

“A Study on Jacques Ellul’s Dialectical Approach to the Modern and Spiritual World.”

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A. Introduction

Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) is Professor of the University of Bordeaux, a well-known French Philosopher, Sociologist and Theologian, has written over 40 books and 800 articles. Ellul's writings covered multiple disciplines: history, law, sociology, politics and theology. Because of his strong sociology training and background, his approach to theology gives him a unique perspective compare to other theologians. Instead of just focusing on the historical, terminological and spiritual aspects of theology, Ellul analyzes the society through the impact made by media, money, politics and technology. He uses these subjects as a tool to build up his theology structure. Flashing described Ellul’s dominant theme is “the threat to human freedom and Christian faith created by modern technology.”¹ Ellul’s work gave some important insight to the modern world as well as the spiritual world. In order to understand Ellul’s theological writing and thoughts, it is essential to understand the context of his works in sociology, especially his theological response to the technological society. In this paper, I will study Ellul’s dialectical approach to the Modern and Spiritual world, and illustrate the significant of Ellul’s sociological and theological thoughts. I will also discuss how Ellul goes beyond merely a sociology spectrum and study his attempt to integrate sociology and theology. Through this study, I would like to discover some of Ellul’s implications for today’s society and reflect on how we should respond to the challenge in the 21st century.

B. Background

1. Influence by Marx and Barth

Karl Marx has a deep influence in Ellul’s sociological thinking. In the early 1930s, Ellul was himself a committed Marxist at age of 19. However, Ellul’s attraction to Marxism does not involve in political activism, therefore he does not situate himself in a closed Marxist paradigm.² Yet Marx has strong influence in some of Ellul’s main ideas. Besides the development in terms of sociological theories, Marx has made Ellul sensitivity to the special significance of technique and technology as problems in contemporary social development.³ The most enduring connection between Marx and Ellul is the dialectic approach to social analysis and criticism.⁴ Indeed, Marx’s thinking has influence Ellul greatly in the area of social, political and economical problems. But Ellul takes the dialectic method beyond strict Marxist concern; he has established some distinctive scholarship by insisting that dialecticism is a means for seeing the reality of life in technological societies.⁵ I will further look into the dialectical approach in his thinking later on.

Since Marx could not answer some of Ellul’s existential concerns, Ellul underwent what he calls a violent and brutal conversion to Christianity.⁶ At the age of 22, Ellul becomes a Christian. But we must notice Ellul even after his conversion to Christianity; he still appreciates how Marx has influenced him on the interpretation of sociology. Therefore it is important to understand what Ellul calls his “double conversion” to Marx and Christianity.⁷ And this provides Ellul a special approach of integrating his sociology and theology thinking.

¹ D. J. Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), 1.

² Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶ D. B. Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 25

⁷ Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, 39.

Theologically, Ellul has been greatly influenced by Karl Barth's dialectic theology, for the most part in the area of biblical exposition and dogmatics.⁸ Even though Ellul himself doesn't view himself as "an unconditional Barthian", he follows Barth's dynamic concepts of Word of God whereby "Scripture or preaching is God's Word only as God himself speaks through it in living power."⁹ Ellul's discussion of the freedom of Word is also related to Barth, what Barth has written about this topic in *Church Dogmatics*. As Ellul comments on his own work: "Whenever the witness of Holy Scripture is received and accepted, man has a freedom and power which... correspond to the freedom and power of the Word of God itself."¹⁰ Another significant similarity about Barth and Ellul is on biblical exposition, which must be primary Christological.¹¹ An example of Ellul's Christological understanding is in the story of Jonah, which Jesus reference to Jonah as a sign of himself.¹²

Besides the connection in biblical interpretation, Barth also influences on Ellul's theological themes such as Christ's reconciling death and resurrection, and the distinction between salvation and freedom.¹³ The theological belief of salvation and freedom enables Ellul to describe the present situation the same way Barth does, suggesting even Christ has won the victory over Satan, yet Satan's power continues to affect the world we are living in.¹⁴ This topic of principalities and powers in the world is a major theological theme in Ellul's work. We should take notice that Ellul also develops on Barth's idea and expand his own original work theologically.¹⁵

Although the influence of Barth is central to Ellul's theology and ethics, Ellul criticizes Barth for his lack of social realism in the modern world. Ellul complains, "As Barth aged in small and conservative Switzerland he lost touch with the rapidly emerging world of technocracy, so that his ethical recommendations, however sound in principle, were almost completely unworkable in practice."¹⁶ We can observe the area of sociological analysis and response in contemporary society are the focus on Ellul's theological thinking and where he mainly disagrees with Barth. As Ellul put a strong emphasis on how Christians should respond to the challenges from the modern technological society. This is one of the major concerns in Ellul's work that one should notice.

Overall, we can clearly observe that Karl Marx, on the social scientific level, and Karl Barth, on the theological level, combine to form the roots of Ellul's dialectical method.¹⁷

2. Ellul's Dialectic Method

Ellul's thoughts and writings are based on a dialectical approach. We can view his extensive writing as a single project with a dialectical structure comprising his two different strands of work: sociology and theology.¹⁸ Ellul is intensively devoted to a dialectical method, he believe nothing can understand without dialectical analysis.¹⁹ He strongly believes that dialectic "always claims to have to do with the real, to be a means of taking account of the real."²⁰ As Ellul described,

"Dialectic, then is not just a way of reasoning by question and answer. It is an intellectual way of

⁸ Christians, *Jacques Ellul*, 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ J. Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 66.

¹¹ Christians, *Jacques Ellul*, 38.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Christians, *Jacques Ellul*, 47-48.

¹⁷ Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, 25.

¹⁸ A. Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World: The Life and Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2002), 57.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰ Ellul, Jacques, "Epilogue: On Dialectic," in *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 293.

grasping reality, which embraces the positive and the negative, white and black... It includes contradictory things that do not exclude one another but coexist. Hence a system of vigorous thought ought to take account of both the yes and the no without ruling out either, without choosing between, since every choice excludes on part of reality.”²¹

Therefore in Ellul’s theological approach, this biblical dialectic states both the NO and the YES of God’s work over the world. It also brings both God’s judgment and his grace into dialectic, which can be illustrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.²² As discussed above, Ellul deeply believes that theology requires a strong association with the contemporary society which is under strong influence of technology. Therefore, his theological approach has to be done by “a confrontation of scriptural revelation and theological insight with a detailed sociological analysis of humanity’s present situation.”²³

This confrontation between Ellul’s sociological and theological works has provided some important insights to Ellul’s work. First, sociology forces theology to be timely and relevant, as in the case of the emerging technology in the modern society.²⁴ It enables theology to understand and respond to the situation accordingly. Hence, sociology can prevent theology asking the wrong question and be irrelevant to the society.²⁵

Second, sociology forces theology to be not only relevant, but also concrete. To Ellul, theology’s function is not only as an academic activity that concerned with doctrine, but emphasis the relation to concrete, real-life existence.²⁶

Third, sociology forces the church to examine itself and to determine if the church is only functioning as a sociological group with no Christian value characteristic; which can help the church to avoid obvious conformity to the world.²⁷

On the other hand, theology also confront sociology, it forces sociology to be wholistic.²⁸ As Ellul suggests, sociology tends to be reductionistic, it defines man only by such things as his work; yet it neglect the equally important spiritual nature of people.²⁹ This is where theology provides its value by examining on individual’s spiritual life, so that sociology is not just focusing on things that are valuable to the society.

To summary, in order to understand Ellul’s study on sociology and theology, it is essential to understand his dialectical approach and the tension between these two subjects. By then we will be able to understand his view on the modern world and spiritual world.

B. Ellul On the Modern World

1. Technology: A Technological Society

Ellul’s views of the modern world can only be understood by reference to his conception of Technique and its dominance.³⁰ Ellul believes this “Technique” phenomenon has a major impact on our modern world. There are three important books on Technique by Ellul, the first and the most influential one is *The Technological Society*, which was published in 1954 in French and translated in

²¹ J. Ellul, *What I believe*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott Publications, 1989), 31.

²² Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴ Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, 40.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 151.

English in 1964. The second is *The Technological System* (1980) and the third is *The Technological Bluff* (1990). The French title of *The Technological Society* is "*la technique*", that covers "the whole network of rules, regulations, ordinances, and administrative decrees in modern society, with technology as such scarcely mentioned."³¹ The definition of technique for Ellul is significant:

The term technique, as I use it, does not mean machines, technology, or this or that procedure for attaining 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 activity."³²

Hence for Ellul, the essence of technology is *la technique*; which is not the society of machines but the society of efficient techniques that is the focus of Ellul's sociological analysis.³³

For Ellul, technology is also strongly related with human's civilization. "Modern technology (*la technique*) has become a total phenomenon for civilization, the defining force for a new social order in which efficiency is no longer an option but a necessity imposed on all human activity."³⁴ However, it is also important to study the context out of which Ellul developed his analysis on technology to understand the impact to the world.³⁵ I will further look into the context later but now I would like to discuss the characteristics of technique describes by Ellul.

These five characteristics of technique in *The Technological Society* illustrate its relationship with the society in the modern world. Especially the difference between the new things in modern Technique compare to the traditional society. First, Ellul suggest there is automatism of technical choice.³⁶ The reason is modern Technique imposes itself as absolute efficiency. Therefore, the ability to choose between techniques by human in earlier societies is eliminated.³⁷

The Second characteristic of Technique is Self-augmentation.³⁸ Technique not only imposes itself on human beings it also effectively produces itself apart from humanity.³⁹ This Process of self-augmentation allows each new technical innovation in turn makes other possible and so extends Technique further.⁴⁰ However, when the technical innovation creates technical solution, these solutions in turn create even more problems which in turn demand ever more technical solutions.⁴¹

Third, Technique is also characterized by its monism.⁴² Ellul believes one cannot disassociate the good uses of technique from the bad, the useful from the destructive; there is no possibility of accepting some and rejecting others.⁴³

Fourth, Technique is now marked by technical universalism.⁴⁴ Technique has become a universal language and a universal determinant of human culture.⁴⁵ This is what we can understand as globalization today. And as every area of life and of human civilization is subordinated to Technique,

³¹ R. Nisbet, forwarded to *Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays*, by Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), viii.

³² J. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. J. Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), xxv.

³³ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁵ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 151.

³⁶ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

³⁷ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 143.

³⁸ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 85.

³⁹ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 143.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 91-92.

⁴² Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 94.

⁴³ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 92.

⁴⁴ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 116.

⁴⁵ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 92.

there is also a qualitative universalism.⁴⁶

Finally, there is the autonomy of technique, which is the most controversial characterization.⁴⁷ It is a closed system determining the conditions of social, political, and economic change.⁴⁸ No other sphere (e.g. economic, political, or moral) is now able to control Technique, which is free from humanity itself.⁴⁹

Therefore, from these characteristics of Technique by Ellul, we can observe Technique is not only a new and powerful determining social phenomenon but also the central determinant in our modern society.⁵⁰ There is also a historical change, Technique no longer belongs to a civilization, but encompasses the whole of our civilization.⁵¹ We now live in what Ellul called a technical civilization. The world we are living in is a new world.

The concept of Technique by Ellul brings out a strong message, that it is influencing all areas of the modern society. When the English translation of *The Technological Society* came out in 1964, it definitely makes a strong impact to the Western World, as the "Technology" development is still in its early days and is not as advanced as today. As we look at the development of the technological influence and Globalization effect of today's society in the 21st Century, we can see Ellul's idea of Technique is very prophetic. By understanding the world we are living in, it laid the foundation for the dialectic approach to his theological reflection.

2. Mass Media and Propaganda

Another important area to understand Ellul's analysis on the modern world is his study of mass media and propaganda in technological societies. Ellul defines propaganda as: "a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization."⁵² Ellul believes propaganda is a term for the dominance of technical means over the flow of information through society; it is a universal condition which pervades all individual lives in modern societies.⁵³ Hence, Propaganda is not only need of the individual but also necessary for the technological society.⁵⁴ As Ellul suggested, "Propaganda is the inevitable result of the various components of the technological society, and plays so central a role in the life of that society that no economic or political development can take place without the influence of its great power."⁵⁵ Therefore, propaganda is not just a deceptive use for "brainwashing," but is the calculated explanation of the social situation that makes people think they are making free personal choices while they are adapting and conforming to the orchestrated society.⁵⁶ The personal choice by people seems to be an illusion under the influence of propaganda in technological society.⁵⁷

There are some distinctions within propaganda. First, propaganda is mostly found in the political, however for Ellul, modern propaganda is sociological as well as political. Second, the purpose for propaganda is not only to agitation for a change but at the integration of individuals into established order.⁵⁸ Third, instead of just the normal "vertical" influence of propaganda, Ellul believes "horizontal"

⁴⁶ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 143.

⁴⁷ Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 133.

⁴⁸ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 92.

⁴⁹ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 143.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² J. Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, trans. by K. Kellen and J. Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 61.

⁵³ Christians, *Jacques Ellul*, 110.

⁵⁴ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 20.

⁵⁵ Ellul, *Propaganda*, 160.

⁵⁶ James A. Fowler, "A Synopsis and Analysis of the Thought and Writings of Jacques Ellul," *Christ in You Ministries*, 2000; available from <http://www.christinyou.net/pages/ellul.html> (cited 1 December 2006).

⁵⁷ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 21.

⁵⁸ Christians, *Jacques Ellul*, 110.

influence, meaning rational, integrative and sociological propaganda are all hidden persuaders influencing peoples in modern society life.⁵⁹ These different meanings of propaganda attempt to influence individual behavior in definable and predictable ways.⁶⁰

Moreover, according to Ellul, propaganda is as propaganda does, he concerned about the impact of propaganda rather than the form or format. And propaganda not only moves people to action, but to entirely transform both human psychology and social relationships.⁶¹

The emergence of mass media enables the use of propaganda techniques that influence the entire modern society; which include the press, radio, and television to create a continuous and lasting environment.⁶² Ellul believes when mass media and propaganda technique combine together, they have the capacity to penetrate to the core of the human personality so a person can fulfill the needs of the technology society.⁶³ However, when individual fulfill such needs, the cost is a loss of individuality and freedom as personal life is replaced by public opinion influenced by propaganda.⁶⁴ Ellul defined such propaganda techniques as "human techniques," which include the disciplines as education, counseling, vocational guidance, public relations, human and social engineering, all these reinforce the economic, administrative, political and educational institutions as the guardians of life.⁶⁵ It is among almost every aspects of a person social life. We can observe the influence of propaganda described by Ellul is the core of political, technical, mass media in modern society. After getting an idea on Ellul's perspective of technology and propaganda in the modern world, I will now discuss the other dialectic position about Ellul's view on the spiritual world.

C. Ellul On the Spiritual World

1. Presence of the Kingdom

As we see the modern world is dominated by the influence of technology, propaganda and mass media. How should Christians living in this world respond to the challenge? What is the relationship between God and the world? These are two important questions to understand Ellul's theology. According to Goddard, God and the world in terms of communion and rupture lie at the heart of Ellul theology, which provides his understanding of the Christian life in modern world.⁶⁶ The world we are living in is a rupture world. Ellul's book *The Presence of the Kingdom* gives us a good understanding to the Christians in the world. It is stated clearly in the beginning of the book, "The Christian community must never be a closed body. Thus if the Christian is necessarily in the world, he is not of it. This means that his thought, his life, and his heart are not controlled by the world, and do the depend upon the world, for they belong to another Master."⁶⁷ Therefore Christian living in the world has to resist the world. The Christian is in communion with Jesus Christ in this world, but one has to "fight not against flesh and blood but against 'the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness.'"⁶⁸ For Ellul, Satan is still the world-ruler, which is a spiritual reality in the world. But at the same time, Ellul believes God's Kingdom is also presence in the modern world. God is manifesting His Sovereignty Power in the world through His revelation by his prophets, incarnation of Jesus and the presence of Holy Spirit. The Evil's Power and God's Power in the reality world can again illustrate Ellul's dialectic thoughts.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 21.

⁶¹ Randy Kluver, "Contributions of Jacques Ellul's "Propaganda" to Teaching and Research in Rhetorical Theory," 1995; available from ERIC, EBSCOhost, (accessed December 1, 2006).

⁶² Ibid., 21.

⁶³ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁶ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 62.

⁶⁷ J., Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* trans. Olive Wyon (New York: The Seabury Press, 1967), 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 8.

In order to fight against the Prince of world to preserve the world, says Ellul “the Christian ought to place himself at the point of contact between two currents: the will of the Lord, and the will of the world.”⁶⁹ The will of the Lord confronts Christians as law and as grace, as commandment and as promise, which is revealed in the Scriptures.⁷⁰ And the will of the world is always a will to death, which is obvious not acceptable and must oppose it.⁷¹ Because the world is the realm of Satan and the sin causes a separation from God to towards death, yet this is exactly where Christian should place himself to be “truly present in the world, so that they can carry on effective social or political work, by the grace of God.”⁷² Hence, The calling of Christians is to live out their communion with God in the modern world.⁷³

2. Apocalyptic Hope

Human beings living in the technological society seem to be in a hopeless situation.⁷⁴ For Ellul, the true source of hope and freedom against the modern society lies in an authentic apocalyptic tradition, which Ellul calls “apocalyptic hope.”⁷⁵ “Hope...can be situated only in an apocalyptic line of thought, not that there is hope because one has an apocalyptic concept of history, but rather that there is apocalypse because one lives in hope.”⁷⁶ This apocalyptic hope is the answer for Christian not to conform to the values of the technological society.⁷⁷ Because living in the age without hope, in order to resist the world, Ellul believes “everything – including life, ethics and theology has to be based on hope.”⁷⁸ The object of this hope must transcend the technology society, because it must not settle for the promises of politics and technology.⁷⁹

3. Necessity and Freedom

According to Clendenin, the dialectic between necessity and freedom is the central and controlling idea in all of Ellul’s work and governs his theology.⁸⁰ Necessity had its origin in the fall, suggests to a loss of freedom and spontaneous communion with god and man no longer able not to sin, hence in a transition from order of freedom to order of necessity.⁸¹ Necessity is the enslavement of men by the “powers” of this world, the enslavement of men in sin.⁸² And as discussed above, the “powers” of the word is refer to Satan, which is the ruler of the world. Necessity demonstrates all kinds of threaten to our lives in the world, including techniques, propaganda, urbanization...etc, in which man are losing control.⁸³

To counter this necessity, according to Ellul, it is God who reveals himself in the person of Jesus Christ, as the liberator that counter against necessity.⁸⁴ Therefore, Jesus Christ is the essence of freedom, as freedom is also very crucial to Ellul’s thought. Human freedom can only become a real possibility when it is founded in the perfect freedom of God, then Christian alone can be free, and they can live in the world with this freedom to resist the challenge.⁸⁵ Yet this freedom does not depend only

⁶⁹ Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 27.

⁷⁰ Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 27.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 28-29.

⁷³ Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 116.

⁷⁴ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 67.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ J., Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, trans. by C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 208.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁹ Fasching, *The Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 81.

⁸⁰ Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, 59.

⁸¹ Ibid., 69.

⁸² Ibid., 79.

⁸³ Ibid., 87.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 119.

on man, Ellul believe it requires the co-operative interaction between God and man.⁸⁶

D. Observation and Reflection for Today

1. Sociological Pessimist and Theological Optimist

After reviewing Ellul's view to the technology society in the modern world, Ellul's sociological view of the modern world is rather pessimistic. Ellul says "My purely sociological and historical intellectual approach had led me into a blind alley."⁸⁷ Indeed, if we only study Ellul's sociological work without his theological work, his worldview is quite negative without any hope. However, Ellul's "pessimism" is only about man, not about God.⁸⁸

On the other hand, Ellul is "optimistic about the possibilities for a practical, vibrant hope and freedom based on the gospel."⁸⁹ The goal of his theology is relate with real life, which is to communicate hope and freedom to the person in the street.⁹⁰ Contrasts to the pure sociological approach that lead to a blind alley, Ellul's theology serves the purpose of helping people "emerge from the blind alley, knowing that this gift (of Jesus Christ) has been granted to us."⁹¹ Therefore for Christians to live in the world and impact the world, there is true hope and freedom from God. To understand Ellul's thinking, it is important to have a good knowledge on his dialectic though in both sociology and theology.

2. Implications and Respond to the 21st Century Challenge

Ellul's life long work has really provided us a detailed analysis of the modern Western world. Two of his most important and influential books *The Presence of the Kingdom* (French 1948, English Translation 1951), and *The Technological Society* (French 1954, English Translation 1964), are written in the time after the Second World War, where the technology world is just in its initial developmental stage. His sociological, political, biblical and theological reflection is truly "prophetic" during that time. Under the strong influence of Karl Marx and Karl Barth, Ellul's not just simply follow their thinking but also build on them to develop his own thoughts. Ellul's theology is practical with his sociological confrontation, which put Christian faith into context with the real world.

Ellul's theological thinking also emphasis the need to be timely and relevant to the world, as we look at today's society, technology and media has indeed become one of the most influential power today that shape our modern life, much powerful than the what is Ellul facing in his times. Yet as we now living in the 21st Century, the church is still struggling to understand and respond to the technological revolution such as the Internet. The church needs to hear a prophetic voice which is able to discern the signs for the times and show the church how to be relevant to the world and witness the Lord.⁹² Ellul offers his criticism as a prophet during his time, but I believe his thoughts are still applicable and valuable to us and to the contemporary church in the 21st Century.

E. Conclusion

By studying Ellul's dialectical approach of his thinking in sociology and technology, it gives us a good understanding to his view on the modern technological society. Yet the key for Ellul is how

⁸⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁸⁷ Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, vii.

⁸⁸ Clendenin, *Theological Method in Jacques Ellul*, 87.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*, x.

⁹² Goddard, *Living the Word, Resisting the World*, 306.

Christian and Church live and act in this world, which is also a spiritual world. The principalities and powers of this world are controlled by Satan, Ellul helps us to look beyond the social reality, so Christian can realize the battle facing today. Ellul emphasizes about the universal Christian calling to have a revolutionary presence living out God's word within the fallen world.⁹³ His sociological perspective will always help us to reflect on the calling and be relevant to the world. Ellul's thoughts not just apply to his time, but in every period of history Christians should take a critical and resisting stance towards the world.⁹⁴

To conclude, I believe Christians are called to be the prophets in the 21st century. Ellul has reminded us the significance on the idea that Christians should be "In the world, but not of the world." Helping us to rethink the meaning of Gospel for a technological civilization. Most importantly, we know we can triumph over this battle between the visible and the invisible by the truth of God.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.