G, p. 21. Concerning the necessity for good theology, see, for example, "Note Problématique", p. 321; L'Apocalypse, pp. 138-9; "Théologie Dogmatique", pp. 141-42.

language, what is being said by all of the parts taken together.⁹⁹

This effort is what he means when he calls for "une théologie biblique et eschatologique".¹⁰⁰ By that phrase, he means a theology based on, rather than lifted from, the Bible. Such a theology would be the reverse of trying to fit or twist the Bible into an alien mould. In short, for Ellul, theology should provide the proper link between exegesis of specific passages and preaching. "It is the source and resource and the controlling factor of all preaching."¹⁰¹ The fact that theology is a service discipline and not an end in itself indicates both its importance and its incompleteness. Its language is to be a pointer to its source beyond, parallel to the form of traditional iconography. The language is necessary for the Church, although always inadequate and in human terms that will vary from age to age.¹⁰² The

⁹⁹ Two quotations from Barth sum up Ellul's position well. "The freedom bestowed upon him the theologian by the origin, object and content of the Biblical testimony can and must be asserted through his attempt to think and to relate in his own terms what he heard in the Bible." (H of G, p. 89) "But in relation to God's Word itself, theology has nothing to interpret. At this point the theological response can only consist in confirming and announcing the Word as something spoken and heard prior to all interpretation." (ET, p. 14).

¹⁰⁰ "Le Réalisme Politique", p. 731.

¹⁰¹ HTA, p. 84. As we shall see in Part B, Section I, none of the three is entirely separate. Ellul's account of theology comes close to Barth's account of dogmatics. See Church Dogmatics I 1 p. 1. Although the difference may be largely one of terminology, in conversation, M. Ellul expressed the opinion that Barth gave too high a place to reason, indicating a special mode of reasoning unique to Christians and especially to theology. As we shall see in Part A, Chapter 3(b), Ellul prefers to speak of the renewal of the intellect through faith.

¹⁰² As we shall see in Part B, Section I, Chapter 5(b), Ellul sees the use of human language as mediation to be mandatory; nevertheless, no single manifestation is adequate or even pre-eminent.

distinctly Protestant flavour will begin to emerge when we look at how he outlines the limitations and major abuses of theology.

Increasingly, Ellul seems to have divorced himself from theology and there seem to be two reasons for his rejection. In the first place, theology, as such, is an internal discipline for the Church, so that it cannot be the focus of his own attention. At best, it could serve as a prolegomenon to his work. Of greater concern to him is the fact of a tendency to formalism in theology.

There is an intellectual formalism which, in the very act of communicating the word richest in meaning, empties it of its meaning. In our day one is tempted to call it "orthodoxy".¹⁰³

In other words, he is struck by the evidence that acceptable theology can still lead to weak practice.¹⁰⁴ These considerations have led to a belief in the inherent limitations of pure theology as the vehicle for his specific work. Therefore, although most of Part B will deal with matters that can be classed as theology, it provides only the background for his further task as a Christian intellectual.

¹⁰³ HTA, p. vi. Although Ellul's basic stance has remained remarkably consistent, there has been a slight change in his assessment of the possibilities of theology. In PK, p. 97, he advocated the need to evolve a "practical theology". By this quote from HTA, he maintains that, good theology is becoming increasingly abstract and theoretical. Part of the shift seems to be an increasing awareness of the inherent limitations and part to be, once more, the silence of God who summons theology into existence. Theology also becomes a survival tactic because of the role it used to play and can now play only in hope. That limitation is uppermost in his mind in HTA. I do not dwell on it here, for, in his own work, Ellul still relies on what he considers to be good theology and uses it in his articulation of the position of the two realms.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, "Le Réalisme Politique", p. 723; most of FPK and especially pp. 7, 102; To Will, pp. 247-8 and 252. This concern is the same one mentioned in footnote 53.

Assuming the need for good theology, Ellul's main outcry is against bad theology in that it obscures the central Christian doctrines that should be edifying to the faithful. The most striking reason why he dissociates himself from theology is his anger that much theology has betrayed its calling. For him, the root of all the major errors is the rejection of the foundation of biblical revelation, in favour of some human construction or fantasy. From that starting point, in order to clarify his own starting points, we can consider what principles he thinks should not inform theology -- justification, speculation and systematization.

I call these "theological" explanations lies because they are nothing more or less than justifications for continuing to work without pause, without turning toward God.¹⁰⁵

The quotation marks in the above reference indicate that he considers them to be quite the opposite; yet he sees justification as the trend in much Christian thinking. Theology is used to rationalize normal human activities by endowing them with a halo of Christian virtue. More than the actions themselves, he deplores any a posteriori legitimization with a so-called theology. He speaks of the Christian who "is tempted to follow the world's leads, baptizing them in one way or another",¹⁰⁶ even though, in doing so, he ignores explicit biblical injunctions about the ways of the world. When theology does perform this work, he thinks that it, in fact, corresponds to everything Karl Marx

¹⁰⁵ PMM, p. 15. The problem of using theology for justification is a major theme especially in Violence and FPK.

¹⁰⁶ FPK, p. 8. The temptation not only leads to bad theology, but also induces the Christian intellectual to misappropriate the relationship between the two realms.

said about it.¹⁰⁷ In principle, he maintains, it is impossible simply to appeal to the Bible to support one's actions, for it does not supply any ready-made solutions -- either before or after the fact.

Christianity does not offer (and is not made to offer!) a solution for social, political, economic (or even moral or spiritual problems!). God in Jesus Christ puts questions to us -- questions about ourselves, our politics, our economics -- and does not supply the answers; it is the Christian himself who must make answer.¹⁰⁸

Since the Bible constantly calls people into question, it cannot in turn be used as a tool in their own self-defence. The justification of the biblical revelation comes solely from the mercy of God and, for Ellul, it is a grave mistake to confuse God's commandments and activities with human explanations of human activities.

The second grave theological error for Ellul is speculation. Accepting the sola scriptura principle involves accepting that its authority comes from God and that all things necessary for salvation are contained in it. That is not to say that the revelation is always crystal clear; rather, the belief implies that the theologians (like the Church as a whole) are not to choose their own subject matter. At a bare minimum, one can say that topics not dealt with in the Bible are not suitable topics for conjecture. For example, Ellul says that it speaks of God only in terms of His relationship with His creation, so that one cannot speculate on the essential nature of God's own being.¹⁰⁹ Ellul goes

¹⁰⁷ See HTA, p. 153

¹⁰⁸ "Mirror", pp. 200-1. See also HTA, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, P of G, p. 57; HTA, pp. 98-99, footnote on p. 173. In conversation, he also used the example of the eternality of the world. It should be noted that he uses 'speculation' in the sense of 'conjecture' and not that of 'seeing or mirroring'. That idea, for which he would reserve the word 'reflection', is very important to him, as the rest of the thesis will demonstrate.

further when he insists that the givenness of theology cannot be an excuse for a ghetto-like existence in its own restricted circle. No area is outside of the purview of the Bible.¹¹⁰ Because the Bible deals with human life in relationship with God, good theology cannot separate itself from that reality nor can it impose forms into which everything must arbitrarily fit. Any formulation (although perhaps academically satisfying because of neat syllogisms) of theology must be false if it is out of touch with the way things are. Such an undertaking would also be an unwarranted speculation and it is one of which Ellul is especially wary. "I refuse to construct a system" mainly because "it would be totally inapplicable and therefore totally meaningless".¹¹¹ His stance against speculation stems not mainly from a modern anti-metaphysical empiricism, but more from the major Reformation emphases on the activity of God.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ For example, H et A argues that although the Bible does not delineate an economic system, it does react to the power of money in specific ways that a theologian could not easily ignore. Similarly, TFL speaks of the issues surrounding human law. Although both these books fall within Ellul's own task of being a Christian intellectual, the point here is that good theology would provide a basis for these reflections and would fail if it was inappropriate for practical concerns. Theology then becomes 'intellectual formalism'.

¹¹¹ Katallagete, p. 5 and "Mirror", p. 200.

¹¹² See, for example, Calvin's Institutes I 2 3, and I 14 4 or Luther's Table Talk I 72, both of whom railed against speculative theology as anathema. In conversation, M. Ellul said that he agreed in principle with Calvin and Luther at this point—in seeing speculation as unsalutary. Although he underlined that they were speaking to particular arguments which are no longer a challenge to contemporary theology, he too rejects concentration on problems that arise from idle curiosity.

It is also true that Ellul is anti-metaphysical, but his stance at this particular juncture is not the product of specifically post-Kantian philosophy. (See, for example, "L'Irréductibilité", p. 64.)

As the other side of the coin of speculation, Ellul sees the most serious threat in systematization, by which he means a self-sufficient, comprehensive intellectual unity that embraces both God and man into a complete schema.

The third error is an error of method. It is the transposition of the theological to the philosophical; that is to say, the transformation of the living event of love and grace into a principle of systematic construction, of elaboration and explanation. It is a utilization of the revelation for man's satisfaction, which has the effect of crystallizing and immobilizing that revelation in order to make it fit the system, thereby emptying it of all value.¹¹³

Apart from the issue of the incompleteness of human knowledge that would render completely structured organization impossible, there is the central problem of what the Bible is all about. In brief, Ellul believes that the Bible cannot be systematized because it is referring to a living relationship.¹¹⁴ Ellul starts from the Protestant position that the Bible portrays God in terms of His activity, rather than in terms of His being -- and it is His activity with respect to His relationship with people, for the purpose of their salvation.¹¹⁵ From that standpoint, he sees any attempted systematization as arising from the general error of wanting to formulate the being of God and humanity based on their joint essences. He is of the opinion that this approach entails three specific theological misunderstandings of the Bible. First, there is the question of God's activity, just mentioned, which

¹¹³ To Will, p. 52.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, To Will, p. 204 and HTA, p. 226. Concerning the incompleteness of human knowledge, Ellul would stress, among other factors, the inscrutability of Providence; that is, God's plan for governing the world can never be known in advance.

¹¹⁵ In sub-section (a) of this chapter, I have already referred to the centrality of activity with respect to the discussion of the task of the Church. In Part B, Section 2, the primacy of 'will' for Ellul will be further explicated.

precludes any closed classifications. Secondly, he can find no place in the Bible where a common identity is shared by God and man; quite the contrary, he maintains the relationship is characterized by separation and opposition. In conversation, he said, at this point, he is in total agreement with Barth concerning "the infinite qualitative distinction"¹¹⁶ between God and man, as central to biblical theology and as antithetical to integration. Thirdly, and probably most important for Ellul, is the belief that the discrete activities of God for people culminate and find their fulfilment in the unique Event of Jesus Christ. "In Scripture, there is no possible knowledge of the good apart from a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ."¹¹⁷ Since a unique event cannot be fitted into a generalized whole and since the touchstone for all understanding of the Bible comes in relationship with Him, theology cannot be systematized. Although the task of theology is to try to think about what the biblical revelation is saying as a whole, for Ellul, it is a deception to calcify God's activity and the human response by forcing them into categories which constitute a variety of non-biblical speculation.

What we have here is a revealed truth about God's action. It is a theological statement, but we cannot construct a philosophy or theology on that base, still less an ethic, since it involves grace. It has to do precisely with something that cannot be grasped, pinpointed, guaranteed, or incorporated. There can be no intellectual construction of any kind based on grace. That is why Luther was right

¹¹⁶ E to R, p. 10 (quoted from Kierkegaard). A prime example of trying to find a common identity between God and man, according to Ellul, comes in the acceptance of natural law theory as Christian doctrine. See TFI and "Propositions". In fact, he finds most natural law theology to combine all three of the cardinal mistakes.

¹¹⁷ To Will, p. 16. For references to the uniqueness of the Event of Jesus Christ, see footnote 29.

in insisting on faith, a discernible and structurable human capacity, and in not constructing a theology of grace (although that was the driving force of his life and his theology).

Grace is pure act of God. Precisely because it is grace, it is beyond our grasp, and beyond our ability to assimilate. It cannot give rise to any speculation.¹¹⁸

At many points, Ellul seems to make theology synonymous with distorted theology. On this particular question, his is not merely an anti-theoretical stance, for he does recognize the importance of theology in the service of the Church. What he does show is a thoroughly Protestant suspicion of pride in the human faculties as a substitute for obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Bible. In terms of his own understanding of theology, at times he pushes this Protestant view so far that the discipline remains tenuous and good examples are hard to find. In reading Ellul, however, we must remember that he does not think it always necessary to repeat good theology, with the result it does not always get the credit it deserves.¹¹⁹ When theology does not respect its limits, he believes that it becomes dangerous: it succeeds only in bringing itself down to a solely human plane. In so over-stepping the mark, perhaps paradoxically it becomes less than it should be. It can do its job well only by showing the unified

¹¹⁸ HTA, p. 226. See also Barth's analogy of theology to the description of a bird in flight, in ET, p. 7. This reference underscores both the secondary position of theology, as well as the dangers of systematization. Even a theology based on faith could never claim to be giving a self-contained, comprehensive view. Also, this reference points to both the first and second usages of 'theology' in a way that, in context, does not seem contradictory. Finally, Ellul's views concerning the use of philosophy will be discussed in Part B, Section 1, Chapter 6(b).

¹¹⁹ See PMM, p. vii. More often he proceeds by commenting on other positions, especially their inadequacies so that one finds Ellul's own stance only by contrast. His own success in limiting his work solely to the authority of the Bible has yet to be assessed. Such an evaluation is beyond the scope of this thesis.

witness behind the diverse manifestations in the Bible.

ii) What Ellul is Doing

Although Ellul does not consider himself to be a theologian, he surely does have definite ideas of what one should do and of what constitutes an adequate content. In short, only at those places where he thinks good studies are lacking does he undertake his own. In any event, he never regards these fields as his full-time responsibility. Certainly, an emphasis on sound exegesis and theology is the first task in his 'theological' writings; still, it is not their final goal. In the last analysis, he wants to take the insights of theology to shed light on the particular situation of the layman. The issue becomes slightly more complex when one moves to the place of sociology within his framework of being a Christian intellectual, for his full-time profession does lie in teaching that field. In this capacity, he is carrying out his own work as a Christian layman, in his own occupation. With students and in publications, he tries to delineate the major points around which modern society revolves, to strip away false notions about what is happening and to encourage people to raise questions that will prevent a totally closed stagnation. Here, he participates as a sociologist who is a Christian. The central focus of his further undertaking as a Christian intellectual, although not unrelated to either discipline, starts from these insights gleaned from both sociology and theology. His final message does not lie in either field taken by itself, but only at the point where they come into contact with each other.

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 ground that they are "spiritually" embarrassing, maintain complete

clarity and 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 to face the sociopolitical reality. This is one demand of the Christian intellectual. The other is that he also develop and deepen his knowledge of the biblical and theological fields. But he must be beware of "inflecting" theology for the sake of the cultural. . . . 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. For 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 position.¹²⁰

In other words, within the doctrine of the two realms, Ellul believes that the Christian intellectual has to state, as clearly as possible, the task of the Church in the world for his particular time and place.¹²¹

Done alone, sociology is purely descriptive of the world: done alone, theology has no concrete reference in the world. The Christian intellectual must ask constantly, "What are the Church members supposed to do with theology?" The specific situation of the world to which the eternal Gospel of the Bible is directed does in fact vary. He must remind the Church of her practical task, so that, in this sense, Ellul's is a 'practical theology'. On the one hand, he does not see his contribution as a substitute for other action, for it remains within the

¹²⁰ "Mirror", p. 201. That confrontation will be explicated further in Part B, Section A, Chapter 6(b) where this reference will be re-examined.

It should be noted in passing that the word 'understanding' is used in this passage which has appeared only in English. Since, as we shall see in Part A, Ellul does not think that sociology can provide its own understanding, I presume this word is either a mistranslation or a somewhat careless use of language on Ellul's part.

¹²¹ Among other references, see PK, pp. 104, 140. He has concentrated on the situation in France, for he sees it as being of special interest; for example, concerning statism and secularity. See, for example, FPK, p. vi or his historiographical study Histoire des Institutions or PI, p. xiii. Because he thinks that the trends are becoming global, he thinks that his observations may be appropriate for a wider audience.

realm of the intellect.¹²² On the other hand, he would call it practical to the extent that it should demonstrate a realistic appraisal of the world as it is and not of an imaginary one. He strives to make the Church assess whether her witness is not hopelessly misshapen because of a misreading of one or both of the realms, or because of a deep-rooted misunderstanding of the relationship between them. Like the early Christians, he contends with the problem of the stunning bombshell of the Gospel into an alien environment.¹²³ Yet the Church cannot easily turn to the answers of the early fathers, for her social and political setting is now a different one.¹²⁴ Therefore, the immediate task of the Church has to be spelled out and lived out over and over again. There is a constant need to keep alert, to watch for the signs of the times and to exhort the Church not to falter in fulfilling her unique task. The Christian intellectual is a watchman for the prophetic Church.

To complete the foundational study of what Ellul does, I shall consider four major corollaries to his basic stance -- implications that will arise in various guises throughout the rest of this thesis.

First, despite the fact that he is preoccupied with the practical

¹²² One of the criticisms that has been levelled against Ellul is that he is overly intellectual. His reply would come from two directions -- first, that he is not fulfilling the whole work of the Church, and, secondly, he would be in agreement with Barth's response to a similar criticism in E to R, pp. 5-6, concerning his lack of simplicity.

¹²³ See again FPK, p. 19 and also To Will, p. 289, concerning Luther's error in thinking that Christianity was the normal situation.

¹²⁴ For a specific reference to the difference, see HTA, p. 291.

witness of the Church members, Ellul does not provide detailed answers.¹²⁵ As a Christian intellectual, his emphasis is not primarily the development of a theory of practice so much as a reminder of the task. Since he accepts that the Bible itself does not give solutions, but raises questions, he does not presume to go further. To give any sort of detailed game-plan, in his opinion, would be to undermine and indeed to repudiate the whole enterprise. Since the answers can be given only out of the decisions in the life of the Church, he never envisages it as part of his task to spell out the details of a 'new law'. At most, at times Ellul does argue what ought not to be attempted as impossible for incarnating faith -- a sort of via negativa. Yet, at the same time, his doctrine of the two realms invokes a response by Christians in every area of their lives. In order to avoid the dangers of an inward or spiritual retreat (already alluded to) and relying only on correct analysis or theology, Ellul keeps returning to the centrality of the Old Testament in trying to understand the whole Bible; that is to say, everything one does reflects his relationship with God. Therefore, the full implications of Mosaic Law are never far from his reflections.¹²⁶

Secondly, on a preliminary reading, it is difficult to pigeon-hole or classify Ellul. Obviously, he thinks both about the Bible and about

¹²⁵ Ellul's refusal to falsify his task by giving advice on where God's commandments will lead people has given rise to criticism of pessimism (a charge which he specifically refutes in TS, p. xvii and HTA, p. 224ff) and again of an intellectualism that sits back after analysis. I find this latter criticism very difficult to discern in the actual texts. Probably one's assessment would hinge on Violence, including the possibilities for the suggestions at the end of sub-section (a).

¹²⁶ See especially Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7(b), for a further elaboration on Mosaic Law and Part B, Section 1, Chapter 5(b) concerning how he sees the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

society -- in accordance with different facets of the task of the Church. Indeed, his final goal is bringing the two areas into confrontation. In saying so, however, it is easy to make the mistake of forcing a false dichotomy between the two main spheres of his output. Although he will not distort the findings of either field to suit the other, he is always writing as a single member representing the laity. The responsibility of witnessing to the revelation of the Bible does refer both to the ability to look at the reality of life and to read the Bible, as part of obedience to the commandments. There is a unity.

Thus it is not only an intellectual process. . . but a transformation of life, expressed in intellectual terms. Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who henceforth inspires our minds, and enables us to discover new ways of thought, and a new understanding of the world in which we live.¹²⁷

In other words, even though he separates his different types of writing, he sees himself as being holistic in approach. If God (as Holy Spirit) has transformed his mind in order to express a transformation of life, then he believes that, however humanly flawed it may be, his work could not be deliberately fragmented.

Thirdly, Ellul sometimes gives the impression that he is the only person who has ever thought about these questions -- or at least they are peculiar to the modern world. He contends mainly with other contemporary thinkers, so that, by omission, one might conclude that he never turns to the tradition for wisdom.¹²⁸ In light of the discussion

¹²⁷ PK, p. 98.

¹²⁸ See "Actualité", for Ellul's clearest statement of his attitude towards the Reformation tradition as guidance for the twentieth century Church. When one remembers that the Protestants have always held an ambivalent attitude towards tradition, it is clear that he stands within his own tradition.

of theology, two considerations emerge here. Mainly, his particular task refers to the immediacy of the present situation of the laity; therefore, he refers to the past only to the extent that it sheds light on what has to be done now. He is not primarily a methodical theologian, and that is the area of Church activity in which he thinks a study of the tradition is most important.¹²⁹ Although there is little doubt that he is very much in the tradition of Barth, Pascal, Calvin, Luther, John of Salisbury, St. Augustine, Tertullian etc., it is not up to the Christian intellectual to demonstrate the continuity of his tradition.¹³⁰ The other factor is his belief that every age, with guidance from the tradition, must actively reconsider the revelation and the way it speaks to its particular situation. In conversation, he said that he does not accept that there is either progress in Christian thought or a cumulative development of doctrine. No single manifestation is complete and each generation can see different dimensions of the total revelation more or less clearly than others have.¹³¹

¹²⁹ See, for example, To Will, p. 225. I have already noted in footnotes 20 and 22 his homage to the tradition, especially to the early fathers. Even in that discussion, however, and in stressing his work as an historian, he still emphasized the particular aspects of his task as a Christian intellectual.

¹³⁰ I do not mean to imply that he is in total agreement with any of these thinkers, but rather I want merely to indicate that he works clearly within the Christian tradition.

¹³¹ For example, in conversation, M. Ellul said that modern theologians perhaps can see better than some others the dialectical tensions in the Bible (to be concentrated on in Part B and the general Conclusion). Yet, they tend to flounder when it comes to questions of allegory and myth which were seen much more clearly by earlier thinkers.

Certainly, he does not consider himself an improvement on all that has gone before. Without saying that he disregards the Christian tradition, it would be more accurate to conclude that he assumes it, with its debates and insights, without further discussion in his own endeavours, in order to concentrate on the contemporary discussions. He takes it for granted that the tradition is not to be simplified or dismissed or glorified beyond the realm of discussion or twisted to suit other ends.

Finally, as I have already indicated, Hope in Time of Abandonment raises the question of what the Christian intellectual can say, if God is silent to the Church. Although the book does lead to a re-reading of some of his earlier statements, there is no doubt Ellul believes the Church continues in one form or another.¹³² Precisely because there must be a modification in emphasis from faith to hope, he believes that the question of how Christians can be steadfast in their mission becomes even more pressing. The need for the Christian intellectual as a sentinel for the Church becomes even more acute.

As indicated in the general Introduction, the body of the thesis examines how Ellul goes about this immense undertaking as a Christian intellectual. We now move to the detailed studies, starting with the human possibilities for analysis and reaction. Both Part A and Part B should be read within the context of Ellul's belief in the need to work

¹³² For example, he seems to have altered his search for a Credo which he advocated in "Mirror", p. 204. Nevertheless, as early as 1959, he spoke of the need to hold on during a time of the silence of God. See "Actualité", p. 56. See also To Will, p. 256. In HTA, p. 296, he expressly denies any charge that he is repudiating himself. There, he says only the way of being present in the world has altered in his thinking.

out and proclaim a doctrine of the two realms applicable to the present situation.

PART A HUMAN TENDENCIES, EQUIPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE

Introduction

"God has always required man to make use of his human equipment and knowledge."¹ In light of Ellul's presentation of his task as a Christian intellectual, as I have outlined in the preceding chapter, it is now necessary to examine in detail how he goes about his work. The three chapters of Part A will focus mainly on his sociological studies as his articulation of the concrete world in which all people, whether Christian or non-Christian, currently find themselves. That is to say, his sociological studies spell out one half of his explication of the doctrine of the two realms for this era. Without an examination of the contents of his findings and his principles by which he reaches them, it is impossible not only to see the importance of his separate social descriptions in their clearest perspective, but also to appreciate the totality of his enterprise. More specifically, Chapter 2 will deal with Ellul's account of the continuing human tendency to sacralize the reality which confronts man collectively, and also why he considers it to be of primary importance for the sociologist to demarcate the given reality in contradistinction from the sacred aura surrounding it. In Chapter 3, I shall discuss Ellul's assessment of the tools or the equipment that is at people's disposal in order to carry out that description of the way things are -- in short, the possibilities and limitations of the human reasoning ability, the intellect and science. Finally, in Chapter 4, with the first two chapters as background, I shall approach the thorny problem of how Ellul knows and what he knows about society. His writings sometimes tend to give the impression that he

¹ FPK, p. 2.

himself has so few qualms about the certainty of his assertions that nowhere does he devote much detailed attention explicitly to the way in which he is able to reach his conclusions. Here again, as was the case concerning his view of theology, he often follows the procedure of commenting on other, contrary approaches, with the result that only by inference (and scattered direct references) can one elucidate exactly what Ellul does when he sits down to write. Only then will the content of how he analyzes technique sociologically come directly to the fore. Finally, by way of focusing attention for Chapter 4 and as a rounding out for the whole of Part A, I shall examine Ellul's approach to knowing about society vis-à-vis that of Karl Marx and Max Weber. In short, this chapter will try to draw together, as succinctly as possible, Ellul's own modus operandi in following his profession as a sociologist.

Since, however, we have already seen a singularity, albeit with various facets, in Ellul's purpose, it is reasonable to assume a similar unity governing how he goes about its execution. Part A, therefore, will also be closely connected to his specific biblical reflections that will be discussed in Part B. In this Part, I shall lay much of the groundwork for later discussion, for the actual processes and possibilities do not alter substantially in his different fields of writing. Because Ellul sees a strong emphasis in the Bible on the use of human intermediaries by God, he also sees the requirement of knowing what human beings can in fact accomplish and exercising those abilities. Therefore, Part A will draw together those elements that, for Ellul, come together in his expression 'human equipment and knowledge'.

CHAPTER 2

FACT, REALITY, THE SACRED AND MYTH

a) Basic Categories

From Ellul's formulation of the doctrine of the two realms, it is obvious that he has a paramount concern for the concrete setting in which people find themselves. In his biblical reflections as well as in his social writings, he is preoccupied with 'fact' and 'reality'.¹ If one wants to appreciate Ellul's delineation of what human beings can achieve, then it is essential to begin by an examination of what he means by these two words.

Generally, by 'fact', Ellul means the basic data of experience which he takes as given without reference to the parts played by the human recipient in the actual constitution of a fact. 'Fact' is an object, or event, or force, or social structure which is capable of accurate observation and description, ascertainable through the senses or through the mediation of the methods of science, and capable of being reflected upon.² He refuses to speak of the construction of facts, for facts are given and can be perceived as such. To distinguish his own concern, he speaks of facts or phenomena in the effort to concentrate, without illusion, on the way things are, regardless of any concomitant philosophical questions. For him, there are simply palpable facts experienced

¹ See for example TS, p. xxviii, M of C, p. 170, Violence, p. 83 or all of "Le Réalisme Politique".

² The rest of Part A will elaborate this very general account which as such is open to many controversial debates.

as impinging on man and he wants to examine at least one aspect of them. Although he admits to leaning slightly towards a materialism somewhat reminiscent of Marx, in conversation he said that he considers the straight materialism, for example of the biologists of the eighteenth century, to be a passé question. In summary, in the realm of fact, he includes the material factors, human reactions to them and the complexities of all the possible interactions between those two aspects. Thus, throughout his writings, with varying emphases, he distinguishes among a variety of levels of fact, none of which is totally unrelated to the others.³ At the most basic stratum, there are material facts directly perceived by the senses. Somewhat more generalized are collections of such discrete facts into a broader, more composite fact, such as a school, or a corporation or a department, each of which tends to become a fact which can be examined in itself. (According to Ellul, this level of fact, as we shall see, tends to dominate contemporary social scientific studies as relatively easily mathematizable). Other examples of a similar level of fact are historical or political facts such as World War I or the electoral process. On a still wider plane are the social structures that arise to channel and control the other facts and the resulting human relationships. He sees these structures, of which the state and bureaucracy would be the major examples, as following their own patterns regardless of specific individuals working in them. Overarching and permeating all these other levels of fact is the fact of the whole, of the milieu in which all facts are defined and interact with each other.

³ These distinctions are culled from various parts of his writings, but see for example, TS, pp. 3-6 or PI, Chapter III.

In fact, technique has taken substance, has become a reality in itself. It is no longer merely a means and an intermediary. It is an object in itself, an independent reality with which we have to reckon.⁴

The last two levels of fact, the structures and the fact of the whole, have become the focal points for his own studies of society. At no time does he advocate a removal to an area of abstraction to explain facts: on the contrary, he emphasizes the inter-relationships among all the levels of fact, within the fact of the whole. Since he concentrates on "social phenomena"⁵, his 'factual studies' could be called a phenomenology of society -- not as part of a philosophical school, but on his own terms.⁶

⁴ TS, p. 63.

⁵ See for example, TS, p. xxvi; PI, pp. 9, 102; To Will, p. 163; Propaganda, p. xvii. By using this language, Ellul certainly invites comparison with the self-labelled followers of Husserl. Ellul would find it absurd or self-contradictory, however, to think of analyzing phenomena or the pure consciousness of them, while bracketing the question of reality. By phenomenology, Ellul would mean the general dictionary definition: "étude descriptive d'un ensemble de phénomènes, tels qu'ils manifestent dans le temps ou l'espace par opposition soit aux lois abstraites et fixées de ces phénomènes; soit à des réalités transcendantes dont ils seraient la manifestation; soit à la critique normative de leur légitimité." (Roberts) The dictionary goes on to indicate that the word was not common in France until after 1920 and also, that many people use it to cover many different conceptions. As we shall see concerning the fact-value distinction, Ellul wants to look at the reality (realities) of society as they impinge on people.

⁶ At this stage, I would formulate a general principle for reading Ellul -- one that can be borne in mind for the whole thesis. In his use of terms, whenever there is a choice between popular usage that can be found in virtually any dictionary, and a technical and/or philosophical meaning, he will always tend towards the former. Since, however, he is very aware of the latter, at times he seems to play on the philosophers' self-definitions, and then use them himself in common usage. As I shall discuss later, this tendency does not mean that he accepts the commonplaces as true, but it does mean that he wants to speak in an exoteric way. For example, in conversation he said that, although he considers 'nature' to be a word invented by those who no longer believed in creation, he will use the word in a way that he assumes most people will take it; e.g. 'Nature is beautiful in spring.' or "the

On close investigation, it becomes apparent that what Ellul means by 'reality' is the totality of the facts impinging on people, including the relationships, that go together to make up the concrete existence in which they find themselves. He has put his account of reality most clearly in his discussion of what is meant by 'the world' in the Gospel of St. John.

First of all, the Greek word Cosmos is held to mean essentially the world as we see it and know it, in an entirely neutral perspective, the whole of things that make up the universe, without any note of approval or disapproval: i.e. an "object" in the scientific sense of the nineteenth century. (Included in this sense are the universe of ordered matter, the totality of the inhabitants of the earth, as well as the whole range of goods and things of this world.)

As I comprehend it, the "world" in the Fourth Gospel is indeed the universe we perceive as an object, i.e., the world of things. But it is equally and simultaneously the world of men, or what we today would call "society". It is as much the cosmos of the heavens and the earth as that of the "State" and "Commerce" (and, as such, it does not coincide in the strictest sense with "creation").

The world is mankind as a whole and its history.⁷

This holistic concept of reality is important for seeing Ellul's approach to and his account of human knowing. He would not say simplistically that all

promptings of old human nature" ("Mirror", p. 200), without going into the philosophical ramifications. In these cases, the popular word is used to facilitate communications. In order to avoid confusions, it is very important to see individual statements in the context of the whole of his work. Throughout, I shall try to clarify how he is using certain central terms, particularly when there is a danger of a looseness of language. In Part B Chapter 6, I shall discuss Ellul's general reluctance to discuss his work in philosophical terms.

⁷ "The World", pp. 16, 17, 20. In the article, he goes on to talk about the other two aspects contained in the expression 'the world', but here he is talking about what is open to solely human investigation. It becomes apparent in his usage that, for Ellul, 'fact' and 'reality' are very tightly linked, with the latter term including the totality of the former.

that is involved in the apprehension of reality is sensory perception, for there are less tangible facts emerging from human relationships and reactions to the world, as well as from the interaction among the parts and the whole. Therefore, he prefers the more encompassing realm of experience to the more limited description of sense data, as the source of what one can know about reality. The result is that he can speak of the "qualitative aspects of reality"⁸ and he can see relationships as being constitutive of reality, as well as the more easily quantitative aspects of sense data. Ellul would maintain that any description of reality that neglected to take all these factors into account would result in an account that distorted reality. For example, he would sharply disagree with the following statement.

[R]eality is an infinite and meaningless sequence, or a chaos, of unique and infinitely divisible events, which in themselves are meaningless: all meaning, all articulation, originates in the activity of the knowing or evaluating subject.⁹

⁸ Critique, pp. 24-49. These aspects are not simply an evaluation of other facts, nor is he talking theologically. Rather, he is talking about aspects of reality arising out of irreducible human motivations and resulting from interactions that cannot simply be measured mathematically. Also, at this point, I should perhaps add that Ellul does not believe that our methods for learning about reality are the only sources of knowing altogether.

⁹ Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: 1953), p. 77. This statement was made with reference to Max Weber. It should perhaps be noted that Ellul thinks that it has been incorrectly applied to Weber; nevertheless, it does sum up a view of reality to which Ellul is opposed, and the truth or falsity of it in relation to Weber is not at issue here. Rather than an infinite chaos, Ellul has said, "As a matter of fact, reality itself is itself a combination of determinisms." (TS, p. xxxii).

Although, in conversation, Ellul took the position that reality or facts achieve significance only as experienced and acted upon by people, the articulation or description by a social observer is not simply a human construct. There is a whole, a reality, to describe. The combination of his practical emphasis on reality experienced as real, along with the givenness of reality as finite, centres his attention on the descriptive and not on the constructive task of the sociologist and of the Christian intellectual. Therefore, he is not interested in metaphysical or theological debates between idealism and realism etc.¹⁰ If pushed to a defence of his certainty of the reality of reality that can actually be described as opposed to an illusion or haphazard construction, he does not give a theoretical foundation. At most, he says that the conviction is related to a reliance on common sense (which he does not see as a philosophical category, but rather as a rising in a limited way from the concrete situations), as well as a belief in creation and in certain prophecies.¹¹ Anyone, whether or not he believes in creation, can

¹⁰ See, for example, Violence, p. 81 ff; Propaganda, p. 39; HTA, p. 274 ff. Also, in conversation M. Ellul did not agree with Karl Barth concerning the 'reality' of God, nor with the distinction between Wahrheit and Wirklichkeit. Although Ellul considers the debate to be largely semantic, he himself does not speak of the 'reality' of God. If asked, "Is God real?", he said he would reply in the affirmative, according to the intent of the question. In his writing, however, he confines 'reality' to the finite. Also, he avoids questions concerning whether reality is eternally constant etc.

¹¹ For a preliminary reference to common sense, see A of R, p. 241 and Critique, pp. 22-23, to be discussed again with reference to his verification principle. Regarding belief in creation, this stance is not in conflict with the earlier one that reality is not strictly synonymous with original creation; rather, it underlines the position that things really do exist. Concerning the prophecies, in conversation, he referred to the prophecies concerning the Prince of Tyr in Ezekiel 28 as an example. For a general discussion, see the last section of M of C.

experience the reality of the world because it is created: it is there. His statement in conversation that 'reality is reality' is probably the most theoretical defence of his position. One must remember, therefore, that Ellul's own emphasis on reality and realism is specific, concrete, and, in his view, non-philosophical.

Although he insists on realism, at the same time, he forcefully recognizes that it is not easy simply to put forward the facts. Reality, unfortunately, does not merely exist in splendid isolation, easily accessible to any casual observer. Apart from the problem that individual facts are interwoven into the fact of the whole, the issue becomes more entangled in the ways in which man collectively views reality. Facts, and reality as a whole, do influence people and exercise a force over their lives; therefore, reality is not simply external to or detached from people; similarly, as we shall see, they do not simply remain neutral to reality. What will actually constitute reality remains inextricably bound up with human attitudes towards that very reality. From Ellul's perspective, it is hard to separate stark reality from the sacred aura around it and from its explanatory and motivating myths. In brief, those three form mutually supportative processes that reinforce the strength of each once for society collectively. Myth results from the confrontation with a given reality but, simultaneously, fact becomes important only insofar as it is integrated into the sacred realm as explained by those myths. I shall now examine in some more detail what these relationships mean in Ellul's thought.

Throughout his writings, Ellul has discussed the topics of the sacred and myths in passing, but his most sustained account comes in

Les Nouveaux Possédés.¹² Here, he argues that the most controlling category (humanly speaking) is the sacred, which is not simply an aspect of religion nor a synonym for myth. Rather, religion and myth are inextricably bound up as possible translations of the sacred. Because it lies behind all the various manifestations, the sacred, in itself, is the most difficult to delineate. As a result, most of the discussion concerns the traces that are easier to isolate -- the modern myths and religions. In the long run however, Ellul says that they can be properly located only within the context of the sacred; therefore, in his account, it must come first.

Fundamentally, Ellul says that man feels that he has to confront a chaotic, external material structure that controls, terrifies, attracts and haunts him.¹³ The movement towards sacralization is the way in which people collectively deal with the world they encounter, in which they learn to confront the tendencies of that milieu, in such a way that allows them to cope with it and to answer their peculiar anxieties. Within the process of sacralization, they are able to sort out the aspects that both protect and threaten them. In that way, they come not only to accommodate themselves to reality, but also to be integrated with the milieu: the individual is no longer at odds in any way with the group. Reality loses its ambiguous and menacing traits by being

¹² An earlier important account also came in "MM".

¹³ This statement does not contradict what has been said about the givenness of reality. The explanation comes on two planes -- i) that people only feel the world to be chaos, although in fact it is not and ii) that by sacralizing reality, they bring a livable order out of the seeming chaos. How these two levels of explanation go together will be a central theme of Part B, Chapter 7.

transformed into something which is sustaining at every turn. The process is not formally imposed; quite the contrary, it gets its strength because people desire a structuring of reality that gives meaning.¹⁴ Such a tour de force could not possibly result from the influence of a single individual. It comes only from a collective response to the concrete environment. From Ellul's perspective as a sociologist and historian, it is important to note that the sacralizing of reality has always been a human tendency. Therefore, it is a vital part of the collective social reality with which he deals.¹⁵

[S]i le sacré, en effet, est l'ordre irrécusable que l'homme pose comme une grille de lecture sur un monde anarchique, incompréhensible, incohérent, afin de pouvoir s'y retrouver et y agir, de telle façon que cet ordre doive être intangible, et que l'homme s'y soumettre le premier, il est évident que l'homme institue ce sacré par rapport à son milieu de vie. C'est dans son milieu qu'il a besoin d'un ordre, d'une origine, d'une garantie de possibilité de vie et d'avenir. C'est pour ce milieu qu'il lui importe, par le sacré, d'avoir des règles de comportement -- et c'est d'ailleurs ce milieu qui lui fournit son expérience la plus globale, la plus riche, la

¹⁴ A major theme in all of Ellul's social writings is the strength that reality exercises both because of its material influence and because of the authority given to it through sacralization. This force, although not at all unrelated, should not be confused with the theological understanding of the principalities and powers to be discussed in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7(b). When I am speaking of Ellul's sociological descriptions, I shall refer to the force(s) of reality. At this point, Ellul follows quite closely Durkheim's lead in sociology.

¹⁵ In keeping with his stance that his studies of reality will not include metaphysical questions, he refuses to debate whether or not the sacred realm as such exists. See for example, NP, pp. 65, 87, 165-6, 132. He does say that the category of the sacred is certainly a human tendency. (See, for example, pp. 87, 257.) In his description of the way in which the category of the sacred functions and how it changes, it seems apparent that it is and always has been a man-made category. One cannot say, however, that in doing so, he disproves or assumes the non-existence of the sacred as such, for each varying form could be simply one manifestation of a transcendent monism. Although he rigorously refuses to make those assessments as a sociologist or historian, he certainly does make them within the context of biblical faith.

plus fondamentale, qui donne au sacré sa substance, sa corporalité, qui en fait tout autre chose qu'une sèche construction intellectuelle. Et c'est ce milieu qui alors se trouve investi de valeurs sacrées.¹⁶

Je constate aussi que l'homme finit toujours par se référer, le plus souvent inconsciemment, à cet ordre d'expériences à partir desquelles il finit par assigner un sens, une fin, des limites à la fois du monde où il vit et à sa propre vie.¹⁷

Ellul's central claim is that the modern world is in no way less pre-occupied with the sacred than were previous ages. For us, the original confrontation with nature has given way to the need to live within the radically different reality of the mastery of nature, of the machine.

L'expérience fondamentale de l'homme aujourd'hui est celle du milieu technique (la technique ayant cessé d'être médiation pour devenir le milieu de l'homme) et de la société. C'est pourquoi le sacré qui est en train de s'élaborer dans l'inconscient individuel et dans l'inconscient collectif est lié à la société et à la technique, non plus à la nature.¹⁸

Therefore, the old sacred with its old myths and old religions no longer suffices and new ones tend to emerge. The problem today is the recognition of the changed situation. Since this thesis is not the place for a detailed discussion of the mechanics of the sacred realm, I shall simply outline his case. He argues that the sacred is always arranged around antithetical poles, each of which is equally important. The whole realm consists in the relationship between the two. "Et c'est autour de ces axes ainsi établis que tout l'ordre du monde et de ^{la} société s'organise."¹⁹ Ellul contends that the modern sacred has only two such pivots -- technique/sex and nation-state/revolution. Within these two

¹⁶ NP, pp. 87-88.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

dimensions, modern man lives under the guidance of the myths and religions which are developed as different modes of expressing the sacred in everyday life. At this point, I want to examine why he considers it essential to describe the results -- apart from mere curiosity. Why not simply be glad for the security and meaning provided? For an answer to this question, we must consider further what Ellul means by myth and its relationship to reality.²⁰

Myth is a collective interpretation or explanation of the sacred reality that serves two purposes. First, it articulates to man, at a 'gut' level, how things came to be and what his place is in the whole. Concomitantly, it motivates him to action. "It is the image deep within his mysterious self of his confrontation with a given reality."²¹ It is the picture that a person has of the sacred that enables him to embrace it. In order to be effective, the myth must be an all-encompassing explanation that leaves no area open to serious doubt. In other words, if a myth really does hold sway, then even the denunciation of one

²⁰ For an analysis of Ellul's work, it is convenient to keep the terms separate and usually he follows this practice himself. Because of the tight connection between them, however, one has to be careful that such a procedure does not become misleading. At least once, he calls myth a phenomenon. See Propaganda, p. 116. In a sense, myth does form part of the reality which he studies. Secondly, since the use of the words has been so much abused, making them central seems fraught with danger. Although in both "MM" and NP he recognizes the difficulty, he seems to take on the issue almost deliberately, in the attempt to state the problem properly. Thirdly, a significant fact is that, unlike Sorel to whom he is indebted, Ellul focuses on reality and myth rather than on science and myth. The reason, as we shall see, is that Ellul thinks science itself has become one of the two foundational myths of the modern world. The problem becomes a more complicated one than simply isolating science from any Weltgeist (see PMM, p. 75) when science itself has become a Weltgeist.

²¹ "MM", p. 25. One could say that myth is the story that explains the sacred.

particular aspect does not exercise the whole: even the accusation takes place within the dominant myth itself. Furthermore, if it works, then it both embraces reality and also shields people from the terrors they encounter. Because of the tight link with the sacred, it is impossible to say that myths are simply manufactured for an unsuspecting public. Again, the process is a collective one. Similarly, the dominant myths are more than a system of beliefs to which one pledges support through intellectual and self-conscious choice. Rather, they are total images, subsequently articulated in a formal manner, that evoke faith and provoke action, in a way going far beyond what is usually meant by belief. Once one sees that myths are different from mere fables, then it is possible to make distinctions. All myths can be placed under a single rubric in the sense that the motivations and the basic characteristics remain constant. What can change, as I indicated concerning sacralization, is the basic reality with which mythology has to deal. Our stories are different from earlier ones, because our sacred is different.

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. The myths. . . repeatedly reiterate to us "how" this happened. They make us relive this innovation and enable us to share in its efflorescence. And this takes the place of "why" and of every justification.²²

²² "MM", pp. 39-40. This quotation shows that the very physical force of reality requires an explanation for people to be able to cope with it rather than being overwhelmed by it. The material force needs control and structuring if they are to survive with any security.

Because of the all-pervasive quality of myth exempting no area of life, Ellul also sees the need to distinguish among several layers of myth fanning out from a core.²³ In a nutshell, Ellul argues that the two basic myths for the modern world are history and science, from which spring all the beliefs, sentiments, actions, ideologies etc. of our age.²⁴

²³ In his writings other than "MM" and NP, Ellul often seems to refer to all the levels equally as myth and the failure to maintain the specific distinctions can be somewhat misleading. In this relatively early article and recent book, he clearly does distinguish between the fundamental, rarely changing myths and the derivative levels that are much more transitory, without upsetting the overall understanding when they do pass.

²⁴ From what has already been said about the characteristics of myth, it is important to note from the very beginning that Ellul sharply distinguishes the proper disciplines of history and science from the myths of history and science as explanations of the sacred with an accompanying unshakeable allegiance. That the one is the contrary of the other will continue to be important throughout the thesis. For now, in clarification of what he means by the 'myths' of history and science, it will suffice to point to some indications of the difference. In a letter to Playboy (March 1971, pp. 55-6), he points out that the very faith in science and technique is irrational and therefore is the opposite of genuine scientific thought. More clearly, he draws the contrast in different places in NP. The myth of history is the "transmutation de l'histoire en valeur, qui conduit à considérer que l'histoire est juge du bien et du mal". (p. 127) It is the belief that history has a meaning in itself or is itself a source of salvation. "Il n'y a aucun accord possible entre le récit de la science historique, qui ne comporte ni sens, ni leçon, ni valeur, ni vérité, et puis le "discours-croyance" sur l'histoire qui n'est que cela. Ainsi quand l'historien et le philosophe prononcent ce mot, ils ne disent pas du tout la même chose." (p. 128) Or, concerning science, "Cette croyance en l'universelle capacité de la science est maintenant associée à la foi que la science est le destin de l'homme. Il vit (et ne peut vivre autrement) dans le cosmos scientifique: c'est la science qui lui découvre son origine, qui justifie son présent, qui lui garantit un avenir. Bien entendu, la science des scientifiques ne fait rien de tout cela, et n'y prétend pas." (pp. 131-2) "[O]n a assisté de plus en plus à la rupture entre ce que font les scientifiques dans leurs laboratoires, les patientes recherches, les prudentes conclusions, le renoncement aux explications, le refus des généralisations, la récusation des causalités, l'abstraction mathématique en tant que représentation de méthode, et puis le grandiose et grandiloquent discours sur la science, comme on l'a par exemple entendu au moment du Spoutnik ou de la première descente sur la lune." (p. 130) Or, finally, there is his characterization of science and

Together, these two myths allow man to see himself in control of the otherwise baffling world of technique -- to his virtually unchallenged benefit. This most fundamental level of myth is the most passive one, the one least publically manifested, for it is embedded deeper in the human psyche than the vagaries of public life seem to admit. What happens is that these two basic myths in turn produce certain images that convey to people acceptable and explanatory views of themselves in relation to the world around them. These image beliefs usually stem from some combination of the original two myths; for example, the image-beliefs of the class struggle, happiness, progress and youth are all traceable to the myths of history and science.²⁵ Finally, there is the most easily discernible level of myth -- what Ellul calls the actualizing

and history as disciplines. "Vouloir que la science soit une représentation parmi d'autres possibles du monde dans lequel nous vivons et qu'elle ne donne jamais la clef de la vérité." "Vouloir que l'histoire soit un intéressant roman de l'aventure humaine, et rien de plus, rien de plus, non pas l'immense déesse qui nous permet de vivre. . ." (p. 281) Further on in this chapter, I shall demonstrate that, because of the power of the myths, disciplines tend to become convoluted into their contrary and to be submerged under the sacred of technique.

- ²⁵ Ellul admits that in these discussions he has been guilty of a looseness of language. (See NP, p. 155) He is not always careful about what he puts into which category. For example, even in this later writing, he slips into speaking of the image-belief of technique (p. 141) and of revolution (p. 143), when he wishes to distinguish them as axes of the sacred. Perhaps more accurately (although at times also confusing because of mistranslations) is the description in "MM" of the image-belief of technology. That expression would not refer to the whole realm of the sacred, but in the limited sense of belief in the benevolent image of the machine. Regarding the complexity in speaking of revolution that leads to some ambiguity in language, see A of R as a whole, or in "MM" where revolution is listed as a secondary myth. Despite this occasional lack of rigour in the categories, Ellul's main points seem to be fairly clear, especially in NP.

myths; for example, Marxism, peace, the hero, productivity, democracy.²⁶ He calls these ones 'secondary' or even 'tertiary' myths for two reasons. First, they are derivative from and dependent upon the deeper levels. For that very reason, they are more readily available as palatable and justifying explanations that actually turn man away from the harder aspects of reality in favour of comforting illusions that give every appearance of truth. Also, they are called 'secondary' because they are partial. They express with warmth and vigour and passion some single aspect of the most basic images. They are embellishments that seduce and motivate people to react in a manner suitable to maintain the way things are going. They provide the vehicles through which the images are concretely effected in the world. Because they are somewhat passing manifestations of something prior to themselves, they are more easily recognized and they can be replaced without altering the whole structure. Because of the several levels of myth, there is always a constant danger of confusing a relatively minor expression with the more root cause. All levels though, must be understood as manifestations of the sacred and as evidence of the presence of the sacred in the modern world.

²⁶ Here is another example of fairly loose language, but one that does not cause serious problems in understanding. In "MM", he refers to this level as 'secondary' myths, and in NP probably more accurately as 'tertiary' myths. Secondly, it is interesting to note that Marxism and democracy are listed as myths, whereas, in general, he says that ideology is not (or is not yet) myth. For the difference, see Propaganda, pp. 116-7 and p. 193 ff. At best, in his language, ideology might be called a fourth level of myth, closer to the new commonplaces than to myth proper. Finally, for his comments concerning the myth of democracy as a betrayal of genuine democracy and for his view of democracy itself, see Propaganda, p. 243 ff., "Actualité", pp. 58-59, and PI, p. 224 ff.

In fact, the link between myth and the sacred seems so intricately bound up that at times it is difficult to see the difference between the two. Myth could never maintain itself if it were fabricated out of lies, with no touch with reality. At the same time, the difference between the two is important.

[L]e sacré est une qualification attribuée à une réalité parfaitement saisissable: tel arbre, telle source sont sacrés. L'organisation du monde sacré est une organisation du monde effectif dans lequel vit l'homme. Au contraire, le mythe est un discours fictif sur une réalité, à l'occasion de telle partie de ce monde. Ainsi le sacré maintient constamment l'homme au niveau de réel, le mythe l'amène au contraire dans l'univers fictif.²⁷

Ellul does not let us forget that the relationship between the real and the fictional sides is a two-way process. We have already seen that myth arises out of and is dependent upon a confrontation with a given reality. At the same time, Ellul recognizes that the fictional aspect of myth can become more important than the original milieu to which its very existence is a response. At this point, the double connection between myth and reality becomes both increasingly dangerous (because it becomes an alienating fiction) and increasingly reinforcing (because it speaks to human need). I shall now turn to that characteristic of myth as a fictional explanation into which, fostered by propaganda, reality is forced to fit.

In The Political Illusion and To Will and To Do, Ellul elaborates the other side of the coin, in which myth becomes determinative of what will and will not constitute acceptable fact. Particularly with the appealing help of the secondary myths, facts are sifted and arranged

²⁷ NP, pp. 155-6.

into a meaningful whole that helps man, at least in part, to turn away from the real situation. "As long as the fact remains a fact, it has within it but little power"²⁸, but facts do not remain simply facts: they must become part of myth. (As mentioned earlier, but constantly to be borne in mind, the dominance does not come from reality alone, but from the loyalty which people give to the sacred realm with its explanations.) In The Political Illusion, Ellul goes as far as to indicate that, to all intents and purposes, raw fact or immediate experience has no objective significance. It achieves importance only by being incorporated into acceptable public opinion. Only after it has become a political fact, do people take cognizance of it. "It must be elaborated with symbols before it can emerge and be recognized as public opinion."²⁹ In this process, the original raw fact becomes increasingly abstracted from immediate experience, so that often knowledge of a fact becomes a question of trust and its meaning must be given to us from outside. We cannot see fact simply as unmitigated fact, for the myths tell us how to react in every phase of life. His argument does not deny that individual facts do or do not happen, but he does say that people can recognize them, if at all, only in a way defined by myth. For Ellul, therefore, the strength and danger of myth comes from the mutual process of

²⁸ To Will, p. 157. As pointed out in footnote 22, facts do have some strength, but here Ellul argues that they wield an even greater influence over people when they are incorporated into a compelling structure and a reassuring explanation. It is with both aspects in mind that I speak of the force(s) of reality.

²⁹ PI, p. 104. Basically he is speaking here of facts that in one way or another can be described as political or public facts; eventually, however, he says (PI, p. 116) that this process subsumes all facts.

dealing with the given material structure, while, in that very function, allowing man to be increasingly alienated through a parallel process of abstraction from reality. As a result, he can state that myth:

is not superstructure in that it does not confine itself to being a translation of material structures; neither is it an ideological veil for something that exists but which one would prefer not to see, nor a vulgar justification of an actuality which is felt to be unjust. It is far more than that and, in certain respects more essential than the material structure itself.³⁰

Yet it is thoroughly compatible for him to assert that myth is alienating.

[M]yth is the agent of total alienation, since it is that which makes it possible for man to accept the situation by interpreting it as entirely different from what it really is.³¹

Myth aids and abets the sacred reality by telling a story about it and, in the long run, by transforming it into an illusion. The net result of the necessity of dealing with the world of machines through the explanatory myths of science and history has been the strengthening of the unchecked dominance of the new sacred reality in all spheres of life, to the exclusion of any alternative. Also there is a fanatic adherence to new religions as the ways in which modern people live their devotion to the sacred.³² The major axes of the sacred are cloaked

³⁰ PI, p. 104.

³¹ FPK, p. 205, See also HTA, p. 36.

³² Because of the focus of this thesis, I shall not describe in detail Ellul's account of exactly how modern man lives out this relationship to the sacred. He points to the predominance of political religions under various guises. His final assessment is that not only are they as religious as those of any other era, but also they can be seen as perhaps more atrocious than earlier ones. See NP, p. 224.

with a religious aura in which, through the worship of representative idols, the sacred is justified and hidden by the various levels of myth to which the sacred axes are partly indebted for their hegemony. Human knowing and acting then, are always hedged around by the necessity and yet the alienation and illusion of the modern myths and sacred reality.

b) The Fact-Value Distinction

Ellul's social writings are his attempt to describe contemporary social reality, and their final goal is to show how much force reality, when sacralized, has over people in influencing their lives and, concomitantly, how dangerous and alienating the modern myths have become. (More accurately, how much force people have given to reality through sacralizing it is the focal point of his social writings.) He wants to expose reality for what it is -- the totality of facts on various levels that have been transformed (through sacralization and myth) into even stronger forces impinging on people, both for their feelings of security and also for an increasing enslavement. In order for Ellul to perform this task, he staunchly insists on the fact-value distinction.

Malgré toutes les critiques que l'on a pu adresser à Max Weber, sa vue de la tension entre les faits et les valeurs (en tout cas comme phénomène de croyance, non pas comme métaphysique) est non seulement utile mais certainement exacte.³³

³³ IP, p. 35. Weber will be discussed further in Chapter 4. Ellul maintains this distinction despite his attack on most other modern social sciences that are also based on that distinction. His attitude to the social sciences will be discussed later in this chapter. Also, it is important to note that he is not claiming the distinction metaphysically. On the one hand, this is a typical disclaimer of interest in philosophical questions. On the other hand, this particular comment is interesting in light of his theological stance. In light of the biblical revelation, facts do have a meaning, but that meaning is not open to normal human investigative equipment. He sees what happens when a meaning is imposed on reality and it is that error he wishes

That formula, for Ellul, is basically a short-hand reference for his work to separate the myths that camouflage reality. Conversely, he wants to guard against the glorification of facts and against objectivity being integrated into the myth of science.³⁴ Because reality is usually perceived as filtered, mediated, evaluated, and then glorified via the dominant myths, Ellul insists on separating out the values entwined with the facts.

A serious problem, at this point, comes from the consequence, in keeping with this principle, that Ellul deliberately does not bring his Christian faith into his social writings.³⁵ This practice might not pose a problem, were it not for certain statements in his theological writings. "For the birth of a new civilization can only originate in the will of God."³⁶

to guard against. He cannot begin to talk about the meaning of reality from within, and he thinks that an understanding can come only when the right questions are asked; that is, when man is in a position to hear. As a result, he sharply distinguishes, as I have noted, between description or analysis, and understanding.

³⁴ See PI, p. 30 and Propaganda, p. xv. As well as separating the myths from reality, he also wants to prevent the "Is" from being transformed into an "Ought".

³⁵ One might object that he breaks this rule in NP; nevertheless, even there he is careful to cordon off his warning to Christians from the rest of the book where the question of Christianity is treated as an historical question. In Chapter 3, I shall discuss what difference being a Christian does make.

³⁶ TFL, pp. 35-36. See TS, pp. 23, 44, for a partial confirmation of this statement in a social writing.

Only the liberation of man through the truth can both show him the real situation in which he finds himself, and at the same time release him from the myths which mystify and deceive him. But the truth can only play this role if it is not intrinsic to history, if it is not history. History is not liberation. It has no being independent of events, and events do not have a liberating significance. The truth cannot be liberating unless it be the Wholly Other. . . . Scripture itself is the most destructive acid with respect to myths. It is the revelation contained in the Bible (and there alone) which can demythologize man's current situation, a situation constantly in flux. . . . How can we fail to see that one need only apply this to politics, to nationalism, to communism, to science etc., in order to reduce them all to changeable undertakings which are meaningless in themselves?³⁷

Clearly, he believes that only the clarity of the biblical revelation makes it possible to see things as they really are. In that case, especially in consideration of the fact that man needs the sacred to make life bearable, what does he expect from his non-Christian or non-Jewish readers? Not only do myths give people bearings, but also he says it is impossible to step out of one myth without stepping into another.

But, in truth, this seems to us unavoidable. One cannot, at the human level, combat a myth except thanks to another myth (Sorel saw that clearly, merely by extending Marx's concept of ideology). One can only destroy the myth of liberalism by the myth of socialism. . . . But that means that there is never any actual demythologizing.³⁸

The issue becomes even more acute when he also admits the following:

To destroy myths is to disalienate man, but it is also, in many cases, to rob him of his reasons for acting, his hopes. While it is socially and politically indispensable to bring man back to reality, it can also commit him to despair. Hopes may be false and ideologies absurd, yet they are still the source of

³⁷ FPK, pp. 206-7. See also HTA, p. 90.

³⁸ FPK, p. 205.

action and life. Therefore it would be a cruel act to destroy them without more ado.³⁹

Before going on to a further examination of how Ellul thinks people know, it is necessary to clarify this separation of his studies, beyond simply saying that it is a sociological requirement.

From within the context of his task as a Christian intellectual, the answer is fairly straightforward. One can say that Ellul does not intend to leave it 'without more ado'.

So here I see the peculiar and unique task of Christians. Insofar as it is the truth which brings man back to the real, insofar as it is that hope which doesn't deceive, that destroys the deluded judgments, to that extent there is no room for despair. Thus the proclamation of the hope and the love which are in Christ goes unfailingly along with the demystification and desacralization. The latter cannot really be carried out except in company with this witness and this charity.⁴⁰

As discussed in the Introduction, he wants to help put people in a position where they will be able to 'hear the Word' which will supply the response and the reason for living. Or, put differently, these writings, which are 'the sighting of the key points', form only part of his work and an even smaller part of the corporate work of the Church. Within his social writings, one can point to the equivalent rationale that he never claims to be giving the whole story; for example, he speaks of the need for a diagnosis before a cure, the refusal to give solutions and the

³⁹ FPK, p. 207. Even in conjunction with the alienating aspects of the modern religions, he makes the same point. "Détruire ces abris, fermer ces issues, c'est exactement acculer l'immense majorité des hommes à la folie ou au suicide. . . . Peut-on ainsi condamner, par la désacralisation, la presque totalité des hommes à sombrer? . . . Et sinon, que celui qui ne peut apporter ces lumières laisse le reste de l'humanité civilisée, moderne, scientifique, chinoise ou occidentale, dormir en paix dans son rêve religieux." (NP, p. 261)

⁴⁰ FPK, p. 207.

impossibility of drawing up a blueprint for future action etc. within the confines of sociology itself.⁴¹ These reasons certainly can be argued when one considers the overall unity of his task.

Even with that explanation, however, one cannot entirely prevent the nagging feeling that there is something vaguely dishonest about such a complete separation. Is he practising 'skilful means' as a mode of sneaking in a little secret preaching or is he calling for conversion as the only answer?⁴² Is he being 'a Greek with the Greeks' to the extent that the other might get lost? His immediate response as a Christian is that the stripping away of myths cannot be hoped for as a guarantee of inspiring faith or as a 'point of contact' to compel non-believers to the truth of Christianity. Although his arguments are not always brought out clearly, Ellul does insist that his social writings are in fact directed to ordinary people with ordinary human equipment, apart from the blessings of grace. To speak to this major issue, I shall begin by looking at the closely related concerns of why myths should be exposed and the possible response; that is, some myths are more salutary than others, and, secondly, there are options within the sacred realm.

⁴¹ See for example IS, p. xxxi, A of R, p. 250ff, Propaganda, p. x. These statements also can be seen to correspond to his position that Christianity cannot give solutions (Chapter 1, footnote 108) and the need to pose the right questions.

⁴² See HTA, pp. 193-4, where he says his goal has been "to shut the false escapes of man's false hopes". It can be argued that this statement comes in a theological book; nevertheless, on the surface, it does not seem fair entirely to readers who are non-believers! In that case, one might ask him to give at least a little hint as he does in NP.

c) What Non-Christians Can Do

In his writings on myth, Ellul gives good reasons why one would want to expose the alienating side of the myths. The further out from the core the secondary and tertiary myths evolve, the more debilitating they seem to become. Particularly in A Critique of the New Common-places and Hope in Time of Abandonment, he stresses that now the situation has developed to the extent that people have almost lost touch with reality. The negative side of myth seems to be palpably overbalancing the benefits. Therefore, the current forms of the myths should be exposed, even if only to be replaced by more salutary forms. In other words, a myth can be replaced, at least partially, either by a different form of the same basic myth, or in the name of a past or future myth. For example, in conversation, he said that he prefers the liberal form of the myth of science to the Stalinist form of that myth.⁴³ Perhaps the most powerful and compelling way of changing views is speaking in the name of a future myth in its incipient stage, at the time when the sacred is changing. That non-Christians can engage in this work does not necessarily run counter to the theological arguments already mentioned, nor to the historical observation that the only two really profoundly desacralizing movements in the West have come

⁴³ This view will be important in the theological discussion concerning the order of Christ and the order of necessity. See, for example, FPK, p. 152. At this point I am referring to the other side of the expression, "All cats are not grey", which comes from Karl Barth, Community, Church and State (Gloucester: 1960), p. 119.

in the rise of Christianity and the movement of the Reformation⁴⁴. The spark, the prise de conscience, is not subject to direct study; nevertheless, as soon as people try to translate that motivation into the world, its effects (latent or manifest) do become part of the observable phenomena that do have an influence, either consciously or subconsciously, on all people.⁴⁵ For example, he says that the Reformation's emphasis on revelation, resulting in a de-sacralizing of nature, indirectly paved the way for the rise of technique which, although doubtless not central to the Reformation itself, increasingly demythologized the old myths in favour of new ones. One did not have to be a Christian, then or now, to observe the results and to think about the possible implications of the changes. Probably the best example, in Ellul's view, was Marx, who, because he was tied to the up-and-coming myths rather than to the dying ones, pointed clearly to the reality of his times. In fact, he was so powerful that he gave impetus to the myths that would themselves become alienating and illusory.

⁴⁴ See NP, p. 79. Here I am not going into detail about the straight historical questions of how myths and the sacred have changed. In this respect, there are two points to mention. First, he sees a two-tier, simultaneous interaction between material and explanatory factors. For example, see TS, pp. 23-60, or for his precise comments on Max Weber's thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, see "L'Actualité", pp. 39-51, and Ellul's review of the book in *Bulletin Sédésis*, pp. 4-17. Secondly, it is important to note that even when any given sacred is thrown into question, another sacred, in some form, is always established. That which becomes sacred is that which had been the instrument of de-sacralization. For example, techniques were a means of de-sacralization, but now technique itself has been elevated to the realm of the sacred. For this argument in more detail, see NP, pp. 79-86.

⁴⁵ Ellul uses the example of Weber who tried to show the results when a prise de conscience was injected into society. He says that Weber was correct to say that he could not examine the prise de conscience itself, nor whether its translation into society and the impact on others was a more or less pure attempt.

Therefore, according to Ellul, both the following statements about Marx are correct.

Marx est le seul homme de son temps qui ait saisi l'ensemble des problèmes sociaux, politiques et économiques dans leur réalité, qui ait correctement posé les questions de la civilisation du XIX^e siècle.⁴⁶

He 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.⁴⁷

Most important for this section concerning the human possibilities is the implication that Marx's achievement within the human realm of myth had nothing directly to do with the ultimate truth of revelation.

Even though Ellul has spoken of the inevitability of the sacralization of technique⁴⁸, he has also said that there can be options within the sacred milieu. We have already seen that, even in the modern world, Ellul distinguishes two different axes of the sacred (as distinct from the antithetical poles of each particular axis). That such a distinction within the sacred realm is even possible points to his second reason for writing for Christians as well as non-Christians. The two-pronged nature of the sacred points to two different groupings or orientations of force that can produce some degree of interplay within

⁴⁶ "KM", p. 367.

⁴⁷ "MM", p. 29. In doing so, Marx linked work to happiness and in turn to the fundamental myth of science. I shall discuss Marx in relation to Ellul further in Chapter 4.

⁴⁸ See, for example, NP, p. 259.

the sacred itself, which does not have to rest immobile.⁴⁹ Even without stepping outside of the realm of the sacred and of myths, even staying within the domain of the dominating forces, Ellul argues that there still remains the possibility for movement. In fact, he underscores the crucial importance of maintaining a dialectical tension among the major forces of society as they are ordered within the sacred. Now in modern thought, the expressions 'dialectics' and 'dialectical relationships' are so common and so abused that they tend to become virtually meaningless. It is important, therefore, to indicate what Ellul means by them, for they play a major part in all areas of his thought. In general, he refers to 'dialectics' as a view of the whole which consists in relationships among different or contradictory elements which remain held together in an inseparable bond of tension. Each aspect can be seen and analyzed or described only in terms of its opposite pole, while the whole includes the interaction or the field of force between the poles. It is important to note that Ellul does not see dialectics as a distinctive mode of reasoning, but rather as a description of the relationships

⁴⁹ It is at times difficult to see exactly how Ellul differentiates the terms 'the sacred' and 'the forces'. Basically, he sees the relationship between the two as that of the difference between the fact (the forces) and the belief or attitude (the sacred). In a sense, the sacred is the sacralization of the forces, but a simple equation is not in order, for not all the forces are sacralized. (See, for example, *NP*, pp. 95-96; 184, for the position of money in his schema.) The sacred will reveal and be a source of ordering the forces in a way that gives a higher view or understanding of what constitutes society as a whole. The sacred is the untouchable source of the arrangement of the hierarchy of the forces in fact. Since the sacred does arise in response to the major forces, and since the sacred and the forces are never totally at odds, it is not surprising that a common vocabulary comes into the discussion of each part. M. Ellul himself, especially in our conversation, sought to clarify the distinction, so that the different issues could be discussed in a precise way.

involved in the way things are.⁵⁰ The result for Ellul's work is that he continually emphasizes challenge, movement and the forces of relationship in any attempt to look at the whole.⁵¹

Sociologically, he considers that societies live through the dialectical play of the inner contradictions of the forces at work in society (as already discussed.)⁵² Although the content of these forces will vary from civilization to civilization, the common danger remains that the tension and interaction will be completely resolved. When the major forces become increasingly unified into a monolith, when society ceases to evolve, it dies. Society then stagnates and will either crumble internally or else collapse of its own weight -- with no guarantee of the outcome, or else succumb to external attack. But why does he think a dialectic within society's forces is necessary for its continued existence? In response to this question, he has spoken first from the perspective of micro-sociology, using as an example the dialectical relationship between husband and wife. When there are no more fruitful tensions or no more differences within a common relationship, or when the two become increasingly similar, then the members have nothing more

⁵⁰ See, for example, "W and C", p. 15, where he refers to "not dialectic that is a type of reasoning, but a movement of actual experience". For his discussion of reason, see Chapter 3 of this part.

⁵¹ In chapter 7 of Part B, we shall see how he views the relationship between God and man as a dialectical one, and in Chapter 6 of Part B, we shall see how he views the relationship of the biblical revelation and the here and now situation as a dialectical one as well.

⁵² For his view of society, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, Ellul is indebted to Karl Marx. His disagreement comes in the meaning of the evolution of society. For Ellul, it does not imply a progress of history, but rather one can speak only of the course of society during its lifetime.

to say to each other; there is no more communication and growth. Then, in other words, the social unit has broken down. Without any internal reasons for existence, the marriage continues only as a result of external pressures: it disappears if the external (usually juridicial) constraints disappear. Analogously, Ellul has said that within larger societies there are similar effects. For any society to maintain itself, it must find challenges to realize why it exists, and these challenges stem largely from the interplay of the major forces. For example, he says that France appears less and less important to many Frenchmen, so that the relationships between groups are increasingly those of retreat rather than those of dialectical tension. This route, he sees as one way a society can deteriorate. The second route comes on a wider scale (though not unconnected) when the major forces that have provided the raison d'être for the society become so rigidly unified that society exists only as a mechanism. In both cases (and they usually go hand in hand) there is no internal meaning or challenge, so that the society goes into decline. For Ellul, a society can find a collective meaning only through dialectical relationships among individuals, among groups and among the dominating forces. When these relationships of fruitful tension disappear, a political system can maintain itself for only a limited time against internal disintegration or external threats. Otherwise, it must be so enclosed, for example by police power, that it is no longer a living society. Although he believes that a dead society (one in which distinctions between the axes of the sacred no longer exist) can be maintained for a long time through force, he does not think it

could survive indefinitely.⁵³ Unlike Marx, he thinks that the collapse is catastrophic for those involved in it.

In short, the existence of options and movement within the sacred realm is necessary to the continuation of a healthy, live society, but that existence is not guaranteed. The desirability of maintaining some options provides an impetus for anybody to assess the social situation and take cognizance of where society is headed if left unchecked. The danger of negating the dialectical movements of society is the one that he tries to spell out in all his social books. If blind obedience is given to the unification of technique and state power, the route would be an ever-increasing slavery, until they become so enmeshed that there will be only a total rigidity. Without being a Christian or a Jew, one can still, Ellul argues, see that this process of unification has been going on, virtually unchecked since the nineteenth century. Therefore, as has already been pointed out, The Technological Society,

⁵³ From the historical point of view, Ellul has said that he does not think it is exact to say that there have been rigid societies that could have existed indefinitely. On the one hand, the images of Egyptian and Byzantine civilizations, so-called rigid societies, are usually superficial. On the other hand, where rigidity has taken place, he maintains that the societies have collapsed. This observation is mainly a historical one and in conversation he pointed to parallels, for example, in certain dynasties in China. In the modern case, since the integration of state power and technique is tending to become universal, the alternative of susceptibility to external attack becomes less likely, unless one refers to invasion from other planets! Unchecked, the prospects seem to be a total internal collapse which would not lead to Marx's higher stage of development.

as "a call to the sleeper to awake"⁵⁴, applies to Christians and non-Christians alike. The longer this process goes on, the more difficult any options or movements become. He maintains that there is no reason why even non-Christians, within the realm of the sacred, could not corporately effect a revolution against this trend. He does admit, however, that the most practical possibility is a holding action against the stream and a slowing down of the destructive or integrating tendencies on all levels.⁵⁵ He pointed, in conversation, to the efforts of some African states, notably Tanzania, to inject a new relationship between the state and technique, and to the movement to allow for more small states to increase the possible sources of fruitful tension and a mutual calling into question of the two major forces. "As a matter of fact reality is itself a combination of determinisms."⁵⁶ What he is advocating, for both believer and non-believer alike, in the interests of the preservation of a healthy society, is the attempt to ensure that there actually do remain combinations and not the alternative of an attempted monolith.

⁵⁴ TS, p. xxxiii. For a description of the original dialectical tension between technique and state power, see PI, pp. xvi, xx. See PI, p. 214ff for an account of the desirability of dialectical tension within society. For a precise comment that, contrary to popular opinion, society is becoming increasingly rigid, see A of R, p. 261ff. For a comment that this process is not yet total, see A of R, p. 302. For a discussion of how this view of sociology relates to his account of the fact-value distinction, see Chapter 4 (b) and (c). For now I am concentrating on what he thinks non-Christians can see and do.

⁵⁵ In A of R, he outlines the requirements for such a revolution and it is not directed solely to Christians. The fact (for Ellul) that non-Christians will not be able to bring about a wholly new civilization with a different set of poles for the dialectic, does not mean that there is nothing at all for them to do.

⁵⁶ TS, p. xxxii.

These two factors of better and worse myths and of the maintenance of dialectical tension, therefore, provide the motivation for the carrying out of his work of social description taken alone -- with no appeal to revelation. In theological terms, it is his concern for the preservation of the world, because God loves the whole world and not just the Christians and Jews. Or, as discussed in the foundational chapter, as well as spelling out one half of the doctrine of the two realms, Ellul's sociology is his contribution to the responsibility of the Church to the world in spelling out the direction in which the world is currently headed. The ambiguity concerning the impression that he is looking for a point of contact or indulging in hidden preaching comes in the way in which he makes his appeal to both believers and non-believers. For example, there is his account of freedom in The Technological Society.

In my conception freedom is not an immutable fact graven in the nature and on the heart of man. It is not inherent in man or in society, and it is meaningless to write it into law. The mathematical, physical, biological, sociological, and psychological sciences reveal nothing but necessities and determinisms on all sides. As a matter of fact, reality is itself a combination of determinisms, and freedom consists in overcoming and transcending these determinisms. Freedom is completely without meaning unless it is related to necessity, unless it represents a victory against necessity. To say that freedom is graven in the nature of man, is to say that man is free because he obeys his nature, or, to put it another way, because he is conditioned by his nature. This is nonsense. We must not think of the problem in terms of a choice between being determined and being free. We must look at it dialectically, and say that man is indeed determined, but that it is open to him to overcome necessity, and that this act is freedom. Freedom is not static but dynamic; not a vested interest, but a prize continually to be won. The moment man stops and resigns himself, he becomes subject to determinism. He is most enslaved when he thinks he is comfortably settled in freedom.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ TS, p. xxxii-iii.

This question of freedom, given as a backdrop to the purpose of that writing, seems remarkably analogous to his account of the unique, specifically Christian response to the world. This apparent identity of Christianity as the only possible suggestion is exacerbated in his comparison of the task to that of the Reformation.

But we should not have any illusions; this will be a grave crisis, comparable with the religious crisis of the 15th Century. Everything will be put into question if we put technology into question. . . . [I]t will be a very serious crisis, for man will have the feeling that a future is no longer possible and that nothing makes sense. He will experience immense frustration.⁵⁸

Despite the similarity of language, Ellul insists that he is not speaking only of conversion to Christianity. For clarification of this point, he has said that he should be careful to separate the possibility for independence for man outside of revelation from the specifically Christian notion of liberty.⁵⁹ By independence, he means the individual taking the options to move within the forces of the world, and working to keep options possible, so that he can speak of "une sorte de passion naturelle"⁶⁰ or "man's wild cry for freedom"⁶¹ as seen throughout history. Because for Ellul independence is not a given in reality, it can never be an object of study in itself, nor can the goodness of that

⁵⁸ Playboy, pp. 55-56. The fact that he has written at all to Playboy, an appeal to an audience so far removed from the citizens of Calvin's Geneva, shows that his concern is definitely not simply for the faithful. His attack on the Playboy philosophy is not on moral grounds. Rather, he attacks its lack of lucidity which can lead only to a further enslavement.

⁵⁹ In conversation, M. Ellul said that this distinction, which he has not always made explicitly in his social writings, will be carefully underlined in Ethique de la Liberté. The notion of Christian freedom will be discussed in Part B, Chapter 7.

⁶⁰ This is a description of Yves Charrier, who was not specifically Christian, in Ellul's Jeunesse Délinquante (Paris: 1971), préface.

⁶¹ A of R, p. 243.

goal be defended except as experienced. Yet, at the same time, independence or freedom, as discussed above, does remain the raison d'être of his writing social books for all people. Whether or not this stance finally remains viable, he does maintain that it is possible to demonstrate sociologically that the forces do tend to come together in a way that increasingly tends to limit possible options. "We see in this loss of liberty the downward path into which technique is leading us."⁶² Also, he can show historically what has happened, including man's reactions. Thus, although his goal is to prevent people from getting comfortably settled into freedom, no specific studies can describe or instigate a response by an individual. That specific step, as we shall see in his discussion of sociology, is beyond the scope of human analysis. As we have already seen, only when the results enter into the interplay of the forces of reality is a study possible. Since he says that the dialectic between the individual and the forces of society (as distinct from the dialectic among the forces themselves) is not open to study, all he can do is to pose the questions acutely. One result of his only rare allusions to possible responses is the impression that perhaps he is interested only in some revealed answer. Such is not the case. More important, he says that all possibilities, including acting in the name of a different myth or a different form of the same myth cannot, in themselves, be dealt with in descriptive writing. A final note to remember regarding what Ellul thinks should be done is that he writes specifically to specific audiences. He seems to be responding more and more to the fact that people feel increasing discontent or, as in the

⁶² TS, p. 218. This is an example where the distinction expressed in footnote 59 has not been clearly made. Another example is the reference to 'freedom' in the Playboy letter.

Playboy letter, think that they have successfully rebelled. To those people, he wants to give warning of the difficulties or to steer them from paths that can only tighten the noose. In doing so, however, he does not want to repudiate entirely the effort to protest for although it may be superficial, a protest remains a real and genuine one. He does tend to sound the warning at the point where it seems most required, rather than indicating what could possibly be accomplished by anyone. He considers these warnings to be a contribution to the preservation of the world which God has decreed for a purpose. In other words, his descriptions of social reality must be seen under the rubric of the double responsibility of the Church to the world -- preservation through the prevention of closed systems, and also her unique witness to Jesus Christ. Both aspects are present in Ellul's writings, but he maintains the separation of studies to ensure that the issue of preservation of the world is not lost in the shuffle.

Within the context of why it is humanly necessary to carry out the specific task, I shall now turn to an examination of the possibilities and limitations of the human ways of knowing through reason and the intellect.

CHAPTER 3

REASON, INTELLECT AND SCIENCE

"Cette longue marche . . . n'était pas un jeu intellectuel. Nous cherchions à saisir non pas le dit mais le vécu et son interprétation dans l'intelligible."¹ Beyond the emphasis on lived reality, Ellul also considers it part of human equipment to bring the mass of experiences on many different levels into focus. Or, put differently, he thinks that the human brain can view and organize those experiences, so that, taken together, they achieve some overall coherence, for the comprehension of all the participants. For Ellul, that second level of human knowledge is the exercise of the intellect, and the intellectual is one "whose job is to use his brains" or whose "trade is to reflect."² Although he does not claim that the intellect is the only or the complete way of reacting to human reality, he does maintain that it is important to find patterns, to analyze and to consider one's place within what is experienced.³ In order to consider what he means by this capacity with its specific limitations, I shall look first at the tools of the

¹ AR, p. 351.

² Critique, p. 9; To Will, p. 2. For clarity about this section it should be noted that, although he makes no explicit reference, Ellul does seem to accept a more or less traditional view of the faculties of the intellect (of which reason is a sub-faculty), the will and the appetites. Although he does not enter into philosophical or even psychological debates about the faculties, he does recognize the distinctions as a working basis. This chapter and Part B, Chapter 7 will discuss his view of the workings of the intellect and will and their interrelationships.

³ See, for example, HTA, pp. v-x; "Mirror", p. 203; PK, p. 97. One must remember also what was said in the general Introduction about the need to divide up the task.

intellect, most notably the faculty of reason, and then thought and reflection. Then I shall move on to consider the overall work of the intellect and the specific example of his view of science. Finally, in this chapter, I shall examine what difference Ellul thinks Christian faith makes in this enterprise.

a) Tools of the Intellect

i) Reason

Within Western philosophical thought, the nature of reason in itself has probably been the single most controversial issue. Since Ellul refuses to enter explicitly into 'philosophical' debates, and since he says that there is no such thing as 'pure' reason, but only reason as practised by people who remain in the context of the fall, he tends only to discuss its present usage.⁴ In doing so, he more or less takes for granted that the readers will easily recognize the major categories and his acceptance of everyday parlance.⁵ Since, however, he wants to give a reasoned description of our radically new situation, in which rationality and efficiency remain at the core, it is incumbent on the reader to attempt to differentiate among the various terms. This analysis will not try to argue the validity or even the total consistency of Ellul's stance. More simply, I shall try to draw together what he thinks reason is and ought to be as a major function of the human intellect.

⁴ As we shall see in Part B, Chapter 7, he says we can see all human activities only within the context of the fall, having given allegiance to the powers. Here I am discussing the added limitations he sees in 'reason in itself', since he sees reason solely as a tool.

⁵ See, for example, TS, pp. 78-79, where he gives a very summary account of the controversial expression 'rationality' on the grounds that it will be familiar to most readers.

The first and most important note concerning Ellul's use of 'reason' is that it is a tool that carries out a function. As a tool, it can work only within a particular and limited sphere and also it always operates in the same way, albeit in the hands of different masters dominated by different powers. For example, the following statement hints at the possibilities and limitations of reason.

Law is not a product of human reason, but only of God's activity in the world. Reason is confined to organizing and ordering. It is neither a source nor standard for justice or for law.⁶

Reason is then a relative faculty, but not a non-faculty.⁷ It is the faculty by which man is able, first, to put the internal world of the passions into order and keep them in check and, secondly, to put the external world into order. The first aspect, very closely resembling Freud's concept of the ego, is the prerequisite of the second. It is the giving up of this function that Ellul calls the retreat into the irrational.⁸ The other main aspect of reason implies that it is the

⁶ TFL, p. 68. It is clear that in this usage, Ellul is not referring to the meaning of 'reason' as 'motive or justification', although he does at times use the word in this context; see for example, Propaganda, p. 155 ff., concerning rationalization as the search for good reasons, or FPK, p. 205, where he speaks of the reasons for acting. It should be noted here that rationnel is the adjective used for raison; it is not used as the adjective for rationalité or rationalisme or rationalisation. In reading translations, there is some problem, for there is not always the same care taken as Ellul has taken in the original. Much of the source for this part on reason came from clarifications in conversation with M. Ellul.

⁷ Although Ellul does not refer explicitly to faculty psychology, this is a clear example in which he accepts it at least as a tool to clarify his own position. He does also want to emphasize the unity of a human being. See also the discussion on pp. 125, 143 of this chapter. Again, these distinctions, for Ellul himself, should not be used to tie him to a specific school or philosophy.

⁸ See for example, M du B, p. 208, where he discusses reason and the dangers involved now that the struggle with and for reason is being abandoned.

analytical organ of the mind.⁹ It can order and organize -- make divisions of experience into concrete observations, distinguish among observations, delineate patterns and similar relationships among discrete facts, relate means to ends, see possible options, separate into parts, make inferences and deductions and comparisons, assess internal coherences and project from them. In filling these tasks, reason is limited to the practical realm or to the immediately useful aspects of the topic under consideration. The major initial conclusion that one can reach from looking at this list of possibilities is that reason does not stand on its own, nor can it choose its own sphere of operation, nor justify its own activity. It must be directed by something outside of itself, in whose service the operations of reason work. In short, the faculty of reason, as a tool, can in no way lead to a knowledge of the good or to self-justification.

The error surely stems from treating the good the same way as any other object, a thing to be known among other things. And since man was capable of knowing the stars and of knowing himself. . . it became a certainty that man had kept intact his capacity to know. And why should he not also know the good among all the diverse objects to which he applied his reason? . . . But all that rested upon ignorance of the biblical revelation, or rather upon the primacy bestowed upon philosophy or on experience, thanks to which the interpretation of revelation was coloured.¹⁰

⁹ 'Analytical' here is used in the sense of a breaking down into constituent parts and is the word M. Ellul used himself. At times, he uses the noun 'analysis' in the wider sense of a synonym for 'description'. Admittedly, it is somewhat ambiguous to use this term at all -- especially considering its diversity in modern philosophical and social thought. I have mainly used the noun with reference to description, following from "The World", p. 17, where Ellul contrasts 'analysis' and 'understanding' of the world. Wherever possible, it is best to check with the original text and then to see the word chosen within context.

¹⁰ To Will, p. 15. It is this habitual linking of the rational with the good that probably has led to the two different meanings of 'reason' mentioned in footnote 6.

Even apart from the biblical revelation, reason itself cannot lead to a good, but rather its direction is controlled by what the man using this faculty considers good. A second preliminary observation is also in order: Ellul is in no sense anti-reason. In fact he said in conversation that in order to confront reality, people need to use reason, for he thinks that, in Nietzsche's terms, the Dionysiac is more dangerous than the Apollonian. On these grounds of the two aspects of reason, he attacks Marcuse's advocacy of polymorphous sexuality as dangerous.¹¹ What he does want to guard against is the tendency to try to force reason to exceed its limits.

The fact that creation can be partially known by reason, plus the fact that all men are to a greater or lesser extent endowed with reason, prompts the idea that all that is rational is universal.¹²

He says that reason becomes dé-raison when it oversteps its bounds to say that everything can be totally ordered or totally explicated by reason. On the other hand, reason becomes a negation of reason, when it gives up its limited possibilities -- even in the name of efficiency.

Or, dans le temps qui vient, nous assistons à un déchaînement de délires, à une négation de la raison; qu'il s'agisse en Occident de la mentalité grégaire et collective, de l'obéissance aux courants sociologiques, de l'appel furieux aux forces obscures de l'Inconscience, de la propagande, . . . partout c'est une négation de l'usage simple et ferme, modeste, mais rigoureux de la raison.¹³

¹¹ See A of R, p. 287ff, where he says that Marcuse makes the same kind of appeal as the early Hitler.

¹² TFL, p. 63. This is not simply a discussion of reason before the fall, but this faculty with its severe limitations is also a tool given to us and maintained after the fall. See TFL, p. 90. That note still does not bring us to any discussion of pure reason apart from the users.

¹³ "Actualité", p. 59.

The rigorous use of reason avoids the extremes of the rationalistic (as opposed to rational) man and the irrational man.¹⁴

Perhaps for clarification of what reason can accomplish within these two emphases, one can point to some of Ellul's own illustrations. For example, in The Technological Society, he speaks of the intervention of reason into the field of technical operation which by itself is simply the human activity of attaining a certain end. Before the intervention of reason, these ends were achieved either through response to the passions or to blind instinct. Once the stage of organization by reason came into this sphere, then it was possible to produce objects with more calculated efficiency or in terms of certain abstract features, so that the method would always work predictably and not just passionately at random. Reason, however, has not always been limited solely to the technical field. Other examples he uses are the use of reason by the Greeks (as governed by philosophical considerations that tended to limit the scope of practical applications in favour of contemplation), or the question of comfort in the Middle Ages when reason did not operate under its technical guise, but rather in the interests of other considerations.¹⁵ Within Ellul's overall task, however, we should look at what he means by reason in his two most important areas -- first, the relationship between reason (as a mechanism that does not substantially change) and rationality or technique (as a distinctly modern phenomenon) and, secondly, the use of reason in looking at the Bible.

¹⁴ For discussion of rationalism, see PI, p. xvi, 235, and A of R, p. 290 that the battle for reason is an attack on both rationalism and the irrational.

¹⁵ For these examples, see TS, pp. 27ff, 63.

Within the core area of the definition of technique vis-à-vis the faculty of reason, Ellul makes the fewest explicit distinctions. Yet one must see those very distinctions in order to appreciate how Ellul wants to describe technique without simply becoming part of it. The major clarification must be the relationship between reason and rationality.¹⁶ As a preliminary note for the discussion, he pointed out, in conversation, the original derivation of 'rationality' from the Roman understanding that there is a specific order in things, so that the purpose of reason (not unrelated to it) is to find this order existent in every sphere. Rationality, even though the content of the notion has changed, has since been a particular preoccupation of the West. He also pointed out that, although there has been a social and moral order throughout the history of China, until recently it has never been characterized by rationality. Hence, there has been a blurring of terms for almost any Western thinker or reader. He does not believe, however, that one should use the same term to denote what is being described and also the process used to describe it.¹⁷ He would certainly concede that reason has so submitted itself to the power of rationality that it has become largely perverted into a rationalism. He sees this process as a prime example of the almost indissoluble link between material and belief factors. Nevertheless, in order to describe technique within a proper framework, he prefers to keep the two separate.

¹⁶ In discussion, Ellul concurred that technique, especially as used in TS, is virtually synonymous with Weber's concept of 'rationality'. In the up-coming version of the book, he will emphasize where he has somewhat diverged from Weber's systematization. These changes should not substantially alter this thesis.

¹⁷ He does not believe that Weber erred in using the same kind of reason he was describing, and in conversation he categorically dismissed Marcuse's attack on Weber in "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber", Negations (Boston: 1968), pp. 201-226.

In technique, whatever its aspect or the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous or irrational. This rationality best exemplified in systematization, division of labour, creation of standards, production norms and the like, involves two distinct phases: first, the use of "discourse" in every operation; this excludes spontaneity and personal creativity. Second, there is the reduction of method to its logical dimension alone. Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments to the schema of logic.¹⁸

The net result in the West is that rationality or technique has increasingly become the order existent in things -- not simply externally for Ellul, but as the only way in which reality with all its relationships can be understood. Reason, on the other hand, is a discipline and faculty that helps man to see this tendency.

This man is then called upon to pass everything through the sieve of his reason, marshaling in his conscious mind all of it that he can -- everything, i.e., his own passions, his own prejudices, his own doctrines, and also the groups and the society to which he belongs.

Man learns to try to judge for himself by the use of reason; he then begins to see the limits and uncertainties of all the information in his possession, the relative aspects of his ideas and opinions, the restricted utility of institutions that must never be exalted, but must not be despised either.¹⁹

That distinction brings us to the very heart of Ellul's social concerns. Since modern technique is categorically different from pre-modern rationality, where does he see the precise difference? The answer will finally lead us back to the discussion of the sacred realm and modern myths.

As long as there have been people, there has also been technical activity.

¹⁸ TS, pp. 78-79.

¹⁹ PI, p. 235.

Technical activity is the most primitive activity of man. There is the technique of hunting, of fishing, of food gathering; and later of weapons, clothing and building. And here we face a mystery. What is the origin of this activity? It is a phenomenon which admits of no complete explanation. By patient research, one finds areas of imitation, transitions from one technical form to another, examples of penetration. But at the core there is a closed area -- the phenomenon of invention.²⁰

Thus, there is certainly nothing distinctively modern about technical activity. As already indicated, the first important step was the introduction of reason into the process, as opposed to the following of instinct. Reason, then, goes as far back as the original myths. The result of the dawning awareness of the awesome reality confronting man, as we have seen, was the rise of collective myths. Traditionally, they did not deal with the situation by putting people directly in charge. Rather, through the development of religion, they saw the basic principles as being external to their own control. Reason operated in every field, but remained subsidiary to the assessment of the myths for guidelines to good organization. Coeval with reason in the service of myths was reason in the service of the technical phenomenon, also present in all civilizations. To put together the account of the origin of myths and of the technical phenomenon means a double explanation of the ways for grappling with reality -- both of which involved the use of reason. The second mode came from those who sought direct control of their environment, either as homo faber or through magic. They affirmed the solely human power to master things, to secure their own destiny through their capacity to reason.

²⁰ IS, p. 23. Again, I am not going into the historical details he presents, except to outline the basic patterns of his thought -- here with reference to reason.

[T]echnique is the translation into action of man's concern to master things by means of reason, to account for what is subconscious, make quantitative what is qualitative, make clear and precise the outlines of nature, take hold of chaos and put order into it.²¹

In this respect, Ellul does give at least one clear account of how reason organizes when it serves this way of looking at things.

[L]a raison mesure les résultats, elle va tenir compte de ce but précis de la technique qu'est l'efficacité. Elle note ce que chaque moyen inventé est capable de fournir, et parmi les moyens qu'elle met à la disposition de l'opération technique elle fait un choix, une discrimination pour retenir le moyen le plus efficace, le plus adapté au but recherché, et nous aurons alors une réduction des moyens à un seul: celui qui est effectivement le plus efficient. C'est là le visage le plus net de la raison sous son aspect technique.²²

At this point, I make two observations central to Ellul's position.

First, he maintains that the intrinsic characteristics, the mechanics of reasoning, within the technical phenomenon do not change throughout history.

The mental operation by means of which Archimedes constructed certain engines of war is identical with that of any modern engineer who improves a motor. And the same instinct impels a man to catapult stones and to construct a machine gun.²³

Secondly, in pre-modern times, this use of reason was restricted to a relatively small field -- a fact which is difficult for modern minds to grasp. Since the overall source of society lay beyond man and his techniques, the basic characteristics were religious preoccupations that led reason to operate in areas other than the technical. Even for those directions in which technique did operate, they could never expand

²¹ TS, p. 43.

²² La Technique, p. 18.

²³ TS, p. 62.

autonomously, for people did not entirely trust an instrument that was potentially a destructive, de-sacralizing agent. Instead, they gave the technical phenomenon only partial credibility as a minor instrument of the sacred order. Technique evolved only insofar as it did not overturn (e.g. Greek inventions) or was able to enhance (e.g. Roman law) the non-technical myths to which men did give their highest homage.

The change in the total orientation came with the combination of the proliferation and perfection of various techniques, along with the breakdown of the old sacreds. We have seen that the spread of techniques was a factor in de-sacralizing, but the decisive difference has been the new relationship between man and the technical phenomenon. Beyond being a limited tool within reality, technique has become reality itself. With the breakdown of previous beliefs, the only alternative seemed to be for people to give their undivided allegiance to technique. The only sphere for reason became the technical realm. By the nineteenth century, rationality -- the totality of technique as the sole criterion in every field -- began to win decisively as the only way to see reality. By now, no other end can be imported, except perhaps in rhetoric, but the efficiency of means in splendid isolation. Since the technical phenomenon is a constant in human history, Ellul does not attack it specifically. What he does expose as a social scientist and attack as a Christian are the dangers when technique becomes monolithic both as a major social force and as major axis of the sacred. Technique has never existed in either capacity before the modern era. Within such a monolith, reason is under the constant threat of becoming either dé-raison or a negation of reason. Far from detracting from the use of reason, he wants it to be able to operate within its proper sphere and also to

be able to operate under a number of different guises that would permit at least some movement of the mind. Because there is a decreasing possibility for an alternative to technical reason, he finds it a more dangerous and alienating prospect than it was in the past.

I have never attacked technology. On the one hand, I have attempted to describe the whole sociological problem of technology, with emphasis on my conviction that the benefits accruing from technology are well worthwhile. On the other hand, I have attacked the ideology of technology and idolatrous beliefs about technology.²⁴

Ellul does not claim to be using the dominant form of reasoning, which tends not to be reason at all, nor a different mode of reasoning from others used before. He does say that reason has to be directed to a new situation and that the effort to revive its proper usage must come from a renewal of our attitude towards reality as a whole.

There is no magical alteration, according to Ellul, in the mechanics of reason when one moves into the area of biblical studies. If anything, the distinctions between what reason can and cannot accomplish become perhaps more pronounced. On the one hand, the faculty of reason has absolutely no ability to discuss the authority of the Bible as the Word of God or even as important for our concrete consideration.

Either Israel is the chosen people and receives a revelation from God, so that what it holds, transcribes and transmits is a Word of God and not its own ideas, or Israel is not the chosen people and its ideas and myths and writings are of no more interest than those of the Aztecs or the Japanese.²⁵

²⁴ "A Little Debate", p. 707.

²⁵ P of G, p. 27. See also M of C, p. 179.

That crucial assessment is entirely outside of the realm of reason, and in this matter, Ellul remains firmly grounded in the Reformation tradition. In other words, his biblical reflections clearly demonstrate that reason is confined to the human and the useful; therefore it cannot tell us all there is to know about the Bible. On the other hand, it is very important not to abandon reason in favour of following the dictates of the modern myths concerning what we can see in the Bible. In fact, Ellul would probably argue that, because the Bible, even looked at from a solely human perspective, challenges any human monolith, it is studied less and less reasonably, so that eventually researchers would prefer to choose the Aztecs or the Japanese as more accessible or more compliant to the interpretations of the modern sacred. Equally, he rejects appealing to the Bible as simply the irrational leap into absurdity, open to no rational discussion, as an antidote to modern rationalism. With these parameters in mind, one can see at least three general areas where Ellul thinks reason has a definite place in any biblical studies. I merely mention them here, so that their implications can be expanded further in the Postscript in Part B. First, reason can serve as a prolegomenon -- either as a via negativa instructing the reader how not to read the Bible or as a positive step. In short, reason can assist in preliminary tasks such as providing proper texts, analyzing what kind of document the Bible is, the claims or motivations of the authors, the kinds of concerns appropriate to this kind of writing, or the prevention of wrong tacks or imposed assumptions that will distort the reading before it even starts. In these respects, one can surely not be claiming to exhaust the field of the Bible, but

it can help to avoid some of the most gross kinds of errors.²⁶ Secondly, exercising the faculty of reason can help to put a stop to any tendency to give up too soon, to resort to an irrational position about the Bible. Ellul firmly rejects any form of literalism that retreats into credo quia absurdum stances which reject all thought or which attach more faith to the record than to the truth of Jesus Christ.²⁷ Reason must struggle with the text(s) until it has reached the very limits of the internal meaning, before writing it (them) off as impossible error.²⁸ Thirdly, reason can organize and note internal coherences, draw comparisons, show the links among the parts, and can extrapolate from the specific and peculiar kind of logic involved in the paradox of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It is at this stage that reason joins the service of theology in seeing the relationships of the various parts taken together as a whole. Reason alone cannot dictate that the Bible be read in such a manner, but it can serve in the practical carrying out of the implications of such a position. These three functions of reason in the study of the Bible (which do not differ from any other use of reason) can be so easily be misunderstood, that Ellul summed up his position by referring to Calvin's concern for the humble use of right reason.²⁹

²⁶ For one example of this aspect of the discussion of reason, see JJ, p. 14, concerning the selection of Jonah as a book of prophecy.

²⁷ See HTA, p. 143; JJ, pp. 10, 61, for a passing rejection of these positions. The whole question of literalism will be discussed further in Part B, Chapter 5.

²⁸ See, for example, the question of the song of thanksgiving in Jonah, in JJ, pp. 46-58.

²⁹ This reference came from M. Ellul. My underlining. Although the original source is not known, the main argument can be found in Calvin's Theological Treatises (Philadelphia: 1954), pp. 272-273.

ii) Thought and Reflection

From these two discussions from the major areas of his work, it is clear that Ellul does see reason as a solely instrumental, though highly necessary, piece of apparatus that helps in the overall work of the intellect. Before moving directly to an examination of the intellect as the mode of comprehension of experience, I shall first look very briefly at its other two major tools -- thought and reflection. To encapsulate the sense of his meaning, Ellul pointed to the etymological roots in which penser derives from 'to weigh' and réfléchir comes from 'to look in a mirror'. Thinking, then, implies a weighing of the evidence to see which is heaviest or counts the most in relation to the other experiences. Or, in biblical studies, it implies a judicious weighing of the exact demands contained in what is read.³⁰ In all cases, thought provides a sifting of the evidence and the scales for balancing that must always accompany reason which supplies the organizational ability. Finally, there is the tool of reflection in the sense of looking at the way in which we ourselves look either in the light of the biblical passage or our particular social situation. As we shall see in more detail, the ability to reflect prevents any acceptance of the Bible as a totally and superstitiously mysterious belief concerned only with eternal life or the wholly inner life. Rather, reflection will relate what is being said to the concrete existence in the world as the focal point of the on-going work of the Church.³¹ Similarly, if

³⁰ See "Chronique", p. 686. Also see Violence, p. 83 about counting the cost and keeping one modest. Also, see, for a general discussion about the proper use of memory in thought, PI, pp. 61-62.

³¹ By the ability to reflect in the biblical sense, Ellul means the same thing as his interpretation of St. Paul's use of 'conscience!'. See To Will, pp. 53-58. This aspect of reflection is his area of work in biblical studies.

reflection operates within social analysis, then one could recognize the direction in which society is headed, the threat of the closing down of options for the individual, the awareness to diagnose disease as disease, and the implications of various responses. Again, this ability can take place only in concert with the ordering and weighing of experience.³²

As with reason and thought, reflection remains simply a tool or ability which people either use or do not use, under the guidance of the intellect as the central capacity to control and utilize these three tools. The problem lies in the fact that all of these talents appear in forms distorted, perverted or even eventually paralyzed by the powers to which man gives his allegiance. Ellul does not want to focus on a new and different way of practising these functions, but rather on the problems involved in their functioning at all. That question brings us back to the overall human intellect for which the various tools operate and, without which, all talk of reason, thought and reflection becomes rather meaningless.

b) Intellect

With the intellect, once again we come across a term open to diverse interpretations, many of which now have pejorative connotations.³³

To specify what he means by it, Ellul, again, mentioned its etymological sense of taking a thing as a whole. Literally, it stems from the Latin

³² For an example of thought and reflection as needed along with an ordering principle in political analysis, see PI, pp. 59-60.

³³ Ellul himself often has very little use for the contemporary intellectual class as seen in the introduction to Critique or M du B, p. 133 ff. or p. 264, among other examples. In view of his own task, it is clear that he attacks them for having abdicated their proper function and not because he wishes to eliminate the activity itself.

inter legere -- to read, pick out, or gather together from among the parts. In short, the intellect is the ability to comprehend the whole as a whole. One can pursue the image of reading either literally, in the case of the Bible or figuratively, in the case of social description. In both instances, the tools of the intellect, most notably reason, are technical skills that correspond to technical language training in the sense of being literate as opposed to illiterate. The intellect is the governing ability that corresponds to how one perceives the overall sense or the recognition of the purpose of the author that determines how carefully one will apply the linguistic skills. For a rather simplistic analogy, one can see the difference between the skills attained in a rapid reading course and the ability to 'read' what Plato or Shakespeare is really saying. That is to say, although the technical skills of organization, thought and reflection are necessary for the carrying out of the whole operation of coming to grips with the whole, the intellect is not only a question of the rational or the analytical as is the case with reason. For example, Ellul stresses that one can finally 'know' something only by being personally involved in it and through loving it. Otherwise, one will be incapable of reading the material completely accurately; nevertheless, neither way is, strictly speaking, within the realm of reason as Ellul has delineated it. Before demonstrating what he means by the intellect in operation, a few preliminary distinctions are appropriate. First, as was noted concerning reason, the intellect is self-consciously aware as opposed to instinctual. Although it is reason that keeps the passions in order, it is the intellect which is the source of that distinction which knows that the passions can be subordinated and which tells reason that it must perform

such a task. Secondly, it is always important for Ellul that the intellect must still be distinguished both from knowledge of the good and from will and action. The former continues to underline the fact-value distinction sociologically and, as will be discussed later, the Bible as both a human and divine book. The latter concern of the relationship among the different parts or capabilities of man can easily be distorted, for Ellul also sees the essential unity of man who should not be segmented or compartmentalized. Still, he reacts against the blurring of the various parts or the making of one into a basic substratum from which the others emerge. Thus, he continues to hold the position that seeing something as a whole, whether it be the Bible or society, does not automatically spell out what action should result or guarantee that an appropriate response will be made. It can point out clearly that some response is in order. The malfunctioning of one part will surely influence the working of the others -- a statement that is quite different from identification.³⁴ Therefore, he limits the discussion of the intellect to the reading of the whole, with the not unrelated question of response standing on a different plane. With those provisos, one can now look briefly at demonstrations of the use of the intellect.

Since how Ellul thinks the Bible should be read intelligently will be dealt with in further detail, I refer to it here only in passing. Basically, he distinguishes between those who see the Bible as a whole and those who see it piecemeal. It is possible to take the Bible apart

³⁴ See for example, *Propaganda*, pp. 26-27 and *M du B*, p. 133 ff. concerning the fact that thought and action are different, but also the attendant dangers when they become totally severed. The question of the 'will' will be discussed in Part B, Chapter 7.

into literary fragments, historical strands etc.; nevertheless, he thinks that all those technicalities are to little avail if the work of the intellect is not brought to bear in reading it as a whole, in seeing the unity among the various parts. Thus, we shall see, he does not attack biblical science as such, except when it abandons the use of the intellect in preference to the dictates of separate, individual pieces of information, with no awareness of a unifying principle except our own myths and commonplaces. In other words, he says that all this technical work has not even approached the important question of the intellect in how to read the Bible. Certainly, the same principle guides his sociology as well. One of the most immediately striking examples comes in The Political Illusion, in his discussion of the dispersal of the news.³⁵ He argues that we have more precise pieces of political information given to us than at any other time in history, and we are always hearing instant 'analyses' of the latest news events. Yet, at the same time, modern people have increasingly less knowledge of the political realm, for the information is fleeting and fragmented. They are not able to read or discern the trends and relationships among and behind the ever-growing single bits. They do not know even by what principle to start to organize and weigh the material in self-conscious awareness, except in the mechanical way it is presented by the media.

³⁵ PI, pp. 56-61. This is a single example, but one that is typical of all his social writings.

In the midst of all this, how can a man not specially trained perceive the slightest continuity, experience the slightest political continuity, how, finally, can he understand? He can literally only react to the news. But, once more, let us be careful not to draw a false portrait of our citizen. If he were a man with a solid, well-informed political doctrine, a set of political thoughts enabling him to judge, certain information items would be useful to him. But, at least in non-totalitarian countries, this is not the case. Politically, man lives on certain connotative stereotypes without doctrinal content (democracy, republic, fascism, social justice, and so on) which cannot help him to understand or interpret events. Therefore, he can only react in the same way as Hale's famous frog. The citizen will have purely visceral "opinions" springing from his prejudices or his milieu, his interests, or some propaganda.³⁶

Therefore, the possibilities for independent options in response are ruled out in advance. Without the intellect to draw the parts together, one can do nothing but to respond spontaneously, and within the modern sacred, the 'spontaneous' has been channelled and defined by the dictates of technique. Ellul is not as concerned with a new definition as he is with the dangers of abandoning the intellect altogether.

This really is the problem. The first step. . . is the resignation of the intellectual. . . . The intellectual abandons the attempt to exercise his intelligence, to come to grips with ideas, to understand the facts, to confront with his mind a reality that is, no doubt, increasingly complex and elusive, to practise analysis in depth, to pass judgement, to commit his whole life to his function of intelligence. He runs away. So often have intellectuals been deceived, so often has one theory eliminated the one that preceded it, that now not one of them dares to take responsibilities. They have looked for irreproachable matter and unequivocal method, and only number is irreproachable, only the new mathematics is unequivocal. The results are guaranteed at the price of invention and the integrity of the individual and his thought.³⁷

³⁶ PI, p. 57.

³⁷ Critique, p. 242.

The increasingly technized aspects of the modern monolith mitigate against the operation of the intellect to the extent of the danger of committing intellectual suicide in order to find a reason for existing at all.³⁸ Either there is an abandonment into the irrational and anti-intellectual or else the intellect is enslaved to the modern myths. (That second choice also amounts to the abandonment of the intellect, for it becomes the paralysis of the intellect: only the label remains intact.) Eventually, the only other choice for the intellectual seems to be the acceptance of a compromise in which he can operate in a small corner, peripheral to the mainstream of life as it is accepted. Again, the result is the abdication of any serious attempt at a reading of the whole. When these dangers become manifested in Ellul's writings, the same question arises as did in the discussion of myths. Is it at all possible for the intellect to function under the aegis of the sacred, especially as it is lived today?

Concerning the liberation of the intellect, Ellul finally refers to the renewal of the intellect by the Holy Spirit. "But what does this mean, if it does not mean a transformation of our ways of understanding, of looking at facts, of the very process of argument."³⁹ Ellul wants to underline that the action of the Holy Spirit frees the intellect to operate. It does not take over in order to guide it as a new or outside 'first principle'. This is one of the points where he takes issue with Barth, who, according to Ellul, gives too high a place to the mode of reasoning as the distinctive operation of the intellect as informed by the Holy Spirit -- a kind of nostra philosophia. "The Holy Spirit

³⁸ See PK, pp. 104-116, where the increasing dilemma of the intellectual is presented.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 98. The whole argument covers pp. 97-99. Of particular interest is his reference to Romans 12:2.

does not do away with the human argument, with the evaluation of situations and means, nor with personal involvement."⁴⁰ It allows the human intellect with its tools to do these things. This stance does not abolish belief in the incomprehensibility of the activity of the Holy Spirit: it simply says that He does not take over direct management of the human responsibilities. In fact, even when God is silent, the intellect can still operate within the freedom of hope and in memory of past liberation.

The potential danger of this theological position comes in the quick conclusion that only Christians can have any effective operating intelligence -- a conclusion which makes a mockery of his social books taken on their own. The discussion here, to a large extent, parallels the earlier one on de-sacralizing and, de-mythologizing. Again, Ellul argues that although everyone has more or less intellectual ability, it is impossible to speak of the intellect on its own, but only of the intellect in conjunction with the fallen people using it in the service of the powers.⁴¹ Certainly, one can talk about the thoughts of the modern world or of its intellectuals, for in a very definite way, the function of myth is to give a reading of the whole in which a very

⁴⁰ FPK, p. 150. It might be pertinent to think of the miracle stories in which the blind are made to see and the lame to walk. It is not introducing a new skill, but enabling proper human functions. In this regard, see "The World", p. 18, concerning all the miracles as the opening of closed situations.

⁴¹ This theme may begin to sound repetitious; it is however a cornerstone for his thought. Even Christians are not exempt from the controls and perversions by the powers. The significance of the fall and the paradox for Christians will be a central theme of Part B, Chapter 7. See also TFL, p. 90, concerning assertion that all people have intelligence. This statement does not guarantee its usage. Even though the intellect is not defined as a tool as is reason, still it never appears in a pure form. Ellul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit will be discussed further in Part B, Chapter 6.

rigid way of reasoning becomes increasingly mandatory!⁴² Here one is reminded again of the desirability for options, even within the dominations, for the preservation of the world. As long as there is some dialectical movement within the sacred, as well as changing forms of the myth, there is still some possibility, even for the non-believer, to weigh, compare and analyze what is going on. To say that this work is always bound and, therefore is a useless attempt, is a betrayal of what it means to be human.⁴³ Again, not all cats are grey. Ellul concerns himself with the danger of the total paralysis of the intellect, for when it ceases to operate entirely because of the optionless monolith, there arises the likelihood of the total collapse of society.

For if, from one point of view, it can be said that myth gives us our thoughts, it is still more accurate to say that myth supplies the only obligating and satisfying reasons for action!⁴⁴

Eventually, the myths will supply motivation for action without the operation of the intellect at all. He says that, since society is moving more and more in this direction, he wants to give a warning before it is too late. What is at stake is any exercise of the human equipment and knowledge. As a result, Ellul does not generally concern

⁴² We have already seen that the explanation of the myths is both satisfying as well as enslaving and alienating. For example where he speaks of modern 'thoughts' and 'intellectuals' in a non-facetious manner, see FPK, p. 55ff. or HTA, p. 52ff.

⁴³ See Propaganda, pp. xv-svi, for a statement on this issue reminiscent of his account of freedom in TS.

⁴⁴ FPK, p. 205. He agrees with the first part to the extent that the myths do give a reading. He rejects it though, to the extent that it speaks of genuine thought in need of some first principle. His own position is that one at the end of the sentence. For him, of course, the proper motive and justification is provided by the biblical revelation.

himself with the actual processes of the tools of the intellect, for predominantly, he thinks the allegiances of the users are decisive.⁴⁵

The actual workings, insofar as they can be discussed in a vacuum, remain more or less the same. These general comments about the human possibilities become more concrete in the specific questions of his account of science and finally the possibilities for Christians in these matters.

c) Science

i) General

Earlier (p. 86), I discussed that Ellul considers that the work of scientists is only one way among others to represent reality. Since now it is the form that has taken on the highest pre-eminence, Ellul considers it important to delimit this major utilization of the human intellect and reason (to which it is related as a 'putting in order'). Secondly, since Ellul's profession of being a social scientist has been the target of some attack, it is also important to spell out what he means by the task of science in general, before going into the details of his own approach. Science is an accurate account of the structure of reality, as divided into different fields according to the objects of study. Science, he says, wants to describe the reality people experience, by the building of coherent concepts to explain what is happening in the area under discussion -- based on a generalization from perceivable,

⁴⁵ "That to which at least everybody who counts politically is supposed to look up, . . . gives a society its character; it constitutes and justifies the regime in question." (Leo Strauss, Liberalism Ancient and Modern (New York: 1968), p. 214). For Ellul, the equivalent is "the principal motif" of a society (To Will, p. 164). He warns against seeing the essential motif too simplistically, for it is always a combination of belief and material factors. For his view of how this process works in the actual practice of morality, see To Will, pp. 159-171.

pre-scientific experience.⁴⁶ Apart from this wide characterization, he seems to take for granted today's definition of science, with the result that he really only wants to delineate the deviations.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, even from these broad outlines, some major inferences can be drawn. Because science, like reason, is done by man in the world of the fall, he says that it is impossible to speak of a non-dominating science. The forms of domination will vary as the powers incarnate themselves under the guise of changing myths. This aspect will be discussed in Part B, Chapter 6. Despite certain historical variations in method he still holds that the goal of science has always been the same. At any stage, Ellul simply states that reality remains reality, and the goal to know it coherently remains the same, whatever methods are employed. Because people do science, there will never be a purely objective science; yet, because there is a givenness to reality, one can speak of 'better' or 'worse' science in any given age.⁴⁸ The fact

⁴⁶ For an indication for this broad definition of science, see *IS*, pp. 8, 27; "Debate", p. 707. Within this definition, one must bear in mind that, for Ellul, concepts are not merely figments of the observer. As I shall discuss concerning his own methods, they must constantly be checked as real or else discarded.

⁴⁷ For example, when asked about fact and reality, he simply spoke of 'the mediation through the methods of science'. Or, when asked about his own methods, he said, 'I follow the classical methods of history and science', assuming those of post-1850. The answer seemed to involve the same ambiguity to which the question was directed. It is not self-evident that modern science agrees about the givenness of reality.

⁴⁸ An illustration of this stance comes in his assessment of the difference between ancient and modern science. He sees an obvious difference in method, but he sees the main distinction in the way of looking at reality as a whole and the myths in which the intellect is enmeshed. He does not see a categorical break in the very idea of science, as a putting in order to know the structures of reality, at a given point in time. As illustrations, he points to the re-introduction of teleology by some scientists and to Abel Rey, *La Science dans l'Antiquité* (Paris: 1930-40), which Ellul claims exposes certain misconceptions about Greek science. Different perceptions of the sacred have brought about the changes in science. One main difference is that science is now a narrower field, not entirely synonymous with (but still related to) reason.

that there is no pure science should not lead to giving up, for to abandon the search is to abandon oneself to the growing monolith leading to enslavement. He does not look beyond contemporary accounts, partly because of his own non-philosophical bent, and partly because of the futility of searching for the science of a previous age that has nothing to do with ours. He thinks that we have to deal with what we have, in order to supply possible correctives to the present. Finally, the major error he wishes to avoid in his account of science is any attempt to surpass the limits of science as a system of organization, to force science to supply its own meaning. We have already seen the danger of science as a myth and, in this respect, Ellul thinks that Christians must resist their own added temptation, when it comes to any specific science, of using a specific concept or method as an apologetic; for example, the use of Aristotelian teleology, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle or bi-polar physics. He wants to emphasize both the usefulness of science and its limitations. Far from saying that modern science is the only way of knowing that must exclude everything beyond its scope, he wants to show it as a limited way of knowing.

ii) Social Sciences

Since Ellul's own work is in the field of social science, I shall move there directly, without a detailed discussion of the natural sciences, except to point out that he does not trespass into that area. He draws a sharp line between the natural and the human sciences, mainly on the grounds of the possible independence of the observer from what is being studied.⁴⁹ Within the general area of the social sciences

⁴⁹ Here Ellul points directly to the influence of Marx. Unlike Marx, however, Ellul does not say that a full account of society is a full account of human life. See e.g. IS, p. 219.

taken together, Ellul recognizes two major problems. First, there is the question of the legitimate separating out of the individual sub-disciplines. He does not consider any one social science, even sociology, as the basis for the others or as the queen of the sciences. Each science has its specific sphere of material to look at and, at different times, different branches will be central in pointing to the key points and problems. At the same time, he does not see the knowing of reality as simply the addition of the disciplines into a pile. Rather, one can point to reality only by looking at their totality, including the interplay among them. In other words, he does not think that his own profession as a sociologist and historian is the only one nor that his work must be isolated from others. Secondly, he considers it a problem to find a principle of ordering in the human sciences, without merely lifting the methods from the mathematical and the natural sciences.⁵⁰ An examination of what he means by good and bad sociology will illustrate his attempt to answer these questions.⁵¹

Since Chapter 4 of Part A will discuss Ellul's own sociology, here I shall discuss only the general guidelines within which he wants people to examine that enterprise. The first major step is a delimitation of the sociological enterprise within the overall category of human reality.

⁵⁰ See "A Little Debate", p. 707 and Critique, p. 243.

⁵¹ Since I am concerned with Ellul's understanding of the specifically modern project, I shall concentrate on his sociology rather than on his view of the study of history which will arise in the Postscript of Part B, section 1. Since the two are not totally isolated realms, much of what is said here, will also apply there.

As to the rigorous determinism, I should explain that I have tried to perform a work of sociological reflection, involving analysis of large groups of people and of major trends, but not of individual actions. I do not deny the existence of individual action or of some inner sphere of freedom. I merely hold that these are not discernable at the most general level of analysis, and that the individual's acts or ideas do not here and now exert any influence on social, political or economic mechanisms. By making this statement, I explicitly take a partisan position in a dispute between schools of sociology. To me the sociological does not consist in the addition and combination of individual actions. I believe that there is a collective sociological reality, itself pre-existent and more or less determinative. I have simply endeavoured to discuss technique as a sociological reality. We are dealing with collective mechanisms, with relationships among collective movements, and with modifications of political or economic structures. It should not be surprising therefore, that no reference is made to the separate, independent initiative of individuals. It is not possible for me to treat the individual sphere. . . . Keeping in mind that sociological mechanisms are always significant determinisms -- of more or less significance -- for the individual, I would maintain that we have moved from one set of determinants to another. The pressure of these mechanisms is today very great; they operate in increasingly wide areas and penetrate more and more deeply into human existence.⁵²

This stance entails a number of important distinctions, which of course do not give rise to universal agreement. Beyond those noted in the above quotation, there is the further distinction between history and sociology. Although he largely sees the difference in practical terms of time, he also insists on the difference between reading texts of the past and reading the forces impinging here and now. Also he insists on the uniqueness of this society, so that he wants to prevent appeals to solutions from the past, on the grounds that they are diversions

⁵² TS, pp. xxvii-ix. See also "KM", pp. 371-4 for his account of the characteristics of social structures. Again this statement conjures up Durkheim's collective consciousness. For Ellul's comments on Durkheim directly, see *To Will*, pp. 163-171, where he says that he sees the relationship of the individual and the sociological in a more complex and intricate way. When he speaks of 'collective sociological reality', he means the same thing previously described as the social forces, the social structures or the over-arching social fact(s).

from what can be done right now. Still, with reference to his second concern, sociology does not take place in vacuo; therefore he also tries to show the influence that the sociological determinants will have on all spheres. Hence his work achieves sweeping proportions.

Finally, we shall be looking at technique in its sociological aspect; that is we shall consider the effect of technique on social relationships, political structures, economic phenomena. Technique is not an isolated fact in society (as the term technology would lead us to believe) but is related to every factor in the life of modern man.⁵³

Any separation that does not also point out the interrelatedness of the disciplines is a false description of reality.

Another area for clarification in Ellul's view of sociology is how he perceives these social determinants which collectively define our milieu. Basically, he sees them as forces that interrelate in a dialectical tension among themselves.⁵⁴ In other words, he accepts in principle, although not in detail, Marx's argument that society with its development is to be understood in terms of its inner contradictions among the forces. Ellul sees no constant thread running from civilization to civilization, in that he believes that the forces can take almost any number of forms. Nevertheless, he does say that society is distinguished by the dialectical movement of the forces rather than by their natural harmony. In fact, in Ellul's assessment, a total harmony

⁵³ TS, pp. xxv-vi. He also insists that you have to have good knowledge of history as a prerequisite to doing good sociology. On this point, he criticizes Talcott Parsons, who, according to Ellul, describes societies as if they sprang fully grown and exist in a vacuum.

⁵⁴ I have already discussed the dialectic among the dominant forces. See also PI, p. 140, for the example of bureaucracy as a social force as distinct from those who hold positions within the bureaucracy. See also M du B, p. 210. It should be noted in passing that Ellul's definition of sociology is different from that of study of social action or the study of accumulated individuals. This stance is what he meant by taking 'a partisan position'.

of the forces produces a monolith under which society cannot survive. Also, unlike Marx, he does not think that the interplay of the contradictions necessarily entails violent conflict based on group hatred. Rather, he tends to explain the outbreak of the most extreme violence when the dialectical movement among the forces is blocked.⁵⁵ In a monolithic society, the dangers of violence from enslavement are more pronounced than in one where the various forces are allowed to define and act as a check for one another. As a discipline then, sociology should be prepared to describe coherently these forces, the possible relationship among them and the effects these forces have on all other realms.

Within this understanding of sociology, Ellul takes a definite stance on how the sociologist must proceed if his work is to be accurate description. Above all, he argues the case for the involvement of the sociologist, as opposed to a false detachment, as the only way to achieve any degree of objectivity.

I do not limit myself to describing my findings with the cold objectivity in the manner of a research worker reporting what he sees under a microscope. I am keenly aware that I myself am involved in technological civilization, and that its history is also my own. I may be compared with the physician or physicist who is describing a group situation in which he himself is involved. The physician in an epidemic, the physicist exposed to radioactivity: in such situations the mind may remain cold and lucid, and the method objective, but there is inevitably a profound tension of the whole being.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ This a major theme of A of R. Once more, one must remember that he is speaking of the best options we can expect in the world. This statement does not speak against what he says in Violence that all societies are based on violence. Sociologically, he is referring to the options to make this world of necessity livable at all. As discussed previously, this account of sociology can lead to the conclusion that the number of options is becoming narrower as the result of human activities and allegiances: it cannot, however, include freedom within the actual discussion of the forces.

⁵⁶ TS, p. xxvii. For further use of this image of the physician making a diagnosis, see "KM", p. 365ff and A of R, p. 239.

In this analogy, one can easily point out that if the examiner has no prior idea of health, then he cannot recognize a disease. Ellul answers that such an assessment is not a theoretical statement, but rather it comes only from participation. Any science, but most notably the human sciences, is a subsequent articulation of what has been experienced, either at first hand, or from reliable report. This argument does not reduce sociology to personal subjectivity, for the purpose of the study is a description of a given reality. Nevertheless, even to know what to consider describing, Ellul says that the observer must be involved. Therefore, his works are not simply the attempt to put society into a neat framework. He thinks that sociology must go further to throw society into question, to describe a society that must be modified from its present course. Sociology must put into perspective the problems of society in such a way that will be inductive to action. As already discussed, this kind of sociology does not automatically lead to a solution, but it can starkly state the reality of our predicament. The clarification of experienced reality is his defence against any charges that he imports value-judgements when he speaks of 'diagnosis', 'enslavement', 'problems' etc. Whereas the raising of problems is within the scope of sociology itself, the giving of solutions and the actual response is not.

The second demand he makes of the good sociologist becomes central for all his own work. That is, he rejects any method that does not seek to look at the wholeness of the society in which we live. Without looking at the interrelatedness of the forces within the context of the whole, the other aspects tend to fall by the wayside. He says this task has "un aspect de recherche d'information et de discernement

spirituel".⁵⁷ What is the most difficult and the most important to attain is the ability for spiritual discernment. Elsewhere, he speaks of the need for a spiritual nucleus in all science.⁵⁸ It is vital to underline at this point that Ellul does not say that the biblical revelation can be the spiritual nucleus of any society. He is talking about the recognition that behind and among the discrete events and pieces of information, there is a force which dominates the way we experience things. An awareness or a discernment of those forces is possible only from the perspective of the whole, for the force permeates all parts without itself being a single segment. The ability to make this discernment is the proper use of the intellect in this field.⁵⁹ Although the recognition of the intellect of the spiritual forces cannot tell a person the final meaning of what is entailed, that recognition supplies the impetus for action -- leading to some intervention. The alternative of totally ignoring the spiritual nucleus leaves a sociology that is not objective enough to be value-free, for it becomes a tool of those same existent forces that it fails to recognize. Then,

⁵⁷ "Notes Préliminaires", p. 21. The use of the word 'spiritual' may appear somewhat odd in light of his separation of sociological and theological writings, and Ellul himself does not always confine the word to the social realm. See for example, *HTA*, p. 258, "The World", p. 17 or "Mirror", p. 201, where it is used with quotation marks. It is the term, nevertheless, that he uses to describe the overriding social force that dominates in any given society.

⁵⁸ See *M of C*, p. 148.

⁵⁹ This aspect will be important in the discussion of Marx and Weber. Also, with this discernment, the intellect can then use the tool of thought to weigh and sift the mass of facts into proper perspective.

there is no possibility of any action except blind reaction. Before seeing Ellul's own modus operandi, one can perhaps see what he means by sociology by looking at his attack on the predominant trend in the current social sciences.

iii) Attack on Mathematical Methods

In The Political Illusion and Propaganda, Ellul argues forcefully against the adequacy of piecemeal or numerical methods as a means of examining society. He dismisses the most common methods of behavioural social scientists -- statistical, experimentally controlled, microscopic studies. He says that, although such work can produce impressive results, it finally tells us very little about the subject allegedly under discussion, because of a mistakenly partial picture. The nature of the whole sociological realm can be measured accurately neither by a limited public opinion poll nor by a study of one segment while trying to hold the other variables constant. Modern scientific methods are simply not equipped to look at the whole. Quite the contrary, the isolation of discrete, measurable segments leads the researcher astray to accept the validity and neutrality of the various parts taken alone.⁶⁰ When he says, "We must seek the deepest possible sociological understanding of the world we live in, apply the best methods. . .",⁶¹ it seems clear that he is not advocating the tools of most present social sciences, but rather a better alternative that includes the proper

⁶⁰ For example, he points to studies in democracy that tend to see the citizen as an entity separate from the state. (See Propaganda, p. xvii) or elsewhere, he mentions Crozier's study of bureaucracy as if it were an isolated, self-contained phenomenon. (See PI, p. 149.)

⁶¹ "Mirror", p. 201.

collaboration of the intellect, as described earlier. Most important, he objects to the fallacy involved in protesting that such partial studies are the only way to know objectively -- through the accumulation of enough small studies. He would argue that, far from rigorously maintaining science as a legitimate way of knowing, the social sciences have succumbed to the present coalition of the sacred and myth. They have become solely a servant of technique, making it palatable and shielding us from it. Overall, he claims that the social sciences serve and foster technique by reducing their own scope to 'the one best means' of countable, mathematizable facts that cannot run amok in the mire of subjectivity. Because of the certainty of that method, the result is the prevalence of microscopic studies which Ellul deplors. A corollary to the emphasis on countable facts as the only sure way to knowledge leads to a glorification of facts. Once a fact is established beyond the shadow of doubt, there is no way to question its efficacy. The social sciences thereby become supportive of the modern myths. By agreeing to measure the various sub-groups, the illusion is fostered that there is much more autonomous activity of pluralism than is the case.⁶² Furthermore, the emphasis on this kind of certainty eventually dictates, in accordance with the myths, what will be considered as legitimate facts. Ellul claims that this absolute method invalidates itself by deliberately turning away from aspects of reality that do not fit into its own schema.⁶³ The absorption of the social sciences into technique not only opens them to every manipulation by the modern

⁶² See PI, pp. 44-45.

⁶³ On this particular aspect of the social sciences Ellul's most acid writing is "All Science is Numerical", Critique, pp. 24-49. Of particular interest is his attack on the sociology of religion, pp. 246-48.

myths, but also it renders them incapable of pursuing their proper goal of describing social reality. Thus, it appears that the modern social sciences are far from stripping away the modern myths to expose reality. On the contrary, they participate, in three ways, in the very project they should describe -- they submit to the test of 'the one best means', they tend to cover and justify reality, and they assist in the alienation from reality.

Ce discours est celui de l'impuissance en face du mécanisme intégrateur de la société technicienne. Les grains de sable soigneusement comptés, analysés, empêchent de voir le ras de marée qui déferle sur eux. Mais cette impuissance proclame qu'elle est la réalité. La seule. Elle s'affirme comme méthode, science et, par conséquent, ne se reconnaît pas en tant qu'impuissance par rapport à un autre phénomène. Et comment le pourrait-elle puisque justement elle refuse de reconnaître ce phénomène. Elle le vide de sa substance. Elle se voile elle-même en tant qu'impuissance, en voilant le fait majeur. Cette recherche scientifique exacte, cette scrupulosité intellectuelle remplit exactement son rôle d'idéologie.⁶⁴

What is required, according to Ellul, is a sociology with the capability of discernment that is not simply a device to cover the very object of study.

To disregard many factors in order to study only one, to schematize behaviour in order to classify it, to indulge in prejudices carefully camouflaged by extremely objective methods -- such are the shortcomings, among many others, of this type of sociology. Its methods do not entitle us to pass from microscopic to macroscopic conclusions. . . . Attempts such as these superimpose 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!⁶⁵

⁶⁴ M du B, p. 254. See also Bulletin Sédais, p. 12.

⁶⁵ PI, p. 5. See also Appendix I of Propaganda and TS, p. 206.

Although this discussion has been brief, it does point in a specific direction for reading his social works. The most important function and responsibility is clarity. Only through a clarity about reality is any independent response possible. Ellul takes it for granted that clarity or consciousness, available through the pursuit of the intellect, is a mandatory prerequisite for any intervention in society.

Thus revolution's only possible focus is upon the development of consciousness. Technique results from a variety of intellectual processes, scientific discoveries and planned observations. Technological society goes a step farther by combining involuntarily a multitude of techniques, with unanticipated and startling results. The effort to disintegrate the technological society, and at the same time to master this technique, must be a conscious and intelligent one, presupposing a state of mental awareness.⁶⁶

This conclusion sheds more light on what Ellul means by the fact-value distinction, for he obviously does not want the reader to be totally divorced from judgments. In fact, one can say that the purpose of social writings is to press for a choice to keep society healthy and alive.

To study anything properly, one must put aside ethical judgments. Perhaps an objective study will lead us back to them, but only later, and with full cognizance of the facts.⁶⁷

The stripping away of values imposed on facts leaves man in a position to see that some response is called for. Far from accepting the current

⁶⁶ *A of R*, p. 283. He goes on to say that a clear awareness is not sufficient in itself, but, without it, there will be no effective intervention.

⁶⁷ *Propaganda*, p. x. This final pressing for ethical judgments, as well as his goal in sociology to describe the growing enslavement of an increasingly monolithic society and impetus to intervention, is not a standard use of the fact-value distinction. He seems to say that, although sociology can expose society and push for a decision, it must fall short of the obvious conclusion of making a judgment of value on what is being exposed. This limitation on sociology comes from his conviction that it cannot prescribe action or remedies. It should, however, be able to delineate a disease as a disease.

relativism that all things are equally good, he wants to encourage protest against the current trends. Only by relativizing the powers and preventing the relative from becoming absolute, can people make sound judgments about what is really important. In order to do this task, he insists that science must stay within its humble limitations.

d) The Difference Christian Faith Does and Does Not Make

All that remains in this chapter is a review of what difference he thinks being a Christian makes in this whole enterprise. This question arises for his overall task on the two grounds that, first, he wants his sociology to be judged on its own merits, and, second, Christian belief involves the unity of faith and experience. Throughout this chapter, I have noted that, despite his task as a Christian intellectual, Ellul does not speak of his faith in his social writings. In fact, he goes to almost disconcerting lengths not to make this connection -- in the interests of allowing everyone to consider the world he lives in, unimpeded by myth or a prior prejudice against Christianity. Again, he wants to put them in a position where they can actually hear the Word of God. A striking feature is his constant reluctance about claiming any superiority or inside track for the Christian engaged in science in general or in sociology in particular. In Chapter 1, I discussed that he sees the Church as a unique being which entails a unique task. That characterization does not extend to a unique intellect, methods or illumination by a new first principle. In short, he denies any suggestion of nostra sociologia or that only a Christian can be a good sociologist. In light of these statements and in consideration of the previous conclusions about the human intellectual equipment, I shall now focus on what he means by saying that the Holy

Spirit is "clarity itself".⁶⁸

When speaking of the activity of the Holy Spirit, there is a major problem in distinguishing among seeing, understanding, and responding to the given situation. Although I have referred to these differentiations before, we must now look at them from the point of view of the Christian. Basically, the reader should bear in mind that Ellul emphasizes knowledge other than that strictly of the intellect, or that goes beyond the intellect, shaping it. For him, knowledge in the sense of understanding comes only through loving, and he underlined that the only definition in the Bible is of God as love. (I John 4:8) This is the knowledge that the Holy Spirit supplies through faith in the biblical revelation.⁶⁹ Even though the Church has the responsibility to sight the key points of the world in order to ensure its responsibility of witness, the unique calling of Christians concerns itself with the understanding of and a response to the specific situation. Or, in biblical terms, it is hearing as well as reading the Word of God, as well as the biblical emphasis on taking one's cue from hearing perhaps more than from seeing. The 'reading' or the intellect or the science is always necessary, but it should be subsidiary, as it cannot supply its own proper understanding and response. For the Christian, that understanding comes the clarity of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells how God views the world and human activities.

⁶⁸ Violence, p. 183. See also Part B, Chapter 6, footnote 6.

⁶⁹ The link between the Bible and the here and now inspiration of the Holy Spirit will be discussed in Part B, Chapter 6. Ellul made this point explicitly in a sermon given in Bordeaux in June, 1974.

And when we contemplate the perceptible, accessible fact of the Incarnation, we at the same time discern -- against a vivid background -- the profound, naked reality of the world in which the Incarnation took place: the reality, I dare say, of how God views the world. For He never provides a direct revelation about what the world is.⁷⁰

The biblical revelation supplies believers with the true understanding of all that can be learned from human knowledge and analysis.

[W]hat 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, coordinated, strongly knotted together, because of the spiritual nucleus. The result is that our natural sources are dependent on revelation.

Revelation -- which was not given with this in mind, but which incidently serves in this way -- enlightens, brings together, and explains what our reason and experience discover. Without revelation, all our reasoning is doubtlessly useful, but it does not view reality in true perspective. So when we said that we had nothing new to offer to history or sociology, we were correct, but not strictly. We have in fact furnished no direct contributions to these sciences themselves; but what history and sociology tell us about the city is here confronted with revelation, is brought together and synthesized not as bare fact, but as illuminated by another source of light.

Have the Scriptures perchance taught us something decisive concerning the concrete situation in which we find ourselves? If so, all the historical and sociological problems take a subordinate role.⁷¹

These statements sum up Ellul's view of the unique clarity of the Holy Spirit and this thesis will culminate with how he does 'understand' the reality of our world in the light of the biblical revelation. That clarity is not an added piece of information that completes the jigsaw

⁷⁰ "The World", p. 18.

⁷¹ M of C, pp. 148, 153, 147. As noted, these passages do not mean that the biblical revelation is to be the spiritual nucleus; rather our natural sources are dependent on revelation for their proper understanding.

puzzle or a tool, open only to the Christian, for the actual work of description. With respect to the clarity of the Holy Spirit in the question of response, Ellul sees the commandment given to Christians to inject something entirely new into the world.⁷² Whereas anybody, including Christians, can study and see the need for keeping the dialectical movement going, only Christians can provide the entirely new contradictions that radically alter society. As discussed concerning Weber's thesis, and as will come up again concerning Ellul's understanding of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, this clear impetus from the Holy Spirit is beyond the realm of human description, even though it is not precluded for the Christian as a way of knowing. In summation, the clarity of the Holy Spirit seems to have, at best, an indirect impact on the actual doing of social description which is not the sole preserve of Christians.

Bearing that position in mind and also the responsibility of the Church for the preservation of the world, combined with Ellul's doctrine of the two realms, one must turn to the following consideration.

But the conclusion from the radical heterogeneity of the Is and Ought to the impossibility of an evaluating science is obviously not valid. Let us assume that we had a genuine knowledge of right and wrong, or of the Ought, or of the true value system. That knowledge, while not derived from empirical science, would legitimately direct all empirical social science; it would be the foundation of all empirical social science.⁷³

⁷² In discussion, Ellul referred to the requirement that Christians supply an ever-present and unique bouleversement, no matter what the social situation. Therefore, for him, his sociology would always be a diagnosis. That argument does not undermine his contention that one is especially needed now.

⁷³ Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 41.

Obviously, Ellul does believe that the 'Ought' can, in some sense, be known through faith in the biblical revelation. In fact, without that knowledge, reality is shrouded in dominant and illusory myths. "He has the key to the riddle. Christians share the same knowledge. This is about their only difference from non-Christians."⁷⁴ Surely this key makes quite a big difference even for social description, especially when there is no marked time sequence between Ellul's sociology and his biblical reflections. Since the biblical revelation does put the 'Is' into proper perspective, from Ellul's point of view, it can shed light on the initial sighting of key points. Although it can focus the intellect on certain issues, it does not do the resulting analysis. Revelation does not supply or change the methods of further investigation, where the Christian will be on an equal footing with everyone else. Furthermore, the revelation does not automatically spell out the key points, as is demonstrated in the differences among Christian social thinkers. Ellul cannot simply point to a guaranteed proof-text to validate his selection. More accurately, as previously discussed, the Holy Spirit liberates the intellect to operate, and to make the discernments. An orientation towards the Bible does not supply the details. In biblical terms, what faith does for social description is to provide for the destruction of false idols and to allow for the recognition of myth as myth. Even in a time of abandonment, when the Word of God which destroys false idols is silent, those who cling to the first commandment, refusing all other allegiances, can recognize the dominant forces as idols and myths. Therefore, Ellul can speak of the work of "le

⁷⁴ JJ, p. 33.

décapage sociologique tel que j'avais pu l'entreprendre".⁷⁵ Since even the Bible warns about the human dangers involved in de-mythologizing, he is careful to speak to felt alienations. "We must learn to hear what the question is which is really being asked by the person of this age."⁷⁶ This work is what he means by his efforts to put the questions and problems into the proper perspective. One final caveat against over-estimating the abilities of Christians comes again in the warning against "angelism".⁷⁷ Because all are both sinners and redeemed, because the two realms can never be pulled apart, the Christian is never removed from the world of the fall. He is still subjected to the same pressures, with, at times, the added temptation of smugness! The 'raw data' does not mysteriously separate itself out for presentation to the Christian. The revelation is not given as a preface or a guarantee for his work, for the Christian too is caught up in myths and in his own vanities. Whatever his particular task may be, the Christian cannot expect any privileges or exemptions. All his work will be deeply entwined with the culture and the civilization in which he lives, and from which he cannot hope to escape. Either to give up all efforts or to over-estimate one's abilities is to be guilty of angelism. The only difference in social description is that the Christian accepts the commandment against idolatry -- a requirement that must be constantly

⁷⁵ NP, p. 265. Here he explicitly parallels his work to that undertaken by Barth in theology. See also M of C, p. 54, concerning the activity of God. Ultimately, both aspects of God's activity and the response of His human intermediaries are required for the stripping away of myths and idols.

⁷⁶ HTA, p. ix.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 1, footnote 33.

renewed at each moment of his work.

For Ellul, the clarity of the Holy Spirit influences social description by its requirement both to take reality fully seriously and yet, in doing so, to insist on the relatively humble possibilities for any human undertakings. This understanding in turn centres on his understanding of the Incarnation.

That is the relativizing of all things and a total seriousness applied to the relative. Separated from each other, these two attitudes are trite. . . . Neither one is true. The absolute of God does indeed relativize everything, but God's Word tells us to take absolutely seriously this relative, which he himself took seriously enough to give his Son. It did this from the moment of the incarnation in time and space (which, for all that, do not cease to be relative) and it promises to continue to take them just as seriously in creating his Kingdom and in recapitulating our history, the history of our relativity.⁷⁸

The impact of this belief specifically for the human intellectual disciplines is that they should neither sink into a morass of relativity nor contribute to the setting up of a new dogmatism. To be able to accomplish this double task without faltering or despairing is not finally open to those who rely on their own resources. It is not a question of method, but rather of the odds against success.

Now it is an extraordinary innovation to be willing to work with zeal, love, joy, and interest in something which is entirely relative and secondary. We have to realize that man cannot do it left to his own resources. He cannot give himself to something he knows definitely as relative. He can submit to working in the relative only if he knows there is some absolute motive for acting and for getting involved, a motive which, as a matter of fact, is not embraced within the action itself. To take the relative with entire seriousness implies some anchorage in what is not relative.⁷⁹

On the one hand, the Christian should be able to look fully at reality, because the promises of God are his absolute beyond the

⁷⁸ HTA, p. 242-3.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 246.

structures of the world. Therefore, the Christian should be able to look at all the hard facts, even the attacks on the Church and Christianity.

Without a living hope there is likewise no human capacity to consider the actual situation. Man can never stand reality. He spends his time lying to himself, covering up the real, providing himself with illusions and rationalizations. . . . Without hope, reality becomes an unbearable mechanism, a continual damnation, a source of fear and apprehension which cannot be appeased.

Surely the Christian -- and only the Christian -- should be able to exercise this clarity of vision and thought because the Revelation has to some degree given him an understanding of the world, and also because, terrible as the reality may be, he can accept it without despairing, for he has hope in Jesus Christ.⁸⁰

Because of the great difficulties involved in looking at reality and the great inducements against it, Ellul does not feel confident in appealing to common sense. In general, he would agree that basic common sense is the opposite of the commonplaces, except that, without a bulwark against the worldly pressures, common sense tends to become "the type which prevails in the contemporary mentality, the outlook of 'plain common sense' which puts its trust in appearance and success".⁸¹ To look reality fully in the face does not come easily to people.

On the other hand, while taking reality fully seriously, the Christian observer must try to defuse the tendency to absolutize the relative.

⁸⁰ HTA, p. 275; Violence, p. 81. See also PMM, p. 136 and NP, p. 265.

⁸¹ PMM, p. 74. See also NP, p. 189; A of R, p. 241; Critique, pp. 22-23. As we shall see, he does point to common sense as part of his verification principle.

All wars and all revolutions involve absolute belief on the part of the people. But the moment there is absolute belief then massacres, exploitation, oppression, torture, and concentration camps immediately follow. It is not economic interests which are to be feared, but rather, absolute convictions. It is that which shuts man up within a narrow scope and organizes him in terms of total polarization.⁸²

Since the Christian should be less apt to be taken up with myths and more able to see the relative as relative, a Christian scientist or thinker should remind his particular discipline of its limitations and its very modest, legitimate accomplishments. This work, again, is not as directly related to the methods employed as to the reminder of humility. (Ellul considers that humility is not a common trait in most disciplines, but especially among the social sciences which tend to be less rigorous scientifically.) The Christian, hopefully, will know that he can never have the final word, that there is always a part that his discipline is unable to explain. The Christian must challenge his cohorts (and himself) when they try to overstep the limits: the Christian must always challenge the evidence. In fact, Ellul has said that this is exactly what Eve failed to do in Genesis 3:6. (One cannot say that this failure constituted the fall, as we shall see, but it was a concomitant circumstance.) From the social sciences, he has used the example of history which can only ascertain what happened and how people have interpreted it. The Christian who is a historian must challenge any further conclusions only allegedly based on historical evidence. This obligation pertains equally to Christians in the natu-

⁸² HTA, p. 244.

ral sciences as to those in the human sciences.⁸³ In the field of biology for example, he refers to the discovery of the 2Y chromosome factor among certain criminals, with the subsequent advocacy of testing and abortion in certain cases. He says that the Christian biologist, as a biologist, must challenge the evidence from the beginning -- to question the principle of probability, the use of statistics, the sample used, the risk factor etc. -- in order to prevent a dangerous and enslaving explanation that goes beyond the biological evidence. In this field, Christians as moralists or belated statements by the World Council of Churches can never have the same impact as biologists qua biologists. The Christian cannot force others to respond as Christians, but he can remind them that they are not acting specifically as scientists. Of course, these requirements of realism do not exhaust, for Ellul, the totality of Christian witness. They do, however, illustrate the contribution of Christians to the intellectual disciplines, without necessarily introducing new methods. In his specific work as a sociologist, Ellul sees his own Christian task in this light.

Finally, as an illustration of the difference and the non-difference that being a Christian should make in the actual doing of social description, I shall look again at the Christian intellectual as 'watchman' (as discussed in Chapter 1), vis-à-vis the normal predictions of social science. The Christian intellectual does not see different things

⁸³ In this respect, he rejects Brunner's "law of the closeness of relationship", as outlined in Revelation and Reason (Philadelphia: 1946), p. 383. For Ellul, a biologist or a mathematician has as much responsibility for challenging the evidence and for keeping his discipline humble as does the historian or sociologist. The examples in this part come from a discussion with M. Ellul.

nor make different extrapolations with a different organizational or generalizing ability. In these respects, he stands on no higher ground, with no increased clairvoyance, with no new methods other than those of any other good social scientist. The difference comes because the sentinel, the Christian intellectual, has the specific task of looking for danger. The watchman knows that there are, in fact, dangers and he has no doubt that more are coming: otherwise, he would not be there at all. The non-Christian social scientist has no innate reason to be convinced of this part of his task. In the long run, the Christian intellectual has the primary responsibility to warn others, not only the Christian community, of which he is a representative, but also the whole world.

Ellul and the Reformers on Reason⁸⁴

What Ellul says about the human faculties, especially concerning reason, may well be accurate; nevertheless, one has to note that it is not how other people, including Christians, have seen themselves. I merely point out, without going into a thorough argument and proof, that the definition of reason as a tool, as well as this account of people searching for their security and justification through the sacred -- to bring order out of seeming chaos -- are both distinctly modern notions. Because of the magnitude of the questions and because of Ellul's reticence on these issues, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to make this case or to argue that he also moves away from the modern account of reason to make it sound more traditional. What is of some concern here is his reference to Calvin, concerning the humble use of right reason. Is he following the insights of the Reformers or has he twisted the Protestant tradition to suit modern assumptions? I shall make some general comments about the general direction of this discussion insofar as it pertains directly to what Ellul has said.

Certainly, there is no doubt that Ellul and Calvin are in accord that human reason or the intellect is insufficient to establish the authority of Scripture. (See for example, Institutes, I 8 1; I 8 13; I 7 5.) The real issue comes down to whether Calvin believed in any human capacity to know goodness or virtue, however limited, by itself.

⁸⁴ The specific references to the Reformers will be limited to Calvin's Institutes, and Luther's Bondage of the Will and Commentary on Galatians.

Here, the issue becomes somewhat controversial, for he seems to have had two tendencies. On the one hand, one notes his love for the classics and his assertions that all men have some knowledge of God. (See for example, Institutes, I 3 1; I 16 1.) Similarly, some passages indicate that man's highest and governing faculty, reason, still functions somewhat, despite the fall, as it did originally. (See for example, Institutes, I 15 4; I 15 8; II 2 12.) On the other hand, Calvin's writings as a whole constitute a massive attack on the efficacy of human reason. For example, he rejected theory as not only impossible, but also unsalutary. (See Institutes I 2.) For Calvin, the chasm between belief and unbelief remains central, dominating even questions of knowing and reason. Knowledge of God is a question of how to serve God -- a question in which reason becomes a tool and not a source. This argument tends to undermine acceptance of reason as autonomous, even in the most limited way.⁸⁵ Thus, although Calvin accepted the prevalent accounts of reason, he also largely effected a great diminution of reason. (See Institutes II 8 1, concerning the understanding of the Bible, but by implication, also of many or all other fields.) Perhaps even more than Calvin, Luther also recognized that pagans knew the law, and also he spoke of the light of nature which can take men a certain distance or of reason as an innate common sense. (See, for example, The Bondage of the Will, p. 202.) Yet, he was also more polemically extreme than Calvin against reason as philosophy. (See, for example, Commentary on Galatians, pp. 128, 131 or The Bondage of the Will, p. 174.) On this issue, the differences between Luther and

⁸⁵ See "Actualité", p. 42 for Ellul's view of the effect of desacralizing on the understanding of reason and the possibility of knowing the good via the world.

Calvin seem to have come in flair and in extremity of language.

At this point, I would note the argument that, since the Reformers were not as preoccupied with questions of reason and revelation as they were with works and revelation, they did not pursue the implications for reason with equal rigour.⁸⁶ Therefore, for more general light on this issue, I shall look briefly at Luther's The Bondage of the Will. He asserts that the human will is completely incapable of its own activity, so that it must serve (be a tool) God or be enslaved to Satan. If that doctrine can be applied to reason, then Ellul's position is not entirely removed. As well as lowering the possibilities for reason on its own, the Reformers also elevated the centrality of 'will' with reference to what God reveals of Himself. This aspect becomes central if people rejected belief in God and tried to usurp His prerogatives to themselves.⁸⁷ When those two provisos were met, one can argue that the way was paved for belief in reason as the servant of the will or enslaved by the passions. Certainly, Calvin and Luther were not saying the same thing as, for example, were Hobbes or Nietzsche. They may well, however, have inadvertently supplied a vehicle for the change. What is more pertinent right here is a consideration of Ellul's position.

Man knows that a good exists. He knows that from now on the choice has to be made. . . . But he is ignorant of that good because he does not know the counsel of God.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ For this argument, see Karl Barth, Natural Theology (London:1946), pp. 101-2.

⁸⁷ See "Actualité", p. 45, for Ellul's discussion of the contribution of the Reformation to the exaltation of the individual.

⁸⁸ To Will, p. 14.

Ellul agrees with the Reformers that man knows that a good exists: he disagrees that either the false or the true good is known through reason. Although he agrees that all people to some degree are given reason and intellect, he does not talk about them before the fall. He disagrees that it is possible to speak of pure reason or pure intellect at all -- apart from its association with the powers (to be discussed in Part B, Chapter 6). By the category of fallen reason, Ellul does not refer to the mode of reasoning, but rather to its perversion or paralysis through enslavement. The area of the widest possible divergence between Ellul and the Reformers then, centres on the possibilities of fallen reason. And this is the very area on which the Reformers did not focus much specific attention. In discussion, Ellul maintained that Calvin was very much influenced by the intellectual currents of his own day as are all Christian thinkers. Still, he argues that Calvin would never have accepted the use of reason (even if identified with the intellect as a whole) as a point of contact for the reception of revelation.⁸⁹ Ellul would agree that he has pushed beyond the Reformers on the questions of reason and the intellect, to present a different and (in his view) non-philosophical account. Although the position that reason has no status of its own clearly moves further than the Reformers went themselves, Ellul would argue that it is not totally divorced from the overall direction of their thought. Secondly, he pushes them to the limit concerning the implication of human attempts to put themselves in the place of God, by their refusal of the absolute judgment and mercy of the biblical revelation. Although the whole

⁸⁹ See To Will, pp. 269 and 273.

issue is never crystal clear, it does not appear that Ellul has decisively broken with the principles of the Reformation. The results show, in a most pointed way, the possibility of seeing that tradition both as giving some impetus to the modern accounts of reason and the intellect and also as being able to pronounce a judgment against that very formulation.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ See "Actualité", pp. 46-51 for the attitude of both acceptance and rejection that is essential to the Reformation tradition, and also p. 53 for the comment that the Reformation unleashed a monster that was too much for them. In conversation, M. Ellul said he does not consider himself a 'Calvinist' and he has no qualms about separating himself from Calvin on any issue. For example, he considers that Calvin was very much a metaphysician within the spirit of his own times. In this respect, therefore, their views of reason would also differ.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF ELLUL'S STANCE IN THE CONTENT OF HIS OWN SOCIOLOGY

So far, I have tried to depict the human possibilities and limitations, and then to outline the principles on which Ellul bases his sociology. In this chapter, by way of concrete illustration, I shall focus on a) what he himself does when he sits down to write, b) a summary of the major structures contained in his own sociological content, and c) a brief consideration of Marx and Weber to highlight Ellul's own stance.

a) Modus Operandi

Having examined the sources of knowledge, I shall now look at the concrete question of Ellul's own modus operandi or his concrete methodology stemming from this view of human knowing.

Since 1935, I have been convinced that on the sociological plane, technique was by far the most important phenomenon, and that it was necessary to start from there to understand everything else.¹

The first immediate question is how he arrived at his starting point -- apart from a general reference to an ability for spiritual discernment. How did he come up with technique? The most important notion for coming to grips with what he means is the relationship between fact and concept. In our society, when one looks around, he does not see technique in itself, but only a vast array of individual techniques, methods and different relationships. To draw all these discrete facts together and to see them as a whole, one must build a concept.² In different terms,

¹ Katallagete, p. 5.

² See, for example, TS, p. 148.

when confronted with a mass of seemingly inexplicable data, one needs une grille de lecture -- the formation of a framework to ascertain whether or not the material has an observable order. In the light of this chapter, it is the functioning of the intellect in the direction of spiritual discernment. A concept, Ellul insists however, is not simply an invention of the mind. Certainly, it involves the preliminary workings of the mind, but only in relation to what exists, so that if the other facts do not correspond to the concept, then it is a bad or false concept that must be discarded. He emphasizes that a genuine concept is a fact -- a description of the reality outside and behind the individual, more easily measurable facts and the interaction among them. He also insists, in saying so, that this general reality goes beyond simply the accumulation and synthesis of the other facts.³

Therefore, Ellul calls technique a social fact and not just a theoretical construct, an ideal type or a philosophical idea.⁴ Ellul does give us a few explicit hints concerning where he started to conceptualize something so all-pervasive as the central social fact of technique.

³ For an emphasis that these concepts or basic structures are central but not self-evident, see, "Chronique", pp. 678-87.

⁴ See e.g. TS, p. xxv. That technique is a social fact also means that he can speak of the task "to measure determinisms" (TS, p. xxxiii). They will not be measured by numerical count (see e.g. Propaganda, p. 277), but have a definite impact of their own. Secondly, Ellul has said that the debate about the reality of concepts is the same debate as between Marx and Hegel in which he stands on Marx's side. Thirdly, he says that the debate does not at all refer to the medieval debate about universals, for the concepts would change for different societies. Finally, he wants to emphasize that a concept is not finally a "subjective hunch". (See "A Little Debate", p. 707.)

This problem is exacerbated when the central social fact and social force is also one of the major axes of the sacred. As a result, the central concept becomes so difficult to ascertain, that Ellul says one has to start with the secondary traces to build towards the less easily demarcated concepts.⁵ What clues does he give to assist in the gargantuan task of selecting the particular facts or experiences from which to generalize? Assuming his view of myth as already discussed, he indicates that one can approach the general structures of reality by looking at what people hold dear. The only elaborated guidelines he gives for sources come in A Critique of the New Commonplaces. The commonplaces are not the myths themselves, but rather they are nearer to the surface as the verbal expressions of the secondary myths or as ideologies. Although they are rooted in the contemporary myths, they are much easier to analyze. "They are collective beliefs based on assumptions that are accepted without discussion, beyond all question."⁶ Because the commonplaces are cast in the form of ideas, Ellul claims that they are the best way to gain a foothold on the problem. Where does one find these commonplaces? He does give some indications culminating with the following recipe:

But with what net can we catch it? Not with a net, but with a recipe. Make a cocktail out of a blend of *l'Express*, *Marie-Claire*, *Planète*, and *Paris-Match*, flavour it with the formulas made immortal by our most established intellectuals, add three pinches of the daily column of *Le Monde* and a slice of *Canard enchaîné*. Run the whole thing through Père Ubu's debraining machine and out will come a proliferation of commonplaces.⁷

⁵ See NP, pp. 68, 155.

⁶ Critique, p. 13. As stated in this chapter, Ellul does not think that the sacred or its myths are perpetrated by individuals or deliberate thought. The commonplaces are subsidiary formulations spread precisely by alleged intellectuals.

⁷ Ibid., p. 27. In "KM", p. 374, he also suggests looking at "Samedi soir" and "les comics".

In the same chapter, he gives three pointers to show whether or not the observer is on a fruitful path. First, the commonplaces tied most tightly to the dominant myths are those equally acceptable to ostensibly opposed sides.

When you discover a formula that is equally acceptable to rightest and leftist, Christian and secular man, Marxist and liberal, bourgeois and proletarian, then you can be sure that you are near the bone.⁸

These areas of agreement show a level beyond class or party on which all moderns can relate and which in turn relates to the common myths. Secondly, modern commonplaces are marked by noble sentiments but, according to Ellul, a paucity of noble deeds. By following the outcome of such sentiments in the world, one can deduce what actions and realities they are really covering up and justifying. Specifically, he says an examination of the noble sentiments of our age reveals repeated and vociferous talk of an absence.

[P]hilosophy plays its compensating role in protesting the existence of that which is about to disappear, and in affirming it more loudly as its reality diminishes.⁹

Above all, he speaks of the protestations of freedom, pluralism and individualism. Again, it is a kind of via negativa: if you see the commonplaces, you also see, by default, what is being hidden. Ellul is not speaking of a Machiavellian will nor a conspiracy theory of history, for he considers myth and even its commonplaces to be much deeper and more compelling. Because the commonplaces stand on the most evanescent level, they can give some clue to the determinisms that in fact control us.

⁸ Critique, p. 14.

⁹ To Will, p. 143. See also To Will, p. 169; PI, p. 5; Critique, p. 253.

Ellul's subsequent approach to social description is still rooted in the relationship between individual fact and concept. The concept or overall definition must be examined constantly in dialogue with the various instances, so that each contributes to the seeing of the other. This method, which he puts forward in opposition to the mathematical method, he calls 'discursive'. "The discursive method, though seeming less precise, is, in the end, more exact."¹⁰ The French word discursif has two seemingly disparate meanings -- proceeding by a series of arguments towards a more complete expression of things in their totality, and, secondly, that which is not bound by a rigorous continuity, but proceeds by digressions. I shall now look at how he uses a discursive method in an interesting combination of both these meanings.¹¹

In contrast to those methods he has deplored, he refers to this method as "the observation of general phenomena by the best possible use of our general knowledge of man" "in conjunction with very broad facts and very general ideas".¹² These generalizations, however, cannot

¹⁰ PI, p. 5. In Part B, Chapter 5, this method has a parallel, as we shall see, in his biblical studies. Still, sociologically, Ellul attributes the direct influence to Marx.

¹¹ The use of the word 'discursive' is another example of his tendency to twist or almost to make fun of certain philosophical terms -- to throw them in, out of context, when he thinks that the philosophical meaning does not concur with normal usage. He is able to succeed, for the translation into French of many foreign philosophical terms made use of already valid words. I shall discuss what he means by 'discursive' without reference, for example, to Kant's distinction between intuitive and discursive knowing -- a discussion which is of virtually no interest to Ellul. At most, he hints that he thinks the use of 'discourse' in every operation is one of the hallmarks of technique itself. (See La Technique, p. 74 for this veiled reference. In the translation, a sentence is left out.) For Ellul, constructive reason is inseparable from technique.

¹² Propaganda, p. 277, p. 287.

be separated from a vast array of particular facts from as wide a range as possible. "Il faut connaître une immense quantité de faits pour trouver celui qui est vraiment significatif et qui doit être à la fois retenu et étudié."¹³ He constantly moves between a general definition, showing the common element surrounding and throughout a whole large series of phenomena, and the multiplying of instances, many of which are not normally associated with one another, of the concept. This double method reinforces the notion of the totality and the interrelatedness of facts in such a way that the general idea does not remain theoretical nor the examples isolated. For example, the concept is sometimes explicit, as in The Technological Society or else the whole work revolves around a non-stated definition, as in The Political Illusion or Propaganda. In either case, he has a holistic assessment in which it is difficult to separate the parts from the whole. With examples, he winds in and out and through the whole to emphasize the inseparability of the examples. In keeping with the second meaning of discursif, he does not simply follow, in a linear fashion, in one level or direction and then the other.

A second element of Ellul's discursive method, related to the first dictionary definition meaning, is the application of reason to all he surveys. By this statement, I mean more than simply looking at the internal coherencies of the various phenomena in order to show their unity. Beyond that task, he says that careful reasoning shows certain chains and sequences.

¹³ "KM", p. 369.

If we may not speak of laws, we may, at any rate, speak of repetitions. If we may not speak of mechanisms in the strict sense of the word, we may speak of interdependencies. There is a certain logic (though not a formal logic) in economic phenomena which makes certain forecasts possible. This is true of sociology and, to a lesser degree, of politics. There is a certain logic in the evolution of institutions which is easily discernible. It is possible, without resorting to imagination or science fiction, to describe the path that a social body or institutional complex will follow. An extrapolation is perfectly proper and scientific when it is made with care. Such an extrapolation is what we have attempted. But it never represents more than a probability, and it may be proved false by events.¹⁴

He has devoted his social writings not only to judgments of facts but also to judgments of probabilities concerning the development of the determinisms. For a number of reasons, he only rarely speaks of 'laws' with reference to sociology. Basically, he prefers to limit that term to biblical and juridical law. Secondly, although he doubtless preoccupies himself with sociological causality and mechanisms, he insists that these regular sequences within a given society and the unfolding of the implications of a given social reality can at best be projected only into probabilities. They do not constitute the basis for either a fatalism or a philosophy of history. Since the observation of special trends cannot take into account individual actions or prises de conscience, one cannot conclude that the way things are is the way they must be for all time. Having taken into account those provisos, Ellul still thinks that the determinisms are acute enough and pervasive enough in a set direction for the astute observer to analyze and predict. He goes further than showing the relatedness of the various determinisms to project the trend of their future direction. Thus, he writes of a society, admittedly not yet at the total stage, the totality of which will subsume all the

¹⁴ IS, p. xxx. See also To Will, p. 187 re. extrapolation.

phenomena and structures under the singularity of technique. The ability to extrapolate properly; that is, to make accurate judgments of probability, can come only as a result of a profound discernment of the present forces: the appropriateness of his extrapolation is the ultimate mark of his whole approach. The extrapolation, from the present to an expression of the eventually singular totality, throws into sharp relief the problems in such a way to propel us into action now, before it is too late to invalidate the predictions. I can only repeat that Ellul's extrapolation never sees a sociological system as eternal nor as absolutely realized. He projects what can happen if the present trends continue unchecked to their total completion.

A third aspect of his discursive method is his use of comparison with other thinkers as an integral part of his own social description. He always includes a vast survey and commentary on the relevant contemporary literature with a view of sharpening his position for the reader. He conducts a constant dialogue of acceptance and rejection of parts of other authors, whether or not he agrees with their total stances. This procedure goes beyond the standard review of literature or a repudiation of competition to enhance his own contribution. It is also the attempt to find a balanced and total view of the whole through this continuing dialogue with the insights and limitations of other social observers. He sees this dialogue as necessary and decidedly preferable to the effort of each thinker jealously working on his own. Also it is far more accurate and exact than the idea of an ever-increasing pile of knowledge simply from the addition of individual microscopic studies undertaken in isolation. Thus, the discursiveness of Ellul's thinking extends in many directions in his attempt to discuss

the whole. This brief sketch of Ellul's own procedures is obviously not complete, but mainly I want to show that he does not fall easily into standard categories. His sociology cannot be labelled neatly as deduction, induction, abstraction, individualization etc. It is discursive in the full sense, and he consciously uses this method as the proper and most rigorously scientific one for the practice of sociology.

Finally, with regard to how Ellul himself works, one must consider whether or not his sociology can stand as a science. He is not particularly interested in technical acceptance by those whose own methods he has attacked nor in a popularity contest. Still, he does want to speak to people, and he has said, "I am concerned only with knowing whether things are so or not."¹⁵ For his studies to achieve credence as a social science, there is the strong desirability of a verification principle. I do not use the more technical term 'falsification principle', because he does not claim to be a technical social scientist and also because he says the differences between natural and social sciences requires that different factors be taken into account.¹⁶

For example, Freud's concept of the id can be verified only through the actual processes of psycho-analysis in which, in a certain sense, the

¹⁵ TS, p. xxvii. See also "KM", pp. 370-71, where he defends the starting from a given and the goal of sociology as leading to action as being more scientific than any liberal science that denies that possibility. He would find it difficult, for example, to entertain the argument that Marx was not a social scientist.

¹⁶ For example, he does not speak to the principle enunciated in Flew's "Theology and Falsification", New Essays in Philosophical Theology (New York:1964), p. 98ff. One ground for his refusal is that that discussion cannot be expanded from the natural sciences, and in any case, he implies (see e.g. Critique, p. 241) that the current scientific methodology itself has no falsification principle.

improvement of the patient supplies the evidence. In the social sciences, in other words, verification can come only in concrete examples from the participants involved, so that it would be somewhat misleading to speak of a principle by which the work can be assessed in advance. What would count against his work, in Ellul's eyes, would be simply that the facts asserted are not borne out by experience or that the extrapolation does not follow in experience.¹⁷ He maintained in discussion that significant verification in the social sciences, although of prime importance to keep in mind, cannot arise legitimately until after the work. Only time can bear out or refute the concepts and their extrapolation. As we have seen, he starts from an overall perspective and then marshals evidence. The governing principle remains that if the facts do not fit the more generalized concept, then the concept and not the facts must be discarded. One could say that the validity of the concept can be checked subsequently by almost any observer, whereas not any observer can come up with the concept in the first place. Ellul can 'get away' with this conclusion, for he says that there is a given reality to which we are all subject. Thus, for the purposes of verification, in distinction from the original ascertaining of the situation, he can appeal to common sense, experience and a serious attempt to be ruthless about any previous evaluation of the matter. He still does not want to give common sense any status beyond practical awareness in a given situation and it is obvious that he is under no illusions about the vagaries of relying on common sense and experience.¹⁸

¹⁷ See TS, p. xxx for a description of possible ways that would not invalidate the accuracy of his present work.

¹⁸ See for example, Critique, pp. 22-23, Propaganda, p. 54, and PMM, p. 74.

Also, he does not appeal to a human nature that remains constant despite any vicissitudes. Still he does think there is something to which to appeal as long as man remain man. Despite the fact that experience is open to gross manipulation, he does not seem to think that people are absolutely and totally malleable.¹⁹ The proof of that belief lies beyond the actual doing of sociology, but without it, there is no point in discussing a verification principle at all. Because of the strength of the myths surrounding the determinisms, Ellul will admit the possibility of common sense and experience in concrete verification, whereas it is not reliable enough, unaided, to be the only source of the best sociological writing.

In an examination of what Ellul does when he sits down to write, it appears that he does work within the principles outlined as the best way of knowing, by pursuing a discursive rather than a statistical or constructive method. Eventually, however, the central questions culminate in the content of his social description, as the outcome of Ellul's use of his human equipment and knowledge.

¹⁹ Because of his insistence on not speaking philosophically, Ellul has purposely not looked directly at this question sociologically. There is some indication of his position in *A of R*, pp. 281 ff; *Propaganda*, p. xvi; or *PI*, pp. 224-40. Basically, he considers the 'in-dividual' as not simply being defined by the combination of the forces, but rather he is that which is indivisible. Nevertheless, the individual cannot be separated from the whole milieu in which he lives. Therefore, he is defined in relation to that milieu, whether he allows himself to be absorbed into it by giving his allegiance to the collective sacred, or he asserts his individuality against these forces. Because the question of the whole is tightly tied up with people's allegiances, it is almost impossible to separate the individual from the sociological whole; yet, the two should not be seen as identical. At the best, the two should remain in a dialectical relationship of tension. See for example, *PI*, pp. 214-16. This issue will be discussed theologically in Part B, Chapter 7.

b) Technique

Throughout Part A, it has always been clear that the 'spiritual nucleus' of the content of Ellul's social description, around which all his writings revolve, is technique. Since an exposition of this concept would provide material for a number of theses, it is perhaps arrogant to try to underline the main points in a few pages. To examine the details of those writings is not the primary purpose of this thesis, but rather, it is to put his vast array of writings into the perspective of his overall task. Here, I shall indicate only briefly the outcome of his principles and concrete methods in his description of the most fundamental reality that underlines and supplies "the lines of force"²⁰ among all the phenomena of our society. As already indicated, the major problem of this description lies in the recognition that technique has become so pervasive that it has become not only a social fact, but also one of the major poles in the social dialectic, and one of the two axes of the sacred.²¹ Since these three attributes co-exist, the present combination gives technique an unprecedented power and an unchallenged authority that make it difficult to define. At the same time, the very position of technique demands, for Ellul, that it must be delineated and de-mythologized.

The term technique, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for obtaining an end. In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human

²⁰ TS, p. 148.

²¹ See pp. 161-162 of this chapter.

activity.²²

Even within this concise definition, three different aspects combine -- all of which are necessary for an appreciation of Ellul's argument. In the first place, technique involves the primacy of reason as the highest and governing priority of human activity. This 'putting in order' of chaos is part of the attempt to gain power and security within man's collective environment. Within technique, this activity becomes elevated until it is seen as the only way to know all that can be known. In Ellul's terms, raison becomes dé-raison. One must remember, however, that in his account, reason always functions as a tool that must appear under some guise. Therefore, as we have also seen, that argument brings us to the second part of Ellul's definition -- efficiency.²³ On the level of everyday language, the basic notion of efficiency is not difficult. It is the procedure of homo faber, the inventor, who uses his reason to find the best method to arrive at a goal whose features can be abstracted in advance, so that all the factors are streamlined with that single end in mind. Although these operations originally took place in separate human activities of productivity, Ellul suggests that the purest and most easily discernible form of technique remains the machine.²⁴ The most efficient solution to any problem becomes a form of mechanization that will guarantee the simultaneous working together of the parts, to come up with the desired effect,

²² TS, p. xxv. See also p. 95, where he says, "To analyze these common features is tricky, but it is simple to grasp them". From the outset it should be noted that Ellul is discussing not only the advanced industrial nations in which technique arose, but also the more traditional societies where the modernization process is making technique universal.

²³ Although this definition appears only in English translation, the word he uses most frequently is l'efficacité.

²⁴ TS, p. 4.

without leaving any area open to chance, human foible or error. In short, efficiency is concerned with practical utility, applicability without waste, the insurance of results, systems building. Technique is a question "of human reasoning concerning action, of efforts directed towards simplification and systematization, and of a concern for efficiency".²⁵ The first two aspects of the definition of technique are fairly straightforward, as the technical phenomenon exists and is not impossible to point to in any society. It is surely not distinctly modern: to the extent that as a collective expression, it does not differ radically from the totality of technology (that is, machines and machine-like operations). In terms of the discussion of the various levels of fact, at this juncture, technique, quite precise and limited, could be described as one of the structures of society, following its own patterns of growth and development. Then, it is also possible to discuss the purpose of the efficiency brought about by mechanization; for example, happiness or money.²⁶ At every opportunity, and especially in this overall definition, however, Ellul explicitly states that contemporary technique has a third dimension that takes it beyond this machine stage, which, by itself, is more or less obvious to all.

The third aspect refers to the phrase 'in every field of human activity'. For Ellul, this final part introduces something entirely new into our society and, for the reader, it supplies the most problems. In order to come to grips with what it means, one has to separate in Ellul's writings, descriptions of two closely related processes. The first is the sheer proliferation of techniques in our era. Although

²⁵ TS, p. 38.

²⁶ See TS, p. 55 and M du B, p. 67 ff.

he says the tendency to growth occurs in every civilization, he also claims that the long process came to fruition in the West after 1750. Since that time, there has been such an explosion of techniques in every imaginable field, far beyond simply human material productivity, that the whole apparatus has undergone a change.²⁷ The technical phenomenon in our society takes on entirely new proportions as the scope of the technical order has spread in a geometric progression. Since there has always been a human tendency towards the adoration of the work of one's hands,²⁸ as techniques spread, they become more and more objects in a direct relationship with the sacred. In other words, as the possibilities grew, so did an appreciation of those possibilities; therefore, the tendency to see technical solutions as the only way of seeing things also grew. The net result was that the principles of machine technology have spread to every possible area of human activity, thought and reflection. Technical reasoning has taken over larger and larger portions of reality, so that people have become incapable of thinking outside its boundaries for assurance and security. In Ellul's account, however, even that enormous multiplication of techniques, taken in itself, does not describe the uniqueness of modern technical society, for it still remains too closely associated with the totality only of machines and their growth of self-perfection. The other, allied process,

²⁷ "What appears to be genuinely new is the formation of a 'technical complex', which. . . consists of a series of partial inventions that combine into an ensemble. This unit begins to function when the greatest number of its constituents have been assembled, and its trend is towards continuous self-perfection." (TS, p. 47) See also, TS, pp. 89, 63 and 62 (where this qualitative change is discussed in the light of Marx and Engels).

²⁸ See TS, p. 21.

that is decisive, does not concern the internal mechanics of technique, no matter how widespread, which can be increasingly destructive, but rather the external relations between the vast technical phenomenon and the society in which it has arisen.

But let the machine have its head, and it topples everything that cannot support its enormous weight. Thus everything had to be reconsidered in terms of the machine. And that is precisely the role technique plays. . . . The machine could not integrate itself into nineteenth century; technique integrated it. . . . Technique has enough of the mechanical in its nature to enable it to cope with the machine, but it surpasses and transcends the machine because it remains in close touch with the human order. The metal monster could not go on forever torturing mankind. . . . Technique integrates the machine into society. It constructs the kind of world the machine needs and introduces order where the incoherent banging of machinery heaped up ruins. . . . All-embracing technique is in fact the consciousness of the mechanized world.

Technique integrates everything. It avoids shock and sensational events. Man is not adapted to a world of steel; technique adapts him to it. It changes the arrangement of this blind world so that man can be part of it without colliding with its rough edges, without the anguish of being delivered up to the inhuman. Technique thus provides a model; it specifies attitudes that are valid once and for all. The anxiety aroused in man by the turbulence of the machine is soothed by the consoling hum of a unified society. . . .

But when technique enters into every area of life, including the human, it ceases to be external to man and becomes his very substance. It is no longer face to face with man, but is integrated with him, and it progressively absorbs him. In this respect, technique is radically different from the machine. . . . [T]he mechanization which results from technique is the application of this higher form to all domains hitherto foreign to the machine; we can even say that technique is characteristic of precisely that realm in which the machine itself can play no role. It is a radical error to think of technique and machine as interchangeable; from the very beginning we must be on guard against this misconception.²⁹

²⁹ TS, pp. 5-7. In TS, Ellul seems to equate la technique and la société technisée, at least to the extent that the former leads directly to the latter. In other writings (see for example, A of R, p. 329 or "A Little Debate", p. 707), he sharply distinguishes between the two, in order to level his attack at the latter, rather than the former. Since the two are so closely linked, there is no contradiction in putting them together; nevertheless, in the perspective of basic problems, he sees the aspect of la société technicienne as the crux of the issue.

Technique, in integrating the machine into society and vice versa, moves from being an instrument or an intermediary between man and reality to help him from being powerlessly engulfed by it, to being the main force behind and running throughout reality itself. Put slightly differently, technique moves from being one aspect of society within a larger framework to being the whole basis of the society -- the source and standard governing all social relationships. In this sense, Ellul can say that technique has taken over from nature as the accepted touchstone of reality; therefore, it is not only reality, but also sacralized reality. Because of this alteration in the role and position of technique, contemporary people are left with virtually no opportunity of finding another intermediary for assistance in dealing with this new configuration of reality that controls how they live.

Obedience to the plow and the plane was indeed the only means of dominating earth and wood. But the formula is not true for our techniques. He who serves these techniques enters another realm of necessity. This new necessity is not natural necessity; natural necessity, in fact, no longer exists. It is technique's necessity, which becomes the more constraining the more nature's necessity fades and disappears. It cannot be escaped or mastered.³⁰

All of Ellul's social writings concentrate on the unique results coming from the modern influence of technique -- either as a whole or as a description of a particular segment within this definition of the whole. Because technique has become the social fact, over-arching and permeating all other facts and relationships, one cannot easily separate it out for description. Still, one should remember that the all-pervasive strength of technique did not suddenly emerge from a vacuum, but rather it is in a process of gaining ascendancy. As a result,

³⁰ TS, p. 146.

Ellul can still validly distinguish technique on the different levels of fact, for in his extrapolation of the single most important concept, he never says that the system and the unification is complete.

To make the distinctions a bit clearer -- on the very wide level of machines going together to form a social structure--one can speak of technology; on the level of the spiritual discernment of the social force of reality, one can speak of technique;³¹ finally, on the level of sacred reality, one can speak of the axis technique/sex. Technique, therefore, operates on all levels of fact and reality at the same time, with the result that the issues often become contorted. In addition, because technique has become an untouchable source of meaning, it cannot easily be thrown into question and it becomes hard to schematize. With Ellul's emphasis on the importance of clarity, he insists that to give up the attempt to delineate technique is to submit to the growing power of technique, without any challenge. In fact, one could say that, for Ellul, clarity (however arrived at) may be the only human equipment left for considering the possibility of a new intermediary between men and the new experience of reality as technique.

³¹ These two levels tend to become closer and closer together. Although the possibility continues to be less and less likely, he still does see some dialectical movement possible within the social whole, between different social structures, of which technology would be only one force. It is still possible to speak of the movement of the forces, although even that observation entails an increasing rigidification into the one social fact of the second level. "Notre société est fondamentale technicienne et étatique. . . . Mais cette société n'est pas que technicienne. Pendant que se développait, dans leur secteur sans cesse élargi, l'ensemble des Techniques, sur des voies parallèles au début, puis convergentes, se développait le pouvoir de l'Etat. . . . Tous les caractères de notre société aboutissent là". (AR, p. 314).

Within this concluding discussion of the content of Ellul's social thought, one must remember that he considers it part of the very description to put the problems into the proper perspective to incite some intervention. To round out what he is saying, I shall look further to isolate precisely what he sees as the major problems in the organization of our particular society. One should perhaps note that he does not say that our civilization is any worse than any previous one. More important, he sees it as essential for doing sociological description at any time, to spell out the problems inherent in the development of the particular society. Even a superficial reading of Ellul's works gives the impression that all is not well. Nevertheless, in order to prevent any abrupt dismissal of Ellul on the grounds of a congenital pessimism, predictable in a Calvinist, I shall try to spell out the problems he outlines as part of his solely human sociological undertaking.

The basic problems of technique and la société technisée come out perhaps most starkly in Ellul's description of the five characteristics of the unhindered processes of technique -- the automatism of technical choice, the self-augmentation, the monism or holistic unity, the universalism, and the autonomy of technique.³² Above all, this section underlines the monolithic nature of modern society -- a danger already alluded to in this chapter. In The Technological Society, he indicates that the singular power of technique has evolved so far that the question of the needed dialectic among the forces has become a passé

³² See TS, pp. 79-147, for his most detailed elaboration of these characteristics. In this section, I shall limit discussion to isolating the problems he discerns.

issue.

Henceforth, there will be no conflict between contending forces among which technique is only one. The victory of technique has already been secured. It is too late to set limits to it or to put it in doubt. The fatal flaw in all systems designed to counter-balance the power of technique is that they come too late.³³

In summary, when modern technique began to develop in the early nineteenth century, its dialectical tension with political power kept society healthy. Subsequent history, according to Ellul, has been the assimilation of these two forces into a single one that, although not yet paralyzed, blocks any alternative.

Dans la mesure où les deux phénomènes tendaient, l'un à 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. . . . Car celui-ci [le système] se trouve structuré à deux niveaux. Le niveau inconscient, spontané: celui de la croissance des techniques qui se répercutent et s'engendrent mutuellement, sans volonté sous-jacente de faire une société d'un type donné. Le niveau volontaire et conscient: celui de l'Etat qui organise cette société pour la meilleure coordination des techniques. Car l'Etat moderne n'est plus simplement du "pouvoir politique".³⁴

When everything will have been assimilated, there will be no further movement and no further options within the play of the forces -- a situation he anticipates as being disastrous, not only for individuals, but also for society as a whole, which by that time will be global. When there is no movement and no development, a monolithic society will collapse under its own weight.

³³ TS, p. 130. This section also shows Ellul's use of extrapolation at its most powerful -- to the extent that the view of the totality of technique becomes almost overwhelming for the reader.

³⁴ AR, pp. 314-15.

Doubtless, technique has its limits. But when it has reached these limits, will anything exist outside them? Its limits are presupposed by its object and its methods. But is it not succeeding in undermining everything which is outside of it? Beyond its precise and limited compass, whatever its size, will there remain anything in existence?³⁵

There is no indication that the destruction of the monolith, when it comes from its own growth, will possibly guarantee a higher, more liberating form of the same society. For Ellul, the problems of the growing monolith cannot be overestimated. In that perspective, he advocates any intervention that can serve as a holding action to slow down the process, even if the likelihood of a collective revolution against the trend seems very dim. Any tension injected into the process can be only advantageous.³⁶ The introduction of tensions rather than simple adjustment to technique, for Ellul, is different from the futile attempt to subordinate technique to a higher human value. In order to see why he rejects that often proposed answer, one has to consider another problem related to that of the monolith.

The description of the five characteristics of technique also stresses that it obeys its own predetermined logic of development, totally beyond any control by man.

He is a device for recording effects and results obtained by various techniques. He does not make a choice of complex, and, in some way, human motives.

Man is reduced to the level of a catalyst. Better still, he resembles a slug inserted into a slot machine, he starts the operation without participating in it.³⁷

³⁵ TS, p. 85.

³⁶ See PI, pp. 206-23, where he concludes that such challenges may not be finally successful, but they provide the only possibility against the monolith.

³⁷ TS, pp. 80, 135.

Technique can follow no other course or goal except its own perfection. How can he then even intimate the possibility of any activity of intervention? At this point, we come back to the discussion of the sacred whose power comes from the allegiance people give to it. The reason why technique has such independent power to control them lies precisely in the fact that they have ceded their undivided allegiance to this power, in the expectation of security and meaning.

There is no such thing as technique by and in itself. In its irresistible forward progress, it forced the human individual, without whom it is nothing, to accompany it.³⁸

Technique, having been sacralized, now supplies the standards and guidelines, because that is what we have collectively desired. There is not another possible allegiance, despite any oratory, under which this total allegiance can be subjugated now. Staying within the realm of human tendencies, technique's authority as a whole can be challenged only by the tension of a wholly different allegiance. By its very nature, one cannot speak of tinkering with its internal operation or of asking it to change course midstream. The only question is whether or not we let it develop on its own grounds, to govern external relationships as well. Until technique becomes total, in the sense of the realized monolith, some variations can be supplied under the rubric of different forms of the dominant myths, but, finally, technique can be called into question humanly only by a different sacred or by a rejection of the acceptance of a sacred altogether, (the difficulties and possibilities of which I have discussed earlier in Chapter 1). Therefore, for the title of this thesis, I have chosen the term 'the modern

³⁸ TS, p. 223.

project' to imply that, for Ellul, la société technisée is not haphazard, is not something independent of human willing and desiring; yet, since it has become the sacred milieu, it is no longer an individual question, for it has its own parameters and rules of development. Because it is not independent of people, it cannot be neutral for them either.

[W]e are faced with a choice of "all or nothing." If we make use of technique, we must accept the specificity and autonomy of its ends, and the totality of its rules. Our desires and aspirations can change nothing.³⁹

Not only, then, is technique's monolithic tendency a problem, but also the difficulty of fruitful tension is so compounded by man's collective complicity, that there is little chance for a real desire for change. Either we are not aware of the present unfolding of technique or else we do not see the process as intolerable.⁴⁰ These lacks of awareness go together to highlight major and related problems that Ellul wants to put into perspective.

The other focus or cluster of problems on which Ellul's description concentrates concerns the actual viability of technique as a source of well-being and meaning for society. "In fact, technique is nothing more than means and the ensemble of means."⁴¹ That account is no stum-

³⁹ TS, p. 141. (my underlining)

⁴⁰ See for example A of R, pp. 238-9.

⁴¹ TS, p. 19. It should perhaps be noted that when Ellul speaks of 'means' and 'ends', he is not referring to the philosophical argument of final cause. He is speaking in the general sense of goal or intended result and how to achieve it. From his view of reality, one can see that, for him, ends or purposes are not given in the nature of things, but, humanly speaking, they are collectively imposed mainly through sacralization. Theologically, the purposes can be known only through divine revelation. In short, he is not speaking of 'ends' in a classical Greek way. By 'means', he is speaking of instrumentality which has come to be associated with mechanics and modern systems. These have become a goal in themselves.

bling block, except when it extends to the whole of reality, when every relationship revolves around the search for means with no end except means. One can easily dismiss that summary as a use of words with no meaning, for the meaning of the central word 'efficiency' includes within itself the need for a desired effect or goal. It is, therefore, simply impossible to speak of any system that is nothing but means. No matter how rationalized, mechanized, systematized a society may become, it must be in the service of some end, if only comfortable self-preservation or the alleviation of man's estate through productivity. As already noted, the process can be said to have originated for a number of reasons, but Ellul argues that those goals are finally absorbed, so that technique always functions in the same way, regardless of the original motive.

Whatever the differences in its development in England and France, however, the technical consciousness that appeared was identical in both countries.⁴²

Technique does start with what went before, going back to the original mystery of invention; nevertheless, once in motion, technique follows only its own set patterns.

It evolves in a purely causal way: the combination of preceding elements furnishes the new technical elements. There is no purpose or plan that is being progressively realized.⁴³

In that way, efficiency becomes its own goal and source, with everything else falling by the wayside. For Ellul, one of the biggest dangers is in fact the delusion and the final impossibility of finding what people are looking for in this particular allegiance. "C'était le gigantisme

⁴² TS, p. 58. See also M du B, pp. 255-57, where he discusses how the ideology of happiness has been absorbed to the point of being merely a veil for the processes of means without end.

⁴³ TS, p. 97.

des moyens au service de l'absolu d'un rien.⁴⁴ Whereas he obviously sees that the modern project can exist, he also recognizes that clinging to the ever-increasingly artificial, efficient operation of all aspects of life is actually a manifestation of clinging to the abyss and death. The search for security through attachment to nothingness is a contradiction at the heart of modern society. Because it is impossible to have means without end, the present course will also have to provide its own internal negation.⁴⁵ He does not sound this warning philosophically in the manner of the existentialists nor moralistically in the manner of the Children of God. Because of the contradiction at the heart of technique, people will not be able to achieve what was their original motivation to security and well-being, through the search for means without end ad infinitum. One cannot say that a cure is to be found by furthering the course of nothingness. In this part of Ellul's description, he moves beyond saying that it is enslaving, to asserting that the exaltation of technique (including the wild outbursts that are in no way its opposite) leads to the problem of a complete negation of meaning and an eventual collapse.

⁴⁴ M du B, p. 20. See also p. 203, where he speaks of "l'idéologie du Néant" at the heart of our society, and the hidden reality of "la mort virtuelle".

⁴⁵ See M du B, p. 209, concerning the non-fruitful contradictions that characterize our society. This discussion is different from the one concerning the need for a fruitful dialectic of tension among the major forces for a healthy society. Again, he does not compare this development with other civilizations of the past. He does emphasize its inherent make-up that can finally lead to the paralysis and decline of its own evolution. Perhaps, I should also note that Ellul does not equate the collapse of a civilization, even ours if it is not prevented, with the end of the world. He merely says that there is no guarantee of what would emerge.

La puissance se développe sans signification et sans destination.

Précisément au nom de la science-technique-état-économie-productivité-consommation -- sans frein. La puissance s'est accomplie, les barrières devant elle sont tombées. Il ne reste plus que l'univers dont rend compte l'idéologie du néant. L'univers de la puissance sans signification qui réduit à rien tout ce qu'elle atteint, en créant indéfiniment les biens que seule elle justifie -- et qui fait habiter le néant au coeur de toute entreprise de l'homme précisément à cause de l'excès de cette puissance.⁴⁶

Finally, even if one accepts that Ellul does put the problems of technique effectively into perspective, it is still possible to argue that he does so to the extent of inhibiting all action in response. Perhaps his description is so chilling that it leads only to resignation and despair, or else an 'eat, drink and be merry' attitude. How does he stand up against the charges of undue pessimism? He speaks to this issue in the Foreword to the Revised American Edition of The Technological Society.

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. The reader tempted to brand me a pessimist should begin to examine his own conscience, and ask himself what causes him to make such a judgment. For behind this judgment, I believe, will always be found previous metaphysical value judgments, such as: "Man is free"; "Man is lord of creation"; "Man has always overcome challenges" (so why not this one too?); "Man is good". Or again: "Progress is always positive"; "Man has an eternal soul, and so cannot be put in jeopardy". Those who hold such convictions will say that my description of technological civilization is pessimistic. I ask only that the reader place himself on the factual level and address himself to these questions: "Are the facts analyzed here false?" "Is the analysis inaccurate?" "Are the conclusions unwarranted?" "Are there substantial gaps and omissions?" It will not do for him to challenge factual analysis on the basis of his own ethical or metaphysical presuppositions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ M. du B., pp. 281, 283. One can speak only of the goals of unlimited power.

⁴⁷ IS, pp. xxvii-viii. This plea is yet another form of his insistence on the fact-value distinction. Just as he claims that his description does not come as a deduction from his theological stance, so he asks that a previous assessment of technique or allegiance to it does not blind the reader to what is being said.

Also important is his pinpointing of the limits and role of sociology.

I do not presume to put chains around man. But I do insist that a distinction be made between diagnosis and treatment. . . . Technique presents man with multiple problems. As long as the first stage of analysis is incomplete, as long as the problems are not correctly stated, it is useless to proffer solutions. And before we can state the problems correctly, we must have an exact description of the phenomena involved.⁴⁸

Although sociology can and must pose the problems, it cannot, within its own limitations, provide the solutions. Optimism or pessimism, for Ellul, are simply not words applicable to the discipline. They might be applicable to the understanding of the reality described, but that question is of a different order. The human possibility of intervention into the present course of society is a question of allegiance and not of description. The study of technique, within Ellul's task as a Christian intellectual, is his sighting of the overall key points, an attempt to participate in the preservation of the world by acting as a watchman. Also, he is spelling out to Christians the 'here and now' necessity to open an increasingly closed situation -- a description made in accordance with his understanding of the doctrine of the two realms.

c) Marx and Weber

As a final focus for this chapter and this whole Part on Ellul's knowledge of society, I shall look at it from the perspective of his view of Karl Marx and Max Weber. I shall not consider detailed comparisons nor Ellul's assessment of the particulars of either thinker. More generally, I shall try to isolate what he considers the greatness and the main limitations of each. Obviously, these comments in no

⁴⁸ IS, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

way comprise definitive discussions nor are they meant as a facile 'put-down' of two great minds, in order to show that Ellul considers himself on a far superior plane. I choose these particular thinkers for three reasons. First, they illustrate his constant dialogue with other social thinkers as requisite for his own work of describing social reality. Secondly, Ellul has acknowledged, both explicitly and implicitly, the unsurpassed grandeur of both Marx and Weber, as the two most significant commentators of the modern era.⁴⁹ Thirdly, since neither of them claimed to be writing within biblical revelation, they illustrate both what the human equipment can know and also the limits of knowledge apart from revelation.⁵⁰ These points will help to clarify the concern of this chapter -- Ellul's own position regarding Christian realism.

Marx est le seul homme de son temps qui ait saisi l'ensemble des problèmes sociaux, politiques et économiques dans leur réalité, et qui ait correctement posé les questions de la civilisation du XIX^e siècle.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ellul refers to Marx, both positively and negatively, many times, with the two most direct and sustained comments are "KM" (positively) and A of R (in refutation). Even in his attacks on Marx, he recognizes his importance. His recognition of Weber is seldom explicit, but it is always in praise. See e.g. HTA, p. 53; PI, p. 15, 30, 149; M du B, p. 253. The only sustained discussion of Weber comes in the review article, Bulletin Sédésis. In conversation, he also said that they are the two thinkers who can put his own efforts into the clearest perspective. The following general comments come largely from those discussions.

⁵⁰ There can be little doubt that Marx wanted to remove all traces of biblical faith as false consciousness, or that Weber's value-free insistence excluded any argument for the possibility of enlightenment in social description from the Bible. How either of them could see anything is not an issue for Ellul, because of his view (already discussed) of the givenness of reality that impinges equally on all.

⁵¹ "KM", p. 367. For a previous reference to this passage, see Chapter 2, footnote 46.

Ellul has nothing but praise for Marx, to the extent that he was able to stay within the limits of sociological description. As a sociologist, he obviously provided a model for Ellul. Most important, he lauds Marx's ability to see, from among the vast array of discrete facts he had amassed, the whole with its interrelated parts and the forces moving them. Even though the man himself would have rejected Ellul's exact choice of terminology, he says that Marx had the ability of 'spiritual discernment'. As part of this ability was Marx's insistence on the importance of the dialectical play of these forces in the evolution and life of any society. Through his own involvement, he saw the movement of these forces, and therefore was able to diagnose his society and to throw into perspective its problems in a way that was conducive to some action of intervention. Thus, in terms of specific sociological procedures, Ellul considers Marx as almost an impeccable practitioner. Furthermore, he considers that Marx's description of the nineteenth century, made in the nascent stages of his particular society, was as accurate as could be reasonably expected -- as subsequent experience verified in the main. There are, of course, a number of areas, even sociologically or historically, where he is not in accord with Marx; for example, his one-sided materialism, his failure to see the most important aspect of the French Revolution, his account of the bourgeoisie. Although these divergences take on different weight in different discussions, they do not provide the backbone of Ellul's main attack on Marx. Although he does say that Marx could have sighted some other key points, he also holds that one should not be too critical because Marx was influenced by myths (whether present or progressive ones), for all

thinkers are. The Christian should not hope for an absolute advantage over a non-Christian at this juncture. In general, Ellul thinks that Marx did see his own society with canny skill and did make a remarkable diagnosis of the whole.

Ellul does take issue with Marx when he oversteps the bounds of straight social description, and at these points, he concentrates on Marx and Marxism as public enemy number one.⁵² In the first place, there is his conception of the relationship between freedom and necessity -- an account which can never emerge out of the boundaries of sociological material and one which can be thrown into question historically. The history of Marxist interpretation shows that the relationship Marx had in mind, especially in the final society, is not always obvious. It is sufficient to say that Ellul interprets Marx as saying that, now, freedom and necessity are in such a relationship that freedom will arise out from necessity. Therefore, in order to gain freedom, people must submit themselves to the order of necessity and work to speed up the direction in which society is moving by itself. Ellul points to the fundamentally non-revolutionary activities of present Marxists, who differ from what Marx himself predicted, but who do not constitute

⁵² See PI, p. 45. It is in this respect that he is more preoccupied with Marx than he is with Weber. Even in the realm beyond sociology, he says that Marx was far from being devoid of insight. He discusses Marx explicitly concerning the need for hope. "Marx saw this clearly in his theory of the false consciousness and ideology. He could not have seen it, could not have attempted to discern the real and show it to others, except with and within a hope. But that hope was deceptive and insufficient to the degree to which it was purely human, to the degree on which it was based on historical analysis, and not on the only possible source of hope. But it must be borne in mind that Marx's thrust was the only acceptable one which made the closest approach possible to the reality of its time." (HTA, p. 275).

an aberration. They follow inevitably from an acceptance of his view of freedom which, according to Ellul, can lead only to the tightening of the determinisms.⁵³ In making this error, Marx not only made an error of sociological description, but also went beyond the realm of sociology to say that that description can tell you how freedom will come about not only in his society but always. For Ellul, that mistake is illustrative of the single most important and most disastrous error of Marx -- his desire to construct a total philosophy that would apply to every society and for all history. Ellul thinks that, whereas Marx's analyses certainly were astute for his own time, he made the error of generalizing from it, both into the past and into the future, to form a complete closed system.⁵⁴ Once again, Ellul can challenge this interpretation, at least historically, but above all he objects that Marx far exceeded the humble limitations of both history and sociology to draw unwarranted conclusions about the overall pattern, the inevitable direction and the felicitous outcome of what was being described. In short, Marx wanted to have the last word and this is the temptation the Christian must guard against. Marx stepped outside the confines of his disciplines by going on to say, first, that the solution to the problems lay within the very reality of the determinisms, and, secondly,

⁵³ See e.g. *A of R*, p. 98 ff or "Le Réalisme Politique", p. 711, concerning the inherent imperialism. For Ellul, neither the horrors of Stalinism nor the success of the Left to the point of becoming banal is incompatible with Marx himself.

⁵⁴ See "KM", p. 367; and *A of R*, p. 67. This critique is different from a failure of extrapolation for which Ellul does not fault Marx. He did predict the movement of the forces and an increasing crisis, but he went on to say that an improvement would be the final outcome. It is the going beyond these limits of prediction of the course of a given society to which Ellul objects. See also *PI*, p. 217 concerning Ellul's view that there is no necessary dialectic.

that the evidence could supply its own complete understanding and guidance for all time.⁵⁵ The net result of his lack of humility concerning his work in the scientific disciplines could lead only to an active perpetration of the myths, a further enslavement and a further movement to rigidity in society.

Max Weber illuminates Ellul's position in a way quite different from Marx. Biographically, Ellul first found the description in Das Kapital to be the most persuasive description of his own experiences until he met the Communist Party which seemed quite different. Then, when he began to reflect for himself, in the same manner and following the same methods, he found Marx's concepts not entirely applicable for the twentieth century. The concepts he himself articulated as more basic, and especially technique, were very close to the descriptions of Weber. Ellul easily admits that if one is going to speak of a mentor in terms of content of specific concepts, he need only look to Weber's emphasis on the state, bureaucracy and, above all, to rationalization. Also, Ellul goes to some effort to challenge any interpretation of Weber as a constructive sociologist (that is, that he did not believe in a given reality that can be ascertained through the methods of science) or as having any marked influence in North American sociology whose methods Ellul has dismissed. For example, in discussion he said that he does not consider even Talcott Parsons as a genuine follower of Weber. Ellul insists that Weber neither was limited to one way of

⁵⁵ In terms of the solution Marx espoused to the problems he did see, Ellul cannot accept an answer that pits group against group in hatred. This is one of the major themes of Violence, especially pp. 27-80. For Ellul, however, this disagreement is not at all on the level of sociological description. For him, it is clear to a believer in the biblical revelation.

knowing nor succumbed unduly to the myth of science. Quite the contrary, he had harsh words for those who did. Above all, Ellul admires the great rigour and integrity that allowed Weber to look at the hard facts of reality without softening or distorting, in a way that was probably even more pronounced than was the case with Marx. Weber refused to cushion himself with any explanatory myths and strictly tried to keep to his own distinctions between judgments of probabilities, judgments of value and value orientations. (Ellul and Weber are quite similar in their avoidance of the explicit philosophical debates involved.) Because of his unflinching integrity and Weber's awe-inspiring erudition, which very few later sociologists have even begun to emulate, Ellul thinks that his results were superb in the realm of descriptive concepts. Because he was able to see an incredible amount, it is more difficult to make attacks on Weber than it is against other thinkers of less stature and determination.

Weber's main drawback, admitted somewhat reluctantly by Ellul, lay in his constant refusal to consider the possibility of looking at the whole; therefore, he did not have the same spiritual discernment as did Marx. Because of his great abilities, he did see the major factors, recognizing the multiplicity of factors at work in society: in this sense, one can say that he thought dialectically.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he did not describe himself as a dialectical thinker, nor did he focus on the movement and the relationships among the forces constituting the whole, as did Marx. Without such a view of the structures, Ellul thinks that

⁵⁶ See *Bulletin Sédésis*, p. 16. In discussion, Ellul also said that Weber would have accepted Engel's law that a quantitative change eventually leads to a qualitative change. At this point, it is important to remember that Ellul always wants to see the tight link between both material and belief factors that remain in dialectical tension.

it is impossible to put the problems of society into a perspective that will give impetus to action for change from the predictable course of this society. Weber's ability to see society, but his reluctance to portray problems as problems, in turn is related to his perhaps overly-prudent attempt at objectivity that might have prevented him from finally arriving at the most objectivity that is possible in sociology. Just as he did not want to discuss the whole in order to avoid philosophical conclusions, Weber also drew back from the involvement of the describer in his work, for he feared analysis based on mere hunch or subjectivity without any scientific validity. Also related is Weber's reticence about attributing facticity to his 'ideal types'. This self-conscious reluctance and care have often resulted in Weber's partial dismissal (seen as unfair by Ellul) as being merely a theoretician.⁵⁷ Ellul would argue that to see the dialectical movement of the social concepts as social facts, in which one is literally caught up, leads to an even higher level of objectivity. That higher level of a view of the whole of a particular society allows the diagnosis of an epidemic as an epidemic, into which there must be some intervention.

In order to seek a revolution -- that is, a total upheaval -- you must assume an overall viewpoint, take up a synthetic method, define the essence of given society and reject

⁵⁷ See, for example, M du B, p. 253. As mentioned in Chapter 3, footnote 16, Ellul now thinks that Weber over-systematized. He does not consider, however, that this drawback came from Weber's being a theoretician, but rather he considers it a methodological question. In conversation, M. Ellul said that his differences with Weber will be more pronounced in his forthcoming re-writing of TS.

that essence.⁵⁸

Thus, despite Ellul's great admiration for Weber, he does fault him for his failure, sociologically, to push on to the discernment of the forces within the whole. Weber's refusal to see the work of sociology in this way led to a calculated detachment that separated too radically a description of social action from action itself.⁵⁹ In other words, Weber's sociology did not go quite far enough in describing the forces of society to engender a needed response.

Beyond the limited use and work of sociology itself, Ellul comments on Weber's overriding despair, apparent in his understanding of what he saw and his response to it.⁶⁰ The Christian can openly admire Weber's great ability to look at reality without covering it up or

⁵⁸ Raymond Aron, Main Currents in Sociological Thought, Vol. I (New York: 1965), p. 5. Aron is fairly often cited with praise by Ellul. There is every indication that Weber considered his era also as an epidemic, but he considered that assessment to lie beyond the scope of sociology in such a way that led to an acceptance (however unwillingly) of the situation. As we shall see, he also perhaps considered that there was no cure for the epidemic.

⁵⁹ "The term 'sociology' is open to many different interpretations. In the context used here it shall mean "that science which aims at the interpretative understanding of social behaviour in order to gain an explanation of its causes, its course and its effects." Weber, Social and Economic Organization (New York: 1947), p. 88. (Weber is here using 'understanding' in the way that Ellul would probably use 'description'.) This account is somewhat different from Ellul's which would be closer to that of Marx's description of the forces, as just discussed in this sub-section.

⁶⁰ Ellul refers especially to the end of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, (New York: 1958) p. 182, where he speaks of the future. "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." M. Ellul also referred to Weber's own anguish (different from Christian suffering) which often incapacitated him. Although Ellul would largely agree with Weber's social analysis, it does not drive him to the same despair.

justifying it and he can only wish that more Christian intellectuals had the same courage and integrity for the realism to which they are called. Yet, in the long run, Weber was overcome by despair at what he saw, for without a hope from outside those structures, such a despair is inevitable. For Ellul, there is a great difference between saying that the sociological realities cannot supply their own understanding or that values are not demonstrable through the methods of sociology, and believing that there is no hope for there is no truth at all. That difference is the difference that not being a Christian made for Weber. Although Ellul finds it hard to say that being a Christian, by definition, would have made Weber a better sociologist, he does say that biblical faith would have prevented Weber from falling into the abyss.

Thus, in an encapsulated and perhaps much oversimplified examination of Ellul's view of Marx and Weber, one can see more clearly Ellul's own basic principles for the doing of sociology and also what he means by the requirement of Christian realism. On the very highest level, the discussions of the divergences between Marx and Weber show us how dialogue can instruct us about society and this debate, in Ellul's view, can take place solely within the realm and the limitations of human equipment, joined by anyone, whether Christian or non-Christian, with the tools and the discipline. In short, it does not take the unique revelation of biblical faith to discuss their procedures and accuracies. Nor can one say that their specific sociological errors stem exactly from a lack of faith -- or at least not in any way different from those of Christian social thinkers. For example, Marx's choice of the key points of the French Revolution is a debate now open to all, and his selection was quite justified considering the evidence available

to him. In neither case, would the Holy Spirit give an inside track for the actual doing of the analysis. Of course, both Marx and Weber were bound and influenced by their times, with their myths, confusions and lack of clear perspectives, but those failures do not form the core of Ellul's critique, for both seemed to see through the old myths remarkably well. On the other hand, Ellul also sees clearly that both were influenced by certain forms of biblical religions; for example, the passion for clarity about the world, moral judgments, steadfastness, hope. That argument does not undermine Ellul's position concerning the human possibilities, for Christianity had served as a major social force (along with, but distinct from, biblical faith that is the true de-sacralizer of all religions) within both Marx and Weber's milieu. Although these influences may explain some of the reasons for their respective sociologies, it would flatly contradict what each of them said about his own work to say that, for either Marx or Weber, biblical faith was a source for doing sociology. What Ellul does find most impressive about both men is the scope of their knowledge apart from revelation -- a knowledge with which man can participate, in a limited way, in the preservation of the world. At the same time, Marx and Weber also provide concrete examples of the very precise boundaries of knowledge apart from true understanding. In somewhat traditional language applied to a modern situation, Marx and Weber illustrate respectively the dangers of the sins of presumption and despair in the limited area of one of the descriptive scientific disciplines.

writings.

We shall adopt the simple attitude of the believer with his Bible who through the text that he reads is ultimately trying to discover what is the Word of God, and what is the final meaning of his life in the presence of this text.³

He is not being (facetiously or otherwise) merely self-effacing, but rather he has definite views on the way in which his particular task in this area (which he calls biblical or theological reflections and which he finally distinguishes from straight theology or exegesis) should be pursued.⁴ In the foundational chapter, I have already discussed the distinction Ellul makes between the theologian and the Christian intellectual: it is in his biblical reflections that the final difference becomes clearest. Also, as mentioned in Part A, Chapter 3, the verb réfléchir means 'to hold up to a mirror' -- and his biblical reflections aim finally at holding up our present society to the mirror of good theology. With respect to the explication of certain passages in the Bible, in conversation, Ellul referred to Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans with whose exegetical principles he would by and large concur. The main difference between the two writers comes in their final orientations. "[W]e theologians serve the layman best when we refuse to have him especially in mind and we simply live of our own, as every honest workman must do."⁵ While Ellul would agree that wrestling with specific

³ P of G, p. 12.

⁴ Much of this specific discussion arose in conversation with M. Ellul. In the foundational chapter b (i), I have discussed what he means by theology (the taking of the Bible as a whole), and he distinguishes it from exegesis which is the explication of specific passages. As we shall see, there are times when he wants to make distinctions between the two and other times, for example in his own bibliography, the link is so close that he can almost equate the two. Normally, his intent is clear from the context.

⁵ E to R, p. 5

texts is central and while his own method, as we shall see, embroils him in many of the same disputes as the exegete, his final task retains a different emphasis. For him, it involves keeping in mind, at all times, the most urgent needs of the laity. The two jobs remain closely allied, for Ellul wants to show how the laymen can appropriate exegesis and theology for their daily lives in the world of technique. Furthermore, where adequate, preliminary exegetical work is lacking, Ellul is prepared to undertake that aspect as well, so that often his biblical writings combine both dimensions. Where Ellul would differ comes in the fact that exegesis is preliminary for him and when that work has already been done, he is quite content to leave it and refer to other sources.⁶

An indication of Ellul's specific concerns when turning to the Bible is immediately apparent when one looks at the themes of his biblical writings. Rather than working through the Bible book by book, or looking at the pre-eminent books in isolation or drawing together the parts into a systematic theology, he prefers to approach the Bible for guidance on specific problems facing people today. This generalization applies equally to his studies on specific books of the Bible such as The Politics of God and The Politics of Man, The Judgment of Jonah, L'apocalypse: Architecture en Mouvement⁷, and to his more

⁶ For example, See HTA, p. 186, where he is quite happy to leave out his own studies on hope, for the exegesis has already been done adequately by Neher. That reference indicates that he sees the exegesis as preliminary. Also, his own reliance on Barth's theology shows that his own work is to consider the implications, in the world, of that stance.

⁷ This last book is perhaps the closest to straight exegesis, but even there, he is trying to show that the book of Revelation, if properly read, does speak to our situation.

obviously thematic books such as L'Homme et L'Argent, The Meaning of the City, and to his quite general writings such as The Presence of the Kingdom and Hope in Time of Abandonment. He is not trying to popularize the Bible nor to inflect it to make it relevant to an indifferent population by means of "short-lived pseudo-simplifications".⁸ Certainly, Ellul is not trying to verify the Bible nor shore it up with content drawn from our situation. Quite the contrary, for him, it is the Bible which supplies the primary witnesses to what is eternally true; therefore, it speaks as clearly to modern people as it did to its original readers. Since the Bible supplies the revelation of truth, he turns there to reflect on the meaning of what is going on in the world, to find the source through which one can grapple with life and to respond in the light of the biblical teachings. In short, what does the Bible say to specific areas of my life?

Within the corpus of Ellul's theological writings, there are, then, two aspects of his overall task which come together in one type of writing. First, he includes one-half of his doctrine of the two realms--just as his sociological writings (which formed the basis of Part A) contain the other half. He himself underlines this point in "Mirror of these Ten Years", where he says that he deliberately writes a theological counterpart for each of his social writings.⁹ The aspect of the actual reading of the Bible clarifies the mirror up to which he will hold his social descriptions. It is this part that comes closest to the

⁸ E to R, p. 5 Ellul would like Barth's reference to drawing modern rather than ancient parallels (*Ibid.*, p. 11), and he himself does so with great vigour. Barth would be more apt to be leery of the dangers of illustration and commentary as undermining unadulterated exegesis.

⁹ See once more "Mirror", p. 201.

work of the exegete or the theologian. Secondly, Ellul argues out his overall task in his theological books and not in his sociological ones. Because the two realms cannot, in his final view, be held apart, the end of his theological writings is to spell out the details of the doctrine of the two realms in this age. Since the two aspects of his theological writings move together to the heart of his specific task as a Christian intellectual, it may seem somewhat pedantic to dwell at great length on the way he reads the Bible, in distinction from his actual reflections on modern society. At the same time, it is the purpose of this thesis to come to an appreciation of how Ellul understands and goes about his task. Although it is not always feasible to keep the parts of his theological writings separate, basically this Part will focus on the principles with which he undertakes his biblical readings, including the way in which his reflections are closely allied to that reading. In other words, it will not be a précis of his theological writings as such, but rather a drawing together of his exegetical-theological principles (often discernible only by inference and from the writings taken as a whole), which lead to the requirement of reflection. It will focus on the mirror itself.¹⁰ Only when that part of Ellul's stance, which forms the background necessary for his reflections has been ascertained, is it possible to place his conclusions in the clearest possible perspective. Only then shall I examine what he sees as the meaning of our society in the presence of the Bible.

¹⁰ A good example comes in PMM, which he says is not a theology of prayer (see preface, p. viii), even though there are many theological references and starting points. It is a theological reflection for modern people. This part will not discuss that book in full detail, but it will provide the framework for his approach, so that PMM, as one example, can be read with a maximum of clarity and so that this book can be seen within the perspective of his whole task.

Although Ellul's sociological writings have provoked much controversy and diverse interpretation, it would appear that his theological position is even more complex and more open to misunderstanding. Furthermore, it has received less public attention. Therefore, in Part B, I shall go into more detail than in Part A and, especially in Section 1, I shall include in my discussion more of the debates within biblical studies in which he participates with a substantial contribution. The result will be that this Part will be considerably longer than the first one. A second, related preliminary comment concerns the use of theological language. As I indicated in the general Introduction, because the issues here are in fact theological ones, it would be inappropriate to transfer them to another plane. Since Ellul's own task, although sustained by theological roots, is not purely theological, the balance has to remain delicate. Throughout the rest of this thesis, I shall try, as much as possible, to avoid the use of esoteric, theological shorthand, while remaining close to Ellul's own principles. To examine those principles, I shall divide part B into two sections -- the first one concerning his view of the Bible as Holy Scripture, which governs the way in which he approaches any reading of the Bible or any reflection on it, and the second section dealing with what he sees in his specific readings; that is to say, the central foci of the content of the Bible.

The basic thesis of Section 1 will be the utter centrality of Ellul's belief that the Bible is God's book -- a belief which affirms that the Bible is not entirely a book resembling other books. Above all, Ellul sees that the source of the Bible lies beyond the Bible itself and even beyond the writers, holding it together in a unique way. Since

the source is not of human origin, he believes that the criteria for understanding the Bible must come from within biblical faith and not from other human sources outside of it. From that starting point, in an attempt to see what Ellul says is involved in this fundamental assertion, Section 1 will be further subdivided into two chapters. Chapter 5 will discuss what it means to say that God's self-revelation provided the source of the writing of the Bible. This concern will be approached from two different, but interconnected, directions. First, I shall discuss Ellul's view of the radical unity of the Bible in witness to Jesus Christ (that is, to God's self-revelation). This statement of unity has very definite repercussions for the way in which he approaches the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. From his standpoint, they go together to form a single witness to the Event of Jesus Christ. Similarly, I shall discuss the tension he maintains between the parts of the Bible and the Bible as a whole (including the significance of the closing down of the canon.) This segment will stress the unity of the Bible. A second aspect of the way in which he sees the Bible as God's book comes, once more, in His use of human intermediaries. In the foundational chapter, I have already indicated how this belief shapes Ellul's account of the Church: in Chapter 5, the issue will emerge from the importance of the fact that the Bible has been written down in concrete form. The two factors of the unity of the Bible and the use of human recorders converge in the way in which God has made Himself known through the means of the Bible. Since it is God's book, not only is He its source, but finally only He can help interpret what it is saying to the here and now situation of the readers. Chapter 6 will delineate how Ellul does not shirk from

this final implication of his original position. For him, a commitment to God's truth can contribute not only to any degree of certainty about the content of what is read, but also to the transformation of the Bible from being seen as a document (or, in all likelihood, a series of ancient ones) like other documents, to being seen as the source of the proper response to the world. Ellul believes that this link is possible only through the assistance of God's activity as Holy Spirit (which will be a topic of this chapter). It is this belief which grounds his rejection of the mediation of philosophy in favour of a 'dialectic of confrontation' between the two realms. In the final analysis, he maintains that a faithful reading of the Bible centres on prayer as the meeting point between God and man -- the only true link between the written word of the Bible and the life of the Christian. This chapter will attempt to show the way in which he sees that a proper reading of the Bible leads undeniably and directly to the further task of biblical reflections. Chapters 5 and 6 will combine in spelling out what can loosely be called Ellul's methodology in biblical studies. Because of his practice of commenting on other approaches, I shall add a Postscript to Section 1, in which his arguments will be highlighted by contrast to other positions, which he rejects as not being based on the conviction that the Bible is God's book.

With Section 1 as a background, Section 2 will attempt to give some guidelines for Ellul's specific readings in the biblical field. The basic thesis of this section is Ellul's belief that the revelation of Jesus Christ centres on the relationships among God, man and the rest of creation. Once again, the section will be divided into two chapters. Chapter 7 will be concerned with Ellul's examination of the biblical

teachings about creation, the fall and salvation -- as illuminated by Jesus Christ. Here, the emphasis falls on the questions of human responsibility, of the implications of the human tendency to reject the original relationship with God in favour of man's independence and finally of the re-establishment of the proper relationships as covenant. Although in this chapter I shall devote much attention to Ellul's reading of the early chapters of Genesis, it will also involve the content of the unity of the Bible. Furthermore, in its emphasis on Ellul's view of salvation as right or healthy relationships, this chapter will provide the source for the discussion in the Conclusion of Ellul's understanding of la société technisée as a question of the human relationship to technique. This chapter by itself, however, would not be sufficient, for Ellul does not think that the Bible points to static relationships; therefore, Chapter 8 will deal with Ellul's understanding of what the Bible says about history. In short, for him, it is the vehicle for the on-going relationship between God and man -- which God, from His side, never breaks. Ellul's specific reading of the Bible reveals that all the responses of human history, as human attempts to be separate from God, are never totally rejected by God. That is to say, although people are continually in revolt from the order of God, He does not cut them off, but instead He continually takes up human activities and transforms them. Thus, the final relationship between God, man and the rest of creation will include all the immediate desires and futile human pursuits. Once again, Ellul derives his position from what he sees as the biblical witness to the central Event of the revelation of Jesus Christ. From this chapter will come, for the Conclusion, Ellul's understanding of why the society we live in cannot simply be left to its

own devices. Bearing in mind his final purpose of reflecting on what the total revelation entails for understanding our society, the pivotal aspects on which I shall focus in Part B as a whole are these of power, responsibility and change -- within the relationships revealed by Jesus Christ.

In fact, the Bible tells us of a world which is situated within the promise of God made in all faithfulness -- which He will never betray because He always fulfills His word. Similarly, the Bible announces a Promise which is already present in the world. We must examine these two aspects in a bit more detail.¹¹

¹¹ "The World", p. 20.

Overview

In no single writing does Ellul elucidate in full the methods by which he undertakes his biblical studies. Since, however, he has indicated a deliberate adherence to a defensible position, an attempt to pull together the strands is not necessarily imposing an alien order.¹ He never appeals to a specific interpretive guideline, for example, as outlined in the Talmud, or to a hierarchy within Scripture and very seldom to traditional authorities. Because he respects the different types of writing contained within the Bible, he does not advocate a single technique to the exclusion of all others.² His main principles come from acceptance of the Bible as having been instigated by God; otherwise, he sees only a very limited point in studying the Bible at all. Put most clearly, he sees the Bible as:

un livre qui, pour les croyants, contient la parole de Dieu. Dans ce livre, c'est Dieu qui parle. Il le fait au travers d'hommes, patriarches, prophètes, mais qui sont de simples véhicules, de simples porteurs d'un message, qui leur est délivré. . . . Mais toujours, c'est Dieu qui parle.³

¹ See, for example, P of G, p. 12 or M of C, p. xvii.

² See JJ, p. 46. He makes this kind of statement, as I shall show in Chapter 5, without sacrificing the context of the unity of the Bible. He does insist that the method of study must be subordinated to the content and style of what is written.

³ Psaumes, p. xv. In addition, he points out that the standards for inclusion in the canon of the Bible were stringent. See, for example, JJ, p. 10. It should be noted from the outset that he does not say that only believers can study the Bible at all. Nevertheless, in conversation, he did say that even non-believers should recognize that the Bible was written and originally received as being inspired by God. This dimension will be discussed at various points throughout this section and falls within the discussion of Part A, Chapter 3, concerning the use of the intellect.

This stance provides the source from which all the rest, for Ellul, must flow -- whether one is discussing the reading of the whole Bible; or a single book or even an isolated passage. Since the Bible is God's specific book, it is, therefore, not a book like other human books. Rather, the Bible always points beyond itself to its source -- the holiness of God.

Proclamer la Sainteté de Dieu, c'est le dire 'Autre' et 'Séparé'. Dieu est toujours autre que nous ne pouvons le croire, le penser, l'imaginer. La Création, devant Dieu, reconnaît. . . que Dieu n'est pas elle, ni en elle, . . . mais reconnu comme étant le Tout Autre (Saint). La création se reconnaissant elle-même tant que création, et renonçant de son fait à son 'ipséité', attestant donc sa propre dépendance. Il ne faut pas oublier, que, en très résumé, c'est cela que nous déclarons lorsque nous disons que Dieu est Saint!⁴

Because the Bible supplies the primary witness to what God had made known about His holiness, it is itself referred to as Holy Scripture. That title means that not only was God the source and the focal point of the writing of the Bible, but also it cannot be properly interpreted apart from a recognition of the total dependence of the reader upon God -- even for his interpretation. The main implication for reading the Bible comes in the requirement to focus on the source -- the same that has to inspire both the reading and the writing of the Bible. Therefore, Ellul would agree with the following statements.

No human word of Paul is absolute truth. In this I agree. . . with all intelligent people. But what does the relativity of human speech mean? Does relativity mean ambiguity? Assuredly it does. . . . But nevertheless, we must learn to see beyond Paul. This can be done, however, if, with utter loyalty and with a desperate earnestness, we endeavour to penetrate his meaning.

⁴ L'Apocalypse, pp. 255-6. In Chapter 7, I shall discuss how this statement refers to the description by Ellul of Israel or the Church as being 'a holy nation'. Here, I will be discussing only his view of the special status of the Bible.

[H]e will not let himself be bewildered by the voices of those other spirits, which so often render inaudible the dominant tones of the Spirit of Christ. . . so that all the other spirits are seen in some way or other to serve the Spirit of Christ.⁵

Only the conviction that the Bible is, in fact, God's authoritative book would likely lead to such a 'desperate earnestness'.

This principle of the uniqueness of the Bible as the primary witness to God leads to a central question for the Protestant sola scriptura tradition, of which Ellul is a leading exponent. Does this doctrine not lead in a vicious circle? One has to know God (at least to the point of accepting the Bible as His book) in order to be able to read the Bible properly and yet the Bible is the only source of true knowledge about God. One possible answer to this problem could come in stressing the uniqueness of the Bible as holy in itself, so that the question of which comes first, the conviction or the reading, remains an indissoluble mystery. Although that answer may remain orthodox, it does not explain why anybody reads the Bible in the first place. Without trying to explain away the mystery of the total 'otherness' of God, Ellul would say that the question has not been clearly stated. To understand his position, one has to turn to the distinction between God's self-revelation itself (what is referred to as 'the Word of God') and the written record of the Bible as the primary witness to that Word.

⁵ E to R, pp. 19, 17. The way in which Ellul thinks the reader is thereby bound by the words of the text will be discussed in Chapter 5, as will his attitude towards literalism. At this point, however, the discussion points to the inadequacy of certain forms of literalism that do not recognize that the Bible points beyond itself to its source which is the holiness of God. Also, when this quote refers to the 'spirit of Christ', as we shall also see in Chapter 5, for both Barth and Ellul, the phrase is synonymous with the source of the Bible being God.

Because of the closeness of the connection, many Protestants consider that the Bible participates in what it records: for Ellul, however, the two are not synonymous. The main link between the two parts of the 'vicious circle', reading and faith, is, for Ellul, the witness or the proclamation of the Church. One must remember his view that because God acts through human intermediaries, the Church has a responsibility towards the world (as I discussed in the foundational chapter). The relationship between the Bible and the proclamation of the Church allows Ellul to break out of the circle. Revelation is the self-disclosure of God, to which the biblical writers witness. Similarly, the Church, as the secondary witnesses, points to the same self-disclosure, via the primary witnesses.

So the revelation must be proclaimed, and its proclamation must be an event, an act of God, still reaching out to lost man. The second form of revelation is the proclamation. . . , first uttered by the apostles and prophets, and still uttered in the preaching of the church. But the testimony of the apostles and prophets has been recorded in Scripture; once canonized, Scripture remains the permanent basis of the proclamation of the church. Revelation is not the static property of the Scriptures, even though the church has canonized them in recognition of their permanent authority, and they alone must govern the proclamation. Even through Scripture, revelation happens as an event, in which the written word, like the proclamation of the church, becomes the Word of God. Scripture and preaching are spoken of as the medium, even the occasion, of God's self-disclosure, rather than its substance. God remains sovereign Lord, even in his revelation of himself.⁶

Although God could give His revelation to anybody He chose, He has decided to use Israel and the Church as the vehicle. In this way, following Karl Barth, Ellul tries to preserve the Reformation insights about the Bible.

⁶ Wm. Nicholls, Systematic and Philosophical Theology (London: 1969), p. 98. Since this excerpt is a clear statement with reference to Barth, I have used it to outline Ellul's position as well.

If the old doctrine of inspiration could be described as two-dimensional, confined to the flat pages of a book, Barth's was three- or even four-dimensional. Barth saw revelation as a historical event, behind and within Scripture and the life of the church out of which Scripture came, an event constantly renewed, without being repeated, in the proclamation.⁷

Ellul gets out of the vicious circle by combining witness, proclamation and special biblical studies in an indissoluble way. On the one hand, he does not discuss his methods in minute detail, for he says it is the Bible itself which supplies the standard. On the other hand, he must make the proclamation to all as part of the Church's responsibility to the world. The Bible is not actually a neutral book that, picked up cold, can be easily understood. Whereas the introduction to the Bible comes about as a result of the proclamation of the Church, acting as God's agent, the understanding of what is read comes only from within that community which accepts the Bible as witness to God's truth. The issue becomes complicated, but not insoluble, because the proclamation and the understanding of the Bible, for Ellul, following the Protestant tradition, go hand in hand.

This solution, which Ellul espouses, may not entirely satisfy non-believers; nevertheless, it does raise the discussion from a logically closed circle to a consideration of what the Bible, seen as God's book, really is. In order to appreciate Ellul's principles of biblical studies, one must recognize that he accepts the distinctive position of the Bible as pointing to God's ways which are not man's ways. As outlined in the introduction to Part B, the rest of section 1 will concern itself with the way in which this approach to the Bible determines Ellul's reading of it. Chapter 5 will centre on its unity

⁷ Nicholls, p. 99.

and uniqueness as a divine authority that has been written down by human beings and Chapter 6 will deal with the uniqueness of its reception by readers.

CHAPTER 5

GOD AS THE SOURCE OF THE WRITING OF THE BIBLE

a) The Radical Unity in Witness to Jesus Christ

Well then, that which constitutes Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ. Everything derives from the fact that Jesus is God, that Jesus is Lord and Saviour. Apart from that, there is only talk.¹

Because the Bible is God's book and because of the affirmation that Jesus Christ constitutes the self-disclosure of God and because of the affirmation in the first commandment telling people that God is one, Ellul has no doubt about the radical unity of the whole Bible as witness to Jesus Christ.

As the different books fall into different categories, so there must always be many different categories of interpretation, though always related to the unvarying central line: Jesus Christ.²

Even from within the Christian perspective, one can ask whether, in order to find this doctrine even in the New Testament, certain passages do not have to be selected and elevated as the standard of interpretation for all the others, that are thereby diminished in stature. In this case, Ellul would have to validate his claims of the divinity of Jesus on the basis of the post-biblical formulations of the Christian

¹ To Will, p. 88. There is no misunderstanding when he also says, "it was the totality of God who was in the Son". (HTA, p. 102). See also, HTA, p. 285, footnote; L'Apocalypse, p. 79; p. 85. The statement of this belief also shows that Ellul draws a distinction between the Bible and Jesus as the Word of God to which it points.

² JJ, p. 46. See also P of G, p. 9; M of C, p. 134; "Chronique", p. 467. In conversation, M. Ellul said that he sees the biggest split in biblical studies as coming between those who see the Bible as a totality and those who see it piecemeal. That dichotomy is not strictly between believers and non-believers, although there is that tendency.

tradition, in distinction from the Bible itself. In short, is this interpretation of Jesus not derived from, and an imposition of, a strained and distorted reading of the New Testament? Ellul does not discuss the issue directly, for he doubtlessly accepts Barth's position that the New Testament is in accord in this matter.

There is no discernible stratum which does not in some way witness that it was felt that there should be given to this man, not merely a human confidence, but that trust, that respect, that obedience, that faith which properly can be offered to God. Allowing for every difference in viewpoint and concept, the heavenly Father, His kingdom which has come on earth, and the person of Jesus of Nazareth are not quantities which can be placed side by side, or which cut across each other, or which can be opposed to each other, but they are practically and in effect identical.³

Furthermore, since there has never been a Church without the Old Testament, it follows that Jesus Christ cannot be absent whenever the Old Testament speaks of God. "We are simply looking at the Old and New Testaments; at the One whom Scripture calls God."⁴ Ellul does not accept the view of God the Father as Creator in the Old Testament, God the Son as Redeemer in the Gospels and God the Holy Spirit as Comforter in the rest of the New Testament. Rather, he maintains the Trinitarian unity of God throughout the Bible.⁵ He does not see this unity as an abstract doctrine or as an imposed 'Christology' that separates the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection (as the Event of Jesus Christ which happened late in time) from the saving activity of God from the very beginning.

³ Church Dogmatics, IV 1, p. 161.

⁴ Ibid., III, 3, p. 186. See also Calvin's Institutes, I, 13.

⁵ This thesis is not concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity as such. More simply, it is an attempt to put Ellul's principles into a clear perspective. His understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit will be discussed in Chapter 6. Again, it is accurate to say that he follows Barth for a dogmatic formulation of the Trinity.

Because Jesus Christ is God, there can, according to Ellul, be no separation, simply on a linear basis, of before and after the Incarnation. This 'simply' of course does not imply a simple doctrine; nevertheless, Ellul would certainly agree with Barth concerning the time problem.

Don't let yourselves be led astray by the difficulty of the time concept, which might well result from this. The world came into being, it was created and sustained by the little child that was born in Bethlehem, by the Man who died on the Cross of Golgotha, and the third day rose again. That is the Word of creation by which all things were brought into being.⁶

This statement is not as easy as Barth makes it sound. Put rather simplistically, there is no explicit mention of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament nor has the Hebrew tradition ever viewed its Bible as Trinitarian. Although one may question Barth's position, there is no doubt that it stresses the unity of the Triune God who is witnessed to throughout the Bible. If the radical unity of the Bible comes in witness to the one God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, then it follows that the study of biblical passages in the light of Jesus Christ is not at all strained, but rather it serves to illuminate what the text is saying.⁷ For both Barth and Ellul, the principle of unity is not imposed on the Bible, but rather it is proclaimed from it, so that others may participate in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. It is proclaimed as grounded in the unity of the Bible in witness to the one God and

⁶ D in O, pp. 57-58. For references from Ellul concerning the time sequence, see L'Apocalypse, p. 48; pp. 212-13.

⁷ As I shall discuss shortly, Ellul tends to focus much attention on the Old Testament, so that, although his interpretations may remain controversial, he cannot be accused of Marcionism.

for all of Ellul's biblical studies, one should remember that he sees this radical unity as total. Therefore, I shall now turn directly to the specific impact that this belief has on his view of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and between the individual books and the whole Bible.

i) The Relationship Between the Old Testament and the New Testament

[T]he New Testament is concealed within the Old, and the Old Testament is revealed by the New. As long as theology preferred to neglect this rule, as long as it was content to exist in a vacuum by claiming exclusive orientation to the New Testament, it was continually threatened by a cancer in its very bones.⁸

This quotation, although not his own, succinctly summarizes Ellul's own position on this major subject. Definitely, he rejects any notion of a progressive understanding from a primitive tribal religion to differentiated, universal principles of a loftier sort.

And the first item of evidence that cannot but appear is that Jesus Christ in no way modifies the Old Testament message. In this particular area also, [the city] Jesus Christ fulfills but does not change what was said in the law and the prophets. Everything that was said finds its true meaning in Jesus Christ but does not disappear or change.⁹

There was no decisive break in God's attitude towards man and the world. He neither breaks nor changes His Word, nor sends a new message. More

⁸ ET, p. 23.

⁹ M of C, p. 113. Also, in "CP?", Ellul states his opinion, quite definitely that there is no categorical difference between the two Testaments. Unlike even Calvin (Institutes, II, 10. 20), Ellul takes a strong stand against progressive revelation, especially within the Old Testament. He does speak of the Old Testament as the shadow of things to come (H et A, pp. 87-88), but that comment is in relation to Jesus Christ and not to the New Testament itself. He says, for example, in P of G, p. 13, that the orientation of II Kings is exactly the same as St. Paul's epistles. He wants to avoid the impression, given in any account of progressive revelation, that ultimately Christians can dispense with the Old Testament altogether. The content of this refusal to see an easy progression will be discussed in Chapter 8 concerning the Law-Gospel relationship.

important, He fulfills His promise given in the Old Testament. That promise from the very beginning related to the person of Jesus Christ. For example, "knowledge of the creation and of the original nature can only be had in Jesus Christ, in whom all things were made".¹⁰ Secondly, as I have discussed regarding the prophets, Ellul says that all prophecy has a two-fold nature, of which the second is its reference to Jesus Christ.

Like all prophets of Jesus Christ, he indicates and bears witness only to a second and relative aspect of what Jesus Christ will be and do. Nevertheless, this is also contained in the total revelation given in Jesus Christ.¹¹

In fact, he sees all the important aspects of the Old Testament (including even the city of Jerusalem itself) as types or figures or 'prophecies' of Christ from whom they all achieve their full and final significance.¹² This kind of declaration can give rise to a special and high pre-eminence only for the New Testament, for it alone can point fully to the fulfilment of the promise in time -- free of the ambiguities of the Old Testament. Ellul's particular stance, however, is somewhat different.

He maintains that the Bible is the totality of the witness to God who is revealing His one truth of the Incarnation and Resurrection of

¹⁰ To Will, p. 73.

¹¹ P of G, p. 11.

¹² When Ellul speaks of 'types' in the Old Testament (for example, P of G, p. 9; JJ, p. 17; H et A, p. 106), he is not articulating a well-developed technical language of typology. His approach is in the more general usage of Calvin; for example Institutes, III, 20, 25. It is his account of what is meant by saying that the New Testament is concealed within the Old Testament. The content of the message or promise will be discussed in Section 2. This section is concentrating only on Ellul's approach to the Bible.

Jesus Christ. In that truth there is no progress. Since, however, every aspect of the truth cannot be said at the same time, God (as a teacher) chose to give His truth in time sequence. Through the means of human events, God gave different aspects of His one truth -- teaching little by little, different ways at different times throughout the Bible, until the whole of it was complete. Because of this mode of teaching, one is forced perhaps to speak historically of a revelation that is somewhat progressive, but in truth there is none. The Bible must be taken as a whole; for example, he argues that there is no time sequence between Law and Gospel.¹³ He gives absolute pre-eminence only to the Incarnation and Resurrection as the Event of God to which each biblical witness has given partial primary witness. The New Testament, even though the Event has taken place, does not constitute the revelation itself. Rather, as was the case in the Old Testament, the various writers point directly to it. The final significance of St. Paul or St. James or St. Matthew comes only in the fulness of Jesus Christ, just as the final significance of Solomon or Jonah or Elisha does. According to Ellul, one cannot obliterate the Old Testament as having been surpassed, for it points to what is being fulfilled.

If there is not such God as the Old Testament reveals, then there is no incarnation; for if there is no God, then who or what could be incarnate in the person of Jesus?¹⁴

¹³ This discussion at this point derives from conversations with M. Ellul, who commented that he is in basic agreement with Barth's account of the relationship between Law and Gospel. See, for example, "Gospel and Law", Community, State and Church (New York: 1960), pp. 71-100. This stance in no way undermines his belief that the Event of Jesus Christ in time is absolutely central. Again, the relationship between Law and Gospel will be dealt with further in Chapter 8.

¹⁴ Violence, p. 75.

If the Church scraps the Old Testament, then there remains only an incomplete understanding of the New Testament -- just as the Old Testament remains incomplete without the complementary witness of the New Testament. The fulfilment of Jesus Christ does take place in time, but it is witnessed to by the prophets and apostles, both before and after the Event. Furthermore, he goes as far as to say that in truth, the Old Testament knew as much about God as did the New Testament or, to paraphrase St. Augustine, the Jews knew the whole of truth except that the Word became flesh. Ellul argues that nothing else can be meant by the teaching that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Old Testament. Therefore, one has to be extremely wary of referring to progressive revelation in the Bible.

This position also speaks to the specific issue of the Old Testament as both Hebrew and Christian scripture.¹⁵ Within his biblical studies, he does give some attention to the matter (as, for example, I have indicated concerning his discussion of prophecy): in conversation, he addressed himself to the exacerbated difficulty for post-biblical times. Ellul points to the tradition in Jewish scholarship that there are seventy different meanings or levels of meaning for every text; yet at the same time, there is a unity in the totality of the Bible, however mysterious that unity or totality may be (because it is God's book). For Christians, Ellul says that Christ does not supply the seventy-first meaning that wipes out the others; rather He is the unification of all the others in whom they are gathered together and finally and fully revealed as the totality of one truth. The result is that, in order to

¹⁵ For Ellul's view of the Bible as Muslim scripture, see HTA, p. 305.

understand in what the unity of Jesus Christ consists (that is, to understand what is being fulfilled), Christian biblical scholars must throw themselves into the same work that preoccupies Jewish scholars.¹⁶

They cannot simply consider that undertaking surpassed nor the seventy different levels as simple and immediately self-evident, for it took a small library to give God's revelation. Concerning the big problem of radical differences in interpretation of the Old Testament, he maintains that they are not cut and dried down the middle between Christians and Jews. More precisely, he sees many shades of variation on each side that overlap and, at this point, he uses the illustration of importance or the lack of importance attached to the fall.¹⁷ Similarly, concerning the argument of some Christians that since the Jews have radically misinterpreted their own scriptures, it would be a waste of time to look at false readings, he counters that the fault is certainly not limited to Jews who have generally paid much closer attention to the Bible as God's book. Therefore, he advocates the closest possible collaboration between Christian and Jewish students of the Old Testament, in the attempt to come to the deepest possible understanding of the whole Bible as Holy Scripture.

¹⁶ For a discussion that there are the same levels of meaning, all finding their unity in Christ, in the New Testament, see "Du Texte", p. 126 ff.

¹⁷ In conversation, he mentioned that certain Jewish scholars; e.g. Neher, give a high pre-eminence to the fall in the Hebrew Bible, whereas many Roman Catholic thinkers tend to underplay it. He concludes that it is difficult to make generalizations without detailed studies undertaken non-polemically between Christians and Jews who take the Bible seriously. This spirit of dialogue, as I shall discuss shortly, he also maintains is itself biblical.

To underscore his conviction about the two Testaments, Ellul gives at least as much time to the Old as to the New.¹⁸ As indicated in the quotation above from Violence (footnote 14), he does tend to turn to the Old Testament as the corrective to certain errors that he finds rampant in any Christian thought that minimizes the Old Testament as carnally and culturally conditioned.

For my part, I am merely trying to read the Old Testament texts over and beyond cultural definitions. They tell me a number of things which clearly do not derive from any known culture, and especially not from the Middle Eastern cultures surrounding Israel. There is an irreducible kernel there. Moreover, those who strive above all else for the elimination of God know this very well. Their chief enemy is the Old Testament. It has to be reduced to dust, dismembered and emptied of all content, so that they can finally discard the membra disjecta in oblivion. It is the constant temptation of rational scepticism.¹⁹

Most importantly, Ellul emphasizes the Old Testament to provide the concreteness for, and to avoid the possible pitfalls of, the doctrine of the two realms. He thinks that Christian faith, especially with its exhortation to be the ambassadors of God in the world, has direct repercussions on all areas of life (to the extent that it does matter

¹⁸ To date, he has published three books on specific books of the Bible -- JJ, P of G (both of which refer to books that come from the Old Testament and which many Christians consider to be obscure) and L'Apocalypse (which many Christians tend to shy away from). He seems to choose his books in order to show the unity of all parts of the Bible in witness to Jesus Christ. Similarly, he has only one article dealing specifically with the New Testament, "Le Sens", and in it he goes to some lengths to show that St. Paul is not giving a witness that is different from that pointed to in the Old Testament.

¹⁹ HTA, p. 110. See also HTA, p. 118 concerning the necessity to understand the parables. Generally, he looks to the Old Testament for models for the proper Christian witness. All the examples indicate that there is a danger that the New Testament taken alone can be so easily misconstrued as to lead man astray. This conclusion does not undermine the possibilities of the Holy Spirit as much as it looks at what has been said by those who persist in separating the two Testaments.

even what you wear and what you eat).²⁰ In order to grasp its implications in a concrete and realistic way in which no area of life is exempt, Christian faith requires the Old Testament. Although he does not advocate a legalism, he does want adherence to the Spirit that both inspired Mosaic Law and fulfilled it.²¹ He turns there for concrete guidance for obedience to God's commandments both to the individual and to the whole Church. Therefore, he keeps both Testaments in the foreground of his studies which will form the basis of his concrete reflections.

ii) The Parts and The Whole

Having emphasized the unity of the Bible, Ellul also stresses the second issue of the relation of the parts to the whole; that is, the complementary view that the unity is neither simple nor easily discernible, for the diversity is never dissimulated. It would be wrong, in his view, to force a false unity that betrays the proper unity. Furthermore, it is not enough simply to state that there is a unity in

²⁰ See, for example, "C and P", p. 749. Another example, given in conversation, was that not being a follower of the latest fashion would be within the spirit of Mosaic Law as would the avoidance of hamburger instead of pork for a North American. The issue will be discussed further in Chapter 7. For now, I wish only to underline the importance of the Old Testament for his thought.

²¹ In this respect, it is interesting to compare Ellul's specific task with that which Bonhoeffer undertook (before his imprisonment). Particularly of note is his concern with the 'concretion of the proclamation'. For an interesting comment that could be paralleled for Ellul at this point, see J.A. Phillips, The Form of Christ in the World (London: 1967), pp. 84-94. He summarizes Bonhoeffer's approach to the Bible by saying, "One might describe this outcome as a self-conscious turn towards legalism in Bonhoeffer, if by legalism we mean an understanding of the scriptures as direct, clear and wholly relevant commands; and by self-conscious we mean that Bonhoeffer was fully aware of the dangers involved in the decision he had made." (pp. 90-91). Secondly, when I speak of the 'Spirit which inspired the Mosaic Law', I am underlining the Trinitarian aspect of Ellul's reading of both Testaments. See also H et A, p. 46. Ellul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Christ, without trying to show how the parts fit together. His argument about the unity in Christ would in no way be strengthened by ignoring the division of the whole Bible into different books with different themes and different purposes. How then can one give the parts their due recognition without severing belief in the unity of the whole?

In order to answer this question of diversity within the unified witness of the Bible, Ellul does not waver from his primary assertion that the Bible is God's book. From that stance, he draws the conclusion that each text must be taken for what it purports to be, as given in its entirety. One cannot simply dismiss certain sections as not making sense or as later copying errors or as interpolations.²² Ellul never pushes this conclusion (as we shall see further in the Postscript to this Section) to deny the findings of historical studies that indicate different layers which were subsequently compiled into a whole. He does believe, however, that the various layers and compilers were equally inspired by God, with the result that the texts are assembled as they ought to be. We are, therefore, not subsequently entitled to take them apart, to rearrange the different strands and to analyze them separately.²³

²² See once more, for example, his discussion of the song of Jonah in JJ, pp. 46-58.

²³ At one point, in "La Technique", p. 108, he goes as far as to indicate that Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 may have come from other layers of myth. That observation, however, does not affect its truth as having its source in God, for God has adopted the myth and transformed it completely into a revelation. Then, its importance becomes something else other than myth, so that generally, he warns about the dangers of calling Genesis a myth or pulling apart the various sources. (See, for example, To Will, p. 270). Also, he warns about seeing the Old Testament simply as a series of cultural definitions. (See, for example, HTA, p. 110 or H et A, p. 40). For other passages concerning the question of layers of composition, see M of C, pp. xvii-xviii; JJ, p. 10. As I shall

While he thinks that a grave danger comes in dividing up the books of the Bible into separate strands and layers, in a way that it was not originally brought together, Ellul also recognizes that the division of the Bible into books signifies that each can somehow stand on its own.

Each book of Scripture has its own particular sense, emphasis and perspective. Each reflects one aspect of God's total revelation. Each imparts a unique and singular truth. Yet they cannot be rigorously separated from one another. On the one hand, they are not to be confused with one another. Each has its special character. We are not just to draw out the main lines. This would be of no particular value in the Bible. Naturally everything is in everything. But it seems to me that the idea of finding everything in every text serves no useful purpose.²⁴

He urges believers to take each book on its own terms accepting the wide differences and not as merely symbolic of something else with only a remote connection to it.²⁵ Only by seeing God's will for Israel (in the Old Testament) and the Church (in the New Testament) in very particular situations can Christians learn of the salvific action of the Triune God. Only by studying each book directly, as it stands, is it

discuss further concerning his attitude towards biblical criticism in general, there is perhaps more difficulty than meets the eye with this stance; for example, the biblical claims of authorship. For now, it is important to note that he does not allow any portion, no matter how difficult (for example, see To Will, p. 208 about the commandment concerning herem), to be thrown out or dismissed or rearranged.

²⁴ P of G, p. 12. In light of the preceding discussion, this statement applies also to each Testament as a whole, as well as to each book. He does not discuss whether each verse is equally revelatory, but he does indicate that each part, as it stands, is necessary for the whole revelation.

²⁵ See the foundational chapter a(ii) concerning his view of prophecy in this regard of having two levels, and P of G, p. 13ff. concerning the history books. This statement applies to all the books within the Bible.

possible to gather the various dimensions of the different aspects of revelation. At the same time, he sees each book as more than an isolated self-contained fragment and the unity is not simply the combination of the parts into a random heap. One must remember again that, for Ellul, Jesus Christ constitutes the total revelation and He remains the authority for and beyond all the witnesses. Each witness points to an aspect which is fulfilled in that total unity. Similarly, Ellul does not think that the books are topically divided, in such a way that one could add up the themes to arrive at the underlying principle(s). The unity consists in their combined witness to a unique Event on God's part and not to the articulation of eternal principles. This view of the relationship between the self-sufficiency of the parts and their unity as partial witnesses to the total revelation which is beyond all of them touches on several important issues concerning how to view the Bible as having its source in God.

First, he believes that each part, required as a facet of the whole revelation, can be seen only in the light of the others. Each part, first of all, must be seen clearly on its own and then with that clarity it acts further as a sounding board or as a mirror for every other part.

And by pressing the individual text too hard, do we not run the risk of obliterating that meaning discerned only by the reflection of one fragment in the mirror of another?²⁶

This view of the Bible, analagous to that of a highly polished diamond, has implications for a number of controversial questions. For example, to maintain that the total truth of the message lies in the inter-relationship of the parts, also means that it is not possible to lop off any part of the Bible and still maintain the perfection of the whole.

²⁶ M of C, pp. xvii-xviii.

In other words, Ellul rejects any search for a canon within the canon of the Bible.²⁷ For him, it is significant to wrestle with the question, not of what parts should be accorded pre-eminence, but of what is the relationship among the difficult parts. Similarly, this view of the relationship of the parts speaks to the very difficult problems arising when the reader confronts apparent contradictions in the Bible. Since the Bible records the Word of God, Ellul argues that the believer should look through the alleged discrepancy to the one truth beyond either side and of which either side is a part. A prime example comes in the obvious observation that there are two creation accounts in Genesis.

How does it happen that these two accounts are placed side by side? How explain the fact that the rabbis, who were not imbeciles, did not try to harmonize them? Why are they handed over to us unaltered as the word of God by Israel and Jesus?

Might it not, perchance, be possible that their confrontation, their mutual relationship, contains one teaching, one truth, on which each of these accounts throws light? In that case, it would not be a matter of dissociating them and putting them in opposition to one another. . . but on the contrary of giving heed to them in their diversity in order to learn complementary aspects of one single revelation.²⁸

²⁷ This rejection would include various attempts; for example, Luther's rejection of James as 'a straw epistle' or the rejection of big chunks (often St. Paul) or the search for a key writer (often St. Paul) around whom the others must revolve or the search for the lost Gospel behind the Gospels or the school that traces the central 'credal' events of the Old Testament. In conversation, Ellul easily said that, for any reader, certain books will pose a puzzle concerning why they are in the canon; nevertheless, they cannot simply be removed.

²⁸ To Will, p. 270. With a similar outlook on this same matter, Leo Strauss writes, "This account may only supplement the first account, but it may also correct it and thus contradict it. After all, the Bible never teaches that one can speak about creation without contradicting oneself." (Commentary, 1967, p. 49 of "Athens and Jerusalem") Perhaps Ellul's most sustained account of the unity lying behind apparent contradictions comes in H et A, concerning the unified biblical witness with regard to money.

Rather than seeing the two parts dead-locked in contradiction, it would perhaps be more helpful to see them in constant dialogue, with each part enlightening or even correcting false impressions that would likely be gleaned from taking one part as the whole truth. It is not a question of synthesis, but rather a question of the human possibilities for discussing the single truth about God that lies beyond any total human grasping. Ellul's emphasis on dialogue assumes a great importance, as we shall see, not only within the Bible itself, as a unified source, but also for any subsequent reflections on it. That relationship among the parts serves as a general guideline for Ellul for reading any single part.

They become true only when they are in agreement with the rest of the biblical revelation without changing its direction. In no sense are we to interpret the symbols by secret keys, traditions etc. We are to interpret them solely by the Bible itself.²⁹

Once more, he thinks that this principle does not come from an imposition on the Bible, but rather it emerges from the complicated unity contained within the Bible itself. If a single passage seems totally at odds with the rest, either the reader has not struggled hard enough to discover the meaning or else he has isolated it to push it too far on its own. In either case, the belief in the Bible as God's book does provide the impetus to ascertain some sense from the great diversity within the Bible.

²⁹ JJ, p. 46. This position also explains one reason why he is reluctant to do classical exegesis, especially if it tries to single out one book as definitive. He does not say that exegesis must fall into this error and certainly he thinks it is a good idea to take individual books seriously on their own hook, but he does seem to think that it is susceptible to fragmenting the whole. Mainly, he sees this danger as being prevalent at the moment, and that is why he stresses it at a time when the unity is often neglected.

The second major area in which Ellul thinks that the wide divergence within the Bible itself has importance lies in his conclusion that it points to the movement within revelation. It is not simply a static book and the continuous activity within it has to modify somewhat the image of the diamond. In short, the manner in which the books of the Bible are presented at different times and by different authors, for Ellul, points to the activity of God and the activity of the human response as being most important.

If it is true that the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ is a God who reveals himself in history, are we taking this revelation seriously if we fix a given word of this revelation to one moment in history, like a butterfly tacked to the wall, so that, completely framed by cultural data, it can no longer be moved from there to mean something else? . . . Is the important point not that these texts -- the bearers of the Word -- have moved, that they have come together in order to bear a wider and deeper meaning? This is why an inclusive meaning of the text appears indispensable to me. When one discovers from the first text of today's Bible to the last, from the text dated as the oldest to the most recent, an identical, continuous, and coherent revelation, would one not be losing the essential if he insisted on considering only each solitary fragment instead of the movement carrying it along?³⁰

This emphasis on the movement or direction of revelation is another way of stating what Ellul sees as the scriptural witness to God's activity as opposed to His essence.³¹ Since this question will re-emerge in Section 2, for now I simply mention that he finds this movement witnessed to in the type of diversity that makes up the Bible. For him, the very construction of the Bible forces the reader to concentrate on this dimension. As I have already stated, Ellul does not see the movement as progressive and God's will for people does not change, for the focus is

³⁰ M of C, p. xviii. I shall discuss in Chapter 8 what Ellul means by history and by God acting in history.

³¹ See also the foundational chapter, pp. 60-61.

always on the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection. What it does mean is that truth cannot simply be fixed down to a single period of time and it cannot be divorced from the activity of God and man.

Finally, for our immediate concerns of the unity and diversity of the Bible, one major question emerges from Ellul's emphasis on the movement of revelation. Since the end of time has not yet been brought about, God must still be actively revealing Himself. Why then was the canon closed for both Testaments? Once more, this question forces us back to Ellul's belief in the centrality of the Event of Jesus Christ. Concerning the Old Testament, Ellul says at least twice that the canon was closed because God became silent to the Jews and they recognized the fact.³² No matter how Israel grew as a nation, it was accepted that political exploits, in themselves, did not constitute revelation. Thus, theoretically for the Jews (although they would doubtless consider such speculation dangerous and futile), it would appear that, in principle, the canon could be re-opened. Ellul would claim that such is not the case for Christians. He argues that God became silent for the Jews, for that to which the Old Testament was directed was about to be fulfilled. Since the people of Israel were entrusted with the revelation until this time, Ellul accepts the argument that the Jewish canon, without the Apocrypha, constitutes the proper body of Scripture before the New Testament. Although he does not discuss explicitly in his writings the determination of the New Testament canon, one can make inferences from his biblical writings. Once the promise is fulfilled in time and the primary witnesses have proclaimed the once for all Event of revelation (both before and after it in time), then, until the final

³² See M of C, pp. 111-112 and HTA, p. 117.

coming of the new Jerusalem, the work of the Bible itself is complete. According to Ellul, since the Bible is God's book, of course the decision to close the canon of either Testament was not a purely human one: the work was accomplished through the inspiration of God Himself.³³ God's saving activity does not cease, even as it did not begin with the central revelation in time, but the Bible, as the primary, most immediate witness to the saving Event, is complete. From then on, there can be only secondary witnesses to the same, continuing activity of God. An integral part of the combined witnesses, in accordance with the biblical presentation, for Ellul, always remains both the movement of revelation through the parts and the human intermediaries to the one truth. Also the activity always continues in the same vein, but in concrete situations, for all of human history.

Throughout Ellul's biblical writings, the crux of the matter lies in maintaining the proper balance between the parts of the Bible and the whole to which they combine in giving witness. It is never entirely humanly possible to determine where the appropriate point lies. On the one hand, Ellul would certainly heed Barth's warning about searching for the veritable Gospel rather than for the whole Gospel.³⁴ On the other hand, particularly with the kind of isolated biblical studies that

³³ Since the issue here is a theological one, the problems of the time sequence remain inconsequential. Human recognition of God's activity is bound to be delayed somewhat from the actual activity. For example, although the Jewish canon was not fixed until after the Christian era, the last canonical book in the Hebrew Bible was in fact written before. Similarly, this argument does not necessarily claim apostolic authorship for all the New Testament, nor does it disregard the fluid, uneven and even turbulent history of the setting of the New Testament canon. Despite all the political and other vagaries connected with the establishment of the New Testament canon, he emphasized, in a conversation, the importance of accepting the witness of the peoples of God in the question of canonicity.

³⁴ See E to R, pp. 12-13.

he sees as predominant today, he sees the danger of concentrating on one part in vacuo. In his own biblical studies, he tries to maintain a fine line, without ossifying it through a set, predetermined definition. In this part of Chapter 5, I have stressed that the source of the Bible in God's revelation provides a unifying focal point. The governing principle of the relationship between the whole and the parts stems from this belief.³⁵ In the Postscript, we shall see that he takes on polemically any understanding of the Bible that asserts that it was written and put together as a solely human document. At the same time, Ellul argues that the Bible provides the paramount example of God's specific mode of acting through human intermediaries -- in order to make His holiness known. Therefore, included within the confession that the Bible is God's book, Ellul also highlights the aspect that it was written down and that it was done so by men. For him, to say that the 'Holy Spirit' inspired people in biblical times and can still inspire people today is not sufficient by itself. That stance could lead to belief in individual inspiration that totally bypasses the Bible and Ellul does not believe that is the way in which God has chosen to make Himself known. In order to show that Ellul stands firmly within the sola scriptura tradition, I shall now turn to his emphasis on the Bible as written.

³⁵ Although he claims that the source for his different studies is not necessarily the same, this approach to the Bible as a constant movement between the parts and the whole, with an emphasis on the movement throughout, certainly does parallel his approach to his sociological studies as discussed in Part A, Chapter 4(a).

b) The Bible as Written by Human Intermediaries

Ellul often stresses that God seldom acts ex nihilo, but rather through the agency of human intermediaries.³⁶ Concerning the Bible, the believer must appreciate God's decision to effect the activity of salvation through the material at hand. The Bible witnesses to the Word of God as received by specific human beings and as mediated through their specific languages. That conviction constitutes his doctrine of the Bible as wholly human and wholly divine.³⁷ He never argues a simple doctrine of verbal inspiration or inerrancy and he points to the folly of expecting any biblical figure to have an anachronistic knowledge.³⁸ The Bible indicates over and over again that God does not act in that manner. There is a sense in which he does not argue for the humanity of the Bible as forcefully as he does for its divine source, for he does not see as serious an opposition in this regard as, for example, Calvin and Luther did with the Anabaptists. In this era, far from being neglected, Ellul thinks that the analysis of the Bible as a

³⁶ This theme underlies much of the thought of P of G, but see especially pp. 20-22; 32. See also the foundational chapter of this thesis. Even in the special case of the prophets and apostles, whose freedom to say 'no' is suspended when they are required for a special task, a human intermediary, using human language, is still the vehicle of God's work. For Ellul's discussion of creatio ex nihilo, see Chapter 7, footnote 19. Concerning God's reason for acting in such a manner, Ellul would point to the holiness -- the 'wholly otherness' of God who would destroy man if He acted on His own. See Chapter 7 for a discussion of how God includes man in His work.

³⁷ The idea of the Bible as wholly human and wholly divine also, of course, comes in the fact that it provides the primary witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ. For a discussion of how Ellul discusses Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man, see Chapter 7(c).

³⁸ See, for example, M of C, p. 115 or the discussion in "CP?" concerning the concept of the 'Kingdom of God'.

human document has succeeded in dislodging all belief in its inspiration. He does want to pose the question from the slightly different perspective of the very human writers pointing beyond themselves to the source of their writing anything at all. He always maintains the strict requirement of holding the two sides together -- in order to bring out the implications of his basic stance regarding the Bible. Most of what he says on this theme serves to elaborate what has already been discussed in the foundational chapter and so far in this section. In short, to complement sub-section (a) of Chapter 5, he also underlines the place of 'literalism' in biblical studies; that is to say, the extent to which the reader should be bound by the actual words of the Bible.

Ellul has never criticized literalism for its strict adherence to the text. He agrees with that school that the written words of the Bible are the only primary witnesses to God's activity that we have: the unity of His activity in Jesus Christ is not enshrined anywhere else. Only through the Bible as it stands can one try to come even in the direction of the meaning God intends.³⁹ For Ellul, Christian faith without the letter of the Bible is impossible. Similarly, if people adhere to the 'writteness' of the Bible, they will be protected from the unwarranted speculation discussed in the general Introduction.⁴⁰ As indicated in the Overview to Section 1 (footnote 5), what he does attack is any form of naive literalism that refuses to insist that each text does have its own proper significance, or that forces certain parts in isolation from

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See, for example, P of G, p. 13.

40 See also, for further examples, M of C, p. 186 ff., concerning the new city, and p. 196 ff., concerning the appropriate use of symbolism.

the whole or that takes the seeming contradictions at face value on the grounds of credo quia absurdum.⁴¹ Interestingly enough, he attacks this brand of biblical scholarship for a slothful approach that does not take the Bible seriously enough. In order to understand Ellul's attack on naive literalism, one has to turn again to the way in which he sees the relationships among the Word of God, the written Scriptures as primary witnesses to that Word and the secondary witness of the Church in making both known. The point Ellul makes about literalism is that the reader of the Bible should be concerned about the source and its wholeness -- the same that inspires both the writing and the understanding of the Bible -- rather than simply attaching faith to a certain human record (or selected parts of it) in isolation from its source.⁴² Thus, in his approach to the literal meaning of the Bible, Ellul once more demonstrates how he sees the indissoluble connection in the two sides of his original statement concerning the Bible both as God's book and as it is given through human intermediaries. Even though cultural studies of Old and New Testament times have a relatively low

⁴¹ See, for example, HTA, p. 143 or JJ, pp. 10, 51. See also Part A, Chapter 3(a) i concerning the use of reason.

⁴² Concerning the problems of literalism, it is interesting to read Calvin's discussion of the Ten Commandments. See the Institutes II, 8, 8. Another side of pointing out the distinction between the Bible and the Word of God which transcends it comes in the following answer to critics of the sola scriptura principle who attack a literalism which is not implied. "The critique of orthodoxy stands or falls by resolutely keeping the opponent to the literal meaning of the text of Scripture. . . . Since however his opponents do not recognize as their authority the merely literal meaning of Scripture, the whole of Spinoza's critique of orthodoxy, in so far as that critique seeks to refute orthodoxy, rests on a petitio principii." (Leo Strauss, Spinoza's Critique of Religion [New York" 1965], p. 144) Although Ellul would not join issue on the specific question of Spinoza, he would agree that often modern literalism defends itself on naive, unwarranted grounds.

priority for his biblical studies, an acquaintance with the languages does become quite important.⁴³ One can be led towards the source only through the actual human languages.

Saying that knowledge of the languages is important for understanding the Bible opens Ellul to potential attacks from linguists. At no time, however, does he base his arguments on solely linguistic foundations nor does he analyze the Bible qua linguist. That is to say, he does not appeal to the bases of the languages to prove general traits or modes of thinking or even the religious self-consciousness of the Hebrews or the contrast between the self-understanding of the Hebrews and the Greeks as manifested in their languages. In fact, as I have already discussed, he wants to underline the unity of the whole Christian Bible despite the differences of cultural background or locale.⁴⁴ From Ellul's perspective, one could argue that any language could have been chosen by God to convey His message. It is not a question of studying the forms of the language alone, in the hope thereby of returning to a specific, earlier 'biblical culture'.

⁴³ Two minor points should be noted here. First, his own proficiency is a separate issue from the issue or principle involved. Secondly, he does not say that every Christian must learn Hebrew and Greek. The proficiency is part of the division of labour on behalf of the whole Church. See the foundational chapter, footnote 44.

⁴⁴ Again, one notes that he sees in "Le Sens" St. Paul as being in accord with what is revealed in the Old Testament. His conclusion, for example, in that article, although based on the actual wording of the texts, is not a technically linguistic one.

Naaman still entertains the ideas of his age, but he bends and subjugates them in the presence of the true God. . . . This is how faith transforms customs even though it leaves a man in his own culture.⁴⁵

For Ellul, the distinctiveness comes not simply in the special attributes of the language chosen, but in the source of revelation, Who chooses human language for His vehicle. In this sense, Ellul, although not totally unaffected, remains basically immune from attacks, such as James Barr's The Semantics of Biblical Language, which accuse biblical theology of using a mass of pseudo-linguistic arguments to impose a preconceived meaning on to the Bible. The two positions seem to start from different

⁴⁵ P of G, p. 36. It would be more important, therefore, to know one's own 'culture' than that of the Greeks or the Jews taken in a vacuum. This statement does not mean that Jewish 'culture' was unaffected by being the Chosen People, but it is the latter and not the former that is of fundamental importance.

In conversation, Ellul pointed out that the argument that any language could have been chosen holds in the case of Greek, for it was the vehicle for the universal proclamation of the witness and is fairly open to translation. In principle, the same is true for the Old Testament; nevertheless, he also said that the Hebrew language does hold a special place, for it was the language through which God gave His revelation to His particular people. Therefore, for the Hebrews, language and revelation were inextricably aligned. For example, the various levels of meaning (traditionally seventy, as mentioned above) and the word-play are not accidental, but rather they point directly to the very revelation itself. Furthermore, Ellul mentioned that Hebrew is linguistically unique and essentially not translatable. For example, he pointed to the first word of the Bible as being non-transferable perhaps even within Hebrew itself. A second example he uses is the tense sequence in Hebrew, (which will become important in Chapters 7 and 8). See, for example, TFL, p. 140. This tense sequence, which he sees as very important in conveying the content of revelation, is extremely difficult to translate into other languages and still maintain the same force. Despite these inextricable links between language and revelation, he still maintained that the mysteries of Hebrew which contain the revelation cannot be wrested from it by linguistic science or by structural analysis. For example, the fact that Hebrew is a language of verbs does not explain the belief in a God who acts. At the same time, the tight link does require a deep knowledge of Hebrew to come to grips with what is being said in the Old Testament.

certainties about what is given -- the one from the language itself and the other from the given that God has spoken through the Bible. Ellul wants to know what He said. Similarly, Ellul remains immune from the attack that his insistence on the languages is the same as one of Spinoza's basic tenets from which he launched his massive attack on the sola scriptura traditions.⁴⁶ Again the givenness of where one starts makes the decisive difference. Spinoza emphasized the Hebrew language to present the Bible as a solely human book, almost totally incomprehensible, full of errors and imagination. His final goal was to destroy all authority for the Bible. Ellul follows the standard Protestant tradition by saying that one must understand the language of the Bible mainly because it is God's chosen way and not as a tool to assess what is said in the Bible. The two aspects of the divine source of the Bible and the languages in which it was written, in Ellul's understanding, have to go together. Without faith, mere acquaintance with the languages yields only technical data that does not by itself bring one closer to the heart of the revelation. At the same time, faith not expressed through human language is contrary to the revealed modus operandi of God. In order to avoid false leads concerning the language problem, it is preferable not to try to force Ellul into the mould of a modern linguistics, for at best he will emerge as a haphazard practitioner and, at worst, his whole point will be missed. Rather, I shall look at what he thinks is important about the fact that God's book was written by human agents at all.

The Bible was neither written nor transmitted by a mystery language. It was written in Hebrew and Greek, neither one of which is intrinsically

⁴⁶ See B. Spinoza, Theologico-Political Treatise, Chapter VII in Works of Spinoza, Vol. I (New York: 1951), pp. 98-119.

esoteric.⁴⁷ For Ellul's basic principles of biblical study, two related dimensions of this fact stand out. First, an understanding of the Bible is not simply subjective and, second, the final implications of the Bible are not confined solely to Christians and Jews.⁴⁸ Basically, the first point has already been covered. People cannot make the texts mean anything they would like them to say. Strict attention to the language prevents the importation of secret keys, wishful thinking and wilful errors into the study of the Bible -- even where speculation is not the specific issue. To consider what this argument means for his study, one need only look at some of the examples that Ellul himself uses. Sometimes, he illustrates points by the use of the etymology of places and names which he considers important for understanding their significance.⁴⁹ More important are the root meaning of specific words

47 The argument that there is nothing intrinsically mysterious or esoteric about Hebrew or Greek simply means that the languages themselves are open for all to study. Even the Hebrew language is not the secret preserve of initiates into Judaism. This stance does not contradict what was said in footnote 45 about the uniqueness of Hebrew as a language. Similarly, it does not necessarily contradict or attack the tradition of Sithrai Torah concerning the mysterious contradictions of the Torah, or even the Kabbalistic attitude towards Hebrew. Rather, it stresses that the actual language in which the mysteries are given is, in principle, potentially accessible to anyone who wants to take the trouble of wrestling with it and thereby wrestling with the mysteries. This assertion has to be taken in conjunction with the one concerning the limitations of linguistic science. At this point, Ellul's position is not specifically modern.

48 To make this point, Ellul refers (PMM, p. 58) to St. Paul's suspicion of speaking in tongues, as expressed in I Corinthians 14, where he advocates prophecy over speaking in tongues. The issue seems to be communicability.

49 Sometimes, these roots are essential for the meaning as in the cities discussed in M of C or Jonah's name (JJ, p. 34). Other times, the roots are of interest for a general perspective, but they do not definitely prove a point; for example the root 'iyr' as discussed in M of C, pp. 9-10 in a footnote.

that may be quite different from their modern equivalents or translations. For two major examples, see To Will and To Do, p. 10, concerning the Hebrew meaning of 'knowledge' and p. 279, concerning the Greek word for 'conscience'. On yet another plane, he insists on the significance of the fact that the New Testament utilizes no word for 'ethics'. (See To Will and To Do, p. 299). Thus, for him, any interpretation of New Testament ethics is on quite shaky grounds. A second example of this type comes in his discussion of the attitude of the Bible towards money or riches. The discussion can easily run off the tracks if it disregards the four, different Hebrew words for 'poor'. (See L'Homme et L'Argent, pp. 187-8). Most of his examples involve the translation of individual words, but there is also an examination of the meaning on a wider scale, such as Paul's account of 'liberty' vis-à-vis the whole Old Testament. This study also comes under the rubric of sticking closely to the precise meaning of what is said. This concern insists that the text of the Bible is the only route to come to hear what God has spoken. Wrestling with the texts implies wrestling with the actual language which cannot be twisted beyond certain fairly distinct limits. This argument does not mitigate against the position that the final meaning is not open equally to those who ^{do} and do not accept and love the Bible as God's book; that is, to believers and non-believers. I shall discuss this argument further in the Postscript to Section 1. It does underline the givenness of the Word of God that is not subject to man's manipulation.

At this point, we come to the second dimension which points to the final purpose of the Bible altogether. Because the languages of the Bible are not simply the esoteric preserve of Christians and Jews, there

is always the possibility of the Bible speaking to anyone and that possibility brings forth the task of the Church. The human aspect of the Bible and its openness to other people, for Ellul, includes not only the actual reading of the Bible, but also the total response of the Church. Because of her charge regarding the whole world, she must, via biblical reflections, witness to the significance of the world-as revealed in the Bible. Although I have made the point before, here I stress again the inseparability in Ellul's thought of the two parts. From the Old Testament, one is reminded of Deuteronomy 4:6.

Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

Or, from the New Testament, one is reminded of I Peter 2:12.

Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Also, there is Matthew 5:16. The understanding of the Bible is not equally open to all, but since it witnesses to the truth, the believer knows it cannot be irrelevant or futile for anyone. This conviction provides an important motivation for doing biblical reflections over classical exegesis. Furthermore, it will be significant in my discussion of certainty in his biblical studies. It also explains the apparent oddity (to be discussed further) when he says that Prayer and Modern Man, The Meaning of the City and To Will and To Do, for example, are not directed solely towards Christians.

Every man in our decaying Western civilization is asking questions about the rules of his life. Still less, finally, is the biblical revelation limited to the narrow circle of the elect. It speaks first about all the others. We shall be

dealing with the life and morality of men of the world.

I cannot supply the remedies, but perhaps we shall be able to discover where we are, all of us, pious or not, believers or not.⁵⁰

These statements do not imply that Ellul thinks he can argue non-believers into becoming believers. They do mean, however, that Christianity cannot be seen or presented as being totally incomprehensible to outsiders -- a delicate stance easily open to misunderstanding. A specifically theological example comes in his discussion for the requirements of a theology of history.

Il [le non chrétien] accepte accessoirement les motivations théologiques qui lui sont fournies par le chrétien, mais n'entre pas pour autant dans la perspective de théologie de l'histoire, et se sent en définitive très peu engagé. Or, je me demande à quoi correspond une théologie de l'histoire si elle ne permet pas une lecture en vérité de l'événement, et si elle n'est pas reçue par le non chrétien au moins comme une question d'un sens possible.⁵¹

Ellul wants to combine the claims that Christian faith will supply a contrast to the wisdom of the world together with the Deuteronomy passage, to emphasize the New Testament exhortations about the 'fruits' of faith. Within that perspective, one can speak of the biblical witness as being somehow self-authenticating. The Bible speaks to people in their actual situation and in human language. Thus, although the Bible is not a book like any other book, precisely because it is God's book, it

⁵⁰ To Will, p. 2; PMM, p. vii.

⁵¹ "L'Irréductibilité", p. 54. This view should not be confused with his equally firm conviction that Christians cannot expect non-Christians to behave the same way as Christians nor to accept even theoretically the Christian view. He does say, however, that what Christians say about the realities, for example, of law or history, must make some sense. One might ask whether HTA on the incognito Church, would shelve this aspect of biblical reflections. The book, however, still stresses the primacy of witnessing, response and realism.

is finally a book for all people. The understanding of that book, however, comes only in acceptance of its witness to the truth of the Word of God. That dual conviction serves as the basis for all of Ellul's biblical reflections. Not only did God use human intermediaries for the Bible, but also He uses the Church for its proclamation throughout each age.

In the final analysis, therefore, Ellul's belief that God provides the source of the Bible goes beyond simply an 'academic' (in the bad sense of the word) study of the principles of biblical construction and exegesis. Nor is the belief that the Bible was originally received as the Word of God merely of antiquarian interest.⁵² It includes the whole responsibility of the Church to witness in the 'here and now' situation of the world. In other words, it is not, strictly speaking, entirely possible to cordon off Ellul's principles of biblical studies from the questions of reflection and response. For all these three dimensions of his concern as a Christian intellectual, however, it is essential to grasp his view of God as the initiator of the revelation which is manifested to the world by the response of human agents or intermediaries. I have looked at how this attitude towards the source of the biblical writings influences Ellul's whole approach to the matter. In the next chapter, I shall concentrate on his belief in the Bible as God's book as it pertains to the reading of the Bible for subsequent believers.

⁵² As we shall see in the Postscript to Section 1, there is a sense in which he would not be critical of even an antiquarian study if it maintained the integrity to recognize that the Bible was received as such and if it did not claim to be the last word.

CHAPTER 6

GOD AS THE SOURCE FOR READING THE BIBLE

Introduction -- God as Holy Spirit

The whole discussion in Chapter 5 has been predicated on Ellul's belief that God makes His will known through human intermediaries. Since he also sees the 'holiness' of God as being 'wholly other' than human perceptions, no comment on Ellul's principles of biblical study can circumvent his equally firm acceptance of the belief that genuine insight into the Bible -- with any degree of certainty -- can result only with God's assistance in the reading as well. Since the Bible is God's book and not simply a book like any other book, strictly human powers will not suffice. No human word can certify God's Word: only God Himself can. At this point, we come to a basic aspect of his thought, already mentioned in passing in earlier parts of this thesis -- his understanding of the Third Person of the Trinity, God acting as Holy Spirit.

Although Ellul never spells out in detail a doctrine of the inner life of the Trinity, he does make references to the Holy Spirit as the very Spirit of God, accepting it as God Himself, also as inseparable from Jesus Christ.¹ The Third Person of the Trinity is directed towards

¹ See, for example, PK, pp. 19; 94; PMM, pp. 145, 148-9; HTA, pp. 209-10, 283, and especially To Will, pp. 303-305 and L'Apocalypse, p. 104 where he discusses Trinitarian thinking as being biblically based. One could say that he takes the difficult doctrine of the Holy Spirit for granted and makes only passing references; nevertheless, it is a foundation for his position. This area provides a good example of where he would accept Barth on a question of dogmatics, but considers his own task to be a somewhat different one of biblical reflections on the concrete situation.

people, to include them in the relationship that God wants --
the relationship which constitutes the core of the biblical message.

The utterances of the third article of the Creed are directed towards man. While the first article speaks of God, the second of the God-man, so now the third speaks of man. Here we must, of course, not separate the three articles; we must understand them in their unity. We are concerned with man who participates in the act of God, and moreover participates actively. Man belongs to the Creed. This is the unheard of mystery which we are now approaching. There is a faith in man, so far as this man freely and actively participates in the work of God. That this actually takes place, is the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of God on earth, which has its analogue in that hidden work of God, the outgoing of the Spirit from the Father and the Son.²

The activity of the Holy Spirit is the way in which God, "objectif en soi"³ makes Himself known to specific people, so that they can help work for the salvation of all people.

The Bible always shows us God laying hold of man in his practical situation, in the setting of his life, enabling him to act with the means of his own time, in the midst of the problems of his own day.⁴

This activity is the activity of God as Holy Spirit in which the biblical message becomes contemporary.

The command given always starts me off in a certain direction. Yet for it to exist I still have to receive it for what it is, for the living commandment which concerns me.

The summons of the commandment is contained in its entirety in the Bible. But it does not cease to be a word for being "written" (hence objectified). It does not become letter, nor does the commandment become law. The word inscribed in the Bible is always living, and is continually spoken to him who reads. Thus the commandment to pray is constantly renewed.⁵

² D in O, p. 137. For a succinct statement of this same position see HTA, p. 210, concerning the sin against the Holy Spirit. "It has to do with the possible relationship with God in a given cultural context."

³ Psaumes, p. xix.

⁴ PK, p. 140.

⁵ PMM, p. 104.

In the 'here and now' of the life of the believers, God reveals His judgment and mercy on the situation, on 'the world'. As I have mentioned in Part A, Chapter 3, Ellul says that the Holy Spirit shows man the way in which God sees the situation, a view that people are incapable of attaining by themselves. This direction is where Ellul points when he declares that the Holy Spirit is clarity itself.⁶ The acceptance of the proclamation not only shows the situation as it really is, but also gives a person the freedom, because of God's mercy, to act.⁷ The Holy Spirit does not separate man from his reality nor simply hand out the first premise of an overall argument. The Holy Spirit transforms the understanding together with the ability to respond, by giving to the individuals of the Church the key to the riddle.⁸ This activity is conducted for people via the vehicle of the Bible and its preaching and the response of believers to the Bible in living their faith. The certainty that the Holy Spirit can actually reveal God's will for the 'here and now' situation through the written Bible comes in the conviction that the will of God does not change. Therefore, there can be no contradiction between what is said in the Bible and the way in which God views the situation now.

And for that reason we should be well assured that there is no conflict between the objective revelation and the revelation hic et nunc, between scripture and Holy Spirit, between the permanent will of God and his will hic et nunc for each one. The Holy Spirit illuminates and makes present, makes contemporary, that which he himself taught in the past to the prophets and apostles. He does not have "something other" to say to us or to add. Therefore all self-styled revelation of current interest

⁶ See again Violence, pp. 82-83 or To Will, p. 304. See also Part A, Chapter 3, footnote 68.

⁷ For a discussion of the ability to obey the commandment see To Will, p. 279.

⁸ See again JJ, p. 33 for this image. The point being made here is that the key can come only from God Himself.

should be subject to verification by the word revealed in the Bible, and conversely all interpretation of the latter should be subject to the revelation *hic et nunc* of the Holy Spirit, without the possibility of there being any contradiction. Thus within this limit one can surely enunciate an ethic of the word of God. The latter is an eternal word, and in the Bible is objective, constant and unchangeable; but it does not have a direct ethical meaning. It must be translated for the sake of the conduct of the current life of the believer -- only, that eternal word is not applicable for man as the word of God except it become current for him through the action of the Holy Spirit: and the difficulty will be precisely that as a living word it cannot be incorporated into an ethical system, yet as a word which God has acquainted us with it should give rise to an ethical requirement.⁹

No explanation of the mechanisms involved is accessible to human analysis. Even as the Bible does not concern itself with the inner being of God, so also His Spirit cannot be regarded as a principle to be grasped or as a presupposition for argumentation and verification. All that people are told about is the results of the activity in the fruits of witness and preaching. At the same time, the certainty of the Holy Spirit is not simply an exaltation of the self to do what one, at one's best, would do anyway. Despite man's inability to incarnate the commandment, the source is God and not wishful thinking. The point of departure must be the requirement of God as revealed in the Bible and not people themselves. Sceptics will never consider the discussion of the Holy Spirit as constituting a cogent argument, for, in Ellul's view, human reason will never lead people to knowledge of God and His activity. The peculiar brand of self-authenticating certainty of the Holy Spirit that takes effect for all of life, combined with the human limitations, makes the doctrine sound tenuous and even dangerous -- especially in a time of abandonment by God. For that very reason, Ellul argues in

⁹ To Will, pp. 263-4. See also his quote from Barth, To Will, p. 274.

Hope in Time of Abandonment, that those who in the past have heard God's Word must meditate on the Scriptures more than ever before.¹⁰

In this time, only through the Bible can Christians still come to grips with how the Holy Spirit gives the commandment. They must live in the hope that God will speak directly through the Bible again; in the meantime, they must hold to what was heard in the past. Mysteriously enough, even the response of hope is still the result of God's activity as the Holy Spirit.

Within this general and all too brief account of Ellul's view of God's activity as Holy Spirit in relation to the human intermediaries, I shall now examine the implications for the way in which Ellul thinks the Bible should be read, from two distinct, but related, perspectives. First, if, when he sees the Bible as God's book, he means that it is finally open only to those who are existentially open to its truth (thanks to the activity of the Holy Spirit), what is his stance concerning 'propositions' in the Bible?¹¹ A corollary to this question will come in a discussion of the problem of any possible certainty in reading the Bible. Secondly, there remains the way in which he makes the link between the written Bible and the concrete present situation. What is the method by which he relates biblical studies to his sociological studies in his overall task of reflection? By looking at both these aspects,

¹⁰ HTA, p. 294.

¹¹ Concerning the belief that the Bible is open only to those committed to its truth, see JJ, p. 21; PMM, pp. 104, 119; To Will, p. 213. These passages further indicate that the activity of the Holy Spirit includes the capacity to fulfil its revelation, even while respecting human liberty. Concerning his references to the content (seeming to imply propositions in biblical revelation), see, for example, HTA, p. 222; "Mirror", p. 200; IFL, p. 11; To Will, p. 1; M of C, p. 148.

one can arrive at some appreciation of the centrality of biblical revelation in his work.

a) Does Ellul Have a 'Propositional' Reading of the Bible?

"Our entire purpose will be to come to a decision and to take our biblical information to its logical conclusions."¹² This statement seems to imply that he will lay bare the important biblical theme of the city (in which all the writers concur) in a way which nobody with a good mind could deny. Pushed far enough, he can be interpreted as saying that the Bible presents certain themes openly, so that anyone can follow through to deduce technically a coherent schema that explains irrefutably the technological society. All the reader has to accept, even hypothetically, is the first premise or presupposition of the existence of God and all the rest follows, as in any well-written book. In other words, despite his attacks on systematization, it might appear that The Meaning of the City tries to present a systematic and self-contained account of one of the ideas of the Bible in a propositional position paper. Then, finally, the honest reader, looking around him, would have to agree with the truth of that statement.¹³ In the rest of

¹² M of C, p. 148. I choose this book, for it is not only the most far reaching and decisive of his theological writings, but also because it is probably the most open to attack that his is basically a propositional revelation. It is the book that can seem the most thematic about the Bible itself and also about a study of the modern world culled from the Bible. I shall not limit the discussion, however, solely to the one book.

¹³ This kind of analysis has been applied to a number of his writings, but most notably M of C, whose very title leaves itself open to it. (One might point out that the original title was Sans Feu ni Lieu and elsewhere, he refers to it merely as "a study of the city in the Bible" -- P of G, p. 125) The other place where Ellul seems most vulnerable is his discussion in "CP?" of the need to accept 'the presupposition of the Bible'. One has to read carefully to arrive at the sense of such statements within the overall position.

this subsection, I shall argue that this kind of reading misunderstands Ellul's purpose and caricatures what he says. The argument invokes the whole debate about what Scriptures are and, once more, whether it is possible to speak of a biblical theology. Are there propositions, themes or ideas that can be lifted directly from the Bible? I shall not even attempt to deal with the host of related problems, both traditional and modern, in their entirety. More simply, I shall try to delineate Ellul's actual position -- to the extent that the issues concern him.

i) Ellul Vis-à-vis Modern Attacks

The modern suspicion about seeing the Bible as substantially propositional stems from Schleiermacher and extends through Bultmann and even to Brunner.¹⁴ The focal point of this trend sees revelation as relational rather than as propositional. The revelation is the feeling of utter dependence or, put positively, participation in the I-Thou relationship that transcends the subject-object dichotomy, and thereby remains totally beyond all speech. Truth does not lie in the acceptance of revealed propositions: truth 'happens' in the actual encounter with the other person or with God (the two sometimes becoming fused). The result is that the notion of truth takes on such a new meaning that perhaps another word is in order. The outcome is a severance between faith and thought or faith and doctrine, with an abyss separating the two, leaving a rather murky relationship between them. Since the Bible

¹⁴ Obviously, this summary does not do justice to the differences within this line of thought and it will not be sustained by footnote reference. The rationale remains that I am using this trend to clarify Ellul's position. I do think these writers would be united in questioning a book such as M of C. Concerning more traditional attacks, Ellul does not address them in detail, except to the extent that he discusses the use of philosophy, to be discussed in sub-section (b) i of this chapter.

teaches the centrality of the relationship between God and man, the continuing identity of the Church is a similar, individualistic, rather mystical, pan-verbal participation with the same source of being. Doctrine, at best, becomes only a tool to guide others into the marvelous experience. Doctrine, or verbalization of the experience, is so far removed from the experience itself that it does not matter much what it says, as long as it conjures up the same feelings and experiential happenings. The Bible becomes first among equals with no unique status on account of its authoritative content. In any case, formulation of the experience can totally alter throughout the ages, for the personal experience and not the written accounts sets the standard for Christians.¹⁵ This school would attack Ellul for objectifying the Bible into a set of credal propositions of verifiable themes. At that point, questioning would come from two seemingly divergent positions. On the one hand, some would charge that he makes the mistake of turning faith into knowledge of an object, expressible in propositions of archaic and largely incomprehensible language. Christianity then has to be accepted or rejected by taking or leaving the statements in the whole of the Bible as it stands. On the other hand, when Ellul tries to make the Bible speak to contemporaries, others would claim he makes an equally erroneous study of what the various writers said, as if the

¹⁵ One might note in passing that this stance seems to lead to the diminution of even the desirability of creeds, to the reliance on situational ethics and, in the field of biblical studies, to the neglect of the Old Testament.

purpose of the Bible was similar to that of any other book.¹⁶ To understand Ellul's position, it is important to see how he answers these charges.

To a large extent, the discussion often becomes bogged down about what constitutes a proposition (especially in light of the Protestant emphasis on the Word of God), the current concern for language analysis and even the rules of grammar. It appears that what Ellul means by propositions are statements with demonstrable proofs, in themselves self-evident, either by virtue of syllogisms containing their own proof or in light of empirical verification. In this light, Ellul categorically states "that the specific Christian revelation is neither a proof nor a display".¹⁷ What Ellul does maintain is that the Bible does

¹⁶ I say that these attacks seem divergent, for the first attack would be against his affinity with Barth and the second against his affinity with Spinoza. This thesis does not deal directly with either man, but from what has been said, Ellul's link with Barth should be clear. In this section, I shall make only a very few comments about Ellul vis-à-vis Spinoza. In The Theologico-Political Treatise, chapter vii, Spinoza argues that studying the Bible is similar to studying nature or any regular human book. Critics of Ellul could perhaps argue that the main difference between the two is that Ellul thinks that the themes of the Bible are intelligible, whereas Spinoza says that they are not. Both, they would argue, see the Bible as containing clear and distinct ideas rather than the revelation of a special relationship. From this section of my thesis, it should become clear that Ellul, although he does not speak specifically about Spinoza, does not simply try to use the same method, with only an allegedly different purpose. He differs at every stage, despite any phenomenological similarities of language. For unlike both Spinoza and all of Ellul's modern opponents (who have much in common themselves), he does not see the Bible as simply an archaic document. This thesis, however, cannot enter the discussion of the real affinities among 'encounter' Christianity, biblical science and Spinoza.

¹⁷ HTA, p. 219. Later, he does say that the Bible does contain its share of information, but in an entirely different way yet to be discussed. This is an instance, as one can see from footnote 12 in this section, of a somewhat loose usage of language. Although these slips do not minimize the lack of clarity in an area where it is especially required, his general position is consistent.

contain genuine knowledge and understanding in the sense of the assertions supported by Luther against Erasmus in The Bondage of the Will. To avoid some confusion, I shall use the term 'assertions', for, although he does not see them in terms open to all, he does not think that their proof is either non-existent or subject only to feelings. In terms of biblical assertions, Ellul would agree with Barth's statement that "[t]he biblical theologian proves that God exists by means of the fact that He has spoken in the Bible".¹⁸ Ellul remains close to Barth by saying that there are assuredly assertions in the Bible, external to our own feelings, but that the contents of the assertions can be known only in a right relationship with God Himself who constitutes the only proof.

Lorsque nous ouvrons la Bible, nous ne trouvons pas une philosophie, une politique, une métaphysique, ni même une religion. Nous y trouvons l'engagement d'un dialogue. . . . Elle [la Bible] apporte la vérité sur toute chose -- y compris sur l'argent. Mais elle nous entraîne à cette conclusion dramatique: la vérité n'est pas objective (et pas d'avantage subjective!!!): elle est découverte dans la relation avec Dieu, pas ailleurs.¹⁹

Basically, Ellul wants to avoid the errors and retain the insights of both relational and propositional theology.

In this catastrophic situation there are two reactions. One is to objectify the Word of God (a charge to which Barth was vulnerable). Objectivication says that there is no need to turn the word into an experience. The word is. That is all there is to it, and it never changes. The other reaction is the radical subjectivication of the Word of God (a charge to which Bultmann was vulnerable). Subjectivication says that there is no need to ask oneself whether or not there is a God who speaks. The important thing is "living as though".

¹⁸ Karl Barth, Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century (London: 1972), p. 312.

¹⁹ H et A, p. 28-29.

Unfortunately, these are interpretations of distress, when and because God is silent!²⁰

Ellul walks the fine line between the two views of revelation when he speaks of the Bible in terms of a dialogue. A dialogue always involves two sides so that the content can never be simply reproduced independently to someone outside the relationship of the dialogue. At the same time, in a dialogue, the subject-object dichotomy is never totally overcome, for one side is saying something to the other. For Ellul there is not any doubt that throughout the Bible the distinction between God and the creature remains constant. The unique Event of the Incarnation in which God became man, a once for all event, is hardly the statement that people can move the other way. What God has spoken to His People, in order to be passed on, is the content of the biblical revelation. It is not a propositional content, for the proof or demonstration does not lie within the control of the witnesses. As a preliminary example, one can look at what the Bible says about creation. It gives no formal proof for the existence of God nor about how He went about creating things nor the mechanisms by which Adam fell. There is, however, the assertion that God did create in such a way that tells us certain things about man, however hard the message is to fathom. Certainly a non-believer can state the proposition that Christians and Jews believe in creation or that belief in such a doctrine entails acceptance of the reality of the world in a way that facilitates empirical sciences or that belief in creation elevates man over the animals etc. Yet, it is undeniable that those conclusions are very limited, telling us nothing about the meaning of creation nor the final

²⁰ HTA, p. 126.

significance of the Creator God's relationship with His creation. In brief, they can tell us nothing about the content of the doctrine of creation.

We can only come to a decision with respect to a revelation which engages our existence, and which has no content for the person who does not commit his existence to that decision.²¹

The source of knowledge of the content has not, biblically, been strictly propositional. For Jews, genuine knowledge of creation is possible only within the Covenant, in obedience to the Law and especially the keeping of the Sabbath.²² For Ellul, the final source of knowledge about creation comes only in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, the content of the Bible is supplied by Jesus Christ. The content comes from the dialogue between man and the Person of the living, acting God. Just as theology for Ellul cannot be systematic, so propositions and formulae cannot encompass a dialogue. Still, the believers of the Church are told something in the dialogue, which, however imperfectly, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they are to pass on to others through the verbalization of preaching.

Verbalization is not useless insofar as it is an instrument of election given to man for manifesting, to make manifest first to himself and afterwards to others, that which is the essence of a living experience. Just as God proclaims his will through the voice of the prophets and apostles, within the framework of human speech, so also he requires on the part of man this rationalization of an encounter that transcends all language. It is not my little story, my fears and desires. . . . It is the statement, the proclamation, in all of its aspects and directions (and consequently including also my fears and desires!), of the life led with the

²¹ HTA, p. 221. My underlining.

²² For this argument, see, for example, Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed (New York: 1956), pp. 218-19.

living God.²³

In the verbalization, therefore, logic, extrapolation, assertions and even the odd idea or principle comes into play. What is important is that all of these must flow from the dialogue, so that they cannot subsequently be detached from or replace participation in the dialogue -- or, in more biblical language, in the Covenant or Testament.²⁴ To underline the difference he sees between propositional revelation and the content of the biblical revelation, I shall turn briefly to the ways in which Ellul does think the Bible should be read; that is to say, as proclamation or promise, commandment and prayer. These ways are not mutually exclusive, but they are mutually faceted and none is, strictly speaking, propositional. Once again, one must always bear in mind that, for Ellul, the source and the content of the Bible comes from the Person of Jesus Christ.²⁵ All three ways of viewing the Bible relate to that content and point to the multi-faceted relationship between God and man.

²³ PMM, pp. 60-61. This statement is made in the slightly different context of prayer, but it is also à propos here. It is basically a reiteration of the theme, discussed in the foundational chapter, that the special being of the Church entails a unique task.

²⁴ See, for example, To Will, p. 303 concerning propositions about the Holy Spirit, or "Propositions Concernant l'Attitude Chrétienne Envers le Droit". Again, these examples speak of a lack of preciseness, but even here, he is clear that the meaning is not exhausted in the propositions and also that the meaning cannot be detached from the living Covenant. See also To Will, p. 215. What he means by 'Covenant' will be discussed in Chapter 7 of Section 2.

²⁵ In conversation, M. Ellul drew the human analogy that through knowing and loving a person, certain assertions are possible and would be true. Nevertheless, they would differ from the propositional statements resulting from a series of psychological tests. Secondly, since each of the ways of reading the Bible relates to other parts of the thesis, I shall introduce each here only to the extent that it sheds light on this particular difficulty. Thirdly, Chapter 7 will discuss further what is meant by saying Jesus Christ is the content of the Bible.

According to Ellul, the primary purpose of the Bible is the proclamation of God's simultaneous judgment and mercy towards people. Only those who have accepted such a promise can proclaim with assurance that God's promise does in fact have some content beyond being a simple contradiction or wishful thinking. Part of that promise is the assertion that, although the goal has been achieved, still the final fulfilment will come to fruition only in the future. Only then will the promise be equally accessible to everyone.²⁶ To see the paradigm for the way in which Ellul combines the content of the proclamation with its reception, one should look to the traditional Christian creeds -- all stated in assertive sentences. All the major articles state "I believe in" rather than "I believe that". For Ellul, all proclamation falls into this category of confession of faith in God. Not only is the relationship central, but also he insists that the promise is the point of the relationship (as opposed to simply 'a happening') and that the proclamation derives directly from the dialogue as witnessed to in the Bible.²⁷

The other side of the same coin of proclamation (which asserts that something is actually said) is the commandment contained in the Bible. The biblical proclamation inherently demands a response from the reader. The promise goes far beyond anything resembling a proposition, for it

²⁶ That the proclamation of God's judgment and mercy, itself seeming to hold together opposites, takes on an added dimension of the 'now' but the 'not yet' declaration brings the reader into the area of eschatology -- to be discussed in Section 2, Chapters 7 and 8.

²⁷ Here, I would recall the whole discussion in Chapter 5 concerning the unity and diversity of the Bible. The unity is not so much thematic as it is a common witness to the activity of God revealed as a Person. The validation of what God has said and done can arise only from being in a similar relationship to the writer of the assertion.

completely throws into question the whole life of the hearer.²⁸ Once again, what is most important is that the biblical summons does not take the form of an external code. In distinction from what is usually meant by 'law', the commandment is possible only within the lived encounter with God's Word.

Law is always objective, universal, neutral, impartial. It has a sort of independent existence. The law is established over against me. I am a stranger to it. It relates to me externally. It is present as a gauge against which I can measure every one of my actions, like a cold requirement which hangs over me in all circumstances. It is like a constraint which does not break my will but which does away with it by requiring in its objectivity even a complete submission. The law is an object, external to my life. It takes no account of the circumstances in which I find myself. It is perfect and serene. My death, my bitterness, my weakness and vanity, make no difference to it at all.

The commandment is the reverse of all that. It is a personal word addressed to me. A commandment is always an individualized word spoken by him who commands to him who should obey. It expresses the will of the superior, yet in addressing itself to a person in his individuality it takes into account the circumstances in which he finds himself, the human reality. It is always formulated hic et nunc. It is always a circumstantial word, which is never a sort of permanent, eternal presence, even when it is God who formulates this commandment. It is always registered in terms of the concrete facts, and must necessarily be interpreted in relation to them. It is a person-to-person relationship.

To be sure, the law can be transformed into commandment. It can depart from its icy majesty to accost a particular person in his life. In a sense, the Jews must have experienced this transformation as is evidenced in Psalm 119. And in Jesus Christ we have the fulfillment of the law, one aspect of which is precisely that it is no longer law at all, but entirely commandment.²⁹

²⁸ "Radicalism is not really produced by some procedure of the intellect, or of will to action, whatever it might be. It is brought about by the presence of God alone. The whole Bible, from beginning to end, attests that. It even constitutes, in all probability, the central theme of the kerygma." (PMM, p. 164) This statement shows the tight link between proclamation and commandment. For the believer, his life is thrown into question, so that he can make assertions about the commandment. See also footnote 84 regarding prayer.

²⁹ PMM, pp. 102-3. For a more complete account of the same argument, see To Will, pp. 201-224. This discussion will come up again in the discussion between Law and Gospel in Section 2, Chapter 7.

Since the commandment comes from God, it can never be vacuous or subject to human whim. Ellul can therefore speak of the 'content' of God's commandment to which Christians must pay close attention.³⁰ For both proclamation and commandment, he maintains that it is essential to stress the right relationship between God and man as the source of knowing the content of the biblical revelation. He thinks that Christians should read the Bible in such a way as to come to grips with God's commandment.

Perhaps one can clarify the distinction between the communication given in the Bible and other language subject to verifiable analysis by looking at the Bible as a book of prayers.³¹ In brief, for Ellul, prayer, the central link in receiving the content of the biblical revelation, is not subject to human communication analysis.

Upon what does the communication with God in prayer rest in fact? It does not rest on an experiment, nor on an interchange, nor on an equality, but on a presupposition of prior relationship. To be sure, one can always refer to matters of current concern, but the fact cannot be escaped that the traffic of prayer appeals to a past which one makes present. It requires a prior conviction, for example, that God hears. But it is a matter of faith. Such a conviction cannot be established on the level of language structure, nor on the level of communication.³²

He goes on to say that it is impossible to speak of the human communication of information when one partner is totally beyond our human grasp.

³⁰ "Karl Barth has a striking formula on this subject: the task of ethics cannot be to decide on the content of God's commandment, nor to judge man's actions, but to describe the limits of God's commandment and of man's corresponding action." (*To Will*, p. 248) This discussion enters into the middle of vast debates that go beyond the scope of this thesis. I introduce it here to show how he views the requirements and limitations within which he writes.

³¹ For this suggestion, see PMM, pp. 109-10. He does not suggest that the Bible is only a book of prayer, but that aspect is essential for Christian reading the Bible.

³² Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Thus we have demonstrated that prayer is not a language which makes possible the construction of a discourse. It takes place on an altogether different plane. Prayer comes to us as a decision of God, who shares his will, his power and his love with men, whom he calls upon to pray through the instrumentality of human speech.³³

To call the Bible a book of prayers is to fend off major errors about the assertions. As such, the language of prayer and subsequently the language of preaching will never legitimately fall to the level of proposition -- even in the extreme of an age of abandonment.³⁴ Since God does miraculously make the relationship possible, Ellul continues in Prayer and Modern Man to speak of the dialogue, the significance of prayer, the concern of prayer with the one truth, the promise of an answer, the required response to prayer in the world.³⁵ All these concerns imply a content of prayer that God invites man to share through reading the Bible. When one sees the essential unity of the Bible through proclamation and commandment in prayer, the very reading of the Bible takes on a different dimension than it does for the non-believer. What is at stake is not a set of propositions nor a marvellous experience, but rather, for Ellul, an engagement with the kerygma of truth that engages the whole life of the reader.

ii) Example of The Meaning of the City

To return to The Meaning of the City, do not his specific comments there tend to fall into the very trap that his general arguments try to mitigate against? Is he not trying to isolate the logically consistent theme of the city? Although the final conclusions may not be definitive,

³³ PMM, p. 60.

³⁴ See for example, Psaumes, p. xix and HTA, pp. 271-74.

³⁵ PMM, pp. 125, 133, 176; 137; 151; 126; 170-74. Prayer as the link between the written word of the Bible and the concrete situation of the reader will be discussed in sub-section (b) ii of this chapter.

a close reading of the book leads to a perspective different from that of a purely propositional account. First, one should note that the reference with which I started this discussion underlines the necessity of a decision. What he says about the logic of the Bible is possible only within the decision to accept the relationship between God and His People and to live within it.

[W]e must remember that everything we have said so far concerning the city was of biblical origin, which means that it is an appeal to a decision of faith. Either we believe the Bible expresses the revelation of God centered in Jesus Christ and that therefore what we have understood concerning the city has an element of truth or else we do not believe it. . . . Therefore whoever reasons in this way [why worry?] does not truly believe in Jesus Christ. But in that case, all that we have written concerning the city has no truth for him.³⁶

In other words, the acceptance of the Bible as God's book makes a distinct difference concerning what one sees when one reads it. Secondly, it becomes clear in the book that Ellul believes that the biblical writers point to a logic which is foreign to human logic.

This is a logical reaction, but God is not logical in what he tells us. And far from asking us to destroy Babylon, he asks us to preserve her alive.

Astonished, we see that, on the contrary, our job is to lead the life of the other inhabitants of the city.³⁷

³⁶ M of C, pp. 179-80.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 73, 74. In light of footnote 12, it seems that there is a slight play on words throughout the discussion. The drift of the argument is not thereby endangered. Concerning the Bible, he does not mean logic in the technical sense of formal logic of mechanics. When he says that we can push it to its logical conclusions, he is referring to the possibility of extrapolation. These terms have been discussed in Part A, Chapter 3(a) i and Chapter 4(a).

The 'logic' of God is the seemingly contradictory proclamation which is unvarying with the conditions and yet which takes them into account. Ellul wants to read the Bible from its perspective, contrary to our own, about the city. This kind of reading requires a special form of attention that ultimately requires the assistance of the Holy Spirit to see the full implications for the reader's life. One can conclude that Ellul describes his reading of the Bible by starting from the centre of the relationship to discuss its 'logic', with no attempt to guide the reader into this particular way of decision, of thinking or of perspective. It might perhaps seem that either Ellul thinks the proclamation is open to all (while bracketing the truth question) or else he writes (without due warning) only to Christians. Concerning the special logic of the Bible that one must see for a complete reading, a central question now comes to the fore. To whom is The Meaning of the City (and of course by implication, more importantly for Ellul, the Bible) directed? What qualifications do the readers need?

For the most part, he speaks of Christians in the third person, on the assumption that all are able to read and adjudicate what he says. Only when speaking of the overall understanding that must include a response, does he use the first person. This procedure can lead to some unclarity only if one disregards his overall task within the Protestant framework. Since the proclamation is for all people, Ellul wants to present that message for non-believer and believer alike.

In my experience the best way of dealing with "unbelievers" and modern youth is not to try to bring out their "capacity for revelation", but to treat them quietly, simply (remembering that Christ has died and risen also for them), as if their rejection of "Christianity" was not to be taken seriously. It is only then that they can understand you, since they really see you where you maintain that you are standing as an evangelical theologian: on the ground of

justification of faith alone.³⁸

I conclude that this is the criterion applied by Ellul in a very bold style in The Meaning of the City. It is a style even bolder than that of Barth for he includes the concrete life also shared by believer and non-believer alike. It is his contention that this is the way in which the Bible should be read and expounded. Such a radical step is not an attempt to find a point of contact or to prove the Bible empirically by cities we know. That is to say, although he writes for all, he is not trying to force all to accept what he says. In fact, he points out that even the 'empirical' resurrection of Jesus had no power of itself to convince His contemporaries.³⁹ How much then would evidence drawn from the technological society prove the Bible to anybody? He does, however, want to show that the Bible is not simply an archaic document that by some form of occult acceptance can obscurely and mysteriously save adherents in another life. He shows that it does speak directly to the

³⁸ Karl Barth, Natural Theology p. 127. See also the foundational chapter to this thesis, footnotes 53-55 concerning the argument that the giving of this proclamation entails giving it in a concrete situation, so that the task of the Church in proclaiming the Gospel 'here and now' is part of the responsibility of doing God's work. Therefore, Ellul does not consider his prolific publications to be contrary to the 'justification by faith alone' principle. Part of the essential work of the Church is to spell out as clearly as possible what that principle means for today, for that aspect is contained within the very reading of the Bible. Therefore, I repeat the general stance in this specific context.

³⁹ See JJ, pp. 66-67.

situation in which all people find themselves today.⁴⁰ This situation and not some ethereal heaven demands a response: The Meaning of the City does speak eloquently of the 'relevance' of the biblical message, albeit in a stern and demanding way hardly calculated to win converts through apologetics. Again, he thinks that a proper reading of the Bible through the intervention of the Holy Spirit makes this route mandatory. In short, he enters directly into the task, without prior distinctions -- even at the risk of making the Bible sound like any other book.

It is not for the Church to separate human beings into two categories -- first of all the 'swine' (Communists, non-'conformists', people who have 'mistaken ideas', working men, and so on) to whom we cannot proclaim the Gospel; and, secondly, those who are not 'swine', those dull good 'sheep', which our world creates in such numbers.⁴¹

What then does this stance say about what a non-believer can read from the Bible? Certainly, Ellul thinks that he would have a hard time

⁴⁰ There are times when he pursues this aspect so successfully that the result swings to the other extreme of indicating that either the Bible speaks only to today or the understanding of the Bible will vary with different historical epochs. In either case, he comes close to being open to charges of historicism. Again, he tries to walk carefully between two unpalatable positions. He admits that the questions haunting people will vary in different historical circumstances which indeed do change. More important though, the proclamation of the Bible is eternal truth that speaks to or enlightens or corrects all ages. The absolute judgment and mercy of God does not change, but it is directed to the flux and change of the world. This position involves a different task from attempting to prove the Bible or to up-date it. This absence of a point of contact also has a bearing on the discussion of his separation of his different types of writing, as discussed in Part A, Chapter 2. See also the general Conclusion (a).

⁴¹ PK, p. 142. This quotation comes right before the exhortation that the Church must put people in a position where they can hear the Gospel. Again, this procedure is not seeking a point of contact, for without the Holy Spirit, the work remains virtually null and void. Also, one must remember that, for Ellul, this work is not prior to witnessing, but it is an integral part of preaching and witnessing to both believers and non-believers.

writing a book such as The Meaning of the City. Being more dominated by myths and false idols, a non-believer will distort and misconstrue the point of the Bible that makes it different from other books. It is not simply that he will see the Bible as an opaque mystery and leave it to the initiates: he will try to place the Bible in an entirely wrong perspective.⁴² At the same time, Ellul does indicate that a non-believer can recognize whether what somebody else writes does square with the actual text. Ellul sees these two possibilities as standing on two quite different levels. In the realm of verification of The Meaning of the City, a vast amount is open to all -- except that which is most crucial. Is it true? Does it matter? Can I stake my life on it? No matter how much common ground there may be in the discussion, the non-believer, at best, has finally to try to separate the proclamation from the commandment. At that point, Ellul must move back to speaking about Christians in the first person, for the tight union between the Word and the response no longer speaks to the non-believer. Although this approach to non-believers may strike readers in an uneasy and unsettling way, it does remain faithful to his conception of his task. At the end of the book, he has conveyed the impression that the Bible is open, but not equally open, to believers and non-believers. In the final analysis, it is possible to read the Bible adequately only from the perspective of accepting it as God's book and a full acceptance of this assertion requires God's intervention. In The Meaning of the City, Ellul assumes a reading of the Bible on the two levels. There are definite assertions

⁴² This conclusion is different from saying that he will see nothing at all. Also, this statement obviously does not imply that Ellul thinks that the believer is guaranteed absolute clarity, as I shall discuss next regarding the question of certainty.

made about the city and how God views human activity in the city. At the same time, to understand what is involved in these assertions requires a right relationship with God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

iii) Certainty

Finally, within any discussion of the problems surrounding how he can speak of the content of biblical revelation, the issue of certainty arises -- certainty in theology, in subsequent reflection and in the correctness of the response. "In their wholeness [what he has written], as in their particulars, they were obviously statements that were not supported by what is usually considered sound evidence."⁴³ To say that the Bible is not equally open to believers and non-believers, because it does not contain 'objective' information, does not speak to disputes among believers.⁴⁴ Considering Ellul's account of the use of human intermediaries, the belief that the commandment cannot be laid down in advance and the recognition of changing historical conditions, is it not foolish to speak of the witness of the Holy Spirit? At most, it seems possibly to point to its activity only in retrospect, thereby often falling into the trap of justification so firmly rejected by Ellul. One can perhaps appreciate his argument that the Holy Spirit inspired the selection of the canon, without gaining much insight or sound criteria for the present task of Christians in

⁴³ ET, p. 42. (As a matter of fact, many Christians as well as non-Christians would fully subscribe to this statement -- in a rejection of Barth and Ellul.) In this writing, Barth goes on to deny that the Bible contains any presuppositions or propositions similar to axioms in mathematics.

⁴⁴ Ellul does not seem to devote a great deal of time to the remarkable divergences among dedicated (and not merely slothful) Christians who claim the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He makes a brief reference in To Will, p. 306, but one would appreciate further discussion. In conversation, M. Ellul did emphasize the continuous process of dialogue among believers. See for example, NP, p. 52 concerning Harvey Cox.

reading and responding to the Bible.⁴⁵ Ellul never answers the question in a way that would give total satisfaction to his critics. In fact, despite the impression of some readers, he does not expect to do so. All I can do is to give some indication of the direction in which he would point any discussion of biblical interpretation and the aptness of any response, within the insistence on the actuality of the Holy Spirit.

From all that has been said about the Bible as God's book, it is clear that Ellul thinks that no articulation will exhaust or adequately express the revelation that points beyond any single human possibility. There can never be a complete biblical study by human beings.⁴⁶ That stance does not concede that there are no basic threads or no certainties at all in the Bible. In other words, Ellul can still speak of heresies and blasphemous arguments that obviously run counter to the biblical witness if it is taken seriously.⁴⁷ Even if the givenness of the Bible as the written word of God were to guide thought and reflection (instead of being used as a proof-text for some other stance), there would still not be automatic agreement among commentators. There would, however, be at least fruitful dialogue within a common framework (such as the centrality of the Bible itself). The area of divergence would become markedly

⁴⁵ See, for example, JJ, p. 14, for a consideration of how a kind of human reason can lead believers to such a conclusion about the canon. Concerning the certainty of the present task, he simply says, "We have no guarantee, no certainty." (PMM, p. 149).

⁴⁶ Largely, this argument goes without saying for Ellul, but see especially To Will, p. 224; TFL, p. 140; JJ, p. 84.

⁴⁷ See, for example, To Will, pp. 232-3 (where heresy is linked with attempts to spell out a Christian morality); HTA, pp. 133, 269; NP, pp. 219, 268. In conversation, he took the position that an argument can be discussed as heretical (i.e., is contrary to biblical revelation), but not a person (i.e., in the sense of a judgment on his relationship with God). See also PMM, pp. 150-2; 169.

more narrow, simply by strict allegiance to the biblical material.⁴⁸

The ensuing dialogue would then be a faithful secondary witness to the Bible: one can have confidence in such an endeavour by remembering the facet-like witness of the parts to the whole. The various biblical witnesses remain in constant dialogue to shed light on the whole. Far from undermining the possibility of insight, Ellul sees this model as essential for faithfulness to the biblical revelation.⁴⁹ Without doubt, differences will remain and strictly human understandings will be called into play at every juncture; nevertheless, as I have already argued, the Protestant position is not anti-reason. Rather than expecting absolute certainty or speaking of a final meaning, it is more accurate to hope for an ever-deepening appreciation of the Bible. There comes a deeper and deeper awareness of the profundity of what is being said in the witness, albeit in a way that makes it harder and harder to make glib summaries. This emphasis particularly suits Ellul's intention in undertaking biblical studies and reflections. The goal is not a technical manual, so much as the attempt to trust in the Bible as the witness to the on-going source of truth. The result is that decisions can be made ever more deeply within its light.

⁴⁸ As Karl Barth said concerning the Reformers, it was hard for them to go very far wrong when they devoted such attention to the Bible. See Church Dogmatics, IV, 1, p. 366.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 5, footnote 28. This dialogue, to the point of contradiction, can take place between texts, as in the two creation accounts, or between books as in Romans and James, or by Testament. Concerning the secondary witnesses, Ellul goes to some lengths to discuss the element of truth in various opposing positions. See for example, HTA, pp. 101-2. Similarly, the notion of dialogue would be very important in Ellul's attitude towards the tradition.

If the above discussion remains far from conclusive, it becomes even more complex with the reminder that 'understanding' the Bible involves not simply intellectual assent, for the assertions contain commandments that demand prayer and response. Are there any standards for what it means to be a Christian -- especially considering that correct formulation of doctrine is not the final witness to the genuineness of preaching and prophecy? Although there is not a cut and dried standard for certainty in 'good' works, once again it is important to point to the repeated biblical references to the fruits of faith.

Il ne suffit pas que le nom de Jésus soit dit, et l'Evangile récité, pour que ce soit le moins du monde un Témoignage rendu à la vérité. J'accepte pleinement d'entendre une nouvelle présentation, un nouveau langage, j'accepte de remettre en question ma théologie et l'Eglise traditionnelle, mais je refuse radicalement de le faire en présence de n'importe quelle élucubration, de n'importe quelle déclaration. C'est n'est pas le fait qu'elles viennent de non-chrétiens qui me garantit en quoi que soit la validité de ces entreprises. Il y a le petit problème de l'arbre et des fruits. Quand je vois que les fruits principaux sont d'une part l'accompagnement de cet Evangile par la drogue et un pansexualisme, d'autre part la production énorme d'argent, et la constitution d'entreprises commerciales capitalistes, je suis obligé de dire que je récuse le contenu de ces discours à cause de leur finalité et de leurs conséquences.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ NP, pp. 269-70. This basically Christian stance proves a complex issue in deciding whether there is any significance in correct formulation at all. Or does the definition of a Christian finally come down to intention? It would appear that Ellul would not like to make Christianity quite so loose and tenuous. Of some interest is the distinction he makes between errors of orientation and heresy. (NP, p. 268) The discussion is not entirely clear or decisive, but it does show an awareness of the tensions. He sees the former as more fundamental, but he does not go to the extreme of saying that practitioners cease altogether to be Christian. (A crucial text for this discussion is John 7:17) See also "Note Problématique", p. 319 and L'Apocalypse, pp. 138-9 concerning the need for good theology in the interests of action. The underlining in this passage is mine.

Although this argument runs the risk of establishing a natural point of contact between believers and non-believers, only the fruits are open to all and they are the only vehicle through which God works to effect a disposition for others to hear the Word preached. (In support of this need for the link, Ellul quotes I Peter 3:15) He sums up his position by saying, "There is no witness unless there is a union, agreement and interaction between word and work."⁵¹ Since human reason cannot encompass God's will, no outline of the commandment can be given in advance; nevertheless, the Bible certainly does not leave the believer entirely bereft. It does supply some parameters of the fruits. For example, the commandment is never pure mystery on the level of caprice, for it is itself the very definition of truth and justice. Although this observation does not supply Christians with palpable proofs, it also means that the response is not simply subjective.⁵² One reason why there is no proof of certainty centres on the eschatological dimension that means that even Christians are not yet fully in the Kingdom of God. Since they are still bound by the order of necessity as are other people, the demand for perfection (either in interpretation and/or in response) can

⁵¹ HTA, p. 289. (The reference to I Peter 3:15 is HTA, p. 164). The fruits are not the source of faith. The link between the source and fruits must be made known to all through preaching.

⁵² One must see the full impact of both "The Impossibility of a Christian Ethic" and "The Necessity of a Christian Ethic" (To Will, pp. 201-24; 245-267) and be careful to hold the two in proper tension.

When Ellul says that God's will is never capricious, but that it may go beyond regular human reasoning about morality, he 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 it. The 'loving act' can be actually calculated in advance. This position is not at all similar to an act of obedience that may require going beyond human reason.

be a sign of angelism or cynicism.⁵³ For example, although the commandment given through the mediation of the Holy Spirit includes the power to fulfill the commandment, still it does not give a detailed battle plan.⁵⁴ As soon as people try to incarnate the commandments by their own devices, they tend to distort, diffuse and even lose it. They cannot, however, destroy it: at most they can refuse it totally. The fact that the results are never, at any single time, certain does not lead Ellul to despair that nothing can be known or done at all. It is not 'all or nothing': more accurately, it is the 'impossible possibility'. The lack of human perfection in no way proves the Bible to be fiction and in fact the Bible itself points to that continuous tension. Ellul would look at I Corinthians 13:12. It is the very lack of immediate certainty and the verification in the fruits of faith that turn him back continually to biblical studies for guidance. Therefore, the links among Christian study, reflection and response, once more, are always mutually inseparable and re-inforcing.

b) The Link between the Written Word and the 'Here and Now' Situation

In order to focus again directly on Ellul's task as a Christian intellectual, one must include, in a discussion of his approach to biblical studies, the way in which he makes the link (both in reading the Bible and in reflecting upon it) to the concrete position of the reader. Traditionally, the mediation between God's revelation and the various human sciences

⁵³ See especially To Will, pp. 220-1; 237, 306; HTA, p. 139. The significance of the order of necessity and the eschatological dimension will be discussed in further detail in Section 2, Chapters 7 and 8.

⁵⁴ See To Will, p. 221. This concept is central in seeing what Ellul means by saying that God uses human intermediaries to participate in His work and yet leaves their liberty intact.

was accomplished through philosophy. As I have indicated in various places in the thesis, this route is one that Ellul has rejected. At this point, in relation to his biblical studies in connection with the task of reflection, I shall draw together the strands of his attack, and indicate how he views the alternative.⁵⁵

i) Philosophy and the Dialectic of Confrontation

Basically, Ellul is suspicious of the whole philosophical enterprise, as he sees it being presented as a discipline, as being both irrelevant and also dangerous. He finds it not germane to the task at hand, because he usually finds it theoretical and abstract, in the bad sense of not being rooted in experience. For example, he denies any effort to prove anything by solely syllogistic arguments, for often the premises can just as easily be turned the other way around. As we have already seen concerning his view of sociology, the involvement of the practitioner is the only valid basis for an intellectual discipline. Otherwise, he sees only an "intellectual formalism"⁵⁶ which may be irrefutable, but also totally irrelevant. Thus, for example, he sides with Marx over Hegel on the question of concepts. The purpose of the intellect, according to Ellul, is to articulate what has been experienced as a whole and he says that the philosophers generally do not speak to his experience. For example, he said that he has never met a Platonist nor has read Plato in a way that moved him to pursue the study further. This aspect of his rejection of most philosophy seems to come on practical grounds. The

⁵⁵ Since he spends very little time writing about philosophy or philosophical assumptions, most of the following comes from discussions with M. Ellul, except where noted. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the adequacy or the accuracy of his view of philosophy.

⁵⁶ HTA, p. vi. See also Chapter 1, footnote 103.

most specific aspect, which he deplores even more, comes in what he sees as being the goal of philosophy, and that is the attempt to gain a systematized view of the whole -- including its understanding. This attempt to have the final and complete word, for Ellul, (as we have seen regarding both theology and science) is not open to the Christian. Therefore, he is willing to consider thinkers such as Rousseau, Marx or Nietzsche insofar as they speak accurately concerning the modern situation, but not insofar as they can be considered philosophers. When they become philosophers, they overstep the legitimate bounds of human knowing and fall into dangerous error. Since this account of philosophy could be considered somewhat narrow, I inquired concerning the importance of philosophy as 'the love of wisdom'. He answered that, although the question is largely a semantic one, for the Christian, that pursuit would have to come through theology and biblical reflection. In short, what he is railing against concerning philosophy are its practical abuses and the false claims made for it regarding the apprehension of truth or revelation. One might say that he judges all philosophy by its aberrations. In response, he would say that the aberrations are largely built into its very task. Apart from whether Ellul is fair to philosophy,⁵⁷ the question remains whether he himself does not harbour some unexamined philosophical assumptions within his own work.⁵⁸ Without answering the question

⁵⁷ As only one example among many, see Hilary Armstrong, "Platonism", *Prospect for Metaphysics*, ed. I.T. Ramsey (London: 1961) who argues cogently, in a manner not incompatible with Ellul's own position, that Plato was not in fact a systematizer.

⁵⁸ For an article concerning the link between philosophical empiricism and the Barthian theology of revelation, see Martin Jarrett-Kerr, "Scepticism and Revelation", *Theology* Vol. 52, 1949, pp. 410-16. It should be noted that, despite any affinities, both Barth and Ellul would reject any modern philosophy which says logic and sense data are the only ways of knowing. In this section, I am discussing only his view of philosophy as mediation.

explicitly, I shall try to put it into the perspective of his own task. Therefore, I shall look at the necessity of using language in any theology, and, secondly, at his answer about how the relationship between theology and sociology should be viewed.

Ellul is in complete agreement with the whole Christian tradition which says that the revelation of God is beyond human comprehension, so that it must always be mediated by means of human culture and modes of thinking, even including philosophy. As we have seen, he would concur that theology stands as a secondary, human activity requiring mediation. His position, to which he has not directed his specific attention in writing, can be summed up in a quotation from Karl Barth.

A free theologian does not deny, nor is he ashamed of, his indebtedness to a particular philosophy or ontology, to ways of thought and speech. These may be traditional or a bit original, old or new, coherent or incoherent. No one speaks in exclusively biblical terms. At least the combination of these terms, if not the meaning they assume in his mind and in his mouth, are, willingly or not, of his own making. The Biblical authors themselves, incidentally, far from speaking a celestial language, spoke in many earthly languages. This is why a free theologian, who is not even a prophet or an apostle, will certainly not wish to dissociate himself from his brethren in the Church and world by his claim to speak "as from heaven", "according to the gospel", or, if this is synonymous for him, "according to Luther". If he does speak with any such authority, his listeners must sense it without his explicit affirmation. To speak God's word must be an event and not the object of his assertion. Even then he speaks from within his philosophical shell, speaks in his own cumbersome vernacular which is certainly not identical with the tongues of angels, although the angels may utilize him at times. Three characteristics distinguish the free from the unfree theologian. First, he is aware of his condition. Secondly, he stands ready to submit the coherence of his concepts and formulations to the coherence of the divine revelation and not conversely. Thirdly, to mention the inevitable slogan, he is a philosopher "as though he were not", and he has his ontology "as though he had it not". . . . He will not necessarily feel obligated to the philosophical kairos, the latest prevailing philosophy. The gratitude of the Royal House of Austria will, in any event, not be showered upon him. . . . If we visualize for a moment the ideal situation of the free theologian, we may foresee the possibility

not of theology recognizing itself in any form of philosophy, but of free philosophy recognizing itself in free theology. Yet the free theologian knows very well that, like a poor wretch, he does not live in this ideal situation.⁵⁹

While Ellul admits the danger of hidden assumptions, what he will not concede is the traditional search for that one form of expression or philosophy which constitutes the vehicle of mediation over any other.⁶⁰ For example, Greek thought is no better than modern thought or even Buddhist thought for the doing of theology. Each is equally adequate or, more precisely, equally inadequate. The mode of expression is not itself the truth and its importance comes in the ability to use it to point beyond it. As was the case with sociology, he objects to any notion of nostra philosophia -- especially if that form attempts to systematize the whole of Christian truth.

We absolutely do not deny the grandeur and value of the Platonic ideal and of its philosophy. 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.⁶¹

It is the identification to which he objects, for that effort denies the true work of theology: the medium is never to be confused with the message. For his own work, Ellul would easily admit that his formulations do have

⁵⁹ H of G, pp. 90-91. See also D in O, p. 33, where he goes so far as to say that the Church must be able to use the language of the newspaper. In conversation, M. Ellul said he agreed specifically with Barth at this point.

⁶⁰ This argument concerns the work of theology (and also reflection) and does not involve the question of the uniqueness of Hebrew discussed in footnote 45 of Chapter 5.

⁶¹ To Will, p. 74. Again, it is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss whether or not he is accurate to speak of 'the Platonic ideal'.

certain cultural and even philosophical assumptions. What is important is the status or lack of status given to the formulations by themselves. Once more, he insists on a modest assessment of the intellect, the partial nature of any human expression and the supremacy of the biblical revelation over any human formulae.

Finally, his hesitancy about philosophy stems from his emphasis on dialectical aspects in all areas. We have already seen that he views society in a dialectical perspective and in Section 2, Chapter 7, we shall see that he sees the relationship between God and man as a dialectical one. Similarly, he emphasizes a dialectical relationship in the link between those two realms. He sees a grave danger in thinking that the implications flow smoothly and automatically or that theology provides a first principle for morality.⁶² As was the case concerning theology, he emphasizes the error of seeing the relationship between revelation and the human faculties as a continuum (with the link often provided by feelings or philosophy) -- the error of trying to bridge the unbridgeable gap apart from Jesus Christ. In order to avoid these dangers as much as possible and to accept the complexities of the real situations in which Christians find themselves, Ellul prefers to speak of the confrontation between 'truth' (as the revelation of God) and 'reality' (as discussed in Part A, Chapter 2). For his overall task, he does not consider his biblical studies and his sociological studies as either unified or totally separate. Rather, he finally sees them as locked in a constant tension in which both he and the reader are inextricably bound -- in a way he considers difficult, if not impossible, for the detachment

⁶² See, for example, To Will, pp. 201-24 including footnotes. As mentioned in the foundational chapter, footnote 53, it is in this area that he parts company with Barth.

and completeness of philosophy.

I always think "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 dogmatician. I can never look at anything sub specie aeternitatis. Whatever I think, do, write, as a Christian, I think, do, write, in relation to a specific setting.⁶³

He does not undertake a critique of eternal problems or all possible problems, but only a critique of those he thinks need attention right now.

I have set up the principle of confrontation. . . . The Christian intellectual is called frankly to face the sociopolitical reality. This is one demand on the Christian intellectual. The other is that he also develop and deepen his knowledge in the biblical and theological fields. . . . The only thing that will be of any use is not synthesis or adaptation, but confrontation; that it, bringing face to face two factors that are contradictory and irreconcilable and at the same time inseparable. . . . So I have steadily deepened this idea, which is meant to prompt every reader to make his own decision, on the spiritual as well as the economic level. . . . The whole of it is a composition in counterpoint. Every sociological analysis of mine is answered (not in the sense of replying, but in that of noting the other dialectical pole) by a biblical or theological analysis. For example, to my book The Political Illusion, a study of politics as actually studied in the modern state, corresponds my Politics of God, Politics of Man, a biblical study of the Second Book of Kings.⁶⁴

Ellul sees the confrontation as forming a dialectic in which the Christian intellectual cannot legitimately disregard either pole. There are not simply two separate spheres that happen to be in conflict, nor can he merely choose truth and reality with an accompanying rejection of the other. The reality of the world can be understood finally only in the light of the biblical revelation; otherwise, the facts and reality

⁶³ "Mirror", p. 200. This is yet another statement of the doctrine of the two realms.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 201. One should perhaps note again the somewhat ambiguous use of the word 'spiritual'. Also, it is in his biblical books that come his reflections on the understanding of his sociology.

achieve no true significance. "Without revelation all our reasoning is doubtlessly useful, but does not view reality in true perspective."⁶⁵ Furthermore, there is no aspect of life, whether economic or political or scientific or technical, that is autonomous from the truth of the judgment and mercy of God. It is fairly clear, then, why Ellul says that reality should be considered in its relation to the biblical revelation for proper understanding. At the same time, if man were totally in communion with God, as in the Edenic state, then there would be no problem about reality at all. There would be no need for the biblical revelation, for it is intended, as we shall see in Section 2, Chapter 7 only for the salvation of all people in revolt from God. It is directed towards man who, as a result of the fall, is enslaved in reality. Since the situation is as it is, one cannot aspire to a 'pure' knowledge of the Bible as the expression of God's holy will, as a thing on its own, apart from actual people in the 'here and now' situation. Thus, even the Bible cannot be adequately examined, if it is severed from the concrete world to which it is always directed. For example, the true understanding or significance of The Technological Society is considered in The Meaning of the City: at the same time, The Technological Society is required to document for now what is said biblically (that is, for all times) concerning God's judgment and mercy on the city. Ellul insists on both of the foregoing aspects when he places his overall enterprise into a dialectical, rather than a philosophical, schema.

This formulation does not constitute a Manichaeian dualism: in fact, it does not even mean that ultimately the two poles of the dialectic have comparable power at all. God's truth is prior, sovereign, triumphant.

⁶⁵ M of C, p. 153.

In addition, as I shall also discuss in Section 2, Chapters 7 and 8, Ellul maintains that Jesus Christ defeated the powers of reality and His revelation showed what it would mean not to give allegiance to them -- through the power of reconciling love. When stressing the relationship of confrontation, Ellul does not deny these beliefs, but he does want to remind readers that knowledge of the victory of Christ and the sovereignty of God does not extricate Christians from their real position, where they are called upon to manifest that love. They are not exempted from the struggle with reality. He sees this conclusion as also being part of the biblical revelation from which the Christians should not remain aloof. They are not exempt because of the revelation of Jesus Christ -- as the only Event when truth and reality were united.⁶⁶ Because of that revelation, they both have heard the Word of salvation and also cannot ignore the world in which they live. No human synthesis can resolve the contradiction and tension between truth and reality: the Christian intellectual can only try to state it clearly.

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 position.⁶⁷

ii) Prayer

Thus, through the means of confrontation, Ellul spells out his particular task, in the hope that Christians will be exhorted to incarnate in the world their biblical faith. It must be remembered, however,

⁶⁶ See M of C, p. 170 and To Will, p. 27. The idea of 'truth-in-reality' is what he means by the Christians injecting something wholly other into the world. See also "Du Temps", p. 362.

⁶⁷ "Mirror", p. 201. What he means by 'decision' will be discussed in Section 2, Chapter 7. For now, I am merely looking at the structure of Ellul's work to clarify his task. This view does not undermine what he has said about the aspects of his writings directed to all people.

that the Christian intellectual performs only a limited task for the Church. Ultimately, for Ellul, the only genuine link between truth and reality comes not in any philosophical formulation nor even in a dialectical schema, but only through the activity of the Holy Spirit, in the Christian witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ -- through prayer.

Prayer is the means given by God for the dialogue with him, that is to say, it is the very junction of the future with eternity, where we have seen that our hope is located. In its dialogue it embraces the past presented for pardon, the future defined by the co-operation between the praying person and God, and eternity, which prayer lays hold of through the sighs uttered by the Holy Spirit.

With respect to the world, prayer is the act of bringing reality into the presence of God.

Apart from prayer, action is necessarily violence and falsehood. Even technological action, in spite of its appearance of neutrality and objectivity, is nevertheless in that category. Prayer is the only possible substitute for violence in human relations.⁶⁸

When Ellul writes about prayer, primarily in Prayer and Modern Man, he goes to great pains again to stress that he is not writing a theology of prayer. He simply refers the reader to others for this aspect of the matter.⁶⁹ Rather than attempting to make any easy substitution for philosophy, he wants to stress that the gap between 'truth' and 'reality' cannot be bridged except through the miracle of prayer, which cannot be

⁶⁸ HTA, p. 273; PMM, pp. 171, 173. These quotes are given to indicate the general tenor of what he says about prayer. Earlier I discussed his views concerning the Bible as a book of prayers. Here I am focusing on the need for prayer to see its full implications as far as his approach to the Bible is concerned. The two go together.

⁶⁹ See PMM, p. vii. In one of his few explicit references to Calvin, he recommends The Institutes, III 20. From that writing, it is interesting to note, in light of Ellul's point about philosophy, the following. "This is indeed that secret and recondite philosophy which cannot be extracted from syllogisms but is well understood by those whose eyes God has opened, that in his light they may see light."

separated from God in Jesus Christ. Basically he shows that everything he reflects upon in his theological writings cannot finally be rooted in or responded to by means of certain techniques. For him, there is no getting around the fact that the link arises only from faith. Even the clearest articulation of the doctrine of the two realms for a specific age does not, in itself, supply an appropriate solution. Furthermore, he considers it impossible to speak directly of Christian prayer, but only of the Christian who prays.⁷⁰ Even that task is difficult, for Ellul recognizes with full force that all the reasons for praying have effectively been knocked down in the modern, technological world. In fact, he accepts and even stresses as genuine all the difficulties, the insecurities and the fragility of a belief in prayer. For him, there can be no reason for prayer except obedience to the commandment given in the Bible. It is not my purpose here to discuss in full detail Ellul's arguments concerning prayer; more simply, I want to spell out some of the implications of his belief as it pertains to the other parts of this thesis and also to dispel any charges against Ellul of mere intellectualism.

Put succinctly, "it is prayer which constitutes the meeting place between God's word and the human word, under the form of a dialogue".⁷¹ The possibility of that meeting involves the prior miracle of God who chooses to come close to man, who chose to reveal Himself through Jesus Christ, so that the gap has actually been mediated in advance. Although

⁷⁰ See PMM, p. 53.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 176. The significance of dialogue among believers has already been discussed. Here I am concerned with prayer as the means of mediation.

a decision to respond is also an integral part of prayer (especially in a time of abandonment), the primary element is the assumption of a prior relationship, before even the thought of prayer comes to a person -- one in which God spoke first.

When my emotions, the tragedy or the joy of the situation, push me to take the initiative and to turn fervently to a God who may not be there, and who is certainly silent, lo, I enter upon an open dialogue established from the very beginning, whether I do so knowingly (having read the Scriptures), or unknowingly (having been cut off from them).⁷²

The permanence of prayer does not come from any human initiative or faculty or even a feeling of need, but only from the addressee. Furthermore, the guarantee of that permanence, for Christians, comes only as a matter of faith that the Word spoken in the Bible is addressed to everyone from the very beginning -- through God's activity as Holy Spirit. Thus once again, for Ellul, the Bible is the source for receiving directly the commandment, the invitation, to prayer.

It is by reading the Bible that man can receive this command to pray. So in a certain sense we can say that as long as Bible reading is maintained prayer is not dead, the more so since the Bible conveys not only this summons but also prayer lived historically, and ready at every moment to become our prayer.

The word of God does not transmit an external command, but one which is at the same time carried out. Because there is the commandment to pray, there is along with it the substance of prayer. God does not issue an abstract order, but always one which is incarnate and lived in reality.⁷³

This statement also implies that prayer is necessary for a proper reading of the Bible. Prayer then, is not something a person does by himself: it is a gift, with the actual prayer being a fruit or a sign of God's prior activity. For Ellul, it is this miracle of the gift, fully revealed

⁷² PMM, p. 124. For a discussion of prayer as human activity as well as God's gift, see HTA, pp. 270-74, 283.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 109.

in Jesus Christ, that makes the spirit of prayer the contrary of present reality.

[P]rayer precisely is not made possible by a system, but rather by a free decision of grace on the part of the one who wills indeed to listen; . . . that prayer precisely is a miracle and not a technical procedure.⁷⁴

The gift of grace, as we have already seen for Ellul, cannot be humanly analyzed.

As soon as he speaks of prayer as a gift, there is the added danger, especially in a consumer society, of thinking of it as a commodity or an acquisition which will automatically bring efficacious results to the receiver. Ellul thinks that the idea of gift must be seen in proper perspective. It is true that the commandment to pray also includes a promise -- the promise that the required conditions for prayer will be provided, that prayer is possible, that prayer will be answered (although not always as expected), that all individual prayers are united in God's plan for the whole Church.⁷⁵ This promise, however, does not imply a super-technique to fill the hunger for instant results. Neither is prayer something that Christians 'have', something that they can save for a rainy day. On the contrary, he sees these attitudes as contributing to the drying up of prayer. Ellul prefers to talk of the gift as an invitation to participate in a form of the life of God.⁷⁶ The gift is the power of bringing one's will into conformity with the will of God (to be discussed further in Section 2, Chapter 7).

We no longer seek through prayer a conformity of our will with God's will, which makes our speech true, hence efficacious. We seek, rather, to achieve direct results, without bothering about the truth or the special will of God, or with

⁷⁴ PMM, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 68, 125-30.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

our own obedience.⁷⁷

The human decision comes in the responsibility to respond to the commandment, to enter into the dialogue. This decision implies no passive reaction by the recipient; quite the contrary, it involves the total commitment of his whole life. To accept the gift of dialogue, to enter into a form of life with God, means to be prepared for the consequences of being chosen as an intermediary in God's work for the salvation of all people. As we have seen, Ellul underscores the biblical revelation as showing neither God nor man as acting totally independently.

God does not tolerate lukewarmness. We must know that genuine prayer is infinitely simple and radically serious. We need to sit down first and count the cost, to see whether we can complete the tower, whether the army at our disposal (the "Our Father") is sufficient for the battle. It is impossible to take prayer lightly for there is where we meet the radicalism of faith.⁷⁸

This radicalism of faith requires the provision of the link in the world between 'truth' and 'reality'.

In theological terms, Ellul would see prayer -- man in the presence of God -- as the only and necessary connection between faith and works. As I have indicated, he sees prayer as possible only within faith; yet, he also says, "Prayer is not a work of faith. It is the possibility of the work of faith. That is why we are told to pray without ceasing, for faith is completely sterile without this respiration."⁷⁹ It is the inseparable link between the two, without which neither has genuine life and significance. Because the gift of grace is beyond analysis, as is the actual mechanics of human decision, Ellul speaks mainly in images

⁷⁷ PMM, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 163-64.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

and concerning the results in the life of the Christian. The most important image, in terms of this thesis, is that of prayer as a mirror in which the person praying sees himself as God sees him.⁸⁰ This metaphor is the same one that Ellul uses in his description of his work as biblical reflection. The decision of prayer is the source of Christian realism about the way things are. Similarly, prayer allows the possibility of seeing one's life as a totality instead of unconnected fragments that have no rhyme or reason.

It is the continuous woof on which is woven the warp of my occupations, my sentiments, my actions. The warp without that woof will never constitute a whole, a pattern, and the tissue of life will never be woven. We will, in fact, give way to every solicitation.⁸¹

The image of prayer as mirror reinforces what he means by the fact-value distinction in social thought. Human events etc. do actually have an understanding and an assessment, but only seen in the mirror of prayer: otherwise, that understanding and that totality is unavailable to human equipment on its own. Furthermore, only with this reflection comes any possibility for the unique activity of the Church in the world. James I:23-25 uses the explicit image of the mirror in such a way as to emphasize that the reflection is not merely a static or an intellectual one, for it leads directly to the second commandment regarding one's neighbour. Ellul says the only true mirror, in this respect, is prayer. Prayer does not eliminate action, but rather specifically Christian action is the fruit of prayer.

We must get away from the idea that prayer is contained in the encounter with the other person. So many encounters take place which bring me to the despair of an impossible dialogue. Rather, it is the encounter comprised within

⁸⁰ See PMM, p. 119.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 107.

prayer which gives me genuine access to the other person, because of this promise of the gathering together. I can then refer to the Father the missed encounter, the dialogue of misunderstandings, in order to render them possible once again. I can lean on the promise, so that my prayer might let me penetrate the sin which separates us from one another.⁸²

Because in God all prayers are united, not only are individual relations possible, but also Ellul uses the image of prayer as "the begetting of a future"⁸³ which includes the whole eschatological dimension of Christianity to be discussed in Section 2, Chapters 7 and 8. This aspect refers, generally, to the fulfilment of God's plan for the salvation of all people, which was inaugurated with Christ and will be completed totally with the coming of the New Jerusalem. For now, I point out only that Ellul contends that this hope and promise of the true meaning of reality is also an assertion of the only liberation from the forces of reality, of the ability to discern the signs of the times in order to be the watchman for the Church and of the possibility of injecting something new into the world in a unique form of social participation.

Thus eschatological prayer necessarily brings us back to the life of current events, but for quite another purpose than merely to take part in these events.

Radicalism is not really produced by some procedure of the intellect, or of the will to action, whatever it might be. It is brought about by the presence of God alone. The whole Bible, from beginning to end, attests that. It even constitutes, in all probability, the central theme of the kerygma.⁸⁴

The third image which Ellul uses in his discussion of prayer is that of combat.⁸⁵ Not only does he consider this dimension always important,

⁸² PMM, p. 129.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 131.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 170, 164. For the other aspects mentioned, see pp. 120-121; 134-36; 170-75. Repeating this quote links again act and prayer.

⁸⁵ For this discussion, see all of Chapter 5 of PMM, pp. 139-78.

but also he thinks it takes on an even higher prominence in a time of abandonment by God. God and man are still not one: there is no automatic communion, ever since man's attempted rupture in the fall. The contradiction between the will of God and the will of man is the situation that makes prayer necessary, with the combat taking place on a number of different levels. It is the entering into this combat that is the central challenge to the human decision in prayer. First of all, it is a combat against oneself, for one has to struggle against doubt and temptation -- all of the reasons for not praying and all the scattering forces of the world.

To pray goes against the natural bent that I instinctively am because inclined that way by my culture, my surroundings, and my work. There is already a combat here, at the most humble level.⁸⁶

Secondly, in a time of abandonment, prayer is also a struggle against God who has turned away. It is the demand that He turn back again and that He keep His promises made in Jesus Christ. For those who have heard His Word in the prayer, prayer is the demand, made against all odds, that the miracle of grace take place again in this era. In this situation, prayer in hope becomes the only link in the dialectic.⁸⁷ Finally, since believers are the representatives of God on earth and the representatives of all people before God, prayer is a combat involving everyone. Again, Ellul stresses the relationship between the individual and the whole of which he is a part. On the one hand, he mentions that Jesus always withdrew to pray. On the other hand, prayer never involves simply the individual self.

⁸⁶ PMM, p. 143-144. The reason for combat will be discussed in Chapter 7.

⁸⁷ See HTA, p. 251.

It is a combat on behalf of men, but also, if need be, against them, insofar as this prayer involves the proclamation of the truth to the indifferent person. It is to this extent that there is no frontier between the Church and the world. The prayer for all men attests this difficult relation of love, which both gives of itself and makes demands. Prayer which rests on that faith and on that love for all men is in no way the expression of a vague and generalized humanitarianism. It is the commitment, without reservation, of all our strength to the single point of salvation won for all in Jesus Christ. Apart from that, prayer is meaningless.⁸⁸

Overall, these three directions of the combat of prayer correspond directly to the three responsibilities of the Church discussed in the foundational chapter. Without prayer, Ellul would say that the Church can be simply another sociological institution: she cannot, however, truly be the Church.

Although Ellul has stressed the combat of prayer and the rigour that is now required of the Church, in conversation, he has rejected the notion that he is making it too hard for Christians. At this point, he would always come back to the liberating miracle of grace, for God is the source. If it were a question of Christians alone, then the demands would be impossibly excessive. It is, however, the revelation of love, forgiveness and reconciliation that is renewed in the dialogue of prayer. He quotes Bonhoeffer, who described prayer as "the break in the anxious circle of hesitations".⁸⁹ Since prayer is the unhindered meeting and dialogue between God and man, it is the re-unification and making whole of man, where all his problems and fears are taken over and put into the proper perspective of God's truth. It is the possibility of finding faith on earth, the possibility of preaching, sacrament and the

⁸⁸ PMM, pp. 165-166. For the relation between the praying individual, the whole Church and all mankind, see also pp. 118, 170, 177, 178.

⁸⁹ Quoted in PMM, p. 142. (not footnoted) See also pp. 61, 133.

witness of love that the Christian does not have to undertake by himself.

Such is the ultimate meaning of the combat of prayer, in which we discover that obedience in the face of every natural inclination and hope in the face of every probability take on a value far surpassing our personal concerns. At every moment, the eschatological prayer is a combat against death and nothingness, so that we may pick up once again the thread of life.⁹⁰

In Part A, Chapter 4, I have discussed how Ellul described technique in terms of le rien, and in the general Conclusion, I shall discuss how he understands technique in the light of the biblical revelation. The only true unity between the two realms of his thought comes in prayer.

Conclusion to Chapter 6

This chapter has been focusing on the way in which Ellul thinks the Bible should be read by Christians -- as God's book. In that examination, we have seen that these principles (which he sees within the Bible and not as an imposition on it) push the readers beyond reading it as they would any other book to a response in witness and works. The very reading of the Bible calls forth the task of the Church as outlined in the foundational chapter. In short, any analysis of his exegesis of and his reflections on the Bible must finally re-unite the two dimensions. It is on this level that Ellul finally does not find the assertions of Barth in the field of dogmatics to be sufficient. On the one hand, he agrees that the central relationship witnessed to in the Bible revolves around the truth that God says something. On the other hand, he also believes that the Bible takes up the most concrete and even subjective concerns of people. Therefore, in the final analysis, he considers it part of biblical studies to concretize the proclamation that speaks directly to the 'here and now'. Furthermore, because the Bible

⁹⁰ PMM, p. 178.

is not immune from life, Ellul thinks that it does include certain themes and problems. Since he does look there for guidance, he can sound like a thematic writer who can be distorted into following in the footsteps of Spinoza. To say that they are alike in their approaches to the Bible is to distort the Bible completely. Ellul always tries to subject his reading to the witness of the Bible, while Spinoza subjects parts of the Bible, separated from each other, to the scrutiny of his own scientific understanding. The distinctiveness of Ellul's position comes perhaps in the illustration that he sees the Bible as a banquet, rather than as a cafeteria or as raw meat needing human intelligence to make it a cooked meal or as a separate menu.

POSTSCRIPT TO SECTION 1
COMMENTS ON OTHER APPROACHES

To complete this account of the way in which Ellul approaches biblical studies, I shall turn briefly to what he sees as the errors in other common approaches. Again, this via negativa, common to all his writings, serves to underscore, by contrast, his own position. Basically, in line with his practical concerns, he does not focus on a catalogue of all possible errors. Rather, he attempts to isolate exactly what needs to be attacked at this particular time. For example, I have mentioned that he rejects naive literalism; nevertheless, he does not go into great detail on this topic, for he does not see it as posing the greatest threat right now. Specifically, he directs polemical attention to principles of biblical studies that he considers are currently working directly contrary to the proper task of the Church. In short, he rejects any approach that does not see the Bible as God's book. From what I have already said, there are indications of places where he is in acute disagreement with prevalent interpretations; for example, prophecy, a lack of reference to Jesus Christ, any separation of texts from their radical unity. I shall not go into the mechanics of each debate, for my purpose is only to examine the principles on which he takes exception to certain major trends: the point is to highlight Ellul's own fundamental principles.

Although Ellul does not always make sharp technical distinctions among the various schools, as is the mode in much current biblical work, he does manage to make clear his views about them. To the three activities that he sees as part of the Church's work in biblical studies --

exegesis, theology and reflection -- he correlates three aberrations abounding in modern biblical scholarship -- structural and cultural studies, hermeneutics and justification. Just as the first three are united only legitimately within the community of faith under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so he sees the other three united in the attempt to understand the Bible, autonomously, as a solely human endeavour.¹ These writers treat the Bible as something other than God's book which only He can disclose. For example, 'justification' has already been discussed in the foundational chapter: it is the attempt to use the Bible, either by a twisting of what is said or by a judicious selection of passages, to fit preconceived ideas and goals.² Ellul claims that the basic error in these attempts, though perhaps inadvertent, is the use of one's own autonomous perceptions as the key to the Bible, in preference to subjecting oneself as a recipient of the Word of God which judges everything else.

Ellul's reproach remains just as stringent when he refers to the seemingly more confined and technically formal explanation of specific passages or books. Whenever Ellul refers to 'modern' exegesis, he criticizes the persistence in dismembering the parts in order to get behind them to the real content. (As already indicated, he makes a sharp

¹ This position becomes somewhat complicated in *HTA*, where he says, "The truth is that no reading is possible when God is silent." (p. 143) Yet he argues the need for the incognito Church to meditate on and hold fast to the Scriptures. There can still be biblical reflections for those who have heard the Word of God and who cling to the promise given in that revelation. Even in a time of God's silence, biblical reflections are possible, but only within the strict rigour of the community of believers.

² This is a constant theme, but with reference specifically to biblical reflections, see "La Technique", *Violence*, *HTA*, pp. 144-45, *NP*, p. 266.

distinction between those who see the Bible as a totality and those who take it piecemeal). This taking apart includes not only structural and form studies, but also the attempts to explain passages in terms of the background of isolated historical or cultural or even psychological factors.³ He maintains that such explanations come as the inevitable result of minute dissection rather than taking the whole as given.

With the text reduced to structures, it is interesting to play with the dismembered parts, but that is a game from which no message comes (and from which none should come). Or, on the other hand, there is a taking apart of what the Church thought significant only when the different parts were fitted together.

That, to me, is the important thing. There is a rejection of the radical unity which the thought of the Bible exhibits from beginning to end, over and above the diversity of authorship, schools of thought, and literary form. It is a rejection for the sake of investigating the specifics of each sequence and of each compilation. This investigation will (perhaps) make possible the precise understanding of a paragraph. It will (perhaps) make possible a better grasp of the historical or cultural setting of this or that school of thought. But it radically separates this strictly isolated and particularized text from the sense of the revelation It is a reduction process which looks scientific, and which in this case is a process of spiritual poverty. It is indeed true that, with God absent, the only thing left for us to do in our real spiritual poverty is to keep peeling layers from the textual envelope. We can rest assured, however, that that will lead nowhere. Its only effect will be to confirm our sterility and to make it more obvious.⁴

³ See for example, M of C, p. 184; HTA, p. 45 and the whole outlook of JJ and P of G.

⁴ HTA, pp. 141-43. Along the same lines is another important passage from the Preface to M of C, p. xvii: "These critical studies reduce to separate parts a text that has been elaborated and at one time received as a whole. It is a good thing to know the strata of tradition in a text and its literary form, but is one sure that all has then been said, or even the essential? Does taking a text back to its date, its primitive identity, give it its real meaning, or the meaning it was at least meant to have when it was made a part of the whole?" It is interesting to note that Ellul makes these comments as one who is a professional historian and not in total ignorance of what is involved. I shall discuss his attitude towards historical criticism shortly.

In short, this information can tell you everything except what you really want to know. These attempts give more allegiance to the guidance of historical and scientific methods than to the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible becomes only a sterile historical and religious record, like that of any other people -- certainly of dubious interest and strange construction. One might think that this approach would prove self-defeating, for their sterility would seem an inadequate substitute for fruitful exegesis or outright dismissal of the Bible. One would conclude that biblical studies would soon wither away as an unimportant discipline, so that the threat would be a passing phenomenon. Ellul's third point is the added problem that the studies are not in fact carried out in vacuo: they take place within the interpretive framework of the new hermeneutics.

"Hermeneutics is the business of interpreting revelation without revelation."⁵ Ellul objects to the reliance on our own efforts alone to find the meaning of the meaning, divorced from the given Bible. In combination with the above sterility, he refers to:

the great effort on the part of Christian intellectuals to make the message audible, understandable, and acceptable on the purely natural level, without the need of any revelatory intervention from God. That is the profound meaning of the immense, well-intentioned investigation undertaken in the

⁵ HTA, p. 146. Despite the limitations he places on theology, Ellul does retain an interpretive function for it. He even goes as far as to admit "that it is indeed possible to restate the revelation without losing it. I assume that one can find images and concepts which fit the situation of modern man, and that the latter stands in need of these, none of which is obvious." (PMM, p. 51) Generally he distinguishes theology within faith from hermeneutics outside that imposes modern explanations back on to the Bible. Hermeneutics is theology gone wrong because of man's usurpation. There is, however, at least one example where he refers to the interpretive task of theology as "proper hermeneutics" (HTA, pp. 269-71). Most often, he is attacking 'the new hermeneutic', but in a generic sense that does not centre out any specific school.

areas of language and hermeneutics. If only one could manage to pinpoint the obstacles which impede man in his hearing of the word of the Gospel, if one could arrive at a linguistic analysis so that this language would be directly understandable, if one could discover the meaning in such a way as to make a restatement possible, then the revealed word would, in short, go over on its own.

The hermeneutic enterprise probes tirelessly and ever more deeply into the mystery of the possible communication and recovery of meaning.⁶

This work of studying the Bible without God through the Holy Spirit is a modern Promethean undertaking in which people try to make over the Bible in their own image. The centrality of the Bible in this task of self-definition is largely a hang-over from the traditional sway it has held. Ellul claims not to be unduly harsh, for he recognizes this age as one of abandonment. Still, just to rub salt in the wound, he draws a parallel between present hermeneutical research and the methods of Billy Graham.

Billy Graham's propaganda methods are the exact equivalent, at his level, of the hermeneutical philosophy, in that they use every last means to obtain results which the Holy Spirit is no longer giving. One can obtain conversions by propaganda, thereby economizing on the action of God, just as hermeneutics can obtain a meaning.⁷

⁶ HTA, pp. 140-1; 144. See also PMM, pp. 50-56, where he expresses his conviction that language is neither the whole of life nor even the key to explain why modern man do not pray. From what I said in the general Introduction, it is obvious that Ellul distinguishes between the legitimate work of the Church (inspired by God) to put people in a position where they can hear the Word, and the actual hearing which in the final analysis remains a gift from God. At this point, he is attacking those procedures that neglect the centrality of God's activity in revelation. Again, as we have seen, he does not think that this observation allows the Church to do nothing.

⁷ HTA, pp. 146-7. To appreciate the full impact of this statement, beyond being merely a facile gibe, one has to take into account all of what Ellul has said previously in Propaganda.

If God is silent in this time, then Ellul maintains that there are only two alternatives -- a sterile non-reading of the Bible under the dominant myths of science and history (as discussed in Part A, Chapter 2) or a remembered, hopeful reading by the remnant Church.

Does Ellul then push his argument to the final conclusion of casting out all modern biblical science? Interestingly enough, considering his attack on cultural studies and the new hermeneutics, he does not. Although it is debatable whether or not he solves the theoretical challenge of the new science, as a historian himself, he bases his argument on the distinction between the work of good and poor historical studies.⁸ As was the case with science in general, he emphasizes the dangers of both a refusal to do all that the discipline can accomplish and an over-stepping of its limits. In short, he says that either a believing or a non-believing historian can study the Bible (or Church history) as documents of human history -- as texts like any other texts. Ellul limits the possibilities of the historian in any field to the establishment of what the text says and how people have interpreted it. In making this statement, he includes the ability of spiritual discernment as central for the study of history as for sociology. For example, he argues that any good study of the history of the Bible comes to the conclusion that Israel

⁸ Most of this whole section concerning the study of history in relation to the Bible comes from a conversation with M. Ellul. It parallels directly what I said in a Part A, Chapter 3 about science, but it is appropriate to include it at this point because of the prevalence of historical criticism in most biblical studies. I concentrate on his view of historical studies as indicative of his overall stance in this area. Ellul's most direct written comments come in "Note Problématique", concerning Church history.

Secondly, when I refer to the theoretical challenge, it is not surprising, in light of what I have already discussed, that he is simply not concerned with the philosophical issue, for example, of the relationship between Spinoza and modern biblical science.

did have unique institutions and traditions, even though it could not ascertain whether the Jews were chosen by God.⁹ Also, a good historian would see that the Bible was written within belief in the revelation of God that demanded a response from the reader. Anything less would be poor history for it would miss the 'spiritual nucleus' of the Bible, which is, in principle, open to any observer.¹⁰ Finally, he maintains that a good historian, who has any semblance of humility, will admit that there is a part to many texts that cannot be explained on the solely human grounds open to the science. For Ellul, the Bible is clearer than most texts concerning the point at which human equipment can go no further.

Les plus honnêtes parmi les historiens reconnaissent qu'un X se pose, auquel ils ne peuvent donner de valeur. Ils admettent que dans tout cela, il y a un enchaînement, qui n'est pas absolument logique, un sens qui va plus loin que celui que la science peut donner.¹¹

If biblical historians always followed the accepted canons of the discipline, then, according to Ellul, there would be no great problem. From his point of view, however, too many practitioners have an axe to grind, so that they do not treat the Bible as they would other texts. As a

⁹ See, for example, *L'Apocalypse*, p. 237 where he contrasts pagan festivals and Jewish festivals. Analogously, see p. 10, where he contrasts the writing of St. John with other apocalyptic literature.

¹⁰ I say "in principle", for Ellul was talking about history qua history, which implies that the reader can recognize the demands whether or not he accepts them. As was the case concerning reason; he thinks that in practice there is no such thing as a 'pure' study of history; nevertheless one can speak of a 'better' or 'worse' studies. In practice, he was reticent to say whether a reader must say 'yes' or 'no' to those demands as part of the very reading.

¹¹ "Note Problématique", p. 304. That X of history will be discussed in Section 2, Chapter 8.

result, they 'get away with' conclusions and procedures that would not be allowed in any other area of the discipline of history. He concludes that historical studies in themselves, if kept within the proper limits, are no threat. In fact, he thinks that they can make some important contributions.

At the very least, Ellul agrees with Barth's position in his prefaces to The Epistle to the Romans that the purely human work of historical sciences can serve as a preliminary to the Christian endeavour of being guided by the Bible.¹² Beyond simply establishing the proper text, Ellul also thinks that historical studies can give a negative answer to certain approaches to the Bible. For example, the futility of the search for the historical Jesus, following solely the methods of nineteenth century science, shows that these methods are not very helpful in learning about the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. That failure, without disproving that Jesus was God, taught people to abandon that particular route. Thirdly, Ellul takes a stand against any crude position that palpable facts about Israel or the Church can be bent to suit a particular conception of the Bible. Again, since he believes that 'reality is reality', he is also convinced that it cannot be changed in retrospect. The Bible does not need human justification through a distortion of

¹² See E to R, pp. 6-10 and also "Note Problématique", p. 314. This 'concession' has been seen to make the argument somewhat ambiguous, for many see the establishment of (especially) the New Testament texts as no mean feat -- one that involves much of what Ellul has dismissed such as interpolation. Both Barth and Ellul take the position that many use these questions as a pretext for going beyond the strictly limited scope of their study. In Ellul's words, there is a tendency "to play fast and loose with the texts" (from conversation). For the argument that the real area of divergence is much smaller than people are led to believe, see C.C. Anderson, The Historical Jesus: A Continuing Quest (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1972), pp. 36-38.

evidence. Since the Bible is the revelation of truth, Christians and Jews have nothing to fear from the proper uncovering of fact and there is a need for honesty on all sides.

S'adressant ensuite au problème de la science historique, l'auteur apporte tout son soin à défendre la validité de la science historique, affirmant à juste titre que la foi ne doit pas conduire à fausser l'histoire, ni à une partialité grossière, comme celle que nous observons malheureusement tout le temps, quelle que soit la foi qui anime les historiens (chrétienne, laïque ou communiste). La méthode scientifique en histoire doit être scrupuleusement maintenue et observée, par honnêteté.¹³

For Ellul, no cultural study could possibly disprove what God has actually said and done, or the relationship between God and man as revealed in the Bible. To use the same example, he asserts that finally it is factually impossible to separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith. From a slightly different perspective, while the Bible is not a textbook for certain groups of people who appeared in the past on the world stage, he argues that it is not possible for the Bible to be at odds with what people can know about the people God chose as vehicles for His self-disclosure. Therefore, Ellul is not averse to using the results of historical criticism for his own biblical studies, if, in his judgment, they constitute good history.¹⁴ Perhaps the most striking example is that, in conversation, he did not insist on the Mosaic

¹³ "Mystère", p. 469.

¹⁴ See for example To Will, p. 305; P of G, pp. 44, 131; JJ, pp. 10, 28 (where he uses their own shaky evidence against their conclusions); HTA, p. 144 (where he makes certain exceptions). This method can be called a 'pick and choose' one to suit his own argument, while he disregards anything incompatible. Also, other historians may debate his selections. Nevertheless, remembering that he is a professional historian himself, Ellul has not violated the main point of his argument which requires an assessment of the quality of the historical studies.

authorship of the Pentateuch in the face of the contrary evidence that it was attributed to him because he had been a great legislator. What does remain of primary importance for him is the belief that the Jews considered themselves, in fact, the Chosen People of God to whom He had revealed His Law. He says that election does not change even if Moses was not the actual author. Fourthly, Ellul contends that historical studies can have a salutary effect on believers, even in a time of abandonment. That is to say, biblical science can make believers reflect on what is essential to their faith and what is simply their own version. Historical studies can renovate the human reception of the Word of the Bible or correct previous distortions that arose from clinging to human constructions. Therefore, he can say, "Historical criticism, for instance, seems to me entirely a wholesome procedure."¹⁵

Apart from these perhaps negative motives, Ellul also gives two positive reasons for a consideration of historical criticism. First, he says that it cannot be cast aside prematurely, precisely because it is so very appealing to modern people with their belief in the dominant myths of history and science. As part of his task, Ellul thinks that he must speak to people in their concrete situation, no matter how dangerous that approach may be.¹⁶ He thinks that he can speak most clearly today

¹⁵ "Mirror", p. 203. See also *PMM*, pp. 75-76, where he distinguishes categorically between the healthy spirit of criticism and the "mandrake poison" of scepticism. See also *NP*, p. 277. This possibility does not necessarily elevate the new studies in themselves, for it should be noted that he made the same comment about the attacks on Christianity made by Marx and Nietzsche, who showed Christians how far they were from witnessing to biblical revelation.

¹⁶ See *HTA*, pp. 86-87, where he also makes the same point about Luther. He does not see the problem as intrinsically more difficult in this age than in any other, except that it is a time of abandonment.

about Christianity by demonstrating what it is saying about history and by displaying that it is not defensive about facts. Secondly, he does not totally reject historical studies in order to encourage Christians to use their human equipment. As discussed in Part A, Chapter 2, he sees the danger in thinking that Christians have an inside track or a special esoteric form of reasoning that exempts them from using the human equipment open to non-believers. Therefore, he goes on to say that since the study of history is the exegesis of texts, the same methods apply to the study of the Bible. In the same spirit as his distinction between analysis and understanding, he also distinguishes between exegesis and theology. In this light, he maintains that Barth was doing the proper work of the historian, without any added tools, when he wrote The Epistle to the Romans. Although this argument runs somewhat contrary to Barth's own comments about the doctrine of inspiration,¹⁷ it does underline Ellul's arguments that history is not simply a technical study and that Christians have no special methods.

Although, in principle, biblical exegesis is open to both believer and non-believer, in practice, Ellul says that it would appear that the historian who believes the Bible is more apt to do good history in this area than the one who does not. The main reason involves the amount of attention the scholar is prepared to give to the text and how long he is prepared to wrestle with it. In the case of Barth, Ellul says that, since he started where most others left off, he was able to do a more accurate job of explicating the text of Romans. Again, this position illustrates

¹⁷ E to R, p. 1. It should be noted, however, that later (p. 18), Barth says that his method is applicable to studying any text. Therefore, the difference between the two men may largely be a difference of expression.

Ellul's insistence that a person can come to know a thing best through loving it and through being existentially involved in it. An integral part of paying attention to the text is the ability not to distort it. For Ellul, a constant threat to good history is the reading in of modern assumptions alien to the text itself.¹⁸ If the historian or exegete excludes the possibility of God's activity, then he is simply not portraying the Bible accurately.

Il s'agit d'abord d'examiner les textes. Toute l'histoire pensée par les modernes repose sur l'examen des textes, sur leur prise au sérieux, et consiste dans leur explication et coordination. Or que nous disent tous les textes relatifs à l'histoire de l'Eglise? Que celle-ci représente Dieu sur la terre, qu'elle ne vit que de la Parole de Dieu, qu'elle n'a pas d'autre valeur que celle que Dieu lui donne, qu'elle a un Seigneur qui la dirige, que toute son activité n'a pas d'autre sens que de répandre la vérité révélée et de témoigner de Jésus-Christ. . . . Or comment voit-on que l'on utilise ces textes? en faisant table rase de tout cet ensemble d'affirmations -- on ne les voit pas. . . . Quand les apôtres expliquent comment l'Eglise a été fondée, . . . tout cela est en fait des hallucinations, des explications a posteriori, des légendes pieuses. Est-ce interpréter correctement les textes? En fait, c'est méconnaître le fondement même de la science historique moderne. . . . Agir comme ces historiens, c'est nier la méthode historique même dont ils sont si fiers.¹⁹

In this regard, Ellul sees the non-believer as more apt to succumb than the believer who is apt to see that the text concerns more than simply human history. The issue refers to the common failure to carry out the humble task of history qua history. The problem is not the

¹⁸ For Ellul, this danger lurks in all historical studies, although it is particularly noticeable in the biblical or ecclesiastical fields. See for example, his general comments in A of R, pp. 11, 32 or M du B, p. 292.

¹⁹ "Note Problématique", pp. 305-6. Although this passage refers directly to Church history, Ellul says that the same comments apply to biblical studies as well. To indicate that there is no change in the methods of good history, Ellul points to Luke 1:1-4. (Ibid., p. 314)

discipline, but it is a question of the transformation of the intellect.²⁰

Ellul's most serious attack on historical criticism comes when he sees it overstepping the legitimate limits of the proper work. In short, as I have shown in Part A, Chapter 2, he attacks any view that the study of history can lead to its own understanding by becoming dominated by the myths of history and science. For example, he sees the danger of succumbing to the myth of objectivity in the search for the historical Jesus. He considers it a fallacy of this aspect of the myth of science to think that, even if one could isolate the 'objective' words of Jesus, one would be any further ahead in understanding Christianity. Ellul stands firm that biblical science can never lead people to the truth of the Bible and, whenever it makes this claim, it is destructive. He points to the tendencies of these studies to mistake the messenger for the message. Although God has chosen human intermediaries to make His revelation known, it is impossible to go the other way -- from an allegedly independent study of culture and history to the meaning of the content of God's revelation. Therefore, in the crucial concern of understanding the meaning of the Bible, historical studies make only a contribution by way of example. At this point, we come back to Ellul's warning that the attempts of biblical science under the rubric of the new hermeneutics can positively mitigate against proper understanding.

²⁰ Regarding "Note Problématique", where he implies that the Christian has a different method for doing history (see for example, p. 302), he explained that because the Christian has a renewed intelligence (see also "Mystère", p. 468), he can do a more complete history of the Church or of the Bible. This task does not involve different methods nor does it mean a rejection of what non-Christians can learn about the Church. Just as he will not allow Christians to disregard human facts, so Ellul will not finally allow the partial history of non-believers to disregard the Event of God in history. See "Mystère", p. 470.

Since at the conclusion of the hermeneutic operation a man finds himself caught between the classic concepts (which may mean nothing to him, but to which he is accustomed) and the new concepts (which he understands only with difficulty and at the risk of every possible misunderstanding), the operation balances out with a deficit of faith. It produces a schizophrenia of "the unfaithful faithful", a lukewarmness, a loss of interest among Christians and a frivolous, ironic skepticism in non-Christians.²¹

Even the work of a good historian, such as Barth, contributes to understanding only under the rubric of good theology in faith.²² Therefore, the most basic issue revolves around Ellul's belief that it is possible to understand the Bible only through being committed to the whole of it. This assertion brings us back to the belief in the Bible as God's book that should be seen as a radical unity in Jesus Christ. Just as God in His activity as Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible, so He alone can inspire its reception as true. Therefore, only those who are committed to the demands of the Bible can see its raison d'être, can do good theology. Finally, for Ellul, debates about the meaning of the Bible can take place only among believers, so that only the believing historian can contribute on the most important level. The final question for him is the absolute standard to which all others must submit themselves in proper perspective. Ellul always remains adamantly opposed to any attempt to understand the Bible independently of revelation.

Although Ellul's argument is persuasive, it still remains to be seen whether or not he has fully spoken to the dangers some see in his even

²¹ PMM, p. 51. At this stage, the issue becomes more than simply incomplete studies or studies that are off the point.

²² With respect to E to R, it was a historical study written under the rubric of good theology overall, so that it becomes extremely difficult to separate out the two different aspects, when Ellul draws his distinction. Basically, he sees theology as an articulation of the meaning of the whole, with exegesis being the spelling out of what a particular writer said in a particular part.

partial acceptance of modern biblical science.²³ Does he become neither fish nor fowl in the current version of an old debate for Protestants? To what extent is it possible to accept modern scientific methods, based on a rejection of the claims of revelation, without thereby undermining the authority of the Bible as God's book? For example, is the rejection of Mosaic authorship of as little consequence as Ellul has indicated? In other words, how many claims of the Chosen People, as contained within the Bible itself and maintained throughout the tradition of Israel and the Church, can be relativized without making their book simply a historically conditioned, and therefore relative, document? Is Moses' prediction of his own death any less plausible a fact than the giving of the Law at all? The difficulty, in Ellul's terms, comes in maintaining a proper attempt in understanding the way in which God makes use of human intermediaries.

In order to reach a conclusion about Ellul's stance on the use of historical studies, it is important to note that (as was the case with literalism) he is launching a two-pronged attack. First, he discusses history qua history to avoid the failures and distortions of many Christian historians that gave rise to a reliance on historical criticism in the first place. Similarly, as a historian himself, he is convinced that the neglect of the proper study of history will lead to a further reading back into the Bible of modern assumptions. The second wing of his attack, from a different direction, comes against the belief that the human aspects of history constitute the whole of history and/or its own explanation. At this point, he seems to move to a slightly ambiguous stance concerning

²³ See, for example, Leo Strauss, Spinoza's Critique of Religion (New York: 1965), pp. 251-271, for a thorough statement of the theoretical problem.

whether or not completely adequate exegesis is equally open to believer or non-believer. Certainly, he does lean to the argument that a believer is more apt to pursue the whole of exegesis well.²⁴ It would appear that he becomes ambiguous here, for the possibility of seeing all the ingredients in a text becomes tightly linked, although not identical, with the limitations of one's understanding of history. In other words, whether or not it is absolutely necessary, modern historical studies and the new hermeneutics on the one hand, and good exegesis and theology on the other, tend to become intimately connected. On the deepest level of his discussion of the study of history, Ellul would remind people that, exactly as is the case with science, there is no such thing as pure history in the world dominated by the fall. Often the defence of biblical science is joined in terms of an independent, non-biased look at the Bible. Although Ellul would say that there is room for movement between 'better' and 'worse' historical studies, there is finally no possibility for complete neutrality and independence. "L'histoire est impossible sans la main de l'historien."²⁵ Even within the possibilities and the necessity of doing good studies, they would acquire their importance only through the framework of their true meaning which comes from outside the facts of history themselves. Therefore, he can also say:

En d'autres termes, le récit d'un fait par un témoin, même erroné, même suspect, est plus vrai que la photographie

²⁴ The question of what he means by the dimensions of history will be discussed in Section 2, Chapter 8, concentrating on Ellul's view of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.

²⁵ "Note Problématique", p. 299. In Section 2, Chapter 7, I shall discuss Ellul's understanding that people are not autonomous in the sense that they give allegiance either to the order of Christ or to the order of necessity.

brutale de ce fait. Et de même l'histoire consistera moins dans une explication par des méthodes dites scientifiques, que dans le témoignage de la réalité humaine contenue dans les faits.²⁶

The apparent discrepancies that seem to appear from time to time in his stance vis-à-vis the threat or non-threat of historical criticism stem from his necessary attempts to fight different battles. The real source of his attack is the tendency of the discipline to become a cloak for a religious perspective, different from the revelation given in the Bible, giving an alien explanation of the world. Although he may not have theoretically resolved the issue, practically, he has laid the groundwork so that his position, like Barth's, basically undercuts the ground under most biblical criticism, thereby constituting a general rejection of its final goals. By his stress on the prevalence of 'bad' history, he puts the whole enterprise into such a perspective that its claims become subjected to an entirely different order. Although many might think that his tenuous balance, with its perhaps uncertain concessions, will not hold against the onslaught of the new hermeneutics, Ellul has confidence that, despite this time of abandonment, the truth of biblical revelation cannot be disproved.

²⁶ "Note Problématique", p. 317. The photograph, which Ellul means by the study of history, remains quite necessary and it cannot be distorted; nevertheless, it remains a humble and limited tool.

Conclusion to Part B, Section 1.

Ellul's position on biblical studies is one that is almost guaranteed to raise a storm of protest from virtually all sides. Many attacks would dismiss him as a fundamentalist 'Bible-thumper'. Apart from the actual content of his theological writings, his methods are apt to be attacked as illuminist and literalistically accepting, in too facile a manner, the doctrine of verbal inspiration. He sometimes is dismissed as a fool who does not take seriously enough account of the historical and cultural factors that make the Bible essentially a human set of diverse documents. Others would say that he is not 'objective' enough in his reading of the Bible if he thinks such ancient documents can speak to current affairs. I have tried to speak to these issues, even though I realize that a complete discussion would entail the whole modern attack on the Protestant position of sola scriptura. Not to underestimate the impact of this attack, but rather to state Ellul's basic position, I shall merely quote Barth's response, with which Ellul would concur, to the charge of biblicism.

When I am named 'Biblicist', all that can rightly be proved against me is that I am prejudiced in supposing the Bible to be a good book, and that I hold it to be profitable to men to take its conceptions at least as seriously as they take their own.¹

Ellul would simply add that if one takes those conceptions seriously, then the commandments will throw the reader's life into question. From an entirely different perspective, equally strong questioning comes from his own tradition of evangelical Protestantism. From that direction come charges that he accepts too much biblical science, too much of the despair of modern reasoning, that he is too concerned with modern

¹ E to R, p. 12.

assumptions and political involvements that he erroneously tries to read back into the Bible, that he does accept the search for clear and distinct ideas in the Bible, that he inflects texts out of context to suit his themes, that he is selective about texts. These attacks would say that the result may be even more insidious than the more blatant relativizers. At this point, I can only recall his overall task. He wants to speak out of faith in the Bible as God's book to the place where modern man is, and he is fully aware of the dangers involved.

But let us be careful of one thing. I do not mean that the Church should let her message be a mere tracing of society's possibilities and demands. She does not have to wait for some "prior consent" on the part of the social group, in terms of which she should construct her preaching. It is nevertheless true that external conditions of communication have to be taken into consideration before the preaching can take place.²

He walks this tightrope in his approach to biblical studies, which recently he has cast into the context of hope as the only way for Christians to come to grips with the present era. Despite all the pitfalls, Ellul believes that the risks are necessary and called for within the Bible itself. One can take the risks in the solid assurance that the Bible is God's book -- both as its source and in its reception. When he brings present concerns under the scrutiny of the biblical revelation, he is confident that God acting as Holy Spirit will transform the questions. The Bible may well reject the questions as insignificant, or remain silent on some issues or, more likely, lead the questioner to

² HTA, p. 86.

formulate them in a different way.³ Not only does he believe that the Holy Spirit will shed light on the specific questions, but also that the truth of these concerns is elucidated when they are taken up in the unity of Jesus Christ. The two sides are inseparable. This stance in no way implies, despite the emphatic nature of his writing, that Ellul believes that he is stating the truth once and for all. Quite the contrary, from his writings and from conversation, it is clear that he sees the method of on-going discussion and dialogue as the only faithful witness to Him who was the once for all revelation. The work is in response to the commandment. All work:

must proceed from God's revelation as it has been recorded in time, and received and understood by men who in turn live in time. Thus we shall never penetrate the essence of the rights God accords to man or the essence of institutions. We shall never possess them entirely. We can grasp revelation only in one particular form and express it in one form for our own time. At this point, the theological enterprise cannot be separated from actual . . . problems.

We have decided to stop at the limit of the useful, attempting only to determine a point of departure and to outline a method.⁴

The essential ingredient in this method is that, from all points of view, the Bible is God's book. From this account of Ellul's methodology based on the holy source of the Bible, we must now move to a discussion of the unique content contained within God's revelation which is 'Wholly Other' than human understandings of the world.

³ For example, in H et A, he says that in the light of the biblical revelation, the problems of money and economics are not questions of economic systems at all, despite what the modern debates would have us believe. Rather, it is a question of spiritual power. He wants to avoid isolating a single theme to make it bear on problems, by the alternative of selecting a single perceived problem to see how the totality of the biblical witness bears on it. See also NP, p. 266.

⁴ TFL, p. 140.

Section 2

Central Foci of the Biblical Revelation

Overview

Within the perspective of Ellul's overall task as outlined in the foundational chapter, Part B is attempting to spell out the principles by which Ellul understands the second half of the doctrine of the two realms -- the revelation of God as witnessed to in the Bible. Whereas Section 1 concentrated on his specific approach to the reading of Holy Scriptures, Section 2 will move on to consider what he understands as the central content of that message. What has God said to which His human intermediaries have witnessed? As I indicated in the Introduction to Part B, this Section will consist of two chapters -- with Chapter 7 stressing the centrality of the relationships among God, man and the rest of creation, and Chapter 8 examining the importance of human history as the vehicle for those relationships. In short, I shall try to collect what he understands to be the central foci for Church doctrines. Once more, it should be remembered that Ellul does not see himself primarily as a systematic theologian. Therefore, since his theological starting points are not presented in one single place, this section will be drawn from the whole corpus of his theological reflections. Such an undertaking is necessary, in order to clarify exactly from what basis Ellul is doing ~~his~~ his work. Only then, in the general Conclusion, shall I bring the two realms back together again in a consideration of his understanding of la société technisée. How does the Bible speak to technique?

The answer to that question provides the crux of his position as a Christian intellectual. The general Conclusion will indicate his engagement with the modern world, both as a sociologist and as a believer, from the vantage point of the Bible. In the meantime, we must look at the content

of the biblical revelation, from which he derives the understanding of his sociological analyses -- an understanding which unifies the diverse strands of his writing without imposing a closed system.

By way of a preliminary overview to the whole section, it is important to recognize that Ellul believes that human beings can know nothing about God in Himself. All that they can apprehend is something of the biblical revelation concerning how He has dealt with people.

Everything begins the moment God decides to choose. We are not to go beyond this in an effort to know God's reasons or hidden counsels. We begin to apprehend only from the moment when a relation is set up between God and us, when he reveals his decision concerning us.¹

In other words, he thinks that the Bible points to what God intends or desires for people in the world and to His freedom and power to be able to effect what He wants. In typically Protestant language, this belief means that people can know something only concerning the will of God for them. As discussed briefly in the foundational chapter, this stance definitely stresses that the activity of God rather than the being of God is pre-eminent in the Bible. Furthermore, Ellul maintains that throughout the Bible God is shown as the One who loves -- a proclamation implying a certain kind of relationship is involved in His activity.² Finally,

¹ JJ, p. 21. Also, concerning the assertion that God in Himself cannot be known, see L'Apocalypse, p. 49; 78-79, and "CP?". Concerning the belief that revelation is an act of God, see L'Apocalypse, p. 8.

² In a sermon preached in Pessac, Bordeaux on 23/6/74, M. Ellul made the point concerning 1 John 4:8 that the only definition given of God in the Bible is that of 'love'. That very formulation is somewhat different from any ordinary formula serving as a discrete definition, for its very meaning implies a relationship with another. In "CP?", he refers to God as "Celui qui aime" -- an expression whose meaning is most strongly indicated in the fact that He is always spoken of as a person. In that discussion, he goes on to say that he does not mean to make the statement that God in Himself is a person, but rather it is the most appropriate human expression to point to God's will for people in terms of relationships. Those two discussions both serve to underline his belief that even the

because the primary biblical image of the revelation of God's will is that of speaking and hearing, for Ellul, the expressions 'the will of God' and 'the word of God' are synonymous.³ Both refer to the way in which God brings about the relationships of love which He desires. Since God is one, what God wants is never shown as separated from the means of accomplishing it. Therefore, despite the variety of God's activity with respect to human beings, this activity or His word or His will is also always in terms of love. "[H]e who is love wills only to exist in, by and for the love of another."⁴ In other words, although God's will, according to Ellul's reading of the Bible, is always effective and sovereign, we have been told that He never steps outside of the relationship of love to achieve it. His will is never coercive and it is always manifested within the context of the way people are at any given moment.

[T]he word is not just words. It is not the phrases God speaks. It is a power which exists and manifests itself. . . . 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. A human order, when not obeyed, is without effect, but God's word always attains its end. . . . The word effects God's decision after all kinds of detours and complications which arise because God takes into account and respects man's decision too.⁵

fullest statement of the 'being' or the definition of God still refers not to God in Himself, but in His relationship with man and the rest of creation. See also L'Apocalypse, pp. 89; 112-13. Also, for a discussion about the use of the word 'person', see "L'Irréductibilité", pp. 58, 62.

³ Concerning the primacy of hearing over seeing, even in the book of Revelation, see L'Apocalypse, pp. 20; 31-32, and concerning the giving of God's revelation as an activity of God, see Ibid., p. 8.

⁴ HTA, p. 102.

⁵ JJ, pp. 21-22. The unity between the two aspects of God's will -- the desire or intention and the ability to accomplish -- both come together in Ellul's thought at all points; for example concerning the question of ends and means. As I shall discuss shortly, the focal point of their coming together is the Person of Jesus Christ. What he means by 'human will' will be discussed in (b) iii of this chapter.

As we shall see, for Ellul, the entire biblical witness points to what, in practice, this relationship of love entails. Despite all their divergences, he maintains that the biblical writers uniformly indicate that God's will is contrary to the ways of man left on his own. Therefore, the core of the biblical message is the call to respond to the will of God for all people.

For this section, the overriding consideration to bear in mind is that Ellul, as we saw in Section 1, asserts that each biblical writing is referring ultimately to Jesus Christ. For him, Jesus Christ is not simply a manifestation (or even the supreme one) of the will of God at a particular time. Rather, He is the will of God which has been the same from the outset and which only God can accomplish. The centrality of Ellul's affirmation about Jesus Christ brings us to the heart of the complex theological issue of the cosmic Christ and the historic Christ. Although Ellul does not go into the debates in any detail, one can draw certain general conclusions.⁶ Basically, we come back to his insistence on the Trinitarian formulation of the whole Bible, with an emphasis on the ultimate unity of the three Persons. When speaking of Jesus Christ, he means the Word made flesh (John 1:1-14); that is to say, the will of God from the very beginning can never be considered as a separate category from the Incarnation of that will. Therefore, Jesus Christ is referred to as 'the Word'. Around that Incarnation (itself inseparable, as we shall see, from the Crucifixion and Resurrection) in time, all else revolves -- through the contemporaneity of the Holy Spirit -- to find its meaning with reference to what God wants and has achieved for man. For

⁶ Ellul discusses the issue of the cosmic Christ and the historic Christ very briefly in L'Apocalypse, p. 47. For his arguments against a Gnostic interpretation of the Bible, see Ibid., pp. 5, 113, 197, 237. For comments concerning the time problem, see Chapter 5(a) of Section 1.

Ellul, there can be no discrepancy between the total (or cosmic) will of God and the will of God as incarnated in history.⁷ This thesis is not the place to go into the long history of Christology with its various emphases throughout the Christian tradition. I merely wish to underline, for the whole section, that Ellul always accepts that the will of God, in all its aspects, has been fully revealed, in time, by Jesus Christ.⁸ Whenever the expression 'the will of God' or 'the word of God' appears in his writings, one can read it only as being inextricably bound up with the Person of Jesus Christ. The will of God is not an aspect of the biblical witness nor something to be considered alongside of Jesus Christ. It is the totality of the revelation given to man. Therefore, Jesus Christ is what God has always wanted for creation: He is the word of God intervening in human affairs: He is the accomplishment of what God always wants: He is the totality of God's desired relationship with man -- for all times. Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of love.

Throughout Section 2, I shall continuously, perhaps to the point of repetition, refer to Ellul's focusing on the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection as the central Event from which all questions of relationship and history derive their significance. In whatever order the doctrines are

⁷ He does not, for example, see any genuine discrepancies between the Synoptics and St. John's Gospel or between the Gospels and St. Paul. See L'Apocalypse, pp. 251, 267 for the latter argument.

⁸ For statements that Ellul accepts that the totality of God was in Jesus Christ, see HTA, pp. 102, 285. One should add, however, that Ellul also stresses that although the totality of God was in Jesus Christ, what is revealed in the Incarnation for man is not God in Himself, but the totality of the will of God for man. See L'Apocalypse, pp. 78-9. For Ellul, there is no contradiction in these forms of expression, for "il ne faut pas oublier que la Parole révélée n'est que dans la mesure où cela est utile pour l'homme". (Ibid., p. 78) It is part of the total revelation of God for man that He acts in this way. Even Jesus Christ, as the totality of God, acts for people to reveal God's will for them. Ellul seems to refrain from further discussion as tending towards irrelevant speculation.

presented or in whatever area he is reflecting, the true starting point remains Jesus Christ. For example, in Chapter 7, I shall start with the doctrine of creation; nevertheless, for Ellul, that teaching finally has no ultimate meaning for people apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ as salvation.⁹ That approach is the one that Ellul himself always uses -- whether explicitly or implicitly. Put briefly, his reflections on what the biblical revelation says concerning our particular society all stem from the question of what God wants and how people have responded to relationships of power and responsibility -- as revealed by Jesus Christ.

⁹ Chapter 8 will concern itself with Ellul's account of the biblical question of historical sequence. See Chapter 5(a) concerning the fact that not everything can be said at the same time. The same comment would apply in discussions by the secondary witnesses.

CHAPTER 7

CREATION, FALL AND SALVATION

a) Creation

From Ellul's various discussions of creation, none of which is a sustained, dogmatic treatise, one can easily see that it holds a central place in his own understanding of Christianity.¹ Basically, he emphasizes the significance of the creation accounts in terms of the original relationship between God and man, within God's offering of love: the importance of the whole topic for him lies only within what God originally wanted for man. The Bible does not concern itself with the actual mechanics of creation, which Ellul considers to be within the realm of speculation. "We cannot resolve the enigma of God, nor find a solution to the problems of life, death and the creation."² Even the biblical writers did not know exactly what Eden was like, in the sense of the details of how things came about or how things worked. They did know about the distinctions of creation and that Eden was different from their present situation, and they did know the position of man in relation to the rest of creation and to God. Still, within the Bible itself, there is

¹ Although there are scattered references throughout his theological reflections, most of his thoughts on creation come in his discussion of Eden in "La Technique", "Le Rapport" and To Will. Again, he is in close accord with Barth's account in Church Dogmatics, Vol. III. The differences would come mainly in mode and emphasis of articulation. For example, although they would be in substantive agreement about creation as relationship grounded in Jesus Christ, Ellul does not use the word 'covenant' to describe it. See, for example, IFL, p. 51, where the first covenant he refers to is the one with Adam after the fall. The way in which Ellul uses the word 'covenant' will be discussed later in this chapter; for now the closeness to Barth's account is noteworthy.

² HTA, p. 221.

only the briefest account of these questions concerning the situation in Eden; that is, Genesis 1-3. Thereafter, the original garden is not drawn upon again. In fact, in Genesis 3:24, the possibility of a return to Eden is blocked. Although these first chapters are tantalizingly cryptic, Ellul considers them to be of prime importance concerning God's original plan and the human response to it from the very beginning. In accordance with his principles of biblical study, Ellul tries to maintain a proper balance of giving due recognition to this part, but also as part of the whole unified witness to God's will. Above all, he sees the creation accounts as a partial witness to Jesus Christ and finding their fulfilment in Him. In order to appreciate how he looks at the creation accounts in the Bible, I shall examine both his consideration of the texts as they stand, and also how he refuses to separate them from the other facets of the whole revelation of Jesus Christ.

i) The Genesis Chapters

The most important thing we are told, according to Ellul's exegesis, is that creation was complete and perfect.³ There is never any doubt in the texts about God's absolute sovereignty over the order of creation. Therefore, there could be no question of Adam as an equal, or a co-creator or as a completer of God's work. Similarly, there would be no room for progress when creation was perfect. At the same time, there is no doubt in Ellul's mind that Adam held a marked pre-eminence in the order of creation.

³ See, for example, "La Technique", p. 99. He cites Genesis 1:31 and 2:2. I shall not enter into the controversy over this translation and interpretation. In conversation, M. Ellul said that he means creation was completed in exact accord with the way God wanted it. He would now avoid using the word 'perfect', for he thinks it implies a static universe.

Tout le monde s'accorde pour lui reconnaître une pré-éminence. Il est le dernier créé, le sommet de la marche ascendante de la création successive. Il est celui dont Dieu dit qu'il est son image. Et encore sur lui, Dieu déclare que tout ce qu'il avait fait était très bon. Il a un pouvoir d'ordre, de surveillance, de commandement, de culture.⁴

Adam did hold an absolute authority within creation and rather strong words are used to describe what he was to do. Ellul argues, nevertheless, that Adam's authority over the rest of creation did not come from an external position as is the case with the modern sciences. It came instead from the ordered unity of the whole and perfect creation as God made it. In Eden, nothing came between Adam and the rest of creation: all relations were direct and unmediated. Although there were definite distinctions and an ordering of the species, that order contained no mystery, no hostility, no gaps between ends and means. The unity was not merely a synthesis of separate parts, but rather it was a totality. "La relation, à l'intérieur de cette création, était comme l'intérieur de la Trinité, une relation immédiate d'amour et de connaissance."⁵ No effort, no toil, no anxiety was present, for the rest of creation gave to Adam what he needed -- spontaneously. This interpretation does not imply an immobile creation, for already an internal rhythm was built in for the continuation of creation. (See, for example, Genesis 1:11-12.) Not a great deal more can be said, especially since Ellul tends to underline the difficulty of our grasping now what such a world would be like.

In order to consider more deeply the implications of what was involved, he does refer to the verbs 'to till', 'to keep', 'to have dominion over', and 'to give names' -- all of which he sees as being intimately

⁴ "Le Rapport", p. 137. It should perhaps be noted that the Hebrew word 'Adam' means 'man'.

⁵ "La Technique", p. 103.

connected. Basically, he sees the first two as having nothing in common with modern ways of thinking of the conquest of nature or production or the law of supply and demand or techniques. He simply notes that there were no tools and no external agents against whom to guard the garden. Ellul views Adam's instructions as admonitions to preserve God's order of things with the proper distinctions and separations, to maintain the proper fruitfulness of creation in its given rhythms and not to misuse man's own place. Similarly, the other two expressions, which he sees as synonymous, delineate the way in which Adam is to exercise his exalted position as protector. Adam was to be in charge of creation through the discernment of the spiritual realities, and to be the representative for them before God.

Assigner un nom, c'est discerner une réalité spirituelle, c'est tracer un rôle, un destin, c'est établir une relation pour Dieu. Donner son nom, c'est se révéler dans son être entier, c'est se mettre à la disposition de celui à qui l'on parle, c'est accorder sa vérité (et non pas la réalité). Nous sommes, bibliquement, en présence d'un fait spirituel qui n'a aucune commune mesure, aucun point de rapport avec l'opération intellectuelle de la science. C'est une incompréhension décisive du texte qui permet de les rapprocher. Lorsqu'Adam donne un nom à une plante, il ne l'appellera crucifère, parce qu'elle présente tel ou tel signe, et les plantes présentant l'ensemble de ces signes sont de telle famille etc. . . . Il attribue un destin à remplir devant Dieu. Maître de la création, par et pour Dieu, la présente ainsi à Dieu en la nommant.⁶

Donner un nom c'est attribuer une certaine vérité, une réalité spécifique à celui à qui on donne ce nom. C'est aussi assurer son pouvoir sur cette personne, puisque connaître le nom de quelqu'un c'est avoir un pouvoir radical sur lui. Le fait de donner le nom est l'assurance, l'attestation que l'homme a pouvoir sur les animaux.⁷

⁶ "La Technique", p. 106. The issue of the maintenance of distinction and separation will be discussed further in sub-section(b), footnote 33.

⁷ "Le Rapport", p. 137.

In other words, although there was to be a domination, it was to be practised in a way that bore no resemblance, for example, to modern technology which is the control of nature. Rather, the act of naming was to be analagous only to the word through which God created. Ellul sums up the difference by saying that "la parole est l'expression de la supériorité spirituelle, de la direction qui laisse pourtant l'autre intact (ce que ne fait jamais la technique) et libre dans sa décision".⁸ Thus, Adam was responsible for the rest of creation in such a way that even the very strong verb 'to subdue' was appropriate. Despite this almost militant vocabulary concerning Adam's instructions, Ellul is certain that Adam was not intended to be the self-sufficient autocrat over the rest of creation. The key phrase in ascertaining the difference comes in the expression 'the image of God' of Genesis 1:26-27.

The relationship between Adam (and Eve) and God was different from that of God to the rest of creation; it is that relationship on which Ellul focuses in all his discussions of the position of Adam in creation. Once again, Ellul does not give a full doctrinal elucidation of 'the image of God', except to say that "la relation d'amour était parfaite entre eux".⁹ What he underlines is that Adam was able to respond freely within the love of God. Although man was never explicitly described as 'good' in the Bible, in conversation, Ellul argued that Adam was the only creature given this liberty.

Dieu aime la création mais il est inévitable qu'il faille dans la création ce qui répond expressément, explicitement, à cet amour -- ce qui n'est pas objet, mais agissant comme sujet est capable d'aimer explicitement, c'est-à-dire en sachant qu'il est aimé.

⁸ "Le Rapport", p. 103.

⁹ "La Technique", p. 107.

Il fallait donc cet élément de la création, appartenant à la création, entièrement de son côté, et qui cependant était susceptible d'autonomie pour aimer Dieu, pour répondre à l'amour de Dieu, pour établir avec lui cette relation merveilleuse et fuyante. Dieu Amour ne pouvait se contenter d'un objet qui se laisse aimer comme un objet. Disons qu'alors l'homme est comme la conscience capable d'aimer dans et pour la création. Mais le second élément dont il faille tenir compte c'est que Dieu en tant que créateur est libre. Les deux choses vont ensemble. Or, en tant que libre, il ne peut se satisfaire d'une création qui serait une sorte de machine, un jouet mis sur les rails et qui fonctionne correctement. Le Dieu horloger ne peut être le créateur. Libre il ne peut vouloir qu'une création où serait également incluse la liberté. Il faut une liberté dans la création. Il n'est absolument pas satisfaisant d'avoir un Dieu libre hors de la création et une création mécanisée. Mais la liberté implique précisément un jeu, un risque, une latitude qui n'est pas dans la 'matière', où tout se joue selon 'le hasard et la nécessité' pour reprendre une formule approximative mais commode. Dieu fait donc entrer dans sa création, le facteur libre qui peut déranger l'ordre de la création, qui peut établir les relations fausses ou imprévues avec lui, mais qui en même temps, parce qu'il est libre est seul capable de l'amour. Il me semble que nous avons rappelé ainsi les deux 'motivations' de la création de l'homme, en tenant compte bien entendu du fait que ces motivations ne sont pas impératives, qu'il ne s'agit nullement de causes, ni de déterminations pour la volonté de Dieu.¹⁰

Nothing came between God and Adam in this relationship of free love, so that once again it can be seen as immediate and without mystery. Adam was in total communion with the will of God for creation, which he was to reflect for the rest of creation.¹¹ He was to love creation as God loved him and the maintenance of the right relationships within creation was possible only if man did reflect the love of God. Since Adam was the

¹⁰ "Le Rapport", pp. 137-38. See also To Will, p. 277, where he suggests that the best translation is 'within the image of God', as pointing to the purpose or destiny of man. Also, in "CP?", he mentions that the expression 'image of God' has meaning only within the fullness of the whole biblical revelation of God's will for people. The reasons for his specific interpretation will become clearer when we consider how he sees them in the context of the whole. Even at this point, however, he does not see this interpretation as being at odds with the specific texts of Genesis.

¹¹ See L'Apocalypse, pp. 258-59.

only creature given this liberty of response, he was also responsible (in the sense of answerable¹²) for the whole of creation in a similar manner.

On arrive alors aux formules très connues: d'une part l'homme représente la création devant Dieu (avec l'apport de l'amour de la création, de la louange, de l'adoration); d'autre part il représente Dieu dans la création: il appartient à cette création, mais il y porte une présence de Dieu, on dira alors souvent qu'il est gérant de la création pour Dieu. . . . Il me semble qu'il faut accepter ici deux limites: d'abord le fait que précisément la puissance de l'homme est arrêtée par celle de Dieu. Il n'est réellement pas maître. Le second aspect c'est que si l'homme représente Dieu, cela veut dire qu'il exerce envers la création sa domination exactement comme Dieu l'exerce. C'est n'est pas seulement une délégation de pouvoir qu'il reçoit, mais si la création s'enracine dans l'amour et la liberté, c'est aussi une délégation de moyens: autrement dit si Dieu conduit sa création dans l'amour, par amour, en vue de l'amour, il doit en être de même pour l'homme: . . . l'homme ne doit donc pas gérer cette création pour la puissance et la domination, mais en tant que représentant de l'amour de Dieu. Cela aussi est signifié par l'épisode de l'attribution des noms aux animaux: on ne nous dit pas qu'il les domine en leur mettant les colliers ou des chaînes et en leur réduisant à son service, mais en les baptisant. Ils sont alors, en effet, des objets d'un amour.¹³

It is in this sense that Adam was the crown or the ruler of creation, that he was to exercise his precise task of dominion over the rest of creation. From the beginning, God wanted to maintain His gift of creation through His relationship with human intermediaries. In short, the source of creation as an ordered unity and the goal of creation were identical -- the will of God who is the One who loves.

¹² See "Le Rapport", p. 150, for a further discussion of this idea of answerability. Ellul always emphasizes both connotations of Adam's responsibility -- being able to enter into the relationship of love with God and also being held accountable for the rest of creation.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 138-39.

Tel est l'ordre que Dieu établit, et cet ordre, comprenant cette culture et cette garde, est parfait, il n'y a rien à ajouter, rien ne peut s'en perdre, Dieu peut se reposer dans le dialogue avec sa création à lui présentée par le chef de cette création, en offrande et en image royale de l'amour gratuit.¹⁴

From the passages quoted, it becomes clear that Ellul's notion of the original liberty in love implies that it was quite different from all other notions of freedom that we have now. Adam, as a finite being, created within the limits of time and space, was never on a par with God nor was he united with God. Certainly, Adam was not in a position to participate in determining the content of the will of God, for:

this will of God is characterized throughout the Bible as a "holy" will; that is to say, set apart -- in the last analysis, intimate, autonomous, now radically separated from man who is not holy. To call that will holy is necessarily to say that Adam could in no wise know it. Only the holy can be in union with that will but Adam does not answer that description Man cannot know that will until he has been brought into conformity because it is a holy will.¹⁵

As long as Adam loved God, he had an existential communion with God's will (that is, with the good), but he did not have any analytical knowledge of

¹⁴ "La Technique", p. 102.

¹⁵ To Will, p. 8. In Section 1, Chapter 5, we saw Ellul's emphasis on the Bible as holy in the sense of the unique revelation of God, pointing directly to Him, in a way that makes it different from other books. There is the possibility of some ambiguity in this use of 'holy', if one considers the description of Christians and Jews as 'the holy people of God'. In that case, the call to "be ye holy as I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44, 45; Deuteronomy 26:19; I Peter 15-16, for example.) refers to the liberation to be in conformity with or to reflect God's will for the world. In conversation, M. Ellul said that the commandment does not require the overcoming of man's finitude nor does he see it as a call to a mystical oneness in which the distinctions between God and man are overcome. In fact, he did not see any problem in this somewhat double usage of the word 'holy'. He concluded that the call was no problem for Adam before the fall: only afterwards did it become an issue. (In simplest form, 'holy' applied to human beings or the Bible means belonging to God who is entirely other. Therefore, it means set apart from any other allegiance.) This issue will be discussed further with reference to the question of 'covenant'. See sub-section (c).

it. Nor did he exercise independent choice between two or more possibilities after a thorough deliberation. His liberty came from obedient response to the only true good. For Ellul, this aspect of obedience distinguishes the biblical from other accounts of freedom.

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.

It teaches us that obedience is the prior condition of liberty.¹⁶

In Ellul's understanding of Adam before the break with God, obedience was not a matter of duty or restraint or obliterating bondage. Quite the contrary, it was the spontaneous play of the creature responding to his Creator -- "the offering of a joyful life in response to the gift of life which had been given beforehand".¹⁷ Nevertheless, part of the very link between God and creation was the fact that Adam's response could never be an automatic mechanism. One should bear in mind this truth of the liberty given to man, when Ellul also argues that "[h]e [Adam] was free before God, which is to say that he could love God as well as cease to love him."¹⁸ This statement underlines both the spontaneity of Adam's response as a separate entity and also the possibility that the rather fragile link could be broken. Adam could (although the reasons would be inexplicable) turn away from the order and responsibility of the relationship of perfect love. To reject the life of communion with God, however, would hardly be a choice or the turning to a genuine alternative for Adam. It would entail the smashing of the original relationship, including the wrecking of the whole creation -- since he supplied the direct link.

¹⁶ To Will, p. 84. This discussion is the basis for his distinction between liberty and independence as discussed in Part A, Chapter 2, footnote 59.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

Rejection or disobedience would mean, quite literally according to Ellul, the annihilation of creation, for its whole basis would be repudiated.¹⁹

It is within this perspective of the relationships among God, man and the rest of creation that he views the fall of Adam and Eve with its overwhelming implications. Without some reflection on the original decision of God, no matter how brief the texts may be, the question of the fall can be little more than an abstraction. Furthermore, since God's will for people does not change, the whole rest of the biblical witness could not make any sense as speaking to the concrete human situation.

ii) Creation within the Unity of the Bible

Before moving directly to the question of the fall of Adam, we should first look at the way in which Ellul sees the Genesis passages as part of the whole. The purpose here is to consider the impression that perhaps he reads too much into the Genesis texts. Will the actual passages support what he finds there? Is his work not eisegesis instead of exegesis or a twisting of the Bible to suit his own themes? This suspicion is perhaps strengthened if one takes seriously his claims that we can know nothing of the original creation.²⁰ In that case, how is he able to say

¹⁹ Although in conversation, M. Ellul rejected most traditional arguments concerning creatio ex nihilo, as examples of unwarranted speculation, nevertheless, he is in total agreement with Barth's account of das Nichtige. (See Church Dogmatics, Vol. III, 3 50.) In French, he distinguished between le rien and le néant -- the latter of which poses a constant threat to the created order, in the sense of the possibility of a return to chaos. For references concerning this position, see HTA, p. 229 and also L'Apocalypse, p. 75, where he mentions that this interpretation comes within the Jewish tradition as well.

²⁰ See, for example, To Will, pp. 73, 272. M. Ellul reiterated this position in conversation, in the context that human knowledge by itself will not suffice now to tell us anything about the original situation in Eden.

anything? With so few verses to go on, how does he substantiate his views, for example, that 'to have dominion over' does not mean what it appears to mean at first glance or that 'the image of God' is love? Despite his apparent consideration of the texts, is he faithful to them?

At this point, we must come back to Ellul's basic convictions about the multi-faceted character of the Bible as a unified witness to Jesus Christ. His interpretation of the creation accounts provides a vivid example of his adherence of the specific guidelines for reading the Bible that we saw in Chapter 5. In short, apart from being carefully examined on their own, the Genesis passages must also be reflected in the mirror of the other parts of the Bible. He firmly believes that what is said elsewhere concerning God's intentions for man illuminate the Genesis passages and vice versa. Such a basis for their interpretation beyond single verses is not only legitimate in his eyes, but it is also mandatory if one is to avoid "le pire littéralisme et fondamentalisme"²¹ about the creation accounts. Therefore, Ellul says that he is not distorting the single text if he substantiates his points with reference to other biblical passages. That method is the sola scriptura principle in action. For example, he argues that the Noachic code indicates that a change had taken place in the relationships of creation; therefore, one can conclude that the original ones had not included fear. Similarly, he discusses the intimations to be gleaned from the spontaneous giving of manna in the

²¹ "Le Rapport", p. 139. Also in "CP?", he accuses his opponent of having a narrow view of the Genesis accounts when he refuses to see them within the whole tradition of biblical writing. There, he says that he accepts that historically Genesis is a later writing to be seen only within the context of the prophets etc. That belief would undermine acceptance of Mosaic authorship, but, for Ellul, it does not undermine its status as a revelation of God will for man at and from the very beginning.

wilderness, the significance of names throughout the Bible, man's position as described in Psalm 8, sexuality in The Song of Songs or the Beatitude "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" or the assembly of the animals in Revelation.²² Again, this issue is not a question of progressive revelation, for each of the cited passages also itself becomes clearer when read in conjunction with the Genesis ones. For example, the Beatitude elucidates part of the true intent of how Adam was 'to have dominion' in the first place, while the Genesis passage implies that 'to inherit the earth' involves a proper relationship 'within the image of God'. Not all things can be said at once or in the same way. Thus, Ellul maintains in his studies on creation both a concentration on the directly pertinent passages and a refusal to dismember the Bible to consider it piecemeal.

In the final analysis, all the passages come together and are recognized in their joint witness to their source and their fulfilment -- Jesus Christ. In other words, what the Genesis passages mean cannot be separated from knowledge of Jesus Christ.

This knowledge of creation and of the original nature can be had only in Jesus Christ, in whom all things were made. The unity of God's creative and redemptive will appear in an especially obvious way in the promise of the resurrection and of the new creation.²³

²² These examples come, respectively, from "Le Rapport", p. 143 and "CP?"; "La Technique", p. 105; "Le Rapport", p. 137; "Le Rapport", p. 139; conversation with M. Ellul; "Le Rapport", pp. 152-53; L'Apocalypse, p. 258.

²³ To Will, p. 73. (In passing, it is interesting to note that here he does use the word 'nature'; see Part A, Chapter 2, footnote 6. For his account of the biblical use of the word, see To Will, p. 45.) See also L'Apocalypse, p. 88.

This statement does not mean, as we shall see, that Ellul thinks that Jesus Christ was identical with the original Adam. It does mean, however, that only the fulfilment of God's will, Jesus Christ, makes it possible to come to any understanding of what all people, including Adam, have always been meant to do. "Toute l'orientation de Jésus Christ est précisément ~~la~~ non-puissance, le non-savoir, ~~la~~ non-domination."²⁴ Or, put slightly differently, because everything else we know concerning Jesus Christ comes in terms of response, liberty and self-giving love, Ellul is confident that the Genesis passages cannot be at variance.

Si Dieu est Amour (et le Dieu de Jésus Christ est Amour et à partir de là nous apprenons que le Dieu d'Abraham, d'Isaac et de Jacob est lui aussi Amour) il est évident que le monde tel que nous le constatons, l'homme tel que nous le connaissons ne sont pas ce que Dieu a voulu et créé.²⁵

As was the case with prophecy, as discussed in the foundational chapter, the creation passages participate in the double aspect of Scripture. In conjunction with the rest of the Bible, they are themselves a partial witness to Jesus Christ and also they find their fulfilment in Him. In this sense, Ellul can say that the proper understanding, for example of the expressions 'to have dominion over' and 'within the image of God' both find their meaning only within the total witness to the revelation of what God wants for man -- and, once more, that totality is Jesus Christ. Otherwise, Ellul thinks that ultimately there can be no fruitful reading, apart

²⁴ "CP?". This argument is also central throughout all of P of G. In fact, it is almost Ellul's shorthand reference to the way in which he sees that God always effects His will. The ways of God, as shown throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament and as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, are always different from what people would come up with on their own.

²⁵ "Le Rapport", p. 142.

from historical and purely literary studies, of Genesis 1-3.

To say, however, that Ellul thinks that the creation accounts should be read Christologically is to muddy the waters -- if one considers Christ to be an external principle pulled in at the last minute when all other exegetical devices fail. Even without being a Christian, one could opt to read the Bible as a whole. Beyond that observation Ellul believes that the creation passages, pointing to the original desire of God, through Jesus Christ become part of the call to enter into the right relationships. The final link of those passages to Christian faith comes in the commitment of the reader who does not isolate the passage from its source. In direct connection with what is said in the creation passages, Ellul says the following.

What is revealed is never in itself objective. It is what is judged by God to be necessary to our lives, to our salvation and to our freedom. . . . We can only come to a decision with respect to a revelation which engages our existence and which has no content for the person who does commit his existence to that decision.²⁶

When the Genesis passages speak of the original intention of God for man, through the prism of Jesus Christ, they also speak directly to the situation in which the hearers find themselves. Through His promise, the revelation of the right relationships among God, man and the rest of creation take on a concrete significance. For Ellul, the very fact that human beings, apart from God's revelation of His will, can no longer have any idea what Eden was like is itself an indication of what the human response to that will has been from the beginning.

²⁶ HTA, p. 221. In this passage Ellul is referring to the difference between revelation and information and using the Genesis passages as an illustration. Concerning what he thinks can be said about the decision itself, see the Postscript of this chapter. This quotation and indeed this paragraph should be read in the light of Chapter 6 of Section 1 -- in the specific instance of the teachings concerning creation.

b) The Fall and Its Implications

Within Ellul's studies on creation, we have seen that he is absolutely convinced that the world as people now know it is no longer that of Eden. There has been a total rupture of the proper relationships.

Il y a eu rupture entre Dieu et l'homme. Je sais bien que l'on m'objectera que je tombe dans la plus traditionnelle des théologies (création/chute etc.). Mais je dois dire que d'abord avant de l'abandonner il m'aurait fallu trouver une critique pertinente et une explication meilleure. Or, depuis une quinzaine d'années que je lis les 'Nouvelles Théologies', je n'ai trouvé aucune critique décisive, ni en exégèse aucune explication nouvelle des premiers chapitres de la Genèse qui permette de faire l'économie du schéma traditionnel. C'est n'est pas entêtement ni préformation culturelle, mais disons, une certaine exigence de rigueur et de qualité.²⁷

A major preoccupation in his biblical reflections, therefore, is the way in which one should understand that rupture and the resulting implications of what people are actually doing in the world. In traditional theological terms, he concerns himself with the fall and sin, as they are continually perpetrated. In order to recognize the parameters within which he considers these questions, it is perhaps helpful to note what he is not doing. First, he is not doing apologetics. On the one hand, he is not trying to make people so miserable with the technological society that they turn to the Bible in desperation. On the other hand, he is not simply supplying a happy ending to a sad story, through the deus ex machina of the Resurrection. Even though Ellul is reflecting on the biblical understanding of the world which he considers to be borne out in the modern situation, still he is not trying to provide irrefutable evidence for it.²⁸

²⁷ "Le Rapport", pp. 141-2.

²⁸ For a statement that the modern project falls within the light of the biblical revelation but cannot be used as a proof for it, see HTA, pp. 155-66.

Secondly, he never views the fall and sin in isolation. Only the re-establishment of right relationships through Jesus Christ clarifies what is really involved in any different ones. No understanding of sin can come directly from the world that people see and are able to analyze. Only Jesus Christ, who overcame the implications of the rupture, revealed what it had been in the first place. This line of argument remains solidly within the Protestant tradition which believes it is not possible to know what sin is except in the light of the acceptance of redemption.²⁹ In other words, once again, the Bible is not simply objective information or description open to believer and non-believer alike.³⁰ Only by remembering these two basic positions can the reader appreciate fully what Ellul is saying about the fall and its implications as central roots of his understanding.

i) The Fall

"The serpent said to Eve, 'You will be like God, knowing good and evil! Such is the point of departure.'³¹ In the biblical account, the one act definitely not recommended for Adam was to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:17) Ellul interprets this prohibition as the warning that man, on his own, cannot know or determine the content of good and evil -- for there is no good outside of the will of God.

²⁹ For Ellul's formulation of this argument, see HTA, p. 50. In view of a standard attack that the whole Protestant tradition is 'hung up' on sin and guilt, it is interesting to note that this position finds virtually nothing of modern guilt complexes in the Bible.

³⁰ To repeat what was said earlier, the order of discussion in this chapter may seem somewhat arbitrary and misleading -- as if knowledge of salvation comes after the first two parts. At this point, I am discussing the fall and its implications because the central passages to which Ellul refers follow directly from the creation accounts in Genesis.

³¹ To Will, p. 5.

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, but simply because God wills it. It is not the good in itself that determines the will of God. It is the will of God which determines what is good, and there is no good that exists outside of that decision.³²

Since man is not holy, but finite, he cannot know the true good apart from being in tune with the decision of God. God warned Adam that altering the original relationships of obedience, liberty and love would result in death. Since separation from God is death, the warning was not so much a threat as it was a statement of fact.

[L]a mort est la séparation totale d'avec Dieu. Celui-ci est le Vivant, il n'a à faire qu'avec la vie, il est le Seigneur des Vivants. La Mort est une victoire du chaos sur son oeuvre, une remontée du néant contre l'Etre.³³

³² To Will, p. 6.

³³ "De La Mort", p. 5. See also footnote 19 of this chapter. In this context, death is linked to the constant threat to creation. As we shall see, that article also says that death means the end of man as attempting a source of autonomous power -- the impossibility of the condition that would result from a rupture.

Concerning the question of whether there was death before the fall, in conversation, M. Ellul said that the Bible does not refer to that point. If pressed, he would say that there probably was, but in a way totally alien to anything we could now know about or discuss. For a similar discussion, see L'Apocalypse, pp. 220; 243-4.

At this point, I merely mention in passing (but without going into further detail) the difficult question of 'separation' in the biblical accounts. See L'Apocalypse, pp. 76; 216-18. In these parts, Ellul stresses that creation itself was characterized by separation; for example, Genesis 1:6-7; 1:8-9 etc. As we have seen, he argues that Adam was to maintain the proper distinctions and Ellul also states that much of Mosaic Law concerns itself with the maintenance of the proper separations. At the same time, because of the very liberty given to man to respond in love to God, the danger was the further separation of man from God which would be the destruction of creation. Apart from the idea of annihilation, Ellul also notes the figure of the Devil as the one who divides (diabolos). That double revelation, as seen in Jesus Christ who overcame the destructive separation, according to Ellul, is very important throughout the Bible.

The very existence of the tree and of God's advice were signs of man's finitude, also of the possibility that he might reject the original relationship. As long as Adam and Eve remained in communion with God, their position posed no problem at all. Very soon, however, they recognized (were told) that, despite their exalted position within the unity of creation, there were limits. In modern terms, Adam and Eve were not able to actualize themselves. As soon as they achieved this self-awareness, an element of dissatisfaction was introduced. Their position within creation did begin to pose a problem or at least to raise questions for them.

At this point is brought to pass, through Satan's intermediary, the awareness of an absence, of a gap, of the missing link in that suddenly glimpsed chain which bound Adam to God, and which when unknown was only a game but which when known becomes a question: the awareness of a forbidden domain which turns happy obviousness into a tragic absence.³⁴

For the very act by which man wants to decide what is good, wants to know the good by himself, constitutes the sin.³⁵

From these two references, it appears that, for Ellul, the fall and sin are almost identical and certainly they cannot be pulled apart. Nevertheless, he does draw a fine distinction between them. The fall is the rupture from God and sin is the impossible attempt to act independently in the ruptured condition. They go hand in hand at all times. For clarity about Ellul's position concerning the fall at least three points are in order. In the first place, especially in conversation, he has stressed that nobody can know about the mechanics of the fall -- either the motivations or what happened psychologically at the precise moment. He maintains that such questions are not of great concern in the Bible,

³⁴ To Will, p. 6.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

and subsequently, for those trying to come to grips with it. The reasons for the fall remain inexplicable. What is important is that there was a total rupture between God and man. Since that situation is the one in which people have found themselves ever since, really only the implications or the results of the fall should provide the focus of attention. Even to say that pride led to the fall is not entirely accurate: it is the sin leading directly from the fall, and which acquires substance only in a world in which the rupture has already taken place. The rest of the Bible bears witness to what is implied in the fall.

Secondly, although Ellul discusses the fall largely (although not exclusively) with reference to Adam and Eve, he does not view it in a simplistic manner that involves all future generations, even though they had nothing to do with it. Here, I refer to the discussion in Chapter 5 that, although the Bible is told in time sequence, it remains a total revelation directed to all people. Therefore, the fall and sin of Adam point to the recurring human tendency that has been the same as long as man has existed. There was a break in which all people have subsequently participated in the implications -- thereby perpetrating the original break. For example, in conversation, M. Ellul argued that the sins of Cain, Nimrod, Babylon etc. were neither new nor different sins: they all point to different aspects of the same sin, explained in different ways, according to different situations. The fact that people after Adam have had to live in a completely altered situation, in which there is no alternative, does not mitigate against Ellul's argument that the sin has been carried on by all. Whether or not people know about it, or whether they accept the truth of the biblical witness, according to Ellul's interpretation, all people are in fact caught up in the same

rupturing of relationships as Adam and Eve were.³⁶

The third important observation is Ellul's firm conviction that the responsibility for the fall has always lain solely with man. It was Adam and Eve who turned away from the original relationships of love.³⁷ Within this interpretation, perhaps the single most difficult problem is the part played by the serpent, whom, as quoted, he interprets as an intermediary of Satan. In conversation, he took the position, that the Bible is very precise in distinguishing among the Dragon, the devil, Satan, Leviathan and the serpent -- and only the serpent appears in the early chapters of Genesis. The connections among them, however, are not always stated; for example, it is simply not said whether or not Satan

³⁶ Again, it is interesting to note the impossibility of a return to Eden. (Genesis: 3:24) This passage indicates that there is no solution in yearning for an idyllic past, for the problem has not changed, except that both God and man must deal with the altered conditions that accompany the fall.

Concerning the responsibility for the perpetration of the fall by people who have not known communion with God, the following is a translation of a reply M. Ellul gave. "One is responsible when one has to answer a question that is posed. Man is responsible before God when it concerns a question posed by God that man understands as a question posed by God. The question posed to Adam 'Where are you?', or to Cain 'What have you done with your brother?' etc. Outside these questions about which man is sure they are posed by God, there are all the questions posed by man to man and the questions posed by nature to man. Man at this point is responsible, but that is not to say that he is guilty before God if he does not know how to answer this question. . . . This means that the Jews and Christians are explicitly responsible for the questions posed by God about the world in which we live. . . . But it is evident that they are not the only ones who can be engaged in this, for there are other questions which can be understood by other men." See also "W and C", p. 18.

³⁷ Ellul tends to dismiss contrary arguments mainly because he thinks that they are not directed to the point of the Bible; that is to say, they are in the realm of speculation. Or else, they are attempts to glorify man at the expense of God. See, for example, "Le Rapport", p. 142. Concerning whether or not God could have prevented the fall, see footnote 10 of this chapter about the motivation of creation and also HTA, p. 223 where he discusses creation as an act of hope.

is a creature.³⁸ Various parts of the Bible indicate that he is the accuser of man before God, who tempts God to destroy creation. Satan brings up the possibility of le néant, of the return to chaos. According to Ellul, as we have seen, that possibility was there from the outset and that possibility is made clear in the questions of the serpent. The texts say very little about the serpent, except that he was "more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made". (Genesis 3:1) In fact, all that he did was to ask questions and there was nothing wrong in that. That activity, in itself, did not constitute the fall nor make it inevitable. The serpent shows that the link could be broken and the questions tend in that direction by testing its fragility. The fall itself was man's response of accepting and wanting the possibility of defining himself apart from his relationship with God. This interpretation implies that Eve, through talking to the serpent, began to ask questions. Why, if God had given them this much power, could they not have even more -- to determine the content of good and evil? Rather than accepting God's answer, she wanted something different. Whatever led to the decision, the liability was with Adam and Eve and the immediate consequence was the upsurge of pride. The voice of temptation and the actual break are not identical and the difference comes in the voice of the serpent. This aspect of the biblical witness is refracted through and also sheds light on the accounts of Jesus's response to the temptations in the wilderness. The 'normal' human response is not simply the inevitable response had man remained in communion with God's love.

³⁸ See JJ, p. 42-43, for an indication of the tight connection he sees among the figures pointing to the possibility of annihilation. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into further exegetical detail, except to mention that Ellul discusses the matter further in L'Apocalypse, pp. 87, 136, 215 ff.

ii) The Order of Necessity

One could well ask, at this point, since Adam's break could bring only negation and chaos, why in fact there was not the total annihilation of creation. Ellul makes it abundantly clear that he believes creation would surely have disappeared if it were not stringently maintained by God. Adam's hiding from God was a sign that the original relationship of love was wrecked and with it the unity of creation was shattered like a broken mirror -- to repeat a common metaphor. The original relationships within creation were no longer recognizable when Adam accused Eve. Then, there was a similar destruction of the link between man and the serpent. Everything in creation became separate and isolated, each pursuing its own goals irrespective of the unity of the whole. They learned fear and hostility. Now the relationships were such that Adam and Eve had to struggle against the rest of creation in a hostile and vicious way.

Il y aura dès lors non pas tant les conséquences déclarées (mort devenue tragique, départ d'Eden, impossibilité pour l'homme de devenir éternel, travail pénible, souffrance de l'accouchement, honte de la nudité) qui toutes sont logiquement contenues dans le fait même et seul de la rupture, mais l'établissement d'un nouveau rapport de l'homme à la création.³⁹

This new relationship is precisely what has always been impossible without the intervention of God. Fortunately, God never changes His will for all people to live in the liberty of His love. Although God does not

³⁹ "Le Rapport", p. 142. This quotation provides a good illustration of Ellul's attitude towards the tradition. He remains strongly within traditional Protestantism and has no wish to repudiate its emphases. (See also To Will, p. 39.) Still, he wants to reflect again on the biblical texts within the context of his own task of articulating the doctrine of the two realms. He will not, for example, take up the issue of whether one can continue to speak of the image of God in any way until he discusses the task of the people to whom the revelation was given. See To Will, p. 42.

force people to change through coercive ways, in His mercy, He does preserve creation -- as a kind of holding measure to maintain things in the face of man's destructive tendencies. "God does not abandon humanity, even in its most rebellious state and at the focal point of its sin."⁴⁰ God's response to man's rupture is the first major implication of the fall to consider.

In order to preserve the creation which He still loved, there had to be a transition from the original order of creation to what Ellul calls the order of necessity.⁴¹ Since relationships were no longer immediate and spontaneous, various means of contact became obligatory, if people were to survive even physically. Therefore, techniques of all sorts had to be introduced for:

la nature qui produisait tout en abondance pour la nourriture et la joie d'Adam devient une nature qui se refuse, ingrate et rebelle. . . . Et, par conséquent, Adam doit vaincre, doit contraindre cette nature qui lui fournit épines et chardons, -- Adam obligera à livrer son blé, ses fruits. . . . Ainsi, Adam se trouve dans un rapport de lutte, il domine par ses moyens, c'est-à-dire par la technique, qui ne peut pas être un instrument de l'amour, mais de la domination.⁴²

Rather than annihilation, but also in contrast to the original liberty, necessity becomes the general rule -- physical, biological, moral, psychological, economic, sociological etc. laws. All of these dimensions have the same origin in God's activity in face of the fall. The totality of

⁴⁰ To Will, p. 92. One might cite the passage that even before the expulsion from the garden, God helped Adam and Eve by making garments. (Genesis 3:20)

⁴¹ This phrase is customary throughout his biblical writings, but see especially To Will, p. 59, where he says that necessity can also be described as "determinism, mechanism of history, scientific law, ananke".

⁴² "La Technique", pp. 110-11. This reference is another example of the rather general way he uses the word 'nature'. See again Chapter 2, footnote 6 and this chapter, footnote 23.

the original creation is transformed into its contrary in the order of necessity. In other words, there is a totality, a uniformity, so that Ellul can say, "the slightest atom of liberty threatens the very existence of the world".⁴³ Because of the new relationships among the parts of creation, there is a very definite element of constraint about these laws; nevertheless, they serve the useful function of making and keeping the world livable. Furthermore, even the iron-clad order of necessity is not internally immobile. There is a hierarchy in the directness of the determinisms. For example, whereas, if one breaks certain physical laws, the consequences of death are instantaneous, if one breaks a moral or sociological law for the preservation of society, the consequences will be further removed. There is a certain amount of leeway, so that there can be a certain amount of movement or change or options within the order of necessity. The world, according to the activities of people, can be more livable or less livable. When Ellul speaks of the order of necessity, he is giving his theological understanding of what he describes in his social analyses as reality being a series of determinisms. The possibility of movement within it is what he describes sociologically when he discusses the dialectical movement within society. Once more, the reader should distinguish carefully between the way Ellul uses the term 'liberty' and the term 'freedom' of some movement. Because God has decided to preserve the world, the whole of life, as it is, takes on an important, though relative, significance. A believer knows, however, that the order of necessity is only a makeshift device on God's part, to give people time to respond to His continuing work of love. "Such is the order, which

⁴³ To Will, p. 60. The 'world' in this reference means the world as we know it and not the original creation. See all of "The World".

is not that of God's love but which God maintains anyway because it is preferable to nothingness, the negation of God."⁴⁴ This Order can never, by itself, lead to salvation, for it is always the realm of revolt from God. It only allows for the possibility of man turning back to the will of God which He reveals. This account of the order of necessity provides a large part of Ellul's understanding of the doctrine of Providence.⁴⁵ For him, it is the first sign of God's combined judgment and mercy on human activities. God never acquiesces to them nor changes His mind about them nor removes the inevitable implications nor changes His own modus operandi of love. At the same time, He never gives up on people nor leaves them entirely to their own devices nor allows for the total annihilation of His creation even in its shattered condition.

Or, en présence de cette rupture, voulue par l'homme, l'attitude de Dieu décrite par la Genèse est toujours la même: Dieu à la fois accepte la situation voulue, d'autre part prend les dispositions pour que ce soit vivable et en tire parti moins mal.⁴⁶

iii) Sin as Will-to-Power

Since God gave Adam the liberty even to break from the original communion, the second important implication of the fall comes in the way in

⁴⁴ To Will, p. 61. In this connection, it is of note to see his interpretation of the prohibition of the eating of the tree of life. "When God decides 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 would then have been the very situation of the demons." (Ibid., p. 11).

⁴⁵ For a specific reference to the doctrine of Providence, see "W and C", p. 9. The bringing about of the order of necessity of course does not constitute, for Ellul, the whole doctrine of Providence which includes all of God's activities in governing the world to bring about the relationships He desires.

⁴⁶ "Le Rapport", p. 142. This statement applies to the continuation of God's love even in the realm of the fall, although that world in itself does not change in His assessment.

which people conduct themselves in the new realm. Ellul argues that from the very moment of the decision to act on the desire for independence from God, the serpent's prediction, that they would become like God, did come about -- but in the form of a lie. As a result of the fall, they knew that good and evil always exist as principles of order and that they had to do something about that ordering.⁴⁷ From that point on, they would have to determine the content of good and evil, in order not to be overwhelmed by the rest of creation. Or at least, this perception was their only possible one, since they had broken with the only true source of order and goodness. Any content that they came up with on their own would certainly be precarious. Any solely human content is always a false content.

To God sin is ignorance, monumental, fundamental, and yet also monstrous ignorance: . . . [t]his is what Jesus is saying when he has compassion on the crowds which wander like sheep without a shepherd. Here too we are in the presence of men who do not know what they ought to do and commit sin because they cannot discern between real good and real evil. This is the effect of the disobedience of Adam, which has meant to give man this knowledge of good and evil in himself. Man has no knowledge at all.⁴⁸

Adam and Eve had to secure their own life, to assert their authority over what seemed to them a hostile environment, with absolutely no reliable standards. Throughout To Will and To Do, Ellul emphasizes that sin is not the breaking of a moral code. Quite the contrary, it is the making

⁴⁷ See To Will, p. 6. At this point, Ellul comes closest to the Reformers' position that all people have a natural knowledge of God. (See Appendix to Chapter 3.) He would not say, however, that this knowledge of good and evil, against which Adam was warned, can possibly have anything to do with true knowledge of God. Again my conclusion, also in this matter, is that he is not at odds with the Reformers. It would be more accurate to say that he pushes beyond them in the same general direction.

⁴⁸ JJ, p. 93-4. On the same point of sin as ignorance, see also To Will, p. 9.

of moralities that could only be false. With the relationships all in disarray, since they had taken upon themselves the task of maintaining order, some values had to be constructed. These values, however necessary to keep human society going, could only be sin -- in the sense of missing the mark of the true good. This assessment of values explains why Ellul does not focus his biblical reflections on finding a suitable ethical system. Nor does he think that Christianity can ever be considered as simply a 'value' which people can adopt or reject by themselves. Rather, he prefers to concentrate on what he sees as the biblical emphasis on salvation, as the restoration of right relationships within the only true good of God's will.

With respect to what form people's ordering activities actually do take in the new order, Ellul takes up the issue of human will. In very general terms, human will for him is tied up with human desires and the activities attempted to effect those desires in the ordering of the world. For all human beings desire or will cannot be spoken of in a vacuum, but only in terms of what is desired and the implications for practice. Or, as M. Ellul said in conversation, human will can be spoken of only in terms of its responsibility -- whether to God or to oneself.

Il [l'homme] a voulu être maître de lui-même et de son propre destin, il a voulu ne pas conserver la relation fondamentale avec son Créateur, il a voulu être seul et posséder sa vie: il aura la même attitude envers le monde, le milieu naturel, la création: c'est-à-dire qu'il établit de la même façon que pour lui-même une relation de domination et de possession.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ "Le Rapport", pp. 142-43. In conversation, he confirmed that he accepts Nietzsche's description of man as will-to-power (including the implications for values) as a factually correct account of what we are constantly trying to do. Ellul would equate will-to-power with the desire for security on one's own and I shall use Nietzsche's expression in this sense. Far from accepting Nietzsche's account as true, Ellul sees it as the mistaken and impossible self-definition of fallen man and the

Therefore, from the human perspective, 'will' has been associated in some way, at least in modern accounts, with self-actualization of possibilities, decisive action to guarantee security and meaning, creating history in which man makes himself through his own freedom and man's advance through the domination of nature that has given rise to modern technique. In short, these accounts of the will correspond to what was said about Ellul's view of God's will at the beginning of the chapter. The difference, however, is summed up in the lie of the serpent. Since man is not God, he simply does not have, despite his desires, the resources within himself to determine good and evil and to make his desires take effect. For Ellul, it is blasphemous to speak of creativity as an attribute of people.⁵⁰ They remain creatures of relationship who have no power on their own. The orientation of responsibility solely towards oneself is precisely what is impossible. Given the problem of not being able to do what he wants to do, man must turn elsewhere to take his cue. In the search for security through domination, man must always orient himself to the only possible alternative to God -- to the order of necessity as the source of his own power. In other words, he allies himself with the order of necessity in the attempt to accomplish his independence. In fact, he has loved its constraints as the alternative to loving God. From that time on, there can only be the complete perversion of anything that could previously be labelled as human will. Man no longer lives within

precise contrary of the dominion that was to be exercised by Adam in Eden. When the relationships were broken, the will-to-power became the only means to seek the necessary security. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the accuracy of Ellul's reading of Nietzsche.

⁵⁰ M. Ellul especially emphasized this point in conversation. At times he does use the verb créer in the secondary sense of 'to bring out', but this usage is not meant in the biblical sense and is the loose usage of everyday language. See, for example, PK, p. 147.

the image of God: one could say that he lives within the image of the order of necessity. In conversation, M. Ellul did not go so far as to say that people are totally defined by the source of their allegiances or desires. Rather, he stressed the liberty before God and the constraints of the order of necessity. Therefore, the impossible seeking of independence, of responsibility towards the self, leads only to the increased enslavement of all of man's attributes, including not only the intellect (as discussed in Part A Chapter 3), but also the ability to effect what he desires, which is what Ellul understands by the will. Therefore, all that people have tended to regard as autonomous will is really the reflection of a relationship of enslavement.⁵¹

It is within this perspective of how the human will-to-power really operates that Ellul finally understands the tendency to sacralize the forces of reality, as discussed in Part A, Chapter 2. In that discussion, the distinction between the sacred and the profane is not the same as the distinction between God and the world. The former remains entirely within the order of necessity and human allegiances springing from their will-to-power. From the beginning of human civilization, as we can know it, this activity in its various manifestations is observable. Because of the necessity and also the impossibility of man's domination through his will, both the comforts and the dangers of sacralized reality ensue. Although sacralization is a collective attempt to find security within the world, it can lead only to increasing slavery, for man is not autonomous. Modern

⁵¹ The whole approach of will-to-power as enslavement to the order of necessity is what Ellul means by 'slavery of sin'. See, for example, To Will, p. 281, where he says, "It is commonplace to speak of the slavery of sin, but in reality this needs to be translated from the inward life to the totality of life in speaking of the order of necessity."

people may feel in control but they are not: they are controlled by the forces of the order of necessity. Thus, Ellul sees the modern sacralization of technique as a manifestation of sin as the human implication of the fall -- the feeling of insecurity, the need for an orientation of values, the unlimited desire for domination and yet, at the same time, the control of the web of necessity that really does hold people in its grip.⁵² The two implications of the broken relationship of love -- the preservation of the world by God and the introduction of the will-to-power by man -- come together in the allegedly independent activities of people in the world.

The clearest indication of what Ellul describes as the factors involved in human sin comes in his discussion of Cain, especially in The Meaning of the City. With Adam, it seemed that there was the possibility of accepting God's decree of the necessity of working, tilling, keeping flocks etc. This interim period points to the institution of the order of necessity as purely functional and limited devices to ensure a possible life. To make this statement does not imply that the situation was idyllic or even apt to last. According to Ellul, Cain too was acting within the order of necessity when he committed the first act of physical violence. "[I]t can be no other way. Cain could not stop being himself. From the beginning he had to kill Abel."⁵³ Unlike Adam, Cain refused to accept

⁵² At the same time that this statement is true, one should also remember that because God has decided to preserve the world, Christians cannot simply ignore it as irredeemably sinful. They must also work at making it livable in a relative way. As we saw in the foundational chapter, this belief provides the impetus for Ellul's doing of sociology. The statement on this page is his understanding that that work can be only relative and it must be seen for what it is.

⁵³ M of C, p. 8. This murder marked a difference, however, which Ellul calls the beginning of history. See Ibid., p. 6. That there was some stability between the expulsion from Eden and the murder of Abel, see Ibid., pp. 2, 5.

God's protection for he could see no semblance of security in it. Instead, Cain decided to search for his own well-being.

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 is assured by a natural order which Cain was to disturb. Now it is absolute insecurity, man's situation to the absolute degree. And thus Cain's fall raises his desire to a higher pitch, that obscure anguish planted in his heart's inner recesses.⁵⁴

Again, Ellul does not see Cain's activity as a second fall and a new sin. What it reveals is the complete misunderstanding of God's protection that accompanies man's attempted self-definition within the rupture. Whereas the account of Adam basically reveals the rupture, the account of Cain reveals the sin, and the two are not to be separated. In Cain, Ellul considers what happened when man accepted only his own responsibility for himself. To find his own security, Cain built the first city. "The city is the direct consequence of Cain's murderous act and of his refusal to accept God's protection."⁵⁵ In seeking a definition of goodness and security outside of the will of God, Cain had to turn to the only alternative. He turned away from God in the attempt to make the order of necessity his own. He accepted it as a source of good for his will-to-power and threw his whole heart into the task, virtually in an attitude of worship. Without the true security of God's love, all Cain can do is to get ever more entwined with and enslaved to the forces of the order of necessity. "Each remedy which seems to be a response to a need in

⁵⁴ M of C, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 5. The specific offering of God's protection both to Adam and to Cain are, for Ellul, the first reference to covenant. This theme will be taken up shortly in the section on salvation.

Cain's situation, in fact sinks him even deeper in woe, into a situation ever more inextricable."⁵⁶

Throughout the Bible, the human city, according to Ellul, represents all the aspects that go into the attempt to enhance human greatness -- including economics, materialism, war, self-realization, the conquest of time and space and nature, all political machinations and, especially for our time, technique. The unrestrained acceptance of the order of necessity cannot be effective apart from the development of techniques, all of which are contained in the biblical figure of the city. For example:

Resen is doubtlessly not the great city of history in any genuine sense, but she is the great city in the sense that she represents human power glorified in her. She is the city of technique, of invention, of domination over nature.⁵⁷

Or, beyond simple technique, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, Babylon is "the city, the absolute synthesis of all that is worldly, all that is non-communication, all that makes the Gospel impossible to share".⁵⁸ One main point in The Meaning of the City is the reflection that human reliance on modern technique (or its equivalent in any age) is not new. He makes it clear that he does not consider modern technology to be a sign of man's 'coming of age'. In a quite different way, he links the love affair with modern technology to the primary and ever-repeated sins of Adam and Cain. It is an example of how people respond in arrogance to the new relationships stemming from the rupture from God.

⁵⁶ M of C, p. 6. On the same page, he says that, with the building of the city, Eden is relegated to the realm of legend and civilization starts.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 14. Elsewhere, he also notes that the sons of Cain were the direct instigators of the various techniques. See "Notes Préliminaires", p. 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

Throughout his writings, Ellul underlines that it is not technique itself nor any single part of the order of necessity with which he takes issue. The issue is one of human allegiances and relationships apart from God. "I have never attacked technology. . . . On the other hand, I have attacked the ideology of technology and idolatrous beliefs about technology."⁵⁹ He would say that the attachment to any part of the order of necessity in the will-to-power is (in biblical terms) part of the worship of a false idol. Since liberty comes only from the right relationship with God, this making of idols out of the order of necessity becomes eventually only enslaving and self-defeating.

iv) Principalities and Powers

Beyond the discussion of God's decision to preserve the world and man's allegiance to the transformed order, Ellul says that there is a third dimension involved in the human situation after the fall. There is the question of the very power that the forces of necessity exercise over people. The power of the forces goes beyond human comprehension and beyond simply human desires. At this point, Ellul emphasizes the difficult and rather elusive New Testament reference to 'the principalities and powers'. At no place does he spell out in detail a doctrine on these matters. His most sustained discussion comes in "Notes Préliminaires sur 'Eglise et Pouvoirs' ", where he says that there is no theology of power in the Bible. He goes on to say the following.

Mais il y a deux indications précieuses: d'abord tout un ensemble d'orientations éthiques. La question étant non celle du fondement, de la nature, des formes du pouvoir, mais quelle attitude pouvons-nous avoir à l'égard de ces pouvoirs. La seconde indication c'est la distinction entre le pouvoir organisme humain et les

⁵⁹ "A Little Debate", p. 707. This letter appears only in English translation, but it seems safe to assume that the original word, translated as 'technology' is la technique.

puissances, inspiration spirituelle de ce pouvoir, ce qui a été mis en lumière par K. Barth et largement développé par Cullmann.⁶⁰

In conversation, he said that the origin of the principalities and powers is not discussed in the Bible, except that it seems to be more than a solely human responsibility.⁶¹ To reflect upon their existence, independent from their incarnation in the forces of the world, is yet another example of speculation. All he would say is that human will, the order of necessity, and the principalities and powers are all inextricably bound together in the world resulting from the fall. He emphasizes them in order to stress that the enslavement is not simply a subjective feeling brought about through perverted personal relationships. There is also an objective quality of power about them.

And without carrying it any further, we must admit that the city is not just a collection of houses with ramparts, but also a spiritual power. I am not saying that it is a being. But like an angel, it is a power, and what seems prodigious is that its power is on a spiritual plane.

⁶⁰ "Notes Préliminaires", p. 11. Also throughout L'Apocalypse there are references to the powers. This reference explains why, in Part A, Chapter 2, footnote 14, I referred only to the 'forces' of sociological reality. Ellul himself does not always make the separation of the different words, but for clarity, I shall try to maintain it. Again one should note Ellul's specific reference to Karl Barth's emphasis on exousiai. At the same time, this question is one area where he is not in full agreement with Barth's dogmatic formulation. See L'Apocalypse, p. 271, footnote 17, where he argues against Barth, saying that the powers will no longer exist in the new creation. This disagreement, however, does not basically affect Ellul's formulation of the problem 'here and now'.

⁶¹ Ellul's only reference to the origin of the powers comes in L'Apocalypse, where he describes them as "des émanations. . . du Dragon." (p. 216. See also p. 87) As we have seen, in footnote 38, the Dragon is associated with annihilation and death; nevertheless, its source is not a major concern in the Bible.

The city has, then, a spiritual influence. It is capable of directing and changing a man's spiritual life. It brings its power to bear in him and changes his life, all his life and not just his house. And that seems a fearful mystery. . . . Man puts all his power into it and other powers come backing up man's efforts.⁶²

The powers exercise an influence beyond anything that mere individuals could do in connection with the order of necessity. At the same time, it is only man's total allegiance that allows the principalities and powers to operate as strongly as they do. Putting the two factors together, he makes this summation.

[L]e Nouveau Testament insiste sur la présence derrière, et au delà de cette apparence sociologique, d'une réalité plus profonde: il y a une autre dimension du pouvoir qu'est spécifiquement révélée, c'est la Puissance, l'exhousia, qui est de l'ordre spirituel (et la dualité se trouve symbolisée dans l'apocalypse par la relation entre le Dragon et les deux bêtes qu'il fait monter de la mer et de la terre, XII, XIII). Il y a donc nous dit l'Ecriture une réalité plus profonde du pouvoir qui n'est pas seulement horizontal et interhumain, mais qui repose toujours en définitive sur un 'esprit'. Parfois personnalisé comme le Mammon d'iniquité, pour représenter l'argent, et symbolisé comme le Chatan (accusateur) ou le Diabolos (le diviseur). Ce n'est nullement obéir à la conception coutumière à cette époque, ni à des modèles culturels du milieu, car, tout au contraire, quand on analyse en détail les croyances sur l'aspect religieux du pouvoir à Rome et chez les Séleucides au II^e et I^{er} siècle avant J.C., on s'aperçoit que ce que dit l'Ecriture est totalement différent, original et indépendant. Bien entendu, cela n'implique en rien une figuration, de type démoniaque médiéval. Ce qui nous est dit ce n'est pas qu'il y a un être personnifié, le Diable par exemple, qui se tient derrière les pouvoirs, mais bien que ceux-ci ont une dimension spirituelle qui dépasse de loin tous les aspects matériels et que l'analyse sociologique ou politique ne peut pas saisir -- qu'il y a une correspondance entre cette réalité spirituelle et certains aspects de l'âme humaine -- qu'il

⁶² M of C, p. 9. For this reason, Ellul does not think it is possible to speak, for example, of pure reason or pure science. See Part A, Chapter 3 (c) i. Not only is human reason or human science an activity within the order of necessity and the human will-to-power, but also either is in the service of the spiritual powers that go beyond simply human capacities.

y a une séduction exercée par tout pouvoir, un appel à se faire adorer, à se faire aimer, à se faire servir, à se faire prendre au sérieux de façon dernière, qu'il y a une relation de foi, d'amour et d'espérance réclamée par le 'démon' de l'Etat, de l'argent, de la ville, de la technique. Cela n'est *pas* produit par le coeur de l'homme, seulement l'homme y répond et y cède. Ce n'est pas non plus le produit des structures matérielles: il y a un phénomène de plus, une 'inspiration' de ces pouvoirs. Au delà de leur forme, de leur matérialité, de leur capacité de contrainte, à leur réalité et leur vérité, plus secrètes, plus profondes, et bien plus dangereuses. Tant que le pouvoir n'a pas réussi à se faire croire et aimer, il n'est pas pleinement lui-même. Et il se trouve d'ailleurs extraordinairement réduit, dépouillé, déssaisi lorsqu'il reste seulement moyen matériel de gestion. Ce qu'il entend, c'est se faire exhausser par l'homme, de s'adjoindre une gloire qui ne lui est pas due (mais non pas glorifier au sens biblique!) C'est cette correspondance entre la prétention de pouvoir et le désir du coeur de l'homme qui récuse Dieu, qui est à proprement parler la puissance.⁶³

What most people consider to be absolute goods are, in fact, manifestations of false gods, the incarnation of the powers which God, in His judgment, has rejected. Thus, the worship of false gods, for Ellul, is finally the giving of allegiance to the principalities and powers in their various guises. Although Ellul accepts that the forces of necessity serve a useful function, he is careful to point out that the powers behind them always present a problem. - For example, throughout The Meaning of the City,

⁶³ "Notes Préliminaires", pp. 15-16. There is some debate whether this interpretation of the powers is correct. Some say the references, almost exclusively from St. Paul, can be seen only within his historical context in which Gnosticism was prevalent. Following the view of the Bible which Ellul accepts, he does not see these references as historical accretions only, but as indicators of the same situation of man as is spoken of throughout the Bible. See, for example, M of C re. the figure of the city, or H et A re. the biblical attitude towards the power of money. In Chapter 8, I shall discuss Ellul's view of the principalities and powers as the three horses that move the order of necessity. Although the powers are inseparably linked to the order of necessity, the two are not identical.

One final note re. this citation. On line 41, there is a strange reference to both 'leur réalité et leur vérité', which seems to be at odds with the distinction made in Section 1 Chapter 6, footnote 66. This somewhat loose usage seems to be in the interests of emphasizing that they really do exist.

he maintains that the spiritual powers of the city are never included in the mercy of God. Although God has willed the preservation of the world, He does reject the intermingling of man and the powers. It is the task of separating people from the power of the powers about which Ellul is speaking when he alludes to St. Paul.

The city is also the "assembly", the "gathering together", but it is exactly the opposite of the church assembly; it is the place where the church is held captive and is a prey for war and threats, a place where it is in combat not against flesh and blood, but against idols, against that spiritual power which is the essential characteristic of the city.⁶⁴

Although the details of his belief may not be explicit, there is no doubt that the principalities and powers hold an important place in Ellul's understanding of the modern world.

v) Conclusion

When thinking about the implications of the fall, Ellul does not forget that finally the whole undertaking surely leads to death. At this point, we come to the other side of the coin of the inevitability of death. The attempt of human beings to define themselves autonomously, no matter how ingenious, finally ends in death, because success is simply impossible.

La mort est très précisément la disparition de cette possibilité d'autonomie, et c'est également la perte de tout moyen d'action, de toute capacité à modifier volontairement ces échanges et le milieu. L'homme mort n'a plus aucune force, aucune autonomie, aucune capacité de décision, aucune possibilité de se changer, et de changer. Il a perdu toute puissance.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ M of C, p. 15. See also PK, p. 8 and "Notes Préliminaires", p. 17.

⁶⁵ "De La Mort", p. 9. For the way in which Ellul holds together the two sides of death as separation from God and death as the end of man's attempted autonomy, see especially p. 14 of the article.

However much attention has to be paid to the order of necessity, it remains a temporary measure. None of the new relationships, according to the biblical revelation, is close to the proper ones. Why then does God simply postpone the actual result of the fall? This question brings us back to the argument that God never acquiesced to the break and He has never simply withdrawn from His creation even after the institution of the order of necessity. Not only has He preserved the world, but also He has never changed His will that the proper relationships be known and lived. For Ellul, the whole biblical revelation points to the truth that God has never willed the ruptured relationship and, from His side, He has revealed His promise never to break it. Therefore, His work goes on and all human efforts at complete autonomy are never achieved.

And if all relations between man and God are broken off (really broken, not just broken in the imagination or the sentiments or the pretensions of man), then man dies.

But because God wants His creature to live, he keeps the break from happening. Man absolutely cannot get rid of God because he cannot keep the subject of all things from really being the subject.⁶⁶

Man keeps turning away from the right relationship with God and God keeps intervening to reveal once more, taking into account what man has done, the way things ought to be. Therefore, the relationship after the fall becomes a dialectical one in which God ever wills to free people from their own bondage to sin.

[J]e suis profondément convaincu que dès l'origine (cela se voit de toute évidence chez Paul), la pensée juive, puis la pensée chrétienne est, et ne peut être, que dialectique. C'est là, et non chez les Grecs, que la dialectique s'enracine et on ne peut comprendre un texte biblique qu'en insérant dans le réseau des

⁶⁶ M of C, p. 17.

contradictions, des crises et des résolutions historiques de la crise.⁶⁷

Whereas the original relationship was one of total communion, in the world of the fall, the relationship between God and man, though still existent, is a broken one. God must constantly tell recalcitrant man what his rebellion really means. As indicated in the above quotation, Ellul considers that the whole Bible points to the dialectical relationship of God's activities of love and the human responses to them. The will of God for man, centering on His accomplishment of it in the reality of the world of the fall, forms the core of the biblical witness to salvation in Jesus Christ.

c) Jesus Christ -- Salvation⁶⁸

Paul semble avoir été le premier, lorsqu'il élaborait son Evangelium de Christo à présenter l'oeuvre du Christ pour nous comme l'affranchissement d'esclaves, et la vie chrétienne comme la vie d'anciens esclaves affranchis. Et, ce faisant, il ne prenait pas une simple image ou une comparaison, mais il entendait transmettre à l'Eglise la réalité même de la Révélation et de l'action de Dieu. . . . En réalité Paul s'appuie ici, non sur des idées particulières, mais sur toute la pensée traditionnelle du peuple juif et plus exactement encore sur toute l'action de Dieu envers ce peuple juif, telle qu'elle est rapportée dans l'Ecriture.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ L'Apocalypse, p. 53. The emphasis on the dialectical relationship between God and man introduces the third area of dialectics in Ellul's thought. See Part A Chapter 2 (c) concerning the maintenance of a dialectical tension within society, and Part B Chapter 6 (b) concerning the dialectical confrontation between 'truth' and 'reality'. I shall come back to the significance of the triple dialectic in Ellul's overall thought in the general Conclusion.

⁶⁸ The French word for salvation, salut, has direct implications of health. For Ellul, therefore, Jesus Christ is the revelation of healthy relationships. This chapter is focusing on that question, while Chapter 8 will discuss the salvation of Jesus Christ with reference to human history as a whole.

⁶⁹ "Le Sens", p. 3.

Il n'y a de liberté que par la relation nouvelle que Dieu établit entre les êtres, car dans la relation ancienne selon le monde, avec les rapports de force, de violence et de sujétion, il ne saurait y avoir aucune espèce de liberté ainsi que nous le constatons en fait. . . . Si notre liberté n'était pas garantie dans la relation vraie entre la créature et son créateur qui a été rétablie en Jésus Christ seul, alors elle cesserait d'être. C'est ce qu'il faut entendre par la distinction entre l'homme libre (que nous ne sommes pas) et l'homme libéré (que nous ne cessons jamais d'être). C'est à chaque nouvelle démarche que toujours de nouveau Dieu nous affranchit. Il ne nous introduit pas dans un état permanent, durable, une situation acquise, mais dans une manière d'être avec lui.⁷⁰

By his intervention God restores man to his true situation as creature. This becomes evident in the covenant as God preserves life and asserts his rule of man.⁷¹

In this language of emancipation and of covenant, Ellul summarizes what has traditionally been called the work of redemption by Jesus Christ. The meaning of liberation is two-fold -- both away from enslavement to the powers of the order of necessity and also towards the true liberty of responsibility within the image of God. In Ellul's understanding of these two sides of liberty, they constitute a unity that enables people to do what they have always been supposed to do -- to reflect God's dominion and order for the rest of creation. This restoration of man to his true creatureliness takes place within the concrete 'here and now' situation -- within the altered situation of the order of necessity. The promise of concrete liberation from slavery in order to fulfil the true task is, for Ellul, the content of covenant throughout the Bible. Covenant is God's activity of intervention in the world to reveal His will for that situation. Each biblical covenant (specifically the one with Adam, Cain, Noah and Moses) refers, with varying emphases as the human response is lived, to the conditions necessary for the preservation of the world, God's judgment and

⁷⁰ "Le Sens", pp. 18-19.

⁷¹ TFL, p. 53.

mercy on man's disobedience, and the conditions which those to whom He has spoken must fulfil in order to do God's work and to reflect His glory in a rebellious world. In other words, covenant is God's liberation in order that there be a response of liberty in an otherwise enslaved world. Each biblical covenant given by God to specific people is a particular manifestation of God's will that witnesses finally to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In conversation, M. Ellul referred to that Gospel as the liberty to be holy; that is to say, the liberty to be obedient to the will of God, so that others may also know it. Once more, for Ellul, Jesus Christ is the totality of the true covenant between God and man for all time. He is the true and final relationship. Because of the dominance of will-to-power in the world, however, this restoration of right relationships and the question of the responsibility to live within the covenant of Jesus Christ can never be taken for granted or answered spontaneously.

[W]e cannot escape the necessity of responding to these questions: What is the meaning of the fact of being liberated by Jesus Christ from the tyranny of things, and so regain the possibility of using them without being enslaved by them? What is the meaning of being committed by Jesus Christ in a true encounter with others, and so of regaining the possibility of serving them and loving them? What is the meaning of being enlightened by Jesus Christ concerning the destiny of the world, and so of regaining the possibility of serving God and of loving him with all one's heart, with all one's soul, with all one's mind?⁷²

Even with the givenness of the complete revelation, Ellul finds it essential to reflect on the implications of these questions, especially in the attempt to understand what is at stake in the modern project. The rest of this chapter therefore, will attempt to put into perspective his thoughts on Jesus Christ as the Covenant of liberation.

⁷² To Will, p. 267.

i) Jesus Christ as Fully Divine and Fully Human

Or, il est de toute évidence qu'elle nous révèle que c'est autour de la crucifixion terrestre et de la Résurrection sur la terre que tout s'ordonne. Jésus est celui qui dans sa vie, racontée par les Evangiles, détermine ce qui se produit dans le monde de Dieu. Il n'est pas une marionette entre les mains de Dieu. Il est la liberté même, et ce qu'il décide sur terre, c'est ce qui se déroule dans le ciel. Il crée l'aventure divine. Non pas que cela signifie que Dieu n'existe pas! Mais ce Dieu qui est absolument amour s'est livré lui-même en Jésus, et n'a rien retenu de sa puissance, si bien que dans une incroyable fragilité, tout était risqué dans le moment et la personne de Jésus. Tout, y compris la suprême puissance de Dieu.⁷³

When speaking of Jesus Christ the Covenant, Ellul considers the three dimensions of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection as inseparable, without making a hierarchy of first and second order statements. Each can be seen only in the light of the other two. Very briefly, the Incarnation was God's intervention, as a new beginning to reveal relationship of the liberty of obedience -- contrary to the rupture of the fall. Because of the implications of the continuation of sin, that obedience led to the Crucifixion which was the activity of shattering the strangle-hold of the powers of the order of necessity. Finally, this activity found its fulfilment and the explanation of its source in the Resurrection -- the plenitude of the love of God for all people, of human beings for other human beings and of the reconciliation of man with nature. That reconciliation, in terms of the re-establishment of the image of God is historic "dans la mesure où je crois qu'elle s'est incarnée en Jésus Christ à un moment effectivement et où nous avons une image de ce

⁷³ L'Apocalypse, p. 47. Right after this passage, Ellul underlines that time factor must be considered as a totality. Furthermore, it should be noted that Ellul refers to the 'puissance' of God as over against 'les puissances'. See also pp. 69-70.

que ce pourrait être".⁷⁴ The key point in Ellul's understanding is that the totality of the relationships is effected in the work of Jesus Christ. He is both the One who liberates and the One who is liberated in the complete establishment of God's covenant. This language corresponds to the traditional articulations of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. That His work cannot humanly be talked about directly is indicated by God's use of human intermediaries to point to the multifaceted character of the biblical revelation. Bearing in mind the danger of pulling apart arbitrarily the two natures of Christ, what does Ellul think is revealed by calling Him both 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man'.⁷⁵

"It is because the world is radically, totally evil that nothing less would do than the gift of God's son."⁷⁶ According to some modern theologians, Jesus became the Son of God because He was a man who

⁷⁴ "CP?" Once again, Ellul does not summarize the doctrine in any detail, except to draw on the elements pertaining directly to his overall task. Again, for details, one should look at Barth's Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV entitled Reconciliation. The fact that Ellul has not spelled out his theology in a similar fashion does not mitigate against the conclusion that it does provide his cornerstone. This particular quotation points to two significant facets of what Ellul means by covenant. First, it takes the position that the final relationship has been revealed but has not yet been fully implemented in the world. This aspect introduces the eschatological dimension that Ellul emphasizes in his accounts of biblical revelation. Although I shall be mentioning it in passing in this sub-section, I shall deal with it more fully in Chapter 8 and the conclusion to Section 2. Secondly, the reconciliation does not ignore the fact that people continue to live in an interim period in which the call to be holy must be renewed at each moment. At this point, one returns to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which makes the victory of that moment contemporary for people.

⁷⁵ Ellul discusses the relationship between the two natures only briefly and somewhat cryptically. See, for example, L'Apocalypse, pp. 125-6 where he comments that the two are not to be confused, and PMM, pp. 154-5, where he says, rather enigmatically, that they must be seen dialectically.

⁷⁶ Violence, p. 26. See also HTA, pp. 102, 173, 285.

managed to avoid sin. Thus, in principle, any person could have achieved such an accomplishment (and it could be repeated): only Jesus actually did. Ellul believes, on the contrary, that only God can re-establish the rapport ruptured in the fall. Because of the impossibility of man knowing the good from his own resources, only God can show people for what they are destined. Finally, the only possibility is that God becomes man. ". . . God, out of love, has made himself the one who puts himself not only on man's level, but also at man's disposition. God has given himself over."⁷⁷ This giving of Himself over for man is the work of Jesus Christ. People can turn to the proper ordering of relationships only when God intervenes to show them the way -- which is His way. The only possible source is God Himself. Only God can reveal how to be human in a way that is contrary to giving one's allegiance to the principalities and powers. For Ellul, to assert that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is the affirmation that He is the content of the will of God for people in whatever situation they find themselves. We have already seen that Ellul considers the preservation of the world in terms of God's judgment and mercy; now, we must consider how he views the wider context of salvation. Within the order of necessity, the Gospel is also the call to be separated from the principalities and powers. Since that work cannot easily be spoken of directly, I shall look at two examples Ellul uses as pointers to the truth of the separation -- the crowds and the city.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ HTA, p. 102.

⁷⁸ For a general discussion of Jesus Christ as the One who rejects the powers, see L'Apocalypse, pp. 87-88, where this activity is linked both to the original creation and to the condemnation of the powers in the book of Revelation. I choose the examples of the crowd and the city because their concreteness speaks directly to his overall understanding of social analysis as will be discussed in the general Conclusion.

The first example of the crowds is illustrative of a concrete working out of God's liberating activity for individuals who are caught up in the implications of the fall. He points out that the Gospels portray the crowd as a psychological, sociological and spiritual reality in which the individual seems to be subjected to anonymous control. A crowd never really knows what it is doing.

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 be extremely active and powerful.⁷⁹

Jesus showed compassion on those in the crowds and suffered with their misery. By taking up their condition, but with the difference of awareness and compassion, He attacked the very core of the sociological reality of the crowd. "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."⁸⁰ It ceased to be a crowd in the sense that its members were no longer held by it. This act of separation was an act of salvation. Jesus dispelled the crowd to deal with each individual member; each person was separated in order to come into direct contact with the healing and transformation of God's will for him. The final step was that Jesus always sent people back to their work in the world, so that they could live and reflect the new kind of relationship they had discerned in this activity. Thus, they were separated from the power of the crowd, but not removed from their specific situation. The whole example stands as a unity in which no

⁷⁹ M of C, p. 127. A crowd becomes an incarnation of the principalities and powers in revolt from God. In one, a person is held by the force of the current rather than by the liberty of God.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 129. It is impossible to be held both by the crowd and by God's will.

single part can be seen in isolation from the others. In God's intervention, there is a unity of the ends and means by which He makes His covenant known. Those who encountered the true and final Covenant of Jesus had to return to the struggle to make the world livable and to contend with the still existing crowds within the same perspective of love and liberty given to them. The situation of the world, for example, the existence of the crowds, will not be altered until the whole creation is restored in Jesus Christ; nevertheless, the true task of the creature vis-à-vis crowds was renewed.

On a wider plane, Ellul's second example of the city draws on an image recurrent throughout the whole Bible. He makes a distinction between the texts directed to the cities (with special reference to Jesus's condemnations in Matthew 11:20ff), and those directed to the inhabitants. Nowhere in the Old Testament or the New Testament are the cities themselves granted pardon. The content of God's will for the cities as spiritual powers does not alter. The same is not the case, however, for people to whom pardon and grace are given. In short, the judgment is for people and against the city as typified in Babylon. This separation is something that no person could ever accomplish by himself, for "the city is an almost indistinguishable mixture of spiritual power and man's work".⁸¹ That Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, did have the ability to make this separation is signified by the fact that people had to come out of the city to hear Him.⁸² Ellul interprets this image as meaning that only the truth of God can draw people away from the power of the city. Furthermore, in the enactment of His death, He was expelled from the city, for

⁸¹ M of C, p. 169.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 131-33.

the lure of the city and the love of God are always incompatible. The rejection of and the removal from the powers of rebellion manifested in the city is clear to Ellul.

When Jesus obeys the law, he is expelled from the city, which cannot take possession of Christ. His death is the only eternal assurance of the city's actual conquest to be carried out by God from outside. . . . Thus Jesus, in his very person and in his entire life, shows himself to be a stranger to the city. . . . 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.⁸³

The totality of the establishment of the Kingdom as witnessed to in Revelation was inaugurated in the Resurrection which revealed what the separation was effected for. The disciples were sent out to the cities to make known this liberation by God. Thus, the example of the city also points not only to the liberation in God's will, but also to the continual response required until His work is completed for all.

We said that God, by his act in Jesus Christ, made the city into a neutral world where man can be free again, a 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. But God's act gives man room for autonomous action. God has preserved man alive and now reserves for him a part, as in Eden he made Adam responsible for keeping and cultivating the fields.⁸⁴

Man is thus re-established to his proper position as a creature, in the world, in covenant with God.

Because a covenant involves two sides of a relationship of responsibility and task, Jesus Christ also reveals what should be the human

⁸³ M of C, p. 124.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 170-71. The use of the word 'autonomous' here refers to liberation from the powers of the order of necessity, for, as we have already seen, Ellul does not think that man acts autonomously altogether. The new Jerusalem will be discussed in Chapter 8(b).

response. In other words, He also reveals what it means to be truly human.⁸⁵ The startling affirmation of Christianity is that God has fully revealed the true order of relationships by becoming a man. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Jesus Christ is the will of God for man for all time. The central affirmation of the doctrine of the two natures states that the Event of Jesus Christ was not simply God's statement of His intention or God's intervention to achieve what He desires in liberating man. It was also the fulfilment of the perfect human response within God's will. Since, according to Ellul, the core of the biblical revelation is the witness to the right relationships, it could be complete only if it also pointed to Jesus Christ as fully human. In short, to call Jesus 'the Son of Man' means for Ellul that he was the fully Liberated Person.

But Jesus took the full condition of man, totally man, except for sin. But that means that he had to accept the consequences of sin. We are well aware of it when we contemplate the cross.

And it is precisely because he took on himself the fulness of human life that he refused this false remedy, this false source of help, this false greatness.⁸⁶

In terms of the discussion so far, put briefly, Jesus Christ was the second Adam and the second Cain (as exemplary of His fulfilment of all of the biblical witnesses). The Incarnation was the sign of a re-commencement, a re-creation to show people how they have continually gone

⁸⁵ For a brief reference to the title 'Son of Man', see L'Apocalypse, p. 106, footnote 2.

⁸⁶ M of C, pp. 122; 124. The context of the second reference shows that in Jesus Christ the two natures cannot be pulled apart artificially.

wrong.⁸⁷ He revealed what they could be within the image of God, in communion with God.

The voice of Jesus Christ, at the same time that it is the voice of God, is also the voice of man. It is near at hand, but it is the voice of a holy man, a man sanctified in our place, who speaks the good in our place, and who accomplishes in obedience what Adam wanted to accomplish in disobedience.⁸⁸

Unlike the first Adam, He continued to love God rather than ceasing to love Him. Although Jesus was also tempted to define the good apart from communion with God, the possibility of the fall did not lead to an actual rupture. In His life, He showed what living within the image of God really involves. He spelled out the meaning of 'to have dominion' in a way completely contrary to will-to-power. It was a self-giving service in free, loving relationships: it was a healing and reconciliation: it was suffering in compassion. He was fully human not through good works, but because He did not give his allegiance to the order of necessity. ("The Christian is not characterized by good works, but by salvation."⁸⁹)

⁸⁷ See L'Apocalypse, pp. 85-86 concerning the birth of Christ as a new beginning that signifies the inverse of allegiance to the principalities and powers that leads to death. At the same time, it is a new beginning that takes into account everything that man has tried to achieve by himself.

⁸⁸ To Will, p. 28. Concerning the fact that Jesus fulfilled what all people have tried to do in separation from God, elsewhere, Ellul says the following. "C'est la bonne nouvelle de la possibilité pour l'homme de revenir à Dieu, qui est l'accomplissement du souhait d'Adam (car il ne faut pas oublier que L'Apocalypse est le livre de l'exaucement des vœux et aspirations de l'homme) maintenant accompli en Jésus-Christ. Et cet Evangile, qui doit être proclamé à tous ceux qui résident sur la terre, entraîne une attitude de la part des hommes, exprimant cette relation nouvelle avec Dieu. . . " (L'Apocalypse, p. 185.)

⁸⁹ To Will, p. 53. This statement refers to the source and the fruits of the human stance. If man lives in a right relationship with God, then he will exercise dominion in a way that reflects God's will. The right relationship is prior.

Rather, He lived the message that all right relationships and right responses stem from the proper orientation to the true and living God. Salvation in the Bible, at the same time, is always directed to the world in which people actually find themselves. That affirmation is central in all the covenants. Jesus Christ as Covenant, therefore, was not simply a removal to Eden as if nothing else had happened. As a man, therefore, Jesus Christ had to live out the implications of the fall. As a specific example, Ellul argues that Jesus Christ showed the destiny that would have been Cain's, if he had risked accepting God's protection rather than seeking his own security in a city. In all the accounts, Jesus refused to accept the lure of the city.⁹⁰ Although good actions cannot supply the starting point, the life and teachings of Jesus show that obedience to God leads to action that is the inverse of everything people have tried to achieve in the city. For example:

Jésus nous dit: Heureux les débonnaires, car ils hériteront la terre. . . . Cette béatitude inverse exactement ce que l'on a normalement l'habitude de penser: la terre est à celui qui l'occupe et la conquiert.⁹¹

His teachings and His life revealed that by not following the ways of the world, even in a situation very altered from that of creation, the response that God has always willed, becomes operative.

What is most important is that, as a man, Jesus had to suffer the ultimate consequences of death. This action was necessary to reveal what is at the core of being human.

⁹⁰ See *M of C*, pp. 120-123. See also "Du Temps", p. 369.

⁹¹ "Le Rapport", p. 152.

Mais être Vrai Homme vivant c'est avoir encore justement cette aptitude à adresser une prétention en face de la volonté de Dieu, une objection. Et Jésus le vit ainsi au jardin de Gethsémani Et c'est dans cette perspective que l'on comprend le texte de Jean XIII: 'passer du monde au Père', ce n'est pas dire que Jésus était englobé dans le monde, ce n'est pas dire que Jésus sera plus près de son Père en montant, mais il cesse d'être un centre de décision autonome -- et, même parfaitement obéissant, même accomplissant parfaitement la volonté de son Père, il vit encore par lui-même -- simplement parce qu'il est vivant. La mort est dépouillant de tout, il n'y a plus que la grâce. Et c'est bien le sens du 'Je remets mon esprit entre tes mains'.⁹²

Through His own death, Jesus Christ revealed that to give up the much vaunted independence for its contrary of conformity to the will of God is the only way in which death no longer has power to dominate through fear. Ellul finally completes the last reference by saying the following.

Qui est finalement le seul chemin par lequel la mort est elle-même dépouillée de sa puissance. Elle n'est terrible que dans la mesure où le vivant se place au centre du monde et veut assurer sa puissance: à partir du moment où le vivant a renoncé à lui-même, se désintéresse de son autonomie et de sa puissance, alors la mort perd effectivement sa puissance et sa signification. . . . Et c'est pourquoi, de fait, la mort est bien le dernier ennemi. Mais, agissant, elle détruit ce qui, par autonomie, séparait l'homme de Dieu. Et par conséquent, elle laisse la totalité de la place à la grâce, sur quoi elle n'a aucune prise: son oeuvre s'arrête là. Celle de Dieu remplit alors tout et en tous.⁹³

The victory of the Resurrection implies that the total re-establishment of love between God and man, man and man, and man and nature is never a return to the situation exactly as it was before, but rather it is the incarnated truth that ultimately man cannot be separated from the love of God. Once again, even though the restoration has been accomplished

⁹² "De La Mort", pp. 10-11.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 13-14. For firm statement that Ellul believes that man does not thereby become God, any more than he was in Eden, see L'Apocalypse, p. 243.

in Jesus Christ, the work of making it known (through the help of the Holy Spirit) to all people continues. Although it took the Son of God Himself to accomplish what was promised from the beginning, the Event of Jesus Christ showed what it means for man to be fully responsible within the image of God.

ii) Gospel and Law

Far from being definitive, the foregoing discussion has attempted only to give some guidelines for considering the stance from which Ellul makes his reflections for his understanding of the task of the Christian in the world. Perhaps the most difficult, but one of the most helpful indicators of the way in which he sees the covenants as liberation comes in his scattered reflections on Mosaic Law. "It is not a matter of distinguishing in the Bible that which is law from that which is gospel. All is law, . . . but also it is all gospel."⁹⁴ In conversation, he said that, whereas natural law and positive law are parts of the order of necessity, Mosaic law was part of the contrary realm of the revelation of God's will.

It seems impossible to recognize an identification of the decalogue with the lex naturae, as was often done, and perhaps by Luther in the primus usus legis, for the idea . . . implies life in a Christian society. . . . The decalogue is a law revealed to the Jewish people as the chosen people. It is not a general law for all, and it does not express what comes naturally to the human heart. Otherwise it is hard to understand why it should be revealed on Sinai in the midst

⁹⁴ To Will, p. 310. Although he has not written at length on this specific question, his few references, particularly in conversation, indicate that Mosaic Law as witness to Gospel is central for him.

of thunder and lightning.⁹⁵

It was established to bring about a holy nation; that is to say, a people distinguished from the other nations in the world around them because of their allegiance to God.⁹⁶ The Law of the Mosaic covenant liberated the Hebrew people from the ways of the will-to-power for the task of witnessing to God's will in the concrete situation. They were the human intermediaries chosen to make God's ways known to the nations (See Deuteronomy 4:6). In the few places where he does speak of God's election of Israel, Ellul seems to draw out the concrete implications of liberation from a world caught up in sin. "D'une part il fixe les limites. . . . D'autre part, il pose des questions sur ce comportement."⁹⁷

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To Will, pp. 286-7. It should be noted that in TFL, he is not speaking at length of the place of the Law of Sinai. Although he does say in passing that he is not referring to the Mosaic statutes, (See pp. 66-7; 90.) the distinction is not always clear. This lack of clarity tends to make the book somewhat misleading. The place of TFL in his thought will be discussed in the next chapter. With respect to the relationship between Mosaic Law and Gospel, in conversation he recommended Barth's "Gospel and Law", in Church, State and Community (Gloucester, Mass: 1968).

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See footnote 15 in this chapter. Israel is to reflect the will of God in the world of the fall. In conversation, M. Ellul said that the Bible does not discuss why only one nation was chosen, except to say that the witness is for all mankind. Furthermore, the Bible does not concern itself with those nations who have not come in contact with the Christian or Jewish witness. One cannot speculate as to the mechanics of God's plan, except as it has been revealed. Concerning the question of why the Hebrew people were chosen, he also said that there was nothing intrinsically virtuous about them and one can point only to the indications that God has chosen the humble and meek to teach the mighty and proud. See, for example, Proverbs 3:34, Ezekiel 21:26, Luke 1:52 and the recurring theme in Amos and Isaiah.

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"Le Rapport", p. 152. Ellul does not claim to be discussing every aspect of Mosaic Law, any more than his writings are directed to every aspect of the teachings of the Church. He refers to the covenant as it bears on an articulation of the doctrine of the two realms.

As was the case in God's decision for Adam, Cain and Noah, the Mosaic covenant affirms that God continues to love and preserve His creation and that He still wants man to be His representative on earth. Therefore, Ellul stresses that much of the legislation defines the limits within which there can be domination over other people and the rest of creation -- if it is to remain livable.

Cet amour que Dieu manifeste en acceptant l'appropriation des choses, il est la limite du usage de ces choses. L'homme ne peut strictement pas se comporter en propriétaire absolu mais il doit manifester au monde créé par Dieu le même amour.⁹⁸

For example, he cites the specific legislation about property, animals, the sabbatical year and the cutting down of trees.⁹⁹ These statutes do not simply reflect the cultural phenomena of an ancient time. Rather, they point to the truth that liberty within the world as it is involves restraints -- restraints that apply to all relationships, through the maintenance of the proper distinctions and the limitations of man's will-to-power. Only those who know God's covenant of liberation know the impossibility of an autonomous and unrestrained world. Therefore, since the commandments are neither abstract nor obscure, the recipients are responsible, if, through neglect of the covenant, the world threatens to run amok. At this point, reflection on God's gift of the Mosaic covenant becomes important vis-à-vis the modern project of the technological society.

[E]n face de la menace du désordre écologique, les seuls qui étaient responsable, étaient ceux qui ayant reçu et cru la Parole de Dieu avaient là tout ce qui était indispensable pour voir clair et avertir. Juifs et chrétiens.

⁹⁸ "Le Rapport", p. 146.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 144-9.

Dans la mesure où Israël et l'Eglise n'ont rien dit et rien fait depuis un siècle et demi dans ce domaine, cela signifiait pour le monde qu'il n'y avait de fait aucune limite. Cela veut dire qu'ils ont une fois de plus manqué l'occasion de leur sainteté. Cela veut dire qu'ils sont devant Dieu responsables eux, et eux seuls, du désastre dans lequel nous commençons à vivre.¹⁰⁰

Beyond the need for restraints, the Mosaic covenant further reveals that only through worshipping the one true God and being in communion with His will for the world is the whole work of witnessing possible. For Ellul, it is mainly through the institution of the Sabbath that God revealed the source and the means of the task.

Or, rappelons-nous que le sabbat (et tant d'autres institutions d'Israël) est donné par Dieu à Israël comme marque de leur sainteté -- pour le différencier radicalement de tous les autres peuples et attester au milieu des nations qu'il est, visiblement le peuple du Seigneur.¹⁰¹

The emphasis on the Sabbath of the joy of the Lord through abstention from the concerns of maintaining oneself in a hostile environment refers to the final liberation of the covenant. The Sabbath as a day of rest points not only to the original creation, but also for Ellul, it is the promise of the final restoration of all right relationships within the image of God. At the same time, the Sabbath is also the cornerstone from which relationships in the present can be maintained. That is to say, the separation of the Sabbath from the rest of the week points in two directions. On the one hand, it points to the final promise of God that will be fulfilled; on the other hand, it points to the fact that man lives in a different world. Finally, it sheds light on how the restraints are to be exercised through the whole of the week. The 'here and now' restraints to be practised, that is, the work of election, are

¹⁰⁰ "Le Rapport", p. 144-9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 154; 155.

possible finally only through living within and through the Sabbath which reveals the grace of communion with God in contrast to the will-to-power. God separated His People from the principalities and powers of the world, so that they may live within His covenant -- with its dual revelation of the 'now', but 'not yet' life with God.¹⁰²

Mosaic Law, for Ellul then, does not consist in simply primitive or early teachings that were abolished by the New Testament. For example, he says that the liberty of St. Paul:

ne vient pas d'un rejet de la loi, d'une rébellion contre l'ordre de Dieu, mais au contraire de ce que la loi est écrite dans nos coeurs de chair, comme la prophétie en était faite, et du rétablissement de l'ordre de Dieu.¹⁰³

Since Jesus Christ is the True Covenant for all time, His Gospel also is the source and fulfilment of Mosaic Law concerning God's intervention

¹⁰² There are indeed many comments that might be made concerning this interpretation of the institution of the Sabbath and certainly there is no total accord with Ellul in all traditional accounts. He is, however, also not totally at odds with the way in which many Jewish scholars have viewed the questions. For one Jewish discussion of the Sabbath as the antithesis of will-to-power similar to the one presented here, see I. Grunfeld, The Sabbath. (London:1954).

A related and important point to be made is that Ellul sees the aspects of the Law as being in contradistinction to will-to-power being constantly reiterated throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament. Whenever Israel seeks to be a nation like other nations, whenever she wanders from her proper witness of the preservation of the world through restraint and allegiance to another way, she is condemned to failure. God constantly intervenes to keep His People a holy people of the covenant for the whole world. This aspect of the covenant is a major theme throughout P of G. See also M of C, pp. 30-40. Unlike many Old Testament scholars, Ellul does not see the need for making a dichotomy between the Law and the history of Israel as the focal point of revelation. See for example TFL, p. 54 or M of C, p. 134, where he speaks of "covenant history". Again, he emphasizes the multifaceted unity of the revelation of the relationship between God and man. The centrality of history is to be the topic of Chapter 8 and the idea of covenant history will be brought out in the conclusion to Section 2.

¹⁰³ "Le Sens", p. 9. See also P of G, p. 191 where he describes the Law as "the will of God broken down in commandments entailing our works".

and the human response. He is the One who separates people from the principalities and powers and He is the One who shows what keeping the Law really means. Jesus Christ fulfills both the promise of the Law as well as the 'here and now' commandments. In short, He is Mosaic Law incarnated as a person. Above all, Jesus Christ reveals what is involved in the 'now' but the 'not yet' responsibility that permeates Mosaic Law, centering on the Sabbath. In theological language, Jesus Christ is the source and fulfilment of the eschatological dimension of the biblical witness to be examined in Chapter 8. That is to say, the right relationship between God and man, as pointed to by the Sabbath, has actually been established once and for all.

But the final solution, the situation before God, has been changed: man is no longer entangled in his work, because Jesus Christ came for man as separate from his work, because he came to save man considered as though he were outside his work.

Only the death of the very Son of God is sufficient to change the facts of history. Only the resurrection is sufficient to dispossess the demon powers of their domain.¹⁰⁴

This truth is the truth of the Sabbath; therefore, believers must witness to this final liberation in the spirit of the Sabbath.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, Ellul also accepts that, although the principalities and powers have been defeated, Jesus Christ did not completely annihilate them. God does not use coercion to force people to be different, except

¹⁰⁴ M of C, pp. 125; 170.

¹⁰⁵ In conversation, M. Ellul discussed that the Sabbath should still retain the same significance for Christians as it does for Jews -- as well as the celebration of the Resurrection. As Christians are still living in a world characterized by sin, the setting aside of one day, a day free of the constraints of work, remains part of the special calling. To refer to every day as the Sabbath would, in reality, culminate in its becoming meaningless.

through the constancy of His liberating love. Therefore, as long as people continue in their rupture from God, the principalities and powers will still operate. Although God has effected His judgment and mercy in Jesus Christ from the beginning, that victory is not at all obvious.

And God's will is to separate this power from man's work, in fact a part of man and his destiny. And this is exactly what he does in Jesus Christ. But as so many have said (Barth, Cullmann, Visser 't Hooft), these conquered powers have not yet been eliminated. And as it is with the city, so with the state. Virtually conquered, still they have their power to act and fight, and in the last days they actually manifest a superabundant amount of activity.¹⁰⁶

Ellul sees this activity in full force in every sphere of the modern world -- in war, in ideology, in materialism, in state power etc. Therefore, believers must also live their new relationship in the interim period. That truth is the truth of the Law for the six days. Mosaic Law is not a different truth, but it is the same truth. In Jesus Christ the full truth of the Law is incarnated. He introduced, for all time, the first-fruits of the new creation that has not yet been fully brought about. This strange tension must characterize the Christian response which must remain within the spirit of the Mosaic Law, which, as a whole, announces the whole Gospel. The spirit of the Law, therefore, is still binding on Christians as well as on Jews. Just as obedience to Mosaic Law has always pointed to its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, so also knowledge of Jesus Christ always leads back to the Law.

iii) Conclusion

In conversation, Ellul clarified somewhat what the relationship between Gospel and Law as Covenant should mean for the Christian. The Law

¹⁰⁶ M of C, p. 164.

is God's liberating activity, in every sphere of life, from all the slaveries in which people find themselves. He said that, on the one hand, the Jews have tended to make the error of transforming the Law into an obligation, fixed to a certain historical set of slaveries. More aptly, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, it is the question of being liberated by God from the slaveries of any particular age in which people find themselves. For example, he said that the refusal of the power of television would be a twentieth century instance of obedience to the spirit of Mosaic Law, as would ecological restraint.¹⁰⁷ Christians, on the other hand, have tended to err in making obedience into a natural law somehow inherent in all human beings or which will somehow flow naturally without specific commandments for specific situations. Although he did not say which tendency is more dangerous, he did say that both are wrong. When the Law of the Gospel is manipulated to become something which people 'have' in their possession as a guarantee of their own security in one form or another, it becomes a force of the order of necessity. It becomes itself an enslavement from which the grace of the Gospel must liberate them again for their true task. Because all people have not yet fully re-entered the right relationship with God, witnessing to the order of Christ must now take place within the order of necessity and not on another plane -- as the Law makes abundantly clear. The conflict between the order of necessity and the order of Christ is never simply resolved.

¹⁰⁷ He distinguishes, therefore, between the biblical revelation of Moses and Jewish law as it may or may not be practised at any given time. See, for example, "Le Rapport", footnote on p. 148, or *TFL*, pp. 66; 29-30. For this same tendency among Christians, see "Le Sens", pp. 16-17. In conversation, M. Ellul also mentioned St. Paul's admonitions about women in church as the carrying out of the Law, by Christians, of the legislations concerning the distinctions between men and women. The specific activities of obedience will vary in different epochs, although the revelation remains the same.

The answer comes with life, day by day, in the conflict between the world's necessity and the liberty given us of God, between the world's wisdom (which we can never totally set aside) and the folly of the cross (which we can never totally live out).¹⁰⁸

That the Covenant has been accomplished is the core of the Christian message.

Elle [la Révélation] est essentiellement (et en dehors des drames et combats) présentée comme l'Alliance. . . . On ne peut pas mieux décrire la Nouvelle Alliance comme le cœur même de Dieu et une alliance qui ne peut pas être remise en question, puisque maintenant c'est une véritable identification de Dieu à l'homme qui se réalise, puisque cette arche n'est plus sur terre comme celle de Moïse et de David, mais qu'elle est l'alliance faite par unité dans la personne de Jésus de la totalité de l'homme avec la totalité de Dieu. Il n'y a donc pas à chercher ici des significations diversifiées (L'arche de Moïse étant la réplique terrestre d'une arche céleste; . . . ceci est sans importance en comparaison du mystère central de la décision de Dieu).¹⁰⁹

Within the certainty of the Covenant of Jesus Christ, for the believer, there is the double requirement of the preservation of the world and of witness to the other way of God's truth which has been promised. In holding these two sides together, there is, for Ellul, as we have seen, always a dialectical tension to be lived in the world. It is his task to articulate this tension of living the covenant in this particular age. In this sense, all of his writings are reflections on covenant. Mosaic Law, as a work of salvation, points to and gives guidance to the Church in her task of witnessing to the new creation, so far only inaugurated by Jesus Christ. Only through the constant renewal of God's intervening love can the discernment of truth and the introduction of the contrary to will-to-power become possible.

¹⁰⁸ M of C, p. 44. The relationship would correspond to that of the rest of Mosaic legislation to the Sabbath.

¹⁰⁹ L'Apocalypse, pp. 82-83. The ark is the sign of the covenant.

[T]his is where man's work lies -- to help bring truth and reality together, to introduce somewhere, in some small way, the victory won in truth by Christ into concrete existence. . . . Such is man's calling. Such an assertion is, as a brilliant intellectual said not too long ago, "a rather narrow basis for action." But outside of this liberating work, man's only future is to fall into his old habits and to revert to the much wider basis offered to him by the power of the city!¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ M of C, p. 170. It is not the purpose of this thesis to spell out an ethic arising from Ellul's position. Rather, it is to delineate the framework within which he approaches these questions. From as early as PK, he has focused on the need of witnessing to the reintegration of means and ends within the light of the intimation of the order of the resurrection.

Postscript to Chapter 7

In Chapter 7, I have concentrated on Ellul's views of creation, the fall, and the re-establishment of right and healthy relationships. Surrounding the whole discussion of the biblical witness to Jesus Christ, for many readers a basic question will still hover. If Jesus Christ is the total revelation of God's will for man, why do some people accept it and others do not? The question has nothing to do with choice within the order of necessity, which, as we have seen, Ellul considers sin itself. It is rather the big question of the overall orientation of the human will. It corresponds to the problem of why Adam ceased loving God in the first place or why Cain built a city instead of accepting God's protection. As already pointed out, Ellul does not think that the Bible addresses itself to the actual operation of the change. Similarly, the mechanism of turning away from the order of necessity to obedience to God is equally inexplicable. The Bible simply does not discuss it. From the biblical accounts, Ellul can draw only two, not particularly conclusive, observations about conversion. First, man has been given the liberty to make the decision either for or against God: that liberty distinguished Adam from the rest of creation. Therefore, a choice or a decision is in some sense implicit and possible, so that individuals are somehow responsible for their own orientation if the choice has been made clear to them. In the case of the fall, he puts full responsibility on Adam and Eve. In the case of repentance and salvation, however, there is a second observation. The choice there is a response to a prior gift of God and the mystery of God's grace remains totally beyond any human capacity. It is not entirely man's doing, so that it can be spoken of only in terms of elec-

tion. Typical of Ellul's answer to the question of the discernment of truth are the following statements.

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 pretensions to fathom the mysteries of God's will. If God is truly God, he is outside the reach of our intelligence; if God is truly God, our intelligence can never grasp anything but a falsification of his true nature.

Grace is pure act of God. Precisely because it is grace, it is beyond our grasp, and beyond our ability to structure and to assimilate. . . . It is a miracle from which my faith can take its source, or my hope find its assurance, but on which I cannot count with serenity. . . . We have no right to play upon the superabundance of grace. Since the Spirit is free, it blows where and when it wills. We can only be ready to receive it when it blows. God gives grace to whom he gives grace -- and when he gives grace -- no more.¹¹¹

In the debate "Croire Pourquoi?" , Ellul cut off virtually every avenue of possible answer to the content of the decision for or against grace by stating baldly that the Bible gives no reason for believing, not even the hope of salvation, for salvation is a gift. In fact, using the example of Abraham, he says that the Bible tells of the impossibility of faith. No apologetics for him -- not even the one often put forward by Protestants of a unique experience that some people have had and others have not -- is possible. He emphasizes rather, that it is a matter of the discernment of truth and the experience is the response.¹¹² Human beings have no capacity alone to grasp what is at stake. They do not decide to apprehend

¹¹¹ M of C, p. 174; HTA, pp. 226-7. The mystery of grace is finally the only answer to the question of the election of the Jews, mentioned in footnote 96 -- as well as the election of Christians. The human decision to accept or not to accept also remains a factor, as is seen in the text "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15).

¹¹² He quotes John 7:17. See also HTA, p. 221. Throughout that book, he constantly reiterates that there is no human basis for hope.

God: God apprehends them. Only through the decision to engage one's life in the given revelation is it possible to speak of any capacity for it and, even then, the secret of the decision and the understanding of the response remains unfathomable. Therefore, the question of the turnabout is simply not answered, for Ellul believes that it cannot be answered definitely and objectively.

Does that stance imply then that whole issue, particularly as it centres on the use of human intermediaries, is in vain, since the turning around is totally out of man's hands? Although his position will not prove satisfactory to all, Ellul has made a few comments in this regard -- especially in "Croire Pourquoi?". His answer brings us back to the task of the Church as discussed in the foundational chapter. Above all, he insists that since God has given people the liberty of loving, it is not a matter of why to believe, but of whom they can believe as being reliable in an ultimate way. Since people are characterized by their allegiances or relationships -- either towards the order of necessity or towards the love of God -- it is a question of trust in a relationship. If the God witnessed to in the Bible is truly God, then He loves in a way that can be apprehended only within personal trust in His initiative. People cannot make up the relationship nor does God force them to accept His offer. The only source of trust in God who is truly God can never be a demonstration or description: it can be made known only through a witness that this relationship is liberating. Such a witness can speak in neither a purely rational nor a sentimental way, for then it would refer only to the self and other isolated human beings, but not to a relationship with God. Then, it would be only a continuation of the enslaving trust in human independence. The only source for human trust is the living witness

that opens otherwise closed situations through loving relationships. Since one side of a relationship cannot be known by itself, the witness must be to the whole relationship. Within Christian thought, Ellul says the Person who can be trusted to liberate is Jesus Christ -- God's Covenant. Since the final revelation has been given by Him, but the achievement of right relationships not yet universal, this is the point where His human intermediaries come on the scene. The covenant relationship is one of immediate 'here and now' response and it can be made known only through living it. Because the miracle remains miracle, Ellul can say little more about the mechanics of conversion. In light of his position, however, he can focus Christians' attention on the need to witness as the raison d'être of election, as the truth of covenant in itself and as the one route to make faith even a possibility for others. Beyond that stance, he can say very little, except to speak to believers in the following manner.

What then, is the meaning of this effort if we have closed all the roads? It can only be an address to "Christians", to those who acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. . . . Apart from that acknowledgment, this thinking has no import of any kind. This discourse has no meaning in itself, but only with reference to that prior discernment.

Yet at this point we are obliged to put the same question again (but in reverse): If the reader is already in the faith, if he knows all that already, what good is this discourse? The fact is, I observe that a great many Christians today, and myself first of all, can know and also try to live in the faith, yet without hope. In the midst of the world, in this occident, they are just as discouraged, depressed, uncertain, fearful and agonized as everybody else. Hence, it is not to be taken for granted, it is not automatic, obvious and spontaneous. . . . Thus our thinking is located in that interval which separates faith from hope. Its purpose is to close that gap and to arouse the Christian to hope.

To be sure, it can also be received and understood by a non-Christian. I have no intention of erecting a barrier, of establishing a prior condition. I insist only on emphasizing that there is here no recipe, no gimmick for arousing hope, and that the reader can no more expect to emerge from a meditation on hope equipped with hope than I can expect to

persuade him to "have" this hope. What troubles me is to see a generation of Christians born without hope. . . .

But this always involves another dimension. We have tried to show that no hope can be born except from a hope lived by another, attested as lived and visible at that level. It cannot happen otherwise. Hence, in a generation without hope, Christians would seriously be missing the significance of their faith if they failed to live this hope. It is not given to them primarily for themselves. It is for them in the midst of, and for, others. But if they are not living it, there is nothing. They can in no way help others, still less witness to Jesus Christ. A hope lived and living is a prior condition of witnessing.¹¹³

Although Ellul admits that this kind of Christian witness is rare, he does not waver in the belief that it is the only way. The witness of the Church, although no guarantee that people actually will discern the truth, nevertheless, still provides at least the possibility of the right questions being raised, the possibility of people being in a position to hear the Gospel which is addressed to all people. Without the witness of the Church (and Israel), there is not the remotest possibility of trust in the only source of liberation. The Church's task is to make known that Jesus Christ is the living Covenant.

¹¹³ HTA, pp. 164-65.

CHAPTER 8

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF HISTORY

Introduction

i) What Ellul Means by History

Moreover, we wish to make it clear that in basing our analysis on the creation and the covenant, we do not thereby claim to grasp the total reality. . . . We must not overlook for a moment the fact that it is not static.¹

As we have seen in Chapter 7, Ellul believes that God does not leave people entirely to their own devices nor to the complete sway of the principalities and powers. At the same time, He does not force people back into line against their own perceptions of their will. We have already looked at Ellul's account of the implications in terms of relationships, but in considering the full dimension of the biblical revelation, he also wants to consider what it says about this on-going human activity as a whole. What makes it what it is and what is its significance? In short, the time between man's first strivings for autonomy and the time when God completely brings a new creation is what Ellul refers to as history.² When he reflects on a theology of history, he wants

¹ TFL, pp. 75-76. This reference, from a relatively early writing, shows a somewhat loose usage of the words 'reality' and 'analysis', but the sense of the reference is clear.

² In M of C, p. 6, as already noted, he says that history began with the murder of Abel, while in L'Apocalypse, p. 161, he indicates that it began with the first act of Adam after the fall. In either case, it started with the definite activities of man trying to secure his own independence. For reasons discussed in Chapter 7 (b), footnote 53 and footnote 9 of this chapter, the murder of Abel takes on a certain importance as the first really self-assertive act; nevertheless, it was still inseparable from the desires of Adam. Cain is a more direct indicator of the activities that will constitute history and for Ellul the biblical witness concerning him deals directly with the issue at stake in this chapter.

to come to grips with what the Bible says about this interim period, involving all people (and not just Christians and Jews) and all human strivings. What is it about?

Il y a donc bien dans l'Apocalypse une prise au sérieux et du rôle de l'homme et de l'histoire mais sur un mode qui ne nous est pas familier et qui contient à la spécificité du temps. Le Temps de L'Apocalypse est d'une part le temps intermédiaire (entre la création et la récréation), d'autre part le Temps de la fin.³

On the one hand, any adequate Christian teaching must take into account the concrete facts and not run roughshod over them. Although Ellul believes that the biblical revelation in this matter (as in all others) is finally open only to believers, it should not be discussed in such an

³ L'Apocalypse, p. 25. This book supplies Ellul's most sustained account of the biblical understanding of history, drawing together a number of themes that run throughout his theological writings. Ellul's articulation of the relationship between the unfolding of the interim period and its ultimate outcome is not a simple one. In order to see what he means by 'an unfamiliar mode', the following passage is illustrative. "L'Apocalypse ne nous décrit aucun moment de l'histoire mais nous révèle la profondeur permanente de l'historique: c'est donc, pourrait-on dire, un discernement de l'Eternel dans le Temps, de l'action de la Fin dans le Présent, du découvrément de L'Eon Nouveau, non pas au but du temps, mais dans cette histoire-ci, du Royaume de Dieu caché dans ce monde; elle révèle alors d'un côté le noeud du problème, noeud insoluble, et n'appelle pas seulement à la passivité mais à l'oeuvre de l'espérance. Elle nous révèle, de l'autre côté, la présence actuelle de la fin, avec les deux sens possibles: elle montre le Télos, c'est-à-dire le but, qui est ici, et la Conclusion, le terme qui est inclus dans l'histoire. Et ainsi partant de la Fin, L'Apocalypse rest~~a~~ conforme au schéma de pensée hébraïque: elle pense à partir de la fin et non du commencement (il y eut un soir, et il y eut un matin: premier jour; mais c'est à partir du matin et de la Lumière, qui est finale, que le Tout doit être vu et compris.). Pour prendre une formule inexacte par sa référence à une succession, mais exacte comme représentation, nous pouvons dire que c'est la lumière qui vient après, qui éclaire ce qui était avant, qui fait comprendre qui montre que le chaos était chaos, que l'abîme est abîme, que l'obscurité est obscurité. Ainsi la fin nous fait saisir et appréhender ce qu'est l'histoire en même temps ^{qu'}l'Actualité. Mais il ne s'agit pas d'une fin temporellement successive: il s'agit d'une fin absolue. C'est de la (et seulement de là) que nous pouvons dire ce qu'est l'histoire... L'origine n'est ni cause ni explication pour la pensée juive. Rien ne se met en place par un déroulement temporel à partir d'une cause première. L'important, c'est le but, la fin, l'accès vers lequel on tend." *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23. It is this notion of time and history with which this chapter will be primarily concerned.

esoteric or other-worldly way as to appear only 'gobbledygook' to non-believers who have been involved in the same events. On the other hand, it cannot become so caught up in culturally defined details that it confuses them with (and thereby completely misses) the final focus for understanding what people do and how it will culminate. Or, put slightly differently, he wants to avoid the twin dangers of neglecting human historical events and of glorifying them. He wants to take history seriously without succumbing to the belief that history itself is the standard of progress.⁴ Any account of the biblical view of history, according to Ellul, would be in error if it did not recognize both sides of the coin -- even though it might involve the holding together of apparent opposites. Since Ellul sees the age in which we live as one of the historical works of man, in this chapter, I shall move to the actual working out of human history. This issue is not separate from that of covenant relationships nor is it simply tacked on as an after-thought. Rather, it is the overall context within which the covenant is lived, as I shall discuss in the conclusion to Part B, Section 2. It is the further reflection that God takes up and transforms into His plan the doings of people within time. Within this perspective, I shall consider what Ellul means when he says, "Dieu est, bibliquement, avant tout le Seigneur de l'Histoire".⁵

ii) Use of a Non-Biblical Word

Before turning directly to Ellul's explicit discussions on this topic, there is an immediate question concerning his whole approach. That question turns on the significant observation that there is no word for 'history' in the Bible. How is it possible for him to speak of a theology

⁴ For an account of the double danger involved in theologies of history, see "L'Irréductibilité", pp. 51-54.

⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

of history when the closest possible biblical terms are 'generations' and 'time' -- words with quite different connotations for modern readers than the category of 'history'?⁶ Is he not reading back into the Bible a very modern assumption or his own professional interests as an historian? Does he not fall into the very trap he wishes to avoid? To these overriding concerns, Ellul would give two answers. First, there is the task, as we saw in the foundational chapter, of speaking to modern people in a language they can understand, and of speaking directly to modern assumptions. Obviously, he does not mean that it is part of the task to accept those presuppositions, but rather he considers it possible to challenge them effectively only by meeting them head on. There is certainly no doubt for Ellul that the category of history and its movement is one of the fundamental myths of this age.

But let us be careful about one thing. I do not mean that the Church should let her message be a mere tracing of society's possibilities and demands. . . . It is nevertheless true that the external conditions of communication have to be taken into account before the preaching can take place. . . . I think that, at the present time, no word can be heard unless it is responsive to two fundamental propensities of our 'epistemological' base. I am not referring to its being existential. Anything can be that. . . . The two propensities to which I refer are the dynamic element and the factual element. Modern man, launched in what he believes is progress, in what seems to him to be a very rapid development, can never accept a message which has the appearance of being in any degree static. Modern man is also turned toward the factual, the concrete.⁷

Even though this route can be very precarious, he thinks that it is part of his work to demonstrate, in light of the biblical revelation, the

⁶ The image of 'generations' will be discussed further in the conclusion to Part B, Section 2.

⁷ HTA, p. 86. See also Part A, Chapter 1, footnote 51. Although this reference has been cited before, it bears repeating for this question.

proper perspective for these notions, strip them of their mythical garb and show how the Bible turns our own perceptions on the matter of history upside down. He tackles the question of history precisely because the current interpretations are misleading and dangerous. Furthermore, he feels confident in doing so because he believes that the Bible is meant to raise precise questions about the way people see the world.

Secondly, and perhaps more important, with direct reference to the biblical usage, he says that it does refer to events taking place in time and also, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, to the end of time. It should be noted that those connotations are all that Ellul includes in his own usage of the term 'history'. Of an historical event, he says, "It took place and can be dated."⁸ Of history as a whole he says, "c'est-à-dire, le déroulement du temps".⁹ Ellul would argue

⁸ P of G, p. 186.

⁹ "Mystère", p. 467. Although Ellul does not enter into debates about the cosmological significance of his position, he does hold firmly to the position that time was created. "Dès lors, sur la nature même du temps et de l'espace, nous n'avons à en connaître que ce qui nous concerne, et d'abord, qu'il s'agit d'une création de l'Eternel, -- le Temps et l'Espace sont deux créatures, les deux premières. Il me semble évident que tel est le sens de ces versets 3 à 8 du chapitre 1^{er} de la Genèse, qui ne paraissent guère prêter à ambiguïté malgré toutes les interprétations, hésitations, corrections et futilité qui ont été écrites à leur sujet, -- que la création de la lumière soit la création du Temps, point n'est besoin de se référer à Einstein pour le comprendre. C'est le texte lui-même qui se charge de nous dire explicitement: la lumière est créée dans son opposition et son alternance aux ténèbres. Et le premier effet de cette alternance (qui suppose donc une durée), c'est: Il y eut un soir et il y eut un matin: ce fut le premier jour. Qu'est-ce à dire, sinon très évidemment, que le temps existe à partir de ce moment, qu'il y a un 'premier jour', point de départ de tous les autres." ("Du Temps", pp. 354-5). What he does draw from this belief is the conclusion that it is impossible for man to go beyond the limits of concrete time to enter the realm of eternity which is of the order of the Creator. (See *Ibid.*, p. 355) Therefore, he would consider any view of history that goes beyond the creaturely confines of time (and space) as yet another example of the human will-to-power. This belief further limits his usage of 'history' to a humble sphere. In fact, he is even

very strongly that in this very limited sense of the word the category of history does remain at the very core of the way in which the biblical

more careful, for as we have seen he considers that history as we know it began with the murder of Abel. This contention does not mean that he sees the limitations of time as one of the implications of the fall: it is a condition of creation. What it does mean for Ellul is the following. "Mais ce que le péché a sans doute transformé, c'est que cette situation était normale, et joyeusement acceptée par l'homme en communion avec Dieu, alors qu'elle est l'occasion d'un déchirement d'une tension, d'une contestation insupportable par l'homme qui a rompu cette connaissance. . . . [P]our Adam, cet écoulement du temps accepté ne pouvait être qu'une source d'émerveillement, de renouvellement et d'action de grâces. Mais dans la rupture avec Dieu, commence la contradiction entre 'Panta rhei' et 'le désir d'éternité', -- chaque chose belle en son temps devient, confrontée au désir d'éternité (désir seulement et jamais accomplissement), le 'jamais plus' inacceptable pour l'homme. Et pourquoi est-il ainsi? Parce que cet homme séparé de Dieu ne peut plus saisir l'oeuvre que Dieu fait du commencement à la fin. Il est donc frustré dans son attente, dans ce désir d'éternité que Dieu a mis dans son oeuvre, et qui y est toujours, mais qui ne rencontre plus jamais pour se satisfaire que l'écoulement du temps et la limitation du lieu. Tel est le déchirement. (*Ibid.*, pp. 357-8) Again, the understanding of what is involved for man, for Ellul, comes only in the Event of Jesus Christ. For now, I wish merely to underline that the demarcation of history from the murder of Abel until the judgment prior to the new creation is the worldly arena within which the relationship between God and man, in the light of Jesus Christ, is played out. Since the biblical revelation is directed to the concrete world in which people find themselves, the question of historical time is also directed to how they live within the fall. That view does not mean that the word of God was not present in the time of creation; rather, it means that the Event of Jesus Christ revealed that the unrolling of time in the world of the fall is the contrary of that in the original creation. That difference is the reason why a distinction is made between the words 'time' and 'history' and why Ellul starts his discussion of history with the murder of Abel. Since he thinks that the Bible is concerned with the relationships between God and man, people and other people, and man and the rest of creation, by history, he means primarily human history. As we have seen, the human response affects the rest of creation; nevertheless, Ellul is concerned, in a classical way with the activities of human beings and he is not preoccupied, for example, with evolution as the history of nature, in isolation from its relationship with human history nor the history of law as a solely theoretical discipline.

revelation is presented.¹⁰ In fact, he goes to some pains to stress that this vehicle for the revelation of God's will -- events in time in contrast to myth or philosophy -- characterizes the Bible. "The order is that of history and not of principles."¹¹ This statement serves to underline both that he sees the lived response to relationship as central in the Bible and also that he does not see history itself as a principle. In speaking of a biblical view of history, therefore, he wants to run the fine line between the dangers of the current over-emphasis on history and a betrayal of the Bible.

Ainsi le Temps ne peut pas être pour nous l'Histoire au sens où la pensée moderne l'entend. Il est bien entendu exact de rappeler que l'action de Dieu est une histoire. Mais cela ne nous conduit nullement à magnifier, glorifier, hypostasier l'histoire comme nous le voyons sans cesse dans tout le mouvement de la pensée protestante. Cette hypostasie ne vient nullement de la vérité théologique, mais de l'influence de K. Marx.¹²

Once more, Ellul's overall stance, that a careful reading of the Bible can supply correctives for our understanding and give insights for the proper

¹⁰ His defence of the use of the word 'history', which is clearly not itself specifically biblical, would be analagous to Calvin's defence of the use of 'Person' in the doctrine of the Trinity. See, for example, Institutes, I 13.

¹¹ P of G, p. 15. This statement does not mean that the whole of the Bible is history, but it is a witness to that vehicle for revelation.

¹² "Du Temps", p. 370. Clearly, here he is referring to the modern Protestant thought that is now current and not to the whole Protestant tradition. This running of a fine line can lead to seemingly contradictory usages of the word 'history'. See Ibid., p. 371. Like the use of the words 'power' or 'dominion', he maintains that here the Bible points to a meaning that is contrary to human usage, so that our language will always prove difficult. Also, once again, in conversation, M. Ellul mentioned that any reading of the Bible will be coloured by the dominant myths of the reader, so that there is no 'pure' reading of the Bible. That possibility does not mitigate against the attempt at rigour.

posing of questions, emerges.

As with the rest of this thesis, I shall concentrate on the specific approach that Ellul takes towards this question -- in order to put his writings into perspective. The main theological issue at stake is that of eschatology; that is to say, the teachings concerning the last days which, through the Event of Jesus Christ, have been injected into the unrolling of time. Two central images around which his thinking tends to revolve are the four horses of the Apocalypse and the new Jerusalem. Although they do not constitute the whole of his thinking in this area, they show the general direction of the eschatological dimensions of his writing. They are overlapping and interrelated figures that come together to give both a concrete and overall way of looking at history within the biblical witness to Jesus Christ. More precisely, the vision of the four horses centres on the revelation of the Incarnation and Crucifixion as the focal point of human history, while the new Jerusalem points to the meaning of the Resurrection as the inauguration of the fulfilment of that history. Their unity comes in the unity of the Event of Jesus Christ. "C'est donc à partir de l'Incarnation, la mort et la résurrection de Jésus-Christ que l'Histoire devient lisible."¹³

a) The Four Horses of the Apocalypse

The book of Revelation, in giving us an image of the forces which constitute history, describe the four horses: war and the power of the state, famine and economic power, sickness and the intuition of death, and then the white horse who went

¹³ L'Apocalypse, p. 71. It should be noted from the outset that Ellul thinks that none of the parts of Revelation should be considered in isolation; therefore, this section runs the risk of being somewhat misleading. (See Ibid., pp. 42, 44, 50). Nevertheless, these two images are the ones that figure rather prominently in his other writings. With regards to this particular image, in the conclusion to Part B, Section 2, I shall show the link between the four horses and the fifth and sixth seal of Revelation.

out conquering and to conquer, which is the word of God.
(Revelation 6:1ff)¹⁴

The figure of the four horses is particularly helpful for appreciating Ellul's understanding of what is happening throughout history (taken as a whole), for it makes a number of distinctions that he thinks are too often blurred over. In the above reference, he stresses that the horses represent the forces of history; that is to say, the forces or powers that keep the order of necessity moving, instead of falling into stagnation -- the push behind the unrolling of time. Obedience to the order of necessity is in no way immobile, but, as we have seen, that allegiance also involves man with the principalities and powers (as well as with God's preserving activity). They are also what keep things moving. In this chapter, I am examining what the powers mean with respect to the continuing drama of human activities.¹⁵ Above all, Ellul stresses that it takes the presence of all four horses to make possible any human history as we know it. Although they are completely intermingled, at the same time, the horses are not at all identical. Particularly, he sees a fundamental difference between the first horse and the other three.

¹⁴ PMM, p. 175. See also, for example, P of G, p. 187; M of C, pp. 149, 178, and especially Chapter V of L'Apocalypse. Actually, the first horse mentioned in Revelation is the white one; therefore, I shall refer to it as the white horse.

¹⁵ As a preliminary note, one should recognize, as with the question of the principalities and powers as discussed generally in Chapter 7, that the four horses are not simply abstract entities and this belief is underscored by the fact that each horse has a rider. See L'Apocalypse, pp. 122, 153, 159, 160. Even of the first horse, he says, "Et cette puissance n'est pas 'en soi', elle n'est pas active indépendamment des hommes, comme une sorte de génie autonome." ("Du Temps", pp. 366-7.) History moves because of the horses and human desires.

Ainsi, les quatre chevaux: nous avons un rapport de contradiction entre le premier cheval blanc et les trois autres. Nous aurons à examiner pourquoi le cheval blanc n'est pas du même ordre que les autres.¹⁶

In brief, the first horse is the word of God intervening in human affairs from the beginning. The red, black and pale horses are the exousiai, the principalities and powers in their capacity of standing behind the forces of the world that cause re-groupings of power combinations. In order to see how Ellul looks at the overall picture, I shall first discuss his view of the three horses and then the importance of the first one as the word of God.

i) The Three Horses

Our point is that there is a kind of logic discernible in the evolution of a society or of institutions and events. There are significant and intractable regularities. There are social and economic laws (though we do not give the word the more precise sense it might have in physics). There are irresistible developments in historical processes. . . . And often those whom we call great men are simply a personal expression of historical fatality. We have the impression that they make history when history would have been more or less the same without them, so long as we do not identify the whole of history with the most detailed or superficial event. Yet this fatality is not always the same. There is no all-embracing 'Weltgeist' nor exhaustive dialectical explanation. Nor does this fatality affect all men in the same way. Kautsky was right when he showed that at certain points the movement of history is irresistible no matter what may be the intentions or efforts of man, while at others man has a limited possibility of modifying, bending, arresting or dividing the course of events.¹⁷

As indicated in the Postscript to Section 1, the historian has the task of examining the two elements of human activity and the forces of seeming fatality within which they take place. This study, in principle,

¹⁶ L'Apocalypse, p. 52.

¹⁷ P of G, pp. 182-3. This view of the movement of history corresponds to the discussion in Part A of the thesis.

can be undertaken without the understanding that these events are the content of what people actually do in their will-to-power in conjunction with the principalities and power and the order of necessity. The forces of history, the actual incarnation of the three horses, can be studied on their own.

We must dare to take human history as it is without changing its substance or interpreting it as we fancy or throwing a Christian mantle over the concrete facts. There are certain causalities and correlations in history. The historian is not at fault in trying to find an explanation in previous events. . . . To be sure, the more facts we know, the harder it is to establish causalities and the more obscure they are. But it is on this horizontal level that we must tackle the question.¹⁸

To summarize Ellul's position, as an historian, concerning the whole of history, he does not see history as either total fatality or total chance: above all, he does not see it as containing its own meaning. Fundamentally, he says that there is no sense in which an historian can discern a goal or a direction towards which all the various tendencies and activities are leading. Although there may be periods in which the human condition is ameliorated (and he admits that our age may be one of them), there are no grounds for viewing human history, on its own, as a progress.

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.

The only direction there is to history is the one we ourselves attribute to the past.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁹ Critique, pp. 30; 31. See also "Le Réalisme Politique", p. 722. In making this point, Ellul again is underlining the difference between history and the myth of history as discussed in Part A, Chapter 2(a). Here I shall discuss how he thinks that the image of the four horses makes that distinction as well -- theologically.

Within the actual mechanics of history, its meaning is not contained. Even though the patterns of history can be epitomized by the three horses, the various manifestations are not the same at all. At the same time, because of the constancy of the three horses, it is difficult to speak of progress in history. He emphasizes that human history, to the extent that historians can know about it, is the domain of the changeable, the relative, the ever-shifting balance of forces. In short, to counter-balance the impact of Hegel through Marx, he wants to debunk any notion of human history as a positive category on its own.

[H]istory has no pre-eminent or exceptional value. History has no privileged significance. It is nothing but a sort of appendage to man. Man is the most important thing, not history. The latter exists because man lives and history adds no value whatsoever to man.²⁰

The issue in this chapter is the further one of Ellul's understanding of what can be said about history as a whole, from what one could call the transcendent perspective. Starting from the image of the three horses, he shows how, theologically, the Bible points to such an understanding.

Je crois que c'est en effet la signification de cette image du cheval: ils parcourent toute la terre, et paraissent tantôt en un point, tantôt en un autre, sans que nous puissions saisir une logique dans leur galop. Nous pouvons ainsi avoir l'impression que c'est un hasard. Mais, il n'y a pas de hasard en histoire. Ceci est une des leçons fondamentales que nous recevons ici. Il y a des forces qui agissent, il n'y a aucun aléa véritable, seulement un aléa pour nous, un hasard à nos propres yeux. . . . Mais s'il n'y a pas de hasard, il est évident que la combinaison entre les. . . forces déchaînées avec leur diversité d'action et s'inscrivant dans une durée indéterminée produit un si grand nombre de figures possibles que nous pouvons avoir l'impression d'un hasard. En face, et

²⁰ FPK, p. 21. Concerning the question of Marx and Hegel, see "Le Réalisme Politique", p. 722. Also one of the main arguments in A of R is a refutation of Marx's view of history and Violence is a refutation of the way in which this view has been taken up by many contemporary theologians.

au contraire, il n'y a pas de causalité rigide, d'enchaînements clairs d'événement à événement. Tout est finalement livré à un galop furieux qui provoque et déclenche l'incendie et la mort, qui fait se lever la guerre et qui disparaît ensuite. . . . On peut analyser tous les événements, tous les enchaînements, et l'on revient toujours à la puissance économique, au travail et au commerce, à la puissance politique, à la guerre et à la 'justice', à l'influence de la Mort, des épidémies et de la démographie: il n'y a rien d'autre. Et comme ces cavaliers sont toujours les mêmes nous pouvons aussi en conclure qu'il n'y a non plus aucun progrès et aucun empirement, aucune détérioration de l'Histoire et des civilisations. . . . Le jeu des forces reste le même. Cependant, parfois le cheval rouge est ici, parfois il n'y est pas, nous le retrouvons ailleurs. Parfois le cheval noir apparaît, parfois il s'éloigne. . . , c'est tout.²¹

The finite number of horses reveals that there are a finite number of combinations. Therefore, there are common threads running throughout history and he claims that the image of the three horses provides a striking picture of the common theme of power in its many manifestations.²² Yet, it is also equally clear to him that the activities of the horses reveal that there is no unbroken line of causation. As he says elsewhere:

Je suis très sceptique en face des évolutions reconstituées: en réalité on ne peut presque jamais dire qu'il y a eu évolution historique souple et constante, mais plutôt des séries de cassures. On ne peut, à mon avis, jamais dire qu'une institution est issue de telle autre.²³

²¹ L'Apocalypse, pp. 157-59. He stresses throughout that the horses (or the powers) are hidden in the heart of events and are not open to the historian. The manifestations or incarnations of the powers are open to study.

²² See, for example, A of R, p. 170, where he sides with the analysis of the Jouvenal concerning the theme of power in history.

²³ "L'Irréductibilité", p. 66. In the conclusion of this chapter, I shall discuss what he thinks are the errors of certain other interpretations. For now, I would look only at one ambiguous statement in his own writing. "I believe it is a mistake to look for a constant, unvarying factor behind civilizations and history itself." (A of R, p. 166) Out of context, it becomes a strange sentence, for the constancy of the horses remains and also the constancy of the human desire for autonomy. In context, he wishes to underscore, yet again, that there is no single direction of history and the factors at the heart of history cannot be known to the historian, except in the various manifestations from which no general conclusions can be drawn. The statement from A of R corresponds to this reference.

Thus, although there are specific evolutions within certain periods of history, human history always tends towards running into a blank wall, of a degenerating into a non-history. Therefore, if it is possible to say anything about human history in general, it would be the ever-repeated tendency of the three horses towards stagnation and disaster until a new impetus comes. He sees this view of history as being both factually correct and also consistent with the biblical view of man in revolt from God and in league with the principalities and powers. Although an historian cannot prove the truth of the Bible, Ellul thinks that a realistic view of historical trends is not at odds with the biblical revelation. Although human activities are important in the Bible which also (as we shall see) is oriented towards the future, there is no indication that, following the three horses, they will lead to a better world. "We have no guarantee that our human history will not end in disaster, in catastrophe."²⁴ The following quotations encapsulate Ellul's position on history as the movement of the human allegiance to the three horses.

[H]istory is by nature a combination of forces, and always tends to reproduce constraints and to establish the bondage of man under one form or another. At every stage it finally results in an intolerable situation.²⁵

We might accumulate activities, revolutions, institutions, epics, massacres, production, and culture, and what would come of it would . . . be a confused mixture of misfortune and surfeit There is neither beginning, nor focal point nor conclusion.²⁶

²⁴ "C and P", pp. 747-8.

²⁵ P of G, p. 189.

²⁶ PMM, p. 176.

What we think of as history cannot stand by itself, let alone possess a meaning or provide a reliable standard for knowledge of the good.

ii) The First Horse

To return to the original image of the four horses, Ellul also reminds the readers that people are not left alone with only the inevitable implications of their allegiance to the principalities and powers. This clinging is not the sum total of the unrolling of time for human beings. God is also at work to make sure that the life of His creation continues to exist and to develop.

[A]mong the powers let loose on earth, it is the word of God intermingled with the others, which makes history and which alone is victorious. It is the one which guarantees finally that the history of mankind is not all disaster and annihilation. It is a presence on earth, in the midst of men, within history, of that word. If . . . the incarnation is not present, it means that history is not being made.²⁷

What does it mean to say that the word of God is within history or that the Incarnation makes history? These questions bring us back to the point made in the Overview to Section 2 that, for Ellul, the will of God or the word of God is inseparable from the Word, Jesus Christ.

When will Christians realize that history has known only one absolute novelty, the incarnation of God in Jesus?

History is made up of the balance of power, of reciprocal conditionings Man is the carrier of these forces, but he is unable to play upon them. . . . He thinks he is demonstrating his independence by saying that the situation is novel. History never repeats itself, but it is never anything but a novelty of combinations and the expression of a tautology which man is incapable of penetrating.

When will Christians see history in that light? When will they understand that the independent, the surprising, and the unlooked for factor -- which introduces initiative and the possibility of a fresh start. . . is the intervention into this dreary course of events of the Word of God. Only if and when the Wholly Other cuts across history does history have a chance of modifying its course. Only then can a novel situation be created.²⁸

²⁷ PMM, pp. 175-6.

²⁸ HTA, pp. 254-5.

The death of Jesus Christ does not mean that a strange power which has conditioned history thus far has been annihilated. History and society are still very much subject to constraints. But the breaking of the chain of constraints by the cross has incalculable historical consequences. It is the white horse which goes through the world with the three others and intermingles its action with theirs. Historical forces are, as it were, unceasingly repairing the web of necessity, and in different forms the web is being broken annulled, and disrupted afresh by the action of the power of freedom unleashed at the cross.²⁹

It is the breaking of fatalities, the opening of blocked situations that really allows the history of the world to continue in any form at all.

The intermingling of the word of God with the other powers, represented by the other three horses, does not simply imply their reshuffling, even though that result may be one of the manifestations for the human reading of history. In the first place, the very existence of the white horse places limitations on the other three horses. They are never unleashed in a totally unrestrained manner.³⁰ Secondly, neither time nor human endeavours are obliterated in the intervention. Human independence is always taken into account (if not acquiesced to) by God. The white horse works only in conjunction with an intermingling with the other three horses. The work of the white horse constitutes the preservation of any possibility of the continuation of human activities.

²⁹ P of G, p. 187. In this regard, he makes an interesting reference to Barth in M of C, p. 149. "But beside and under this superficial history there is a true history. There is Jesus Christ, who, in the approximate words of Karl Barth, makes history, because he is history. To state this brilliant but delphic formula more explicitly, there are forces running through history that form the substratum -- the horsemen of Revelation -- and which because of Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ, are in permanent action as the explanation and reality of history. These forces are the very form of his action". The last sentence is somewhat ambiguous, but it refers to the breaking and the formation of the web of necessity that constitute the movement of history.

³⁰ See L'Apocalypse, p. 157, where the limitation of the powers is linked to God's activity in the very act of creation as over against le néant.

And moving on to the relation between a naturalistic view of history and the intervention of the Wholly Other, we may say that the miracle is, in Jesus Christ, that which excludes natural causalities (not for themselves; that is not in itself the miracle) by breaking historical fatality. This is the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ at the intersection of history. It is the incarnation of the Word, and the death of the Incarnate, which interrupts the process of fatality. Here is the authentic event which takes place once for all and can never be reproduced. There is no other authentic event after that one, dated and known. It is quite improper to think that the event can begin again in each of our lives. There is only a contemporaneity which the Spirit ascribes to our actual life as it is carried back to this moment when historical fatality was broken. And it is the fact that God had to die which shows us the gravity and depth and pressure of the fatality. Yet we must not interpret the fact of this unique event as a separation of time into two periods, one enslaved to fatality, the other free. For all the miracles before Jesus Christ, all the divine interventions in the normal course of history, all the liberations granted by God find their true point and orientation and weight in the miracle of Jesus Christ.³¹

Although I shall consider the question of miracles more fully in the conclusion to Section 2, it is central in the working out of the biblical understanding of history. For now, I would simply point out that, for Ellul, any historical event, even one with easily discernible 'natural' causes and antecedents, can be used by God for the introduction of His will into that situation to alter the dangerous course of events. This belief, however, does not imply that the particular course of events themselves constitute the revelation or the miracle. Whenever a miracle does take place, it completely alters any predictable course of events. Therefore, once again, it is humanly impossible to predict a direction of history or an overall movement, for it is impossible to predict miracles.

³¹ P. of G, pp. 186-7. Ellul links miracle with the Crucifixion rather than the Resurrection, for he says the latter is "radically outside all categories, even that of miracle". (*Ibid.*, p. 186.) The significance of the Resurrection for his understanding of history and how the two go together will be discussed shortly.

As we have already seen in various parallel contexts, Ellul does not think that the Bible reveals that God often inscribes His will into events in a directly explosive and dramatic way (although that mode is not impossible), but rather through the use of human intermediaries. Since the four horses cannot be isolated from human beings, it is also human beings who break the fatalism of historical evolution -- anything that changes it from being a mere mechanism. Ellul here makes two points. First, the performance of a miracle is not guaranteed by the Crucifixion (even though it will finally be victorious) for people can refuse liberty at any moment. Secondly, he holds that the actual performance of a miracle, as illustrated in II Kings for example, need not be accomplished by a Jew or a Christian.³² Thus God intervenes in history in many different ways and through many different people. We shall see shortly that the fulness of miracle comes only when it is recognized as miracle; nevertheless, it would appear that it remains a central cornerstone in Ellul's general biblical understanding of all of history.

iii) The Four Horses Together

In this view of the biblical account of the workings of history, Ellul wants to maintain the balance that he considers to be central. First, the Event of Jesus Christ has to be distinguished from all other interrelated events that results from the forces of history -- just as the white horse is not to be confused with the other three.

³² See P of G, p. 188, and also M of C, p. 149, where he indicates that the word of God is active throughout all history and not just the history of the Chosen Peoples. In that case, miracle would not be fully known as miracle, but would serve to make life possible. See also Chapter 7, footnote 96 and the conclusion to Part G, Section 2. In any case, the true understanding remains linked to the Crucifixion -- whether known or not. See also P of G, p. 187. Again the time question should not provide a major stumbling block.

En face de Jésus-Christ, ou bien on conserve cette notion d'événement, et dès lors tous les faits de l'histoire sont orientés par cet imprévisible; ou bien on cherche (et c'est l'attitude des historiens classiques) à réduire cet événement à n'être qu'un fait comme les autres, mais alors on fausse l'histoire.³³

At the same time, he does not want to make the mistake of dividing history into two different spheres or levels that often have nothing to do with each other. This danger is the one he envisages were Barth's formulation (referred to in footnote 29) to be read in the wrong light.

There is only one realm of human activity and what is at stake is not some special 'spiritual' realm removed from the rest of reality -- it is a question of the movement of reality itself. As could be expected, again Ellul sees the four horses operating in a dialectical relationship among themselves -- and especially among the first horse and the other three.³⁴ What is important to underline at this stage is that Ellul indicates his belief that this discussion is not limited to the history of the Chosen Peoples, but is extended to the history of all nations.

L'Histoire sainte est donc mêlée à l'Histoire. Et celle-ci ne se déroule pas selon un mode naturaliste mais pas davantage comme un objet dirigé abstraitement par Dieu. Elle est imprégnée, dans toute tribu, toute langue, toute nation de ce peuple spécial de Dieu. . . . [L]e Salut acquis par Jésus-Christ s'adresse à toutes les créatures et non pas seulement à l'homme qui se prend pour roi.³⁵

³³ "Mystère", p. 470. This statement does not undermine the validity of classical historical studies as long as they remain part of a relative and humble discipline.

³⁴ For an explicit reference to the dialectical relationship, see L'Apocalypse, p. 162 and "Mystère", pp. 468-69.

³⁵ L'Apocalypse, p. 258. See also p. 260 where he states that this is the case, whether or not people recognize its truth. As we shall see in the conclusion to Part B, Section 2, Ellul does not make specific statements, except with reference to the Chosen Peoples; otherwise, as we saw in Chapter 7, footnote 96, it would be a matter of speculation. Therefore, even this reference centres on the Chosen Peoples, but as having a mission to every nation. Secondly, the reference to sacred history raises many questions within modern biblical studies, to which I shall refer briefly in the conclusion to this chapter and the conclusion to Part B, Section 2.

Within the image of the four horses, I have considered Ellul's views of the on-going processes of history in the light of the Crucifixion. As we also saw in Chapter 7, God's will remains constant and He continues to intervene within the very powers of opposition within the world. The significance of God's intervention in history comes in the fact that He is shown always acting on whatever grounds people themselves have chosen. In order to complete the image of the four horses, there remains a discussion of where all this human activity is leading. At this point, we are brought to the image of the new Jerusalem as a central image in understanding the significance of the Resurrection for Ellul's view of history.

b) The New Jerusalem

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 new Jerusalem.

It is in Jesus Christ that God adopts man's works.³⁶

As has been discussed in Chapter 7, Ellul views the Resurrection as the incarnated intimation of the final reconciliation in love between God and man, people with other people, and man with nature. It supplied the revelation of the content of the liberation for which Jesus Christ separated people from their allegiance to the order of necessity. A directly parallel understanding of the Resurrection pertains to his understanding of the realm of history. Just as the Crucifixion unleashed the power to break the impasse to which the principalities and powers tend to lead, so the Resurrection reveals the final goal for all the human activities. At this point, we move directly into the

³⁶ M of C, pp. 172; 176.

eschatological dimension of Ellul's thought -- the doctrine of the last times as pointing to the final fulfilment of God's will for man. God intervenes in human works; nevertheless, it has been revealed that even they will finally not be repudiated by God. Because He does not desert people, the Resurrection also reveals that God will adopt even their works in time into His plan for salvation -- even though these works themselves cannot lead to it. Therefore, the whole interim time, that is to say, history, takes on a significance that it would not otherwise possess, if God had not revealed His mercy as well as His judgment on the whole of human life. This dual revelation of God's judgment and mercy towards what people do in history Ellul sees in the overall biblical revelation concerning Jerusalem, with special emphasis on the final judgment and the new creation in Revelation.³⁷ Just as he considers the Crucifixion and the Resurrection to be inseparable for the question of the right relationships, so also his discussion of the four horses should be complemented by the image concerning the re-creation of the city.

i) The Biblical Image of Jerusalem

It is man's high-handed piracy of creation that makes creation incapable of giving glory to God. . . . He forces creation to follow his destiny, his destiny of slavery and sin, and his revolt to escape from it. From this taking possession, from this revolution, the city is born.

What appears to me remarkable in this brief and rich declaration of Scripture is that it is true no matter what position one adopts towards the Bible. If it is God's revelation, here is what God thinks of the affair. It is God giving us his appraisal of man's action and the profound meaning of the construction of the city. And we must accept it for

³⁷ The two main sources for this discussion come in M of C, and L'Apocalypse, where he says that he will only summarize what he said in the earlier book. (See p. 225 in the footnote.)

all history, for this is how God sees this story.³⁸

Throughout the rest of the book, Ellul stresses two aspects: first, that there is a unified biblical witness against the powers of the city and, second (and at the same time), it is the city of Jerusalem that God chose to be the fulfilment of His plan. God chose Jerusalem to be His holy city because David first chose it. This election is typical of God's activity and, throughout the Bible, the earthly Jerusalem becomes indicative of the crossroads situation combining both judgment and mercy on history. The great condemnation against the idolatry of the city is never revoked in the case of Jerusalem nor does God obliterate her. Rather, in His adoption, He insists on being present.

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. In reality, when man becomes involved in the gigantic task of a counter-creation, when he organizes the world of death, when he builds with dead matter, stones, bitumen, asphalt, cement, cast iron, steel, glass, aluminum, lime, brick, there is still life there. And when man's enormous machine becomes the body of a new spiritual power rising in revolt like the others against the Lord of creation, that is where the Lord is: not outside or before, but inside. And he lets man's work go on. He lets him build immense necropolises. He lets 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.³⁹

This passage is a dramatic statement of the work of the white horse of the word of God. What we must examine in this sub-section is the final outcome in the final judgment and the new creation.

In all of his writings, Ellul insists on the reality of the judgment of God on the revolt of man: he thinks that there is no getting around it.

³⁸ M of C, pp. 6-7.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

La première porte sur l'importance de ce 'jugement'. La tendance théologique et spirituelle actuelle consiste à le minimiser, et même à l'évacuer. . . . Si nous continuons à considérer que Jésus-Christ est vraiment le Messie, et qu'il atteste ce que l'Ecriture nous dit, c'est-à-dire si nous restons chrétiens, il est impossible d'évacuer ce jugement de la création par Dieu. Le tout est strictement cohérent. La pensée du jugement que l'on trouve tant chez les prophètes que dans les Psaumes, tant dans les Evangiles que dans les Epîtres, n'est pas un fait culturel: il repose sur cette évidente conviction que si Dieu est Dieu, à la fois parfait et juste, comment la rencontre entre ce Dieu et le monde tel que nous le connaissons pourrait-elle se faire sans que se produisent quelques étincelles et que, pour le moins, se révèle à la lumière absolue ce que nous avons été en vérité?⁴⁰

Just in case there might be some misunderstanding of what this judgment means in concrete terms for the actual human works in the here and now historical setting, in another writing Ellul says:

the Bible expressly tells us that the history of mankind ends in judgment. It does not give place to the Kingdom. It destroys itself in the judgment which is not a sham nor a myth. There is no continuity between our earthly life and our resurrected life. We must pass through death and destruction. All the historic works of man, technological, scientific and artistic, go down into the annihilation which is the end of judgment when the flaming elements will dissolve into nothing.⁴¹

Along with this acceptance of the final judgment in no uncertain terms (a judgment that embodies all the defining attributes of the city), Ellul makes two points that distinguish him from a number of other commentators on Revelation. In the first place, he maintains that the judgment in the Bible is linked up with a revelatory power rather than that of a judge in a human legal system. Secondly, he argues that there is a difference between the judgment (applicable to human beings) and the condemnation (which will apply to the principalities and powers)--

⁴⁰ L'Apocalypse, p. 182

⁴¹ EPK, pp. 21-22.

according to Revelation.⁴² Although the totality of the judgment will not be mitigated, he concludes one of his discussions judgment in the Bible by the following statement.

C'est n'est pas théologiquement possible qu'il y ait des hommes damnés. Cela voudrait dire d'un mot qu'il y a une limite externe à l'amour de Dieu. Seul le Néant est anéanti. Et dans la seconde mort il n'y a pas d'hommes, il n'y a pas de vies, il y a les oeuvres mauvaises de l'homme, il y a le Satan et le Diable, il y a les incarnations (inventées par l'homme!) de ces puissances, il y a la Mort. Rien de plus.⁴³

Then comes what Ellul finds probably the most remarkable biblical revelation -- that God has decided that the new creation, the end point for the final communion between Himself and man, will be the transformation of Jerusalem. Ellul notes that throughout the Bible, although there is no precise description of the new creation, all the indications come in terms of a city. Unlike the other traditions, the biblical view of the final paradise is neither a retreat to a golden past of a garden nor nature perfected as in Islam.⁴⁴ It will be a city that descends after the judgment of all of man's works. Ellul sees this revelation as a sign that the new creation will take into account all human works throughout history as a whole. Although they will be totally transformed in the new Jerusalem, it will not take place as if they never existed. The revelation concerning the final end of history takes on its full impact only when put in conjunction with the biblical curses on the powers of the city. The new Jerusalem will not be the natural

⁴² See L'Apocalypse, Chapters VI and VII and especially p. 183 for a succinct statement of these positions. For the first point, see also D in O, Chapter 20.

⁴³ L'Apocalypse, p. 223.

⁴⁴ See M of C, p. 160 and L'Apocalypse, p. 226.

end of the city towards which it is inevitably headed. Rather, it will come only from God's decisive action that will spell the end of history as we know it.

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 work that this event will come about. . . . There are two directions to be followed, both of which are basic to the history of the city. One originates in Cain, the other in Eden, and they converge finally in the new Jerusalem. Each expresses one form of the saving and kingly act of God in Jesus Christ.⁴⁵

Holding together both sides of this seeming paradox provides the core for Ellul's understanding of history as eschatological in the context of the Resurrection. But what could such a statement possibly mean?

ii) The Link Between the New Jerusalem and the Resurrection

For Ellul, the fact that God does not ignore or totally reject the history of man in His plan is a supreme statement of God's love and he sums up the importance of the new Jerusalem in this way.

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 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 even man's revolts and transforms them. . . . God assumes all

⁴⁵ M of C, p. 163. See also p. 162 for an interesting note of the influence of this notion on Karl Marx. The main difference is that Marx sees the seeds of the new city already inherent in the old.

of man's works. This is the meaning of God's creation, for man, of the new Jerusalem.⁴⁶

This passage also points to the significance of the Resurrection for an understanding of history and its outcome. It signals the inauguration of the reconciliation even of the revolts of human beings against God. Jesus Christ not only showed a different way from the ways of the world, but also He took upon Himself the implications of that revolt from God and transformed them, so that they too were taken up within the image of God. In Chapter 7, we saw that Ellul believes that the Event of Jesus Christ dissociated people from the spiritual powers that have bound them and re-established right relationships -- as if people were outside of their allegiances and works. Yet, at the same time, in terms of the revelation of the new Jerusalem, Ellul also thinks that the Bible indicates that even the works are not to be rejected entirely or annihilated. They are also mysteriously adopted into the reconciliation. That this activity concerning human works is also part of God's will is, for him, an intrinsic part of the Resurrection. Inseparable from the judgment or the breaking of the web of necessity, there is also the reconciliation of all the specific attempts of people to live without God, to the will of God which does not alter. Therefore, when Jesus Christ sent the disciples back to the cities, they were called not only to witness in an alien world, but also they were not to obliterate the goals and aspirations behind all the vaunted and fruitless projects of people separated from God.⁴⁷ Every human activity is

⁴⁶ M of C, pp. 174-75.

⁴⁷ In the conclusion to this section, I shall discuss what this means concerning the Chosen Peoples. For now, I merely wish to underline that the new Jerusalem image, for Ellul, points to the fact that all the works of fallen man will be taken up and transformed; therefore, none of them can be totally ignored.

important to God. For this reason, within the revelation of the final reconciliation of the new Jerusalem, Ellul can say that even the works of technology or, more generally, the four horses will be transformed to reflect the glory of God.⁴⁸

This formulation of God's decision to choose the city rather than the original garden for the final place for man may seem to be saying that God is somehow dependent upon human beings for the evolution of His own biography and His plan for His creation. Does Ellul really believe that people can force God to change His mind to follow their devices? A close scrutiny of his argument, however, indicates that that conclusion is not possible, for Ellul staunchly maintains that God never gives up any of His prerogatives. For him, there is a vast difference between saying that God will adapt or alter His plan to suit the whims of what people do in ignorance and saying that God will adopt all the human works to transform them and incorporate them into His never-changing will. The goal remains the same for the second creation as it was for Eden -- only taking into account the consistency of God's will from the beginning not to refuse the relationship with man whom He created in liberty. When He appropriates the human activities, He does so in combination with His judgment, in a way that is totally contrary to the human perception of what they thought they wanted. Every one of the human attempts at will-to-power serving the order of necessity and the powers that keep it moving through time will be drawn somehow into the new Jerusalem. For Ellul, it is not simply a question of separating

⁴⁸ See, for example, HTA, pp. 233-39. Another example, apart from the central image of the city throughout the Bible, that Ellul uses is the desire of the Israelites to have a king -- a desire which is accepted by God and transformed into the Kingdom of God. See especially TFL, p. 97 and also P of G, pp. 17-19.

the good human works from the bad or the good parts of history from the less salutary parts from a solely human perspective. Both the judgment and the mercy, the No and the Yes, are total.

[W]e must not attempt to discriminate between what is eternally valid and what is ultimately rejected. The time for such discrimination has not yet come. This sifting will take place only in the last judgment.

Nevertheless, our whole. . . receives its validity from the fact that one day God will appropriate it. Moreover, God alone is able to discriminate and to separate one aspect. . . from the other. For us both are united because we have no ultimate criterion of justice at our disposal which could transcend sin.⁴⁹

Just as the mechanics of creation remain a mystery, similarly, for Ellul, the mechanics of the adoption of human works also remains outside the realm of the biblical revelation. Nevertheless, he insists that the fact that God does not divorce Himself from man does not mean that human beings become the decisive component in the bringing about of the new Jerusalem. "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."⁵⁰ Or, put somewhat differently, even in the works of perversion, God remains somehow in charge: that belief does not alter their character as perversion. For Ellul, there may be a paradox, but finally there is no contradiction within the biblical teaching at this point.

⁴⁹ TFL, pp. 100; 98. See also M of C, p. 178. As I shall discuss shortly, this stance does not imply an indifference to the here and now historical situation; rather, at this point, it is concerned with the overall view of history and what can be said about it. Even the Christian cannot make the kinds of judgments reserved to God. What is required for believers will be discussed in the conclusion to Section 2.

⁵⁰ M of C, p. 138.

We discern here an aspect of God's wisdom, of his art of governing the world, the divine action which is made up of respect for man, of finesse of subtlety, of pedagogy, of choice. . . . Yet all of this is inserted also within God's omniscience and omnipotence which has prepared everything in advance no matter what may be the solution that each man finally adopts, that God leaves each man free to adopt.⁵¹

Only God knows when the final culmination will take place and nothing more can be said about the final work of God.⁵² Nevertheless, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ constitutes not only the inauguration (or the incarnated intimation) of the restoration of right relationships, but also the inauguration of what Ellul calls "God's design in history".⁵³ Because His love never changes, God not only intervenes in human activities in time, but also He takes up these activities themselves. For Ellul, this final activity is the implication of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ for coming to grips with history as a whole.

c) How the Two Images Come Together for a Reading of History

At this point, it is necessary to see how the images of the four horses of the Apocalypse and the new Jerusalem come together in Ellul's thought about history, and his discussion of law provides a good example to start to think about their ultimate unity.

i) Example of Law⁵⁴

⁵¹ P of G, p. 22.

⁵² In "CP?", Ellul comments that we cannot attempt to go beyond what Jesus Himself said about the impossibility of knowing about the final coming of the Kingdom. See for example Matthew 24:36.

⁵³ PMM, p. 176.

⁵⁴ Most of the following remarks about law come from TFL and "L'Irréductibilité" and "Propositions". The two articles are important for seeing the proper perspective for the book which is at times problematic. I shall not discuss the details of what he says about law and the Christian attitude towards it, but rather how it can be used as an example of how he sees the movement of history. Here, the focus of attention is on human law as one of the human activities and not on Mosaic or divine Law. It will provide background for the discussion in the general Conclusion concerning technique.

As a starting point for his reflections on law, Ellul sees it as a solely human attempt to bring a seemingly chaotic world into order and, in that sense, it provides a necessary function in the preservation of life. In other words, law is part of the order of necessity as an implication of the fall. On this level, there is nothing conducive to salvation in law.

Before God's righteousness all human justice is unjust. All that is not his righteousness is injustice. . . . Man by himself is incapable of knowing what justice is (Proverbs 2:9). . . . Strictly speaking everything that natural man does is unjust. This is precisely what makes for the depth of the controversy in the Book of Job.⁵⁵

Furthermore:

Il faut en effet considérer que le droit échoue toujours. L'homme n'a jamais réussi à accomplir son projet: L'histoire du droit est l'histoire des défaites du droit. Jamais l'homme n'a réussi à immobiliser une situation dans le temps, à la perpétuer. Tout ce qu'il peut faire (même dans les sociétés traditionnelles), c'est une stabilisation très courte.⁵⁶

That is to say, the history of law shows that people are never able to accomplish entirely what they want -- complete security through the control of circumstances. At each stage, law tends to evolve to an impasse that blocks human purposes and defeats its own purpose by threatening human existence rather than preserving it. Here, Ellul sees both the necessity and the danger of law, as well as the impossibility of the

⁵⁵ TFL, p. 40. This type of reference, which goes along with his rejection of natural law (See Chapter 1, footnote 116.) seems to leave few possibilities for guidelines for any jurist or even a Christian jurist in the practice of his necessary work. A number of people see this lack of practical suggestion as a weakness in Ellul's writings. For a general comment on this aspect, see Part A, Chapter 2 (c) and Chapter 3 (d). The specific task of the jurist is to help to make the world livable and to keep open the possibility of options, within the concrete, important, but relative situation. Also, he should try to prevent any manifestation of human law from being absolutized.

⁵⁶ "L'Irréductibilité", p. 67.

attempted independence from God. At each stage, there have to be certain forces, the four horses, to send law back to its proper functions. In accordance with what has already been discussed in this chapter, the horses prevent the disintegration of law into annihilation. A miracle may or may not be involved, depending on whether there is a complete change in the direction of law or, more simply, the preservation of people in time. The four horses are the powers that incarnate themselves both in the changes and evolution of law. Law is not one of the powers of history: it is one of the aspects of the order of necessity. The forces of history make the continuation of law in any form possible. Yet, within the biblical perspective, the revelation concerning law and the history of law goes beyond this statement of the intervention of the four powers to preserve the function of law.

Nais, précisément situé dans la perspective de Jésus-Christ, le droit n'a pas pour les chrétiens une simple valeur utilitaire. D'une part, en effet, il est dorénavant rattaché à la Justification en Jésus-Christ, d'autre part, il est promis à la Récapitulation. Ainsi le droit humain doit être vu par le chrétien comme compris entre la Croix et le Retour de Jésus-Christ, et se rapportant à l'un et à l'autre.⁵⁷

At least three further points are in order concerning this further aspect of the biblical revelation about the history of law. First, the history of law serves to point to the aspirations of people in their will-to-power, the aspirations which God never ignores either in His interventions or in His final plan for them.

Autrement dit, le droit n'est pas témoin de l'échec de l'homme, mais il est témoin des espérances, du projet, de l'aspiration, d'une légitime reprise de l'être. L'homme investit le droit d'une immense fonction, indispensable non pour le salut ni l'éternité, mais pour la possibilité de sa survie, donc de l'histoire. Et sans cesse, le droit déçoit cette espérance. . . . Car il faut bien prendre conscience de ce que le droit n'existe

⁵⁷ "Propositions", pp. 38-39.

jamais par lui-même, sorte de réalité objective inscrite,
dans les lois; il n'existe que dans le 'vécu comme . . .
des sujets du droit.⁵⁸

In law, therefore, one can see the separation of the aspirations of people and history from the fruits of their attempts. It is these aspirations that God never allows to be obliterated and the new Jerusalem will embody the true fruits of what they were trying to do throughout the course of law-making. Secondly, the Bible points to the fact that this transformation has already been inaugurated in the giving of Mosaic Law in the Old Testament. This revelation, which we have already seen, in Ellul's view, is quite different from human law, is an indication that in God's adoption, human works of law are transformed into the commandments of God for all of life. The history of the covenant, grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, provides both the agency for the word of God as the white horse and also the intimation of the final transformation of all of man's activities in history. That is to say, Mosaic Law incorporates the questions of history as well as those of relationship into the interim period.⁵⁹ Finally, as pre-figured in Mosaic Law and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, human law in its entirety will be taken up as part of the final Kingdom of God in the new Jerusalem. With regard to law, he sees the connection taking place on three levels.

Celui de récapitulation: le droit est oeuvre de l'homme, et comme toute oeuvre de l'homme (et pas seulement ses oeuvres morales ou spirituelles) il est promis à entrer dans le Royaume de Dieu qui n'est pas grandeur abstraite ou paradis désincarné, mais qui se trouve pétri de toute l'histoire de l'homme; mais c'est dans la mesure où l'homme est sauvé avec

⁵⁸ "L'Irréductibilité", p. 68. This passage would refer to the intervention of the white horse.

⁵⁹ This aspect will be discussed further in the conclusion to Section 2.

ses oeuvres. Les oeuvres ne valent pas en tant que telles, le droit n'est pas sauvé dans la mesure où il a été conformé à une abstraite justice divine, où il a incarné une doctrine absolue qui serait conformé à la volonté de Dieu, mais au contraire dans sa relation avec l'homme, du fait de cette relation et non pas parce qu'il est supérieur à l'homme mais parce que Dieu aime l'homme aussi dans ce qu'il fait.

Et ceci nous amène à un second ~~niveau~~ niveau: ce n'est pas comme oeuvre en soi, mais comme attestation de ce que finalement l'homme a eu l'intention de faire. C'est comme porteur de l'espérance et du projet de l'homme, en même temps que témoin de l'échec et de la désillusion, que le droit est assumé par Dieu. Car ce qui est réellement assumé, c'est justement le projet et l'échec, l'espérance et le naufrage. Mais si Dieu l'assume, ce n'est pas en tant que tel, mais pour exaucer justement ce que l'homme a eu l'intention de faire: l'homme dans le Royaume de Dieu trouvera la réponse à son inlassable recommencement. Ce qu'il avait eu l'intention de faire par le droit, en échouant chaque fois, sera finalement pleinement réalisé, donné par grâce, une nouvelle relation avec le temps et avec l'espace, où l'homme ne sera plus victime errante et perdue. Telle est la justice en Dieu, qui accomplit bien le droit, mais dont le droit ne peut s'inspirer pour s'accomplir dans le cours de l'histoire.

Et c'est à partir de ce point que nous pouvons nous retourner vers la réalité historique du droit: on peut dire que chaque fois que dans une société, le droit réussit, c'est-à-dire est vécu comme satisfaisant pour l'homme, il est une image non-explicitée souvent, mais vraie, du Royaume de Dieu. Il l'est non pas en tant qu'il réaliserait une oeuvre correspondant à la volonté de Dieu, ou qui sera déjà une fraction du Royaume, ou une approche, un 'bout de chemin' fait en direction du Royaume, mais au contraire en ce qu'il annonce la satisfaction que l'homme trouvera dans cette proximité de Dieu: ce droit n'éclaire pas le Royaume. Inversement, chaque fois que l'homme récuse le droit de sa société, qu'il le vit comme un injustice, ou un désordre ou un esclavage ou un délire, alors cet homme est placé dans un dénuement tel qu'il est rejeté vers une espérance (révolutionnaire, apocalyptique etc.) qui est finalement l'appel à l'entrée immédiate dans le Royaume et par la présence même de la fin des temps. Dès lors, le rôle d'une théologie de l'histoire en face du droit est d'être questionnante sur la vérité de droit dans la relation avec les hommes d'une société donnée: elle ne peut se borner à constater l'événement, mais à redonner sens au juriste de ce qu'il est en train de faire, en même temps qu'elle ne peut éviter de formuler l'espérance implicite qu'il a tenter d'exaucer. Elle n'a donc pas à être

l'explication intégrante du phénomène juridique, mais une force que se situe en tension par rapport à lui.⁶⁰

Without going into further detail concerning what Ellul says about law, one can see the general direction of his thought in relationship to history as the unfolding of human activities in time. On the one hand, this teaching concerning law clearly indicates that Ellul does not think that one can speak of the development of law as a doctrine of progress towards a predictable end. On the other hand, the very possibility and the only significance of law come in the goal to which they will finally find themselves oriented -- Jesus Christ. The holding together of these two aspects, even in the present state of human law, is the task of a theology of history which recognizes that the biblical revelation incorporates all of history, but not entirely on its own terms.

ii) The Unity of the Images in Time

Moving from the example of law, it is possible to make some general comments about the coming together of the two images for Ellul's understanding of history in general. Again, at first glance, there is a time problem that makes the link appear somewhat difficult.

There remains the question of the relationship between the point of departure and the destination point, between the covenant and the final judgment. We are forced to conceive of this relationship as linear, because our intelligence is conditioned by time. In reality, the relationship is eternal. . . . But while the judgment represents the final event in history as well as the opening of the new eon, the covenant is instituted by God in the course of history. It expresses

⁶⁰ "L'Irréductibilité", pp. 68-69. At the risk of sounding repetitious, I would point out that Ellul is referring to the whole of human law and yet, at the same time, he wants his discussion to be appropriate to a concrete situation. The truth of any discussion concerning a theology of history is not open to all, but by its very nature, it should speak to the situation and the activities of all people.

itself in relative terms which cloak its meaning.⁶¹

Ellul describes the Event of Jesus Christ in terms of substitution. "This fundamental substitution of grace for nature, of the Kingdom of God for the Kingdom of darkness, is actually introduced into history."⁶² With reference to Chapter 7, Jesus Christ was the substitution of obedience to God for obedience to the principalities and powers. With regard to the unrolling of history, this expression of substitution does not mean that the works of people are done away with, but rather, there is a substitution, so that they are put in the proper perspective of true human liberty. As a result, the power of the powers has been defeated, so that people can do what they have always been supposed to do. Within the interim period of history, this substitution, the white horse of the word of God, is always cloaked for it remains in tension with the other powers. At the end of time, there will not be a radical alteration in God's activity of substitution: only it will be fully open to all.

In the coming of the new age we find essentially the same elements involved as in the covenant: judgment, grace, the re-establishment of God's lordship in Jesus Christ. Only now it is a judgment which can no longer be misunderstood or rejected. It is grace which enlightens everything so that nothing remains hidden anymore.⁶³

Therefore, it is the white horse of the word of God that provides the way in which God transforms and adopts human activities both in the interim period and at the end of time. The difference comes only in

⁶¹ TFL, p. 99. Here, the use of the term 'covenant' is somewhat ambivalent. I conclude that it means the whole of the interim period between the fall of man and the new creation, which finds its fulfilment in the Covenant -- Jesus Christ. The place of the Chosen Peoples in this account will be discussed in the conclusion to Section 2. Here, I think the time problem refers to the whole of history in relation to the end point.

⁶² Ibid., p. 44.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 99.

whether the will of God is cloaked or crystal clear. It is not simply a destructive force or another power that keeps things going willy-nilly. The way in which the web of necessity is broken, the way in which chaos and annihilation are prevented, is the same way in which the substitution is made and the works of man are adopted into the will of God. The whole biblical image of the city combines the 'now' but the 'not yet' truth of the way in which God deals (and always will deal) with human works and aspirations.

[S]ommes-nous en présence d'un jugement final ou d'un jugement qui s'exerce tous les jours (une eschatologie consécutive ou réalisée)? Je crois que l'on ne peut éliminer l'un des deux et faire un choix. Sans doute, puisque l'Apocalypse nous décrit. . . les composantes de l'Histoire, et qu'ici nous sommes en présence de la section. . . qui lui fait pendant, le jugement est bien une fin de l'Histoire qui aboutit à une oeuvre finale de récréation, de la réinsertion du temps dans l'Eternité, de la destruction de la mort pour qu'il y ait la Vie. Mais d'un autre côté, il est tout aussi exact de dire que c'est pendant le cours de l'Histoire, à chaque époque, à chaque génération, que cela a lieu. Dieu intervient aussi dans cette histoire des hommes, non pas comme la Cause ou comme le Tout-Puissant qui bouleverse tout, mais comme celui qui a accepté de se mêler aux hommes, le Dieu avec nous. Et cette présence qui est l'attestation de la grâce, ne peut cependant être autre que la présence du jugement aussi.⁶⁴

To take the two images of the four horses and the new Jerusalem seriously implies, for Ellul, that it is impossible to speak of a purpose in history apart from its destiny that lies outside the course of events itself. One cannot draw the conclusion that darkness can bring about

⁶⁴ L'Apocalypse, pp. 183-84. Similarly, he argues that the Kingdom of God has already been introduced into history through the Resurrection and nothing more is added in the book of Revelation. "C'est pourquoi l'Apocalypse peut donner le sentiment d'un mécanisme inéluctable, mais il est justement essentiel de constater que c'est cette Apocalypse qui nous décrit la fin du temps (aussi), et qui nous déclare en même temps que nous sommes dans la fin des Temps, que notre temps (quelle que soit sa durée) est eschatologique, déjà en 90 après Jésus-Christ, aussi bien qu'en ce jour où j'écris." (Ibid., p. 116) On the page before, he says that according to the biblical revelation, this commencement is true, whether or not it is seen as true.

light, but only that the light will reveal what the darkness really is.⁶⁵ History can be seen only in the light of its goal -- the substitution and transformation effected by Jesus Christ. The images combine as the revelation of the way in which God exercises His judgment and mercy on human works and it is that aspect which constitutes the phrase 'God's design in history'. There is no separation between God's means for history and God's end for history.⁶⁶

Conclusion

i) General Comments on Other Theologies of History

By way of conclusion and a drawing together of this chapter concerning history, I shall first discuss the major errors that Ellul sees in many modern theologies of history. There is perhaps a sense in which Ellul's thought in this area could be referred to as Heilsgeschichte, for he emphasizes that both God's activity and human activity are important parts of the biblical revelation in this sphere. Also, he stresses that finally neither can be considered in isolation from the other. Yet I hesitate to use that term, for he explicitly tries to avoid what he sees as the dangers in this general formulation.⁶⁷ He maintains that in many accounts, the dialectical relationship between the two in history

⁶⁵ For this aspect, see again the quote from L'Apocalypse, p. 22-23, as cited in footnote 4 of this chapter.

⁶⁶ Similarly, there is no separation between God's will for history and God's will for relationships as discussed in Chapter 7. It should perhaps be noted again that the use of two images indicates that God does not simply force His will on human beings. It is this line of thinking that provides the answer to the question of why God delays in bringing about His Kingdom. See, for example, L'Apocalypse, p. 89.

⁶⁷ Apart from the ambiguities surrounding this expression which has been used in a host of different ways, concerning Ellul's own writings, it would be more appropriate to use it in connection with 'covenant history' than with history in general. For a further discussion, see the conclusion of Section 2. Once more, in this area as in others, he deals mainly with what he considers to be the most prevalent errors now.

is easily misunderstood and in contemporary thought he sees two general tendencies.

The first and most prevalent error he sees as being typified in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, who represents the mistake of seeing the events of human history as themselves leading towards the final goal. They are themselves progressively bringing it into existence, so that the Kingdom of God will be the inevitable outcome. He characterizes Teilhard's position as:

evolutionism, in which technology, socialism and science play the role of factors which permit humanity to pass from the Noosphere to fusion at Point Omega -- just as, by simple evolution, matter passed into life and the animal into man.⁶⁸

Although Ellul does admire the emphasis on eschatology (which he thinks has too often been totally ignored in the past), he also argues that it is one-sided in a way that does not stress strongly enough the sovereignty of God's activity in pronouncing judgment on human activities which remain in the realm of the fall. Also, it does not take into account that it is God alone who will bring about the new Jerusalem and the inscrutability of God's plan in this regard. Ellul objects to any emphasis on revelation within history that glorifies human activity as a category of its own.

It is splendid to have rediscovered that God has revealed himself in the course of a history and in history. It is horrible to turn this humility of God into a theme of pride for the history of man.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ "C and P", p. 748. This thesis is not the place to go into Ellul's whole attack on Teilhard, but I mention it here, for he is concerned about the great influence that this theology is having on Christians. In conversation, M. Ellul used Teilhard as an example of the over-emphasis of one aspect of the total revelation.

⁶⁹ FPK, p. 20.

Two further related examples will suffice to show how widespread this tendency has become. First, in certain biblical studies of the Old Testament, the political history of Israel is seen as paramount and as typical of the history of every other nation, with the intervention of God being seen as an a posteriori, aetiological explanation. Then all political events and historical activities become equal and as constituting God's plan. Not only is the special calling of Israel thereby shrouded (to be discussed shortly), but also the primacy given to historical events distorts what is being said in the Bible. The Bible is not, for Ellul, primarily a history textbook, but rather the revelation of the will of God for people living in time. A second example for Ellul comes in the contemporary theology of revolution, which he sees as being more directly dependent on Marxism than on the biblical revelation concerning history. As in the other instances cited, he considers it to display a confusion between the works of God and the works of man -- to the glorification of the latter.⁷⁰ In all these cases, Ellul would underline that there is a difference between saying that God is the Lord of all history and saying that all of history itself constitutes the work of God.

In trying to avoid these pitfalls, however, he thinks that people often go to the other extreme of wanting to develop a teaching of Heilgeschichte that emphasizes the otherness of God's salvation in history in a way that does not worry about the concrete events of the world. This position, according to Ellul, is:

⁷⁰ These two examples form the bases of P of G and Violence respectively.

an idealistic position of blind trust in God, which holds that scientific and technological progress cannot turn out badly because God keeps watch and because, ultimately, we have the promise of salvation.⁷¹

This outlook is in fact an optimistic version of the argument that human history in its concrete forms can be disregarded because it is irredeemable and will end in judgment anyway. Both say that since God's ways are not our ways, one should be concerned only with the end of time and not particularly with what goes on in the interim. With respect to this stance (which he sees as probably less of a problem in this specific age), Ellul wants to stress that a Christian understanding of history cannot simply and/or complacently disregard the ways of the world -- if only because God Himself has not disregarded them. They do not constitute progress, but also they are not irrelevant. The combination of the images of the four horses and the new Jerusalem point to this revelation. If one is going to talk of two levels or strands of history, for example, the sacred and the profane either now or at the end of time, then one must also remember that they are completely intertwined in one sphere and that neither will be discarded in the new creation. Basically, through these two images in the book of Revelation, Ellul emphasizes 'God's design in history', in order to come to grips with the biblical revelation of God's love for all people, a love that concerns itself with every human response -- even in rupture from God. Nothing human is left out nor finally rejected both in judgment and in mercy. He considers any theology of history that does not take seriously that double affirmation to be an inadequate reflection of the Bible.

⁷¹ "C and P", p. 747. See also M of C, p. 179.

ii) The Church and General History

When we spoke of man's work, we were, of course, referring to the results of man's physical labour, what he manufactures. It is not a question of moral or spiritual works in a Roman Catholic sense, works which might possibly lead to one's salvation. Neither do we have in mind the works of faith as an expression of the Christian life, the meaning given them by Paul. The works we are thinking of have no relation with man's spiritual destiny, are in no way a manifestation of his. . . piety. We have confined ourselves to the purely secular sense of works as the results of man's labour, what he makes. We were then able to observe that this work is in fact connected (but by no means because of man) with his spiritual destiny, or rather, with God's action in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit.⁷²

The specific reason for Ellul's articulation of a theology of history, as was the case in Chapter 7, is to remind Christians of their task, as members of the Church in the world. Here, what is most important is that the biblical revelation does not exempt the works of all people from its purview: it is not just concerned with the doings of Christians and Jews. Rather, it is concerned with the whole of human activities. Since the conclusion to Section 2 will concentrate on the specific way in which he thinks the Church should live its calling with regards to history, here I shall allude only briefly to three dimensions which he thinks are important for the Church's attitude to the activities of the rest of the world.⁷³ First, because God preserves His

⁷² M of C, pp. 177-78. It should perhaps be noted that within the category of what man manufactures, Ellul would include both intellectual systems and systems of morality, which would be included in the order of necessity for the preservation of the world, but not leading to salvation. Re. morality, see To Will, Part I, Chapters 3 and 4.

⁷³ The best short summary of his position concerning the Church in this regard comes in M of C, pp. 177-82. This argument leads back to the foundational chapter and also towards the conclusion to Section 2 of Part B. I put it in here as it specifically deals with the Church in relationship to the activities of other people -- activities within which the Church must live and which Christians must share.

creation in time and because He will adopt human works, Christians must work in the world to make it livable. They must not scorn the activities and desires and the strivings of the specific time in which they live. In this regard, they must be concerned with the concrete way in which the world is headed and they must participate in the prevention of history degenerating into non-history. This attitude implies a whole-hearted sharing in all human activities. Here he refers to Ecclesiastes 9:10. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going."⁷⁴ Christians cannot sit idly by nor can they applaud any tendencies towards the destruction of the possibility of human life. This basic requirement is a call for realism about history on the part of the Church as a whole: Christians must work to prevent disaster. At the same time, Christians must remember the other message of Ecclesiastes concerning the vanity of all human doings and especially of the trends in human history as a whole. They must seek to relativize the order of necessity and the three horses that move it, for they know about the first horse, so that history can in fact continue. To relativize history is the only way to prevent its annihilation. "With this in mind we are obviously able to put all our irony into the contemplation of man's efforts to build -- but at the same time we participate in them."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Quoted in M of C, p. 180. The reference to Sheol need not detain us here except to stress the 'here and now' emphasis of the Bible. For a biblical study on this question, see "De la Mort".

⁷⁵ M of C, p. 180. He suggests that perhaps the most concrete suggestion is "to inject humour into the situation. Where we are working, we absolutely must not take our actions seriously, neither ours nor that of our companions. . . . And this humor is one limit of our participation, for it must not be kept within us, a secret, but lived out and made known. Now there is a big difference between the work we accomplish with this attitude, and the work that requires idolatry and unbelief." (Ibid., p. 181).

The presence of irony will itself be a limitation on the human will-to-power and the absolute worth often attached to history. The double requirement of taking the relative seriously and relativizing what people take to be serious is crucial for the Christian to remain alert about what is actually taking place. Thirdly, because of the time question, Christians must live as if each moment were the last, even though they cannot know when that time will be.

A Christian cannot have any other vision of the world in which he lives than an apocalyptic one; and, knowing very well that historically it is not necessarily the end of the world, he must act at every moment as if this moment were the last. That is why we are so often commanded to 'watch'. What matters is not the 'end of the world' as we know it, but life itself, which is really apocalyptic.⁷⁶

Not only does this living in expectation involve the final revelation, but also it means that Christians cannot live in expectation of worldly success.

We have seen that down through history God's answer to the construction of man's closed world was to move in just the same. And if he is there by his hidden presence, he is also there by those whom he sends. . . . But then again, will the city accept us there? Will men accept our task of witnessing to the very opposite of their great enterprise? How long will they put up with it? . . . The whole affair will boil down to our rejection by the city.⁷⁷

These three suggestions concerning a Christian stance regarding the specific era in which one lives seem, in a sense, not the sole prerogative of Christians. Certainly, as we shall see, they do not form the whole of the Christian witness within history. Nevertheless, within Ellul's understanding of history, taken by itself and as a whole, they do serve to highlight both its importance and the demands within a response to a non-Christian world.

⁷⁶ FK, p. 32.

⁷⁷ M of C, pp. 181-82.

En somme cet inventaire devrait avoir pour but de donner des éléments pour penser sainement notre temps, pour vivre de façon concrète une vie chrétienne au milieu des difficultés actuelles et pour agir par conséquent par notre vie même.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ "Chronique", p. 687.

Conclusion to Part B, Section 2 -- Covenant History

All of Part B, Section 2 has been concentrating on Ellul's theological position -- focusing on the questions of right relationships and history. Since the Covenant of Jesus Christ and the end point of history within God's will are, in truth, identical, in Ellul's thought, the two chapters come together in what he calls "covenant history"¹. As has been reiterated throughout this thesis, he does not think that the Bible promulgates abstract doctrines nor shows God acting by Himself. Rather, it points to God's truth through the concrete response of His human intermediaries. The same argument applies concerning the whole of this section. God's intervention in history is made known through obedience to the Covenant.

[L]e Seigneur n'est pas lui-même présent dans l'Histoire; ce qui fait partie de l'Histoire, c'est l'Eglise, mais celle-ci ne serait rien de plus qu'une composante idéologique et sociologique de la société si elle n'était d'abord et avant tout liée, reliée à son Seigneur; et si Jésus-Christ est bien le Seigneur de l'Histoire, c'est par son Eglise dans l'histoire que cette Seigneurie devrait apparaître.²

Or, put slightly differently, but still emphasizing the concrete agency of the People of the Covenant in history, elsewhere he says the following.

¹ See again M of C, p. 134 and Chapter 7, footnote 102 of this thesis. It is the task of those within a covenant with God that would provide the basis of any notion of 'sacred history' for Ellul. Basically, as mentioned in Chapter 8, footnote 67, he remains cautious concerning the specific expression Heilsgeschichte because of the vagaries of its use, but for a specific reference to 'holy history', see L'Apocalypse, pp. 169-70.

² L'Apocalypse, p. 131. See also Ibid., pp. 8-9 for one of the clearest discussions of the use of examples rather than doctrines as the mode of revelation in the Bible -- with special reference to his own book P of G.

This present incarnation is both the way and structure of our history. If the way is known to God, the structure has constantly to be put together and assured by us. What is decisive is not the tension between a future eschatology and a realized eschatology. It is, rather, the movement of Christ who comes to us. That is translated by the introduction on our part of the eschatological kingdom into the to-day of God's design.³

What is required of the Peoples of God (Israel and the Church) is that they reflect God's transformation of the human implications of sin, by living within His desired relationships. Most important, they are to live the covenant at the very heart of each concrete human endeavour and movement. Put very briefly, Ellul sees the history of Israel and the Church as holding the meaning of the history of all of mankind and that secret revolves around living the right relationships within the unrolling of time. For Ellul Isaiah 40-55 presents a specific view of the significance of 'covenant history' at the secret centre of the totality of human history.

Dieu est le créateur et le maître de l'histoire; l'homme conserve une autonomie que lui permet de se conduire, dans la mesure où Dieu le laisse agir. Mais Dieu nie le pouvoir des idoles. Israël a une situation spéciale, mais l'attitude que Dieu adopte à son égard est le type de son attitude envers toutes les nations. Cet Israël est le porteur de Dieu au milieu des nations, et c'est de cette Israël et non pas des nations que dépend la trame de l'histoire. Ainsi Cyrus n'est choisi par Dieu, et ne réussit politiquement qu'en fonction d'Israël. Mais Israël est en définitive incapable de remplir cette mission. Esaïe appelle donc le serviteur, dont l'identité est complexe, pour être le porteur de Dieu. Il est au centre de l'histoire, parce qu'il représente Dieu, et parce qu'il porte en lui-même tous les éléments de la création dans leur opposition puis dans leur médiation. Les lignes de l'histoire avant ou après, convergent vers lui. Ce serviteur est enfin celui qui, incarnant et réalisant la Parole de Dieu réalise par lui-même l'histoire, puisque c'est la parole de Dieu qui suscite et provoque les événements de l'histoire.⁴

³ PM, pp. 176-77.

⁴ "Mystère", p. 467.

Et tout le déroulement de l'histoire se poursuit selon la dialectique de l'évidence humaine (les faits, les pensées de l'homme sont pour lui la seule réalité évidente) qui s'ordonne et se construit par rapport au mystère de la présence de Dieu. Et aucun des deux éléments ne peut être séparé de l'autre. L'histoire n'est pas de l'un sans l'autre, mais de l'un à l'autre. Ainsi l'analyse permet de discerner l'histoire de notre rédemption en Jésus-Christ, l'histoire de l'Eglise et du peuple juif, et l'histoire universelle, encore ne faut-il les séparer.⁵

Ellul has drawn on a number of biblical images to shed light on what that significance within human events really means. For example, he refers to the inseparability of the fifth and sixth seals of Revelation from the four horses discussed in Chapter 8. That is to say, the revelation of the four horses is not a kind of deus ex machina, pulled out of a hat. It centres finally on the witness of the liberty and the prayers of the martyrs in specific, and the history of Israel and the Church in general.⁶ Because I have already discussed the task of the Church in the foundational chapter, in order to draw together this particular section, I shall look at how Ellul uses the image of 'generations' and 'giving birth' as a central image of covenant history.⁷

In the overview to this section, I mentioned that Ellul stresses Jesus Christ as 'the Word made flesh'. It is not coincidental that Matthew and Luke point to the same truth in terms of the birth of Jesus -- in complete accord with the Old Testament emphasis on generations. That

⁵ "Mystère", p. 468.

⁶ For this discussion, see L'Apocalypse, pp. 163-76. In conversation, M. Ellul pointed out that 'martyr' means essentially 'witness'.

⁷ See Chapter 8, footnote 6, for a reference to the biblical usage. For specific examples of Ellul's use of the image, see PMM, p. 131 or L'Apocalypse, p. 258 or "Mystère", p. 467. This conclusion will not be a definitive study on this aspect which is central to the Old Testament understanding of covenant. I introduce it only to show that Ellul tries to remain faithful to that understanding in his theological arguments and draws upon that specific image.

image of the Incarnation combines most of the aspects discussed in this section -- the personal relationships involved, the bringing together of truth and reality, the concreteness of humanity of relationships and of historical events and the specific form of an orientation towards the future. The two areas in which this image has the most direct bearing for Ellul's thought are the significance of miracles and the biblical revelation concerning time as the vehicle of the word of God. Both these dimensions combine for Ellul as the focal point of Christian activity.

In Chapter 8, we have already seen miracle as the intervention of the white horse into the patterns of history. Since God does not work in vacuo, however, there is an added dimension to make a miracle completely a miracle in biblical terms.

He acts at his own level He forces man to confront him. God has always the perfect freedom to act in this surprising and disruptive fashion, to be the super-natural which shatters the course of the natural, with all due deference to Robinson and the rest. But we must carefully avoid the error of assimilating the incomprehensible fact which the historian can recognize and circle at once, to the objective intervention of God, as though both were miracles. The incomprehensible fact may be a miracle, but a miracle is first God's act, then God's revelation in the interests of the man on whom he has acted, and finally the discerning of the significance for man of this divine intervention; these are the three elements which constitute a miracle.⁸

Thus, for Ellul, miracles are neither a substitute explanation for shoddy historical studies nor an attempt to simplify the forces at work in history nor an apologetic for Christianity. "Above all we must not try to push God into the system, whether by making him the cause of the causes or by establishing a hierarchy in causality."⁹ The image of

⁸ P. of G., p. 185

⁹ Ibid., p. 182. See also L'Apocalypse, p. 8, footnote.

giving birth points rather to the possibility of new life, to the starting again of living within the covenant. Through God's intervention and revelation, it is possible to know that the fatalities have been broken and that life can, in fact, be taken up again. That apprehension or understanding is more important than the details of causality.

"Miracles exist for faith and God adopts this manner of speaking for those who believe."¹⁰ Any miracle (and all find their fulfilment in the Event of Jesus Christ) is the making known of God's will in a specific situation, so that the Chosen People can witness to a new direction for history by witnessing to different relationships, proper restraints and the true direction of specific human activities. This aspect brings us back to the prophetic work of the Church. "But there are other men who alone present the true meaning of history; these are the prophets."¹¹ The task of the Church is to recognize miracle as miracle, in order to act upon it to be the agent of giving birth to the living covenant as the only prevention of death through annihilation. As we have seen, Ellul does not think that miracles guarantee a process of progress in history, but rather the possibilities of sustained relationships within God's plan. Therefore, Ellul would be in accord with the biblical usage of generations in preference to more modern understandings of history as progress. The Bible points to the Chosen Peoples as being the only ones

¹⁰ P of G, p. 184. One must also remember that miracles are not inevitable. "[T]o expect miracles of God is not in accordance with Scripture." ("C and P", p. 747.) The believer must be 'expectant' (to change the image somewhat) and ready to bring forth new life, but not complacently relying on a mechanism. In any event, they must witness, if only in hope, to the Event that has taken place once for all.

¹¹ P of G, p. 189.

who can articulate what is happening and the dangers of human history left on its own. That announcement must be combined with a witness to the new, alternative possibilities of life.

And here the great passage from Pascal takes on its full import once again; but it is not so much a mechanical or a philosophical causality which is given by God to man. It is a historical causality.¹²

Thus, although miracles exist only for faith, they are not simply for the edification and the glorification of those lucky enough to be elected. In Ellul's terms, they are for "the begetting of a future".¹³

This image of giving birth to a future (centering on the birth of Jesus Christ) is also important for coming to appreciate the eschatological dimension that Ellul sees in the Bible. It combines the double notion of time (the present and the future or the 'now' but the 'not yet') within the concreteness of human relationships. Ellul takes the physical image as pointing to the covenant as the intimation of the end of time within time.

Or, effectivement, L'Apocalypse est un livre de l'imminence, de l'urgence. . . . C'est l'imminence de Dieu dans le temps, c'est le "clash" entre deux dimensions inconciliables et inimaginables, celle de l'Eternité et du Temps si l'on veut, celle du Tout Autre et du Semblable, celle du Pas encore et du Déjà là, celle de l'Absolu et du Contingent. Ce qui doit arriver bientôt, ce ne seront pas des accidents comptabilisables sur les tables des historiens et chroniqueurs (sans quoi, justement, l'apocalypticien serait un chroniqueur), c'est l'Emergence de ce qui est si profondément caché que c'est seulement par réfractions et symboles qu'on peut le discerner.¹⁴

¹² PMM, p. 176. Concerning his further comments on Pascal and causality, see also Ibid., pp. 45-46 and P of G, p. 22.

¹³ PMM, p. 131.

¹⁴ L'Apocalypse, p. 24. See also Ibid., p. 95 where he uses a different image of a springboard and also p. 13, where he talks about the tight link between truth and reality.

Since it is the Chosen Peoples who carry this secret and are called to bear its fruits, the image of generations remains a vivid one for the call for the right relationship between truth and reality. Not through her own activities, but through the intervention of God, the Church has been sent to witness within history to the Event that makes all history and all relationships possible. The only way the Church can articulate the significance of history (as discussed in Chapter 8) is through the liberation of Jesus Christ (as discussed in Chapter 7). The two chapters of this section come together in the liberation from slaveries in order to bring forth a totally other way in the here and now activities within time. At the end of Hope in Time of Abandonment, Ellul sums up how he views the Church as the bearers of God's will.

Now, just as the Old Testament shows us, in effect, a history which is hidden (separate because hidden) in the heart of events, and one which is more true than the political agitation (in the narrow sense) and in relation to which universal history takes its meaning; just as the Apocalypse describes the course of history for us as the running of four horses, one of which is white, the Word of God; so today the profound truth of our history can be given to it by this union of Israel and the Church, the two bearers of hope for mankind, who must henceforth be one in order that all political actions might receive a meaning. What is needed now is that the community of the abandoned, since its hope is indestructible, should be able in its unity to say with Abraham, "Hineni" ("Here am I"), with Jesus, "Father I praise thee", with the first Christians, "Maranatha". That is where, the beginning and the end of every political act in the modern world is to be found.¹⁵

¹⁵ HTA, pp. 305-6.

CONCLUSION

The remains that they dig up pertaining to the American churches, and to "American theology", and to American social ethics, in the opportune years just before the terminal event, will prove that all of these neither knew nor cared for the concern for life which Ellul represents, and that all of these, in fact, were fascinated and preoccupied and possessed by the idolatry of death.¹

The purpose of this thesis, as indicated in the general Introduction, has been to place the writings of Jacques Ellul into a clear perspective. Such a study involves the maintenance of a proper emphasis on the parts, without sacrificing the whole. I have begun with the view of his task as a Christian intellectual. From that unified foundation, Chapters 2 to 8 I have analyzed his assumptions and procedures, both as a social thinker and as a layman reading the Bible. What remains for the Conclusions is the concrete articulation of his doctrine of the two realms; that is, the way in which the two main areas of his work can be read together. At this point, I do not intend to introduce new material not already indicated in the body of the thesis. Rather, the purpose is to bring us back to the second part of the title, "A Proclamation of Biblical Faith as Requisite for Understanding the Modern Project". Having examined the basic structure of Ellul's undertaking, from both Parts A and B, certain conclusions can be drawn about Ellul's understanding of the technological society. What can we ascertain about the direction in which he ultimately points for coming to grips with the specific kind of society in which we live?

¹ Stringfellow, Introducing Jacques Ellul, p. 138. See also p. 1, footnote 1.

HOW ELLUL UNDERSTANDS THE MODERN PROJECT

Contrary to the impression given in many reviews, Ellul does not simplistically denounce technique as entirely alien to man. Indeed, he opposes any notion that it is something external which, in principle, can be used either for good or for ill. Similarly, he never argues that the enemy is technique per se, for it does not appear by itself. Quite the contrary, he contends that the technological society arose from human endeavours and maintains its strength only because people give it their undivided allegiance. In short, he thinks that the emergence of our society involves the human will-to-power and that the current trust in technique stems from the attempt to construct our own security. Historically, he argues that all such collective strivings to achieve autonomy and free self-definitions have led to their very opposite. Concerning the specific example of the technological society, he says, "Et ce sera bientôt la réussite aussi du monde technicien. L'esclave heureux."¹ In assessing the meaning of what is now happening, he believes that the Bible speaks to this enterprise in such a way as to query its very assumptions. In biblical terms, technique is the contemporary manifestation of enslavement to the principalities and powers -- a situation whose roots lie in false self-understanding and blind desire. The rest of the Conclusion will examine the subtleties of these brief statements, in

¹ I de l'0, pp. 148-49.

order to highlight how Ellul collates them into a holistic, but not systematic account in which his theological reflections provide the understanding for his social descriptions.² The two foci will be a) why technique is not the enemy and b) the centrality of dialectical relationships. Both these sub-sections will converge in a discussion of his doctrine of the two realms as a une mise-en-question of the pre-suppositions of the technological society.

a) Technique is Not the Enemy

I have never attacked technology. On the one hand, I have attempted to describe the whole sociological problem of technology, with emphasis on my conviction that the benefits accruing from technology are well worthwhile. On the other hand, I have attacked the ideology of technology and idolatrous beliefs about technology.³

Je ne dis pas que la technique est un fruit du péché. Je ne dit pas que la technique est contraire à la volonté de Dieu. Je ne dis pas que la technique est mauvaise en soi.⁴

Some readers of The Technological Society find it difficult to accept Ellul's statement that he has never attacked technology. Seldom does such a sombre social analysis appear in which people seem to be up against such formidable odds. There is no doubt that he is attacking something! The basic issue here is the root of the problem and, for Ellul,

² One should remember that Ellul's distinction between analysis and understanding is vital to his undertaking. Although he does think that the Bible speaks directly to our society, he wants to avoid apologetics. For a discussion of the way in which he maintains biblical explanations for reflection, while recognizing the dangers involved, see HTA, pp. 156-66. Specifically, on pp. 157-58, he warns against speaking on two different levels at the same time.

³ "A Little Debate", p. 707. See also Part A, Chapter 3, footnote 24 and Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7, footnote 59. This reference bears repeating in the general Conclusion, especially as it comes from a sociological discussion.

⁴ "La Technique", pp. 112-13.

it originates in the human heart. In order to perceive his understanding better, we must now consider the source of the relationships involved in the ascendancy of technique -- from his vantage point of the Bible. I do not want to repeat what has already been said; therefore, I shall collect only his reflections on the novelty of the technological society. Is it unique in history? To this question, he answers both 'no' and 'yes'.

In his biblical meditations on our society, he is quite vehement that there is nothing categorically new about modern man or about his situation. "Babylon, Venice, Paris, New York -- they are all the same city, only one Babel always reappearing. . . ." ⁵ "As far as power is concerned, exactly nothing has happened since Genesis." ⁶ Furthermore, although he often rejects the 'philosophical' notion of an unchanging human nature, Ellul does say that all people are prone to definite tendencies; that is, the will-to-power. ⁷ The rebellion against God (with the implications of seeking autonomy through the only alternative power of the order of necessity) has not altered, in principle, since Cain consolidated the sin of Adam. This belief means that everything said in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7 has a direct bearing on the modern technological project. Because people do not know the will of God as the true ordering principle, they always encounter the world as hostile and chaotic. In the face of

⁵ M of C, p. 21.

⁶ HTA, p. 212.

⁷ See, for example, Ibid., pp. 63-64; M of C, p. 7. For his rejection of the idea of human nature, see, for example, To Will, pp. 52-3; PMM, pp. 89-41; Critique, pp. 268-79. The main reasons for his rejection are, first, that it is alien to the Bible, secondly, it is a false source of hope that obscures the requirements of realism and, thirdly, the lack of evidence. See also Chapter 4, footnote 19.

felt threats, they react by attempting to construct their own order. Consequently, as part of the effort 'to go it alone', they must fall back on the order of necessity. What is false in this understanding, in this reading of the Bible, is that even in the new situation there is no such thing as an autonomous person. Man has always remained characterized by that towards which he directs his homage: he becomes defined by his dependence on the order of necessity. By its very nature, that relationship (in any form) can only imply domination. Ellul's reflections lead him to the position that modern man is doing exactly what people have always done. From the time of the expulsion from the garden, techniques have been mandatory to guarantee mere human survival. This demand, he argues, is exactly what prompted the desire for the mastery over nature. In modern society, people have ceased to think of the technical phenomenon as a tool to make the world livable and increasingly regard it as the only aspect of the order of necessity upon which they can rely. The net result is that we now live within the image of technique, within the image of God. Despite the motivation to independence, the former image is one of enslavement rather than the original one of the liberty of love. The technical snare, from which there seems to be no escape, is exacerbated because it entails the incarnation of the principalities and powers.⁸ All of Ellul's references to them must not distract from the main point about the origins of power relationships. Just as Adam and Eve were responsible for the fall, so also the principalities and powers are significant only insofar as human longings foster and feed on their existence. The fact of the order of necessity came from the fall, while

⁸ See "Notes Préliminaires", p. 10.

the operation of the exousiai is the implication of the will-to-power. In seeking to be more than a human creature, we have become less than truly human.

The same conditions exist today. Although Ellul never claims that this interpretation is proved by the technological society, he does insist that this society is fully explained by biblical revelation. We have built la société technicienne: it was neither imposed from the outside nor did it arise randomly. We have invested our whole energy in it because we firmly believe that increased rationalization will be a progressive step in human development. Nevertheless, the goal of freedom through the total control of life has produced the exact inverse.

La technique est le facteur d'asservissement de l'homme. Bien entendu pas seulement cela! Elle pourrait être hypothétiquement son facteur de libération. Mais exactement aussi bien que L'Etat pouvait être hypothétiquement son facteur de sécurité et de justice aussi bien que l'Economie capitaliste pouvait être hypothétiquement son facteur de bonheur et de satisfaction des besoins. Mais cela était le possible. Le réel fut l'aliénation. De même pour la Technique. Or, l'homme éprouve la dépossession de lui-même.⁹

In other words, we have accepted a monopoly of reassuring technical solutions for the problems in the growth of technology and those solutions have escaped our control. At the beginning of the process, there was room to manoeuvre; once a definite path was chosen, the ensuing web of relationships and forces so intermeshed that fewer and fewer distinctions were possible.

⁹ T de l'O, p. 157. See also Ibid., pp. 213-16, where he employs the images of the sorcerer's apprentice and the Grand Inquisitor.

[W]hen technique enters into every area of life, including the human, it ceases to be external to man and becomes his very substance. It is no longer face to face with him but it is integrated with him, and it progressively absorbs him.¹⁰

What is important is that the human orientation counts the most, so that, while technique is not neutral, it is also not to blame. Finally, because man remains the focal point for the world, the fruits of his particular orientation will be exploitation in the whole of life -- both human and non-human.¹¹

Et voici que, bien au-delà des planifications exsangues, des rationalisations réduites, tout cela se met en place, dans une sorte de croissance que l'on ne peut dire spontanée car elle est bien le fruit de calcul, mais de qui? -- une sorte de croissance aveugle de racine plongeant implacablement vers ce qui la nourrit -- aveugle et pourtant dirigée.¹²

Ellul always comes back to the theological understanding that there is nothing unique in these directions.

Quand l'Ecriture nous dit que l'homme est dominé par l'esprit de puissance et de conquête, par l'esprit d'autonomie et d'aséité, qu'il veut construire un monde à lui et à lui seul, à l'exclusion de Dieu, qu'il veut exploiter ce monde pour lui-même et qu'il proclame: "Où donc est Dieu? que peut-il faire ce Dieu inopérant, invisible, et incohérent. . ." Est-ce bien un discours dépassé qu'il faut démythologiser? Sans doute, cette attitude, la Bible appelle orgueil, péché, rupture avec Dieu et la condamne. Le monde moderne au contraire trouve que c'est enfin de cette façon que l'homme se réalise, s'accomplit, devient majeur, adulte et prend son destin en main. Mais la Bible a-t-elle jamais dit autre chose? . . . Je ne vois rien de nouveau par rapport à l'élucidation biblique, ni dans l'essor prodigieux des sciences, techniques et politiques actuelles, ni dans l'adhérence des chrétiens à ces admirables réussites. Le jugement que porte l'Ecriture sur

¹⁰ TS, p. 6.

¹¹ See "Le Rapport", p. 150, concerning the assertion that the unlimited domination of nature has led to the present threat of ecological disaster.

¹² T de l'O, p. 215.

ces tentatives et ces réalisations n'est nullement issu
une ambiance culturelle. . . . Les formes ont changé,
le problème est le même.¹³

The last sentence in this passage leads to Ellul's positive assertions, made primarily in his sociological writings, that there is something completely distinctive about the world we live in.

If I do not refer to the past, it is only to emphasize
that present determinants did not exist in the past, and
men did not have to grapple with them then.¹⁴

As we saw in Part A, Chapter 3, the quantitative change in the proliferation of techniques went hand in hand with a qualitative change in relationships in terms of technique. The new relationships, he maintains, have no historical precedent. Because he also sees people sociologically as defined by relationships, they cannot simply divorce themselves from the new situation. No part is left unaffected. Again, he does not think that they can appeal to a hidden reserve of 'human nature'. Put slightly differently, the material and belief factors are so tightly linked that the factual situation is radically new. Ellul, therefore, allows no flight into past societies in wrestling with the specific problems related to technique now. Sociologically and historically, one might impute an historicism that negates what has been said above.

To combine the two sides of the case with some coherence, we should remember what Ellul says about the principalities and powers. In fact, their specific embodiments will vary from civilization to civilization,

¹³ NP, pp. 283-84.

¹⁴ IS, p. xxix. See also, among other examples, Ibid., pp. 60, 77-8; PI, pp. 226-34; AR, p. 352.

while still retaining the basic characteristics as exousiai.¹⁵ Allegiance to technique is far from being the only form that the human will-to-power can take. One is reminded here of the horses of the Apocalypse as reviewed in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 8. Although they can operate in a large number of coalitions, there is a sameness to the forces underlying history. Like law, the technical phenomenon is not itself one of the horses, but has become a specific incarnation of the powers resulting from the 'galloping'. The conclusion emerges that a singular grouping of the forces gave rise to the present state of affairs with its unique characteristics. (For example, one would have to include among the forces both the impetus of the Reformation and the subsequent rejection of the restraints of the Christian tradition.) The immediate concrete manifestation of the powers is new: its basic meaning and tendencies are not at all new. This theological reflection corresponds to his particular usage of the fact-value distinction. The understanding of any historical age (which for ours must focus on technique) is not to be found within the horizons of that epoch itself. He avoids charges of radical historicism by his appeal to the challenge of the biblical revelation. For Ellul, the absolute judgment and mercy effected in the Event of Jesus Christ does not change, whereas the flux of history can bring together many variations.

Le coeur d'une révélation, le point "extra", à partir duquel, parce qu'il est transcendant, il est possible de voir tout le reste, le lieu non-lieu et non situé

¹⁵ "W and C", p. 18. See also I de l'O, pp. 82-85, for his commentary on Greece and Rome as obeying the will-to-power through philosophy and politics respectively. The incarnation of the principalities and powers in any given age corresponds to those aspects of the order of necessity collectively viewed as guarantors of security.

mais qui permet de situer le reste, le point de perspective jamais atteint, d'où tout tire sa place.¹⁶

The issue of responsibility within the context of the novelty of the technological society points directly to Ellul's specific task as a Christian intellectual within it.

In this book, I believe I am describing what has always been the situation of the Christian in the world. . . . In reality, the actual problem of revolution is a problem of life or death for man, and it is presented to us in terms which we have never known before. Now no one, unless he is moved by a supra-human power, can consider himself truly revolutionary. . . . On the other hand, Christians no longer act according to that unconscious impulse which, whenever the Church was fully alive, made them bearers of a profound revolution. Today this inner impulse seems to have faded away -- and in spite of their faith Christians usually act as sociological beings.¹⁷

The task of the Church does not waver. She must try to reflect the liberty of obedience to God within the actual enslavements of this world. On the one hand, Christians must face the new technological society without an unwarranted retreat into the past.

The work of the moralists. . . has no further significance for us. . . . It is not because their work was less "valid", but because if it was a genuine ethic, it was necessarily related to a certain social, political and economic situation which is no longer ours. Their conclusions (if not their point of departure and their method) are thus entirely

¹⁶ NP, p. 265. From this perspective, he attacks both any attempts either to historicize the biblical revelation or to absolutize the events or the flow of history.

¹⁷ PK, pp. 58-59. See also FPK, p. 8 and the end of the foundational chapter (b). It is important to note again that he does not talk on two levels at the same time. Here, he refers to the revolutionary impact of Christianity as a wholly different route from the ways of the world. In *A of R*, he refers to revolution within the order of necessity -- open to everyone. The overlapping of language can cause some confusion. Similarly, the 'supra-human power' refers to the word of God and not to all the principalities and powers.

outmoded. . . . Hence we cannot think today of looking for the ingredients of a Christian ethic in Augustine, or Ambrose, or Calvin, or Luther.¹⁸

How to go about living the commandments must always be contemporary.

On the other hand, a more pressing temptation now is the acceptance of the claims of the technological society that mitigate against belief in revelation which is not historically conditioned.

Or ce que nous avons évacué, c'était non seulement le religieux, mais l'absolu de la révélation. Les intellectuels chrétiens sont tellement imprégnés de tous les mythes modernes, ils vivent tellement dans le sacré d'aujourd'hui, ils participent tellement à tous les rites, à toutes les croyances, et spécialement à la religion politique, que bien entendu, ils ne discernent pas qu'il s'agit de la religion.¹⁹

This route involves the whole-hearted acceptance of technique which, for Ellul, is the very kernel of the problem. Under these constraints, the task of the Christian intellectual has become uncertain, for what is involved in the keeping of the commandments has become very obscure.

Ellul's answer brings us to the importance of dialectical relationships in his understanding of technique.

b) The Centrality of Dialectical Relationships

I am a dialectician above all: I believe nothing can be understood without dialectical analysis.²⁰

In each of Ellul's major areas of study, the question of dialectics remains crucial. Since the aim of this thesis is not to go into a

¹⁸ To Will, p. 225. (Here he separates the task of the theologian from the task of the moralist.) See also PMM, p. 46 or FPK, p. 4.

¹⁹ NP, p. 264. See also Ibid., p. 280, where he says "[E]t je reste ultra-classique parce que ce classicisme est la seule issue possible en face des dieux de ce monde."

²⁰ See Menninger, p. 240, from a conversation with M. Ellul. Throughout this thesis, Ellul's emphasis on dialectics in every phase of his writing has been highlighted.

detailed study of this controversial field, I shall only recapitulate the triple dialectic he sees in operation -- with the purpose of showing the complex unity of his thought about technique. Before moving to his precise usages, a preliminary comment is in order. In general terms (to repeat from Part A, Chapter 2), he refers to 'dialectics' as a report of any experienced encounter in which contradictory components are locked together in inseparable bonds of tension and continuous interaction. Each segment of the complete picture can be defined only in terms of its opposite pole, while the ensemble includes the lines of force between the conflicting elements. This interpretation has direct repercussions for Ellul's entire corpus. First, he always considers dialectics to be contrary to any form of systematization. Because of the constant interplay among opposites, there can never be a static, final account of the way things are.²¹ At the same time, this emphasis forbids him from approaching any issue piecemeal, for each part exists only in total relationships and not alone. Thirdly, Ellul reminds readers that his concern is "not dialectic that is a type of reasoning, but a movement of actual experience".²² Rather than advocating a specific form of reason (let alone a philosophical argument), he is searching for a way to express the situation in which one is involved. All of these factors combine to

²¹ It should be noted that, in conversation, M. Ellul said that he is more convinced by the arguments of Kierkegaard than he is by Hegel. (See also TS, p. 55 and HTA, p. 54.) He sees the latter as finally being a systematizer for whom there is a resolution of the dialectical tensions. Ellul thinks that his own perception of the matters precludes any neat plan for predicting historical developments, for the tension between opposites persists, unless one speaks of death. As we have seen, there can be extrapolation of the probability inherent in present trends, but no complete historical conception of inevitable outcome.

²² "W and C", p. 15. See also Part A, Chapter 2, footnote 50.

lead to the immediacy of his writings and, from the beginning, he has stressed movement, challenge and tension in his articulation of the technological society.

In Part A, centering on Ellul's sociological stance, I analyzed his view of the desirability of maintaining dialectical tensions among societal structures and forces, including his view of the danger of any trend towards a monolith. He states that our society is distinguished by the transition from the use of technology as a tool, through technique as a structure of society, to rationality as the definition of reality which tries to transform everything else into its own image.²³ In addition, technique now holds an unprecedented position for it has undergone apotheosis and is now the dominant axis of the sacred. The double effect ensues that the possibility for dialectical relationships and the likelihood of apprehending what is happening both tend to diminish.

Cette volonté de réduire les contradictions . . . a éliminé, exclu ce qui décidément provoquait la contradiction. La passion de l'Unité a plongé dans le néant ce qui restait inassimilable ou ce qui provoquait une nouvelle question.²⁴

La société technisée becomes increasingly closed, abstracted and stagnant, so that alternatives continuously become more limited.

[N]ous sommes saisis. . . avec un prodigieux mécanisme de répétition, de ressassement, de redondance. . . . Cette impuissance à innover autrement que dans le jeu des signes

²³ See, for example, T de l'O, p. 189, where he comments on the betrayal of reason in the amalgamation of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac in modern technique. Also, a major theme in A of R is the increasing technicization of state power which originally provided a counterpoint for technique.

²⁴ T de l'O, p. 191. On this page, he talks about all levels of dialectical relationships as manifested in the claims of the Christian Church which has shaped the Western tradition.

(non pas des symboles!) marque pour moi la fin de l'Occident.²⁵

Ellul concludes that the singularity of confidence in technical solutions will probably lead to a series of upheavals or social disintegration before the ultimate form of enslavement occurs.²⁶ Because he sees such a direction as bondage and eventual destruction, he continually confronts technique in order to arouse awareness and stimulate a determination to keep all healthy relationships within society alive. He thinks that at least the acknowledgement of the implications of unchecked technique is a sign of potential health. Precisely because sustained social dialectics are not inevitable, he accepts it as part of his responsibility to warn everyone of the dangers before it is too late. On this level of analysis, Ellul maintains that the diagnosis of present ills is open to all and the possibilities for a healthy reaction are not limited to Christians and Jews.

Theologically, as discussed in Part B, Ellul also is convinced of the centrality of dialectics as the most appropriate mode of expressing the biblical revelation concerning the relationship between God and fallen man. Even though the truth of the Bible is categorically on a different plane from the forces of society, the main guidelines concerning dialectics stand unchanged. Very briefly, Ellul reads the whole Bible as

²⁵ T de l'O, p. 223. For a discussion of the increasing abstraction of modern technique that makes even the raising of questions particularly difficult, see Ibid., p. 157.

²⁶ In conversation, M. Ellul said that he is of the opinion that the dystopia of Huxley's Brave New World would probably not be achieved. He thinks the challenge will come from the impossibility, which appears more and more likely, of adapting social organization and human psychology to the rapidity of the evolution of material techniques. This challenge does not present itself as a new direction, but more as a distintegration. Neither that possibility nor that of the perfection of technique is particularly edifying to him.

testifying to the radical contrast between God and man. They share no common identity in terms of reasoning, understanding, feeling or activity. Rather, Scripture reveals a rupture, a chasm which man cannot bridge without God.

[J]e pense aux théologiens: cette incroyable aventure de la théologie occidentale refusante. . . la différence, la rupture, la distance entre Dieu et l'homme et s'efforçant par tous les moyens de ramener l'un des termes à l'autre. . . avec un acharnement digne d'un project moins stupide.²⁷

At the same time, he also sees that the whole Bible points to the truth that God has preserved His creation and has refused to accept the alienation of man and human corruptibility where all relationships are concerned. God has always maintained an enduring connection in which He wills the salvation of all people, no matter how intransigent they may be. From that dialectical perspective, finding its ultimate unity in the Person of Jesus Christ, Ellul draws his biblical understanding of technique.

First, there is the belief that God reveals Himself only in His dealings with people. Reciprocally, man is also never portrayed in solitude: he is characterized by his relationships and loyalties, even in disobedience. This dimension was a major strand developed in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7. Made sacred, technique becomes the tangible demonstration of the impossibility of human autonomy. Technique is more than the means for survival; more accurately, it is now a form of the worship of false gods. As a result, Christians must understand our society as part of the biblical revelation concerning relationships of obedience and liberty. Secondly, because the will of God remains constant even in altered situations, Ellul also stresses His simultaneous judgment

²⁷ T de l'O, p. 191.

and mercy on all human activities. This point was presented in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 8. He thinks that the Bible speaks directly to technique as one of the historical works of people. Although the undertaking is exactly the same as that of Cain in building the city, technique in itself will not finally be rejected by God. As was the case concerning law, he asserts that the Christian's assessment of technique must be shaped within the revelation of what God wants for the world. Technique is part of the order of necessity; therefore, as a tool to make the world livable, it cannot be lightly dismissed. It goes further to pinpoint the human aspirations: it follows the tendencies of human history to run into a blank wall: it shows the impossibility of human constructs. Yet it too will be liberated from the tyranny of the principalities and powers and transformed to reflect God's glory.

We need to maintain a rigorous dialectic. The "Yes" of God is pronounced in relation to a previous "No". Without the "No", there is not "Yes", and the "No" in question is not a mere "manner of speaking", a mere "appearance". . .

It is not a question of pronouncing a judgment of discrimination between good works and bad works (which is ruled out by the parable of the wheat and the tares). This "No" and this "Yes" apply to every human undertaking and to every man. The "No" is against the world's enterprise, which moves towards judgment and death. The "Yes" is for the work of God, to which we look in hope, and which ends with the taking up of the work of man. One cannot really proclaim the Gospel without also proclaiming the "No" included in it, and which is also itself a gospel.²⁸

Since God remains faithful to His creation, the problem for theology is not the possibility of the cessation of this dialectic, but the ease with which the nature of the relationship can be overlooked. Even when it is grasped, there is a struggle to make known the revelation.

²⁸ FPK, pp. 23, 25.

How can the Church speak of living and often tortuous relationships of love, while avoiding the lures of a simplifying synthesis or an erroneous dualism? As the witness for God, how can she come to grips with both the "Yes" and the "No" which must be pronounced, comprehensibly, over the technological society? These questions constitute the central issues for theology. Although Ellul does not concentrate on straight dogmatics, he finds Karl Barth's emphasis on the dialectical nature of biblical revelation compelling, for it forces self-scrutiny and impels the Christian intellectual to his further task vis-à-vis technique.²⁹

Ellul sees his most important contribution in the third level of relationships, which stem from the biblical exhortations to live Christian faith in the world. Theological understanding by itself is not sufficient: it demands response. The Church is called to bring forth new life from the very centre of human disobedience in the age of technique. He is convinced that there is no mechanical channel between what is learned in the Bible and what can be known about contemporary society.

For my part, I am convinced that the theology of Karl Barth should lead to the adoption of very precise positions in the world, specifically with regards to politics, positions which owe nothing to the laxness we are witnessing, and which are as hard to formulate as to live. This work has not yet begun.³⁰

²⁹ For a concluding comment on Ellul's view of Barth, see FPK, pp. 79-81, where he gives his full support, despite the tendency of some Barthians to follow the irrationality and scepticism about action that prevail in modern society. In conversation, M. Ellul also mentioned that Kierkegaard continues to be a good antidote to Barth's partial susceptibility to systematization in Church Dogmatics. For a discussion of self-scrutiny in theology, see "Théologie Dogmatique", pp. 151-54.

³⁰ FPK, p. 81. See also the foundational chapter, footnote 53.

This statement brings us back to the summary of his doctrine of the two realms in the foundational chapter. The demands of the two spheres are totally in conflict. What Ellul hopes to accomplish is to remind Christians that they must live out the resulting tensions in challenge and love. To crystallize his vision of the relationship between the two realms, he again leans on the fruitfulness of a dialectical approach.

Thus on the one hand the Christian is called upon to participate in the activities of the world in which he lives, to recognize, not the justice before God but relative usefulness and normality. It is normal for the world to develop its own morality. But on the other hand, the Christian is called to live in all its dimensions the fullness which has been given to him, without distinction of temporal and spiritual, private and public etc. The Christian faith implies for him transformations in politics, in business etc., which are directly referred to the person of Jesus Christ. Thus the tension is set up in one world (and not a separation), tension which does not mean rupture but not adherence either. It is a dialectical relationship which eliminates at one and the same time the possibility of the autonomy of the morality of the world and the possibility of the autonomy of revelation in relation to the world.³¹

Of course, opponents can argue that it is logically impossible to live simultaneously in two contradictory realms. From Ellul's stance, however, this requirement is the paradoxical commandment of Christ to be 'in' the world but not 'of' the world.³² If nobody has heard the commandment, then Ellul would agree that there is no reasonable task for the Christian intellectual. If the commandment has been heard, he says that,

³¹ To Will, p. 290. See also the foundational chapter (a), footnote 25 and the same stance was also presented in Part B, Section 1, Chapter 6(b). I have included the first part of the quotation in order to underline that the Christian is not exempt from the requirement to keep societal relations moving in the one realm.

³² See PK, p. 7. The biblical reference is to John 17:13-19. At this point, two observations are pertinent. First, in conversation, M. Ellul stressed that the Bible itself shows us the constant conflict between the two realms. Secondly, there is no question of the Christian leaving the realm characterized by technique by his own choice.

in our time, it is the technological society as a whole which forms one pole in the never-ending confrontation between the human project (itself dialectical) and God's plan (itself dialectical). The technological society is the concrete realm to which the word of the Bible is now directed and in which the Church must be prophetic.

To illustrate further what he means by the overall dialectical tension, I shall refer to passages dealing with Ellul's understanding of the history of the West as the unrolling of the task of the Church.

Le mystère de l'Occident, c'est que depuis vingt siècles, il est tiré entre deux facteurs rigoureusement contradictoires, dont, malgré ses efforts, ses trahisons, compromissions, il n'a jamais pu assurer l'unité, l'équilibre et l'ordre.

Il est vrai pour le chrétien que s'il en est ainsi c'est, selon ce que les Ecritures nous révèlent de façon constante au sujet des décisions de Dieu, que l'Eternel intervient, là où précisément l'homme accède au sommet de son autonomie et de sa puissance.

Nous sommes en présence du défi ^{que} Dieu porte au défi de l'homme. Le christianisme a été l'attestation de l'Autre Amour, quand l'homme a renoncé à l'amour pour la puissance. Et Dieu ne luttait pas à armes égales, . . . mais tentait d'atteindre au centre même du débat, le cœur, la racine, il tentait de remonter à l'origine de cette aventure pour lui donner une autre origine et lui faire prendre un autre cours. Dès ce choix de Dieu, choix du lieu et choix du sens, le conflit se nouait, l'Occident devenait le lieu du combat spirituel le plus radical, et toutes ses œuvres, ses créations, ses progrès politiques, intellectuels, économiques, techniques, sont le fruit de cette tension, de ce conflit, de cette inlassable rencontre de l'homme qui veut être lui-même et de Dieu qui veut que l'homme soit lui-même, mais ce "lui-même" n'est pas identique dans les deux visions. Il est contradictoire.

Et maintenant? . . . Dans le conflit, après que Dieu avait été traité par ruse et stérilisé en engluant sa révélation dans les habiletés scolastiques et les mensonges politiques, l'homme se trouve soudain muni de moyens si puissants qu'il lui semble ne plus avoir besoin de ruser avec son adversaire, il peut attaquer de front, et pratiquement anéantir tout ce que la Révélation avait tenter d'introduire dans la voie de cette exaltation. Aujourd'hui l'homme semble totalement vainqueur.

Le paradoxe de l'Occident n'existe plus. Il n'y a plus qu'un déroulement plat et incolore. Il n'y a plus qu'un jeu de forces et de mécanismes. Il y a des structures et des systèmes.³³

Ellul does not equate the decline of the West with the end of the world. What he does do is to place the ultimate responsibility for the present crisis with the failure of Christians -- both in the preservation of their society and as God's explicit intermediaries.³⁴ If the Church is to remain the Church, she must heed the warning -- even in a time of abandonment.

The balancing of the various levels of dialectics poses considerable problems for the reader trying to grasp the whole of Ellul. Since it is impossible to say all things at once, one can get the impression that his dialectics camouflage contradictory arguments. Does he jump from pillar to post? The issue reduces to the basis of the ambiguity. Is he self-contradictory in his accounts or are there existing contradictions whose tensions cannot or should not be resolved? If the latter assumption is correct, then he cannot be accused of deliberate obscurantism or of over-simplification. Because he is acutely sensitive to the dangers of distortion in the regimentation of technique, he consciously

³³ *I de l'O*, pp. 82, 86, 91, 91-92, 95. These excerpts do not constitute the whole of his argument, but they do give the general direction of his thought in this area. It should be noted that these comments are also related to the question of the four horses of the Apocalypse, as seen in Part B, Section 2, Chapter 8, for in the West, Christians and Jews have been called to be riders of the first horses. For a similar discussion, see "Notes Préliminaires", pp. 22-23.

³⁴ See also "Le Rapport", p. 155, for a similar argument that Christians and Jews must accept responsibility for the unleashing of the ecological crisis. He does not say that one can understand the reasons for the silence of God: he does say that insofar as they have not made known the truth they have received, the peoples of God are accountable for ensuing disasters.

follows a discursive style and, by and large, separates his social treatises from his theological reflections. Although, at times, the mental dexterity might prove problematic to someone more used to an easy resolution of the question of technique, preferably in neat syllogisms, Ellul's dialectical framework does make him immune from attacks that his theology distorts his sociology.³⁵ Central to an understanding of Ellul's approach is the recognition that the various parts of his publications must not only be seen under the rubrics of analysis and understanding, but also reacted to as confrontation. He sees the technological society as the current triumph of the will-to-power (on every level) that runs roughshod over the acceptance of all dialectical relationships that are conducive to health. Therefore, the final goal of all his writings is to throw this process into question.

c) The Doctrine of the Two Realms as une Mise en Question

Et précisément toute cette étude montrera que Dieu pose sa question à tous les hommes, mais la différence qui peut subsister entre chrétien et non chrétien consiste en ce que le chrétien se sait responsable.³⁶

Car tout cela n'est écrit . . . pour notre satisfaction intellectuelle. . . , mais ils sont le point de départ d'une prise de position concrète, le moyen et l'incitation . . . à prendre une décision. . . et à partir de

³⁵ In this general Conclusion, I am not arguing that he is always correct in his social analyses and in his biblical interpretations. Rather, I want to highlight what he is trying to do, so that the controversies will not fall into false issues. At this particular point, it should be noted that, biographically, (although such an argument does not constitute proof) he adopted Marx's tools of social analysis before his conversion to Christianity.

³⁶ "Le Pauvre", p. 107. See Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7, footnote 12, for a discussion of the double meaning implied in 'responsibility'. Here the emphasis is on question and answer.

là, nous avons la possibilité de choisir notre adhésion ou notre refus.³⁷

These two references sum up Ellul's motivation for writing, as well as the way in which he writes. All of his works, whether sociological or theological, share the common purpose of urging people to come to a decision about their lives. From his whole approach, it is clear that he does not proceed through the presentation of a new or different morality.

But I refuse. . . to offer up some Christian or pre-fabricated socio-political solutions. I want only to provide Christians with the means of thinking out for themselves the meaning of their involvement in the modern world.³⁸

Somewhat differently, he tries to throw into question the assumptions taken for granted in the modern understanding. In conversation, he referred to the proper Christian response to God's question as itself une mise en question of the contemporary world. His own task as a Christian intellectual, he described as une mise en perspective. Whereas in his social analyses, he wants to put the problems of society into perspective, in his theological reflections he wants to put those problems within the context of the biblical revelation. Only when people ask significant questions does he expect any possibility for une prise de conscience. This provocation, particularly to the intellect, is Ellul's public contribution to the dialectics he sees at the core of the doctrine of the two realms. The source of questions about our society revolves around the way he reads the Bible as God's

³⁷ "Notes Préliminaires", pp. 14-15. Although 'tout cela' refers to examples from the book of Revelation, it can legitimately be transferred to Ellul's reflections in general as an attempt to mirror the Bible for this era.

³⁸ Katallagete, p. 5.

questioning of the world.

But we can learn by contemplating the Cross. Thereafter, both the texts of condemnation and commandment find their meaning.

The same is true for the world. I believe that Jesus imparts four significant shades of meaning in the Incarnation: his relation to the Spirit of God; the decision of total obedience to God's will; the choice of non-power; and finally, an abiding openness.³⁹

The Church must reflect this challenge for the rest of creation.

For any such challenge to be successful, it must speak in terms that will strike the listeners at the centre of their actual experience. Otherwise, there is only an abstraction, which, although perhaps formally acceptable, cannot act as a catalyst for change. Therefore, Ellul's accounts of the technological society include concepts such as 'freedom', 'will', 'power', 'the individual' -- expressions that are prevalent throughout modern political thought. He has a subtle and sophisticated awareness of how technical man sees himself and he does not lightly dismiss the presuppositions holding society together. He does, however, try to turn them upside down.⁴⁰ In short,

³⁹ "The World", p. 18. In this reference, one must remember that he sees the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection as inseparable. Also, it must be read considering all of Part B, Section 1.

⁴⁰ Ellul has consistently denied any interest in political philosophy by itself, except to the extent that it provides an accurate description of the collective consciousness and response. For example, in conversation, he said that he studies neither Rousseau nor Nietzsche as philosophers. Nevertheless, he stated that Rousseau's definition of freedom as self-definition has predominated (including the radicalization of Rousseau's position into the belief that man finds his freedom by following the course of history.) Similarly, he thinks that Nietzsche had great clarity about man as will-to-power. In part, their error came, as modern society has shown, from the inability to see that these definitions can lead only to enslavement. Theologically, he said that Rousseau's definition was precisely the lure that Adam and Eve 'fell for' and Nietzsche's account is the definition of original sin. Insofar as Ellul accepts that these activities are what people have always done, he does not start from totally different assumptions. See also Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7 (b).

although the underlying issues are legitimate, he stringently maintains the answers have been wrongly formulated to the point of complete contortion. Ellul wants Christians to recognize what people are seeking and then constantly to contend with all their collective answers.⁴¹ To clarify this conclusion, I shall now briefly summarize what Ellul says about the challenge of God in Jesus Christ to the three foundations of the technological society -- the pursuit of freedom, the maintenance of power and the belief in a stable order.

I've got to be free;
 I've got to be me;
 I'll go it alone,
 All on my own. (Chorus of a popular song)

Ellul agrees with most modern thinkers that the crucial issue is freedom -- especially for the individual. What he confronts is the definition of freedom. Contrary to popular opinion that freedom is rooted in the self, he asserts that true liberty is possible only within the context of obedience. Obedience to God is the only source of liberation; within this relationship there is found no domination. The attempt to be 'all on my own', the attempt to be 'liberated' from God, is a delusion that leads to entanglement with the order of necessity and the principalities and powers.

This non-obedience expresses itself, then, in a closure, a closing! In its estrangement from God, the world withdraws within itself and recognizes only its own imperatives: it is closed to all outside influences. Imperviousness, exclusivity and closure are the perpetual signs of the world, for it entraps man in situations

⁴¹ See, among other examples, "Notes Préliminaires", p. 12; FPK, p. 178; PI, pp. 222-23. Although he deals with specifically modern assumptions, we should remember that he thinks this approach is correct for all ages. See again HTA, p. 86. On any plane, he sees this avenue as the contrary of apologetics.

without exit, all the while promoting itself as an all-fulfilling, all-encompassing system.⁴²

What people want from freedom is important; unfortunately, they do not know what they are doing. Since it is impossible for 'natural' man to know the implications of his fantasies, Christians and Jews must make known what is at stake in the pursuit of freedom. Ellul does not want to expound a new philosophy of freedom; rather, he wants to loosen the grasp of all myths and ideologies that obscure the lack of freedom (and even any modicum of independence) we actually do enjoy.

Les chrétiens n'ont pas le droit de tomber dans le panneau des idéologies et des idéalismes. A ce moment aussi, ils deviennent hypocrites. Ils doivent détruire ces fausses consolations, ces fausses espérances d'abord en eux-mêmes, mais aussi dans le monde qui les entoure. . . . Ce rejet des idéalismes amènera bien entendu à dénoncer les mystifications.⁴³

To impose answers on people, Ellul thinks, is to perpetrate the same error in understanding and the same tendencies against freedom. Thus, as we have seen, a major portion of his task is to unmask the forces at work against any form of freedom. Even the cognizance of the increasing restrictions on the individual can be the source for some response.

Inextricable from the goal of freedom is the question of means. Ellul claims the modern world has accepted the total domination of nature, in every field, as the guarantee of freedom. He

⁴² "The World", p. 19.

⁴³ "Sur le Pessimisme", pp. 173-74. Concerning this reference three points are in order. First, there is a double challenge -- the challenge to Christians to challenge the world. Secondly, later on page 174, he argues that this combat is not a negative one. See also FPK, p. 176. Thirdly, see Part A, Chapter 2, footnote 59, concerning the possible confusion between freedom and independence.

goes to great lengths to underline the eventual folly of any such undertaking. Because I have already reviewed his attitude towards technique as the will-to-power, I shall move to the further issue of the use of power by Christians.

Il est bien exact que toute situation, tout pouvoir, toute puissance doivent être passés au feu de la critique évangélique, et qu'il y a une attitude de rigueur extrême, sur le plan intellectuel et sur le plan éthique à l'égard de tout ce qui exerce une puissance: car l'Evangile (non pas l'Eglise) est une puissance mais ne participe à aucune puissance de ce monde, il les met nécessairement en question, il peut, justement parce qu'il est la bonne nouvelle de la Liberté envers les puissances et de la Seigneurie de Jésus-Christ, que contester et refuser tout ce qui prétend exercer une autorité dernière, tout ce qui se veut pouvoir sur l'homme. Ceci entraîne un radicalisme intransigent à l'égard de toute autorité comme de tout système.⁴⁴

Although Ellul does not think that the Church can strive for her own 'pure' realm, he does want her to stop justifying any one use of force over others. This argument leads back to the error of justification outlined in the foundational chapter (b).

Il s'agit de passer d'une éthique du choix entre des objets que propose le monde, à une éthique de mouvement par rapport aux pouvoirs du monde.⁴⁵

This interpretation precludes any withdrawal from the world, for it is those means that the world has chosen that consistently produce disaster.

Autrement dit la spécificité du christianisme ne conduit jamais à dresser les barrières et des intérêts préalables, à différencier le christianisme en tant que tel, avec des inclusives et des limites, mais se traduit dans le

⁴⁴ "Notes Préliminaires", p. 4. This theme, with special reference to political power is a major concern of EPK.

⁴⁵ "Notes Préliminaires", p. 19. This reference is yet another appeal for a dialectical relationship between the two realms.

mouvement par la décision constante concernant les moyens.⁴⁶

Thirdly, at the root of the formation of any society, he considers the need for order to ensure security in the face of a seemingly chaotic environment. Also, there is the problem of integrating the individual, so that he feels at home in his society. Ellul asks the questions 'What constitutes order?' and 'What is conducive to making the world livable?'. As we have seen, he extrapolates from present trends towards technicization to predict that society will become totally blocked in a way that can lead only to social upheaval and disintegration. In other words, people have so over-compensated that the result will exceed their worst fears about chaos. He maintains that there can be no check as long as people believe that the present route guarantees stability. The challenge here is a negative one which he sees as the only source of significant change entailing wide social repercussions.⁴⁷ Theologically, he argues that the Bible states unequivocally that the true source of order is the will of God. All autonomous human attempts, however rock-like they may seem, always tend towards chaos, le néant, death.

The Gospel miracle is essentially the restoration of God's order which sin has thrown out of kilter. And the city is a symbol of this disorder. She has within her every disorder because she is the great means of the separation between man and God, the place man made to be alone. She is the very centre of the world's disorder, and it is therefore useless to speak to her of order. There is a basic lack of understanding.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ "Théologie Dogmatique", p. 147. See also FPK, pp. 178-79, where he makes the same point using the image of the four horses of the Apocalypse.

⁴⁷ See, for example, A of R, pp. 250-52.

⁴⁸ M of C, p. 119.

The call to Christians, therefore, is to introduce at least an intimation of the order of Christ into the illusory or perverted order of the technological society.

In summary, I will say that calling no longer concerns what we had so long thought it did -- an entry into an order (of life, of the world) willed by God, as such, and to which one adheres by vocation. Rather, calling is an entry into a disorder (though apparently "ordered") established by man, and this disorder will be upset and put into question each time we seek to express our calling.⁴⁹

Thus, what passes as order and security must be challenged, on all levels, in the name of true order and security. This requirement is what he means by calling for the opening of closed situations.⁵⁰

In throwing doubt at the core of the preoccupations of most people, Ellul is on a tight-rope, so that his balancing act is, at best, precarious. One implication is an overlapping of language that can prove troublesome; for example, the power of God and the power of the powers, the possibilities for revolutionary action, separation and reconciliation. Within the context of his overall task, for the most part, these usages do tend to fall into place. A calling into question, without being destructive or dictatorial, is a delicate task. To deny the possibility, for him, is to deny Christian faith including the biblical demands on the intellect. Although the question of God is put to all people and although all people can

⁴⁹ "W and C", p. 16.

⁵⁰ Combined with the reconciliation of individuals, such a defiance of structures and forces can be disruptive only in the eyes of the world. The apparent disruption becomes positive. See, for example, *To Will*, p. 259. Also concerning the opening of closed situations, see "The World", p. 22 and the constant challenge of the people of God who will be rejected, see *L'Apocalypse*, p. 261.

respond in some way, he strongly believes that it is finally to Christians and Jews to whom the explicit responsibility is given. As a Christian intellectual, a watchman for the Church, he puts the question where it belongs.

So it is up to Christians to relativize social, political and economic activities, by the use of a sense of humor, for example. They should avoid the language of exaggeration, of melodrama, of excessive indignation, approaches found so frequently in all the political articles by Christians. Rather it is a matter of great friendliness toward the people who are implicated in these activities, of helping them to understand that the life is worth more than food and the body than clothing, and that in the end all political, economic and social forms, all institutions, all patriotic activity, all resistance movements, all conquests, all liberations, all sociological structures and all businesses are mere clothing. In the last analysis they never attain to life.

I have few illusions. In spite of all precautions, I know very well that [parts] will be used by devotees of the spiritual as a pretext for the cleavage between faith and life. I know very well that those same [parts] will be condemned by others as apolitical and pessimistic. I am fully aware that the [final] proposals . . . will be looked upon as ineffective and academic by those hungry for action, as superfluous by others and as impractical by all.

I know that -- and yet I am determined to write, wondering within myself whether, in this present night in which Christians are assuredly not fulfilling their role as the light of the world, God may not eventually make use of one of these lines to strike a tiny spark.⁵¹

⁵¹ FPK, pp. 210-11. For a reference that all people can respond in some way, see "Le Pauvre", p. 107. See also Part B, Section 2, Chapter 7(b), footnote 36.

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