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My relationship with Jacques Ellul had two phases. From 1971 to 1981 it was a relationship of correspondence by letter; from 1982 to 1991 it was a relationship of personal conversations.

In late 1971 I read (and reviewed) my first book by Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City for Right On*, a monthly "radical Christian" journal in Berkeley, California, that later evolved into *Radix Magazine*. There were very few Christian perspectives on the city at that time so I was pleased to find Ellul's book. I thought it was interesting but nothing sensational. However, I noted a list of several other Ellul titles on the dust jacket and, in preparation for the 1972 presidential campaign, I read *The Political Illusion*, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, *Presence of the Kingdom*, and *False Presence of the Kingdom*. As I read these books and then attended the Democratic Convention in Miami I was "hooked" for good. His descriptions of modern politics and statecraft were played out before my very eyes. I found Ellul's discussions of both politics and Christianity powerful, illuminating, and brilliant. It was an intense, passionate, spiritual and intellectual awakening for me.

In late July of 1972 I decided to send a letter and copies of my articles and reviews to Ellul at the University of Bordeaux. I was surprised to get a personal reply from him in September 1972. He was very kind and encouraging about my articles and gave me helpful responses to a few questions I had asked.

For the next ten years I corresponded with Professor Ellul two or three times per year. I collected and read everything of his that I could get my hands on. A French-language bookstore in Los Angeles helped me acquire many of his French volumes. From 1973 to 1977 I was a Ph.D. student in Religion/Social Ethics at the University of Southern California. From my initial interview onward, my USC professors supported my project of studying Ellul's theological ethics, his intellectual sources (the Bible, Weber, Marx, Kierkegaard, Barth) and his counterparts (in ethics, in the sociology of politics and technology). In the fall of 1976 Lewis Smedes invited me to teach a course on Ellul's thought at Fuller Seminary, my first effort along those lines. While I lived in southern California I got to know Vernard Eller at LaVerne University. We met several times to discuss our mutual interests in Ellul's ideas.

From 1977 to 1982 I was back in Berkeley, leading a project to establish a graduate-level study center and think tank on the relation of Christian faith and biblical ethical perspectives to modern life and work. Ellul's ideas and counsel were certainly important to me as I worked on this project.

All this time, of course, I had wanted to go to Bordeaux in person and meet with Ellul. But my wife and I had two small children and not one cent extra in our budget. I was able to carry out my research and writing in North America by aggressively collecting Ellul's writings in French as well as in English translation and by writing to him for clarification and further detail.

Finally, however, I took my wife and children to Europe for two months in the summer of 1982. I'll never forget the excitement I felt as we drove into Bordeaux and then a few days later visited the Elluls at their home in Pessac. Joyce Hanks and my wife Lucia helped with my almost nonexistent spoken French as I interviewed Ellul (later published in *Christianity Today* and *Radix Magazine*). I also persuaded Joyce that we should invite the Elluls for Sunday dinner after hearing him preach at the

Reformed Church in the Chartrons neighborhood. Ellul brought along a couple excellent bottles of Bordeaux and we had an afternoon full of good food, fellowship, and conversation---made the more memorable by the experience of riding in Madame Ellul's car. She is on my top five list of "wild drivers I have ridden with"!

That visit in 1982 laid the groundwork for my twelve months in Bordeaux on sabbatical from June 1984 to June 1985. After two months of intensive work on my French I began meeting with Ellul for an hour or two on Friday afternoons at his home. Allowing for vacations, travel, etc., I probably averaged meeting with him two or three times per month for nine months. I also attended his monthly studies on Ecclesiastes at his church, heard him preach a couple times, and accompanied him to a weekend GBU (InterVarsity) retreat.

Basically we did three things in our meetings: (1) we discussed his work, sometimes arguing vigorously about the theology of work, eschatology, politics, etc., and often exploring intellectual terrain we occupied in common; (2) Ellul read and critiqued my writing and ideas---about Christian ethics, higher education, the church, etc.; and (3) I prepared for him bibliographical introductions to the work of James Gustafson, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and other Americans. I asked him if I could do anything to assist him while in Bordeaux; he replied that he had difficulty sorting through the immense volume of American publications in ethics to see what was worth his special attention as he prepared his own books on ethics.

I have met many famous intellectuals but I have never met anyone as learned as Ellul. I locked horns with him many times (work and calling, universalism, individualism, etc.) and always found deeper layers of Ellulian research and knowledge as I pressed him on his case. He sometimes seems hasty and simplistic in his written statements; in person it was clear that his views were carefully, appropriately nuanced and reflected a vast research.

Ellul's personal character affected me as much as his intellectual brilliance. Unlike the self-important, sneering buffoons I met at Oxford, my Bordeaux mentor was relaxed, genuine, warm and kind. He was as good at relations with my children and with blue collar workers as he was in the pulpit, lecture hall or in debate. His marriage to Yvette and their warm hospitality were great and inspiring gifts to those who benefitted from them.

On one of my finer days in Bordeaux, my landlord, Henri Cerezuelle, who had been a long time friend of Ellul, drove me south into the foothills of the Pyrenees for a wonderful afternoon with Bernard Charbonneau, Ellul's best friend, often cited in his writings.

I (like some others) tried very hard to persuade Ellul to visit the USA. He said he would come, then backed out two or three times. His excuses were that his heart condition wouldn't allow him to fly, taking a boat was too long, and he didn't speak English (true). I told him we would bring along an entourage including his cardiologist, wife, and however many friends and translators he wished. I described to him Helmut Thielicke's tour and his method of successfully grappling with the English problem. But I think he really was afraid to fly (did he ever in his life?) and felt that his work in Bordeaux was a better use of his time. I also tried to persuade Bill Moyers and PBS to do a first rate interview series on Ellul---but didn't get very far. Thankfully we do have the Dutch and French video interviews to show our American friends.

I returned to Bordeaux for four weeks in the summer of 1988 and one week in the summer of 1991. On both occasions it was a great joy to be with Ellul again but painful to see his health and then (especially after Yvette's death in 1991) his spirit

failing. Our correspondence continued until 1991 but after that date he wasn't able to respond to my occasional letters any more.

It is ironic that just as C.S. Lewis's death on November 22, 1963, was overshadowed by that of John F. Kennedy, so was Jacques Ellul's death on May 19, 1994, by that of Jacqueline Kennedy. (I'm not suggesting a conspiracy!) For me, May 19 has always been significant because it was the birthday of Malcolm X, the African American social prophet who woke me up to the depths of America's sin of racism. And now it also marks the end of the life of another one of the twentieth century's most important prophetic voices. When I heard Daniel Cerezuelle's voice on my phone with the news on the morning of May 19, I felt a great emptiness sweep over me. The world was emptier. We lost a great man. But what a privilege it has been to have learned from him and to have known him.

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