

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Humiliated Word in a Time of Crisis

Conference of the International Jacques Ellul Society
July 14–16, 2026 | University of Notre Dame, Indiana

Image by Jan van Boeckel

What is the word's status today? In a time marked by division and polarization over politics, medicine, science, culture, or even what it means to be human, often words are weaponized and truth is buried under lies. Confronted by such circumstances, what would it look like to attune ourselves to the conditions of spoken and written words today? What challenges and possibilities might emerge if we take the word seriously, even imaginatively and hopefully, today and in the future?

The 2026 International Jacques Ellul Society conference explores these and related questions through engagement with themes developed in and beyond Jacques Ellul's 1981 book *The Humiliation of the Word*. *Humiliation* is a creative sociological, theological, and personal meditation on the place of language in the late twentieth-century West, written during a time of deep cultural upheaval, technological change, and political tension. For this reason, many readers rank *Humiliation* as a piece of Ellul's most profound sociology, most mature theology, and most poetic prose. Furthermore, it is a distinct contribution to and central text for the field of media ecology.

But if this text is so significant, what did Ellul say within it that makes it so resonant? Although there are many ways to answer this question, a short-form answer can be given here: Ellul uses this text to show us that the humble fragility of the spoken word is humanity's most sure path toward freedom, truth, and peace. In this sense, Ellul makes an ambitious and hopeful claim for the power of the word in a time when the word seems to be powerless.

About Jacques Ellul

Jacques Ellul (1912–94) was a renowned professor of law at the University of Bordeaux, a scholar of the history of institutions, a sociologist, and a Protestant theological ethicist. In more than sixty books and one thousand articles, Ellul critically examines the evolution of Western society, raising questions about human freedom in a world driven by economic and technological necessity. His theological ethics offers a prophetic call to live in freedom, a non-violent refusal of domination, and a hope-driven response of love. A creative, synthetic, and interdisciplinary thinker, Ellul's work inspires rigorous and personal thought and continual learning.

Submission Guidelines

The International Jacques Ellul Society (IJES) invites proposals for short papers from scholars, thinkers, artists, poets, and anyone for whom words matter and dialogue is capital. Papers examining either sociological or theological aspects of Ellul's work are welcome.

Possible themes include but are not limited to the following:

- relationships between word and image
- language and cognition
- word and image in Media Ecology perspectives
- modernity, post/late modernity, and the philosophy of language
- theologies of the Word of God
- AI and human speech
- political discourse, polarization, and propaganda
- word and image in biblical studies
- imagery vs. iconography vs. idolatry
- phenomenology and speech
- language in the thought of Ellul and Kierkegaard
- poetry, prose, and plain language
- word vs. image in the fine arts
- education and the word
- truth vs. reality
- explorations of the Bible, doctrine, ethics, and/or ethics as applied to any of the above topics
- explorations of sociology, anthropology, psychology, and/or philosophy as applied to any of the above topics

While papers examining other aspects of Ellul's work or related themes will also be considered, priority will be given to papers closely related to the conference theme.

Interested presenters should submit an abstract of 250–350 words and a brief professional biography (100 words max.) no later than **October 1, 2025**. Submissions should be sent by email to ijes@ellul.org.

About IJES

The International Jacques Ellul Society (IJES) is an association of scholars and friends of various backgrounds who share a common interest in Ellul's writings.

Our objectives are (1) to preserve and disseminate his literary and intellectual heritage, (2) to extend his penetrating social critique, especially concerning technology, and (3) to extend his theological and ethical research with its special emphases on hope and freedom.

For more information or to join the society, please visit <https://ellul.org/>.