Richard Davis - *Jacques Ellul's Nonviolent Christian Revolution: A Reappraisal*

Nearly 50 years ago, the French lay theologian and sociologist Jacques Ellul simultaneously wrote two books on violence and revolution. Written together, but rarely read together, *Autopsy of Revolution* (1969) and *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (1969) form Ellul's major contribution to nonviolent revolutionary thought. In *Autopsy of Revolution* Ellul writes of the necessary revolution that must strike at the roots of the technological society, the state, and propaganda. In *Violence,* Ellul rejects Christian compromise with violence and the notion that Christians can use violence, including violence for revolutionary ends. As a radical Christian, he was against violence and for revolution. Ellul was unimpressed that revolutionaries in the 1960s held to a model of revolution 50 years out of date. This raises the question of whether Ellul's own ideas about the "necessary revolution" retain any currency today. Since his analysis in the 1960s, the world appears to have changed dramatically: the Cold War is over, the decolonization agenda is nearly complete, and the modern state has advanced into the Third World, all historical events that make his revolutionary analysis questionable in today's world. Yet in Ellul's analysis, these developments are within the direction of history. What made revolution unlikely then – societal contentment with consumption, entertainment and relative political stability – makes revolution equally unlikely now. The historical direction was one people were largely happy with. Revolution, according to Ellul, must be against the direction of history and be based in the individual in the West. In this paper, I will examine the reception of Ellul's ideas in the secondary literature and whether Christians can be, by following Ellul's advice, effective non-violent revolutionaries in the twenty-first century where violence, technique, and propaganda have combined to create the stuff of Ellul's nightmares.