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Letters to the Editor	2
Linking the Gospel and the Human Predicament: An Interview with Emilio Castro	2
Biblical Authority and Interpretation Randy Maddox	5
Women's Realities: A Theological View Linda Mercadante	8
From Knowledge to Wisdom: The Seminary as Dining Hall Hal Miller	10
How Ellul Transcends Liberation Theologies Thomas Hanks	13
The Politics of Biblical Eschatology: Ronald Reagan and Impending Nuclear Armageddon Larry Jones and Gerald T. Sheppard	16
Introduction to Francis Schaeffer's Jeremiad Ronald A. Wells	19
Francis Schaeffer's Jeremiad: A Review Article Ronald A. Wells	20
Early Christian Attitudes to War and Military Service: A Selective Bibliography David M. Scholer	23
News Articles A New Mission Agency in the United Methodist Church James Pyke	24
The Challenge of Missions History Richard Pierard	27
Sixth Evangelical Women's Conference Linda Mercadante	27
Review Article: A Christian Critique of the New Consciousness Douglas Groothuis	28
Book Reviews and Comments (Itemized on Back Cover)	31

How Ellul Transcends Liberation Theologies

by Thomas Hanks

2.1 Christ Alone—Not Marx

As far as I know, just about all the liberation theologians would agree, in theory, that Christ, not Marx, is the supreme authority. But, in practice, this principle does not turn out to be either simple or easy. Many see Marx as a scientific genius; others as a "prophet." But given that so many modern theologians possess a dichotomized worldview, with the authority of Christ and the Scriptures relegated to a nebulous "religious/theological" sphere, in practice the authority of the great "scientist" and "prophet"—like the proverbial camel—very soon to become the master of our everyday situation.

On the other hand, the great majority of evangelical Christians find it much too easy "to choose Christ" instead of Marx. Without having suffered poverty or oppression, and having no knowledge of the socio-economic analysis provided by Marx, our "choosing Christ" may easily be an unconvincing "cheap virtue." Ellul would be the last one to pretend to offer the "definitive synthesis" that would resolve the conflict between Marxist teachings and Christian revelation, but he can illumine us with his well-informed writings, which reflect nearly fifty years of living this tension. He attempts to show us how to value the scientific and ethical perceptions of Marx in order to make us more authentically Christian—avoiding the trap of "anticommunism" (the unfortunate error of Solzhenitzyn, according to Ellul).

Reading Ellul disturbs many Christians with right-wing or centrist ideologies because he accepts many Marxist notions. But Christian Marxists are startled by the Ellul's forceful criticism of many of the "sacred cows" in the temples of the left.

Hugo Zorilla, in a book of essays, has objected that another contributor to the same work, Miguez Bonino, falls into the trap of judging "the capitalism of 'already' while proposing a socialism of 'not yet' without judging the existing socialisms."⁴⁹

No one could lodge the same complaint against Ellul, who seems to maintain an interminable "lovers' quarrel" with the left. He says little about rightist reactionaries (he doesn't waste energy flogging the horse that Marx had quite effectively slain). Clearly, many Latin American readers, who live under a "reign of death," would prefer that Ellul at least help us a little in our effort to "remove the cadaver" of the horse, since most of us live struggling to breathe under it. But the help Ellul offers us comes much more in the unexpected form of a challenge, purification, and upsetting of the alternatives that confront us. Especially in his most recent book, *Changer de revolution*, it is clear that Ellul's concern is not to resurrect the dead horse of the right, but to free revolutionary forces of their inauthentic elements. This freedom under the lordship of Christ to demystify the sacred cows of Marxism is a characteristic of Ellul's praxis often lacking among theologians of liberation.⁵⁰

2.2 *Sola Scriptura*—Not the Social Sciences

After his conversion to Marx (1930), Ellul was converted to Christ, during a "somewhat brutal" crisis, through reading the Bible (1932). He completed an entire program of theological study, including Hebrew and Koine Greek (he had been tutoring Classical Greek since the age of 16), but was never ordained. In addition to his theological books, he has published several expository commentaries: on Joshua (1952), II Kings (1966), and Revelation (1975). He has also produced unpublished manuscripts on Micah and Job. After finishing the remaining two volumes of his ethics, Ellul hopes to write a detailed commentary on Ecclesiastes.⁵¹

We must not think that Ellul is a "conservative Evangelical" with a doctrine of biblical inerrancy *a la* Harold Lindsell (is it possible to imagine Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, or Jesus and the Apostles considering themselves—or being considered—"conservatives" in their own time?). But, if Ellul does not ally himself

with those who incessantly tout a formal definition of biblical authority (verbal inspiration, inerrancy, etc.), the marked prophetic and biblical tone of his writings testifies to his profound search for the sense and message of Scripture. (It is also worthwhile to remember that the principal enemies of Jesus—the Pharisees and scribes—also touted a definition of the authority of Scripture, but without grasping the Scripture's most fundamental sense and message.)

Ellul does not waver in his affirmation of the importance of biblical authority for his work. For example, in the Introduction to *To Will and To Do*, the prolegomena to his ethics, he affirms:

Lay the cards on the table . . . It would be useless to claim to pursue a moral quest without presuppositions. Such a thing does not exist . . . It is better to have presuppositions which are clear, and which one owns up to candidly, than to pretend not to have any, when such a pretense would reflect only ignorance or a lie . . . I therefore confess that in this study and this research the criterion of my thought is the Biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the Biblical revelation, the point of departure is provided 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.⁵²

Although Ellul criticized Barth's ethics for failing to take seriously the situation of modern persons as illumined by the social sciences, this doesn't mean that for Ellul the social sciences could usurp the authority of Scriptures. In fact, one can see in Ellul's writings a growing preoccupation with the Word of God, and a zeal to understand and communicate the Bible to modern persons, including non-Christians. For example, in 1982 he led monthly Bible studies on the book of Job for a very heterogeneous group (he explains that his ideal for such groups is to have 25% Protestants, 25% Catholics, 25% Jews, and 25% unbelievers).⁵³ When explaining the changes in his thought over the last fifty years, Ellul insists that the principal factor has been an increasingly profound understanding of the Bible, an understanding progressively more liberated from philosophical and theological presuppositions.⁵⁴

As in the case of the lordship of Christ, we must not suppose that the practical application of *Sola Scriptura* in relation to the social sciences is simple. Many Christians of the right, just as liberation theologians, want to affirm *in theory* that the Word of God must take priority over scientific hypotheses. But in practice, the whole gamut of human "interpretations" of Scriptures presents us with the difficulty of distinguishing between scientific "hypotheses" and facts.

For example, when ideologically conservative Christians proclaim the Good News to the poor (if it occurs to them to do so), it does not strike them as strange to "complement" (not to say "substitute") the anointing with oil of James 5 with, say, doses of penicillin and much instruction in family planning. However, basic Christian communities, cooperatives, union organizing, strikes, and protest marches—all this strikes them as a "communist" betrayal of the gospel! The nonviolence of the Sermon on the Mount quickly disappears beneath a cloud of "rational-scientific" arguments, "cultural" factors, and twisted exegesis—so that suddenly the Christians of the right are free to support wars in Vietnam and El Salvador, while Christians of the left call for guerrilla warfare (cf Ellul's book, *Violence*).

None of Ellul's readers is completely in agreement with all the biblical interpretations, theological arguments, and scientific affirmations contained in his writings. But the experience of getting to the bottom of the thought of such a respected Christian (one thinks of the atheist Aldous Huxley's reaction to reading *The Technological Society*)⁵⁵, a prophetic lay theologian highly skilled in exegesis, can

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provide us with a decisive orientation in our desire to be honest and open before the social sciences and at the same time faithful to the supreme authority of the Word of God. Without denying the value of sound doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, I believe Ellul shows us how *Sola Scriptura* must be expressed in praxis and understanding, and in the communication of the biblical message to a world in which the social sciences play an increasingly important role.

2.3 The Option for the Poor—Not Exclusively for the Proletariat

Ellul recognized the decisive influence of Marx in "my decision to side with the poor."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in both his praxis and his writings concerning this theme, he makes a continual effort to recognize as "poor" all those so designated by biblical and sociological criteria—thereby avoiding becoming trapped in the typical ideologies and propaganda of the left:

For Marx there is a complete analysis of the psychological, sociological, and economic situation of human beings, and the poor person is the person deprived in all these areas. Hence, when I say that Marx oriented me toward always siding with the poor, I am not necessarily siding with those who have no money. I am siding with people who are alienated on all levels, including culturally and sociologically—and this is variable. I will not claim that qualified French workers in the highest category are poor, even though they are subject to the capitalist system. They have considerable advantage, and not just material ones. On the other hand, I would say that very often old people, even those with sufficient resources, are poor, because in a society like ours they are utterly excluded. That is why I keep discovering those who are the new poor in a society like ours.⁵⁷

Ellul insists that "the Christian must be the spokesman for those who are *really* poor and forgotten. . . . Christians specialize in joining struggles that are virtually over and championing those of the poor who already have millions of champions. Which is to say that Christians are very susceptible to propaganda."⁵⁸

Further, Ellul makes us rethink and continually revise our understanding of "poor" and our comfortable and static notion of "opting":

. . . (T)he Christian *must* change camps once his friends have won; that is, when in the aftermath of its victory revolutionary party assumes power; for the party will immediately begin to oppress the former oppressors. This is the way things regularly go. I saw it in the case of the French resistance to the Nazis.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Ellul recognized that a situation like that of contemporary Nicaragua is even more complex.⁶⁰ The defeated Nazis and French collaborators in the postwar period could not threaten a counter-revolution supported by a great empire. In contrast, the *somocistas* within and without Nicaragua are not in the same situation as the France of 1945 that Ellul describes. Despite the needed clarifications, the option and praxis that Ellul suggests have a great deal of relevance when the Lord of history overturns the powerful. For Christians, love of enemies and the question "Who is my neighbor?" demands that we continually rethink our praxis.

2.4 The Witness to the Truth—Against Propaganda

You are at liberty to seek your salvation as you understand it, provided you do nothing to change the social order.⁶¹

Many Christians regard their principal role in the world as the "conserving" of traditional values—as much in society as in Theology—so that they are very comfortable when they receive instructions like the above from their political leaders. Perhaps they would be less comfortable with this reference if they realized that it comes from Dr. Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda! The good German—"conservative"!—Christians did nothing to "disrupt the social order" and thus supported their government in the "just and defensive" war (as all wars are!) that left some fifty million dead, including six million Jews.

When reading the propaganda produced by both governments and almost all the press of England and Argentina during the Mal-

vinas/Falklands war, one realizes that the fundamental problem of propaganda did not disappear with Hitler. It continues to live and flourish under fascist dictators (Argentina) as well as the oldest and most "advanced" democracies (England). And how do Christians respond?

The most common response—as much among Christians as among others—is, in effect, to answer bad propaganda with good (that is, "ours" as opposed to that of "the other side"). Instead of conquering "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:11), we think to conquer black lies by opposing them with "good propaganda" (public relations, etc.)—or even with "white" lies (1 Jn 2:21!)—just so long as they are ours.

I have the profound impression that in circles where liberation theologies are dominant there has not yet been serious reflection—let alone the attempt to liberate themselves—concerning the tyranny of propaganda as an instrument of the state. They have changed sides without manifesting authentic freedom. In some cases they have carefully swept the house clean of capitalist propaganda and permitted the entry of seven even worse demons.

Ellul points out that the dominion of propaganda is one of the fundamental characteristics of technological society, while conformism under this dominion is common to communist, socialist, and capitalist countries. The theologies of liberation currently attract more attention in communist and socialist countries, such as those of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, China, Cuba—and, above all, Nicaragua. In order to develop a prophetic testimony in such new and distinct contexts, the theologies of liberation will have to confront seriously the phenomenon of propaganda—an area in which Ellul has made a unique contribution as a sociologist and as a Christian.⁶²

As Ellul notes, to be molded by propaganda is not so much a problem for humble people, peasants, and the uneducated, but for the "educated" class, with its zeal to have an "opinion" concerning every issue in the world (who almost never deal with issues concerning our experience, but rather depend on the media). Further, even Goebbels recognized that effective propaganda does not so much lie as skillfully select from the many truths the public will be permitted to know.

2.5 The Fight of Faith—Against Violence

We reject the caricature of a certain North American theologian who described Theology of Liberation as "throwing a grenade for Jesus." Nor does it seem to us fair to treat Latin American theologies under the heading "War," as does a prestigious dictionary of New Testament theology.⁶³ Wars—always just—(Vietnam, Falklands, El Salvador, etc.) play too great a role in the historical praxis and imported theologies of every type that we have swallowed from the North, along with all the Coca Cola. Without doubt, nonviolent and pacifist praxis (of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Helder Camera, Archbishop Romero, etc.) has had a much better liberation than in traditional theologies.⁶⁴

Many evangelicals, however, have been perturbed to find that some want to interpret the plagues of Exodus not as divine miracles, but as disguised guerrilla activities.⁶⁵ Similarly disturbing has been the failure of some to distinguish between the militarism of the sandinistas (the height of "conformism" rather than truly revolutionary!) and the way of the cross—or even the claim that the Kingdom of God has definitively come to earth in Cuba, with Fidel Castro as the "prophet who is to come," the successor to Moses.⁶⁶

Faced with such extremes (which do indeed exist, but are neither as typical nor as dominant as the Coca Cola addicts believe), Ellul's classic little book, *Violence*, which has only recently appeared in Spanish, is of great importance.⁶⁷ We have elsewhere indicated that this book, like almost all the writings on this subject, suffers from not having started with a biblical definition of violence.⁶⁸ Ellul now recognizes that his argument would be more powerful and convincing had he questioned the definitions that currently dominate—and confuse—the issue.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, it is Ellul (with his years of fighting fascism in Spain and France) who has given us a truly devastating and prophetic analysis of this phenomenon, which is so dominant in our context.

Of particular importance for us is Ellul's refutation of the ar-

gument (so common in theologies of "just war" as well) that seeks to permit violence as a "last resort"—as if Yahweh, the Liberator of the Exodus, who raised Jesus from the dead, had not demonstrated that as long as He lives, there is always another "last resort."⁷⁰

2.6 The Priorities of the Kingdom—Not the Growth of the State with the "Political Illusion"

Who should we credit—or blame!—for having shot the "sweet bird of pietism"? In the U.S. it appears to be the "Moral Majority" of Jerry Falwell and company (with their politicized crusades against abortion and in favor of prayer and Bible reading in public schools, etc.) that has killed the pietistic tradition of "leaving politics at the door" upon entering the sanctuary (usually a naive way of decisively supporting the conservative politics of the status quo).⁷¹

For Christians, love of enemies and the question, "Who Is My Neighbor?" demands that we continually rethink our praxis.

In Latin America it is common to credit the theologies of liberation with the political dimension of the Bible, the gospel, and every ecclesiastical and personal praxis. If the pietism imported by the missionaries is not yet an extinct species, it is becoming as difficult to find as a Quetzal bird in Costa Rica.

With his years in the anti-fascist resistance in Spain and France, followed by two years as the vice mayor of Bordeaux, Ellul came to see that to live out the political implications of Christian faith is not "optional" but "necessary" (whether we do so consciously or not). However, his sociological analysis also enabled him to see the "political illusion" that fails to take into account the realities of totalitarian states in technological societies—and, above all, ignores the preponderant role of bureaucrats and technocrats (who usually determine what the politicians, who claim to be "the decision-makers," must actually say and do).⁷² Further, in his expository work on II Kings, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man*, a part of the canon little known in pietistic circles, Ellul unfolds in a rich and original manner certain transcendent paradigms from the Word of God for the political dimension of our time.

Latin American students observe a common difficulty: they get a "taste" for the political dimension through theologies of liberation, and wind up so "inebriated" by conscientization, campaigns, and political dabbling, that other essential elements of discipleship (personal devotional life, prayer, Bible study, evangelism—which pietism is right to emphasize) become, if not totally eliminated, greatly neglected. They arise from their baptism in the river of liberation looking as skinny as the cows in Pharaoh's dream that had gone hungry for seven years. The sudden extermination in so many countries of "pietist sparrows" has left us with a great ecological imbalance!

Ellul's profound analysis of the political dimension of modern life, with its opportunities and its perils and deceptions, and the role of the church (clergy and laity) therein, was written for a different situation. Nevertheless, it contains a great deal of light that can be essential in guiding us through the long dark tunnel of our current situation. The situation of middle class Christians in the older democracies (such as England and the U.S.) is so different that their evangelical theologians cannot even imagine what our questions are, let alone provide us with answers or orientations. Ellul's writings are of particular relevance because they emerge from a similar struggle (in Spain and France) against fascism. In this anti-fascist struggle Christians and Marxists of very different "ecclesiastical" affiliations find themselves dumped together—often surprised and somewhat ashamed—in the same trenches. In this uncomfortable context, both pietists and liberationists may find an unexpected challenge in what Ellul has written from a similar trench.

2.7 Time would fail us . . . (Hebrews 11:32)

Due to the limits shared by writer, readers, and the budget of this journal, we can do no more than suggest some of the other, not yet explored, areas of Ellul's work that would also be useful for developing a more prophetic Latin American theology:

1. His analysis of authentic liberation (his article on Paul is only a small part of the attention this theme receives in his ethics and other writings);
2. His "rereading" of Marx, springing from his analysis of technique and technology as the dominant factors of the twentieth century (taking the place held by capital in the nineteenth century);
3. His understanding of biblical hope (see *Hope in Time of Abandonment*), which differs radically from the humanistic optimism of Marx, other communisms, and even many Christian theologies;
4. His treatment of authentic individuality and community, almost completely lost in modern society (wherein Ellul accuses both the churches and Marxist groups of conforming

rather than offering a prophetic challenge);

5. His discussions of evangelism, conversion, prayer, and biblical exposition;
6. His analyses of diverse political philosophies: capitalism, socialism, communism, democracy, anarchy, etc.;
7. His grasp of the ecological crisis and nuclear issues (energy and arms).

Conclusion

Undoubtedly there are many who would have liked to see this article end—if not begin!—with another section, entitled, "How do the Theologies of Liberation Transcend Jacques Ellul." That would be fair. We don't want to insist stubbornly that the proverbial "old wine"—a Bordeaux, no less!—is undeniably superior to the new liberationist varieties being imbibed so enthusiastically in Latin America. We in no sense desire to deny the transcendent importance of the theological explosion in our context, which we have elsewhere compared to the Reformation itself.⁷³ But, if Ellul's sociological and theological writings do not constitute all the "fullness" of a liberation theology (which is, in any case, still very much in process of formation), it seems clear to us that the "bordelaise" prophet, like a John the Baptist, has prepared a highway in the desert of our modern technological world.⁷⁴

When we in Latin America read Ellul's writings today, it is vital that we remember they proceeded neither from the Third World nor from the "liberationist" era (1968–83) of our history. We must circumnavigate a certain "hermeneutic circle" to be able to draw lessons and paradigms from them our own context. Nevertheless, it is astonishing that a "little professor" in the Faculty of Law in Bordeaux, on the southwest coast of France, has written with such prophetic discernment about the problems that confront us in current Latin American praxis and theological tasks. Much more than C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, or other prophetic voices of the Anglo-Saxon world, Ellul has addressed himself fervently to the most important elements of our theological agenda. As Martin Marty has remarked of him:

... (I) If I were asked to introduce one man from the Protestant orbit to let the church know what I think its agenda should be, it would be Ellul.⁷⁵

The importance of Ellul for the communication of the gospel to modern persons is underlined by Robert Nisbet, the Albert Schweitzer Professor Emeritus of Columbia University (N.Y.):

If, as some have prophesied, a new rebirth and reformation of Christianity awaits us, one which will eradicate the demons of the twentieth century, in which the necessary equilibrium between freedom and moral authority will return, and in which, above all, once again the sense of the sacred, the truly Judeo-Christian-Christian sacred, will become dominant, the writings of Jacques Ellul will be held in the highest

esteem as the fundamental elements that have brought us to this rebirth.⁷⁶

Postscript

Too late for incorporation into this article, I received the excellent doctoral dissertation of Darrell J. Fasching, *The thought of Jacques Ellul: A Systematic Exposition*, Edwin Mellen Press, New York and Toronto, 1981. Together with the article by John Boli-Bennett (note 29 above), it offers the best available introduction. Fasching does not agree with Ellul's rejection of "utopias" (pp.xxi-xxviii, 170-176). Otherwise, he faithfully expounds many of the areas touched upon in this article.

⁴⁹ Hugo Zorilla, "observaciones y preguntas" (reaction to the paper of Jose Miguez Bonino), in Padilla, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁵⁰ For more details on the centrality of Christ in Ellul's ethics, see Gill's dissertation (note 26), pp. 240-243.

⁵¹ Personal interview, Bordeaux, 1982.

⁵² Ellul, *TWTD*, p. 1. For details on the *sola scriptura* principle in Ellul, see Temple's dissertation (note 48 above), pp. 197-461.

⁵³ Personal interview, Bordeaux, 1982.

⁵⁴ Ellul, *ISOS*, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Huxley said that Ellul's work, *The Technological Society*, was comparable in importance to Spengler's *Decline of the West*, and that Ellul established the argument he had tried to offer in *Brave New World*; Gill, Introduction to Ellul, *ISOS*, p. v.

⁵⁶ Ellul, *POA*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12; cp. *BW*, pp. 85-125; *Violence*, pp. 30-35; see the article below.

⁵⁸ Ellul, *Violence*, SCM, London, 1970, p. 153.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁶⁰ Personal interview, Bordeaux, 1982.

⁶¹ Ellul, *TS*, p. 420.

⁶² Ellul, *PK*, pp. 96-136; *Propaganda, passim*; Christians and Van Hook, *Essays*, pp. 128-146.

⁶³ Colin Brown, ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978, III: 972-976.

⁶⁴ Pacifist theology and praxis are especially dominant in Chile and Brazil. Interview with William Cook, San Jose, 1983.

⁶⁵ Pablo Richard and Esteban Torres, *Cristianismo, lucha ideologica y racionalidad socialista*, Sigüeme, Salamanca, 1975, pp. 74-76.

⁶⁶ Ernesto Cardenal, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 31, 57, 85.

⁶⁷ Ellul, *Contra los violentos*, Ediciones SM, Madrid, 1980.

⁶⁸ Thomas Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1983, pp. 105-08; Jacques Pons, *L'oppression dans L'ancien Testament*, Letouzey et Ane, Paris, 1981, pp. 27-52.

⁶⁹ Personal interview, Bordeaux, 1982.

⁷⁰ Ellul, *Violence*, pp. 169-70; cp. Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology*, pp. 106-31.

⁷¹ Emilio Nunez, "The Challenge of Liberation Theology," in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, July 1981, pp. 41-42.

⁷² Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, Knopf, New York, 1967, *passim*; cp. the critical essays in Christians and Van Hook, *Essays*, pp. 69-90, 128-46; also the dissertation of Fasching, Postscript, note 76, pp. 161-76.

⁷³ Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World*, ch. 4, "The Bible, The Reformation, and Liberation Theologies."

⁷⁴ Gill, "Jacques Ellul: The Prophet as Theologian," p. 9.

⁷⁵ Martin Marty, "The Protestant for this Summer," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 3, 1970.

⁷⁶ Robert A. Nisbet, "Foreward," in Christians and Van Hook, *Essays*, p. 5. Ellul's last evaluation Ellul has made of Latin American theologies can be seen in the journal he edits, *Foi et vie*, 81:5-6 (December, 1982). In particular, see Ellul's reviews, "Quelques livres de la Theologie de la Revolution," pp. 75-89. The books treated are: Ernesto Cardenal, *Chretiens au Nicaragua, L'Evangile en Revolution*, Caribe-CELEP, 1982, pp. 81-85; Vincent Cosmao, *Changer le Monde*, 1981, pp. 85-89. Ellul has evaluated Cosmao's book as "the first theology of liberation that convinces me" (personal interview, Bordeaux, 1982).

The Politics of Biblical Eschatology: Ronald Reagan and the Impending Nuclear Armageddon

by Larry Jones and Gerald T. Sheppard

"Pie-in-the-sky" religion is condemned by progressive evangelicals for its lack of political concern, a willingness to postpone issues of social justice in order to meditate on events during the period of the Great Tribulation. So-called "apocalyptic" eschatology appears to be pre-occupied with "things to come," and pays little attention to the way things actually are. Such a neat distinction between piety and politics often proves to be an illusion. Even apocalyptic ideas have direct political consequences for those who hold to them and to the *politeia* who are under their authority or influence. So, too, American politicians have often recognized a connection between public policy and their religious views. More than any other American president in recent history, Ronald Reagan has displayed a keen interest in biblical prophecy. His interest is evidently more than academic, for he has linked a number of political decisions to biblical prophetic scenario familiar to fundamentalist dispensationalism.

Charismatic Christians close to Reagan, Christian journalists, long-time friends and Reagan himself have made reference to the president's interest in prophecy. Reagan met with friends for an afternoon of fellowship on September 20, 1970 to talk about the Holy Spirit and the signs of the unfolding apocalyptic drama. The meeting is described in George Otis's 1971 book *High Adventure* and in Bob Slosser's 1984 *Reagan Inside/Out*.

After his appearance at a charismatic clinic in Sacramento, Pat Boone, his wife Shirley and two friends, George Otis and Harold Bredesen, drove to the Reagan home. Pat Boone told the Reagans of his recent experiences with the Holy Spirit, including the new song he had sung "in tongues." Recent headlines told of civil war in Jordan and Nixon threatened intervention. Reagan listened intently to his old friend.

At some point, Reagan turned the conversation to the subject of Bible prophecy. He told his guests of a story he had heard from Billy Graham. The famous evangelist, a long time friend of Reagan, told him of a talk he had had with Conrad Adenauer. The then West

German chancellor had asked Graham what the next great news event would be. Graham shrewdly answered, "The return of Jesus Christ."

Reagan, then, listed what he saw as the signs of the times: The scattering of the Jews, the re-gathering of Israel in 1948, and, most especially, the Israeli capture of Jerusalem in 1967. Reagan saw the stage being set for the last act in world history. George Otis described Reagan's using the Bible as a signpost or chronometer of history. For Reagan, the Old Testament prophecies marked the rise and the fall of empires in the timeline of world history. The Bible seemed to him to have authenticated itself by virtue of the complex and intricate "fulfillment of many prophecies." Otis reported that Reagan delighted in the wonderful cadence of history marching with such beauty and precision. Bredesen told the governor that he had failed to mention the most important sign of all, namely, the two great Pentecosts, one of Satan and one of God, which mark the present time as the "last days."

The trial of the cultic Manson murders had only recently filled the television screens and newspaper headlines. For their last fifteen minutes together the little group spoke fervently of their experiences with the Holy Spirit. Pat Boone gave his old Hollywood friend an enscribed copy of his recent book *A New Song*. Boone, Otis, and Bredesen presented Reagan with a copy of an apocalyptic pamphlet they had written, *A Solution to Crisis America*. Before they left the Reagan home, someone suggested they pray together. They joined hands in a circle. In the course of his prayer, George Otis was "possessed by the Holy Spirit." Otis or the Spirit possessing Otis addressed Reagan as "my son" and prophesied that Reagan would one day be "resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue." Otis' left hand, the one holding Reagan's right, began to shake and pulsate. Everyone opened their eyes and let go of one another's hands. Ellingwood drove away in the waiting limousine with the visitors. He told them on the ride back to Sacramento that while he held Reagan's left hand, it, also, shook and pulsated when Otis prayed. Later he reported having felt a "bolt of electricity" from Reagan's hand.¹

Possibly the first published evidence of Reagan's interest in biblical prophecy appeared in the May, 1968 *Christian Life*. In the lead article Reagan's pastor, Donn Moomaw, told of a visit he and Billy Graham had had with Ronald Reagan while he was in the hospital.

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