

## JESUS, ANARCHY AND MARX: THE THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL CONTOURS OF ELLULISM

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Where there is no law, there is no freedom.

—John Locke

Rabbi Hananiah, prefect of the priests, says: Do thou pray for the welfare of the empire, because were it not for the fear that it inspires, every man would eat his neighbor alive.

—*The Mishna*

It is simply true that he who pauses to choose the right word will *find out* what he means to mean, and he who can't will make it clear to his reader that he is ignorant and thoughtless.

—Richard Mitchell, *The Gift of Fire*

Why, then, do men cease to be Communists? One answer is: Very few do.

—Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*

Theologians quickly discover that death and taxes do not exhaust the list of life's inevitabilities. Not only do we die and pay; we think<sup>1</sup>—however well or however poorly. Because such considerations are foundational and pervasive, among the things we cannot avoid thinking about are our relationship to the transcendent, if any, and our relationship to our neighbor, whether near or far away. That is, human nature and human relationships being what they now are, human existence is inescapably theological and political. Thus the question is never whether or not we will have a theology or a political ideology but whether or not the theology and the political ideology we have are any good.

I am convinced that Ellulism—the theology and politics of Jacques Ellul—is seriously defective. It is nevertheless widely held and respected among evangelicals. The burden of this essay, therefore, is to bring its flaws to view and thereby to explain why I believe about it as I do. My agenda will be threefold: (1) to expose its exegetical shortcomings, (2) to

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<sup>1</sup> That thinking is inescapable for some has been memorably depicted in A. Rand, "The Simplest Thing in the World," *The Romantic Manifesto* (New York: New American Library, 1971) 173-185.

reveal its political and philosophical inadequacies, and (3) to trace its ideological roots back to their source.

### I. BIBLICAL ANARCHISM?

According to Ellul, the gospel should not be tied to any prevalent political or economic ideology. To do so, he says, is to degenerate Christianity, which "was originally an anti-ideology."<sup>2</sup> To do so also entails a dangerous conformity to the world, which Ellul sees as a transgression against our freedom in Christ.<sup>3</sup> But Christianity is not the politically or economically ideology-free (or even ideology-neutral) religion Ellul describes. It most assuredly does have political and economic proclivities or tendencies of a definite sort, though they are not the sort Ellul identifies or prefers. To them I will return later. Furthermore Ellul, as a Christian anarchist, does not escape committing the "error" (his word) of fusing Christianity to a political ideology, a practice about which he has warned others. He himself has fused the radical politics of the anarchist left with a skewed vision of Christianity and of Scripture.

Ellul is convinced that both Testaments inculcate the same political theory. That theory, Ellul insists, is anarchism. This he repeatedly declares in the process of "reconciling anarchism and Christianity." "I do not intend," he writes, "to abandon the biblical message in the slightest, since it seems to me . . . that biblical thought leads straight to anarchism— anarchism is the only 'anti-political political position' in harmony with Christian thought."<sup>4</sup> "Both the Old and New Testaments take exception to all political power."<sup>5</sup> "The biblical view is not just apolitical but antipolitical. . . . It refuses to confer any value on political power. . . . It regards political power as idolatrous, inevitably entailing idolatry. Christianity offers no justification for political power."<sup>6</sup> "We must uphold the sure and certain fact that the Bible brings us a message that is against power, against the state, and against politics."<sup>7</sup> By so arguing, however, Ellul has improperly recast the Bible into a left-wing manifesto. This transforma-

<sup>2</sup> J. Ellul, *Jesus and Marx: From Gospel to Ideology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 2. Ellul's view of the allegedly anti-ideological character of Christianity is so extreme that he argues that "God's biblical revelation" is "the destruction of all religions [and] beliefs" (ibid.). That Christianity itself is, on any common-sense view, a religion and entails beliefs seems not to matter.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 157. Note that Ellul's anarchism moves beyond politics without partisanship to politics without politics. Ellul seems undisturbed by the stunning verbal antinomy he has employed here, or by the impossibility of an antipolitical political philosophy, something no more possible or reasonable than an antimathematical mathematics. See also J. Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 4, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 171 (italics added to emphasize Ellul's characteristic practice of overstatement).

<sup>6</sup> J. Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 113-114.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 121. "I believe that the biblical teaching is clear," he adds, "it always contests political power" (ibid. 116).

tion he tries to support with what, to me at least, seem grotesque exegetical contortions that deface the Biblical teaching on government.

1. *Old Testament.* According to Ellul, the OT “always challenges political power in itself where the ‘nations’ are concerned. . . . The government of a foreign people never appears in the Old Testament as legitimate or satisfactory.”<sup>8</sup> But, as is almost embarrassingly obvious, the OT never impugns “political power in itself” among Gentile nations. Rather, it excoriates the abuses those powers sometimes perpetrate. Nor, contrary to Ellul, does the OT challenge the political legitimacy of all foreign regimes, regardless of whether or not the reigning polities were monarchical, oligarchical, or even (as was the case in some portions of ancient Greece) ostensibly democratic. It does not challenge Gentile regimes based upon whether or not those regimes were legitimated, or whether or not they ruled by the free consent of the governed, which, along with hereditary rule (and apart from any direct command of God), seem to me to be the only bases upon which genuine political legitimacy could ever be established. In the OT the question of Gentile political legitimacy is not in view, much less is it always decided in the negative, as Ellul insists. Furthermore the application of the very concept of political legitimacy to OT times and conditions is itself largely anachronistic.

Ellul’s own anarchist assertions, he believes, are taught not only in the OT generally but also specifically in 1 Samuel 8, which he identifies as “the main text” on the issue of political power. The chapter “boils down to three objections” to government, one of which is that “political power is always dictatorial, excessive, and unjust.”<sup>9</sup>

First, Ellul’s assertion that 1 Samuel 8 is the foundational Hebrew passage on this issue is highly debatable if not roundly mistaken. One could argue, as Robert Filmer did three hundred years ago, that Genesis 1 and 2 formed the basis of OT teaching on government and that from those chapters one discerns that the universe itself is both hierarchical and monarchical (not anarchic).<sup>10</sup> What the universe is, written large (as it were), the family is, written small. And government ought to take its cue from the family, of which it was intended to be the national manifestation or extension. The family was monarchical in that the authority of the husband (or father) is singular and unrivaled. The king is and ought to be, Filmer reasoned, the father of his nation and should rule (and be honored) accordingly. The point here is not that Filmer’s monarchicalism is correct.

<sup>8</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 163 (italics his). Ellul here stands over against the Jewish rabbis, both ancient and medieval, one of whom, Menahem ben Solomon Ha-Meiri (1246–1306), comments concerning the epigraph that heads this essay: “Rabbi Hananiah emphasizes that we must pray [on behalf of the government]; and this is intended not merely in behalf of a Jewish government, but in behalf of Gentile ones too.” *The Living Talmud* (ed. J. Goldin; New York: New American Library, 1957) 120 (italics mine).

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 165 (italics mine).

<sup>10</sup> R. Filmer, *Patriarcha; or The Natural Power of Kings*, in J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (ed. T. I. Cook; New York: Hafner, 1947) 249–308.

(I do not think it is. John Locke disposed of that.) The point is that 1 Samuel 8 is not the unquestionably proper point of departure or locus of debate, as Ellul too easily assumes. Nor is the point insignificant for, as Aristotle taught us long ago, he who wishes to succeed must ask the right preliminary questions. The right question here is where properly to begin.

In that light, both Filmer and Ellul notwithstanding, other theologians argue that the place to begin is in Deuteronomy and that the Deuteronomic code itself is an extensive and elaborate constitution<sup>11</sup> for ancient political power, dealing as it does with property rights, family relationships, labor, freedom, and crime and punishment. Among the numerous relevant passages to which those theologians point are Deut 17:8–13 (wherein the Israelites are commanded to obey the judicial decisions rendered by the judges and the Levites, upon pain of death), 16:18–20 (wherein civil judges are expressly said to be given by God), and 17:14–20 (which not only permits an Israelite monarchy and gives rules for its conduct but actually indicates that God himself will select the king). Thus it is not true, as Ellul alleges, that before the incidents in 1 Samuel 8 “the people of Israel have been without political organization”<sup>12</sup> or that human government and political power are always evil and always opposed by God. Instead the case was simply that Israel at that time did not have a human monarch at its head. Prior to 1 Samuel 8 Israel was a theocratic monarchy, not an instance of pre-Christian, divinely-ordained anarchism. This point is underscored by practices in the age of the judges that followed the second giving of the law, an age in which the theocratic monarchy was still (in theory, at least) in full force but in which major portions of political power had been delegated by God himself to human beings and widely dispersed among them. To the advocates of this view the books of Deuteronomy and Judges are pivotal, not 1 Samuel 8.<sup>13</sup>

One could also equally well argue that Genesis 9, wherein capital punishment is prescribed and delegated to humans to enact at their discretion, is the God-ordained origin (and endorsement) of even the most extreme political power, the power of life and death over one’s fellows. Perhaps all Christian theorizing ought to begin there, beneath God’s ancient imprimatur.

Still other exegetes argue that by employing the suzerainty covenant ritual practiced by other nations while himself dealing with the chosen nation of Israel, God was indirectly (though not inadvertently or indiscriminately) endorsing human government and that such passages are crucial, not incidental, to our understanding of OT teaching on political power. Nor have I made mention of such diverse OT texts as Exod 18:13–26 (in which civil judges are appointed to administer God’s statutes), 21:23–25

<sup>11</sup> See *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (ed J H Hertz, London Soncino, 1973) 2 823

<sup>12</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 165 My argument here, of course, in one way depends upon the traditional dating of the Pentateuch In another way, however, it does not, for we are dealing here with the identification of primary passages, or passages of prime importance, not with chronological priority

<sup>13</sup> According to Ellul the rule of the judges was “apolitical” and “nonstatist” (*Subversion* 114)

(the famous *lex talionis* passage requiring human intervention for the proper administration of justice), or 2 Chr 19:5–7 (which indicates, among other things, that judges rule not for man but for God himself).

In short, that 1 Samuel 8 is the pivotal OT text is not at all clear. While theologians commonly find starting points other than 1 Samuel 8, and while those starting points (and the conclusions to which they lead) differ, anarchism is rarely named among them, as Ellul argues it ought to be.

Yet even if one were to begin with 1 Samuel 8 one could not conclude, as does Ellul, that it endorses anarchism or that it teaches that “political power is always dictatorial, excessive, and unjust.” The passage in question deals with Israel’s decision to have a human king once Samuel is gone. Their desire for a human king is spiritually wicked, not because political power is always and everywhere inescapably evil, or because monarchy is inherently vile, but because the Israelites already have God as their king. It simply and plainly is untrue that in 1 Samuel 8 “monarchical organization is formally condemned” or that this chapter condemns it “with ad hoc arguments that are always valid.”<sup>14</sup> This chapter makes no statement whatever about the allegedly universal perversity or dictatorial propensities of political power in general or of monarchies in particular. Ellul’s anarchism cannot be found anywhere in this text. By contending otherwise, Ellul is failing in precisely the same way about which he himself warned others: “Anytime we read the Bible to find arguments or justifications, we wallow in Christian ideology.”<sup>15</sup>

Ellul’s anarchism runs counter not only to the OT but also to the Jewish tradition and liturgy to which it gives rise. Jewish believers, for example, consider it their sacred duty to pray for the welfare of the civil government and of the society of the land in which they happen to live. This duty has been enjoined upon them by the prophet Jeremiah (29:7) and reinforced by the Mishna (*Abot* 3:2: “Pray for the welfare of the government”). The Jewish prayer for the welfare of the ruling powers of state, be they royal, executive, representative, or judicial, is a part of the Sabbath morning service and is recited after the reading of the Torah and before the law scrolls are returned to the ark. According to the *Metsudah Siddur*, this prayer traditionally begins: “He who grants deliverance to kings, and dominion to princes, his kingship is a kingship of all worlds; he who rescued David, his servant, from the evil sword, who put a road through the sea, and a path amid the mighty waters, may he bless, preserve, and guard, help, exalt, and make great, and raise high our sovereign.” Clearly these are not the petitions of anarchism.

2. *New Testament.* Not surprisingly Ellul insists that, like the OT, the NT also teaches anarchism. For example, the miraculous catching of a

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Ellul’s characterization of other portions of the OT are no less unreliable. For example, he believes that the prophets “offer no political opinion” and “never engage in politics at all.” J. Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 373.

<sup>15</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 3.

fish with a coin in its mouth, a coin sufficient to pay the temple tax for both Jesus and Peter (Matt 17:24–27), Ellul describes as an “absurd miracle,”<sup>16</sup> one designed “precisely to show that the obligation to pay the tax is ridiculous.” By it “Jesus held up power to ridicule.”<sup>17</sup> But Jesus’ intention, as he himself clearly indicates, is “not” to “offend” (v. 27). Ridicule is perhaps the furthest thing from his mind—though not apparently from that of Ellul, who goes on to argue that the payment of such taxes is a matter of indifference. We are free to pay or not to pay. “Doctrinally I should not, but out of love I will”<sup>18</sup>—as if the demands of Christian belief and of Christian love were somehow different.

Similarly the standard pro-government views that most theologians take toward Jesus’ famous injunction to give to Caesar those things that are Caesar’s and to God those things that are God’s (Matt 22:21) Ellul characterizes as “unbelievable conclusions.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus’ words, as any “pious Jew of Jesus’ time” would surely recognize, mean that because God is the master of everything “Caesar is the legitimate master of nothing, except for what he makes himself,” and those things “belong to the order of the demonic.”<sup>20</sup> But considering that the question posed in this passage to Jesus by the Jews concerned the right of Caesar to rule the Jewish homeland and not whether or not all government is illegitimate, and considering that the demonic order is nowhere in view, either in this verse or in the entire chapter from which it comes, Ellul’s anarchist conclusions are gratuitous. He is arguing as if all political power is and only could be exercised after a Machiavellian model, as if all political measures were Draconian, and as if the only acceptable alternative to Machiavelli and Draco is anarchy—all of which are patently false. Although Jesus’ words clearly rule out any facile identification of the divine and the political, they do not rule out the political altogether or relegate it to the realm of the irremedi-

<sup>16</sup> *Subversion* 114. Elsewhere Ellul describes this miracle as “somewhat magical and absurd” (*Ethics* 372).

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 167.

<sup>18</sup> *Ethics* 372.

<sup>19</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 167.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 168. See also *Subversion* 114. According to *Anarchy* 58, politics is not only demonic but is also absolutely devilish. He insists that “all that has to do with politics and political authority belongs to the devil. . . . Those who hold political power receive it from him and depend upon him.” This view leads Ellul into a grotesque interpretation of Christ’s assertion to Pilate that Pilate’s political power comes to him “from above” (John 19:11): “Jesus is telling Pilate that his power is from the spirit of evil” (*ibid.* 69). That Caesar (or any government) is not the creator of money, as Ellul seems to think (*Jesus and Marx* 167 ff.), is something economists have known ever since the work of A. Smith and A. Ferguson, who argued that money antedates government and that it arises from human action, not human design. Government eventually recognizes the prevailing medium of human exchange (often rare metals, because they are durable, divisible, and conveniently carried) and then adapts itself and its political mechanisms to it. But government, Caesar included, does not create money. Nor can government even dictate its use, as the United States government discovered at great cost when the American public generally declined to use the newly-minted Susan B. Anthony one-dollar coin. Cf. e.g. A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981), Book 1, chap. 4.

ably perverse. They are, quite to the contrary, an explicit sanction of government, though not of all that governments do. Christ's words indicate the possibility (and implicitly reveal the advisability) of loyalty to both God and government. In no way should this passage be construed as a vilification of all political power for all time and in all circumstances. Such assertions are not the carefully ascertained teaching of the text itself.

When Jesus later declares that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), Ellul again finds what he believes is grist for his anarchist mill. These words teach that "apart from the Kingdom of God, any power exercised is evil" and "should be obliterated." With these words "Jesus . . . launches a fundamental attack on power."<sup>21</sup> But Jesus, of course, has said or done absolutely nothing (here or elsewhere) so politically doctrinaire or irresponsible as that. In fact Jesus tells Pilate something quite the opposite: "You would have no power over me if it were not given you from above" (John 19:11). Pilate's power was political and far-reaching, including even the power to judge matters of life and death. We have it on the highest authority, furthermore, that Pilate's power was given to him by God himself. In other words the dominical utterance to which Ellul alludes has nothing at all to do with the establishment or endorsement of universal political anarchy or the iconoclastic overthrow of all political power. Those things can be found nowhere in Scripture, much less here in John's gospel.

Ellul then dismisses out of hand what most exegetes would identify as the *locus classicus* of NT teaching on government: Paul's word in Romans 13 that we ought to submit ourselves to the governing authorities because, as rulers, they have been established by God himself as a force for good. This passage is "much too celebrated."<sup>22</sup> "This text, it seems to me, should be reduced to its real meaning: rather than giving us the last word on the matter of political authority, it seeks to apply love in a context where Christians detested the authorities."<sup>23</sup> In spite of Ellul's imaginative supposition, we have no evidence whatever that either Paul (who was imprisoned repeatedly by the authorities) or the Roman Christians to whom he wrote ever "detested the authorities." Indeed, some of those to whom Paul addressed his admonition were themselves quite possibly active agents in the government and part of the ruling authority, as a number of Biblical considerations might lead us to believe. Detesting political authority is a characteristic of Ellulism, not of apostolic Christianity.

In short, the anarchism that Ellul espouses and with which he labels both Testaments and Christ himself is not the political ideology of Scripture. It is the yield of Ellul's own anarchic hermeneutic, a hermeneutic that refuses to submit itself to the precise verbal parameters established

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 168.

<sup>22</sup> *Subversion* 113.

<sup>23</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 170. Ellul also fails to deal adequately with NT texts like 1 Cor 6:1-2; Col 1:15-16; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-17, passages he often declines even to mention. He also neglects to mention that the NT teaches that just as God gave Jesus to Israel, so also did he give Israel both judges and kings, such as Saul and David (Acts 13:20-22).

by the language of any given Biblical text. If the Bible entails any sort of political orthodoxy, it is not anarchism.

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ANARCHISM

Because ideas have consequences, and because bad ideas have bad consequences, an anarchistic reading of Scripture is not without its untoward effects. Relying on exegesis of this sort, for example, enables one unabashedly to insist, as does Ellul, that "the state's prosperity always implies the death of innocents" and that "a person can exercise political power only if he worships the power of evil."<sup>24</sup> But, by this logic, voting—the supreme act of power in any democratic republic—would be wicked and ought to be resisted by all Christians as a point of true spirituality and moral responsibility.<sup>25</sup> The same would apply (in most free nations) to paying taxes, to military service, to sending letters (and to delivering them), to pledging allegiance, to testifying in court, to serving on a jury, to filing a lawsuit, or even to purchasing and using a library card at a public library, all of which are exercises of and participation in political power. Furthermore, simply by saying publicly what he does, Ellul himself "worships the power of evil" because the exercise of free speech and of public discourse are political acts of power, as the ancient Greeks well understood and as has been reemphasized in modern times by Leo Strauss and those who identify with Strauss' school of political theorizing, among others. Moreover, because publishing, preaching, teaching, and persuading are powerful political actions, because these avenues of expression are open to Ellul primarily because his government (and others) protect his freedom of speech, his academic freedom, and the freedom of the press, and because Ellul continues to practice those liberties and to value them highly, he must not say that "political power never has any value in itself."<sup>26</sup>

But here as elsewhere Ellul's thought has been misdirected and imprecise. As his exaggerated language frequently indicates, his theological and political beliefs often are inadequately nuanced. For example, Ellul speaks of "the radical incompatibility of the gospel and the state,"<sup>27</sup> which, in light of the fact that he lives in a country that guarantees his right to be-

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 172, 168.

<sup>25</sup> Ellul himself questions the Biblical propriety of voting: "But where do we find the epistles recommending voting at elections . . . ?" (*Ethics* 372; cf. also *ibid.* 374). Cf. *Anarchy* 14: "Should anarchists vote? . . . For my part, I think not. To vote is to take part in the organization of the false democracy that has been set up forcefully by the middle class. No matter whether one votes for the left or the right, the situation is the same." He continues (*ibid.* 15): "Conscientious objection is objection not merely to military service *but to all the demands and obligations imposed by our society*: to taxes, to vaccination, to compulsory schooling, etc." (italics mine). He believes as he does about military service because he mistakenly thinks that there is no "difference between private crime and war" (*ibid.* 39), as if the entire just-war tradition in Christian thought could be dismissed with a wave of the hand as a tragically misguided ruse to justify international thuggery.

<sup>26</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 166.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 171.

lieve as he chooses, and in light of the fact that so many European countries have Christian churches that spread the gospel at home and abroad—churches that are sponsored by the state—is a grossly distorted exaggeration. Had he mentioned only the incompatibility of the gospel and some states, his remark would have been more credible. As it is, however, one has a good deal of difficulty working up any confidence in Ellul's theological and political judgments because of their habitually exaggerated verbal configuration.

But faulty exegesis, internal inconsistency, and imprecise language are only part of the problem of Ellul's anarchism. It is also eminently unrealistic. That is, rather than arising from an observation of what human existence is really like and deducing, as Thomas Hobbes did in the seventeenth century, that life in a fallen world is typically nasty, brutish, and short, and rather than tying his political theorizings to that fundamental diagnostic fact, Ellul seeks to foist onto an already ruptured world an ineffective anarchic vision unchecked by human reality or the Biblical text. In other words, because it is not subject to the dictates of any external restraint Ellul's political theory in effect is epistemologically anarchistic.

Put differently, Ellul has succumbed to what Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, former United States ambassador to the United Nations, has characterized as the unfortunate disjunction between political ideas and human experience. When such disjunctions develop, she says, irresponsible political and economic theories proliferate. These theories, which she labels "the rationalist perversion," "tend . . . to be abstract and unembarrassed by the need for empirical indicators of their major assumptions." "Rationalist theories are speculative rather than empirical and historical; rationalist reforms seek to conform human behavior to oversimplified, unrealistic models."<sup>28</sup> Rationalist theoreticians ignore the fact that human institutions arise out of human behavior and that human behavior is notoriously intractable. This same ideological unperturbedness describes Ellul, who is undaunted by the acknowledged unlikelihood, perhaps impossibility, of his anarchistic political vision:

We must not become discouraged, if our anarchist declaration fails to lead to an anarchist society, or if it does not overthrow society, destroying its whole framework. . . . In spite of everything, in spite of this human reality, we want to destroy power. *This is the Christian hope in politics.*<sup>29</sup>

All this flies in the face of historic Christian wisdom both ancient and modern, and it ignores the fact that Christianity is, as it were, a reality

<sup>28</sup> J. J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 10–11.

<sup>29</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 174–175 (italics his). Ellul has apparently not noticed that the startling term "anarchist society" seems to constitute an oxymoron. That his anarchist vision is impossible and impractical, and that he holds it nevertheless, Ellul readily admits in *Anarchy* 19: "The true anarchist thinks that an anarchist society—with no state, no organization, no hierarchy, and no authorities—is possible, livable, and practicable. But I do not. In other words, I believe that the anarchist fight, the struggle for an anarchist society, is essential, but I also think that the realizing of such a society is impossible."

game. The Bible deals with real people in a realistic fashion. It stares directly upon human nature and does not blink. Jesus, as C. S. Lewis rightly perceived, was a thoroughgoing realist, though he is seldom given credit for being so. Augustine, while he understood perhaps better than anyone that the city of man could never become the city of God, never slid from anti-utopianism into anarchism.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, far from being an anarchist, was an ardent proponent of the *respublica hominum sub Deo*. He believed that the proper purpose of human law was to propose and to uphold the ideal of good conduct and to help habituate men toward its performance. By doing so, however, Aquinas was not therefore an idolater of the state, contrary to Ellul's verdict on those who hold such a view. Thomas knew that "no matter what high ideals, how fine the structures and laws, how good and beneficent the ruler, the political community is no substitute for . . . religion" and that "politics is not a way of salvation." He also knew that "for the Christian, politics is neither all-important nor unimportant." In short, Aquinas understood what Ellul does not: The Christian "cannot let politics fall to the perverters by default."<sup>31</sup> Even Dante, perpetually abused as he was by government, argued to subject the world to one state.<sup>32</sup> Ellul by contrast unrealistically argues to eliminate political power altogether. Calvin, too, understood the realism and practical wisdom of a God who works in our world on our behalf, and therefore he set about actively trying to bring the revealed will of God to bear upon the political and social concerns of Geneva.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For an introduction to Augustine's political views see H. A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University, 1963); R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970). Unlike Ellul, "Augustine envisioned the total Christian society, with believers having essentially captured all nominally secular institutions, including government." See D. Bandow, *Beyond Good Intentions: A Biblical View of Politics* (Westchester: Crossway, 1988) 125. Ellul regards the views of Augustine and those thinkers whom I name subsequently as grossly mistaken. In *Anarchy* 7, Ellul insists that "we have to eliminate two thousand years of accumulated Christian errors, or mistaken traditions."

<sup>31</sup> C. Kossel, "Some Limits of Politics," *Essays on Christianity and Political Philosophy* (ed. G. W. Carey and James V. Schall; Lanham: University Press of America, 1984) 35, 38-39. For an introduction to Thomas Aquinas' political views see F. Aveling, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Papal Monarchy," *The Social and Political Ideas of Some Great Mediaeval Thinkers* (ed. F. J. C. Hearnshaw; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967 [1923]) 85-106; E. L. Fortin, "St. Thomas Aquinas," *History of Political Philosophy* (ed. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981 [1963]) 223-250; G. H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Henry Holt, 1937) 247-257.

<sup>32</sup> For an introduction to Dante's political views see E. Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1963) 162-224; T. G. Bergin, *Dante* (New York: Orion, 1965) 177-194; J. Burnham, *The Machiavellians* (New York: John Day, 1943) 1-26; and Dante's own *On World Government* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957 [1949]).

<sup>33</sup> For an introduction to Calvin's political views and to those of Calvinism in general see W. F. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1971); W. C. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva* (Allison Park: Pickwick, 1983); H. Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982); E. W. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: John Wiley, 1967); *Calvinism and the Political Order* (ed. G. L. Hunt; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965).

Ellul's is just the sort of impracticable and unbiblical political philosophy that Karl Rahner criticized for mortgaging the present for the sake of a generation of people who were never born and who never will be.<sup>34</sup> As the old maxim indicates, politics is the art of the possible. It is not an impractical affair disconnected from human reality. Christian political theory, to paraphrase Algernon Sidney, does not seek for that which is perfect, because it knows that such a thing is not to be found among men. Rather, it seeks that form of government that is attended with the fewest and most pardonable shortcomings, and it knows that anarchism is not the form it seeks. Christian political theory deals with possibilities, not with unreachable goals or with speculations about the politics of the *eschaton*, at least as we imperfectly anticipate them.

Furthermore, simply because human government is imperfectible, Christian political theorists and politicians do not relegate politics and the state to the secularists and to the secular, as does Ellul, who writes that we do not "have to work out a Christian doctrine of the form of government or the economy," and that "another way that is closed [to Christians] is that of wanting to christianize society or the state. The state is not meant to be Christian. It is meant to be secular."<sup>35</sup> To Ellul, participation in politics and in the structures of "the powers that be" form no necessary part of Christian life and faith. "In fact, no directly biblical or theological argument seems to support participation."<sup>36</sup>

The proliferation of views like Ellul's has had a disastrous effect. Partly because Christianity is made to seem not only unpolitical but anti-political, most universities feel free to construct an entire curriculum in political theory that operates as if Christianity were either nonexistent or else an accumulation of merely irrelevant data that can be safely ignored. Theology seems to them to have no bearing upon the integrity or content of the discipline of political science. Yet Ellul appears not to understand that, because they are the chief mechanisms of providing and preserving liberty, peace and prosperity, the state and political power cannot be considered a matter of indifference by responsible Christians, or something from which Christians can detach themselves with moral impunity, as if such institutions and concerns were theologically neutral or somehow fell outside the scope of necessary Christian action and reflection.<sup>37</sup> Ellul does

<sup>34</sup> Ellul is well aware that he stands over against mainstream Christian wisdom on this issue, which he calls "the Constantinian heresy" of aligning the affairs of the Church with those of the state. He contends, with typical overstatement and imprecision, that "Christianity's historical sin has been to recognize the state. This sin continues, no matter what form the state takes, no matter who holds power" (*Jesus and Marx* 172).

<sup>35</sup> *Ethics* 375. Elsewhere Ellul writes that "it is idealistic and fanciful to think that Christianity can permeate or modify the structures of society." *What I Believe* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 43.

<sup>36</sup> *Ethics* 374. Ellul sometimes writes as if he thinks Christians can properly participate in the political but not in politics. The difference is merely semantic. He has simply substituted an adjective for a noun.

<sup>37</sup> Surely Adam Smith is correct when he says, "The administration of the great system of the universe [and] the care and happiness of all rational and sensible beings is the business of

not understand that, while the political considerations surrounding life, liberty and property (to invoke the Lockean triad) are not of ultimate or transcendent importance, they have a genuine significance that cannot be downplayed or made to appear as beyond the purview of Christian revelation and theology. That such considerations are not ultimate concerns should lead us to advocate a limited state, not no state whatever. Ellul has not come to grips with the fact that no evidence exists that demonstrates that the anarchist principles he advocates would make the world more free, more prosperous, or more secure. To procure these desirable political and economic conditions requires "the active presence and participation of the Christian in the affairs of state and society,"<sup>38</sup> not the radical secularization of all political endeavors. Secularization is the enemy of modern Christianity, not its political ally.

As John Stuart Mill once chided Jeremy Bentham, the cardinal error in most misguided political theories is the belief that politics can be reduced to a few simple, overarching formulas, a reduction that leads to an inflexible (and often universal) misapplication of half-true truisms, much to the distress and disadvantage of those upon whom they are imposed. Ellul's anarchism is just such a simplistic theory. What he does not seem to understand about his call to abolish all power is the self-stultifying fact that the abolition of power can be accomplished, imposed and maintained only by means of power. As Baron de Montesquieu observed more than two centuries ago, it takes a power to check a power. Freedom never was, is not now, nor ever shall be (so far as we have evidence to tell) possible without political power.

Freedom and political power are not antithetical realities in a fallen world. Ellul seems not to recognize that there can be no freedom without justice and that in a fallen world there can be no justice without power. He seems not to understand that while freedom is in most cases a desirable political condition, anarchism is simply freedom gone to seed. It is freedom improperly extended beyond the boundaries of political wisdom and foresight, the two indispensable characteristics of any good political theory. There is no freedom without order, and there is no order without law and law enforcement. As Goethe has observed, only law can give us freedom. Freedom without law endures as long as a lamb among hungry wolves. Therefore, because order is a political requirement of the first rank, if anything in politics is demonic it is not Caesar or money (as Ellul says): It is that spirit that cannot bear authority and seeks to destroy it utterly.

In that light I am reminded of G. K. Chesterton's politically illuminating tale, *The Yellow Bird*, in which the zealous Russian, Professor Ivan-

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God, and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension—the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country." *The Wisdom of Adam Smith* (ed. J. Haggerty; Indianapolis: Liberty, 1976) 38. For the care and nurture of such things, Ellul's anarchist principles are clearly insufficient.

<sup>38</sup> T. Molnar, "The Medieval Beginnings of Political Secularization," *Essays* (ed. Carey and Schall) 53.

hov, the author of an intoxicating tract for the times entitled *The Psychology of Liberty*, “emancipates” a fish by smashing its bowl and “liberates” a canary from its cage—only to see it torn to pieces in the nearby woods.

Because moral order in society is predicated upon virtue and not merely upon freedom, the absence of virtue is far more troubling to a Christian political theorist than is the presence of power. For the sake of virtue alone, therefore, one must resist the drive to abolish all power. The variously coercive powers of family, of Church, of state and of school are not inimical to virtue. Rather, they help secure it and make it possible. The eradication of all power results not in virtue, order, or prosperity, but in chaos. Unencumbered freedom (even freedom hiding behind the adjective “Christian”) is not the political panacea or objective toward which we ought to be ineluctably moving. Instead we should desire to do what must be done and what can be done, both of which require power. Political freedom, while itself highly desirable, is largely neutral with regard to the advancement of moral virtues and can be detrimental to them. The abolition of political and economic power is not the inescapable precondition of virtue, either that of the powerful or that of the powerless. In fact the withering of political and economic institutions has often been the precondition of history’s most heinous misdeeds, as it was during the French Revolution. In light of such considerations, therefore, Christians need to realize that the alternative to totalitarianism and to statism is not simply anarchism. As the framers of the American Constitution understood, our guiding principle ought to be a rule of law, not of men, and our political objective ought to be a limited government, not no government at all. By radicalizing politics the way it does—that is, by advocating anarchism in the face of the fact that human beings are inescapably political and societal by nature<sup>39</sup>—Ellulism goes Niebuhr one better: It posits not simply a Christ against culture, but a Christ against creation.

Destruction of the state is the opiate of anarchists. It has no part in the Christian agenda. It cannot produce a better world; it can only destroy the one that is. That is why Ellul’s anarchistic vision is unfit for human habitation. It relentlessly confuses the force of law with the law of force.

But if, as I have argued, Ellul’s political ideology does not derive from Scripture, from whence does it arise? And if it does not resemble the teaching of the Bible or of historic Christianity, to what does it bear the greatest affinity? The answer to both questions is the same: Marxism. Ellulism has Marxist roots and Marxist branches. That is, Ellulism shares with Marxism a plethora of presuppositions, methods and conclusions.

<sup>39</sup> Ellul denies that human beings are either political or social creatures by nature: “I believe that for millennia people lived as though grafted upon the natural environment, and that at that time they were not social animals” (*What I Believe* 101). For an assertion that political institutions and relationships also are unnatural see his discussion on the following page. For an interesting alternative to Ellul’s idiosyncratic views concerning the social nature of man see E. Jungel, *Theological Essays* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1989) 139 ff.

Because it has been done so well and so often,<sup>40</sup> to refute each of Ellul's capitulations to Marxism would both fall outside the scope of this article and be a useless redundancy. I simply say here that both Ellulism and Marxism are characterized by an ideological correspondence that includes (but is by no means limited to) agreement in the following concepts, procedures, and goals, the delineation of which will be the focus of the final portion of this essay.

### III. MARXIST ROOTS AND BRANCHES

Historians of Christian thought have repeatedly noticed the difference between the theology and piety of Martin Luther and those of Huldreich Zwingli, the two greatest of the first generation of Protestant Reformers. Luther's theological distance from Rome, while considerable, is markedly less than Zwingli's. This difference scholars often account for by noting that, prior to his conversion to Protestantism, Zwingli was never the intensely ardent Roman Catholic that Luther once was. Thus while Luther brought with him into Protestantism all of his Catholicism that the Bible did not expressly prohibit, Zwingli brought of his only what the Bible expressly commanded. To the Zwinglians, Luther's break with Rome was imperfect and incomplete because he continued to tolerate what to them was too much Roman residue.

This inability or unwillingness to make a sufficient break with one's own past is not an isolated phenomenon. For example, scholars also have noticed the Manichean inclinations of the mature Augustine and the lingering Rosicrucianism in Charles Williams' Christian novels. Jacques Ellul too, it seems to me, has made an imperfect and insufficient break from his own Marxist past and from the ideology that necessarily attaches to it, as the following observations will indicate.

<sup>40</sup> The literature on the inadequacies of socialism in general and of Marxism in particular on the one hand, and of the comparative superiority of capitalism on the other, is enormous. See D. Conway, *A Farewell to Marx* (New York: Penguin, 1987); F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1944; even though Hayek has been honored as the Nobel laureate in economics, Ellul insists that the fundamental premise of this book is one that "no one accepts"; J. Ellul, *The Technological Society* [New York: Vintage, 1964] 178); *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960); L. von Mises, *Socialism* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics); E. von Böhm-Bawerk, *The Exploitation Theory of Socialism-Communism* (South Holland: Libertarian, 1975); *Shorter Classics of Böhm-Bawerk*, (South Holland: Libertarian, 1962) 200-302; H. W. B. Joseph, *The Labor Theory of Value in Karl Marx* (London: Oxford University, 1923); M. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962); T. R. Machan, *Marxism: A Bourgeois Critique* (Bradford: MCB University, 1988); T. Sowell, *Marxism: Philosophy and Economics* (New York: William Morrow, 1985); F. Bastiat, *Selected Texts on Political Economy* (Irvington-on-Hudson: Foundation for Economic Education, 1964). For capitalist values and presuppositions as Christian or as compatible with Christian belief and practice see G. Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Bantam, 1981); *Is Capitalism Christian?* (ed. Franky Schaeffer; Westchester: Crossway, 1985); R. H. Nash, *Poverty and Wealth: The Christian Debate Over Capitalism* (Westchester: Crossway, 1986); M. Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). For an account of Marx's own personal failings see P. Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper, 1988) 52-81.

1. *Human alienation.* Rather than endorsing the version of alienation expressed by such Christian thinkers as Luther, Schleiermacher, or Kierkegaard (not to mention Paul), Ellul opts for the version articulated by Marx, a version that is not only Ellul's "starting point" on the subject but a version he characterizes as "perspicacious and even prophetic." "I firmly believe that it is in terms of the tradition that goes back to Marx that we must consider man's present condition."<sup>41</sup>

2. *Anti-capitalism.* Like Marx, Ellul views free-market capitalism as a radically flawed, even internally contradictory economic system. It is riddled with exploitative malfunctions so great that they cannot be considered mere imperfections in an otherwise harmonious and productive system. Also like Marx, Ellul believes that capitalism has produced a class of workers who, because they live by wages, are related to their employers by a cash nexus, which reduces their capacity to work to the subhuman level of a mere commodity,<sup>42</sup> something Marx characterized as wage slavery. Ellul rarely rises above the standard Marxist caricatures of capitalism. For example, he states that "massacres" are "required to maintain capitalism," that "workers" are "starved by the capitalist system," and that for the Christian "allegiance to capitalism is virtually impossible."<sup>43</sup> Capitalism's alleged failures aside, both Marx and Ellul have been forced to acknowledge its unparalleled powers of production.

3. *Determinism.* In some cases Ellul not only agrees with Marx but also surpasses him, as he does on the question of human freedom. According to Marx: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness."<sup>44</sup> But Ellul believes that

in this regard we need to probe much deeper than Marx did in his criticism of formal democracy. . . . For our choice is never free. We are conditioned by a number of factors that cause us to elect this or that representative, to sign this or that manifesto, to buy this or that newspaper. The man who chooses is always alienated man, man subject to many necessities. Hence his choice is not an exercise of freedom. For it is not he who chooses. The choice is made by his cultural setting, his upbringing, his environment, and the various psychological manipulations to which he is subject.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Ethics* 24, 26–27. Later in the same text (p. 48) he writes that "one of the merits of Marx is to have brought to light the universal character of alienation."

<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.* 500 ff. Capitalism's power to produce goods and services and its ability to raise the standards of living of those that live under it Ellul judges as detrimental or evil (*What I Believe* 61 ff.). Elsewhere Ellul states: "Capitalism is a historical fact that is obsolete. It may well last another century, but it has no more historical importance" (*In Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul* [San Francisco: Harper, 1982] 176). In a similar vein Ellul writes: "Capitalism, in spite of all its power, will be crushed by . . . automatism" (*The Technological Society* 82). Ellul's understanding of capitalism is abysmally distorted.

<sup>43</sup> J. Ellul, *Money and Power* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984) 14, 16, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Sabine, *History* 695.

<sup>45</sup> *Ethics* 113.

4. *Money.* Like Marx before him, Ellul believes that money is an inescapably and universally alienating power, one that estranges both those who have it and those who do not. Concerning the role and function of money in society, Ellul believes that "the analysis of Marx is perfectly correct."<sup>46</sup>

5. *Dialectical methodology.* Like Marx, Ellul believes that only the dialectical method is able to deal successfully with the continuously changing data with which reality presents us. To both Marx and Ellul, dialectical analysis is indispensable. "I am a dialectician above all. I believe nothing can be understood without dialectical analysis."<sup>47</sup> In order to rescue the Biblical writers (who, at least on a consensus view, lived prior to the era of dialectics and apart from its influences) from the wholesale dismissal that this radical view entails, Ellul quite remarkably claims that the dialectical method can be traced back to its beginnings with the Hebrew prophets in the eighth century BC. Ellul in effect even goes so far as to jettison in principle almost the entire tradition of Biblical exegesis: "Only dialectical thinking can give a proper account of scriptural revelation, such revelation itself being fundamentally and intrinsically dialectical."<sup>48</sup>

6. *Revolution and liberation.* At times Ellul sacrifices Marx's opinions for Lenin's, as he does when he compares Leninism's view of revolution and liberation to his own view of the work of Christ:

It seems to me that the familiar analysis of Marx, according to which a revolution consonant with the meaning of history brings liberation to the alienated, offers points of similarity but cannot be used because it insists on self-liberation. Lenin's doctrine is better in this regard, since it gives the party a mediatorial role on behalf of the proletariat. The work of the party with reference to the alienation of the proletariat corresponds figuratively to that of Jesus Christ with regard to the alienation of man. Since the proletariat cannot liberate itself with its feelings of revolt and spontaneous reactions, the work must be done from above. The proletariat comes into the act when it recognizes the reality and is thus in effect de-alienated already. Along these

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 38; cf. also *ibid.* 154; *Money and Power* 20. Furthermore, as K. L. Billingsley pungently comments, "Unlike Christian writers such as Jacques Ellul and Tony Campolo, I don't believe that money is evil in itself. (Strange that, believing this, these people don't give their books or videos away free of charge.)" *The Seductive Image: A Christian Critique of the World of Film* (Westchester: Crossway, 1989) 77. The same criticism of Ellul has been made at greater length and with more force in Nash, *Poverty and Wealth* 157–163.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in D. B. Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul* (Lanham: University Press of America) 24.

<sup>48</sup> J. Ellul, "Epilogue: On Dialectic," *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (ed. C. G. Christians and J. M. Van Hook; Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981) 297. The same essay appears in slightly modified form in *What I Believe* 29–46. In it (p. 29) he writes that "dialectic is so much a part of my way of thinking and being that [when I talk about it] I am talking about myself and my studies rather than about an academic mode of exposition or a philosophy." See p. 35 for his assertion concerning ancient Hebrew dialectics. According to Ellul, both "Christianity and biblical thought are dialectical" (*In Season, Out of Season* 202). As D. W. Gill comments: "Ellul's thought . . . is thus very *dialectical*." See *Money and Power* 8.

lines the work of Jesus Christ is a revolutionary action in the sense that it is a revolt against alienating forces.<sup>49</sup>

Time and space would fail were I to identify the full range of Ellul's Marxisms, including as it does Marxist assumptions on such things as the nature of religion, sociological nomenclature (and the Marxist taxonomy of class structure and class struggle, as well as the Marxist class analysis that attaches to it), egalitarianism, socialism, the nature of merchandise, and sociopolitical revolution, among many others. One does not wonder, therefore, that Ellul pronounces Fernando Belo's leftist revolutionism a political choice "which we do not question," or that Ellul believes that Belo's view of the "radical opposition between God and Money, God and the State" and "God and Caesar" is not only true but "truly evangelical."<sup>50</sup> Nor is it at all surprising that in Ellul's *The Ethics of Freedom* Karl Marx is the most often-quoted author, even though this is a text on Christian ethics and even though Marx is not a Christian.<sup>51</sup> One can tax Ellul with the same charge he himself levels at Belo: He "appears not to suspect [that] Marx's thought is a whole—a precise, integrated unit, based on a thorough method. Once one has adopted it, one cannot mix it with other methods and concepts." Nevertheless Ellul himself adopts Marxist "methods and concepts" and believes that Belo's choice to be a Communist "clearly merits our respect."<sup>52</sup>

It does not.

Not all, perhaps not even most, of the choices humans make are respectable or are worthy of a Christian's considered approval. Some choices are ignorant and inadequately informed, some are counterproductive, some are wicked. Belo's attachment to Marxist principles is all these things. It is no more admirable than the choice to become a slave trader, which I consider to be very much the same thing. Marxism has been the ideological justification for the imprisonment, enslavement, destitution and murder of countless millions of human beings. It has spawned the most atrocious crimes of history, and its marriage to colossal evil seems both indissolvable and inevitable. Marxism's historic evil towers over all others. In the last thirty years more human beings have been murdered between the western borders of East Germany and the eastern shores of China under Marxism, in all its partial and plenary forms, than in the entirety of the rest of recorded history, stretching back as it does more than four millennia. When compared to Stalin's penchant for mass extermination, even Hitler seems an amateur.

But am I inventing a Marxist Ellul? Not at all. As Ellul himself confesses, he was converted to Marx after reading *Das Kapital* in his teens. Reading Marx "answered almost all the questions I had been asking myself. It seemed to me that the method of Karl Marx . . . was superior to all that I had

<sup>49</sup> *Ethics* 68.

<sup>50</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 86, 89.

<sup>51</sup> If Ellul's index is to be trusted, Marx is cited 44 times (p. 513), or nearly as many times as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (and therefore Jesus) combined.

<sup>52</sup> *Jesus and Marx* 94, 86.

encountered elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> Nor has Ellul's attachment to Marxism proven merely the skewed judgment or passing infatuation of an uninformed youth. Ellul has "remained unable to eliminate Marx."<sup>54</sup> "I totally agree with a Marxism that offers a method of interpretation—one of the best interpretations, in fact, I believe the best—of the world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."<sup>55</sup> Ellul himself boasts that large and significant portions of his own work and the methodology by which he produced it is consciously patterned after that of Marx: "I was certain, absolutely certain, that if Marx were alive in 1940 he would no longer study economics or the capitalist structures, he would study Technique. So I began to study Technique, using a method as similar as possible to the one Marx used a century earlier to study capitalism."<sup>56</sup> Ellul identifies Karl Marx and Karl Barth as the twin fountains of his own twofold intellectual origin.<sup>57</sup>

In short, a man who does not reject socialism,<sup>58</sup> egalitarianism, or the dissolution of the state, but who does reject the teachings of the historic Christian Church and the legitimacy of every government, past or present, regardless of its form, its history, or its ideals, has not really rejected Marxist ideology—despite his claims to the contrary. Simply by distancing himself from other Marxists, Ellul has not thereby distanced himself from Marxist ideology. He has merely subjected it to a marginal reconstruction, as if Marxist methods of analysis could be separated from their philosophical presuppositions and their ideological underpinnings and implications, and as if Marxist methods came from nothing and led nowhere. When Ellul opposes the Marxists, it is still an intracamp affair. When he attacks Communist ideologues, he puts his own work under siege. He is not sufficiently alarmed by the pervasive Marxist ideology of his own position.<sup>59</sup>

The crisis in Ellul's thought is that there is no crisis in Ellul's thought, much less a proper resolution.

<sup>53</sup> J. Ellul, "From Jacques Ellul," *Introducing Jacques Ellul* (ed. J. Holloway; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 5. As Ellul himself recounts the event elsewhere: "I borrowed *Das Kapital* from the library and started reading it, you can easily see that the effect this reading had on me was not purely due to chance. I was eighteen years old. I discovered a global interpretation of the world, the explanation for this drama of misery and decadence that we had experienced. The excellence of Marx's thinking, in the domain of economic theory, convinced me" (*In Season, Out of Season* 11).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

<sup>57</sup> See *What I Believe* 30; "Epilogue" 292.

<sup>58</sup> "I like the Socialists, . . . and I could wish that they would bring about a true Socialist revolution, as I have often said" (*ibid.* 8). "I regard anarchism as the fullest and most serious form of socialism" (*Anarchy* 3).

<sup>59</sup> My recitation of Ellul's Marxisms in this article is far from complete. One could also add, as Ellul himself does, that both his reluctance to offer political solutions for current problems and his dramatic style of political exposition consciously follow the example set by Marx. See *In Season, Out of Season* 196, 223. Among his numerous other Marxisms Ellul also identifies "Marx's analysis of democracy, which I hold to be true" (*The Technological Society* 403). All this notwithstanding, pro-Ellul evangelicals continue to resist any linkage of Ellulism with its pervasively Marxist roots.