Paul Kennedy
Good evening. I'm Paul Kennedy, and this is *Ideas* on "The Corruption of Christianity."

Ivan Illich
In the age of the Church, the idea of the neighbour who constantly lives encountering Christ in the unknown who knocks at his door and asks for hospitality, the idea of acting out of a love which is a gift gets corrupted by being defined as something which can be institutionalized, which charitable institutions can do much better than a bunch of individual Christians.

Paul Kennedy
In June of 1968, Ivan Illich, then a monsignor of the Roman Catholic Church, was summoned to Rome to appear before the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the modern descendant of the Inquisition. He had become, the document drawn up against him claimed, "an object of curiosity, bewilderment and scandal to the Church." At issue were Illich's activities as the Director of the Center for Intercultural Documentation, or CIDOC, an organization he'd founded seven years earlier in the Mexican city of Cuernevaca. Development in the poor countries was then at the top of the international agenda. The United States had just created the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps. The American Church had also stepped up its involvement in Latin America with the creation of a parallel peace corps called the Papal Volunteers.

Illich denounced this campaign as a war on subsistence and predicted that the attempt to foist schools, hospitals and highways on poor countries would produce social polarization and a painful modernization of poverty. He also protested his church's involvement in this secular crusade. And it was this opposition that resulted in Illich's call to Rome.

A year later, Illich publicly withdrew from the priesthood. His views, he insisted, were entirely orthodox but he was unwilling to carry on in the atmosphere of scandal created by the Vatican's proceedings against him. He continued in his analysis of the perverse effects of development, but now as an independent teacher, scholar and writer. Notable among the many books that he subsequently wrote are **De-Schooling Society**, **Medical Nemesis**, **Gender** and **In the Vineyard of the Text**.

Thirty years ago, Ivan Illich criticized his church's complicity in spreading the modern gospel of health, schooling and commodified consumption throughout the world. Tonight, in the first of five *Ideas* programs, he goes a step further and argues that the Church is, in fact, the original source of many of these institutions. The series is called "The Corruption of Christianity." It's presented by David Cayley.

David Cayley
The corruption of the best is the worst — an old saying. You can find it in Aristotle, in Thomas Aquinas and in Shakespeare, who says, "Sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds./ Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds." I first heard this proverb from Ivan Illich who said that, for him, it summed up the influence of organized Christianity on Western society. We were sitting, at the time, in his room in State College, Pennsylvania, where he was then teaching. I was there to prepare the profile of Illich called 'Part Moon, Part Travelling Salesman' that was broadcast eleven years ago on Ideas. The idea that modern society is a corruption of Christianity didn't really fit the design of those programs and, at that point, he wasn't prepared to discuss it at length, in any case. But it happened that after the broadcast of my series and the subsequent publication of a book called **Ivan Illich in Conversation** we became close friends. And as this friendship grew, we returned again and again to this theme of the corruption of Christianity. He said that he intended to write a book on the subject, but as time went by it became clear that illness would not allow him to carry out such a project, at least not to the exacting standard that he would set for himself. So I proposed that I record his

thoughts. He, in time, agreed and twice during the last three years we sat down together for a week to record the lengthy interviews from which these new programs are drawn. As you'll hear in a minute, the crowing of a rooster in the yard outside occasionally punctuated our talk.

In the books for which he is best known, like **Deschooling Society** or **Medical Nemesis**, Illich consistently tried to make three central points. First, that modern institutions tend to defeat their own purposes–schools inhibit learning, medicine threatens health, prisons aggravate crime. Second, that these institutions weaken the self-reliance of individuals and communities by cultivating needs which can only be met by professionalized services. And third, that they threaten people's ability both to enjoy and to bear the human condition, so that endless medical treatment, for example, undermines the art of suffering and of dying.

In his more recent, less well-known work, Illich has spoken mainly as an historian, interested in uncovering the source of the certainties, the unquestioned, often invisible assumptions on which these institutions rest. Preeminent amongst these assumptions is the idea that human beings are made up of needs and that society is organized in order to fulfill them, the good society being the one that does this best. Illich believes that this idea is a perversion of Christianity and as we go on he'll explain why he thinks so. But in order to follow that explanation, you need first to know how he understands the Christian revelation and why he thinks it altered history in a permanent and irreversible way. And that is where our conversation begins.

Ivan Illich
I think I can provide historical evidence for my belief that that angel, you know, that Gabriel who suddenly appeared in front of that Jewish girl and said "Ave" cannot be neglected by the historian. And, at the very same time, he did something which doesn't fit in the ordinary sense within history, or the study of history. I believe that that angel told that woman that she, from that moment on, was to be the mother of God, that He whose names the Jews never wanted to pronounce was from that moment on to be a human being as really human as you, David, and I. I believe in that. I therefore listen to Him as nobody before this event could have listened to another, looked at another. And this is what I live by. I therefore believe that the Incarnation, the *ensarkosis*, the Greek word for the enfleshment of the biblical, the koranic, the Christian Allah represents a turning point in looking at what happens in the world. And this is an extraordinary surprise and remains a surprise. It is not knowledge of the ordinary kind. It is knowledge which, in my tradition, one calls faith. And I do not cease to live in my faith when I study history.

David Cayley
Christian belief changed the world, Illich says, not just because, for faith, the world had changed, but because this belief entered history and shaped the ways in which people subsequently thought and acted. The Incarnation, therefore, matters both to the historian and the believer. It occurred, he says, as the culmination of that unique vocation that appeared amongst the people of ancient Israel–prophecy.

Ivan Illich
The Old Testament, taken as a whole, is prophetic. Its centerpieces are people who speak about what is not yet, about the *non dum*, the Latin word for "not yet." What makes the Jewish people unique is that they have come into existence as a social "we," an "I" in the plural, around the message that whatever happens in history, what can be seen in nature, foreshadows, like pregnancy foreshadows birth. The prophets spoke with the claim to step outside the family and tribal context in which we know what tomorrow is, speaking about a tomorrow which will be totally surprising, messianic. It is around the announced Messiah that this historically unique phenomenon of God's people comes into existence. The Old

Testament is pregnant with the Messiah.

David Cayley
This metaphor of pregnancy is explicit in the apostle Paul who writes to the Christians at Rome that until the appearance of the Christ, “the whole of creation has been groaning in labor pains.” But when Jesus appears he is rejected, humiliated and executed with the complicity of the leaders of his community. Like the prophets, Illich says, he is forced by his calling outside the enclosed world of his people.

Ivan Illich
If I rightly understand the point of the Gospel, it’s crucifixion. That is, Jesus, as our saviour, and also as our model, is condemned by his own people, led out of the city, and executed as somebody who has blasphemed the community’s god. He’s not killed in just any way. He’s killed on the cross, that is, hanged in a particular way. Now, hanging, both in suicide and as a form of execution, has in the Mediterranean tradition by that time already a very powerful meaning. We know about some 250 acts of suicide described in Greco-Roman classical literature. Let me stay with suicide for a moment because it’s so clear there. The very first one is an Italic queen, very angry at her people whom she wants to leave, who hangs herself in the woods to die without touching the earth because in that way she expects her spirit not to be absorbed back to the ancestors, but to remain around to haunt the people. Execution on the gibbet, hanging, that is, to die without touching the earth, is also explicitly dealt with in Roman and Greek tradition as a way of excluding you not only from our people here but from our people in the other world, from our dead. If therefore, we do take this man who says “Let this chalice pass from me” because he so much fears it as our example, it is an example simultaneously of the loyalty to his people and the willingness to accept being excluded from them by what he stands for. This, in the supreme form, is the Christian attitude towards this worldly community, which then shows up as a way of behaviour in everyday life.

David Cayley
By His crucifixion, Illich believes, Jesus showed His acceptance of the new freedom which He had invited His followers to share — the freedom to put love higher than law or custom. This is what makes the Christian New Testament, even though foreshadowed in the Old, still so utterly and explosively new in Illich's eyes. Men and women had been shaped, up to this time, by their obedience to the customs of the place, the people, today we would say the culture from which they had been born. (Illich uses the Greek word *ethnos*, from which we get ethnic, for these bounded and self-contained worlds). The individual, the ego, the "I" which I am, existed only as an instance of a prior, defining "we.” Jesus asserted that human beings find their ultimate purpose not in obedience to custom, however hallowed, but by their free response to other persons. In so doing, he offered an expanded horizon, not just for love but also for the betrayal of this love through the development of new forms of power.

Ivan Illich
I do believe that with the Christian message an entirely new level of surprising flowering has become possible for knowledge and love. Christians believe that they can love the biblical God in the flesh. St. John says that he has put his head at table on his shoulder, that he has touched him, heard him, smelled him. And He has said that whoever sees Him sees the Father and whoever sees his brethren or loves his brethren loves Him in David Cayley. An entirely new dimension of love has become possible. Which is extremely ambiguous because it explodes the universal assumptions about the conditions of love being dictated by the people into which have been born, and the family in which I grew up. It makes it possible for me to choose anywhere whom I will love and thereby destroys or deeply threatens — that’s better — the basis for ethics which always been *ethnos,* the historically given “we” which precedes any pronunciation of the word

"I." So I believe that with the Christian message, with the New Testament, loving the other, love, gaze and knowledge are possibly in an entirely new horizon. But also a new danger exists: the attempt to manage, to insure, to guarantee this love by institutionalization, by submitting it to legislation and making it law, by protecting it through the criminalization of its opposite. So I believe that, with the Christian message, an entirely new ability in the self of giving, giving one's self has become possible but also an entirely new exercise of power which is principally the power of those who organize Christianity, that is Church and churches, to use this vocation to claim their superiority as social institutions, as social organizations.

David Cayley
How this new exercise of power developed in the Church is a subject I'll return to shortly, but first I'd like to linger a moment over what Illich calls "the new flowering of Christian virtues" that was made possible by the gospel. The possibility of virtue, in Aristotle and other classical accounts, lies within the individual. By cultivating the manners and habits that befit my station, I can make myself virtuous. Christianity throws the accent on to the other, and onto the Holy Spirit from whom I receive the possibility of virtuous action as a gift. This deep sensitivity of one to the other led to the creation of communities of an entirely new kind, communities animated by a spirit of contrition and mutual forgiveness, rather than of rectitude. These communities were inspired by what one of Illich's most important teachers, the late Gerhard Ladner, called "the Idea of Reform." But reform, in Latin *reformatio*, had for these early Christians a meaning it had never had before.

Ivan Illich
*Reformati*o, or *revolutio*, could mean the turning around of the stars, or the running of the sun through the spring cycle in a cosmic year, or a greening every year. But it could not mean what it means suddenly, all through Christendom, by the fourth century: a turning inward out, a considering the axioms on which I built my entire life and my feelings yesterday as those which I have to get rid of to be in an entirely new state. Basically contrition. Contrition is not motivated by a sense of culpability. It is deep sorrow and it is based on belief in the mercy of the other who will forgive me my betrayal, not forgive me a transgression or accept payment in satisfaction.

David Cayley
Mutual forgiveness, as opposed to the righteous demand for satisfaction of a wrong, was the characteristic mood of a community whose members keenly felt their dependence on one another. This feeling was founded on their experience of faith because trusting dependence on the word of another, Illich says, is what faith finally means.

Ivan Illich
It's a different way of knowing than that which is based on my sensual experience and the resources of my intelligence. It is a way of taking for certain on the word of somebody else whom I trust. It is making knowledge based on trust for myself more fundamental than anything which I can know by reason. But this, of course, is a possibility when I believe in the existence of God's word reaching me. And when I believe that him whom I trust is God, not you. But it does rub off on my relationship to you. It makes me aim at facing people, willing to take them for what they reveal about themselves, not what I know about them. And this is very difficult to discuss after 100 years of dream interpretation by Freud. The psychoanalytic assumption that I can help you find out about yourself by understanding you more perfectly than you do inevitably colours, in very fascinating and high-level form and in very degraded, trivialized forms, most of our relationships by now. One of the newnesses which come from Him who says, I come to make everything new, is exactly, in dealing with the other, the willingness to accept him for what he tells me about himself because only that way can I be surprised by him. Taking out the predictability from the face of the other...

David Cayley
...which the analytic presumption to get behind destroys...

Ivan Illich
...which the analytic and the Marxist, sociological assumption implies is always an illusion. Illusion shaped by ideology, by social condition, by upbringing, by education. I mean, that's what I've tried to do, invite people to envisage this possibility, even when I couldn't talk to them explicitly about who my model is.

David Cayley
The capacity for surprise, for spontaneous, unpredictable turning towards another is the essence of the freedom Illich finds in the New Testament. But it's part of the ambiguity of the Gospel, as he said earlier, that this freedom can also be twisted into a planned and managed institutional response which de-natures it. He finds an example of this de-naturing of the Gospel in the way in which the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan has usually been understood by Christians. The tale is told in the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus is asked, who is my neighbour? He responds with a story about the rescue of a Jew by a Samaritan, an outsider to the religion which was centered on the Temple in Jerusalem. To Illich, the parable perfectly illustrates the unforeseen horizons that Jesus hoped to open for His listeners. But the interpretations that have generally been applied to this story, he says, point in the opposite direction.

Ivan Illich
Some thirty years ago, I went into sermons from the early third century into the nineteenth century dealing with this story of the Samaritan, and I found out that most preachers, when they comment on that passage, comment on it in order to show how we ought to behave towards our neighbour, when in fact this is the opposite of what Jesus, who tells that story of the Samaritan, wanted to point out. The Pharisees came to ask Him, "Master, Teacher, tell us who is my neighbour?" They didn't ask him, how does one behave to one's neighbour? They asked him, point blank, the question: Who is the guy whom you call neighbour? And he, as a story, told them a man was going down to Jericho, fell among robbers, was beaten up and left wounded. A teacher goes by, a priest goes by, sees him and walks on. And then an outsider comes along, the traditional enemy, and turns to the wounded man, as an internal turning, and picks him up, takes him into his arms and brings him to the inn. So he answers them, "My neighbour is whom I decide, not whom I have to choose." There is no way of categorizing who my neighbour ought to be. This doctrine about the neighbour which this guy, Jesus, brings into conversation, is utterly destructive of ordinary decency, of ethical behaviour and to say this today is as surprising as it was at the beginning.

David Cayley
The teaching of Jesus in this parable is destructive of ethical decency because of the way in which it shows and commends the violation of a sacrosanct boundary between those to whom I belong and to whom I have an obligation, and those others who arrange things in their own way and ought not to be my concern. If the story were told today, as Illich has sometimes pointed out, it would re-acquire its power to shock by showing a Palestinian caring for an injured Jew. The Samaritan does not what he ought to do, as the preachers Illich consulted argued, but precisely what he ought not to do. Ethics, traditionally, were formed within an ethnic boundary that gave them shape and substance. Jesus, Illich says, indicated a different, more open-ended possibility.

Ivan Illich
The Master told them who your neighbour is is not determined by your birth, by your condition, by the language which you speak, by the *ethnos*, which means really the mode of walking which has become proper to you, but by you. You can recognize the other man who is out of bounds culturally, who is foreign

linguistically, who — you can say by providence or by pure chance — is the one who lies somewhere along your road in the grass and create the supreme form of relatedness which is not given by creation but created by you.

David Cayley
This voluntary, created relationship, Illich stresses, cannot be made into an abstract or universal duty. It is a free, unconditioned response and, as such, cannot be converted into an ethical norm or rule. What the Samaritan undertakes, by its very nature, is a concrete, specific bodily tie between two people.

Ivan Illich
This is not a spiritual relationship. This is an act which prolongs the Incarnation. As God became flesh and in the flesh relates to each one of us, so you are capable of relating in the flesh to that other man who has been beaten up. Take out this fleshy, bodily, carnal, dense experience of self and, therefore, of the Thou, the other, from the story of the Samaritan and you have a nice, liberal fantasy which is something horrible.

David Cayley
This distinction between a uniquely embodied relationship and a liberal fantasy comes close to the nub of Illich's argument. Only try to compel, to regulate, to reproduce on demand the free, inward, bodily turning of the Samaritan towards the Jew and a course is set towards compulsory care and the charade of benevolence which poisons charity in modern societies. If the Samaritan's extraordinary charity is made into a duty, a policy or a rule, then not only is love turned into a law, but any failure, or falling short in charity becomes, by the same token an infraction of this law. It's not so hard, I think, to see the outlines of our modern world in this formula. But the way the New Testament understands the failure of charity, Illich says, is not as the breaking of a rule, but as the betrayal of a relationship. And the proper name for this betrayal, he says, is sin.

Ivan Illich
Jesus announced the possibility of Mr. Samaritan being a critter of a new kind which finds its perfection, finds itself only in establishing a relationship — a relationship which is arbitrary from everybody else's point of view except from his because he does it on the call of the beaten-up Jew. Since that moment, since this possibility of a mode of existence was created, its breakage, its denial, infidelity, turning away, coldness has acquired a meaning it could not formerly have had. Sin, as a divinely revealed possibility for Man, did not exist before this moment. Where there was no freely, arbitrarily established relationship which is a gift from the other, which is founded on a glimmer of mutuality, the possibility of its denial, of its destruction could not be thought.

David Cayley
The story of the Samaritan, as Illich understands it, points to a new freedom for human beings in turning towards one another. At the same time, it reveals, as sin, the corresponding possibility of turning away. Like Jesus himself, crucified outside the city's sheltering walls, and out of contact with his ancestral earth, his followers were called to abandon secure horizons and live at the extremity of freedom, guided only by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. But, in this extremity, they were also continually faced with the temptation to establish a new security by investing their faith with worldly power, permanence and visibility. How the early church eventually succumbed to this temptation is a story Illich has traced out in relation to the practice of hospitality.

Ivan Illich
It was customary in a Christian household to have an extra mattress, a bit of a candle and some dry bread in case the Lord Jesus knocks at the door, that is, somebody without a roof arrives at your door and you take him in and take care of him. This form of behaviour is utterly against anything known in the Roman

Empire in any of its cultures.

David Cayley
This practice gradually began to change, Illich says, after the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire during the reign of Constantine in the early fourth century.

Ivan Illich
Bishops got, under Constantine, the same position in the imperial administration which magistrates have, but also they could establish organizations, corporations. And the first corporations they started were Samaritan corporations. They trusted to a special house, supervised by the Bishop, financed by the community, the taking in of the class of people who didn't have a home. It wasn't any more a free choice of a householder. It was a task of the institution to take in homeless people. No wonder that in the very same year–or was it a year later?–practically at the same time at which Constantine assigned the title of magistrate, or the equivalent, to bishops, another great church father, Johannes Chrysastom — golden tongued, they called him, because of his beautiful rhetoric — in a sermon exclaimed violently don't create these *Xenodocheia* — houses for the foreigners. By assigning the duty to behave this way to an institution, Christians will lose the habit of reserving a bed and having a piece of bread ready in every home and the homes will cease to be Christian homes.

David Cayley
Christian hostels for the homeless, Illich believes, were a first instance of the establishment of a charitable agency to care for a designated class of needy people. And as these institutions grew, he says, they became a major way in which the Church advanced its power, wealth and status within the Empire.

Ivan Illich
It's very interesting to see how the institutionalization of neighbourliness, the transformation of gratuitous, free, truly free choice of whom I want to take care of into the ideologically inspired creation of institutions worked in the urban crisis of the late Roman Empire. They had a problem which today is called immigration into the large cities. The cities were flooded by immigrants from rural areas and foreign areas which made city life dangerous. I'm speaking of decaying Rome. And the emperors, especially in Byzantium, found it desirable, by decree, to expel people from the city who couldn't prove that they had a home, and, at the very same time, in order to give legitimacy to this decree, needed to finance institutions which would provide homes for the homeless. And if you study the way in which the Church created its economic base in late antiquity, you will see that, by assuming the task of creating welfare institutions on behalf of the state, the Church's claim to money, and practically to unlimited amounts of money because the task was unlimited, could be legally and morally funded.

David Cayley
This co-optation of the church in the late Empire and the consequent withering of personal hospitality, exemplifies that ambiguity which Illich thinks is inherent in the Church's worldly existence. Welfare institutions, as he calls them, were something radically new in history, as was the identification of the poor as a distinct, and deserving class. Neither can be explained except by the influence of the Gospel. But, by trying to regulate and insure charity, he says, the Church at the same time betrayed the spirit of freedom that Jesus had taught was charity's essence.

Ivan Illich
The introduction of care-taking of people who fit into a certain category of need cannot be explained — the appearance of this mentality — without reflecting on the model of Christian hospitality. On the other hand, we have immediately perverted it. Something which Jesus told us about as a model of my personal freedom of choice of who will be my other is transformed into the use of power and money in order to provide a service. This is not just the idea of the neighbour, deprived of the quality of

freedom which is implied in it in the story of the Samaritan. It is also the institutional decision to make faith into something which is under the power of this world.

David Cayley
Throughout this program, Ivan Illich has been arguing that, with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, a glorious, but volatile new possibility entered history. Through the one who said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,” Christians were invited to share in the life of God, life eternal. But, precisely because of its glorious claim, Illich says, the reception of this revelation was unstable and subject to a corruption that mirrored the height and extremity of its promise. And the corruption of the best, he says, is the worst. In Illich's view, this danger was quite evident to the first generations of Christian, but was then largely forgotten. His evidence is the practice of prophecy in the early Church.

Ivan Illich
How come the first two generations of Christian communities each had their prophet? They insist that each community needs a prophet to be a good community — that is somebody who stands in the tradition of the prophets of Israel, who were people deeply convinced that God’s word was taking flesh in their mouths and around this enfleshment of God’s word the people of Israel could come into existence. Now, God’s word didn’t have to come any more through the mouth of a prophet after it had become flesh in the womb of Mary. Prophecy, in the strict sense, didn’t fit any longer into the life of Jesus or of the early Church. So what did these prophets, who were clearly distinct from the teachers and preachers mentioned in these first Christian documents, have to say to the Church? I think they had to announce a mystery, the mystery of evil, *mysterium inequitatis*. They announced that the Church, wherever was the milieu in which the anti-Christ could nest. They announced, and that’s biblical, the mystery of evil, of final evil which will bring the world to an end, being already present and, at the very same time — you just have to read the New Testament — being held back for the moment. The impressive thing about the transition from the first few Christian generations to the Christianity of Western Europe is that this mystery of evil with which the Church goes pregnant, which wouldn’t have found a place to nest in the Old Testament, disappeared from the Church’s teachings and the concern of most. You find it again and again in the prayers, writings and sermons of mystics and reformers. But the Church, the Roman Church, and also most of the reformed churches, do not center faith on its existence.

David Cayley
By not centering faith on the existence of the mystery of evil, Illich claims, Christian churches have refused to acknowledge that their faith might have a shadow. The doctrine of the anti-Christ has been pushed to the margins, as something monstrous, mythic, esoteric, or fundamentalist. But Illich believes that it refers to something more ordinary and more obvious, which is simply that with the appearance of the Christ, an ersatz or counterfeit of Christ inevitably appears as well, and the greater the good, the greater its betrayal. So what the mystery of evil ultimately means, Illich says, is nothing else but the new reality that takes shape only with God's Incarnation, the possibility of sin.

Ivan Illich
Sin is something which has been, in our modern sense, nonexistent, not really existing as a human option, as an individual option, as a day-by-day option, before Christ gave us the freedom of dealing with each other, seeing in each other persons redeemed to be like Him. By opening this possibility of love, this possibility of facing each other, and only by this, a way of betrayal became possible, a denial becomes possible which exactly is called sin. The idea that by not responding to you, when you call upon my fidelity, I thereby personally offend God is fundamental to understanding what Christianity is about. And the mystery which I’m interested in

contemplating, the consequences of the perversion of faith throughout history which haunts us at the end of the twentieth century, is exactly related to my understanding of sin.

David Cayley
What is it, then, that haunts the contemporary world? To Illich's mind, I think, it's the slow working out that betrayal of which he has been speaking. The new possibility of personally facing one another has produced as its perversion a vast architecture of *im*personal institutions all claiming, in some sense, to care. The vast engines that drive our world–the engines of education and health, as much as those of economic and technological development — all derive finally from a co-optation of the gospel's promise of freedom. Contemporary persons may often live without faith, but they live nonetheless amidst the husks of faith betrayed. And this, for Illich, is what makes the world he sees around him so uncanny, and so unlike anything that has ever been before.

Ivan Illich
I stand as a historian in front of a historical entity, an epoch, which, the more I look at it, the more confusing, un-understandable, and unbelievable it is for me. It's out of whack with any historical epoch which has ever been and faces with me with the organizing axioms for which I don't find parallels anywhere in other societies in the past. And it gives testimony, to me at least, about a confusing kind of — I want to avoid the word evil — what can I call it? Inhumanity, denial, degradation for which other epochs of history had no parallel. To be very superficial, just think about the polarization of incomes during the last 20 years all over the world, not only in the United States, but in the world at large, much more violently. Recently I saw a statement inspiring confidence that 350 people earn as much as 65% of the weaker ones. Now, I'm not so worried about that. I'm much more worried about the fact that the 65% of the weaker ones who earn together less than the 350 rich ones — in the world — 30 years ago would have been able to live without recourse to money. Many things were not yet monetarized. Subsistence still was functioning. But today they can't move without paying a bus ticket. They can't get heat in their kitchen by collecting wood, but have to buy electricity. How to explain this extraordinary evil which has not happened in other societies or only there where Western society has been imported. And that's where, I believe, the *mysterium inequitatis*, gives me a key to understand the evil which I face now and for which I can't find a word. I, as a man of faith, at least should call it mysterious betrayal or perversion of that kind of freedom which the Gospels have brought. Now, what I have stammered to you, unprepared, as you know, talking freely, I have avoided to do for 30 years. You will take it on yourself to make me, at this last moment, say this in a way in which others can hear it. The more you allow yourself to conceive of the evil which you watch, as evil of a new kind, of a mysterious kind, the more intense becomes the temptation — I can't avoid saying it — of cursing God's incarnation.

David Cayley
What Illich means by this barely with-held curse will become clearer, I think, as this series unfolds and he has the opportunity to offer more evidence for his claim that the corruption of the best is the worst. But, in the meantime, I hope it is already apparent that it is the consequences of God's incarnation, and not the incarnation itself that he is tempted to curse. That these consequences have occurred, and that God has continued to suffer them, are part of the mystery Illich is courageously trying to contemplate.