DO NOT BE CONFORMED: JACQUES ELLUL ON TECHNIQUE AND THE CHURCH'S RELATION TO THE MODERN WORLD

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One of the crucial roles of a pastor is to lead the flock to resist conformity to the pattern of this world. This pastoral call comes from Romans 12, in Paul's letter to the church that is living in the shadow of the conforming Empire of Rome, with all its power and spectacle that so easily dazzles and creates patterns of life that demand to be followed. In contrast to the conforming pattern of Rome, Paul's letter outlines a reality that is fundamentally at odds with the reality constructed by Rome, a reality revealed through God's work in Christ that would conform those who follow Christ to his pattern rather than to the pattern of this world.

It is clear in this call to lead our flocks to be conformed to Christ that we must have a clear understanding of the pattern of the world in order that we are able to resist. As pastors, it is critical for us to know the pattern to which we ourselves, and the flocks entrusted to our care, are tempted to conform. In order to do so, we can find great help in the resources of others who have come before us and who could guide us in our work of discerning the patterns of the world. In this essay, I commend Jacques Ellul (1912-1994), a French sociologist and theologian, whose work spans the Cold War period of the Twentieth-century. In my view, Ellul is an important resource for pastors, and his work has a remarkable relevance to our day, as it exposes to us the deep structures of the West that continue to shape the world in which we live.

From his earliest published work in the aftermath of World War II, until his death in 1994, Ellul was engaged in a vast project of unearthing the hidden societal structures, assumptions, and commitments of the modern world.[2] Through that project, Ellul made visible the patterns of this world that dominate Western society. He showed how the intertwined structures of technology, economics, politics and propaganda shape the society in which we live. At the heart of Ellul's analysis is the dominance of what he calls *technique,* the unquestioned technological system that controls

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[2] And vast it is. Ellul published over 50 books and hundreds of articles.

the modern world.[3] As we will see below, Ellul proposes that *technique* is a totalizing system that pursues efficiency above all else. In so doing, *technique* creates a society in which ends have been replaced by means and truth has been replaced by facts, and is the driver of the other patterns, the economic, political, and communication structures, that dictate life in the modern world.

But Ellul's analysis is not merely concerned with "the machine." Additionally, Ellul is deeply concerned with what *technique* does to humanity, and in particular, to human freedom. According to Ellul, *technique* leads to a loss of freedom through the advent of "technical necessity," by which our actions are determined by and predicated upon the unquestioned dominance of the technological system. The age of *technique* has unique features that must be understood and countered if the church is going to reflect the freedom of Christ that we have been granted through grace, and through which we are called to be conformed, not to the patterns of this world, but to Christ himself.

1. JACQUES ELLUL AND THE AGE OF *TECHNIQUE*

A. INTRODUCING JACQUES ELLUL

Jacques Ellul was born on January 6, 1912, in Bordeaux, France, the only child of Joseph and Martha.[4] Ellul was born in poverty, experiencing in his early life the deep effects of scarcity on his parents and himself. These early experiences led Ellul, a brilliant student, to explore the writings of Karl Marx before becoming, through a striking conversion experience, a deeply committed follower of Christ. Ellul's training was in the history of Roman law, for which he earned his doctorate in 1936.

In the years before World War II, Ellul became deeply involved in the student political scene in France and was a lecturer at Strasbourg University. During the war, Ellul joined the Resistance, being forced to move away from Bordeaux and into the "free zone" in southern France because his wife, who was born in Holland and held a British passport, was on the list of those to be arrested. After the war, Ellul moved back to Bordeaux, where he was involved in the civic administration, an experience that proved deeply disillusioning.[5] This experience motivated him to reflect deeply on the nature of human political institutions and the bureaucratic nature of the modern world, reflections that tied in deeply to his growing interest in *technique*.

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[3] I have italicized *technique* in this paper in order to signal the technical use of this term by Ellul.

[4] For a helpful overview of Ellul's life, see Jeffrey Greenman, Read Mercer Schuchardt, and Noah J. Toly, *Understanding Jacques Ellul* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 1-19.

[5] Ellul's disillusionment can be felt in the following line: "The politician is powerless against government bureaucracy; society cannot be change through political action." Quoted in Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 47.

In his book, *Presence in the Modern World,* published in France in 1948, Ellul lays out what would be the project that would consume him over the next 50 years:

> [I]n 1945, I realized that I had to write a short and simple book about the presence of the Christian in the world today…Christians and the church could not hold themselves aloof from the history of human beings, but neither could they become assimilated into one of the political currents (which too often had been the case throughout the church's history).[6]

This project led Ellul into his ongoing project of examining the foundations of the late-modern Western world to discern the societal structures that shape life in that world, with the goal of understanding the world and reflecting on it theologically for the sake of the church's presence in it. As such, Ellul was responding to Paul's admonition in Romans 12:

> I had to begin by understanding the structures of our society that determined the conformisms.[7] I had to critique them, starting from the gospel, and become engaged in a movement in which I would necessarily be alone, because it would be based in faith in a revelation that others did not share…I asked myself, if we must take this decisive verse seriously, what then might be the Christian's position…in the world?[8]

Jeff Greenman describes Ellul's first book, and so his overall project, as having "an overarching concern for the church's conformity to the world's ways."[9] For Ellul, the primary conformism of the Twentieth-century that can capture the church and cause her to be conformed to the pattern of this world is *technique*, the definition of which we will now explore.

B. Defining Technique

For Ellul, the foundational sociological fact of the modern world is *technique*. To demonstrate the importance he ascribes to *technique,* Ellul states early in his best-known book, *The Technological Society*, that "no social, human, or spiritual fact is so important as the fact of *technique* in the modern world."[10] But what is *technique*?

In *The Technological Society,* Ellul describes technique as "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency in every field of human activity."[11] From the beginning, it is essential to state an important point: *technique* is not the same as technology. He is no Luddite demanding that people reject all uses of technological innovation. Ellul is

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[6] Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2016), xvii.

[7] By which he means the patterns that seek to conform the church to the world.

[8] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, xix-xx.

[9] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 14.

[10] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 3.

[11] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxv.

well aware that humans have always used technology, from the very earliest recorded history. In his book *Jacques Ellul and Dialectical Theology,* Jacob Van Vleet argues that Ellul's attitude to technology should be classified as *substantivist.* A subtantivist vision of technology is one that seeks to look through the means of technological machines to the "substance" of the technological system. For Ellul, the substance of technology prior to the Eighteenth-century consists of tools that supported the labor of humanity in its work cultivation and self-provision. However, according to James Fowler,

> …the place of technique began to change dramatically in the eighteenth century with the quest for efficient procedures to find the 'one best means' in every human endeavor.[12] By the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie recognized technique as the key to their material and commercial interests. The industrialized technical employment of technique became a monster in the urbanized and technological society of the twentieth century, 'the stake of the century' as Ellul termed it.[13] Technique became the defining force, the ultimate value, of a new social order in which efficiency was no longer an option but a necessity imposed on all human activity.[14]

In other words, in the modern world, and corresponding with the Industrial Revolution, the nature of technology shifted to "the drive for efficiency, calculability and control."[15] Whereas, before, tools were instruments employed in the service of human labor, now *technique* has become the master over the total social system, the result of which is, as we will explore below, the advance of "technical necessity" and the loss of human freedom. Fowler summarizes Ellul's concern when he writes, "Ellul's issue was not with technological machines but with a society necessarily caught up in efficient methodological techniques."[16] Ellul himself states it this way: "Today's technical phenomenon…has almost nothing in common with the technical phenomenon of the past…[I]n our civilization technique is in no way limited. It has been extended to all spheres and encompasses every activity, including human activity."[17] Or, in the words of Max Weber, "*la technique* is not machines, but machineness."[18]

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[12] "The one best way" or "one best means" is how Ellul refers to the most efficient method that then eliminates all other methods.

[13] This phrase comes from the French title of the book that has been translated into English as *The Technological Society*. In French, the titles is *La technique, ou l'enjeu du siècle,* which reads more literally, "Technique, or, the Stake of the Century."

[14] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxv.

[15] Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul: An Introductory Exposition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 84.

[16] James A. Fowler: "A Synopsis and Analysis of the Thought and Writings of Jacques Ellul," Jacques Ellul Papers, Folder 66, Special Collections, Buswell Library, 2000.

[17] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 78.

[18] Quoted in Lawrence Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2005), 48.

In the preceding conversation, it becomes clear that the drive for efficiency, which Ellul calls "the fixed end of *technique*,"[19] is central to Ellul's investigation of the place of *technique* as the pattern of the modern world. This drive for efficiency means that *technique* leads to a world that organizes activity in a way that maximizes output and productivity and creates a set of value judgments based on efficient output, and this value judgment is a methodological commitment that eliminates all other methods. In other words, if the means that one is using in a particular sphere of life is not the most efficient, then that means must be eliminated, and the human who cannot adapt to the "one best way" is devalued. In addition, the aesthetic is eliminated when efficiency dominates, and human productivity is placed in the service of efficient means of production.[20] Lawrence Terlizzese summarizes Ellul's concern with efficiency as the guiding methodology of society when he writes, "Technicization of the world places technical efficiency before any other goal or end."[21]

In order to better understand Ellul's idea of *technique*, let us analyze further some key features of *technique,* which will then set us up to reflect on Ellul's conception of the formative effects of life in a society dominated by *technique*.

C. THE FEATURES OF TECHNIQUE

1. Rationality and Artificiality

The two dominant features of *technique* are rationality and artificiality, and, of the two, rationality is the primary engine of *technique.* According to Ellul, "In *technique*, whatever its aspect or the domain in which it is applied, a rational process is present which tends to bring mechanics to bear on all that is spontaneous and irrational."[22] By irrational, Ellul doesn't mean crazy, but that which isn't dominated by processes and methods of technicization. His point here is that a society committed to rationality as a determining premise will demote and devalue any other impulse of humanity, including, as mentioned above, the aesthetic and personal creativity. Rationality can provide expedient means to produce goods and services, and once these means have been established, any other less expedient means must be devalued. "Every intervention of technique is, in effect, a reduction of facts, forces, phenomena, means, and instruments in the schema of logic."[23]

Artificiality, the second dominant factor of *technique*, is summarized in Ellul's pointed statement, "*Technique* is opposed to nature."[24] For Ellul, in times past, the tools that humanity developed to enable life in the world

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[19] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 21.

[20] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 72.

[21] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 51.

[22] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 78-79.

[23] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

[24] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

were tools native to the created world in which humans lived and were instruments of humans expressing their creativity in labor. However, in the age of *technique*, humanity is now using technology to create an artificial world: "The world that is being created by the accumulation of technical means is an artificial world and hence radically different from the natural world."[25] For Ellul, *technique* looks on the natural world and sees means to further support *technique*. "Just as hydroelectric installations take waterfalls and lead them into conduits, so the technical milieu absorbs the natural."[26] It is in rationality and artificiality that we can most clearly see the totalizing nature of *technique*.

2. Means Without Ends

Arising from the twin foundations of rationality and artificiality are two other features that are core to Ellul's engagement with *technique*. The first is the dominance of means and the attendant loss of ends. According to Ellul, "the first enormous fact that arises from our civilization is that today everything has become means. The end no longer exists."[27] In another place he writes, "Our civilization is first and foremost a civilization of means; in the reality of modern life the means…are more important than the ends. Any other assessment of the situation is mere idealism."[28] Why does Ellul make this claim and what are the implications?

In *Presence in the Modern World*, Ellul lays out his thinking on means and ends. Ellul acknowledges that individuals continue to have ends, to have goals in life, but at the societal level, there are no longer any defined common goals.[29] Where once society had clear notions of the direction of societal actions, now the purpose of the society has been lost in vague ideas like "humanity," "flourishing," or "the common good."[30] Perhaps the most common notion of an end in post-industrial Western society is "progress." On this, Ellul writes, "Everyone today knows 'more or less' the purpose that civilization pursues, and it seems completely pointless and outdated to pose ourselves this question. Everyone has some vague notion of progress, and this notion of progress can apparently substitute for the ends pursued. As long as we change, there is progress…"[31] But what is the purpose of change? What is the direction of change? A society dominated by *technique* can only offer vague platitudes. In other words, imprecise and apparent ends, masquerading as ultimate purposes, are no such thing. Instead, they are

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[25] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

[26] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 79.

[27] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.

[28] Terilizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 51.

[29] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.

[30] In my view, Ellul is somewhat idealistic about the clarity of ends in pre-modern societies, and thus over-argues his point. But the essence of that point still holds: Whatever was the case of earlier societies, Ellul is correct that ours is adrift of ultimate ends, and that *technique* has come to dominate in this milieu in ways that Ellul helpfully makes clear to us.

[31] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 42.

signs of the confusion that reigns, and the lack of clarity created by the dominance of means. "Once these ends have become implicit in people's hearts and minds, they no longer have any formative power."[32]

So, in the absence of clear ends, we have the proliferation of means. What is the effect of this proliferation on society? The absence of ends corresponds with the dominance of efficiency that we explored above. Lacking a goal, society is driven by technical processes that become self-perpetuating goals in themselves, and humanity loses the ability to question these means and the system of *technique*. These means cloak themselves as ends, but are not, and instead become the mechanisms by which people are made to serve *technique*. Ellul writes, "Human beings who were originally the end of this whole humanist system of means, who are still proclaimed as 'end' in political speeches, in reality have entirely become means, and a means of these very means that were supposed to serve them."[33] This takes place at every level of the society dominated by *technique*. We read on:

> In order for the economy to function well, human beings must submit to the demands of the economic mechanism. As total producers, they place all their efforts into the service of production. As obedient consumers, they swallow blindly all that the economy feeds them, and so on. Thus, humanity is transformed into an instrument to these modern gods that are our means, and we do it with the good intention of making humanity happy.[34]

The instrumentalization of humanity is deeply concerning to Ellul, as it signals a significant change in humanity's relationship to the world around us, creating a loss of freedom that is masked by assurances of increasing freedom. We will explore the loss of freedom below.

3. Facts Without Truth

The lack of clarity about ends, and the proliferation of means, creates another key feature of the age of *technique*: the proliferation of facts without the quest for truth. According to Ellul, in the age of *technique*, facts dominate. If something is declared to be a fact, it is sacrosanct. This is seen in the role that science plays in the age of *technique*. As I said above, Ellul is not a Luddite, nor is he against scientific exploration. However, he does propose that science has taken on a different role in the system of *technique*. Ellul writes, "Once, knowledge of truth was what mattered, but then after the philosophers came the scientists. They developed their theories, which were then applied, first in order to approve the truth of these theories, and then because of their usefulness. From that point on, science was lost. Technical means gradually came to dominate the search for truth."[35] It is clear to see the connection Ellul posits between the loss

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[32] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 43.
[33] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40.
[34] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 40-41.
[35] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 41.

of ends and the loss of the search for truth. The predominance of facts is equivalent to the predominance of means, which Ellul again points to with regard to the place of science in Western culture: "Science today takes its meaning from *technique*; it is completely oriented to application. It is in the service of means. It has become a means of perfecting the means. The abstraction 'science,' to which we still pay lip service, has replaced the search for truth."[36]

The eclipse of the search for truth is based in our unshakeable trust in facts. In his book *The Humiliation of the Word,* Ellul declares that "for today's individual a fact is the ultimate reason, the supreme value, and an unimpeachable proof. Everything bows before a fact. We must obey it… It decides everything."[37] I want to stress that Ellul is not here arguing that all facts are baseless or useless. Rather, he is pressing us to consider how facts operate as "the supreme value" in the age of *technique*, but do so without reference to any overarching end, any fundamental pursuit of truth. As such, facts operate as the unassailable truth, which masquerade as The Truth, and in so doing establish themselves as "the final reason."[38] In taking this position, facts become the object of worship in the age of *technique* and, once established, once declared unassailable, all that is left is to bow prostrate before the fact.

> Here we have the essence of truly modern religion, the religion of the established fact—the religion that the inferior religions of the dollar, the race, or the proletariat derive from, which are nothing but expressions of the great modern divinity, the Fact-Moloch…Fact and truth seem to everyone as one and the same. And if God is no longer true today, it is because he does not look like a fact."[39]

The Fact-Moloch obliges humanity to act and to "progress" in the direction that is established by facts. Thus, humanity hurtles toward the future, toward a vague end that is no end, driven along by facts but without any sense of truth. Ellul summarizes this condition as follows: "No one knows where we are going, the aim of life has been forgotten, the end has been left behind. Man [*sic*] has set out at tremendous speed—to go *nowhere*."[40]

D. THE LOSS OF FREEDOM IN THE AGE OF TECHNIQUE

We are now in position to turn our attention to the effects of *technique* on the formation of the human person. Inevitably, the totalizing nature of *technique* that we have seen has far reaching effects on being human, which can be most clearly seen in Ellul's analysis of automatism.

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36 Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 41.
37 Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 137.
38 Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 22.
39 Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 22.
40 Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, 22.

1. Automatism

In our earlier description of *technique,* we noted the foundational features of rationality and artificiality. A third feature that Ellul discerns, and that has significant implications for human formation, is what he calls "automatism." Automatism is Ellul's way of describing the self-directing, autonomous nature of *technique.* As Terlizzese says, "once the 'one best way' has been rationally established, all technical movement becomes self-directing."[41] Here is how Ellul describes it:

> *Technique* elicits and conditions social, political, and economic change. It is the prime mover of all the rest, in spite of any appearances to the contrary and in spite of human pride, which pretends that man's [*sic*] philosophical theories are still determining influences and man's [*sic*] political regimes decisive factors in technical evolution. External necessities no longer determine *technique. Technique's* own internal necessities are determinative. *Technique* has become a reality in itself, self-sufficient, with its special laws and determinations.[42]

To underscore this claim, we read from Ellul elsewhere one of his most vigorous assessments of the self-sustaining nature of technique: "Technique has become autonomous; it has fashioned an omnivorous world which obeys its own laws and has renounced all tradition."[43] The last phrase, "has renounced all tradition" is an Ellulian declaration that humanity is now definitively no longer the master of *technique.* The traditions and norms that once guided communities and nations are now being swallowed up by the advance of *technique,* and none can stand against the advance of *technique.*[44]

> We are today at the stage of historical evolution in which everything that is not *technique* is being eliminated…Only a technical force can be opposed to a technical force…To be in possession of the lightning thrust of technique is a matter of life or death for individuals or groups alike; no power on earth can withstand its pressure.[45]

Automatism creates the "technical imperative." The technical imperative describes the way that humanity is required to adopt the latest techniques, having no choice whether we will do so or not. Once a new technology has been invented, once the method of efficiency, the one best way, has been discovered, it *must* be adopted. "What can be produced must be; what can be done must be done. The technological imperative cannot be tampered with or questioned. It undergirds the entire social order."[46] This imperative is a

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[41] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 59.

[42] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 133-134.

[43] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 14.

[44] Though Ellul died in 1994, and so didn't see the extent of the globalizing reach that has emerged with the advent of the World Wide Web and cellular communications, he clearly envisioned the way that globalization would flatten the world and relativize culture through the spread of corporations.

[45] Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 85.

[46] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 59.

necessity, and this necessity justifies decisions and gives value to the advance of *technique*. "Rather than moral and spiritual reasoning determining our relationship to and use of technology and technique, technical reasoning determines what is moral and what is the value of the spiritual."[47] Moral decision-making shifts from a conception of human agency determining the choice for oneself to the necessity to follow the path of *technique*. And why is it necessary? Because the determining nature of *technique* demands it be so.

2. THE LOSS OF FREEDOM

We now come to Ellul's deepest concern regarding the impact of *technique* on humanity: the loss of freedom. This is implied in what has been said above about automatism, but let us draw it out clearly.

The nature of technical automatism unavoidably leads to the loss of human agency. In the age of *technique* we are led to believe that we are free to choose the path of our own determination. The illusions of choice are everywhere around us, but in reality, "once *technique* takes over the consciousness of a society, the free agency of individuals is radically diminished. No longer can one choose which course of action to take; technique has chosen already…Humans can only submit to the most efficient path, the one that technique has already decided upon."[48] The ability to make any kind of free choice is abridged, and humans are enlisted in the purposes of *technique*. I *have* to use technology in order to have success in my work; because of this, we don't stop to analyze what that technology does to me, or how I am being utilized by *technique* and being made to serve it. We are determined by technology's overarching dominance in a way that makes that dominance, that makes the pattern of *technique*, invisible, and our conformity to it inevitable. Our freedom is taken away as we think we are becoming freer. As Ellul states starkly, "technique enslaves people, while proffering them the mere illusion of freedom, all the while tyrannically conforming them to the demands of the technological society with its complex of artificial operational objectives."[49]

This loss of freedom is rooted in the promise that the technical system makes to grant humans power through technological innovation. However, the promise cannot deliver, and in fact, is a bait and switch. Promising power, humans become instruments of the technical system, and therefore "go through mechanical motions with the help of various success therapies and techniques that guarantee results, but never experience spontaneity, freedom, or meaning."[50] *Technique* promises the shattering of limitations, the advance of human happiness, life, success, and mastery over a scary world. But this freedom proves to be illusory: "Absolute power leads to

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[47] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 29.

[48] Van Vleet, *Dialectical Theology and Jacques Ellul*, 91.

[49] Quoted in Fowler, "A Synopsis and Analysis of the Thought and Writings of Jacques Ellul," Jacques Ellul Papers, Folder 66, Special Collections, Buswell Library, 2000.

[50] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 64.

absolute impotence…Technology makes everything possible. It grants our heart's desires—whatever and whenever we want—and in so doing inevitably leads to absolute exhaustion and terminal boredom."[51] If this was the case in Ellul's day, how much more are we seeing this in ours? How much more are we seeing the effects of the promise of technology to transcend boundaries leading to the frustration and boredom of humanity? How much more can we see humanity "lose ourselves in the pursuit of more and more possibilities; always striving but never reaching the goal; always wanting more but never satisfied with what we have already attained"?[52]

This loss of freedom is a burden that modern humanity is carrying in the totality of our pursuits even as we are being told that the burdens are being lifted. "*Technique* has proven a hard taskmaster in demands for time, education (most of it technical), work, energy, family, and moral and spiritual compromise."[53] The imposition of technical necessity is the result of *technique's* totalizing regime. Humans are shaped in ways that cannot be easily grasped by those being shaped, and the ability to question the pattern of *technique* is one of its main features.

So how should pastors lead congregations in the age of *technique*? Is it possible for the church not to be conformed to the patterns of *technique*, but rather be conformed to the image of Christ? What should our stance be toward *technique*?

II. CONCLUSION: PROFANING TECHNOLOGY

Paul has called the church to be a people who are not conformed to the pattern of this world. I am convinced that one of the fundamental roles of the pastor is to pursue a deep understanding of those patterns in order that we might lead our congregation to resist conformity. For many pastors, this resistance has been at the level of moral conformity. We have set a project of instructing our congregations in morality that would resist the moral standards of the culture around us. However, I believe that the church has been and continues to be deeply vulnerable to patterns of conformity that we are not even aware. The confusion that we see growing in the church is, I believe, a direct result of patterns of conformity that have taken hold of the church, not through explicit disobedience, but through a failure of the church, rooted in the failure of pastors, to grasp the conformisms that tempt us.

I believe that pastors of the Twenty-first century are called to give the energy to the task before us, a task which echoes the program Ellul set out to accomplish in 1948: "I had to begin by understanding the structures of our society that determined the conformisms. I had to critique them, starting from the gospel…I asked myself, if we must take this decisive verse seriously, what then might be the Christian's position…in the world?"[54] If

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[51] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 57.

[52] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 57.

[53] Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul*, 58.

[54] Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*, xix-xx.

we, as pastors in the Twenty-first century, were to take this decisive verse seriously, what might we conclude to be the Christian's position in the world today? What might we discover about our conformity? How might we be called to lead the church to see and resist the patterns of the world? How can we equip our congregations to not be conformed to the pattern of *technique*?

According to Ellul, those who belong to Christ and live under His Lordship are to "profane technology."[55] By "profaning" Ellul means that we must refuse to consider *technique* as sacred. The church's work of profaning *technique* rejects the assumptions of the age of *technique* and therefore is the means by which we resist, in the power of the Spirit, the formative power of *technique* and the attendant loss of freedom that binds the human soul in necessity and determination to *technique's* purposes. In doing so, we reject the drive to efficiency that is at the heart of our modern world, and in so doing affirm the value of all humans. As we reject efficiency, we also proclaim the End, and reflect on the means in light of the End and have the courage to reject the world's "one best way," even if it means that we lose seeming power and influence in the world as we refuse to seek "relevance" but instead pursue faithfulness. And finally, we refuse to accept the worship of facts, and instead worship the Truth. As we do this, the church confesses the Lordship of Christ, being conformed to his image, thereby "deconstructing [*techniques'*] soteriological myth and refusing to submit to technological necessity."[56] By deconstructing the soteriological myth of *technique*, we open up new and fresh ways to proclaim the soteriological truth of the Gospel in a way that is free of the hindrances of conformity.

As pastors, we must lead our congregations in profaning *technique*. Again, this is not to say that we must insist that our congregants refuse all use of technology, nor do we preach that technology is in itself evil. Instead, we are to lead our flock so that they can grapple with *technique* and its implications and claims on their lives. Perhaps we as pastors will come to different conclusions than Ellul about the nature of the technological world in which we live or about the implications of that world. But wherever we land on our analysis of Ellul's specific claims, I believe we would benefit from wrestling with the challenges Ellul's body of work sets before us.

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[55] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 36.
[56] Greenman, *Understanding Jacques Ellul*, 36.