

The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich

David Cayley; \$24.95 paper 0-88784-714-5, 258 pp., 6 x 9 , House of Anansi Press , Feb.

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As anyone who has noted the enormous popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* can attest, the topic of Catholic Church corruption is both riveting and unsettling. This subject formed the life work of one Ivan Illich, the influential priest, historian, and teacher whose work is given a loving tribute by CBC Radio *Ideas* producer David Cayley.

Though the words "corruption" and "Catholic Church" may evoke images of sexual impropriety and priestly misdeeds, Illich focused on what he saw as a larger, more institutional menace, and one that extended out to society as a whole. This central theme is explored through a series of interviews and dialogue with Cayley, carefully transcribed by the author over a period of several years. The first 40 pages are all original Cayley, providing us with a cogent introduction, in language that is clear, albeit sometimes rambling.

The thrust of Illich's ideas lies in the phrase, "the corruption of the best is the worst," and in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan. The idea – revolutionary for its time – that anyone could help a stranger, even an enemy, soon became corrupted as the Church took away from individuals the need, and even the right, to provide assistance, leading to today's labyrinthine institutionalization, and the creation of society's "helping professions" and legal system. This, in Illich's view, corrupts Jesus' message of seeing God in any individual who comes across our path, and destroys our individual freedom and will to act.

The title of this book refers to a poem by Paul Celan, and "speaks of a ... time and place which cannot be reached by simply projecting from the present, since it lies north of the future." Ultimately, Illich – and Cayley, I would imagine – believes in the hope that we can find the methodology to create a "good society," not through further institutionalization, but through an embracing of faith, hope, and love.

Cayley's masterful transcription – detailed, often surprisingly emotional, yet logical – leaves the reader pondering long after the book is finished. Although certainly not the quick read of a *Da Vinci Code*, for those willing to take the time to examine this remarkable tribute to an even more remarkable man, it is well worth the journey. – Laurel Smith, a freelance writer, playwright and theatre director in Toronto.

– *Laurel Smith*