

## Jacques Ellul on the Bible

By David W. Gill [www.davidwgill.org](http://www.davidwgill.org)

*Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (2013)

While Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) is best known for his massive sociological critique of technology and its impact on all aspects of contemporary life and thought, the University of Bordeaux professor also contributed many original works of theology and ethics. A lay leader in the French Reformed Church, Ellul was converted as a university student while reading the Bible on his own. Barthian in orientation, the Bible was ever the foundation of his theological and ethical thinking.

“The criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given to us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics” (*To Will & To Do: An Ethical Research for Christians* (ET: Pilgrim Press, 1969), p. 1). While Ellul differentiated between the written text of Scripture and the living Word of God, in practice “what one ordains and the other requires are therefore practically inseparable” (*Ibid.*, p. 274n.). Ellul believed in the overarching, Christocentric unity of the biblical message from Genesis to Revelation. While he dismissed “antiquated, outmoded” biblical literalism, he also rejected what he saw as the pretentious arrogance of modern biblical critics who questioned Scripture at every turn but refused to be questioned by it.

Ellul was widely read in biblical scholarship and commentary ancient and modern, was competent in Hebrew and Greek, and was especially attentive to Jewish interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Critics and reviewers found his interpretations speculative and unjustified at some points but also frequently stimulating, fresh, and insightful. Large sections of his books on ethics (e.g., *To Will & To Do*, *The Ethics of Freedom*), and on the theological virtues (e.g., *Living Faith*, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*) are given to biblical studies. Major topical studies were Scripture focused (e.g., *Meaning of the City*, *Prayer & Modern Man*, *Violence*, *Money & Power*). Several volumes were commentaries on specific books (e.g., *Apocalypse*, *Reason for Being* (Ecclesiastes), *Judgment of Jonah*, *Politics of God & Politics of Man* (II Kings), *Unjust God?* (Romans 9-11)). Many of his lectures and studies on the Bible were recorded and are in process of being transcribed and edited for publication.

David W. Gill, “Jacques Ellul’s View of Scripture,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25.4 (Dec 1982): 467-478.

David W. Gill, *The Word of God in the Ethics of Jacques Ellul* (ATLA Monograph No. 40; Nutley NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984)