

Jacques Ellul, *Presence in the Modern World*. Trans. by Lisa Richmond, foreword by Ted Lewis, and an introduction to Ellul's life and thought by David W. Gill (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), 128 pages. ISBN: 9781498291347.

Reviewed by Lina Toth

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*Presence in the Modern World* was one of the first works of this French Protestant lay theologian (1912–1994). A longtime professor of social history and the history of law, Ellul was a prolific author, writing on a wide range of subjects. Conceived in 1946, this short volume reflects Ellul's key concerns: the ideology of unchecked technological advance, or 'la technique'; the use of propaganda; and the radical, 'revolutionary' nature of the Christian call and witness. Such witness, in Ellul's understanding, is incompatible with Christians siding with a particular secular ideology, whether on the left or on the right. Instead, they are called to live in a creative, and at times painful, tension: 'We need to understand that there are no Christian principles. There is the person of Christ, who is the principle of all things' (p. 33). That is what 'presence' entails as a way of witnessing to the modern world.

One of Ellul's key concerns is the ever-extending reach of *technique* under the service of which humans increasingly find themselves. Indeed, the human intellect and human spiritual problems have also become, he argues, the means of mindless consumption, resulting in a growing distance between people's lived experience and the account of that experience they are provided with by the media. And if this sounds familiar in relation to our own time, then it is a reflection of the significance of Ellul's work more than sixty years on. In his Introduction to Ellul's life and thought, David W. Gill notes that Ellul was not a systematician, but 'a kind of a prophet' (p. 110). This refers not simply to Ellul's ability to recognise the likely future from his vantage point of mid-twentieth century, but also to stimulate Christian minds so that they do not shy away from inconvenient, complex, perhaps unresolvable, yet livable questions.

Having first appeared in English in 1951 as *The Presence of the Kingdom*, the book has now been newly translated by Lisa Richmond. Its

inclusive language is a welcome update, though otherwise the translation keeps close to Ellul's text, as reflected in the way the prose tends to follow French language structure, punctuation, and phraseology. This particular volume also includes explanatory footnotes. Some of these, prepared by David W. Gill, provide helpful context and commentary to Ellul's thought, whilst others, supplied by the translator, comment on linguistic issues or offer explanations of various movements or personalities referred to by Ellul, such as Marx, Weber, or Lenin. The latter type of footnote seems to be largely superfluous, given Ellul's dense prose and the target readership of 'Christian intellectuals'.

Those already familiar with Ellul's thought and *The Presence of the Kingdom* may enjoy a fresh rendering of this classic piece. New readers may need patience as they get used to Ellul's language and dialectical argument, but they will be rewarded with a stimulating invitation to 'read' the modern world in a way that searches for an authentic Christian presence and witness to the gospel.

**Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 338 pages. ISBN: 9780691179612.**

*Reviewed by Laura Dijkhuizen*

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'In almost every spiritual empire, there was a she' (pp. 1 and 238).

Historian Kate Bowler describes in this book the public lives of America's Christian female celebrities. She interviewed over one hundred women in order to paint a picture of the search for their role within ministry and the marketplace in the context of a complementarian view on gender relationships.

Bowler wrote the book while fighting severe cancer and discovered that her interviewees were very open to show their vulnerability because she was vulnerable. I cannot imagine a bigger contrast between a deathly ill woman having chemotherapy and a perfectly dressed and styled celebrity who arrived in her private