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Why Philia?

(Lecture note)

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Ivan Illich died on December 2, 2002 in Bremen, Germany. Several days later, after a well-attended funeral Mass in the local church of St. Johann, the plain wooden casket containing his body was lowered into the ground in that same city.

Many obituaries appeared in Germany, France, Italy, England, Scotland, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Chile. The accounts were similar in presenting many of the elementary facts of Illich's life and publications, but they sharply differed in their interpretations and judgments. This characteristic is consonant with what one heard and read while Illich was alive. As with all persons, generalizations are problematic, but it may be safe to say that Illich was a controversial thinker, at times seemingly a contradictory believer in Christianity.

I first met Illich in 1960 when I traveled to Puerto Rico to learn Spanish. Later I worked with him in Cuernavaca, Mexico, and other places in the United States and Europe. It was a singular privilege to know him intimately and share much of his life over more than forty years.

In 1978 he accepted a teaching job at the University of Kassel, and continued to lecture at different universities in Germany during the winter semester until his death. The only exception was the academic year, 1980-1981, when he was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Studies). When I first considered his maternal family history, these facts appeared paradoxical. Many in his mother's family were killed by the Nazis because, according to Hitler's definition, they were Jews. Why did Illich return to Germany each year for a generation?

He told me he was once asked to invite Emmanuel Levinas to Germany to receive an award for his philosophical/moral work. Levinas, the son of a learned Jewish scholar, said he could never step into such a country. Although it is manifestly impossible to penetrate Illich's motivations, he himself found the example of Paul Celan instructive. Throughout the Hitler years Celan was able to avoid execution as a Jew. After the war, teaching in Paris and having been made a member of the French Academy, he continued to write his striking poetry in German, the language of those who had killed his parents. In a talk, he maintained that, among so many losses, language remained. "But it had to go through ... the thousand darknesses of death-bringing talk."¹ As Illich once told me, Celan's action was a powerful voice of intelligibility in what Illich called the horror of the technogenic milieu in which we live. One sees the importance of language for him, and an inkling of the ambiguity that would mark much of his life. The question of "Why Philia?" begins to appear.

For those able and willing to see and listen a certain authority emanated from him. Because of the way he lived and the power of his imagination and mind, there is insight and truth in what

¹ Muska Nagel, A Voice ... Translations of selected poems by Paul Celan (Orono, Maine: Puckerbrush Press, 1998), p. 221. Celan made the statement in a speech in Bremen, January 20, 1958.

Jerry Brown noted after Illich's death: "With acute clarity and sense of irony, he undermined, in all that he wrote, the uncontested certitudes of modern society."² The Guardian of London was even more emphatic, stating that Illich was "one of the world's great thinkers, a polymath whose output covered vast terrains."³ Harvard academic Harvey Cox, who knew and studied with Illich in the 1970s, called him "a prophet, a teacher and a realistic dreamer."⁴ Speaking from Washington, Thomas Quigley said, "Ivan Illich was one of the most celebrated, denounced, praised and defamed figures of mid-20th century American Catholicism - a gadfly, a charmer, a ruthless critic, and a truly original, if highly unorthodox, figure."⁵ The Times of London, printing a dramatic photograph of Illich lecturing, began its obituary stating that

Ivan Illich was one of the most radical thinkers of the late 20th century. In the 1970s, from his think-tank in Mexico, he had a major impact on international readers, especially the young, through his radically anti-technocratic, anti-institutional arguments on health, education, transport and energy."⁶

Not all the post mortem comments were so laudatory. The New York Times, for example, in a generally dismissive and pop-language obituary which, however, took up twenty-two column inches of space, called Illich "an intellectual sniper from a perch with a wide view" who utilized "intellectual ordnance of anarchist panache."⁷ Some writers reached for the complexities of Illich's impact. From Paris, Thierry Paquot wrote that

There is no doubt about his influence, however hard it may be to evaluate, as can be seen from the popularity of his ideas and the references to his work in bibliographies. From the 1976 UN Habitat conference in Vancouver to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, from neighbourhood committees voting on participatory budgets to pressure groups against the neoliberal global market, Illich's ideas are alive and kicking hard.⁸

Jordan Bishop, who knew Illich well, wrote for the Polanyi Institute in Montréal that

... if we can say anything about the life and work of this extraordinary man, we must perhaps begin by noting that he utterly transcended disciplinary boundaries, both as a person and in his work. ... [he] spent his life breaking out of the iron cages of conventional wisdom.⁹

² Jerry Brown, "A Voice for Conviviality," Utne Reader, March-April 2003, p. 26.

³ Andrew Todd and Franco La Cecla, "Ivan Illich," The Guardian, December 9, 2002, p. 22.

⁴ Harvey Cox, "A prophet, a teacher, a realistic dreamer," National Catholic Reporter, December 20, 2002, p. 16.

⁵ Thomas Quigley, "News Briefs," Catholic News Service, U.S., December 10, 2002.

⁶ The Times, December 5, 2002, p. 37.

⁷ Douglas Martin, "Ivan Illich," New York Times, December 4, 2002, p. A29.

⁸ Thierry Paquot, "Ivan Illich: A Tribute," Le Monde Diplomatique, January 2003, p. 15. Paquot adds two websites where much of Illich's work can be obtained: ivanillich.org/ideas.html and preservenet.com/theory/Illich.html.

⁹ Jordan Bishop, "Ivan Illich. 1926-2002," Website of the Karl Polanyi Institute of Political Economy (<http://artsand science3.concordia.ca/polanyi/comment>). Click on "Commentaries."

Giannozzo Pucci, who was also a close friend of Illich, took important steps toward constructing a more complete picture of him. From his home in Florence, Italy, he said:

His tireless research and reflection, which ended only with his death, was motivated by a great love for human beings and inspired by Christianity. It was this that allowed him to recognize the subtle restrictions on freedom that arise from bureaucratic ideology - professional, political, technological - that is the modernist religion. ... [H]e unmasked this neopaganism as a degeneration of the Catholic Church, as a kind of anti-Church and anti-Christ that has transformed the human person, created in the image and likeness of God, into a formless being driven by needs defined and delivered by regulations and the technostructure.¹⁰

In death as in life, many writers succumbed to the temptation to label Illich, calling him a sociologist, a social scientist, a historian, a philosopher, a polemicist, a theologian, an activist, a radical and anarchistic thinker, both a crank and a visionary. In 1995, Eric Utne selected a group of persons whom he named visionaries and, considering Illich the principal one, wrote that he was "The greatest social critic of the 20th century ..."¹¹

A few years before his death, wondering about the use of philia, I reread Plato's Symposium, a work often cited by Illich. Then I reread chapters thirteen through seventeen of St. John's Gospel. In these chapters, Jesus fully reveals his idea of the character of friendship.

I again felt something first experienced when I read Aztec lyric poetry, translated into Spanish from the original Nahuatl. In this poetry, the unknown and unnamed poets wistfully celebrated three realities important in their lives. They wrote about flowers and music, two expressions of human feelings still prominent in Mexico today. The third reality or truth is more difficult to name. At first, it appears to be friendship but, on more careful reading, you see that, in terms of our sensibilities, something is missing; for us, the sentiments are definitely off-key; the expressions don't sound right.

I've always thought the reason for this is that the Aztec poet did not possess the modern notion of an individual, nor of a person, something taken for granted today. But moderns only derived this awareness from Greek, Hebrew and Christian sources through a complex path bridging centuries.

Reading the Symposium and St. John's Gospel, one after the other, I found a very different view in the respective texts. The two worlds or visions are not directly in opposition to one another, but each starts from its own distinctive conception of friendship, and ends with the portrayal of its own notion of a person. Since I hope to be a believing Christian, I find St. John's friendship eminently attractive and Plato's friendship seriously deficient. My judgment is obviously based on where I stand; it's not some quasi- or pseudo- or so-called objective position. For friendship, I would argue, such does not exist anyway.

Illich's abstract references to friendship are many. But in one instance he cites a specific example of two friends. The last word in ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind is

¹⁰ Giannozzo Pucci, Personal email from Florence, Italy, January 2003.

¹¹ Eric Utne, "Contents," Utne Reader, January-February 1995, p. 1.

friendship.¹² He says that we - he and Barry Sanders - "long for ... the silence of friendship," and adds a footnote: "For a definition of friendship, see the epigraph to this book." The epigraph is a Latin letter with no translation. Only a handful of Illich's American readers could translate, namely, understand, this epigraph. And yet the text emphasizes the great importance of grasping the term, friendship. One could make a series of comments about what Illich has done here.

Five years later, in 1993, he published In the Vineyard of the Text. Discussing friendship/amicitia quite differently, he inserts a footnote containing the same letter but now written in both Latin and English.¹³ One can discern, perhaps, an analogy of proportionality: As the Aztec lyrics are to modern lyrical poetry, so the friendship of ABC is to the friendship of Vineyard.

In Vineyard, Illich considered friendship charity (charitas). Further, the text clearly claims that the practice of friendship is related to wisdom, not what is termed "conventional wisdom" but, rather, the supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit, the God-given gift crowning a lifetime of virtue, acquired and infused, given gratuitously to those who love. He goes beyond what he writes about friendship in other places, and far beyond any reference to the notion of philia. The Vineyard text and footnotes are authoritative and powerful. Further, I knew Illich intimately; he was a believer in Christianity. But writing and speaking about friendship he often used the term, philia, a pagan idea taken from the Greeks. I cannot but ask: Why did he do that?

As some of the obituaries noted, Illich was a radical and controversial thinker. In his personal life, he was also radical but chose to live in the shadow of ambiguity. From this last characteristic of the way he lived one can arrive at some understanding of why Illich chose to speak of philia, not of the self-sacrificing friendship so beautifully described in the Gospel and so extensively analyzed by St. Thomas at the end of the thirteenth century. The tract on friendship in Aquinas's Summa theologiae contains 142 articles covering 108 double-columned pages.¹⁴

While preparing for the priesthood in Rome, Illich lived at the Capranica and took classes at the Gregorian. After ordination he was incardinated, that is, canonically accepted by Francis Cardinal Spellman as a priest in the archdiocese of New York. For about eighteen years, his charismatic witness to the truth of the Catholic faith became more and more prominent in various countries of the Americas, North and South. Because of the bold and unusual character of his initiatives and proposals, certain seemingly important people in the bureaucracies of Washington and Rome categorized him as a dangerous enemy. But until his death in 1967, Cardinal Spellman was a powerful and faithful protector; no civil or ecclesiastical figure could touch Illich. When Spellman died the enemies, covertly and overtly, moved.¹⁵

¹² Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988), p. 127. All references are to the English editions of Illich's books.

¹³ Ivan Illich, In the Vineyard of the Text (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 26-27.

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, II II, qq. 23-54.

¹⁵ See Francine du Plessix Gray, Divine Disobedience (New York: Knopf, 1970); David Cayley, Ivan Illich in Conversation (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1992).

One of the best examples articulating his position at this time was the essay, "The Vanishing Clergyman."¹⁶ In this work, based upon his understanding of the Gospel, the social and cultural conditions of contemporary society, a malaise affecting many active priests that would perhaps exert debilitating effects on future clerics, he analyzed the ecclesiastical structure supporting a priesthood and argued for the end of the clerical state.

A good example of his prudential judgment, his practicality, was the founding of sister institutions in Cuernavaca, Mexico and Petropolis, Brazil, the Center of Intercultural Formation (CIF). In 1966, he transformed the Mexican branch into the Center for Intercultural Documentation (CIDOC), greatly expanding its range of activities to include a varied program of university-level courses and seminars, and an ambitious research and publishing project.

Several years ago Illich told me that the last book published in this period, Celebration of Awareness (1970), was the best-selling of all his books.¹⁷ The volume, with an Introduction by Illich's friend, Erich Fromm, is a collection of independent essays. As Illich notes in the Foreword, each piece is "addressed to a different group of believers ... "; most of the early chapters to believers in the Church, the later ones to believers in the contemporary institution of school and the notion of socio-economic development. In these last essays, Illich begins the ever more devastating critique that would soon make him world-famous. The book has been translated into many languages, including Farsi.

Illich believed the priest should be a symbol of unity in the Catholic community. Around 1968, because of the controversies surrounding him, he became more and more notorious. Various persons prominent in the Church, through public machinations against him, made it difficult if not impossible for believers to see Illich on the altar as an alter Christus; he decided he could no longer live the public life of a priest.

One day a young Greek academic, who knew us both, said to me, "Now I know why you and Ivan get along so well together ... you have the same education." "No," I answered, "rather, it's because we pray together." Each day Illich and I recited the Breviary together antiphonally, in the old Latin Vulgate based on St. Jerome's translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Although some obituaries stated that Illich was a former priest, or implied he was a disaffected Catholic, they were in error. It's true, however, that in many public acts, Illich appeared to be just another academic or intellectual.

When he received his first check at the University of Kassel he called the bursar's office and complained. The check was made out to Rev. Msgr. Ivan Illich. The bureaucrat in the office, wanting to make certain that he wrote Illich's title correctly, had called the papal nunciature in Bonn to ask how Illich was listed in the Annuario Pontificio, the official listing of prelates in the Catholic Church.

A few years ago, old clerical friends of Illich in Rome asked him to concelebrate Mass with them. He politely asked to be excused. They suspected that the Office for the Doctrine of the

¹⁶ Ivan Illich, "The Vanishing Clergyman," in Ivan Illich, Celebration of Awareness (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 69-94. First published in The Critic (Chicago) 1967.

¹⁷ See abebooks.com for a listing of many used copies. In a rather disingenuous remark, Illich said he had not spoken as a churchman since 1960. See Cayley, p. 99.

Faith, formerly called the Holy Office, had some restriction or prohibition against Illich that he was reticent to reveal, so they called Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the office's director, to determine the difficulty. The cardinal checked and reported that his files contained nothing against Illich; according to their records, he was a priest in good standing.

Although the collaboration of Washington and the Vatican in 1967-1968 was particularly disgusting, Illich did not complain or whine. Rather, out of fidelity to the Church, he chose to change his outward stance. Not only did he cease to ascend the altar, he also fundamentally altered his lecturing and writing. What he wrote and published before 1971, he did principally as a Catholic believer publically dedicated to making known and practically realizing the Kingdom of God; after that date, he changed.

Examining the complete trajectory of his curriculum vitae I believe the principal approach to get at his life, speech, and writing is his faith, expressed after 1970 in an apophatic mode. He only gradually emerged from this veiled presence as he approached death. The ambiguity of his public presence after 1971 was definitively resolved in the days preceding his death and on the occasion of his funeral. Ignorant of the apophatic perspective, one is left with a very superficial understanding of the man's truth.

Many, however, are mystified by the term, apophatic. The original Greek word, apophasis, signifies denial or negation. In the tradition of Catholic thought, God-talk can be divided into affirmative or cataphatic and negative or apophatic theology. The former affirms attributes of God, such as being, truth or goodness. The latter denies attributes of God asserting, for example, that "he" is infinite (not finite). One speaks about God by way of negation. St. Thomas summarizes the issue in an Introduction to a question of the Summa theologiae:

Because we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not we cannot study how God exists, but only how he does not exist.¹⁸

And, as the author of the entry in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité points out:

The conviction that human language and spirit are incapable of expressing what God is remains a constant of all theological thought worthy of the name.¹⁹

The Western tradition of negative theology can be traced to thinkers such as Plato and Plotinus, Gregory Nazianzen and Evagrius, and reaches a certain analytic and explicit character in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, now believed to have been a Greek-speaking monk of the

¹⁸ Summa, I, q. 3, Introductio ad quaestionem. "Sed quia de Deo scire non possumus quid sit, sed quid non sit, non possumus considerare de Deo quomodo sit, sed potius quomodo non sit." St. Thomas gives a much more extensive treatment to what he calls the via remotionis in his commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard (In 1 Sent. d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4) and in the Contra Gentes, I, xiv. Generally, the translations are mine.

¹⁹ Aimé Solignac, "Théologie Negative," Dictionnaire de Spiritualité (Paris: Beauchesne, 1990), fascicules XCVI-XCVII-XCVIII, col. 515.

fifth or sixth century. His work, greatly influential in the High Middle Ages, appears to be of much interest today, too.²⁰

In the Fall of 1988, while Illich and I were at Penn State University, David Cayley arrived to do a series of interviews to which Illich had agreed. One day Cayley asked me some questions about Illich's thought. I said that, most basically, Illich wrote as a theologian, but in a mode not often seen or recognized; his books were really apophatic explorations about God, the Church, and the believer's movement toward God. When Cayley told Illich about my claim, he, in his own unique way of speaking, confirmed it.²¹

The essays in Deschooling Society (1971) are Illich's first clear venture in expressing himself in an apophatic mode. They are principally a theological study of the Christian life, not a sociological analysis of schools.²² There are probably innumerable ways to say what God is not. Further, as I see in the history of negative theology, there is no one "right" way, no one apophatic "orthodoxy." Within Deschooling itself and in each subsequent book and essay, Illich varied the way he did apophatic theology. It is therefore not surprising that, searching for the way on his journey to the Final Judgment, he should work out different forms of expression.

Roughly, the first six essays of Deschooling, listed as chapters, reveal Illich's thoughts on ecclesiology and, specifically, on that aspect called liturgy. The seventh and last piece, "Rebirth of Epimethean Man," presents his view of the internal disposition required if one wishes to live as a contingent creature under the Providence of God.²³ One would live in (the theological virtue of) hope, not in expectation, for example, hoping a neighbor would extend a helping hand rather than expecting some service from an institution or bureaucratic ruling.

Illich was not a plaster saint. In his own life, he continually and courageously struggled with the tension between living in hope and living in expectation - as he understood these terms and their expression in the Christian dispensation. In my own judgment, I sometimes thought he overstressed expectation in his concern for the welfare of those whom he loved ... me, for example. He seemed to want to surround his friends with the bulwarks of security.

Illich's contrast between hope and expectation, first published in 1971, runs through all of his subsequent writing, speaking and thinking. Serious study of Deschooling Society from the perspective of its theological character would be richly rewarding for what one learns of an apophatic expression itself, and of the Christian life presented in such a form. Once one opens this window, marvels become visible. In this book, Illich makes a genuinely new contribution to contemporary theology ... God-talk. But I am unaware of any study that looks at Deschooling Society as a theological statement.

²⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works, trans. by Colm Luiheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). See also Bernard McGinn, ed., Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher (New York: Paulist Press, 1986). Both volumes contain good introductory essays and an annotated bibliography.

²¹ Cayley, pp. 54 and 241-243.

²² Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

²³ Ivan Illich, "Rebirth of Epimethean Man," in Deschooling, pp. 151-167. See also my chapter, "Reading Ivan Illich," in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, eds., The Challenges of Ivan Illich (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 1.

The books, Tools for Conviviality and Energy and Equity are almost exclusively dedicated to living a decent life on earth, with outlining the parameters beyond which no truly human life is possible.²⁴ Illich worked principally toward constructing the hypotheses and theoretical framework for a naturally good life. In terms of a theory of technology, these are his most basic statements, even perhaps his "last word," if one is thinking of society in a macro sense. His apophatic way of writing is, therefore, presented in a slightly different manner in the two books and many of his other essays. In all these expressions of his thought, the notion of limits is central. But limits, for the believer, mean a species or variety of renunciation, integral exercises in asceticism. What Illich is saying is that the aware person today does not have to go to the Thebaid (the desert), does not have to make and wear a hair shirt; he or she is presented with a plethora of opportunities to practice renunciation. One necessity of the tradition remains, however: acts of renunciation sometimes demand heroism.

With Medical Nemesis he again tried something new, especially in the third section, Cultural Iatrogenesis.²⁵ This is the book's most important contribution to develop a critique of the medical system, containing insights many reviewers and commentators tend to neglect or misunderstand. The theology contained in this part of the book runs like a subtext through his prose. One reality stands behind his words: the Cross. Illich reveals the center of his faith, the Incarnation, and the supremely apophatic expression of the God-man's life, his passion and death.²⁶ For Illich, the believer can come to participate in the love of Christ through an art of suffering. That's supremely difficult, however. Although different arts of suffering were found, that is, practiced in all traditional cultures, that was in an era far distant from contemporary knowledge and experience. Today, medicalization has become so dominant that the individual is largely deprived of even imagining an art of suffering. After submitting to the treatments of the medical system, one is finally left with the bleakness of a technological death. One who believes in the Gospel almost always experiences frustration in her search for the knowledge of how to face the specific personal reality of her pain, her life and, finally, her own death.

A later and more apodictic statement of Illich's position is found in his essay, "Health As One's Own Responsibility. No, Thank You!"²⁷ This speech, originally given and published in German, evoked a gamut of strong reactions. For example, when it was first delivered by Illich in Hannover, doctors in the audience violently dismissed it as worse than reactionary. Those students inclined to give Illich a sympathetic hearing were confused and dismayed by the text. During a month-long sojourn at a Camaldolese monastery in Italy, I wrote a commentary to assist interested readers who wanted to understand what Illich had said.²⁸

²⁴ Ivan Illich, Tools for Conviviality (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Ivan Illich, Energy and Equity (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

²⁵ Ivan Illich, Medical Nemesis (New York: Pantheon, 1976). The third section comprises pp. 127-208.

²⁶ The point is explicitly confirmed in Barbara Duden, "The Quest for Past Somatics," in Challenges, p. 220. (The essay was written in close collaboration with Ivan Illich.)

²⁷ Ivan Illich, "Health as One's Own Responsibility: No, Thank You!" Ellul Studies Forum, no. 8, January 1992, or an Illich website.

²⁸ Lee Hoinacki, "Reflections on 'Health as One's Own Responsibility'," the Ellul Studies Forum or Illich website.

In Gender, Illich worked out yet another version of an apophatic theology.²⁹ There are several arguments in the book, reflecting the levels or dimensions in which it was written, some farther from, some nearer to, God-talk. One meaning of the study is what it reveals about the economic history of the West, detailing the "creation" of homo economicus. In conversations with me, Illich often lamented the absolute absence of a strong theological judgment on the character and place of economics in today's world among Catholic church-men and -women. He was looking for an exposition that would directly confront both the Gospel and homo economicus, that would be at once more inclusive and more incisive than traditional condemnations of avarice.

At the end of a footnote on metaphor, he says, "My thinking on this point is nourished by the scholastic concept of relatio subsistens."³⁰ The concept was used in the Middle Ages to refer to the Trinity, a reality manifestly impossible to know. Reading the Greek Scriptures, commentators faced the difficulty of thinking and speaking about three persons in one God, and sometimes took refuge in notions derived from Aristotle. Subsistens means a reality that stands of itself; it is subsistent; it simply exists. Relatio has no independent reality or existence. A relation only comes to be between at least two substances or beings. For example, I am the father of my children, the son of my parents, and so on. The Scholastics suggested that the Persons of the Trinity could be thought of as subsistent relations. God the Father exists only in relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit. And so on with the other two persons.

In a sense, an individual man or woman does not exist ... in a traditional society. Most fundamentally, a man only exists in his relationship to a woman, and vice versa. Illich traced the various ways this dissymmetric complementarity held true before the dominance of exchange relations was established in modern economic practice. For the person seeking to live an evangelical life, one in accord with the Gospel, and deeply troubled by the pervasiveness of possessive individualism, Illich's notion of gender, interpreted through the concept of relatio subsistens, is a real light in the darkness of modernity. One sees a way to escape being an individual, to avoid living selfishly, to take up and embrace the parable of a seed falling into the ground (Mt. 13.1-25).

For the contemporary believer in the Trinity, for one who attempts to contemplate the revealed mystery, Illich's suggestion is wildly liberating. If one regards what many call God as the Trinity and considers the millennia-old cultural tradition of gender as a faithful reflection of a transcendental truth, then an opening to the possibility of seeing the other, not self, as a more primary and central reality, the possibility of a genuine love, shines out. One recognizes an ultimate reason for working at daily practices of renunciation, what Illich proposed, albeit apophatically, in his talk, "Health as One's Own Responsibility: No, Thank You!" The courage to love, today as always, requires an infinite number of previous small actions, what Aristotle and the Scholastics meant by acquired virtue.

²⁹ Ivan Illich, Gender (New York: Pantheon, 1982). In this book, Illich also refers to his thesis on the strange contribution of the Church to the inspiration and creation of modernity, which he encapsulates in the phrase, corruptio optimi quae est pessima. The only place in print where I have seen what seems to be the same thesis is: Donna Haraway, Modest Witness@Second Millennium: Femaleman Meets Oncomouse: Feminism and Technoscience (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁰ Gender, p. 74, # 56.

In the tradition where St. Thomas resides, all positive predications about God are one of three kinds: univocal, equivocal or analogical. What Illich is saying is that a negative predication - an apophatic statement - can be analogical in the sense that an analogy is a metaphor. The truth of gender reveals the truth of the Trinity and vice versa. In Gender Illich developed his most complex and sophisticated treatment of writing in an apophatic mode.

H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness was published by the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture in 1985.³¹ At the end of a review in the journal, Cross Currents, Sally Cuneen wrote: "This little book, which has the power to start readers toward serious practical planning, is Illich's way of doing apophatic theology."³² Her judgment is a most rare instance - a writer explicitly stating what Illich is doing.³³ In my interpretation of his books and articles, H₂O is also his final full exercise in the apophatic mode. He continued to speak through apophasis, but confined this approach mostly to public lectures. In his writing, he was more generous in gradually coming out of a veiled presentation to confront the reader directly with his faith.

H₂O is about the disappearance of what Illich called "stuff" and, specifically, water. It's replaced by H₂O, often by recycled toilet flush. The new industrial product is essentially different from water. As Illich wrote,

In the imagination of the twentieth century, water lost both its power to communicate by touch its deep-seated purity and its mystical power to wash off spiritual blemish. It has become an industrial and technical detergent, feared both as a poisonous stuff and as a corrosive for the skin.³⁴

Illich's short book raises disturbing questions, not only about the reality of "the real," what he calls, "stuff," but also about the Christian rite of baptism, the ceremony introducing a person into the faith.³⁵ These questions, in turn, lead to further dire implications if one wants to believe in the Incarnation itself. In his speaking and writing after 1985, Illich made his questions and doubts more explicit and, for a believer, more frightening.

Of the various persons who have examined his life and work, one stands out in singular solitude - Domenico Farias, a lifelong friend who studied with him in Rome and who died a few weeks before Illich. In response to my request, Farias contributed an essay to a book Carl Mitcham and I edited, The Challenges of Ivan Illich.³⁶ In its religious and literary depth, his essay goes farther than the other offerings of the volume. Curiously, the only printed source he used was David Cayley's Ivan Illich in Conversation. Farias saw himself as someone assisting others, not so close to Illich, to approach the man. In his first paragraph, he candidly stated what is required from a person hoping to grasp something of Illich's genius. He wrote:

³¹ Ivan Illich, H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985).

³² Sally Cuneen, "Why Is Our Water Polluted?" Cross Currents, vol. xxxvi, no. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 98-100.

³³ Other instances: Hoinacki in Challenges, p. 1; Farias in Challenges, p. 68; Duden in Challenges, p. 220.

³⁴ H₂O, p. 75.

³⁵ In his conversation with David Cayley, Illich denies that baptism cannot take place with H₂O. See Cayley, p. 242.

³⁶ Domenico Farias, "In the Shadow of Jerome," in Challenges, pp. 59-70.

Although an exegetical commentator tries to build bridges and piers to make it easier for ordinary readers to overcome the interruption [in Illich's soul], they cannot be saved from the labor and risks of a "hermeneutic leap," jumping from one shore to the other, attempting thus to grasp the essential underlying unity - the unity of a way of living that aaves itself by appearing to lose itself.³⁷

As Farias recognized, there was a certain transcendence in Illich's life, a transcendence to which every believer is invited. Farias believed that Illich accepted the invitation and experienced the transcendence. He thought that Illich, citing the words of St. Jerome, actually made them his own: nudum Christum sequere nudus.³⁸ In the Western tradition, one way of expressing the transcendence involved in the Christian life is through the concept, apophatic. Farias, in the last paragraph of his essay, speaks "of the souls who, in the pilgrim church, live not only an apophatic theology, but also an apophatic anthropology."³⁹

Farias carefully prepared the reader for a "hermeneutic leap," a jump which, in his estimation, is necessary to approach Illich, both the man and his thought. In his conclusion, Farias wrote:

There is the Major Transcendence and there are the minor reciprocal transcendences of the souls who, in the pilgrim church, live not only an apophatic theology, but also an apophatic anthropology. That they might remain in communion, it is good that they practice the "leap": Charitas omnia credit, omnia sperat, omnia sustinet. ... Vidimus nunc per speculum, in aenigmate (1 Cor. 13.6-7 and 12).⁴⁰

Farias takes the apophatism of Illich beyond the realm of thought into the reality of the man's being, into Illich's life.

Several times Illich told me he was fascinated by the perhaps legendary story of St. Alexis. If he wished to be faithful to his vocation and to the Church, Illich could not but find attractive and instructive the example of Alexis.⁴¹ The saint lived an apophatic anthropology, a hidden life as a fifth-century Roman beggar whose sanctity was only revealed after his death. During his lifetime, the true identity of Alexis was unknown to everyone. Farias suggested that the admiration of Illich for this man's way of living was something substantially more than respect and attraction. I suspect Farias knew Illich well.

In the last chapter of Cayley's book, based on a Bremen interview with Illich in 1992, four years after the interviews made in State College, but all gathered together in a single volume, one can find Illich coming out of his apophatic mode and speaking directly about theological matters. Cayley began the chapter by asking him about a speech he made to the leaders of the Lutheran churches in the United States in 1989. Illich introduced that talk with a formal curse, saying, "'To hell with life!'" three times, and emphasizes what he did, telling Cayley, "'That

³⁷ Farias, p. 59.

³⁸ Cayley, p. 203; Farias, p. 61. "To follow the nude Christ nude."

³⁹ Farias, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Farias, p. 68. "Love believes everything, hopes for everything, puts up with everything. ... [N]ow we see only in a mirror, enigmatically."

⁴¹ An account, with annotated bibliography, can be found in: Butler's Lives of the Saints, Herbert Thurston, S.J. and Donald Attwater, eds. (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1956), vol. III, pp. 123-124.

was a theological statement ... ""⁴² He then speaks about Creator and creature, and talks about the historical phrase picked up by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who said that a believer must speak and act, etsi deus non daretur.⁴³ Illich then points out that

... a believer must be a man who, with the whole of his being and his life, objects to any argument which takes the shape etsi deus daretur, as if God existed - God is not an as if.⁴⁴

Illich, since he knew what the tradition of negative theology had established about our knowledge of God, saw quite clearly that a Christian can really only know about God through looking at the Christ. Such a person comes to genuine belief in God through belief in the Incarnation. Therefore, Illich was tormented by what he saw being done through technological artifacts. In the Cayley interview, speaking about various aspects of life understood as a substantive, he states: "Here you have the ultimate realization of the idea that man makes the world."⁴⁵ He adds that

... at a basic level, issues touching upon the historicity of medical care, of education, of transportation, of monetarization of wage labor, can't be discussed in any Christian church as an issue of agenda, the public agenda, and I don't know anybody there who even participates in the conversations which go on around the world on these subjects. On the second level, which is the historical source of these ideas in a perverse transmutation of a Christian vocation and message, I have not even found a first conversational partner within any of the established churches.⁴⁶

In a speech given to the Catholic Philosophical Association in 1996, Illich mentioned his way of proceeding when he wrote his later books and lectured in a secular university. Then, summarizing, he said that, "When speaking [at the University of Pennsylvania] in Philadelphia or [at the University of] Bremen, I felt I ought to shroud my ultimate motive in apophasy." He added, " ... I did not relate the unprecedented characteristics of the modern artifact to the new commandment recorded by St. John, but to the philia traditionally understood as the flowering of politeia."⁴⁷

In this talk, he also acknowledged his debt to Jacques Ellul.

... I engage philosophy as ancilla, not just to avoid blunders on the path to the good life, but to avoid perverting the Gospel. I engage philosophy in the late twentieth century - which we may increasingly imagine, with Ellul, as one all-encompassing artifact - in order to live in such a way that I go beyond loving my

⁴² Cayley, p. 256.

⁴³ "as if God does not exist" Illich interprets the phrase ambiguously. It seems to have originated with Grotius, a Dutch jurist of the seventeenth century.

⁴⁴ Cayley, p. 278.

⁴⁵ Cayley, p. 270.

⁴⁶ Cayley, p. 279.

⁴⁷ Ivan Illich, "Philosophy ... Artifacts ... Friendship," Unpublished speech, given on March 23, 1996, in Los Angeles. Can be found at: preservenet.com/theory/Illich.html.

neighbor "just" as myself and accept the vocation to love him as God enfleshed has done and wants to do through me.⁴⁸

He spoke of his belief, " ... that it is le milieu technique that conditions, reinterprets, and possibly thwarts the acquisition of ethical habits ... "⁴⁹

The essay, "Rebirth of Epimethean Man," was Illich's first utilization of Greek myth to speak about the life of faith. He thus established a way of conceptualizing the truth that fitted his apophatic mode, and continued to use references to Greek thought. For example, he still mentioned the pagan Greek term, philia, rather than explicitly speak about charity, in the last work published in his lifetime, "The Cultivation of Conspiracy."⁵⁰

Many of Illich's analyses critically examine institutions. Because of the character of what he wrote, some accuse him of being violently anti-institutional. These critics forget that, in one sense, institutions or, as Illich came to believe in his last years, institutions collected or transformed into systems, are an important way of conceptualizing the changing permanence of the world. Corporations, for example, live beyond the current CEOs and stockholders. What Illich has done wonderfully "fits." I have maintained that his work after 1970, albeit remaining theological, became apophatic. Therefore, it was particularly proper that he pick one of the worst excesses of human perversity to speak about God. In the thirteenth century St. Thomas, citing the book, The Celestial Hierarchy by the person we call Pseudo-Dionysius, said it is more fitting that "divine things be portrayed in Sacred Scripture under the images of vile bodies, rather than of noble entities." " ... sicut docet Dionysius, magis est conveniens quod divina in Scripturis tradantur sub figuris vilium corporum, quam corporum nobilium."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Idem. See also the remarks of Illich in Cayley, pp. 110-111. In a meeting honoring Ellul at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Bordeaux, France, on November 13, 1993, Illich directly articulated his debt. He wrote the original speech in English, and it was published in "Statements by Jacques Ellul and Ivan Illich," Technology in Society 17, no. 2 (1995), pp. 231-238.

⁵⁰ Ivan Illich, "The Cultivation of Conspiracy," in Challenges, p. 233. Illich's last published monograph, In the Vineyard of the Text, is an amalgam of positive and negative theology, in this respect somewhat similar to the essay, "Cultivation."

⁵¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, I, q. 1, a. 9, ad 3. A striking and unusual example of this truth in one person's life is the statement by Simone Weil, "It would be better to be the mud which obeys God, rather than someone who could be like God." Quoted by Robert Coles, Simone Weil: A Modern Pilgrimage (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publ. Co, 1987), p. 32.