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Ecological Disaster & Jacques Ellul's Theological Vision

Abstract
This paper will focus Jacques Ellul's insights onto the manner in which our modern technological society is deeply ingrained in the subordination of both humanity and nature to efficient use. Ellul maintains that our way of life is characterised by structural instrumentalism, which is in turn underpinned by a distorted theological outlook. The paper asserts that these aforementioned factors together form the key drivers that propel us towards environmental desolation. This paper asserts that no adequate fine tuning of our present way of life will be possible to address issues such as climate change. What is needed instead is the comprehensive sociological and theological conversion of our society. This paper will conclude by tentatively exploring ways in which the church might proclaim and embody a prophetic message of repentance and conversion in this and other socio-cultural matters.

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Ecological Disaster & Jacques Ellul's Theological Vision

Paul Tyson & Matthew Tan

When one thinks about pressing socio-political issues, such as climate change, one is often unaware that such reflections do not occur within a cultural vacuum. Rather, reflection on issues like climate change occur within a particular context of the common beliefs and shared way of life that help make sense of the world around him, which philosophers and sociologists call a life form.[1] Such life forms emerge out of a community's collective practices, struggles with material conditions and habituated forms of behaviours which have been moulded culturally over time, all of which are intimately intertwined with that community's common deposit of values, beliefs and cosmological ideas. Sociologists argue that there is nothing more basic to one's meaningful experience of the world than its life form, for the life form in which one lives is the grounds of its understanding of reality, not the other way around. At the same time, however, sociologists – and many others besides[2] – have observed that what counts as 'reality', given the plurality of different life forms, is a profoundly contestable thing and not a self-evident given category.

This paper asserts that climate change constitutes one such 'reality'. More specifically, it asserts that what is regarded as the reality of climate change is deeply dependent on the socio-cultural structures within which one lives. These structures are rarely noticed because they constitute the horizons of the life form within which we live, and as such fade into the cognitive background unnoticed, whilst still serving to shape and form cultural consciousness. Providing an understanding or challenge to the dominant discourses on climate change thus requires an appreciation of the dominant life form that generated that discourse. More specifically, this paper seeks to provide an awareness of how seemingly self-evident concepts such as 'nature', 'the environment' and 'climate change' are only meaningful insofar as they become refracted through that dominant life form. Moreover, because of the contestability of such life forms, this paper argues that the concept of 'climate change' does not necessarily have one single meaning, and thus does not make the proposed avenues of redress, particularly the more ethically questionable measures such as population control, the only necessary ones available.

This paper will establish its case by first outlining a broad conception of the dominant, modern Western life form. We will argue that this life form has some serious weaknesses when viewed through the lens of a Christian confessional understanding of creation. We will also argue that to seriously contemplate fundamental change requires a challenge to the cognitive hegemony of our dominant life form and that a Christian understanding of creation

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[1] See, for instance, P.L. Berger, & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Anchor Books, New York, 1966.

[2] Herodotus, in the 5th century BC, for example, highlighted the moral relativism that exists between people from different cultural life forms. (*Histories*, 3.16)

can catalyse that challenge.

This paper asserts that the current dominant life form is one shaped by instrumental reason, which nurtures the instinct to act without foresight and destroy without conscience for short term profit, and which also celebrates this instinct as the height of rationality, normality and even necessity. Because of this, finding solutions within this life form would produce little more than minor lifestyle adjustments, without any fundamental challenge to climate change. More specifically, trying to find economically palatable solutions to climate change will fail because that which is economically sensible in the context of the current life is what underpins the very problem. Thus, this paper will work from the premise that one cannot find a theological solution to late modern consumerism unless it is embedded within a life form that has a different relationship to nature which in turn is harmonious with a Christian understanding of creation. Averting the destructive ecological consequences of the dominant mode of living requires re-envisioning the modern Western way of life at a fundamental level, namely at the level of its life form.

Understanding the contours of the dominant contemporary life form can be greatly assisted by turning one's attention to the French sociologist and theologian, Jacques Ellul, who wrote two major works of sociology in the 20th century, namely *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda*. Ellul sought to expose some of the deep, and hence uncontested, reality structures of the modern secular Western life form, and he did so with two aims in mind. The first was to bring to the reader's awareness of the existence of the substructures of our conceptions of how we live. Having brought these sub-structures out of the cultural subconscious, his second aim was to show how these seemingly cultural foundations, often thought to be so self-evident as to be incontestable, can in fact be challenged.[3] Ellul's more explicitly Christian texts endeavour to place the alternative reality vision of the Gospel in contest with the received reality of the modern Western life form. In doing this, Ellul sought to point out both the radical nature of a genuinely Christian witness to our times, as well as show how unwilling modern bourgeois-Christianity is to be in radical conflict with the contemporary reality structures.

Central to Ellul's work is his understanding of 'technique', which must be distinguished from what the English speaking world understands as 'technology'. Ellul refers not to machines, which are the physical extension of 'technique', but to a 'totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency…in every field of human activity.'[4] One important theme Ellul outlines in *The Technological Society* is the growing disjuncture that occurred between 'technique' and societies from the sixteenth century. While all societies grew, evolved and adapted with 'technique', Ellul argues that 'technique' itself had simultaneously 'evolve[d] under the pressure of circumstances along with the body social', as part of an organic whole.[5]

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[3] A similar argument can found in Berger& Luckmann, *op. cit.,* pp. 67-116

[4] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, Vintage Books, NY, 1964, p. xxv

[5] *Ibid*., p.14

In other words, 'technique' existed alongside, and was influenced by, an array of other organising principles. These included religious, cultural and philosophical principles and the interactions between them which constituted a communal tradition.[6] Yet with the increase of technological advancement, 'technique' gradually disengaged itself from the web of tradition and society, so that by the twentieth century it had become completely autonomous from them.[7] Natural law gave way to technical law.[8] Thus by the 20th century 'technique' had fashioned 'an omnivorous world' which subordinated both tradition and society to its own logic. This is nothing short of an inversion of traditional social organisation.[9] No longer was the most efficient means of organisation employed in the interests of society, rather society had to conform to the logic of efficiency.

'Technique' thus became the first principle of modern social organisation, and the *telos* of this organisation was maximising efficiency without reference to intrinsically meaningful qualitative social or cultural ends. Efficiency thus became pursued for its own sake, at the expense of other ecological or social considerations. The aim of maximising efficiency as a measure of social and cultural success was to enhance human freedom, but for Ellul, allowing 'technique' to dominate social organisation has led not to a freedom. To paraphrase Peter Orchard, what has emerged instead is an enslavement of humanity to purposeless streamlining, which Ellul considered to be a form of cultural suicide. [10] It is important to note here, however, that Ellul does not take 'inefficiency' to be the opposite of 'efficiency', for the terms in which the positive and negative judgements of efficiency are made – speed, cost, profitability etc. – are all of the one family of evaluative reasoning. They are formal and procedural, rather than substantive evaluative categories. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber observed that thrift, diligence, self-control, hard work and obedience had become the highest values of the procedural morality and have attained the status of substantive and religious significance in our capitalist cultural history. There is an intimate relationship between the 'moral' and 'religious' drivers of capitalism and the formal instrumentalism of modern bureaucratic efficiency.[11]

However, this procedural 'morality' is still not grounded in any substantive goodness. The moral ambivalence residing within this equation of procedural efficiency with substantial good is illustrated in a number of ways. The most explicit exemplar would be the efficiency and diligence put into the design, building and maintenance of the extermination camps for the Jews in Auschwitz in Poland. Efficiency that is blind to substantive goods can also

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6 *Ibid*., p.73

7 *Ibid*., p.14

8 *Ibid*., p.218

9 *Ibid*., p.14

10 P. Orchard, comment 10 (Feb 10, 2011, 9:32pm), "On stolen chainsaws, meths dealers and the second mile, part 1" (Jan 30, 2011), Blog: "Beside Ourselves", Accessed: www.besideourselves.com [17/4/2012] Orchard's comment here comes from his reading of Jacques Ellul's *The Presence of the Kingdom*, Helmers & Howard, Colorado Springs, 1989, particularly chapter three 'The End and the Means', pp 49–78

11 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Unwin, 1985.

manifest itself in other, subtler ways in contemporary corporate life. For instance, when high level management imposes staff cuts on workers within its institutions, and 're-structures' the organisation to shift privileges from the bottom to the top of the organisational hierarchy, this is always done for the 'necessary' 'goods' of rationalising 'non-performing' areas of operation, and rewarding 'performing' areas of their operation. These measures are always justified in the terms of economic responsibility, but such rationalisation in large organisations is often a code for the responsibility of company executives and directors to merely produce – by any means – the maximum numerical profit for shareholders. The language of 'responsibility' – drawing on the residual moralism left behind by cultural traces of the Protestant work ethic – thus actually means amoral profit maximization, regardless of any immoral workplace dislocation which restructuring all too typically imposes on the more vulnerable workers of any large organization. In fact, substantive values play no role at all in the 'necessary' power plays of corporate management. In reality, qualitative substantial goods have become evacuated from formal, quantitative and instrumental "values" and merely financial ends.[12] Both efficiency and inefficiency are essentially quantitative and instrumental categories and have nothing directly to do with that which is inherently meaningful or explicitly qualitative – and it is this approach towards social organisation that is a major contributor to any impending ecological disaster.[13]

Ellul does not assert that slower and more expensive is better than faster and cheaper (or vice versa). What he is saying rather, is that if there was a living discourse of public reasoning other than that of efficiency, then genuinely moral or explicitly religious categories of good would govern questions of efficiency and not the other way around. If efficiency was not the only governing principle of society then the calculation of an appropriate speed and cost which corresponded to the qualitatively good goals and qualitatively good means would govern the way in which any common vision of the good would be implemented. As it stands, however, 'the bottom line' remains the final arbiter when social organisation is seen through the rubric of efficiency. Contemporary public discourse still proceeds ostensibly under the aegis of substantive moral ends and ethical means, when in reality it is economic or financial efficiency that acts as the driving force behind how large and powerful institutions actually function today.[14] Hence, under the governing principle of efficiency both humanity and nature

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[12] Money's capacity as a governing principality can be seen in J. Ellul, *Money and Power*, Marshall Pickering, Southampton, 1986.

[13] See Wendell Berry's 1977 essay 'The Unsettling of America' for a critique of the logic of efficiency as an exploitative principle, systematically overriding the logic of care as that relates to land use and patterns of settlement in the USA. See W. Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*, Counterpoint, Berkeley, 2002, pp. 35 – 46

[14] Based on the case made in *The Technological Society,* Ellul observes that "All decisions are dictated by the necessity of technological development. Nothing else matters. Like every other social organisation, politics continues to exist as a kind of theatre in which we play out the comedy of freedom. Culture does the same in identical fashion." (J. Ellul, *What I believe*, Eerdmans, MI, 1989, p. 135.) Theodor Adorno makes the same kinds of observations regarding the difference between the cultural surface of a society, where freedom and personal integrity are lauded, and where large institutions pride themselves on their 'business ethics', and the reality below the surface where naked economic instrumentalism is the driving force which governs all real

are rendered to be without any essential significance, the drive towards amoral domination is unchecked, and the Christian understanding of the intrinsic dignity of humanity and the sacral significance of nature – key features of the Christian theology of creation – are entirely absent.

Furthermore, the contemporary life form is not simply one of technical efficiency, for modern life is now tightly governed by an economic understanding of efficiency. The ascendency of economics as the science of discerning the most efficient distribution of material goods comes to be seen as superior to more traditional forms of social organisation. The subordination of all social organisation to the logic of efficiency is now coupled with the glorification of the material and the narrowing of cultural horizons that entail them. Furthermore, such a crassly economic mode of being comes to be seen as entirely natural. Charles Taylor observed that by the eighteenth century, the 'economic', like Ellul's 'technique', had become sectioned off and reified as a self-contained social category, able to organise itself independently of other forms of cultural, religious or metaphysical principles.[15] Also, like Ellul's 'technique', the 'economic' would eventually subordinate all aspects of social organisation to itself. Under such circumstances, Taylor argues, society came to be seen as first and foremost an economy, and all manner of human agency became regarded as "an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange and consumption"[16] with strategic and material maximisation as the sole ethical guide.

This vision of society as merely a set of economic transactions is made all the worse because, as in Ellul's conception of 'technique', society as economy is marked by a fundamental purposelessness. This is because of one of the most fundamental principles that underpin the vision of a society as economy, which is economic freedom. As William Cavanaugh points out, the heart of the modern notion of economic freedom – particularly as upheld by Milton Freedman – is exactly the principle that no-one should prescribe any good or right end for anyone else.[17] Overarching purposelessness in moral, cultural and metaphysical terms is basic to this conception of economic freedom. One is free if one chooses solely in accordance with one's own will, with no-one else trying to impose universal notions of right and wrong. The "free market" is hence seen as intrinsically amoral at the same time as it is seen as what is good for us, because it distributes what we ourselves determine that we want. Thus, telling the market how it should behave is an infringement of an individual's basic economic liberties.

For Ellul, a life form emerges from the convergence of this collage of social changes, a life form that he calls 'the technological society'. Within that life form society is organised around the principle of 'value neutral' technical efficiency and the only 'value' we can collectively agree on is framed in monetary terms. Within the dominant structures of this life form, the significance of any essentially valuable and intrinsically purposeful vocation - such as

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power. See T. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, Routledge, London, 1991.

[15] C. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 178-80

[16] Taylor, *Ibid.*, p. 181

[17] W.A. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids , 2008, pp. 1-32

motherhood - becomes strangely invisible.[18] Intrinsic value itself becomes lost and things and people become instrumentalised for the greater good of technical efficiency. Everything is given a monetary value and nothing is, in principle and for its own sake, inviolably 'priceless'. Technical efficiency and monetary 'value' have become gods to which living persons are subordinated. We are now the servants of the blind and inanimate tools which society's own hands have made. In this life form humanity and nature become reduced to resources to be exploited till they are exhausted.

Environmental degradation is thus not primarily a problem of science or rationality. Rather, because the ostensibly uncontested structures of the contemporary life form which constitutes contemporary life are causing this problem, only a profound change in that very way of life will lead to a renewal of creation's richness and vitality. In other words, there is no fundamentally technical solution to the problem of ecological disaster - unless the consumer society fundamentally changes its ways, it is going to continue on its path of environmental violence and eventually, the violence of that society will fold back onto itself and destroy the consumer society itself. Moreover, this observation in and of itself yields no guide for that society to actually change its ways when every aspect of daily life remains locked into a structure of habits, relationships, beliefs, ideological commitments, norms, economic imperatives and material conditions which all impose a certain necessity of continuity. Society becomes very much like Achilles in the grip of his fate[19] and there is a sense of fatalism which is fundamentally a denial of freedom.

Whilst Ellul is brutally realistic about the nature of the present malaise, he refuses at the same time to give into despair. Ellul maintains that it is likely that the present situation will force a shift away from the present mode of social organisation, marked by mere technical power and economic necessity and towards an ethic of the limitation of power and technique in order to act differently towards nature and humanity.[20] However, such a shift requires in turn a shift

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[18] Anne Manne points out that mothers who care for their children, rather than being 'productive' members of the paid economy, are a kind of surd that defies the organisational logic of our society, or a problem which must be solved by making universally available state funded child-care an essential government service. See A. Manne, *Motherhood*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005; also, Manne, 'Love and Money – Family and the Free Farket', Quarterly Essay, Black Inc., Melbourne, Issue 29, 2008

[19] See S. Weil "The Iliad or the Poem of Force", in J.P. Holoka (ed. & trans.), *Simone Weil's The Iliad or the Poem of Force – A Critical Edition*, Peter Land, New York, 2003, pp. 45–69. See J. Ellul, *Violence*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1969.

[20] Ellul noted that 'Man has always succeeded in rising to the test, in meeting the challenge presented to him by means other than those which are the source of the challenge'. Thus we must move from the first level of the artificial, which is technology, to 'the second level of the artificial [which] is ethical'. In this way man would learn 'to set limits, to give up on his power, not to do everything it is possible to do, to reject the "always more" (larger, faster). It is to refuse the temptation to identify freedom with the disappearance of limits. To learn, on the contrary, that it is the formation of limits on his own action that is the act of freedom *par excellence*. The refusal of fatality and dogmas, through the critique of power, becomes the imperative for setting limits, ones that are genuine because they are coherent and not fleeting unto utopia'. See J. Ellul, 'Nature, Technique and Artificiality', *Research in Philosophy & Technology*, JAI Press, Vol 3, 1980, pp. 280–2

that runs deeper than at a behavioural level.

Fundamentally, what is needed is a theological shift. Ellul suggests that the most basic reason for the present state of pending ecological disaster is because of the collapse of a viable and influential Christian theology of creation in the West. 'The ecological disaster that awaits us', he argues, 'is not only the result of belief in the technological system, but it follows...from the fact that man no longer believes in the creator God, who is the God of Jesus Christ'.[21] It is the absence of a Christo-centric collectively assumed theological belief in creation which Ellul sees as being at the heart of the present ecological malaise. Interestingly, Ellul maintains that Western culture does *not* need an explicit collective belief outlook that gives sacredness to nature. What is needed instead is a restoration of the Church's witness that asserts that 'Christianity is anti-nature',[22] though 'anti-nature' in a very different way from being 'anti-nature' in post-Christian Western consumerism. Even so, these two modes of being 'anti-nature' are linked. Being post-Christian, contemporary culture cannot return to a genuinely pagan theology of nature. This is because Christ has done away with the pagan notions of an inherent sacredness within nature, and has done away with the patterning of human life according to the necessities of fallen nature. This liberation by Christ from old patterns has impacted Western cultural consciousness irrevocably. Yet, when Western culture has unfettered itself from the anti-pagan strictures of Christianity, it senses a deep desire to return to the pagan resacralisation of nature, which is made subtly manifest in the discursive efforts of radical environmentalists and elite scientific intellectuals. This is ironic, given that at its core, consumer culture is profoundly de-sacralised and pursues a 'naturalistic' disregard for nature in the pursuit of entirely 'natural' conceptions of power, comfort, satiation and entertainment.

In the attempt to provide a confessional Christian response to the environmental malaise, it is crucial to remember that Christianity is not a pagan religion, otherwise one might get drawn into the now fashionable neo-pagan attempt to re-sacralise nature, which then easily draws us into the idolatry of nature worship, however modern and rationalistic its varnish may be. Yet at the same time, it is important also to not overreact to these attempts to re-sacralise nature by denying nature any significance *vis a vis* humanity, as is the case with many critics of climate change. In elaborating on the contours of an 'anti-nature' Christian theology of creation, Ellul writes that Christianity, whilst 'anti-nature' is not 'anti-creation'. 'If man has to love, respect, admire and use creation with moderation', writes Ellul:

> [I]t is not because it is nature, but rather because it is the creation of God. Because he loves God, he has to love God's handiwork and to admire God in His creation and to praise God for this creation. The Bible teaches us to read creation as a mirror of God, but it sends us to Him through it. To be anti-nature is to challenge – to refuse to accept that nature is a value

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[21] J. Ellul, 'The Relationship between Man and Creation in the Bible', chapter 9 in Carl Mitcham & Jim Grote (eds.), *Theology and Technology: Essays in Christian Analysis and Exegesis*, University Press of America, NY, 1984, p. 151

[22] J. Ellul, 'Nature, Technique and Artificiality', p. 272.

in itself, that it exists for itself, that its intrinsic laws are good.[23]

To be 'anti-nature' in the Ellulian sense, in other words, is to refuse to afford nature a 'value in itself' or concede that 'it exists for itself'.[24] Put more positively, a Christian theology is 'pro-creation' in that it makes humanity subordinate and responsible to God for the care and right use of nature which is proper to human flourishing.[25] Secular scientific belief in a purely naturalistic nature – *natura pura* as the early moderns called it[26] – removes any authority above humanity in relation to the use and care of creation and removes all the limits of accountability for our actions which used to be embedded in collective habits of piety. If piety were removed nothing above the human will govern what society should or should not do. In modern naturalistic 'nature', as Hume well understood, there is no ought or meaning embedded in the structure of reality, there is only what is.[27]

Conceptions of nature and conceptions of the place of humanity aside, it is important to note that when Ellul maintains that ecological disaster results from not believing in the creator God who is the God of Jesus Christ, he is also making a very specific point about the love and power of God to whom humanity is subordinate. The God revealed in Christ is the God who is Love and who refuses the way of instrumental domination, even though He has total power over creation. If one is to follow the way of Christ in his engagement with creation, then love, freedom and trust are to be his guiding lights. Those lights refuse the way of domination, utility and self-preservation, and so the Christian must refuse all those things which are natural and necessary to the fallen order, and which comprise our post-Christian culture's naturalistic assumptions about 'realism'.[28] Here again we see another aspect of Christian theology being 'anti-nature', for it is radically at odds with the contemporary life form which is taken by the culture to be a natural given. At the same time, a Christian theology of creation is in no sense a renunciation of nature for an other-worldly utopia. Ellul exhorts instead a rejection of the inevitability of its fallenness and of its natural concomitants, namely the violence, domination and 'efficient' instrumental relations that emerge not only in regard to people, but equally in regard to creation. On this note, Ellul finds a certain common ground with Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*. In paragraphs 2, 5 and 8, Benedict notes that the encounter with divine love in Christ "gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" from what is imposed by what the world calls "reality". This is because God's love promises an infinite reality "far greater and totally other than our everyday existence". Divine love does

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23 J. Ellul, 'Nature, Technique and Artificiality', p. 272

24 *Ibid.*

25 See J. Ellul, 'Christian responsibility for nature', *Cross Currents*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1985, pp. 49 – 53. See also J. Ellul, 'The Relationship between Man and Creation in the Bible', in C. Mitcham, & J. Grote (eds.), *Theology and Technology*, pp. 150–1

26 See L. Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 167–89 for an account of the emergence of the modern naturalistic notion of "pure nature" in the 16th century.

27 D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, BkIII, 1.1.27

28 Ellul exegetically poses suggestions of what a pre-fallen relation of humanity to creation would be like, in terms of what we know about Christ, in his 'Technique and the Opening Chapters of Genesis', in Mitcham & Grote (eds.), *Theology and Technology*, pp. 123–37

not give into the dictates of a fallen order, nor does it set up an escapist "parallel universe". Instead, God's love "accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it".[29] The response to God's love thus expands the horizons of human possibility.

To conclude, the problem of the modern life form's impious relation to creation runs very deep, so deep that even Christians living within this dominating and exploitative life form will often be complicit in that life form's propagation and maintenance. At first glance, Christian integrity seems profoundly compromised, for the comprehensive capture by the contemporary life world of the cultural imagination would mean that Christians would be just as culpable as non-Christians in contributing to a hopeless and bleak outlook on the planet's ecological future. Further, they may be just as culpable in upholding the collective paralysis which takes the structural necessities of the current dominant life form as unmoveable. Christians are currently embedded in a deeply instrumental life form that seems to be entirely natural to many and no merely technical answer or 'efficient' realist mechanism of incentives or penalties can adequately address this problem. Further, Christians have become so embedded in the technological society that it has become almost unthinkable to conceive of non-instrumental, non-'realist' ways of responding to this situation. They may grudgingly and fitfully concede some awareness that it is this very (comfortable) way of life that is the driving force behind the agonised groaning of creation which this globally immoral and destructively exploitative life form perpetuates.

An uncomfortable inertness seems an entirely understandable response to any level of serious awareness of the enormity of the redemptive challenge the Church now faces. Any realistic awareness of the spiritual poverty, even of many Christians, in the face of that challenge would tempt anyone towards escapist denial, 'realist' activism, or fatalistic resignation. Yet none of these natural ways - that is, ways that are reasonable and necessary within the context of the fallen order of creation - can open up avenues of redemptive change.

Ellul's contribution to this discussion comes in his reminder that there is a Christian mode of 'anti-nature' that can be a way forward towards the right conception of the care of the created world. It is, in Ellul's words, 'a dialectical attitude that leads us to consider that we are impotent in relation to structures and necessities, but that we ought to attempt what can be attempted'.[30] Ellul has in mind a politics of radical renunciation of dominating power and a concerted disentangling of our frame of evaluative reasoning from the exclusive governance of the logic of technical efficiency. If one were to take this outlook seriously then it will become possible to renounce the modern instrumentalism of creation that is driving the current ecological malaise – an instrumentalism that can infect even the terms of one's own activism against ecological disaster. It can lead to a willingness to radically renounce all traces of governance by technical efficiency and take up in its stead the discipleship of He that

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[29] Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2006, nos. 2, 5 and 8.

[30] J. Ellul,*What I believe*, p. 45.

renounced the logic of domination propagated by the powers and principalities of this world. Under the tutorship of Christ, what is qualitatively good can be pursued regardless of whether it will make a difference or not in technical terms.[31] There is no excuse to not do the little good that can be done, even though any endeavour we make in that direction will be, by any 'rational' and 'realistic' evaluative criteria, futile. But it is this venture of faith in the non-instrumental yet reality shaking power of the Goodness of God Himself which may indeed be an avenue to affect the redemption of a suffering creation, and avert ecological disaster.

[31] Even so, as Walter Wink documents, the 'foolish' and 'unrealistic' renunciation of the normal means of power is in fact enormously politically powerful, and alone provides an opening for positive redemptive change. See W. Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2003.