

Money and Power **by Jacques Ellul**

L'Homme et L'Argent (1954)

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Money and Power was one of Jacques Ellul's earliest theological/ethical works. The title "Money and Power," is not misleading, but it should be noted that Ellul's title was more broadly "Man and Money" ("Humanity and Money"? "Money and Human Existence"? Even simple phrases can be hard to translate in a way that captures the nuance).

Money and Power has a wealth of information that will take your financial education to the next level. It is also full of typically provocative Ellulian opinions and challenges. If you want a mild, sanitized, middle-of-the-road essay, look elsewhere. Ellul's approach will throw down a challenge to you or your book study group. You will be exposed to biblical teaching you may not have previously known; and some old scripture will be read in new ways. But as Ellul often said, he is not seeking disciples; he just wants to give us resources to work out our own understanding in faithfulness to our Lord.

Money and Power is delivered in five chapters. First, Ellul surveys the ways our culture, our economic thinkers, and our church traditions have thought about money. One of the takeaways is that the answer to the problem of money cannot be left to economic systems and structures; there always remains centrally, "how are we personally going to relate to money?" The second chapter is an exhilarating tour of biblical, especially OT, teaching and stories about wealth, money, and poverty. We meet Abraham, Job, Solomon and company, along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The third chapter is a marvelous series of studies, drawing in Jesus and the Apostolic teaching and practice, about how money can become a "principality and power" (very much as technique can become a god) --- "Mammon." Ellul comments on interest and usury, saving and hoarding, wages and inheritance, on Jesus' parables about money and his relations both to the poor and the rich. He points out that the best way to "profane" a god is to treat it with disrespect and in a cavalier fashion. What better way to profane and reject Mammon, Ellul says, than to be recklessly generous in giving it away. Brilliant lesson! Ellul concludes with some advice on teaching our children about money (chapter four) and with a strong call to understand the cry of the poor as God's challenge to us (chapter five).

Too often Christian reflections on politics, economics, and other life topics feel as though the author's socio-cultural location really drove their point of view, and the scriptures were just cherry-picked to support and justify the position they started with. *Money and Power* and Ellul's other books never leave us so comfortable or reassured. This is a prophet worth listening to.