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**PROLONGING THE INCARNATION: TOWARDS A  
REAPPROPRIATION OF IVAN ILLICH FOR  
CHRISTIAN MISSION AND LIFE TOGETHER**

by

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## ABSTRACT

On the basis of my experience as a U.S. national living as a missionary in Brazil from 2003-2010, this thesis explores cultural, political, and ethical questions related to Christian mission, by reappropriating the life and thought of Ivan Illich. This thesis is an exercise in doing theology *with* and *after* Illich. One of the aims of my thesis is to respond to a ‘research gap’ in relation to Illich in the field of theology.

In reappropriating Illich for contemporary theology, my thesis is two-fold. First, I bring his explicitly theological commentary (focused on the Incarnation) together with his earlier social criticism (focused on conviviality) arguing that they operate in tandem as expressions of “Incarnational Christianity.” Second, I show that he offers a compelling contribution to contemporary accounts of Christian mission, with practical implications for incarnational mission. Illich’s three-fold contribution, I argue, relates to:

- his understanding of the incarnational basis of mission;
- his diagnosis of the social conditions which undermine and corrupt this incarnational movement;
- his insights regarding the cultivation of conviviality as a response to wider social concerns, such as economic and ecological crises, as a means for reclaiming the freedom of living in hope and of “prolonging the Incarnation.”

## DEDICATION

**I dedicate this work to my friend and *irmão mais velho*, Claudio Oliver, who has inspired me and countless others with his friendship and his ‘preferential option for the possible.’**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAC	Crise Ambiental e Cristianismo (Appendix 4)
COA	Celebration of Awareness
DS	Deschooling Society
DP	Disabling Professions
EATC	Eco-pedagogics and the Commons
IIC	Ivan Illich in Conversation
IMOP	In the Mirror of the Past
LTM	Limits to Medicine
MPWTL	Making Peace With the Land
OESP	O Estado de S. Paulo (Appendix 1)
PAF	Philosophy ... Artifacts ... Friendship
QDV	Quinta da Videira (Appendix 3)
SPI	Será Possível a Igreja? (Appendix 2)
SW	Shadow Work
TCCD	The Church, Change and Development
TDD	The Development Dictionary
TFOD	The Future of Development
TPDR	The Post-Development Reader
TCII	The Challenges of Ivan Illich
TFC	Tools for Conviviality
THN	Toward a History of Needs
THWGI	To Hell With Good Intentions
TRNOTF	The Rivers North of the Future

## **Notes on Inclusive Language and Recurring Phrases**

### **Inclusive Language**

Illich wrote during a time when inclusive language, e.g. the use of ‘man’ to mean humankind, was not yet established either in the academy or in popular usage. While my own writing seeks to be fully inclusive, and I have decided to retain Illich’s original and uninclusive language, without marking it ‘[sic]’ in order to make the flow of my, and his, argument as clear as possible.

### **Recurring Phrases**

Throughout this dissertation I use key phrases like “missionary ethic of incarnation”(Yoder), “technological ethos (Garrigós), “economic peace” (Illich) and “prolong[ing] the Incarnation” (Illich). Since I use them frequently, I have decided not to reference them on every occasion they are used, in order to make the flow of my argument as clear as possible.

# INTRODUCTION

## BEGINNING IN THE MIDDLE

In the prologue to his collection of theological essays, *On Christian Theology* (2000), Rowan Williams describes his methodological starting point as follows: “I assume that the theologian *is* always beginning in the middle of things” (Williams, 2000: xii).<sup>1</sup> Williams argues here that the theologian neither begins at the beginning, in the sense of ‘starting from scratch,’ nor begins at the end by securing a standpoint that provides a complete and totalizing overview. Rather, beginning in the middle is another way of saying that the theologian is always already ‘placed’ within history, and, therefore, works from “a practice of common life and language already there, a practice that defines a specific shared way of interpreting human life as lived in relation to God” (Williams, 2000: xii). This thesis, then, is an exercise in doing theology by ‘beginning in the middle.’

A decisive aspect of my ‘beginning in the middle’ has been my experience as a U.S. national living as a missionary in Brazil from 2003-2010. Indeed, that experience, with all its joys and struggles, is the driving force and motivating factor in my doing this research. My missionary experience serves as the narrative matrix and lens for the research agenda expressed in this doctoral thesis.

In order to take the personal<sup>2</sup> as the point of departure for engaging with the wider

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<sup>1</sup> Williams makes this reference to ‘beginning in the middle’ in the prologue to his collection of essays in *On Christian Theology* (2000). Although he makes no direct reference to Dietrich Bonhoeffer here, this trope of ‘beginning in the middle’ can be found in Bonhoeffer (1997:30).

<sup>2</sup> I want to make clear at this point that I regard the personal as redolent of the political, as expressed in “the classic feminist adage, ‘the personal is political,’ [which] rings true. Personal practices and public policy are

cultural, political and ethical questions related to Christian mission, I reappropriate the life and thought of Ivan Illich as my primary interlocutor and guide. Given the diverse contours of Illich's writings and the ambiguity of his legacy in relationship to the church, taking an Illichian turn in contemporary theology is not necessarily straightforward. To be clear, it is not my intention to compress Illich's intellectual breadth into the single role of theologian; rather, this thesis is an exercise in doing theology with and after Illich. I intend to show that there are compelling reasons for doing so.

My 'introduction' to Ivan Illich took place in the context of friendship with Claudio Oliver and others in the community of which he is a pastor in Curitiba, Brazil.<sup>3</sup> That my reception of Illich happened primarily through the mediation of friendship is not incidental, rather it resonates with Illich's emphasis upon friendship as "the source, condition, and context for the possible coming about of commitment and like-mindedness" (TRNOTF: 147).<sup>4</sup>

In reappropriating Illich for contemporary theology, my thesis is two-fold. First, I bring his explicitly theological commentary, focused on the Incarnation, together with his earlier social criticism, focused on conviviality, arguing that they operate in tandem as complementary expressions of his "Incarnational Christianity" (Cayley, in TRNOTF: 41).

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inextricably related. Change in the one catalyzes change in the other. Choices in personal life have political impact" (Moe-Lobeda, 2013: 257).

<sup>3</sup> Since the mid-1990s, Claudio Oliver has served as the pastor of *Igreja do Caminho* [Church of the Way]. In 2003, *Igreja do Caminho* (hereafter, IdC) founded a Christian charity called *Casa da Videira* [House of the Vine] to facilitate the church's missional initiatives, always focusing on relationally-based alternatives to program-based forms of mission. Over the last ten years, *Casa da Videira* (hereafter, CdV) has evolved from being a general incubator or laboratory for a range of initiatives (from urban agriculture, to carpentry, to local film production) towards operating from a more communal base, which I describe in chapter 4 as a 'grassroots ecclesial community.'

As I lived in a different city from Claudio and his community, my friendship with Claudio and others at CdV evolved through regular visits to Claudio's home and immersion experiences through which I 'caught' the ethos of CdV, and through which they included me as a friend and *parceiro* partner in their common work.

<sup>4</sup> To facilitate the reference process, I cite Illich's works and well other frequently cited works with abbreviations. See the Abbreviations page for a comprehensive list of the abbreviations that I use throughout this thesis.

Second, I show that he offers a compelling contribution to contemporary accounts of Christian mission, with practical implications for incarnational mission (Langmead, 2004).

Illich's three-fold contribution, I argue, relates to:

- his understanding of the incarnational basis of mission;
- his diagnosis of the social conditions which undermine and corrupt this incarnational movement;
- his insights for regenerating incarnational mission and the cultivation of 'life together' as responses to wider social concerns, such as economic and ecological crises.

One of the aims of my thesis is to respond to a 'research gap' in relation to Illich in the field of theology. The deeper reason for turning to Illich, however, is that since 2007, he has been the most challenging and reliable guide that I have encountered while navigating Christian and missionary existence in Brazil and beyond.

More than anyone else, then, Illich has influenced me by naming the air I breathed as a missionary, by navigating a similar path, in the Americas, that I was to embark upon as a disciple, and by inspiring me to embrace both the truth that comes to us in Jesus (Eph. 4:21) and "the world that has come upon us" (Jennings, 2010: 290), and, crucially, to do so as a theologian. More than anyone else, Illich offered me a way of not suppressing the questions and "epistemological ruptures" (see Bedford, 2005: 113) that came with becoming a missionary, but rather gave me the impetus to live with them as a way towards the renewal of my own theological imagination (see Rom. 12: 1-2).

By turning to Illich, then, my thesis explores what is at stake in reclaiming the particularity of the Incarnation as the basis:

- for reimagining the missionary conviction that we receive and share “abundant life ” through inclusion in the life of another person (Jo. 10:10);
- for delinking Christian mission from the ‘technopelagian’ assumption that we can deliver the ‘good life,’ and even the ‘fullness of life,’ through assimilating ourselves and others under the power of our technological artifacts, especially our dominant social institutions, for example, the market or the nation-state);
- for embodying creative responses to social questions and crises; responses that are congruent with incarnational mission.

## Chapter 1

In Chapter One, I turn to personal narrative as a way of situating the background for my research, as well asking the basic questions that have gripped my imagination as a missionary: First, given the history of Christian missionary expansion in its colonial and neo-colonial forms, and the fallout of such expansion as what Eduardo Galeano famously termed “the open veins of Latin American,” (Galeano, 1973), on what *basis* do we go on fulfilling the ‘Great Commission’ as Christ’s disciples (Mt. 28:16-20)? A second question, intimately related to the first, is What makes it possible to embody a distinctively Christian presence that is *missionary* without being *manipulative*?

To explore the questions that arose from my missionary experience, I develop Nancy Bedford’s insights regarding theological reflection and social location, extending her reflections on the significance of migratory existence to missionary existence. In other words, I focus on how the experience of doing theology from more than one place might entail a movement from rupture to the renewal of one’s theological imagination (Bedford, 2005: 113). More specifically, I develop my personal narrative in terms of a series of *viradas*, or ‘turning points’ in my ongoing conversion: 1) being turned towards Brazil; 2) navigating the 3S’s of



seminary, sanctuary and street in Brazil; 3) being befriended and ‘introduced’ to Illich; and 4) overhearing ‘the gospel according to samba,’ that is, participation in the ‘samba circle’ as a parable for inclusion and participation in the body of Christ. In this way, this chapter provides a narrative display for situating my own ‘Illichian turn’ as a vital ‘turning point’ for illuminating two ways of approaching mission: either as a technical problem to be fixed and / or to be controlled, or as a relational possibility to be shared.

## **Chapter 2**

In this chapter, I begin to turn theology and Illich more compellingly towards one another, and to reappropriate Ivan Illich’s significance for Christian theology. I do not intend to provide Illich’s intellectual biography nor, a comprehensive survey of his work, nor indeed a ‘theology of Ivan Illich.’ Neither do I engage in hagiography. This is because I am not interested in a mere retrieval of Ivan Illich, let alone providing a eulogy for him. What I propose instead is to do theology with and after Illich.

In this chapter, therefore, I will follow the trajectory of Illich’s life so that it might engage the discourse of theology as both an important challenge and as an untapped, yet constructive, resource. I examine the incarnational imagination that is at the heart of Illich’s life and theology: specifically, a) the Incarnation as a new horizon of love and knowledge which we are called to prolong, b) the corruption of this vocation through what Illich calls institutionalization, and c) his conviction that the Incarnate One cannot ultimately be managed or controlled, but only followed, thereby providing a basis for a “*missionary ethic of incarnation*”<sup>5</sup> (Yoder, 1984: 44).

To do so, I explore how Illich’s own witness embodies the logic of discipleship and

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<sup>5</sup> Yoder means by this a way of navigating between cultural imperialism, on the one hand, and relativism, on the other, through the incarnational logic of the gospel, what Yoder calls “the vulnerability of the particular” (Yoder, 1984: 44).

mission as a response to the vocation to “prolong the Incarnation” (TNROTF: 207), and how I perceive that witness illumines the contours of the journey of discipleship as a missionary in Brazil, by reframing it within the drama of incarnational inclusion. I offer a theological reading of Illich’s life in terms of the motif of journey, or *itinerarium*, that is, his understanding of the Christian life as a form of pilgrimage. Finally I focus on how Illich’s life and theological imagination contribute to a contemporary understanding of incarnational mission. To do so, I turn to the work of the late Australian missiologist (2004), Ross Langmead, who develops a useful account of incarnational mission in terms of three interrelated aspects:

- following Jesus, or “seeing Jesus as the pattern for mission”;
- participating in Christ, or “experiencing the continuing presence of Christ in the church as the body of Christ”;
- joining God’s incarnating mission, or “understanding the activity of God in a sacramental / incarnational framework” (Langmead, 2004: 48).

What I argue in this chapter, then, is the need for congruence between Christian practices and the decisively *theodramatic* logic of incarnational mission, in the ‘drama of incarnational inclusion.’

### **Chapter 3**

In this chapter I shift the focus from Illich’s own story to his role as a storyteller. In doing so, I explore the way in which Illich, and others, engage with the notion that “Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination” (Jennings, 2010: 6). Here I weave together the voices of theologians and ‘other storytellers’, as a way of narrating the historical transformations in the West that have decontextualized human dignity and the conditions for human flourishing (Soulen & Woodhead, 2006). In

order to examine the missiological implications of these transformations, I explore how Illich and others historicize ‘progress’ and ‘development’ as twin “project[s] of intervention” (Rahnema, TPDR: 397) inside a Western “universalist mission initiated in Europe” (IMOP: 93).

In terms of the governing metaphor of this thesis, the journey, or *itinerarium*, this chapter examines modern detours, or, ‘turnings away’ from an original trajectory for human flourishing. More specifically, I examine the conflict between the incarnational ethos of Christian mission and another ethos which I understand as a “technological ethos” (Garrigós, TCII: 117). I argue that in Illich’s view, the detour of the “technological ethos” is inextricably linked to a fundamental mis-perception, a false trajectory for “furthering humanity” (see Gorringe: 2004), and I go on to discuss this in the light of Illich’s identification of a Promethean drive characterized by a dominant, but false, idealization of independent individuals, coupled with a dominant, but also false, dependence upon technological artifacts. By contrast, Illich, encourages us to discern how progress and development generate a novel social space, which he calls a technological milieu (PAF: 3), and which not only eclipses and even corrupts the human self-image, but also undermines and corrupts the incarnational logic of Christian mission itself.

In the final section of Chapter 3, I juxtapose Illich’s incarnational logic with his insight that “so-called development has increasingly turned the world into a man-made thing” (PAF: 1). The Promethean ideal and the ‘corruption hypothesis’ both illustrate the rise of the “technological ethos,” and a modern drive towards institutionalization over embodied presence, or, a spirit of control over “a spirit of contingency” (Schroyer, 2009: 64). Key to this thinking is the idea of the recovery of conviviality which reimagines ‘life together’ in terms of the limits, interdependence, and embodied nature of relationality. It enables us to

discern and, like the Samaritan, to ‘cross the threshold ‘ by which we “prolong the Incarnation”(TRNOTF: 207).

## Chapter 4

In this final chapter, I explore the practical implications of Illich’s notion of conviviality for incarnational mission. To do so, I return to aspects of my personal narrative described in chapter one. More specifically, I develop the third *virada* (being befriended and ‘introduced’ to Illich’) by returning to the witness of Claudio Oliver and other friends at *Casa da Videira* [CdV], and I conclude the chapter by returning to the fourth *virada*, of overhearing ‘the gospel according to samba.’

In this chapter I engage with the extended metaphor of this thesis, namely that of *itinerarium*, or journey, by exploring the motif of re-turning:

- re-turning to the Way is not a straightforward movement from ‘problem to solution,’ rather it represent a movement from diagnosis of alienation to responses – or, imagining possible ways to go forward;
- re-turning resonates with the Christian notion of repentance, a ‘turning around’ or ‘turning back’ to the [path]way, linked to a renewed mindset of imagination (Rom. 12:2);
- re-turning relates to the way Illich avoids retreating nostalgically into the past, but rather emphasizes re-turning to the ‘mirror of the past’ in order to live fully and to be alive in the present.

In terms of discipleship and mission, I argue that making a ‘convivial turn’– a preferential option for freedom in interdependence is, in fact, a theological turn. That is, the ‘convivial

turn' is a theological turn because it enables us to reclaim freedom from the false dilemma of either 'being in control,' through technological artifacts, or the threat of living in despair. In other words, the cultivation of conviviality enables us to reclaim the freedom of living in hope and to "prolong the Incarnation" (TRNOTF: 207).

## CHAPTER 1

### THEOLOGY ‘ON THE WAY’; OR, SPEAKING OF GOD FROM MORE THAN ONE PLACE

Rowan Williams’ methodological insight about ‘beginning in the middle’, discussed earlier, as well as the particular dynamics of missionary existence, closely related as it is to one of the most intensely debated issues within contemporary theology, is the issue of how social location shapes the doing of theology. In recent years, the issue has become even more central in the light of an increasingly globalized economy, the unprecedented fluidity of social mobility and forced migrations, as well as the shift of Christianity’s numerical center from the North Atlantic to the global South in an era of so-called “world Christianity” (see Ott & Netland, 2006). Thus a critical, yet constructive appreciation of the contextual character of theology has become unavoidable.

Of course, what is at stake here is more than one’s address. It is an awareness not only of where you are located, but also in relation to whom, even to ask the question, ‘To whom do you belong?’ One of the threads that runs through my own theological reflection, and a subtext for the thesis that follows, has to do with responding to that question from more than one place: as a US national and as permanent resident of Brazil, currently resident in Birmingham, UK. The set of questions that I bring into this study, therefore, arise out of an experience of place, and sense of Christian identity, that has not evolved around a more or less fixed location, but rather around multiple places, or even, as a movement between them.

Argentinian theologian Nancy Bedford (2005) develops a similar line of questioning in her essay, “To Speak of God from More than One Place”. In her essay she examines the issue of the limitations and merits of place by focusing on the experience of Latin Americans

becoming identified as migrants in a global context. The question she raises is: “What might it mean for theology when – as a result of transnational migration – we begin to speak of God ‘from more than one place’?” (Bedford, 2005: 98)

By focusing on migration, both as a more generalized experience of Latin Americans in the US context, as well as her own journey from Buenos Aires to the Chicago area, Bedford attends to how the dynamics of migration tend to destabilize established categories, expectations, and assumptions related to the question of identity. Migration does this by pointing us directly to “the present-day subtext of capitalist globalization and displacement of peoples” (2005: 106-107), and also points to the possibility of a theological account of identity that is not contained by reference to a fixed place, but rather imagined and performed as movement within a journey. Indeed, by reading the migrant perspective Christologically, Bedford suggests that the journey of migrants is not identical, but is perhaps iconic of Jesus Christ’s own identity as “the way” (John 14:6). That is to say, encounters between migrants and those who represent the dominant host culture may generate a cultural dissonance which perhaps points to the way in which Jesus’ life and identity generated a sense of “cross-cultural incommensurability” (2005: 108) among many of his hearers, particularly the Pharisees of his day: “because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you [Pharisees] do not know where I have come from or where I am going” (John 8:13-14). One of theological insights that Bedford’s argument suggests is that migratory existence and the Christian life share the “ambiguous yet promising possibilit[y]” (2005: 109) of a movement which does not annul what comes before, but rather destabilizes a previous social location and frame of reference for the sake of something new.

While Bedford clearly highlights the idea that migratory existence can entail oppressive and dehumanizing forms of destabilization, she also wants to make clear how

destabilization can be understood as a positive influence for theologians. This is central to how she imagines the task of doing theology. She writes:

In theology our goal is to attempt a discourse born of God and about God that is both integrative and integral. And yet – though this may seem paradoxical at first sight – this integration is not achieved harmoniously, for significant God-talk requires *epistemological ruptures*: I was once blind, but now I see; or I was once deaf, but now I hear; or even I once could see only as those who have eyes, but now I can start to see as those who are blind can see; and I can start to hear as those who are called deaf can hear. This ‘integration’ achieved is constantly submitted to a kind of wholesome ‘disintegration’, as the idolatrous aspects of even our best theological attempts are brought to light (2005: 110-11).

As she extends the analogy between migratory existence and the Christian life as a ‘Way’, she offers a compelling insight regarding what migrants and theologians might have in common:

The experience of migrants is precisely that of a series of epistemological ruptures; time and time again migrants are exposed to ‘others’ in new ways. This opens up possibilities for discovering and rediscovering the gospel (and themselves) in new ways as well. When theologians think as migrants and migrants as theologians, epistemological rupture and renewal are almost unavoidable (2005: 111).

I find Bedford’s comments compelling, because she eloquently articulates something that I had intuited, not as a migrant, but as a missionary in Brazil. Reading Bedford, I recognized that like migratory existence, missionary existence requires an ability “to speak of God from more than one place”. Like becoming a migrant, becoming a missionary can entail a process of disintegration that can lead to “wholesome ‘disintegration’” (2005: 111), which is to say, a journey from rupture to renewal.

I would, therefore, reword Bedford’s statement as follows: When theologians think as missionaries and missionaries as theologians, epistemological rupture and renewal are almost unavoidable. This highlights my contention that my research, as an exercise of ‘beginning in



the middle’, arises not simply out of a generic experience as a missionary in Brazil, but more precisely, it arises in the light of how that experience was one of rupture and renewal. My research, then, presents an extended instance of reflective practice that examines the dynamic of rupture and renewal and what it has to offer to contemporary theology.

In Bedford’s description of the movement from rupture to renewal, it can be noted that there is a turning point, or series of points, through which “disintegration” is transformed into “wholesome ‘disintegration’ ” (2005: 111), or what I will call reintegration. I think of these transitions in terms of the Portuguese word for ‘turning point’ – *virada*. *Virada* is not an explicitly religious term, for in *futebol*, you might speak of how an important play or goal *virou o jogo* [changed the game] or *deu uma virada* [turned the game around], but you can also speak of a *virada na sua vida* [a turning point in one’s life], and it is in this more general, but stronger sense that I am using the term. In using it I refer to an encounter or event that leads to enduring change in one’s perceptions, attitudes, and way of life. In the light of the Christian tradition, conversion is a way of talking of the ongoing movement of being changed and being turned towards life in and with God. *Viradas*, then, are a way of talking about significant episodes within that movement of ‘being turned’. There were many *viradas* during my seven years in Brazil, but here I refer to a series of *viradas* that stand out as being decisive.

## ***Virada One: Being Turned Towards Brazil***

### **Being Joined Together**

The story of how our family ended up in Brazil begins on May 29, 1999, when I married Rosalee Velloso da Silva, a Brazilian-American who was born and raised in São

Paulo, Brazil. We took our wedding vows from the book of Ruth, recognizing and celebrating the idea that through our life together, somehow our peoples' lives would be joined as well. In the light of those vows, there is a real sense in which our journey to Brazil was a Ruth narrative-in-reverse. In our case, *her* people would become *his* people, too.

In 2000, at about the time that our first child, James, was born, we received an invitation to serve as theological educators at *Faculdade Teológica Sul Americana*, a theological seminary in Londrina, Paraná, Brazil. At that time, Rosalee was in the middle of her PhD studies at Duke Divinity School, so there was no rush towards an imminent move. Nonetheless, after a subsequent visit to Londrina and the seminary, we sensed that the invitation to come was an “open door” (Rev. 3:8) for us, so we began to pray and discern with others about a possible move to Brazil.

### **Being Sent**

Many of the key figures in the discernment process were members of our local church, Mount Level Missionary Baptist Church, historically an African-American congregation in Durham, North Carolina. The congregation was founded in 1864 by former slaves who were emancipated from the plantations that covered the landscape of North Durham at the time. Mount Level was decisive in our discernment regarding Brazil, for just as the congregants made it possible for us to cross the ‘color line’ by being joined to their worship and life together, they also recognized and strengthened our call to cross a different kind of threshold – that of being sent to Brazil as their missionaries.

By mid-June 2003, Rosalee had successfully defended her PhD dissertation and our second child, Isabella, was born. At this time, the Mount Level Church commissioned us to serve as missionaries in Brazil. The text for the commissioning service sermon came from the

sending narrative at the end of the Gospel of John.

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'. After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:19-22).

Pastor Turner's sermon that Sunday was entitled "Breaking Out of the Huddle." He explained how in the same way that in American football the huddle happens before the players are sent out to execute the play, so too, does our gathering representing a moment of coming together for the sake of being sent, or 'breaking out'. In football, the point is not to stay in the huddle, for the huddle exists for the sake of the play that follows. In the same way, the point of the church gathering together cannot be limited to a kind of 'holy huddle', as he put it. Rather, while the church today, like the church described in John 20, may be tempted to remain in the insularity of its holy huddle, out of fear of what lies beyond its doors, the alternative lies precisely in receiving and sharing Christ's peace and being led by his Spirit which he breathes on us. By the time Rev. Turner finished, his sermon had developed, nuanced, and even exploded the 'holy huddle' / gathered church analogy. The question before us was not so much 'Has our 'huddling' given us an effective game-plan or strategy for what we are going to do after being sent?,' but rather, 'Are we willing to submit to the One around whom we gather?'

During that service, we were commissioned by being encircled, and during the Altar Prayer, the church re-enacted the scene of John 20 where the circle of disciples took shape around Jesus, the one who occupied the center of the circle. The church prayed for us, blessed us, anointed us, and even breathed on us, just as Jesus breathed his Spirit on the gathered

disciples. As we were being encircled, I recalled how we had arrived at Mt Level five years earlier, for a simple visit to the church where my professor pastored. During that visit, we found ourselves encircled during the passing of the peace by those who could not have had any other reason to embrace us except the conviction that Christ had made peace between us (Eph. 2:14). We had been ‘caught’ by this peace extended to us by our African-American brothers and sisters, and now they were commissioning us to share that same peace in Brazil.

In July of 2003, therefore, we arrived in Brazil not only with the prospect of being theological educators, but with a wider frame of orientation: we arrived as those who had been sent there. For Rosalee, having been raised in Brazil, there was a sense in which this was a return trip. Even though we were not in the same city or state where she had been born and raised, she spoke Portuguese, and more significantly, she was, in fact, Brazilian. My arrival in Brazil was slightly different. Suddenly, I was no longer just an English-speaking American, but also a *gringo* who could hardly speak a complete sentence in Portuguese.

### **Being Immersed**

My arrival in Brazil was an immersion into a whole new world. The more I thought about it, the more I saw in this cultural-linguistic immersion a kind of parable of another immersion at the heart of the Christian life. In the early Christian context, baptism meant ‘to be immersed’. For the early Christians, baptism also signified being immersed into a person – the person of Jesus Christ: “Do you not know that all of us who have been [immersed] into Christ Jesus have been [immersed] into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by [immersion] into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

One of the key insights that integrated my first two years in Brazil was this insight

regarding the Christian life (in general) and missionary existence (in particular) as realities of immersion. Learning a language, and cultural cues, by immersion happens through direct contact with another linguistic world, field, and way of life. It takes time, often six to eight months to become conversational; it is dynamic, with days when you feel like you could write poetry and others when you cannot manage a simple phone call; and, it is challenging, with the ever-present temptation to resort to the effortlessness of expressing yourself in your ‘first’ language. Like learning a language, learning the gospel by immersion into Christ and the kingdom he inaugurates also takes time, is dynamic, and is challenging. In fact, it takes a lifetime. Even after being “transferred [and immersed] into the kingdom” (Col. 1:13), we will be tempted to return to a way of speaking and living that does not depend on the power of God.

As an immersed language learner of Brazilian Portuguese, I was learning what anyone who has become fluent in a second language through immersion will tell you: learning to speak another language goes far beyond learning to say foreign words. Someone who is fluent in Portuguese can tell you that a *churrasco* is much more than ‘grilling out’ or ‘having a barbeque’, although that is how a *churrasco* might appear to someone visiting Brazil. Likewise, *futebol* may translate into English as the sport that Americans call soccer, but Brazilians would tell you that *futebol* is not just a sport primarily played with your feet, but rather a quasi-religious phenomenon whose own ‘liturgical season’ comes to a climax every four years with the World Cup. On another, deeper level, as a language learner I became acutely aware of how becoming fluent in another language involves becoming immersed in another way of life.

## Being in Between

By the end of our first two years in Brazil, I came to appreciate a distinction made by Brazilian social anthropologist Roberto DaMatta between “brasil” and “Brasil”. Whereas “brasil” names a more or less static and reified entity which you might encounter through a *Wikipedia* entry, “Brasil” refers to the complex, but distinctive identity of “a people, a nation, a set of values, choices, and ideas about life” (DaMatta, 1984: 11). For DaMatta, answering the question “What makes brasil, Brasil?”, is not a matter of isolating the ‘essence’ of Brazilianness, but rather, of attending to how certain historical factors, such as Portuguese colonization, geography, and even climate, have given rise to a distinctive Brazilian identity and cultural “jeito...de fazer coisas” [“way of doing things”] (1984: 16). In describing this distinctively Brazilian way of doing things, DaMatta invents and then contrasts the identities of “José da Silva” and “William Smith”, in order to highlight certain realities of Brazilian culture and identity.

I know, then, that I am Brazilian and not North American, because I like to eat *feijoada* [typical Brazilian dish of beans and pork] and not hamburgers...because I speak Portuguese and not English; because, listening to *música popular* [traditional Brazilian music], I can immediately tell the difference between a *frevo* and a *samba* [two Brazilian rhythms]; because *futebol* is, for me, a game that is played with one’s feet, not with one’s hands (1984: 16).

By contrast, I had come to share something in common with both “José” and “William”. Why? Because I not only liked to eat hamburgers, but I liked to eat *feijoada*, as well; because I could speak English *and* Portuguese; because I could also tell the difference between a *frevo* and a *samba*; and because football became, for me, a game played with one’s feet, not with one’s hands.

I recognized that I was somehow in between José and William; I was on my way to becoming what missiologist Paul Hiebert describes as an “outsider-insider” (Hiebert, 2006: 300). I was married to a Brazilian, the father (by 2006) of three Brazilian citizens, a permanent resident of Brazil, a fluent and comfortable speaker of Portuguese (accent included), and a convert to *futebol* and Brazilian percussion. How could I be just a foreign outsider or another *gringo*? Yet I knew I would never speak Portuguese like my children, nor ‘get Brazil’ like a Brazilian. I knew somehow that I would never become Brazilian, nor become José.

Perhaps even more unsettling than recognizing that I would never become Brazilian was accepting that I could never just ‘reset’ my previous identity and sense of belonging as an American. By 2007, I had internalized a range of Brazilian cultural cues, gestures, and perceptions in the midst of being estranged from certain features of my ‘United States of American-ness’. I was traversing two distinct, yet overlapping, linguistic and cultural fields, and I found myself in a space of ‘in-between-ness’, that of an outsider-insider. From that space, I began to question: Is this ‘in-between-ness’ simply about being fated to a kind of ‘no man’s land’, a cultural black hole whose gravity holds me suspended between ‘never-going-back-to-being-just-American’ and ‘never-fully-arriving-as-Brazilian?’ Or, might this ‘in-between-ness’, with all of the change and newness it brought, be a sign of good news for myself and for those Brazilians around me?

The answer that I discovered came from returning to the logic of John’s Gospel, particularly the ‘sending narrative’: “As the Father sent me, so I send you...” (20:19-22). It was that text from our commissioning service that integrated my own experience and made sense of it as a way of being included in the “as...so...” of Jesus’ own mission from the Father. Through the Incarnation of the Word, the Son’s being-sent-from-the-Father brought

something new into the world, a new human embodiment of fullness (John 1:14), and according to the as/so logic of John's Gospel, this fullness makes possible a renewal of our humanity. Seen in the light of this movement towards renewal, I could imagine how being between American and Brazilian identities did not have to create or lead into a cultural black hole of suspended identity. It was neither something 'to get out of', nor something to overcome; it was simply something new, a surprise that we might call becoming '*brasicano*'. In the light of my *brasicanidade*, I was able to imagine missionary existence, like the migratory existence described by Bedford, as a creative, incarnational space that makes it possible to be fully immersed in a reality, while being different from it. Hence, I was able to imagine missionary existence as a lens and even a parable for the common Christian vocation to be 'in the world, but not of it' (John 17:11ff).

## ***Virada 2: Navigating the Three 'Ss'***

The more subtle and challenging struggle that I encountered as a missionary, however, was not negotiating a transcultural identity and a new cultural-linguistic framework. Learning to like *feijoda*, speak Portuguese, play *MPB* [Brazilian popular music] and *futebol* was simply a matter of time, plus effort and patience. The real struggle, that which led to the growing pains of what Bedford calls "epistemological rupture", came from trying to navigate the institutional matrix operating between the seminary, sanctuary, and street.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this triad from theological educator Ched Myers, which he develops in "Between the Seminary, the Sanctuary, and the Streets: Reflections on Alternative Theological Education," *Ministerial Formation* 94 (2001).



## Seminary

As a North American missionary living in Brazil, I had to commit myself to learning not only another tongue, Brazilian Portuguese, but also to becoming fluent in other theological ‘dialects’, including Latin American liberation theology and Brazilian-born forms of (neo)Pentecostalism (see Barreto, 2006; Longuini Neto, 2002). At our seminary, however, the primary dialect, or better, the official language, for theological discourse was *missão integral* [integral mission]. Ever since the landmark Lausanne Conference on Evangelism and Mission in 1974, *missão integral* has been a watchword for many Latin American *evangélicos*. It was at this conference that Latin American evangelical leaders, such as Samuel Escobar, René Padilla, as well as others, delivered a prophetic corrective to the dominant missionary ethos coming from the North Atlantic. The critical perspective of Latin American evangelicals highlighted the way the dominant (North Atlantic) ethos was largely characterized by an under-contextualized missionary practice, one in which the integral link between proclamation and Christian action had become tenuous, or even severed. One of the outcomes of that landmark conference, which launched the Lausanne Movement, was appending *integral* to *missão* as a conceptual marker that word and deed, or proclamation and costly service, are part and parcel of Christian mission (see Costas, 1982, 1989). At *Faculdade Teológica Sul Americana*, this conceptual marker occupied the center of theological discourse, and the task of doing theological education revolved around the phrase *missão integral*.

The more I heard, learned, and read about *missão integral*, the more I realized that my concerns with were not so much with the theological content of the concept, but rather the way the phrase was deployed and approached as unassailable. The discourse seemed to reflect

*missão integral* as a static, already worked-out, position that simply needed to be propagated. When I listened to colleagues talk or teach, I shared their sense of urgency around social transformation and how theology can and should inspire that. But I also sensed that they tended to use keywords such as ‘poverty’ or ‘urban life’ as social facts without questioning and probing them as historically conditioned realities. I sensed a reticence to talk about other themes, such as race or gender. I sensed that for many of my colleagues, theology effectively began in 1974. Or, to adapt Karl Barth’s famous dictum, it seemed that theology was best done with ‘the Bible in one hand and the Lausanne Covenant in the other’. What happened between the first century Christians and 1974 did not seem to capture the imaginations of my colleagues. In spite of discourse about pastors being agents of social transformation not maintenance staff for insular local churches, I sensed that the notion of *ação social* [social action] was not integrated into the life of local ecclesial communities, but rather it seemed to be envisioned as something appended to ‘church-as-usual’, as a programmatic annex. My own exposure to the concept of *missão integral* clearly offered an ethos of proclamation and social transformation. To borrow again from Bedford’s description of theology as “integral and integrative”, I found the discourse of *missão integral* to be more of the former than the latter. I also sensed a deep irony at work. While my colleagues rightly criticized the manner in which North Atlantic theologies were disseminated in Latin America as theologies that were *acabadas* [worked out, finished], in approaching *missão integral* as unassailable, I sensed that they were no longer trying to do constructive theology, but in fact, had settled for their own *teologia acabada*.

In the light of this, I began to see signs of the extent to which the contemporary theology in Brazil was undergoing its own rupture, its own dis-integration. The Brazilian struggle to face this reality would become part of my own struggle, and my own

disintegration. I suspected that the issues ran much deeper than the issues foregrounded by proponents of *missão integral*, but I also suspected that I was not seeing fully or clearly. Brazilians have a phrase for this: “*o buraco está mais em baixo do que você imagina*” [“the hole is deeper than you think”]. I knew that I needed a wider frame of vision to see a bigger picture. I knew that “the hole was deeper”, but I had no idea just how deep.

## Sanctuary

Although I have described seminary as a site of epistemological rupture, it was in the sanctuary, that is, the context of the local church or congregation, that the sense of rupture would continue and intensify for me. My experience of sanctuary refers primarily to the five-year experience of helping to plant, serve, and become pastor at the Igreja Batista Catuaí. While our local church was denominationally Baptist, we were located in what might be called the ‘Presbyterian belt’ of southern Brazil. In this region, Baptists were a numerical minority among *evangélicos*. Perhaps more significant than the relative difference, or lack of difference, between Protestant ecclesial traditions, was the fact that our city of Londrina was considered to be one of the most ‘evangelized’ cities in Brazil. I have heard Londrina compared with Colorado Springs in the US, as a medium-sized city that boasts a disproportionately large evangelical population, as well as being the home city for numerous faith-based NGOs and international mission agencies.

Generally speaking, there is a palpable sense of religiosity<sup>2</sup> that is woven into Brazilian culture: the expression, “Deus é brasileiro” [“God is Brazilian”] is at once playful and profoundly indicative of Brazilian religiosity. In Londrina, this religiosity was as much in the ‘air’ as the scent of *café moído* [ground coffee], historically the main cash crop of the

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<sup>2</sup> I am not using ‘religiosity’ in a pejorative sense, but rather in a descriptive sense.

region.

What I found most disorientating about the navigating ‘sanctuary’ in Londrina was that, despite the undeniably relational nature of Brazilian culture, what characterized the ecclesial culture was a severe dialectical tension between ‘religious individualism’, on the one hand, and the church as ‘institutional provider of religious goods and services’, on the other. This tension is not unique to southern Brazil, but what impressed me about this context was the intensity with which what Gerhard Lohfink calls “the heritage of individualism”, and the conditions of a consumer society, gave rise to a vision of “a church which takes care of the individual, an institution which offers its wares to a group of individuals” (Lohfink, 1982: 4).<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most apt metaphor for this ecclesial sensibility is the notion of the church as the ark of salvation. Of course, this is a biblical image of the church that was readily incorporated by patristic writers, for example in Cyprian (Letter 69, 1-5 in Wiles and Santer 1977, 160-163). Nonetheless, in my Brazilian context, the church as ark was not so much the Cyprianic assertion that being incorporated into the church was a necessary condition for salvation, as that it is being inside the church which protects or buffers us from the forces of the world, just as the ark protected its inhabitants from the adverse elements of rain and flood (quoted in 1977, 161). As an example, a common bumper sticker seen in Londrina reads, “*Não estou em crise; estou em Cristo*” [“I’m not in crisis; I’m in Christ”]. For me this slogan can suggest that authentic Christianity equals ‘struggle-free’ Christianity.

There are, of course, exceptions to the tendency that I am describing. In fact, I can still hear my late father-in-law exhorting the members at our church to recognize that “*Cristianismo não é uma guarda-chuva que te protege de qualquer e todo problema*” [“Christianity is not a umbrella that protects you from any and every problem”]. Nonetheless the dominant evangelistic strategy among the churches in Londrina was offering programs, or

*campanhas* [campaigns] in order to attract and integrate outsiders into the membership of the local church. In this context, I found it hard to resist the impression that what churches were offering to its members and outsiders were not only religious programs and services, but, in fact, a religious security system. The disabling consequence of this was not only the ubiquity of churches seeming to compete for religious clients to consume their goods and services, but also an ethos of ecclesial insularity.

After reading Rubens Alves' *Protestantism & Repression* (1985), I sensed that the insularity that I was experiencing was, in fact, symptomatic of what Alves masterfully characterized as RDP, or "Right-Doctrine Protestantism". In his typology, Alves distinguished between "sacramental Protestantism", "Protestantism of the spirit", and RDP. What characterizes RDP is the way "it stresses *agreement with a series of doctrinal affirmations*, which are regarded as *expressions of the truth* and which must be affirmed *without any shadow of doubt*, as the precondition for participation in the ecclesial community" (Alves, 1985: 8). While my ecclesial location was not repressive in any way recognizable within the Brazilian Presbyterianism through which Alves suffered in the 1970s, it was clearly recognizable as RDP.

One of the most obvious characteristics of RDP in my local ecclesial context was the understanding of Christian doctrine (or "right doctrine") as the secure foundation for Christian ethics (or "right living"). Here, the emphasis was not so much on the inseparability of doctrine and ethics, as it was on the logical priority of establishing "right doctrine" as the condition for leading a regenerated life. In this scheme, "right doctrine" does not change; it is fixed, immutable, and, therefore, received as a certainty. Moreover, "right doctrine" provides the cognitive renewal that enables personal (and social) change.

Alves sums up the relationship between the personal and social ethic of RDP as

follows: “Let the individual be converted and society will be transformed” (1985: 152). Perhaps this motto would have been understandable during a time when *evangélicos* were a marginalized, and even persecuted, minority in Brazilian Christianity. But given that many *evangélicos* have entered the political arena and, as individuals, been complicit in the corruption of the Brazilian political system, it is a difficult motto to maintain. Upon closer examination, the motto actually expresses an assumption regarding the priority of the individual above or over against social relations, something which is itself symptomatic of the rupture, or ‘dis-integration’, of the Christian imagination. Indeed, as one prominent Latin American Protestant theologian has pointed out, one of the deepest problems affecting Latin American Protestant Churches “is not so much the absence of theology, nor its deviations...but rather its ‘reductionism’” (Miguez Bonino, 1997: 111).<sup>3</sup>

## Street

Lastly, in this series of ‘Ss’ is *a rua* [the street]. Taken in its broadest sense, ‘street’ refers here to everyday life, or in Portuguese, *o cotidiano*. My experience of the *cotidiano*, however, was framed and intensified by a set of experiences that took place in the *favelas* [slums, or shanty towns.] Once I had become more or less fluent in Portuguese, I began to visit ministries in the local *favelas*, as well as *assentamentos* [squatters’ settlements] around Londrina. Usually, I would be accompanied by a local pastor, and I would play guitar or lead a Bible study or prayer group.

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<sup>3</sup> Míguez Bonino describes this reductionism as follows: “The evangelical heritage of the Anglo-American ‘awakenings,’ whose fervor and impact we must not undervalue or lose, has resulted in a double reduction, Christological and soteriological . . . This tendency, moreover, played into the individualistic, subjectivistic, and ahistorical character of the religious vision of modernity, ending up in some of the grave deformations our churches suffers. Thus, theology is practically swallowed up in Christology, and this in soteriology, and, even more, in a salvation which is characterized as an individual and subjective experience” (Miguez Bonino, 1997: 111-112)

In 2005, I arranged a short-term mission trip to Brazil with a close friend who was a youth worker for his Chicago-area youth group. We arranged for the group to be in São Paulo, where they would stay in the homes of young people from Morumbi Baptist Church. Together with the youth from Morumbi, they would serve a local ministry in Vila Andrade, a *favela* on the periphery of the Morumbi *bairro*.

One of my clearest memories of the experience was the question my friend kept asking, almost like a mantra: “What does Vila Andrade have to do with Naperville?” The initial response of the group was a collective, “Not much”. After all, Naperville is one of the most exclusive suburban satellites in the West Chicago area; Vila Andrade is a *favela*. The force and shock value of the question, however, was an attempt to ask the participants to look beyond the obvious geographical distance and social gap between the two locations. The question was a way of asking the young people to move beyond the gaze of the tourist in order to pay attention to ‘whatever else’ might be going on, to be surprised by what people from Naperville and Vila Andrade might have in common, and what they could possibly share together.

Several days into the trip, we, the group from Naperville and Morumbi, gathered together with the congregation from Vila Andrade for the Sunday *culto*, or worship service. The young people from Naperville, Morumbi, and Vila Andrade led the music; my friend preached, and I translated. The *culto* was joyful, but intense. Afterwards, I recall vividly how the Naperville young people responded to the question of the week: “What does Vila Andrade have to do with Naperville?”

On one end of the spectrum, a young man seemed to position himself as a ‘spectator’ of other peoples’ struggle to be Christian: “*Their* lives are difficult...I understand that *they* need Jesus, and that *they* worship so intensely, because for *them*, it’s a matter of life and

death...*They* need him to survive” [emphasis added]. On the other end of the spectrum, some of the young people expressed indignation at the miserable living conditions of the Vila Andrade residents: “Why isn’t *the church* doing more to change things? What can *we* do to help?” [emphasis added].

What impressed me most about this experience was not so much what they said, but rather, the transparency of their responses, summed up in two phrases:

- 1) They are needy in a way that we are not; and
- 2) How do we respond to their need?

In their transparency, I also sensed that they were expressing what most visitors from the US, myself included, found themselves thinking when they were in a *favela*: How do we respond to their needs? Like the majority of those young people, I wanted to respond. To be honest, I was not sure how. But the question about the contrast between Naperville and Vila Andrade stayed with me as a ‘live question’, one that would not go away.

Nearly a year later, I returned to Vila Andrade with another group from the US, this time leading a pilgrimage organized by Duke Divinity School. During this second visit, I reconnected easily with the *mocidade* [youth group] from Vila Andrade and with Pastor Marcelo and his wife, Marisa. What I remember most about this return visit was an incident in one of the classrooms of the *crechê*. On one of the walls hung various framed paintings, mostly of outdoors scenes, and by each painting was a child’s name. One of the pilgrims asked Marisa about this arrangement, and I reflected on her explanation in my journal:

Many of the children who come to the crechê come from broken homes and from generally stressful situations. For many of them, their homes are not their place of refuge. Here, each child can adopt a painting, and that’s why they have the names attached to the portrait. So when a child, say João, is having a particularly stressful day, we might say, ‘João, why don’t you go spend some



time with your portrait?’ We have found that this practice of spending time being still and being quiet in front of the portrait helps the children to center themselves. It can be for them a kind of meditation. So, the portraits are not so much an escape, but a way to re-enter the present – a way to reframe how they respond to the noisiness and chaos around them. You don’t take something away without putting something in its place. Our hope is God is at work to replace the brokenness, and one small way that we choose to face and replace the chaos is by offering beauty instead.<sup>4</sup>

While Marisa was finishing her explanation, I walked up to João’s painting to have a closer look. At first, what I noticed was a simple landscape, something that was not particularly beautiful, and even a bit kitsch. All I saw was an unremarkable nature scene, a river, some rocks by its banks, and a few trees with autumn leaves. But I found myself lingering in front of it; I didn’t want to leave without catching a glimpse of what João was able to see. If this portrait had become for him a sort of ‘icon’, a window of vision into a wider, more beautiful, and more peaceful reality than he knew in Vila Andrade, then I wanted to be able to see it, too.

As I looked again, I saw the same river continue to flow freely between its rocky banks. I saw the same trees releasing their colorful leaves to cover the ground below. I saw the same things as before, but as I saw them I remembered that the biblical narrative begins and ends with such a flowing river (Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1-2) and with a “tree of life” (Gen. 2:9; Rev. 22:2). Now, gazing on that tree and thinking about what it means to envision it, I remembered one of the last promises in scripture: “To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). Meditating on those fallen leaves, I recalled the familiar words that “the leaves of the tree [of life] are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2), and suddenly, I saw more than an unremarkable ‘nature scene’. Because of João’s determination to be still and to imagine the world differently, I was

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<sup>4</sup> Journal entry, 27/05/2006.

inspired to catch a glimpse of creation's destiny: a destiny that includes a renewed Vila Andrade and a renewed Naperville in God's new creation. I don't know what João thought about in front of that painting, but I do know what his relationship with that painting made me think: "*Então, é assim que se faz escatologia a partir de uma favela*" ["So, this is how one does eschatology from a *favela*"].

I returned to Londrina ready to turn this eschatological imagination into action. Almost immediately upon returning to Londrina after the pilgrimage, I connected with Lu and Jorge, a couple new to our church, who were deeply committed to working with the women and children in João Turquino, a squatters' settlement-recently-turned-*favela* on the periphery of Londrina. Through Lu's initiative, sense of humor, and contagious ability to connect, she had established good relationships. From this relational base, and through Bible studies, cooking classes, children's activities, and lots of *futsal*,<sup>5</sup> our church found ways to connect with the people of João Turquino.

Within months, the *Projeto João Turquino* was no longer just the work of a couple, but had become the *projeto* of our local church. Over the next year or so, the *projeto* continued to gain momentum and visibility. There was more volunteer involvement from Igreja Batista Catuaí, and through our personal contacts, a few local churches from the US began sending volunteers and financial assistance.

Over time, however, while I felt that what we were doing in João Turquino was good, I had a growing sense that how we talked about and imagined it was actually one-sided. Again, it was our *projeto*, and they were *carentes* [needy]. In retrospect, the very language of *projeto* and *programas* tended to veil the relational heartbeat driving what was actually happening, the sheer goodness of people doing things together with joy. Instead, perhaps even

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<sup>5</sup> *Futsal* is short for *futebol-de-salão*, a small-sided version of *futebol* adapted to the smaller space and hard surfaces of urban areas.

unintentionally so, we found ourselves doing *ação social* as something that ‘we’ do for ‘them’. That we had connections with US churches, who were committed to what we were doing, both facilitated the work and complicated the situation. In short, it became all too easy to allow social action to become a two-step exercise in 1) diagnosing the needs of others, and 2) meeting those needs for them. In other words, it became all too easy for our presence in João Turquino to become a microcosm of how the international aid and development industry operated at its worst.

In the late 1960s when my Brazilian father-in-law was finishing seminary in the US, he tried to recruit missionaries to Brazil by writing on the classroom board, “Brazil needs *you!*” He knew that his American peers were well-trained and well-resourced, and, understandably, he wanted to turn all that training and all those resources towards his home country of Brazil. When I visited churches in the US, I also wanted to turn my hearers’ attention towards Brazil, but I tried a different pitch from that of my father-in-law’s. My tagline was: “Christians in Brazil and the US need *each other*”. I would talk about how we, Americans and Brazilians, need each other, just as Paul said that Christians in Macedonia and in Jerusalem needed each other (2 Cor. 8:1 – 9:15). In fact, I was trying to extend Paul’s thinking in order to imagine how Americans and Brazilians, people from Naperville, Vila Andrade, or João Turquino, might belong to a new ‘we’. But, the more I found myself playing the part of ‘bridge builder’ and connector between our Brazilian church, João Turquino, and churches in the US, the more I sensed that the invitation to the possibility of a new ‘we’ was becoming muted by the collective energy of the fund raising and the intense desire to help others.

The issue was not, as I had initially assumed, so much an unwillingness to express neighbor-love, as it was a lack of imagination regarding what that could look like. Our project

in João Turquino was neither a church planting initiative – there were already church buildings on nearly every street – nor was it primarily relief or aid work, such as that done by World Vision. In fact, there was a fundamental and unresolved tension between cultivating friendships and running a project of *inclusão social* [social inclusion]. I will return to the theme of inclusion throughout my thesis. For now, I want to make clear that the question that my experience in João raised was not, ‘Can social inclusion be a genuine Christian expression of neighbor-love?’, but rather, ‘Into *what* do we imagine that we are including others through our acts of neighborly love?’

In retrospect, what I found disquieting about our *ação social* was the way we tended to imagine social inclusion primarily in terms of uplifting ‘them’ to have the same privileges and access to goods and services that ‘we’ have. Looking back, I can recognize how this assumption generated expectations from both sides, led to a disabling sense of dependence on the project, and, more subtly, involved an exercise of power that left the ‘helpers’ invulnerable to the precariousness of life in João Turquino. Instead, I wish we had asked ourselves more and better questions, like ‘What does João Turquino have to do with Igreja Batista Catuaí?’, ‘What do the people in João Turquino and members of Igreja Batista Catuaí share in common?’, or even ‘Into what are we all being included?’

All the while, I tried to cling to the original sense of integration that came with being sent and arriving in Brazil: the “as...so...” logic of the Incarnation, the peace of Christ, and the ‘inspiration’ of the Spirit as an alternative to insularity and fear. Navigating between the seminary, the sanctuary, and the street, however, I gradually underwent a movement of conversion from ‘integration’ to ‘disintegration’. I could no longer envision what I had glimpsed through João’s painting.

As a missionary who had cast himself as a ‘bridge builder’ or mission partner between

institutions in Brazil and the US, I came to recognize that theological production and formation (seminary), visions for ‘being/doing church’ (sanctuary), as well as the strategies and financial basis for social transformation (street) were, in large part, contained within a dialectic, either institutional reproduction of or resistance to what came from the North. Even more disorientating, however, than the challenge of traversing the North-South barriers was the sense that much of what I was seeing, and even involved in, between these three Ss was counterproductive, that is, much of institutional activity seemed to work against and even undermine the original intent. Thus, in the seminary, the work of facilitating theological learning and formation became locked into the production, dissemination, and defense of theological *certainties*; in the sanctuary, the ecclesial vocation to worship God and make disciples mutated into an emphasis on attracting and serving members as primarily passive religious consumers; and on the streets of places like João Turquino, neighbor-love towards the marginalized ended up reinforcing a perception of ‘their’ poverty as a social fact without challenging either the conditions that generated their poverty and our collective impoverishment.

In my experience as a missionary, a deeper challenge than becoming a *brasiliano* was the dis-integration of becoming aware of the subtle forms of alienation. Learning to speak Portuguese, to eat *feijoada*, to play *futebol*, to enjoy *MPB* – these were not my obstacles. My biggest obstacle came from the challenge of learning to live ‘in’ and ‘out’ of institutional realities without being ‘of’ them. The tension for me was not between Christian identity and some other cultural identity (American or Brazilian), but rather discerning between the freedom of the Christian life *vis-a-vis* being conformed within the horizon of institutionalized expectations and performances.

By 2007, I found myself on the other side of an epistemological rupture. In Bedford’s

terms, a rupture had begun, and I was entering more deeply into a phase of disintegration, a phase not so much of despair as of disorientation, not so much a ‘crisis of faith’ as a ‘crisis of imagination’: the more my missionary work was shifting towards the ‘street’ pole, in the triad of seminary/sanctuary/street, the more I simply could not make sense of much that was happening around me.

From an outsider’s perspective, life in João Turquino seemed exceedingly precarious: the drugs; the number of children unsupervised on the streets, especially young girls vulnerable to prostitution rings; the under-resourced public services, not least in relation to schools and health clinics; and the difficulty of finding and maintaining regular employment. Nonetheless, many residents talked about the transformation of João Turquino from an *assentamento* [squatters’ dwelling] into a municipal *bairro*: how the city ‘regularized’ living conditions by bringing in lighting, paved streets, public services, and a public housing initiative. Many in João Turquino seemed to suggest that they had arrived in a better place. Many seemed content. Overall, people were not asking us for more; they were simply trying ‘make do’ with enough.

I wanted our church to engage in *ação social* in João Turquino, but I struggled to recognize what our presence there meant. From our side, there was a lot of giving, but little awareness of receiving. And what good were we doing by giving out *cestas básicas* [care packages] among families in which some of the children still walked the streets flaunting their MP3 players and brand-name sneakers? Granted, income disparity between those in our churches and the majority of residents in João Turquino was obvious enough, but not everyone in João Turquino was ‘cash poor’. Nonetheless, much of our giving seemed to presuppose that the main problem was poverty, that we understood how poverty worked, and that an adequate way to respond to the adversity of material poverty was primarily through

the provision of more. It seemed that in relation to both the partnerships between US and Brazilian churches, as well as the activities of Brazilian churches locally, the hard work of questioning conditions and discerning how to respond, how to be present, was suppressed or threatened by the desire to help. Although I didn't have the eyes to see, nor the words to describe what was happening around us, I knew that I was struggling to delink missionary presence from counterproductive "projects of intervention" (Rahnema, TPDR: 397). In other words, I was trying to delink my being there from being cast in the role of helper.

And yet, Brazil is a country of extremes. As many of my Brazilian friends have pointed out, it is not a poor country, but rather a very rich country with a lot of poor, marginalized people. Through friends, like Lu, I had been welcomed into some of these peoples' homes. I had eaten meals with them. I had played *futsal* with their kids. I had studied the Bible and prayed with them. I had celebrated birthdays. I had become friends with some of them. In short, I had been touched by them, and I knew that the answer to 'not just being a helper' was not simply to turn away from these faces that I had encountered. I knew that not knowing what to do was no excuse for not doing anything.

### ***Virada 3: Being Befriended and Being Turned towards Ivan Illich***

In November 2007, I was introduced through a mutual friend to a Brazilian named Claudio Oliver. Claudio would not only become my closest friend in Brazil, but, being ten years older than I, he would become also a kind of *irmão mais velho* [an older brother]. Claudio is an "everyday visionary" (Ayres, 2013: 157-164), a rare combination of pastor intellectual, and D-I-Y community-based food activist. Through his capacity for being "creatively maladjusted" (2013: 164), he is someone with insight and wisdom to share, and when I met Claudio, I was more than ready to receive those gifts.

During our first visit to his home city of Curitiba, what I recall most was Claudio's description of his master's research in education on Paulo Freire, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Illich. I had read a lot of Freire and some Tolstoy, but I had never heard of Ivan Illich. After Claudio recovered from the shock of my not knowing who Ivan Illich was, he gave me a brief introduction. That initial visit ended with two parting suggestions from Claudio: meditate on Matthew 10:16, and read Illich's 1968 address "To Hell With Good Intentions". Simply from the title, I immediately recognized that Illich was going to be an important thinker for me. By the time I arrived at home and looked through the text, I knew I had found a guide, someone clearing a path and pointing beyond the counterproductive fallout of good intentions.

In order to understand the message of that 1968 talk, it is helpful to situate it against the backdrop of the story that Illich tells his audience of young, short-term North American missionaries in Mexico, a story which includes, firstly, the idea that the US struggle to maintain the 'American way of life' has led to a crusade to spread its particular form of freedom and democracy around the world under the banner of development. Secondly, the story asserts that the battle lines for this struggle to bring about assimilation into this way of life have been drawn on three fronts: the Vietnam war in Asia; within the homeland, especially in urban centers; and the declared 'war on poverty' in Latin America. Thirdly, in 1961, the US government initiated a new relationship with Latin American nations through the Alliance for Progress, coupled with the missionary zeal of the Peace Corps. Fourthly, in response to the influx of 'secular missionaries' through the Peace Corps, the Roman Catholic Church intensified its own missionary efforts from the North with the formation of the Papal Corps, with the expressed goal of 'tithing people' as missionaries to the South.

In Illich's view, this amounted to nothing less than a "benevolent invasion of Mexico" (THWGI: 1) and other Latin American countries. That Illich likened the missionary efforts of



both church and state to military strategy is not accidental here. For Illich, Christian volunteer movements such as the Papal Corps, as well as government-sponsored efforts such as the Peace Corps, ended up, despite their good intentions, being enlisted into a quasi-religious crusade to sustain the American way of life. Their service to God or country, Illich tells us, was fundamentally misplaced, and therefore, their zeal to serve ended up creating or aligning itself with the “ideal conditions for military dictatorship” and “help[ing] the underdog accept his destiny” (THWGI: 3) in the emerging order of Cold War geopolitics. Addressing those who have come to serve in Mexico, primarily short-term North American volunteers, he sums up his message as follows:

Today, the existence of organizations like yours is offensive to Mexico. I wanted to make this statement in order to explain why I feel sick about it all and in order to make you aware that good intentions have not much to do with what we are discussing here. To hell with good intentions. This is a theological statement. You will not help anybody by your good intentions. There is an Irish saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions; this sums up the same theological insight (THWGI: 2).

Illich’s address, no doubt, intended to deflate the concept of good intentions, just as my friend intended to reframe youthful do-gooderism with the question, “What does Naperville have to do with Vila Andrade?” Here, however, Illich’s more basic point goes beyond merely pointing out how good intentions can lead to harmful outcomes. Rather, his more fundamental insight has to do with the recovery of a deeper sense of missionary awareness, that is, both a) the recognition of the arena in which our actions of service and mission take place; and b) the capacity to renounce ‘good intentions’ in order truly to act for the sake of what is good, what is right, or what is fitting. Illich concludes his 1968 address with a remark that is at once a modest, yet subversive proposal for missionary formation and presence: “I am here to entreat you to use your money, your status, and your education to

travel in Latin America. Come to look, come to climb our mountains, to enjoy our flowers. Come to study. But *do not come to help*” (THWGI: 5, emphasis added).

Thus, while the 1960s peace movement protested against the war in Vietnam, Illich spoke out as a different kind of peace activist, one who campaigned tirelessly against the massive influx of “do-gooders” and for “the voluntary withdrawal of all North American voluntary armies for Latin America” (THWGI: 1). “To Hell With Good Intentions” can be read as a marker which flags how a series of issues regarding US domestic and foreign policies gave shape to the discourse and practice of Christian mission in Latin America by the late 1960s, namely, the crusade to sustain the American way of life, the ramifications of white privilege in a racialized US homeland, and the possible co-optation of ‘Christian mission in the Americas’ inside the development paradigm.

As a US national serving as a missionary in Brazil, Illich’s talk had a deep impact on me. Although written in 1968, nearly forty years before I first read it, his message for ‘do-gooders’ deflated the insulating thinking which had slowly formed around me. Over the next few days, I mulled over “To Hell With Good Intentions” many times, always hovering over the last lines: Come to enjoy our flowers, come...but please do not come to help.

I knew that I had not gone to Brazil out of a sense of duty to help needy Brazilians; I knew that I didn’t even need to leave Durham, North Carolina for that. I went because I was married to a Brazilian, and I believed in the promises of our marriage vows that ‘her people had become my people.’ I went because I sensed a growing desire to become part of this people, to become immersed in their way of life. We went because we found an ‘open door’ through an invitation to teach theology at a seminary in Brazil. We moved to Brazil, then, as a response to a growing desire and a call to *be there*, not primarily to go as helpers. But somewhere along the way, ‘being there’ had been hijacked by ‘good intentions’. Somewhere

along the way, planning projects had gone astray from the path of personal presence. Suddenly, Illich's proposal, 'Come, but not cast in the role of helper,' led me to reflect back upon the way we had been sent, and to reframe what being in Brazil could mean. The real issue was not whether or not I could help, but rather whether or not I would be willing to live out 'coming' according to the original 'as/so' logic by which we had been sent (John 20:19-23).

The insight of Illich's message challenged my burdensome temptation to 'fix' all that was wrong about Brazil by playing the role of 'do-gooder'. At the same time, the more I read Illich, the more I realized he was not letting 'do-gooders' like me off the hook. He was not advocating disengagement, but a different kind of presence, a more aware, more subversive presence.

### **Questioning Certainties: Attending to '(Dis)Order and Progress'**

Encountering Illich in this way provoked another *virada*, but this *virada* was not so much a turning towards clearer answers, but rather towards deeper questioning, or, in Illich's terms, the questioning of certainties. I see a prime example of this in the Brazilian flag and motto. Brazil adopted the original version of the national flag in 1889, the year it became a republic, and the year that it abolished slavery. Written across the flag is a motto, '*Ordem e Progresso*' ["Order and Progress"], which took its inspiration from the regnant positivism imported into Brazil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The motto is a shorthand version formula for positivism extensively attributed to Augusto Comte: "Love as a principle and order as the basis; progress as the goal". While the principle of love did not make it onto the Brazilian flag, the flag effectively sacralizes the coupling of order and progress as two indubitable certainties that would guide Brazil on its way from being an empire to becoming a republic.

Thus, in a world in which order and progress appear joined as inalienable truths, the story of Brazil can be told as a success story: the tale of a ‘sleeping giant’ who awoke to emerge as a G8 nation. Thus goes the plot within the storyline of ‘order and progress’.

From Illich’s perspective, however, order and progress are not inalienable truths, and their status as certainties is as historically contingent as the fact that Brazilians speak Portuguese instead of Spanish, or prefer coffee instead of tea. In fact, at the same time that coffee, sugar, Brazil wood, and gold became Brazil’s most important exports, the European social vision of ‘progress as the goal’ became one of Brazil’s most precious imports. Thus, to borrow a term from Brazilian literary critic Roberto Schwarz, ‘order and progress’ arrived in Brazil as a “misplaced idea” (see Schwarz, 1992). Like a non-native plant that is introduced into a new habitat and manages to flourish, in the land of Brazil progress took root, grew, and naturalized into a formidable and unquestionable certainty.

In the light of Illich’s historical investigations, the idea of progress remains significant, but also highly questionable. In Illich’s view, progress is not only intricately woven into the history of the West, but more specifically and more subtly, into the way we imagine social inclusion as the expansion and provision of “Western needs” (IMOP: 93):

Progress, the notion which has characterized the West for 2000 years and has determined its relations to outsiders since the decay of classical Rome, lies behind the belief in needs. Societies mirror themselves not only in their transcendent gods, but also in their image of the alien beyond their frontiers. The West exported a dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ unique to industrial society. This peculiar attitude towards self and others is now worldwide, constituting the victory of *a universalist mission initiated in Europe* (IMOP: 95 [emphasis added]).

Illich argues that the social ideal of progress is arguably the West’s oldest and most cherished ideal. While the ideal may predate Christian missionary expansion, by the time the Western European church becomes a dominant social institution in late antiquity, Christian

mission and progress operate in tandem: the outsider is no longer an alien whose presence evokes a barrier (the presence of the barbarian for the Roman), rather “the alien [has] become someone in need, someone to be brought in” (IMOP: 95). Taken together, Illich insists, the idea of progress and the Christian practice of mission give rise to a view of the outsider as someone in need of help. Without this view, “what we call the West would not have come to be” (IMOP: 95).

For Illich *qua* historian, the task of historicizing and denaturalizing the link between progress and Christianity means attending to the way the image of the ‘them’, or ‘alien’, reciprocates and shifts in relation to the self-image of the dominant Western subject: how 1) the non-Roman barbarian becomes, 2) the unbaptized pagan, who becomes, 3) the infidel (who resists conversion to Christianity), who becomes, 4) the one who resists the ‘civilizing’ influence of the humanists, the “wild man”, who, in turn, becomes, 5) the native, towards whom the Europeans imputed needs, who finally give rise to, 6) the more recent outsider known as the ‘underdeveloped’. Illich sums up this six-stage shift:

Each time the West put a new mask on the alien, the old one was discarded because it was now recognized as a caricature of an abandoned self-image. The pagan with his naturally Christian soul had to give way to the stubborn infidel to allow Christendom to launch the Crusades. The wild man became necessary to justify the need for secular humanist education. The native was the crucial concept to promote self-righteous colonial rule. But by the time of the Marshall Plan, when multinational conglomerates were expanding and the ambitions of transnational pedagogues, therapists, and planners knew no bounds, the natives’ limited need for goods and services thwarted growth and progress. They had to metamorphose into underdeveloped people, the sixth and present stage of the West’s view of the outsider (IMOP: 94-95).

From this historical perspective, it becomes clearer how the Brazilian sacralization of progress in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century fits within a “universalist mission initiated in Europe”. It becomes clearer how, from the standpoint of the ‘missionaries of progress’, the history of the

republic of Brazil could be told as the conversion of a nation of ‘natives’ into a ‘developed’ nation. But Illich thinks from a different standpoint, and what he exposes is a darker side of inclusion into this order and progress. He shows how becoming a developed nation demands from its citizens a kind of conversion: “the worldwide acceptance of the Western self-image of *homo economicus* in his most extreme form as *homo industrialis*, with all needs commodity-defined” (IMOP: 95). In Illich’s view, the legacy of progress does not represent a linear advance through time, nor even a benign social vision, but rather a questionable ideal, one which leads to “[d]evelopment ...[as] the most pernicious of the West’s missionary efforts” (IMOP: 95).

My exposure to “To Hell With Good Intentions”, and my initial forays into Illich’s other writings, cast a new light on the Brazilian context and called into question what I thought Christians were *for*. I had not questioned why Christians would not be for ‘order and progress’. I had not questioned what it might mean to speak of needs as ‘Western’. Nor had I questioned whether needs have a history. I was left with the question: While the official motto was ‘order and progress,’ how did this coupling work together to escalate and normalize conditions of *desordem e progresso* [disorder and progress] I wondered whether attention to how we perceive our own and others’ neediness might be a clue to understanding the transformative possibility of Christian missionary presence as well as its corruption.

I realized that if I were going to take Illich as my guide, I was going to have to question not only my intentions and actions, but also the arena in which Christian witness has unfolded in Brazil. More generally, I realized that by taking Illich as my guide, I would have to question the certainties and assumptions that shape the way Christians imagine their place and role in relation to God’s ‘good intentions’ for the whole world. Thus, encountering Illich led me to a *virada*, one linked to Illich’s general insight that in a “technological society...[a] new

polarity emerges between the manipulation of things and the relationship of persons” (COA: 98, 103).

That *virada*, however, did not lead to immediate answers or facile solutions; it simply led to the further questioning of my own certainties and enabled a return to my initial question, that which operates as the subtext of my research: What makes it possible to enact a distinctly Christian presence in an authentically missionary (open towards others as ‘good news’) manner without resorting to manipulative control or insular disengagement? With this *virada*, Illich challenged me to seek different questions and different responses. I was only able to grasp Illich’s responses and formulate my own through extended conversations woven around Illich. It is to the shape of this conversation that I now turn.

### **Mingling Between Two Tables**

It should be clear by now that my thesis does not focus on an ‘ideal’ portrait of Christian mission; rather, I ‘begin in the middle’ by attending to particular performances, including my own, and with historical configurations along the North-South axis between the United States and its southern neighbors. In doing so, I want to focus on the tension between what the vocation to be missionary witnesses makes possible, and desirable, and how the responses to that vocation have led to faithful missionary encounters, as well as to missionary distortions.

This thesis is an exercise in doing theology with and after Ivan Illich. This means for me first of all, that this thesis is a work of Christian theology; it is written confessionally, which is to say, from and in the light of the stance of Christian faith in the US context, where I am originally from and where I was trained in theology. My thesis could be read either as a work of theological ethics or practical theology, in that it weaves together the doctrinal

emphases of systematic theology through and around the practical shape of the Christian life. My work is also interdisciplinary. It is not merely an intra-Christian disciplinary treatise, such as an investigation into the two natures of Christ for understanding the Incarnation, the relationship between personhood and ecclesiology, or the significance of the sacraments for the Christian life. The doctrinal themes of Incarnation, anthropology, ecclesiology, the integrity of creation, and redemption, as well as the significance of Christian practices for Christian mission, all run through my thesis; that is what makes it recognizable as theology. What makes it recognizably interdisciplinary, however, is the way in which I weave my theological investigations together with wider conversations that are either largely absent from contemporary theological inquiry or are not adequately engaged as serious and constructive conversation partners.

### **Table One: The Theologians**

To further explain my stance, I want to posit an extended metaphor. Imagine a dinner party with two large, but separate tables, between which I am mingling. At the first table, there is a group of theologians engaged in what I would describe broadly as a conversation in theological ethics, and specifically a conversation about the ethics and practice of Christian mission.

To help understand the conversation at Table One, the following typology presented by Sam Wells (2004) is helpful. Wells suggests that contemporary accounts of Christian ethics tend to fall into one of three camps, or strands of emphasis or orientations, that he identifies as universal, subversive, and ecclesial. By “universal”, Wells has in mind an account of Christian ethics that is fundamentally concerned with engaging and communicating a useful, reasonable Christianity with a wider audience. Here, the emphasis



falls upon Christianity's relevance and usefulness in relation issues of public concern. The lingering problem with the universal position lies in the tendency to separate the universal significance of the Gospel from its particularity of its revelation in Christ, thereby leaving Christian ethics as "ethics for anybody" (Wells, 2004: 33). Alternatively, what marks the "subversive" is a certain suspicion of mainstream perspectives which allegedly universalize a minority, yet socially dominant, position, while suppressing alternative voices. This second strand valorizes the inclusion and empowerment of those excluded voices, whether suppressed for reasons of socio-economic status, race, gender or geographical location. This is what Wells calls "ethics for the excluded" (2004: 34). Finally, the "ecclesial" strand aims to embody "a distinctively theological ethic" (2004: 34). With the subversive strand, it shares an emphasis on "the liberating power of Christianity" (2004: 34). Unlike the subversive strand, however, the ecclesial perspective understands that the generative source of this liberation lies less in the experience of various forms of exclusion, and more in the appropriation of "the character and acts of God" (2004: 34) through the re-formation of identity through ecclesial practices. Similarly, it shares the universal position's concern to communicate and dialogue with other traditions or standpoints. But, unlike the universal account, the ecclesial strand privileges Christian distinctiveness as a primary asset, not a burden. Here, the particularity of ecclesial practices and identity becomes the 'door' through which Christians walk to encounter others, not a 'wall' that they must overcome to reach others.

Wells advocates the ecclesial strand as the most promising way forward for contemporary Christian ethics. As with all typologies, Wells' account runs the risk of finding or illuminating general tendencies at the expense of losing or obscuring the nuance of particular positions that do not neatly fit into his typology. I am not offering a categorical defense of Wells, therefore. For my purposes, the importance of Well's typology does not lie

in its comprehensive accuracy, but rather in the way it identifies distinct voices in an existing conversation in contemporary Christian ethics.

Those who clearly identify with the ecclesial and the subversive strands share a common suspicion towards, and criticism of, false, or abstracted, universalisms; they differ, however, over how or where they locate the generative source of their particularity. Advocates of the ecclesial stance insist that the church is the primary location for theological reflection and ethical enquiry; they insist that “[t]he unit of ethics is neither the universal world nor the isolated individual but the particular church” (2004: 41). Advocates of the subversive stance, such as Ivan Petrella, identify two key elements at the heart of their position: 1) an epistemological break with the “standpoint of privilege” in order “to do theology from the standpoint of the oppressed” (Petrella, 2008: ix), and 2) a practical commitment to structural and institutional change (2008: 148). While those who adopt this position share these two fundamental commitments, the conversation among them remains split over where to locate the decisive forces of exclusion. In other words, there are those who insist on attending to the primacy of ecclesial context and the recovery of a distinctly ecclesial ethic; there are those who insist on attending to the primacy of contexts of exclusion, and specifically, to the particularity of “material context” (2008: 3), which generates economic oppression. Those on the subversive side of the table, such as Petrella, suggest that the ecclesial side is but another instance of the theological inability to deal with “material context”, and that without making a turn towards the reality of material poverty and expansive “zones of social abandonment” (2008: 2), theology becomes a reification of the wrong particulars and a mystification of the real challenge. Those at the ecclesial end of the table, such as Wells, respond that it is precisely by embracing the ‘ecclesial-turn,’ and, therefore, the particularity of Christian practices, that we participate in God’s activity and purposes. This

participation, in turn, enables an appropriately subversive stance in relation to the forces that distort God's purposes in the world, such as, the sustained generation of material poverty.

There is, however, a group of missiologists at Table One (Costas, 1982, 1989; Bosch, 1992; Sugden, 1995; Langmead, 2004) whose perspectives do not conform easily to Well's typology. They are concerned with the universality of the Christian gospel; their account of the universal scope of Christian mission turns on the particularity of the Gospel, rather than an attempt to do 'ethics for anybody'. Similarly, they are concerned about ecclesial ethics, as well as being subversive of the forces that pull us away from the purposes of Christian mission. Furthermore, these writers insist that we must attend to the historical arena and configuration of Christian mission as a lens for approaching the dialectic of Christian missionary particularity and universal scope.

A key insight from the missiologists is that the story of Christian mission has been largely one-directional, "from the west to the rest" (Sugden, 1995: 380). Thus, it is vital to understand current theologies of mission, and practices, in the light of the history of Christian missionary movements, and their relationship with the expansion of European civilizations in the West, in order to construct alternatives or "two-way missiologies" (1995: 381). The two major challenges that contemporary theologies of mission face must be situated within that history. These are, firstly, the integrity of indigenous cultures and, secondly, religious pluralism and Christian particularity (1995: 382). Thus, Sugden's argument is that all theologies are contextual, but that constructive theologies of mission must become aware of, and explicit about, their contextualization.

Deepening these more general insights regarding contextualization, Latin American missiologist Orlando Costas, stands out as a significant voice at this table, because of the way he places this 'contextual turn' in mission inside a Christological turn: he argues that the

Incarnation is the ‘coin’ whose two sides are contextualization and mission. For Costas, the Incarnation not only makes contextualization possible, but also imperative (Costas, 1982: 6).<sup>6</sup> In terms of mission, then, the Incarnation is more than a means to an end; the Incarnation is itself the very logic of mission and opens up concrete implications and connection, such as:

- the experience of Incarnation as a continual reality and presence, especially among the oppressed ;
- the evaluation of social experience, identity, and context “in light of the history of Jesus Christ” (1982: 15); and
- the commitment towards a “new order of life” (1982: 16) and towards the transformation of reality.

For Costas, this entails beginning with the Incarnation in order to explore the contradictions and historical consequences that have emerged in “a continent formed (and deformed) by Christianity” (1982: 35).

In the light of the history he explores, Costas’ case for delinking missionary imagination and practice from the Christendom model resonates with the ecclesial and subversive strands at the table. Taking Costas as a representative of the missiologists at Table One, their focus is more nuanced and questioning of the particularity-universality dialectic which I have described above. For Costas, the basis for why we share the gospel with others is neither ecclesial particularity nor the particularity of the excluded, but the particularity of the Incarnation.

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<sup>6</sup> In highlighting the biblical basis for this move, Costas writes: “As the Son of God, Jesus not only ‘reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature’ (Heb. 1:3), but has definitely, once and for all, made God contextual” (Costas, 1982: 6).

## **Table Two: The Other Storytellers**

Gathered around my second table are a diverse group of contemporary intellectuals. They come from across the Americas, from Europe, and from different regions of Asia. Some are activists, others are academics. All of them are intellectuals committed to social change and cultural renewal. Some might consider themselves Christian, but no one at this table would express or identify him or herself as a theologian. That is what makes the conversation at Table Two different from Table One.

What these thinkers and activists share in common is an affinity with the thought of Ivan Illich. Some have collaborated closely with Illich, others have known Illich personally and have been influenced directly by him, still others have no direct personal link to Illich nor to his thought *per se*, but even for them the direction of their intellectual inquiry converges significantly with Illich's own. If, at Table One, we have a conversation among the theologians, then I would simply describe Table Two as a conversation among 'other storytellers', those who are committed "to think[ing] broadly about what is desirable and what is possible for the future of the multiple worlds that must coexist on the planet" (TFOD: x).

Part of my method in this thesis is to mingle between the tables and weave their conversations together. Anyone sitting at Table Two can sense the legacy of Ivan Illich as a palpable presence. At Table One, Illich is either unknown or ignored, and therefore, effectively absent. Thus, while I find myself located as a theologian at Table One, I prefer to mingle between both tables, because I find myself drawn to what each has to offer. Those at

Table Two help me to grasp the clarity of Illich's social criticism of 'the-world-as-it-is'; those at Table One help me to articulate the fullness of Illich's theological imagination regarding 'the-world-as-it-should-be', or as Illich puts it, a "a world in the hands of God" (TRNOTF: Ch. 3). Therefore, a primary reason for mingling between the tables is that the conversations at both tables keep turning me towards Illich.

Another reason for this method is that as I listen to both conversations, I notice that similar themes are being addressed, even if the questions are asked from radically different perspectives. One of these common questions has to do with the dialectic of universality and particularity. Broadly speaking, the conversations at both tables challenge the imposed dominance of universal ideals by which all should be measured and to which all should conform. Whether one identifies this as the "Westernization of the world" (Latouche, 1996), the "Global Project" (GP: 32), or the hegemony of neoliberal globalization (Santos, 2006), or by some other descriptor, there is a common criticism of the dominance of a 'false universal'.

More specifically, the second conversation shares with the "subversive" strand of Table One an intense critique of forms of social exclusion, whether this is generated by the market system or by the sovereignty of nation-states, which eclipses the cultural logics of indigenous peoples. Like the "ecclesial" strand, many of the voices at Table Two advocate reclaiming and reasserting the particularity of traditions, that is, a return to the wisdom and traditions of the past in order to reimagine and inhabiting a desirable future, as opposed to being "transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others' reality: a mirror that belittles them and sends them off to the end of the queue, a mirror that defines their identity, that of a heterogenous and diverse majority, in the terms of a homogenising and strict minority" (TFOD: 7).

Of course, there are significant differences as well. At Table Two, the response to

social exclusion is less a plea for inclusion into the machinations of state-market centrism or ‘the right to more’, as it is a reclaiming of cultural autonomy and the liberty of “people’s power” as vital expressions of radical democracy (GP: Ch. 5). Similarly, when the voices at Table Two speak of exploring “community, communion, and re-membering” (GP: 55) as a way of imagining the future and inhabiting the future, they are not referring to ecclesial practices, but rather to a diversity of cultural or communal practices.

What I overhear from the conversations at both tables is a profound desire to resist being assimilated, by cultivating or regenerating the conditions for ‘life together’, which leads me to ask:

- What challenges (and insights) might the voices at Table Two bring to those whose advocacy of “ecclesial ethics”, or the ecclesial-turn, depends on the recovery and reasserting of “ecclesial difference” (Hauerwas, 2011: 98-181)?
- What insights might those at Table Two offer to those committed to coming to terms with Christianity’s ecclesial failure and “diseased social imagination” (Jennings, 2010: 9), as well as its promise for recalibrating and regenerating missional forms of ‘life together’?
- What might those in the ecclesia learn from, and possibly share with, these ‘other storytellers’ who identify themselves and relate to others through their own cultural logics of “community, communion, and re-membering” (GP: 55)
- How might an account of incarnational mission (Langmead, 2004) offer a creative response to the voices at both tables?
- Finally, how might turning to Illich contribute to such an incarnational

missiology?<sup>7</sup>

### **Holding the Conversation Together**

As I note above, conversations at both tables kept turning me towards Illich, enabling me to recognize how, although Illich himself was at neither table, he belonged at both. For the task of holding the conversation together, however, I kept turning back to the conversations and voices of friends, especially Claudio Oliver, the friend who introduced me to Illich. It was primarily through Claudio and the Christian community of which he is pastor in Curitiba, Brazil, that I made the connections between Illich's voice, the voices at both tables, and the missional significance of cultivating a "subversive, communitarian expression of another way of life" (Oliver, 2010: 8).

In 2009, I worked closely with Claudio on *Relationality* (2010), his booklet on relational responses to poverty. In it, we distilled countless hours of conversation which took place in his garden, around his dinner table, and occasionally via Skype. In listening to, translating, and editing those conversations, I began to see clearly the polarity that Illich described in the late 1960s between "the manipulation of things and the relationship to persons" (COA: 103).

In *Relationality*, Claudio describes this tension as a conflict of agendas and promises, a conflict between the agenda of Truman-inspired economic development<sup>8</sup> as the panacea for poverty, and a gospel-inspired agenda:

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<sup>7</sup> Since this thesis is a piece of narrative theology, I seek to respond to these questions in a suggestive manner that is congruent with this form of theology, rather than as a *teologia acabada*, a Portuguese term which suggests finality – that is, a mode of theology that gives the 'final word.'

<sup>8</sup> While US president Harry Truman did not coin the term 'development,' Illich and many other post-development thinkers highlight the way he resignified the term in his State of the Union address on January 20, 1949, effectively dividing the world into two groups: the 'developed' and the 'underdeveloped' (see Escobar, 1995: 3; TFOD: 7). I will return to the significance of Truman's development agenda in Chapter Three.



Every time the church and her agencies try to promote development as defined by Truman, or try to overcome a specific definition of poverty that is based on income, home ownership and consumption capacity, over every time we try to include people in our unsustainable way of life or to give them access to the very lifestyle that has pulverized 30% of the earth's resources in the last sixty years, the question to be asked is: Who is setting the agenda? (2010: 12)

He continues by highlighting what happens when the biblical call to neighbor-love gets transmogrified by another agenda:

The programs and solutions proposed by churches and agencies usually accept the economic and developmental definitions and standards uncritically. Even worse is when these attempts seek biblical, theological and spiritual justification in support of their efforts to help include 'primitive', 'underdeveloped', the 'poor', the 'jobless' into our standards of living. Such proposals are made to 'educate' and 'liberate' them from their traditional and **sustainable** lifestyles. As a result, money, professionals, and 'good Samaritans' start swarming like bees to 'help'.

...Don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying people are bad when they try to help. I believe it is quite the opposite; I believe the best and deepest desires in people's hearts have been put to work to try to overcome such problems. What I am saying is that all this good will and effort, all the energy and love at work may have been barking up the wrong tree (2010: 13 [original emphasis]).

Here, Claudio's comments clearly echo Illich's critique of "good intentions". His comments also resonate with my suspicion that the incarnational logic can be 'hijacked'. Claudio highlights the idea, as Illich had done before, that by raising the question of competing agendas, our missionary efforts can be turned away from God's original purposes and turned into a corruption of mission, a counterfeit. The theological task, therefore, is discerning the difference between them.

In Claudio's analysis, Truman's post-World War II development agenda promised a 'better life' through the escalation of technical, institutional, and professional control over other people as well as the environment. Claudio observes, however, that Jesus' agenda does

not turn on technical control, but rather on embodied presence. Indeed, to believe in the Incarnation is to believe that “Jesus is the incarnation of the most frequent promise in the Bible: God with us” (2010: 20):

So we are encouraged to deal with [social problems, such as poverty] relationally because God has done so, because this has proved to be effective and real in history, and because we are not left alone. We have God, dwelling within us, among, and most of all, present with us and in front of us through the others whom we encounter in the endeavor. I think this is a fair enough reason to risk the relational proposal of Jesus (2010: 20-21).

Claudio’s description serves as a lens contrasting two ways of approaching mission: either as a technical problem to be controlled, or a relational possibility to be shared. From my own experience of this conflict, both as rupture and renewal, my thesis explores why it is worth “risk[ing] the relational proposal of Jesus” (Oliver, 2010: 21).

#### ***Virada 4: Overhearing the Gospel According to Samba***

A fourth *virada* related to my experience in Brazil did not happen in a church, nor in a religious context, but rather in a *roda de samba* [samba circle]. It happened for the simple reason that one of my friends, Duda, invited me to join his *bloco* [group], a group formation for playing Brazilian percussion, like the ones in Carnival parades. Even though I had been playing music for all of my adult life, and was already playing percussion at our local church, I sensed it was time to learn more about playing Brazilian music, and that Duda’s invitation was the ‘open door’. Later I came to recognize that Duda’s invitation was also enabling me to reimagine ‘coming’ to Brazil in a way that was delinked from good intentions, from ‘being there to help.’ As a *gringo* in the *roda de samba*, it was obvious that I was not in a position to teach or to serve. It was obvious that if I was going to learn to play samba, then I would have

to submit to the *bloco* and their ways.

Soon after Duda's invitation, I found myself spending every Monday night, and lots of spare time at the weekend, with Duda and other members of his *bloco*, with those who were sharing their musical knowledge and percussion skills with new members like me. What started off as a simple 'yes' to an invitation to attend a workshop, soon stirred up my latent desire to learn Brazilian percussion from Duda and his *bloco*. I found myself being changed from a 'musical dabbler' into a musical apprentice.

What was most striking about this musical apprenticeship was that for the first month we hardly touched our instruments. Or, to be more precise, we used our bodies as our main instruments: walking to sense the beat while clapping, or saying the musical phrases that we would eventually play on our 'proper' instruments. In addition to this form of training using our bodies, we also learned a common musical vocabulary, such as *virada*, *paradinha*, and *convenções*, as well as a simplified system of musical notation using only numbers and letters. Within the first month, we could all find and follow the beat, execute a basic repertoire of traditional phrases, and transcribe and read new phrases. We were being formed as percussionists, and there was no doubt that our musicianship was improving. Then we began the difficult, but fun, part: forming a *roda de samba* and making music together.

All the while, I could not stop making a comparison between the process of being a musician and percussionist in a group, and the dynamics of Christian discipleship. From Dallas Willard, I had a working definition of a disciple, or apprentice, as "simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is" (Willard, 1998: 282). Based on Willard's definition, I knew that I had become Duda's disciple, precisely because I knew that I wanted to be with him in order to be able to play samba like him.

Playing samba made it clearer that both musicianship and discipleship require an intentional process of formation, that no one just ‘drifts’ into being a serious musician or disciple. By belonging to the group, I also recognized how both samba and discipleship make possible, and even require, a form of collective participation: no one plays Brazilian percussion in a *bloco* as a ‘solo performance’, nor does anyone follow Jesus by playing solo.

Through the *bloco*, I came to new awareness of how formation and participation were at the core of both musicianship and discipleship. The more I struggled and grew as a percussionist, the more I came to recognize how the experience of joining the *bloco* serves as a parable for Christian discipleship, the inter-personal process of formation and participation in Christ. The driving question at the heart of this *virada* was this: Given that the process of becoming a musician/disciple includes a process of progression through certain disciplines, both individual and collective, how might the experience of learning to play samba shed light on how we imagine the difference between what disables and enables the common life of Christian discipleship and mission? As my musical imagination continued to shape my theological imagination, I began to formulate and refine an answer to that question, and I began to overhear ‘the gospel according to samba’.

Nonetheless, my experience inside the *roda de samba* needs to be placed alongside my study of *O Passo*, the method by which I was initiated into playing with the *bloco*. In fact, the *bloco* incorporated *O Passo*, which is Portuguese for “the step”, as its basic methodological approach for dealing directly with two of the challenges that led Lucas Ciavatta to create the method: firstly, how to develop each musician’s perception of the rhythm in relation to the beat; and then, secondly, how to develop each musician’s capacity for playing together as a group. At the heart of *O Passo* lies a double emphasis on musical perception, which by analogy I understand in discipleship terms as formation, and group performance, that is,

participation. The experience with the samba group taught me, at times in the most humiliating ways, that I would not learn to play Brazilian percussion fluently and with joyful ease simply by trying to imitate Duda playing samba, especially at full-speed. Going back to the distinction between perception and technique, Duda showed me why the biggest obstacle that I needed to overcome was not technique, but perception. In other words, the fundamental challenge was not how to play faster but to hear the ‘swing’ of the rhythm and to be able to play what I hear. Instead of ‘just trying,’ he showed me how to train at certain things that were achievable, instead of just trying to do what was over-ambitious. For example, instead of ‘just trying’ to play a new, challenging song all at once, I trained by isolating and practicing each difficult phrase until I could do it by direct effort. I was becoming a percussionist by engaging in a progression of musical disciplines, and a discipline, as Willard also points out, “is simply any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort” (Willard, 1998: 353).

It is significant, however, that the emphasis on musical disciplines and perception is not an end in itself, but rather a means for enhancing group performance. In the context of the group, the musical autonomy of the musician is best understood as a relational autonomy, a form of interdependence in which the musicians learn to express themselves through negotiation with and for the sake of the group and its collective music-making. ‘Group’, then, names a context in which members experience and practice the difference between just *ao lado de* [being beside of] and *junto* [being together] (Ciavatta, 2003: 144). In fact, Ciavatta’s commentary on the significance of the relationship between the individual and group sets up an insight that became my mantra for the *bloco* experience: “In samba, it’s easy to play ‘right’; the difficult bit is playing ‘together.’”

In *O Passo*, Ciavatta expands on what is at stake in his distinction between playing

*tocar certo* [right] and playing *tocar junto* [together] in the following way:

Playing ‘right’ – playing your part – is only the beginning. Invariably, playing ‘together’ is much more complicated than playing ‘right’. This is because in music, in which the ‘sounded environment’ [*ambiente sonoro*] is necessarily shared, ‘rightness’ depends entirely on ‘togetherness’. But ‘together’ does not mean ‘annulled by the group’, ‘buried’, or ‘protected from the awareness of one’s own deficiencies’. ‘Together’ means this: playing your part as a creative individual in order to strengthen and be strengthened by the group that builds up and enriches you even while demanding your contribution and helping you in the process of achievement (2003: 37-38).

Through the experience of being included in the *bloco*, I discovered a way of integrating the musical imagination of the *bloco* with a theological imagination which was being increasingly shaped by my continuing encounter with Illich. In his early reflections on the intercultural formation of missionaries, Illich writes: “Preparation for the study of missiology...implies increased receptivity for the poetic, the historical, and the social aspects of reality” (TCCD: 87) Being included in the *roda de samba*, then, took me deeper into a cultural immersion, beyond the grammar, rhythm, and inflection of Brazilian Portuguese directly and more deeply into “the poetic, the historical, and the social aspects” of Brazilian reality.

The more I was drawn into the Brazilian cultural form and the more I reflected on Ciavatta’s description of “playing together”, the more I began to imagine my experience of togetherness inside the *roda* as a parable for the incarnational logic of Christian discipleship and mission. While the *roda* offered an array of insights which could be developed theologically, I was caught not only by the energy of the music, but by the relational dynamics of embodiment and interdependence.

First, the emphasis on the movement and presence of the body in samba echoes Illich’s emphasis on *embodiment* as a precondition for the Christian life. As David Cayley

points out, one of Illich's key insights was his diagnosis of contemporary forms of

disembodiment, the loss of the inhabited and personally experienced body....[and how] [t]his replacement of the dense concretely situated flesh by an abstract construction was a horror for Illich because, from the perspective of his Incarnational Christianity, it is as a *body* that the truth confronts us, and only through the body that we come to know it (TRNOTF: 40-41 [original emphasis]).

In both samba and discipleship, the body is indispensable: we neither 'samba' nor 'follow' without the body. Further, the way in which Ciavatta describes the interiorization and knowledge of the musical beat through our bodies provides a fascinating echo with St Paul's account of how either sin or God's righteousness come to inhabit our bodies (Rom. 6:12-23). Hence, the body is also not a static or fixed substance, but changes and does so primarily through its own actions as well as its interactions with other bodies.

Second, in the *roda* I glimpsed a parable of inclusion into conditions of interdependence that is intrinsic to life together in the body of Christ. Just imagine the simple phrase of an *agogô*, a kind of cowbell that usually produces only two pitches or notes. Voiced, the phrase might sound like this: Ding....ding-dong....dong-ding....ding-ding-ding....dong-ding. This kind of phrase is not complicated, and by itself is musically uninteresting. But put the *agogô* part with the pulsating bass lines of the *surdos*, and you have bass and treble calling and responding. Add the *caixas*, or snares, and you can begin to feel the samba's groove, or swing. If you add the *repiques*, the *tambourins*, and the *rocars*, you then have all the *naipes*, or sections, working together, all playing different parts but as one group. Thus, different members are all playing simple parts that sound complex and incredibly beautiful, *together*. Again, the most difficult challenge in playing samba in a *bloco* is not executing the notes of the phrases in isolation, or what Ciavatta calls playing 'right'; the most difficult bit is executing the notes in full synchronization with the group, playing

together.

Within the musical space of the *roda*, therefore, the interdependent activity of making music actually creates the conditions for inclusion. Within this musical space, I am aware that I am playing a simple *agogô* line, but I am also aware of how my line fits with the ensemble. I no longer hear just a clanking bell sound; I hear the simultaneity of its voiced call-and-response with other instruments. In Illich's terms, the relationships in the *roda* not only embody complementarity, but also conviviality, a term which for Illich refers to a sense of "individualized freedom in personal interdependence" (TFC: 11).

As I play the *agogô*, I am aware that the *agogô*-ness of the *agogô* is most fully expressed in the *roda*. For it is in the *roda* that its distinctiveness – its unique voice – and its relatedness – its capacity to build up other voices – establishes harmony and a sense of proportion. As I play the *agogô*, I am also aware that I am a *gringo*, a foreigner surrounded and included by Brazilians within their *roda de samba*. Yet, through being included in the *roda*, I no longer see myself as a *gringo*, nor am I magically transformed into a Brazilian. Like the *agogô*, I have a distinct voice, yet a voice that belongs in the *roda*. I am 'in between', but I know that I am *in*, a *brasicano* who is a co-participant in the *roda*. My experience of being included in the musical space of the *roda*, as a foreigner, is parabolic of another inclusion: inclusion in the body of Christ. Thus, the *roda* is parabolic of being included in the space of the Incarnation, the personal space that, Illich insists, Christians are called to inhabit and to "prolong" (TRNOTF: 207).



## CHAPTER 2

### ITINERARY: THE DRAMA OF INCARNATIONAL INCLUSION

#### **Theology Taking the Illich Turn**

In 2007, the CIA released a declassified intelligence report from 1961 entitled “The Committed and Church in Latin America” (Kahn, 2010). The central claim of that document was that an underlying ecclesial shift had taken place: that the Catholic Church in Latin America was no longer primarily an institutional ‘prop’ or ‘chaplain’ for the maintenance of the status quo. It had become, at least in part, “a force for change” (2010: 56). More specifically, the report characterized three different stances within the Catholic Church regarding social change: the Reactionaries (anti-Vatican II and pro-*status quo ante*); 2) the Uncommitted (the majority of clergy and laity, those open to gradual change without radicalism); and 3) the Committed. In the CIA’s typology, this last group was further subdivided into “Progressives” and “Radicals”, as those who shared a common commitment to catalyze structural change as well as “an antipathy towards the established order as precluding social justice” (2010: 32). The document is striking, not only in the fact that the CIA paid its staff to do research on the church, but also in its basic tone and message: ‘Watch out for certain groups in the Latin American Catholic Church, especially those who are progressives and radicals!’ Included in its list of radicals was a priest named Ivan Illich.

Even before his death on 2 December 2002, Ivan Illich had been described by Eric Utne as “[t]he greatest social critic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”. An Illich obituary in *The Times* also described him as “one of the most radical thinkers of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century” (both quoted in

Hoinacki, 2003: 83). Clearly, a wider audience had recognized what the CIA research analyst described as Illich's "charismatic appeal, intellectual brilliance, and zest for controversy" (Kahn, 2010: 32). It is notable, however, that Ivan Illich, arguably one of the greatest Christian intellectuals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has remained curiously 'off the radar' in the field of academic theology.

This seems curious because, as Illich's friends and interpreters such as Lee Hoinacki and David Cayley have pointed out, Illich's whole corpus can be read as a set of theologically-inflected investigations into modernity's dominant certainties, institutions, and systems (Hoinacki, 2003: 383; Cayley in TRNOTF: 1-44). If that is the case, then perhaps it is not so puzzling that the CIA not only carefully researched Illich as a 'radical', but even planted a mole inside his learning center in Cuernavaca, Mexico. More puzzling, however, is why contemporary theology has not taken Ivan Illich as seriously as the CIA.

In this thesis, I suggest that the time has come for theology and Illich to be turned more compellingly towards one another. Indeed, as I noted in the introduction, one of my aims in this thesis is to reappropriate Ivan Illich's significance for Christian theology. To be clear, I do not intend to provide Illich's intellectual biography, a comprehensive survey of his work, or indeed a 'theology of Ivan Illich'. This is because I am not interested in a mere retrieval of Ivan Illich. What I propose instead is to do theology *with* and *after* Illich. In this chapter, therefore, I will follow the trajectory of Illich's life so that it might engage the discourse of theology as both an important challenge and as a largely untapped, yet constructive resource.

This chapter will examine the incarnational imagination that is at the heart of Illich's life and theology, specifically: 1) the Incarnation as a new horizon of love and knowledge which we are called to prolong, 2) the corruption of this vocation through what Illich calls

‘institutionalization’, and 3) his conviction that the Incarnation cannot ultimately be managed or controlled but only followed, thereby providing the basis for a “missionary ethic of incarnation” (Yoder, 1984: 44). To do so, I explore how Illich’s own witness embodies the logic of discipleship and mission as a response to the vocation to “prolong[] the Incarnation” (TNROTF: 207), and how that witness illumines the contours of my journey of discipleship as a missionary in Brazil by reframing it within the drama of incarnational inclusion.

### **Biography as Theology: Approaching the Pilgrimage of Ivan Illich**

In this chapter, I tell a story not just about Illich, but through him. My reading of Illich in this chapter turns on the claim that his witness operates from and points to the Incarnation as its center; I also suggest that the story I tell centers on the person whom Illich is following. This chapter, then, does not offer a straightforward biography of Illich, but what could be called “biography as theology” (McClendon, 1974). With this in mind, I want to spell out and examine what is at stake in telling the story this way.

Writing in the 1960s and early 1970s, North American theologian Jim McClendon developed a methodological emphasis on doing theology through life stories as a way of healing the untenable divorce between doctrine and ethics, between Christian belief and action. In terms of ethics, McClendon’s approach was influenced by the recovery of an ethics of character as a response to the decidedly utilitarian cast of Christian ethics then predominant in the North American context (McClendon, 1974: Ch. 1). In terms of doctrinal theology, McClendon sought to move beyond what he called “propositional theology”, that is, the tendency to reduce theology to the act of retrieving, cataloguing, and transmitting doctrinal propositions as abstract concepts, separated from the lives and character of the great “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1). Biography as theology represented McClendon’s method of

integrating doctrine and ethics, incorporating both the ‘turn to character’ (i.e., the character of persons-in-community) and the ‘narrative turn’ into the heart of theological discourse.

As a way of summarizing the logic of this method, McClendon offers two statements about the complementarity of biography and theology. First, he states that Christian doctrine involves more than the isolation and coverage of correct propositions: it deals with “living convictions which give shape to actual lives and actual communities”. Therefore, we must attend to Christian lives, and “theology must be at least biography” (1974: 37). Second, because our attention to these lives enables us to challenge, refine, or even deepen “our own theologies”, then “[b]iography at its best will be theology” (1974: 37-38). McClendon’s point is that for theology to be adequate, it must attend to particular lives that are representative of the Christian faith and community. Furthermore, he argued that certain lives have a “compelling quality” to them, something that ‘strikes’ us. Biography as theology, therefore, is about “understand[ing] this compelling quality theologically” (1974: 190).

McClendon elucidates this further by making it clear what biography as theology is not. He writes:

[The] intention cannot be to discover what X believed religiously, and then argue that we should believe the same thing. *That* is not what biography as theology means...It is not that you must think as they think, or say what they say. It is rather that your theology *must be adequate to lives such as these lives*” (1974: 40).

In what way, then, am I seeking to approach Ivan Illich’s life story as a way of doing biography as theology? In this chapter, I am seeking to tell a story about and through Illich, one that does not merely rehearse the significance of Illich’s ideas, but more fundamentally, displays the compelling quality of his witness as a Christian intellectual while providing a theological argument which is adequate to his life. While I am deeply interested in what Illich

thought and wrote, my aim is not to recruit more ‘Illichians’, who merely subscribe to what he thought or to believe as he did. What is compelling about Illich’s witness is the clarity of vision and depth of character with which he lives into the difference that the Incarnation makes. Both in the shape of his living and in his theological commentary, Illich attends to this incarnational difference, that is, how the lives of all Christians are called to bear a ‘Christic’ form, precisely because the Christian life is a participation in the life of Christ (McClendon, 1974: 201).

In this chapter I engage with Illich as a witness, as someone whose life points beyond itself to Another. I engage with Illich not only to see him (and his ‘life story’), but also to look with him at what he sees, including the breadth of the theological horizon that frames his thinking and orders the trajectory of his life journey as life in Christ. In Illich’s own terms, what fascinates me is the way he seeks and embraces “the one thing that matters in the Gospel sense, namely, the *itinerarium nostrae vitae in Deum* [journey of our life in God]” (PAF: 1).

I suggest, then, that biography as theology provides an appropriate methodological lens for interpreting Illich as a Christian witness and for addressing the problem of how to provide a theological interpretation of a person whose relationship to the field of theology, and to the church, is not only neglected, but is also quite ambiguous. I am not suggesting that references to Illich are unheard of in contemporary theology (Mazko MacArthy, 2012; Bretherton, 2006). Rather, I would argue that theologians have not engaged seriously with his life and thought since Illich’s notable ascent as a public intellectual in the 1970s. This is not altogether surprising, for Illich’s wide-ranging thought traversed multiple disciplines (for example, theology, history, education, economics, technology), and he did not write primarily in a theological idiom. The link, therefore, between Illich’s writing and his theologically-imbued imagination is not always self-evident. But as Cayley’s description of Illich makes

clear, there is a sense in which Illich's corpus is deeply, though often latently, theological, written in such a way that seems to demand further theological analysis:

As a thinker, Illich is impossible to classify in conventional categories. He is a man neither of the left nor the right, as little a romantic as he is a conservative, no more an anti-modernist than he is a post-modernist. He might be called an anarchist, but only insofar as he believes the refusal of power to be at the heart of the Christian gospel, not because he subscribed to the political tenets of anarchism. The most that can be said, I think, is that he shows how revolutionary a faith Christianity is (IIIC: 54).

As a way of turning towards Illich, I can think of no better place to start than Cayley's *Ivan Illich in Conversation* (1992), a collection of edited transcripts from interview sessions between Cayley and Illich. Although Cayley originally organized these sessions to accompany a commentary on Illich's writings, the result is something much richer: an extended conversation between friends on a constellation of themes that emerge in Illich's writings, including theology, the church, modern institutions, development, education, technology, energy, medicine, work, gender, and urban planning. These transcripts show that, although Illich repeatedly offers insightful commentary on his *oeuvre*, it is clear from his comments that he is not interested in merely quoting himself or recycling past insights. Instead, he traces the contours of the pilgrimage of his life and thought as a Christian intellectual.

Illich's philosophical and theological trajectory was indeed very much that of a pilgrim, a 20<sup>th</sup> century itinerant intellectual.<sup>1</sup> Born in what was then Dalmatia in 1926, he came from the 'Old World' of pre-World War II Europe, a world in which identity and imagination were still strongly linked to one's place and family of origin. Illich's early life, however, was uprooted from that world by a genocidally-induced war that forced his half-

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<sup>1</sup>David Cayley has also provided extended introductions to Illich's biography and thought in his two collaborative works with Illich (IIIC: 1-57; TNROTF: 1-44).

Jewish family into an unsettled, and more or less covert, migration from Vienna to Florence and later to Rome. Towards the end of his life, Illich referred to his “destiny as a wandering Jew and Christian pilgrim” (TRNOTF: 147). Responding to a question by Cayley about his background, Illich describes his pilgrimage in this way: “Since I left [as a child] the old house on the island in Dalmatia, I have never had a place which I called home. I have always lived in a tent like the one in which you are sitting at this moment” (IIC: 80).

This understanding echoes that of the author of the Book of Hebrews, where all those who see themselves as Abraham’s children must embrace an ambiguity, that of being from a place while also belonging to a people who “confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth...desir[ing] a better country” (Heb. 11:13-16). In Illich’s case, being “a naturalized United States citizen of part Spanish, part German, part Yugoslav, part Catholic, part Jewish descent” (du Plessix-Gray, 1970: 233), his Abrahamic faith illumined his critical engagement not only of particular sites on his sojourn, but also his reading of the disordered contours of the post-World War II landscape in the ‘West.’ In a poignant response to Cayley, Illich describes his understanding of this ambiguity in the following way:

I can’t do without tradition, but I have to recognize that its institutionalization is the root of an evil deeper than any evil I could have known with my unaided eyes and mind. This is what I would call the West. By studying and accepting the West as the perversion of Revelation, I become increasingly tentative, but also more curious and totally engaged in searching for its origin, which is the voice of him who speaks. It’s as simple as that...childish, if you want, childlike, I hope (IIC: 243).

What undergirds and permeates Illich’s activity as a Christian intellectual, then, is this sense of Abrahamic dispossession, and the commitment to live in faith as a response to God’s Word, “the voice of him who speaks”. This metaphor of pilgrimage also highlights my own struggle as narrated in Chapter One in relation to the *viradas*, or ‘turning points’ of

conversion. For, on the one hand, those *viradas* share in common the simple desire to follow, to respond to a call that is as personal and particular as the one made to Abraham. On the other hand, if Illich's references to "institutionalization" and "perversion" are brought together with his criticisms of the missionary idealism of 'good intentions', then it can be appreciated how easily missionary desire can become entangled and perverted by the illusion and inadequacies of imagining missionary existence as 'being in control', even for the sake of the well-being of others. Consequently, I suggest, the Illichian orientation towards pilgrimage and Abrahamic dispossession reframes the missionary endeavor. Dispossession means the abandonment of forms of social control that are de-incarnational, that is, ways of encounters which distort the I-Thou embodied relationality that is at the heart of the Christian social imagination. As this next section will illustrate, Illich's own pilgrimage led him into new lands in which incarnational mission came into direct conflict with (de-incarnational) projects of assimilation which encounter the other by attempting to recreate them in one's own image. In order to explore these encounters, we turn to his journey into and across the Americas.

### **Following Illich's Journey in the Americas**

In order to examine in more detail Illich's pilgrimage as a Christian intellectual, I want to focus on a common thread that runs throughout his itinerary, namely, his stance as an 'outsider-insider' (Hiebert, 2006: 300). At the surface level, identifying Illich in such a way emphasizes his transcultural identity and his ability to 'speak about God from more than one place'. But there is a deeper sense in which Illich operated as an outsider-insider, and this has to do with the way he consistently challenged dominant "certainties" (COA: 11). Indeed, in the foreword to his first publication of essays, *Celebration of Awareness* (1970), Illich leaves the following clue for how his writings and his life might be approached:



Institutions create certainties, and taken seriously, certainties deaden the heart and shackle the imagination. It is always my hope that my statements, angry or passionate, artful or innocent, will also provide a smile, and a thus a new freedom – even though the freedom come at a cost (COA: 11).

To identify Illich as an institutional outsider-insider is not to suggest that he advocated a straightforward anti-institutionalism: Illich's stance *vis-à-vis* institutions is more nuanced than one which advocates either being for or against. What he is clearly against, however, is the way dominant institutions generate certainties that debase human freedom and eclipse our imagination of what is possible and desirable. To elucidate this, I turn to two locations or 'stages' from which Illich discerned, engaged, and even transgressed some of the dominant certainties of modernity.

### **Questioning Americanization and the Alchemy of Americanization**

In 1951, Illich arrived in the United States as a priest and postdoctoral student at Princeton University. In Illich's narration of his own immigration, he recalls that the decision to move to the US was a matter of mixed motives. In part, he came in response to the challenges of his priestly colleagues who said that he could not succeed in the States. In part, he came to avoid becoming a papal bureaucrat, a position for which he was highly qualified and most likely being prepared (IIC: 84). Opting for postdoctoral studies became Illich's route to America.

Upon arrival in New York, however, Illich's plans took a turn away from the world of the university and towards parish life. During those first days, and in the home of his hosts, Illich found himself overhearing repeated references to the 'new immigrants', the Puerto Ricans. After spending a few days on the streets of the *barrios* in upper Manhattan, Illich

sensed a desire to serve as priest among these new immigrants. It took only a short visit to the office of Cardinal Spellman, then Archbishop of the Diocese of New York City, to facilitate his assignment to Incarnation Parish in Washington Heights, a predominantly Irish neighborhood which was in the process of being reshaped by a massive influx of Puerto Ricans.

Out of this experience, Illich began to question one of the dominant certainties of American life, indeed, one of the pillars of the American social experiment, that of Americanization as the goal of immigrant assimilation (COA: 32). The formula for this social experiment was simple: add any immigrant group, and transform them into Americans. In other words, Americanization was another word for a process of cultural conversion in which immigrants were stripped of the markers of their cultural identity and heritage in order to be clothed in the common garb of American citizenship. It was the necessity of this alchemy of assimilation that Illich questioned. In doing so, he also questioned whether Americans, particularly American Catholics, might relate to the Puerto Rican presence either as merely a social burden which demands help and assimilation, or as those who come bearing a gift, namely, a culturally distinct Catholic faith, to be received and embraced.

These questions reflect Illich's own journey as an immigrant, a journey which traversed significant social and cultural distance from both priestly colleagues as well as the parishioners he felt called to serve. As Francine du Plessix-Gray (1970) points out in her biographical profile, Illich, like the Puerto Ricans, also arrived in New York as someone whose background did not make it easy for him to 'pass' as American, or to 'fit in' in an obvious way in his new setting. Unlike the Irish priests among whom Illich would serve, Illich could not claim to come from a recognized immigrant population.

Another aspect of Illich's background which caused him to stand out in Washington

Heights was not so much being Eastern European, but rather his upbringing as an Eastern European aristocrat. Illich's Catholic father had been a wealthy landowner from Dalmatia, and subsequent to his father's death, Illich's family lived in several places in Europe, allowing Illich to learn to speak multiple languages and to develop a cosmopolitan sensibility. His family's circle of friends included intellectuals such as Rudolf Steiner and Rainer Maria Rilke (du Plessix-Gray, 1970: 242).

At the age of 24, Illich had master's degrees in theology and philosophy from the Gregorian University in Rome and by the time he arrived in the United States, he had completed a doctorate in the philosophy of history from the University of Salzburg, writing on Arnold Toynbee. Unlike his priestly colleagues who came from working-class Irish backgrounds, Illich was socialized as a highly-educated aristocrat. This was sometimes problematic. For example, upon meeting the newly arrived priest, the pastor of Incarnation Parish, Monsignor Casey, probed Illich:

'Ivan Illich? What kind of name is that to go around with?'  
'Ivan is Johann, Jean, John,' the young priest answered affably, always enjoying his control of many languages.  
'Ivan sounds Communist,' said his superior, 'we'll call you Johnny' (1970: 241).

On another occasion, Illich remarked to Father Conolly: "I wish like you I had been a slaughterhouse butcher, because I could be closer to the other priests". In response to Illich's comment about his background, Conolly replied: "You were not cast for the role of shepherd ... but for empire" (1970: 241).

The irony is that the distance which Illich felt between himself and his fellow priests is precisely what made it possible for him to excel as a parish priest among the Puerto Ricans. From his aristocratic, cosmopolitan upbringing, Illich cultivated his gift for languages and

openness to others. Thus, while his Irish colleagues tended not to embrace the task of learning Spanish and struggled to speak it fluently, Illich immersed himself in the life-world of Puerto Ricans and mastered Spanish in a matter of months. His competence and ease of interaction with the Puerto Rican community, as well as his devotion as a priest, would eventually gain the respect of the Irish clergy with whom he served. But, as du Plessix-Gray insightfully summarizes Illich's experience as a parish priest in New York, "Illich was to learn everything about the American clergy except how to be one of them" (1970: 244).

This 'difference-in-similarity', which marked Illich's way of relating with the priestly cohort, was nowhere more apparent than in the relationship between Illich and Cardinal Spellman. Despite their many differences, both Cardinal Spellman and Illich took the Puerto Rican 'Great Migration' seriously, though for different reasons. As the archbishop of the New York diocese, the apparent challenge for Spellman was how to assimilate the Puerto Rican constituency, then a quarter of the Catholic population of the archdiocese, into the mainstream of American Catholicism (1970: 241). Thus, from the archbishop's perspective, the burning issue was how to both help and integrate the new immigrants.

For Illich, this myopic focus on helping and integrating Puerto Ricans into the mainstream could also lead to a subtly condescending move of side-stepping an authentic encounter. The question for Illich was: In what way does the Puerto Rican presence offer both a challenge and a gift to American Catholicism? In Illich's view, the question of 'How can we help them fit in?' both misinterpreted the challenge and squandered the gift. Indeed, he thought that the most adequate way to respond began by recognizing that "[w]hat they need is not more help but less categorization according to previous schemes, and more understanding" (COA: 40).

Through his experiences and relationships within the Puerto Rican immigrant

community in New York City, as well as from his trips to the island of Puerto Rico, Illich was able to draw some crucial insights regarding their background and their ways of adapting to life on the US mainland. In effect, Illich asked the question: How can Puerto Ricans tell and live out their story as immigrants as an alternative to the dominant story of ‘before, we were immigrants, but now we have become Americans’?

In an early essay entitled “Not Foreigners, Yet Foreign”, Illich makes the case that Puerto Ricans are not only relative newcomers, but more significantly, “a new type of immigrant: not a European who had left home for good and strove to become an American, but an American citizen” who is immigrating, perhaps temporarily, from an island to the mainland (COA: 34). More specifically, Illich identifies a seeming paradox related to the Puerto Rican presence, namely, that “[t]hese Puerto Ricans are not foreigners, and yet they are more foreign than most of the immigrants who preceded them” (COA: 31). This paradox, Illich suggests, requires closer attention, because understood stereotypically, it tends either towards xenophobia, that is, ‘These newcomers are not like us’, or towards the ‘sameness fallacy’ of ‘These newcomers are just like us, immigrants who became Americans’.

Illich is responding here to how Americanization creates a stage upon which all immigrant identities gain a new *telos*. All lives that enter upon this stage must be assimilated into the new ‘we’ of American citizenship, a process in which immigrants are stripped of cultural heritage and identities as primary markers, in order to be reborn as Americans clothed with the badge of citizenship. It is a corrupted conversion narrative, one in which the immigrant subjectivities are not so much transformed as they are swallowed and lost within the contours of Americanization with its grand narrative about the remaking of immigrants into the image of a given idealized American.

It is important to recognize that within the alchemic process of immigration

transformation, two crucial marks identified immigrants who ‘passed’ as Americans: the ability to pass as white (Jacobson, 1998),<sup>2</sup> and the ability to speak English. In this way, one’s perceived racial identity and spoken tongue become decisive agents in ‘the alchemy of Americanization’, the rite of passage by which immigrants or the ‘American-yet-other’ lose one set of identity markers in order to find themselves as fully American.

To appreciate the fullness of Illich’s cultural commentary is to recognize how it cuts as a double-edged sword. Illich challenges a veil of cultural stereotypes in order to cast new light on the Puerto Rican paradox: while their “history is more foreign to Europe than to America” (COA: 35), they are yet perceived as the immigrants who are the most foreign of all. Illich, then, focuses on the Puerto Ricans in order for American citizens, especially those of immigrant nationalities and cultural heritages, to see the Puerto Ricans differently, or less differently, as the case may be, and to recognize the contribution their presence brings (COA: 40). In this I would suggest that Illich offers his commentary on the challenge and gift of the Puerto Rican presence as a kind of mirror in which Americans might see themselves. In other words, inside of his plea for “less categorization” and “more understanding”, Illich cuts deeply against the grain of Americanization as the blessed destiny of every immigrant, thereby challenging it as a desirable certainty.

Illich, himself an immigrant, both does and does not submit to this process of stripping and being clothed. He does learn to submit to his clerical role and priestly work in the church, just as he submits to the work of language learning: crucially, he navigates in English and learns Spanish, the language of the new immigrant.

Within the Puerto Rican community, Illich not only embraces their language, but also their festivals and the shape of their everyday life. He learns how to embody the inflections of

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<sup>2</sup> “The European immigrants’ experience was decisively shaped by their entering an arena where European – that is to say, whiteness – was among the most important possession one could lay claim to. It was their *whiteness*, not any kind of New World magnanimity, that opened the Golden Door” (Jacobson, 1998: 8).

their speech as well as the rhythm of their silences (COA: 41-51). He learns the nuances of their way of being Catholic. He does not fetishize their differences from the distance of a tolerant, proto-multiculturalist observer, but rather he celebrates them and their heritage. In short, his witness among them, for them, and against the alchemy of Americanization, celebrates a different kind of newness and change. It is not a stripping in order to become culturally naked before the dominant cultural other, but a kind of becoming that offers a gift to the other and to Catholicism in America.

Thus, Illich's response to the 'Great Migration' and his relationship with the Puerto Rican people demonstrated his desire to chart a 'third way' between mere cultural assimilation and mere tolerance. Arguably, the most profound and obvious example of this took place when Illich unfolded the newness of Puerto Rican outsider immigrant status into a ritualized celebration in which they could participate as insiders. He organized a Puerto Rican Catholic folk *fiesta*, an event which exceeded all expectations:

In 1955, [Illich] organized a Fiesta de San Juan [at Fordham University] to serve as a day for Puerto Rican Catholics to celebrate their religious and cultural heritage. Naming the event after the patron saint of Puerto Rico, Illich conceived of the celebration on the model of traditional *fiestas patronales*, which freely mixed religious processions and a solemn high mass with picknicking, card playing, music, dance, and theatre...On June 23, the eve of the feast, the police estimated they would need officers to control a crowd of about 5,000; the next day, 35,000 people descended on Fordham for a celebration of ethnic cultural identity unprecedented in postwar America (Shannon, 2013: 7).

### **Questioning the Alliance(s) for Progress and “The Seamy Side of Charity”**

Not long after the record-breaking festal crowd gathered for the San Juan Mass at Fordham University, Illich moved from serving the Puerto Rican community in New York City to serving them on the island itself. At the request of Cardinal Spellman, Illich was

appointed as both a Monsignor and the Vice-Rector of the University of Puerto Rico, where he served from 1956-1961. As part of the pastoral work of this appointment, Illich administered a learning center where ‘Yankees’, as he often described them, could come not only to learn Spanish, but to undergo an immersion experience in Puerto Rican culture, and to enter into what he described as “the spirit of poverty” (COA: 42).

Illich’s time in Puerto Rico, however, was shorter than he expected. Although he was well-suited for his administrative and pastoral duties and at ease with life on the island, by October 1960 the conflict between Illich and the Catholic hierarchy had come to a breaking point over Illich’s criticisms of the Catholic Church’s political lobbying. In late 1960, Illich left Puerto Rico to establish a new learning center. After a four-month pilgrimage from Santiago, Chile to Caracas, Venezuela, Illich continued his journey northward, arriving in Mexico. By the spring of 1961, Illich had settled outside Mexico City, in Cuernavaca, where he established his new operational base.

In this alternative learning center in the outskirts of Mexico City, Illich was not retreating from the prophetic stance he established in New York City and Puerto Rico. Rather, Illich was repositioning himself to subvert another dominant certainty that had emerged in tandem with Americanization: the certainty that ‘alliances for progress’, whether the US government-sponsored Peace Corps or the ecclesiastically-sponsored Papal Corps, were compatible with the incarnational logic of Christian mission in the Americas.

The significance of Illich’s social location in relation to North-South relations, and his vehement critique of alliances for progress, is seen against the backdrop of the shifting geopolitical landscape at the beginnings of 1960s. By 1961, this landscape configured around ‘Cold War’ polarities: the capitalist democracies of the West, following the lead of the United States, and the communist regimes of the East, following the Soviet Union. Within such a



configuration, the Latin American continent found itself positioned not only as the South or as part of 'Third World', but also center-stage, as the strategic zone upon which these superpowers, 'West' and 'East', desired to extend their alliances, their markets, and their power.

As I have indicated earlier, shortly after taking office as US President in 1960, John F. Kennedy launched an ambitious international relations program known as the Alliance for Progress. This alliance was, in effect, a repeat performance of the post-World War II Marshall Plan for rebuilding an allied Europe. This time the US would be building alliances with Southern neighbors, pledging \$20 billion dollars in US investment between 1961-1969. To give this strategic alliance a face and to sustain its 'relational heartbeat', Kennedy also established a Peace Corps, a voluntary army of young men and women who were prepared to serve the cause of progressive democracy, not as officers in the US military, but as patriotic ambassadors of American goodwill and benevolence. These were America's 'secular missionaries' responding to Kennedy's famous clarion call to service, "ask[ing] not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country".<sup>3</sup>

What is less well known is that just before Kennedy enlisted the Peace Corps to fight the so-called 'war on poverty' in the Third World, Pope John XXIII issued another call for service in the South. Illich describes this call in the following way:

In 1960 Pope John XXII enjoined all United States and Canadian religious superiors to send, within ten years, 10 per cent of their effective strength in priests and nuns to Latin America. This papal request was interpreted by most United States Catholics as a call to help modernize the Latin American Church along the lines of the North American model. The continent on which half of all Catholics live had to be saved from 'Castro-Communism' (COA: 53).

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<sup>3</sup> This clarion call, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," was delivered by President John F. Kennedy at his inauguration in Washington on January 20, 1961.

Thus, in 1960, the Pope called upon religious superiors in North America to tithe people instead of money, calling upon the Catholic Church in North America to send ten per cent of its priests and those with religious vocations as an offering for service in ‘defense’ of the Latin American Catholic Church. In this way, the Catholic Church established its own volunteer army, not a Peace Corps, but the Papal Corps.

At the same time that the Pope was mobilizing the Papal Corps in the North, Illich was establishing not one, but two learning centers: CIC (*Centro de Investigaciones Culturales*) in Cuernavaca, and in collaboration with Brazilian colleagues such as Dom Helder Câmara, CENFI (*Centro de Formação Intercultural*) was launched as a ‘sister organization’ in Anápolis, Brazil (Zaldívar and Uceda, 2010: 3).<sup>4</sup> Both centers were linked to the CIF (Center for Intercultural Formation), a Catholic missions and research center based at Fordham University in New York. This linkage back to American Catholicism is not incidental to Illich’s purposes: he founded CIC, later renamed CIDOC (Center for Intercultural Documentation), as an alternative learning center for North American priests and missionaries coming to serve in Latin America. In other words, he was preparing a place to receive the ‘invasion’ of the Papal Corps. Illich neither tried to block the missionary invasion, which he knew was impossible, nor did he simply accept the cultural imperialism and sense of American exceptionalism which infected the Papal Corps. Rather, he created a center that provided intercultural missionary formation while subverting the imposition of the dominant American cultural values which undermine missionary presence.

While committed to the work of theological formation, CIDOC was less a conventional seminary and more of a free university that combined language training, library research, seminary-based reflection, and a small publishing house. Rather than focusing on

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doctrinal teaching, the focus at CIDOC was on cultivating a certain kind of awareness by submerging a Christian theological vision into the realities of socio-political change in Latin America: poverty, schooling, transportation, modes of production, and energy consumption, to name a few. Mexican priest and CIDOC collaborator Julio Torres described CIDOC's aims as "provid[ing] a pastoral method more deeply rooted in the cultural tradition of Latin America, and to combat the prevailing trend of developing countries imposing their solutions on underdeveloped countries" (du Plessix-Gray, 1970: 276-277). Illich said something similar, summarizing the ethos at CIDOC as follows: "I would like to help people smile...smile the social system apart. Here at CIDOC we smile violence apart. It is a place where violent people can come and learn *lo respeto para la vida* [respect for life]" (Illich, in 1970: 274). One of Illich's favorite quotes came from Ché Guevara: "One must toughen up without losing one's tenderness" (Illich in 1970: 282).

In many ways, Illich's CIDOC was to Latin America in the 1960s what Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'Finkenwalde experiment' was to Germany in the 1930s (see Bonhoeffer, [1939] 1996). Both Finkenwalde and CIDOC were founded by visionary Christian leaders who positioned themselves on the margins of established ecclesial structures; both were committed to catalyzing an authentically Christian counter-witness to the distortions of culturally dominant forms of Christianity. Bonhoeffer's experiment attempted to reformulate and delink Christian witness from its captivity within the emerging social imagination of the German nation and the 'volk-theology' which emerged and solidified between World War I and World War II. Illich's experiment attempted to examine and delink Christian missionary activity from its corruption within emerging alliances for progress which inextricably linked the Americas in the post-World War II era. At the heart of both experiments was an emphasis upon cultural *kenosis* as a process of guiding participants in 'self-emptying' or unlearning the

dominant habits of social division.

Strikingly, in his resettlement and his agenda with these learning centers, Illich manages to position himself and his centers inside official Catholic missionary structures, in order to question them. Officially, CIDOC existed to provide intercultural missionary training, a process of formation that embedded rigorous language study with immersion into the cultural nuances of peoples and places. Unofficially, CIDOC existed to question the Papal Corps as an alliance for progress (COA: 57). More precisely, what Illich questioned, and attempted to subvert, was not missionary activity *per se*, but the co-optation of Catholic missionary presence inside another missionary endeavor. In Illich's view, the work of the Papal Corps was taking place on the stage of the Alliance for Progress in such a way that the Christian gospel was being cloaked inside the missionary expansion of the 'American way of life' (COA: 22). Illich argued, like many radicals in Latin America, that the Alliance for Progress was, in effect, "an alliance for the progress of the middle classes" (COA: 253). As such, the missionary campaign of the Catholic Church, to the extent that was aligned with such an alliance, would end up training and sending "pawns of United States cultural imperialism" (COA: 253).

By the mid-1960s, in the light of less-than-desirable numbers on the ground in Latin America, the North American church was struggling to maintain enthusiasm for the missionary effort directed from the US homeland. In order to regitalize support and funds for the 'Help Save Latin America' cause (COA: 57), a large conference was planned for both Catholic and Protestant representatives from the United States and Latin America in Boston in 1967.

In January 1967, just days before the conference, Illich published his criticisms of North American missionary efforts in the Jesuit magazine *America*, calling for a re-

examination of the entire missionary enterprise in an essay entitled “The Seamy Side of Charity”. Illich’s essay seems to state the obvious: that from a numerical perspective, the Papal Corps could hardly be called a success. After five years, the project had offered less than one-tenth of the ‘relational tithes’, with only 1,622 responding to the “call for 20,000” (COA: 57). At another level, Illich tries to move the debate away from questions of missionary strategy, or means, to the unaddressed, but vital, questions of missionary purpose. He turns the spotlight away from numbers and intended outcomes and turns it onto the reality of the unintended or unwanted side effects of missionary intervention. Thus, Illich’s basic question is: “Why not, for once, consider the seamy side of charity; weigh the inevitable burdens foreign help imposes on the South American Church; taste the bitterness of the damage done by our sacrifices?” (COA: 58).

By returning to Illich’s attention to the seamy side of charity, clarification is needed regarding what he is and is not saying about missionary presence. First, he is not condemning all missionary efforts. He is not questioning whether such missionary ventures can do good or lead to any positive change. Nor is he trying to undermine “the unquestionable joys of giving and the fruits of receiving” (COA: 59). But he is saying that such projects cannot rest on “uncritical imagination and sentimental judgment”, that is, on ways of thinking and acting which swallow “Latin America needs You”, and “Red danger”, as unquestionably authentic calls for Christian mission. By referring to the Papal Corps itself as “a peculiar alliance for the progress of the Latin American Church” (COA: 57), Illich argues that the church must attend to the way in which its presence can be fused into, and therefore, confused with, “the many-faceted effort to keep Latin America within the ideologies of the West” (COA: 58). Put more strongly: “Men and money sent with missionary motivation carry a foreign Christian message, a foreign pastoral approach, and a foreign political message. They also bear the

mark of North America capitalism of the 1950s” (COA: 58). Illich is saying that the motivation driving “well-intentioned missionary ventures” (COA: 58) is not the most important issue at stake. Rather, he wants to draw our attention to the arena in which those intentions come to life, as well as their potentially undesirable consequences:

We must acknowledge that missionaries can be pawns in a world ideological struggle and that it is blasphemous to use the gospel to prop up any social or political system. When men and money are sent into a society within the framework of a program, they bring ideas that live after them. It has been pointed out, in the case of the Peace Corps, that the cultural mutation catalyzed by a small foreign group might be more effective than all the immediate services it renders. The same can be true of the North American missionary – close to home, having great means at this disposal, frequently on a short-term assignment – who moves into an area of intense United States cultural and economic colonization. He is part of this sphere of influence, and, at times, intrigue. Through the United States missionary, the United States shadows and colors the public image of the Church. The influx of United States missionaries coincides with the Alliance for Progress, Camelot, and CIA projects and looks like a baptism of all three. The Alliance appears directed by Christian justice and is not seen for what it is: a deception designed to maintain the status quo, albeit variously motivated... Within these realities, the United States missionary tends to fulfill the traditional role of a colonial power’s lackey chaplain (COA: 65-66).

The fundamental issue for Illich is not whether the church’s primary motivation for investing heavily in social projects and facilitating significant funds “for the poor” was, in fact, to “contain Castroism and assure its institutional respectability” (COA: 61). Perhaps those two realities cannot be neatly separated from one another. Nevertheless, what remains clear for Illich is this:

By becoming an ‘official’ agency of one kind of progress, the Church ceases to speak for the underdog who is outside all agencies but who is an ever growing majority. By accepting the power to help, the Church necessarily must denounce a Camilo Torres, who symbolizes the power of renunciation. Money thus builds the Church a ‘pastoral’ structure beyond its means and makes it a political power (COA: 61).

Speaking as a voice within the Latin American church, Illich attributes the negative result of this inter-American alliance to the false dependence it generates upon the North American church. In his analysis, it is precisely “[t]his kind of foreign generosity [that] has enticed the Latin American Church into becoming a satellite to North Atlantic cultural phenomena and policy....The Latin American Church flowers anew by returning to what the Conquest stamped her: a colonial plant that blooms because of foreign cultivation” (COA: 59). Without attending to the seamy side of this partnership, the result is a double-blindness: the North American church does not have to “face the painful side of generosity: the burden that a life gratuitously offered imposes on the recipient” (COA: 65), while the Latin American church does not see beyond the horizon of this disabling dependence on foreign exports.

Illich diagnoses this surplus of North American clergy, as well as other debilitating aspects of this “foreign transfusion”, as symptoms of denial on the part of the American church to “face up to the sociopolitical consequences involved in their well-intentioned missionary ventures” (COA: 58). At a deeper level, Illich writes to expose and repair a wound caused by ecclesial failure. Specifically, there is the failure which results from “the underdeveloped ecclesiology of United States clerics who direct the ‘sale’ of American good intentions” (COA: 68). More generally, however, there is the failure which comes from fear, of becoming open to new ecclesial forms of life:

Exporting Church employees to Latin American masks a universal and unconscious fear of a new Church. North and South American authorities, differently motivated but equally fearful, become check quote accomplices in maintaining a clerical and irrelevant Church. Sacralizing employees and property, this Church becomes progressively more blind to the possibilities of sacralizing person and community....In fear, we plan *our* Church with statistics, rather than trustingly search for the living Church which is right among us (COA: 64, 68).

The issue which Illich raises is: What kind of church are we prepared to imagine and inhabit?

I will return to this question later in thesis, but at this point, I want to highlight how Illich's pilgrimage in the Americas both anticipates and illumines the *viradas* of my own journey. Observing Illich's arrival in the United States and his relationship with the Puerto Rican community, there is a resonance between the dynamics of his 'being sent' as a missionary priest in the United States and our 'being sent' from there. In the same way that he was 'caught' and drawn into the Puerto Rican community in New York City, so too, we were 'caught' by the presence of the African-American church in Durham, North Carolina. Just as Illich 'crossed over' in order to join in their ways of worship, we also found ourselves 'crossing over' into a social and ecclesial space which challenged the two dominant modes of relationality generated around the 'color line': the drive towards assimilation, or 'passing' and becoming the same as the other; and the drive towards multicultural tolerance, or maintaining a tolerant, yet detached relation to the other.

Illich's journey southward into Puerto Rico and Mexico also illumines the difficulties and possibilities of delinking an authentic missionary encounter from the "good intentions". He asserts that paternalistic forms of missionary service are hidden inside other 'narratives of inclusion', in this case, the implicit narrative of American exceptionalism. Indeed, one can read Illich's critique of the Papal Corps as an 'alliance for progress' as a more expansive critique of the subtle dynamics of missionary idealism that I experienced as a US missionary in Brazil. I am referring now to that subtle form of control which understands mission as diagnosing and meeting needs, rather than responding to encounters. Thus, I am suggesting that both in the United States and across the Americas, Illich's witness illumines and deepens the questionings of my own *viradas*. He does so by discerning and responding to missionary encounters of assimilation that are de-incarnational. With this in mind, I turn more closely to the center of his theological imagination, the Incarnation.



## **The Center of the Journey: Turning to the Incarnation**

In this section of my argument, I want to shift the focus of attention from the arc of Illich's journey into and across the Americas, and towards the center of his own Christian imagination. Here, the Incarnation and the incarnational logic of Christian life must be attended to. At the same time, I want to return to a question which I raised earlier in this chapter, namely, the ambiguity surrounding Illich's legacy, particularly as it relates to Christian theology. Close readers and friends of Illich have appreciated Illich's "humanist radicalism" (Fromm, in COA: 7-10), whether they read him primarily as a Christian intellectual, a social critic, a "critical traditionalist" (Schroyer, 2009: 9), or simply a post-development thinker who was ahead of his time. Nonetheless, readers less familiar with the overall shape of Illich's life and *corpus*, or less generous in their reading of it, may ask: What distinguishes Illich's stance from that of being just a clever social critic or historian?

To be clear, the ambiguity surrounding Illich's legacy tends not to be *ad hominem*. It is not concerned with whether Illich was an authentic Christian, since no one appears to doubt his character or his abiding Christian faith (Sbert, 2009). Rather, a lingering question around Illich's witness seems to be this: To what extent are Illich's iconoclastic engagements with the dominant certainties of modernity, such as Americanization and alliances for progress, related to his theological convictions as a Christian intellectual? What, if anything, provides the legitimacy for reading Illich's social criticism as theologically-imbued investigation? Thus, the question is: How decisive is Jesus Christ for Illich's personal witness, the art of his living, and the art of his writing? Looking at Illich's more well-known social criticism, especially from the 1970s, it is not at all clear that the person of Jesus Christ is decisive for his intellectual project. Most of what he published in the 1970s and until the late 1980s contains

no explicit Christological references. Yet, I would argue that in the light of Illich's early writings until the late 1960s (COA and TCCD), as well as the later books of interviews with David Cayley (IIC and TRNOTF), it can be seen just how decisive the person of Jesus Christ is for Illich's stance.

In this next section, I will respond to the questions I raised above by continuing my turn to Illich as a Christian witness. My aim is not to demonstrate, as Hoinacki has done, that Illich was "doing theology in a new way" (Hoinacki, in IIC: 54). While Hoinacki's nuanced reading of Illich is convincing, I am arguing a slightly different point. Nor is my aim to prove that Illich operated *qua* theologian; rather, it is to show that his witness is imbued by a theological center: the Incarnation. Therefore, in this section I shift the focus of attention from Illich's stance against dominant certainties towards Illich's stance as an intellectual who operates from and points to a 'center', that is, towards Illich's stance for the Incarnation as a personal reality in which Christians are called to participate (1 John 4:9). To do so, I will attend to the way that Illich imagines the Christian life unfolding inside a theodramatic horizon.

### **Attending to the Shape of the Theodrama**

In *Theology and the Drama of History* (2005), Ben Quash develops a theodramatic account of history, which he distinguishes from a 'theology of history' and characterizes as "heuristic for thinking theologically about history" (Quash, 2005: 9). As distinct from a dramatic conception of history, non-dramatic accounts tend to fall into one of two categories: either the "epic", which emphasizes an objective, or overarching coherence to history, or the "lyric", which highlights the subjective, the contingent, self-involving, and indeterminate character of historicity (2005: 35-39). According to Quash, the problem with non-dramatic

accounts of history, and human action, is the inherent tendency to make either subjects (the lyric account), or structures (the epic account), the key to interpreting how we live and act within history (2005: 2-3). Both the epic and lyric dimensions have their place. When taken alone, however, each is insufficient, either absolutizing a contingent structural configuration to the detriment of subjects (the epic alone), or isolating human subjectivity or agencies in abstraction from its necessarily social, or structured, context (the lyric alone). In relation to Illich's journey into and across the Americas, one can read *Americanization and the Alliances of Progress* as an overly epic process of assimilation.

A theodramatic approach, Quash argues, is especially suited for attending to the complex nuances of theology's subject matter as well as avoiding certain nagging tendencies, such as an inability or unwillingness to 'take history seriously'. While history does matter to theology, given the intellectual trajectory of the West, and more specifically, the shaping of academic disciplines within that trajectory, history's place within theology cannot be taken for granted. As Quash points out, theology does not differ from other disciplines of inquiry because it is concerned with a different history than they are; rather, theology is concerned with a different way of reading history, namely, an eschatological account that reads "history as having an origin and end in God's purposes" (Quash, 2005: 6). A theodramatic approach, then, encourages and enables theological reflection that holds together history and eschatology.

In the light of Quash's insights, I suggest that Illich's own pilgrimage illumines the theodramatic shape of the Christian faith. Illich expresses the lyric dimension in terms of the early Christian notion of *revolutio*, or *reformare*, that is, "self-renewal, the renewal of the person, which God will perform, as the major *social* task of a Christian community" (IIC: 211). He expresses the epic as the perception of living within a providentially ordered

cosmos, “a world in the hands of God” (TRNOTF: Ch. 3). Moreover, what Illich calls “the journey of our life in God” (PAF: 1) holds the lyric and the epic together.

### **Following the Naked Christ**

In an interview with David Cayley (TRNOTF: 146), Illich explicitly addresses the ambiguity of his witness:

Again and again during the last forty years I have been asked the question, ‘Where do you stand?’ I have usually, at the beginning of any major lecture series, told my audience that I stand within the Christian faith, in order that they should be aware that my prejudices may differ from theirs (TRNOTF: 146).

In many ways, this conversation continues another conversation with Cayley, one in which Illich interprets his own life in terms of a medieval motto: “*nudum christum nudus sequere*, [which means] nakedly following the naked Christ” (IIC: 283). While Illich has very little to say directly about the concept of discipleship, his motto, ‘following the naked Christ’, offers a gloss on Christian discipleship, as well as an interpretive lens for approaching Illich’s life and thought. Although not self-interpreting, the simplicity of the phrase does suggest a certain shape and logic to the Christian life. First, following is an action; it is what disciples do. It is their response to the call of Jesus to ‘Follow me’. Second, that response must be given in relation to the One who calls, something which sets up the turn to the naked Christ, the Savior who renounced the worldly power of Caesar and Pilate, the one through whom we are invited to enact “courageous, disciplined, self-critical renunciation accomplished in community” (TRNOTF: 44). Finally, that Christ is followed ‘nakedly’ suggests that the Incarnation is more than a key doctrinal locus; it means that all other claims on our lives are de-centered and re-centered by the authority of this person through whom we are called to live (Gal. 2:20; 1

John 4:9). The motto serves as an interpretive clue or key that points to the Incarnate Christ as the center of Illich's vision of the Christian life.

Another of Illich's friends, Domencio Farias, sheds further light on Illich's stance in his essay "In the Shadow of Jerome", where he also interprets Illich's life in comparison with 5<sup>th</sup> century scholar St Jerome. Farias' essay is an extended commentary on Illich's motto, also attributed to St Jerome (Farias, in IIC: 283). Like St Jerome, Illich was both a Dalmatian and "a wandering, homeless man, but one nevertheless rooted in a tradition that is itself tied to a particular land and history" (Mitcham, in TCII: 11). In his reading of Illich, Farias highlights how Illich's witness embodies the paradox of 'nomadic rootedness', a condition eloquently described as follows:

Jerome's call, *nudum Christum sequere*, follows an Abrahamic dispossession: 'Get thee out of thy country!' (Gen. 12:1). He is in the great tradition of the Exodus, of the individual and of a people who experience a God different from the other gods, those with fixed abodes in certain sites, of a God who passes over the earth and can be known only by someone disposed to see his back as he passes by – and to follow him (Farias, in TCII: 61-62).

Interpreting Illich's witness through the lens of the motto *nudum Christum sequere* involves what Farias calls a "hermeneutical leap" (TCII: 59). Such a leap requires attention to a pattern that emerges from the act of following, a pattern grounded in hearing and responding to a call in obedient trust. Seen in this light, Farias suggests that the tagline, 'following the naked Christ,' serves as the interpretive key by which "to grasp the essential unity of [Illich's life] – the unity of a way of living that saves itself by appearing to lose itself" (Farias, in TCII: 59).

Farias' interpretation of Illich asserts that the latter's life exemplifies the "storied witness" (McClendon, 2000: 350) of the people of God, a people who do not "live, move, and have their being" (Acts 17:28) in themselves, but rather who fully receive and become

themselves through following Another. More precisely, they become themselves through a relationship of call and response “with the voice of [the One] who speaks” (Illich, in IIC: 243). Only the Creator, Farias writes, is “the Major Transcendence”, but “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” (Farias, in TCII: 68).

Hoinacki throws light on this in his essay, “The Trajectory of Ivan Illich” (2003), where Hoinacki addresses the ambiguity of Illich’s legacy with the following insight:

I do not think that one can characterize Illich with any conventional label, whether that be of an academic discipline, such as sociologist, or a descriptive adjective, such as conservative. But I do think one can examine Illich’s life and work in terms of certain thematic threads, for his Christian faith, his practice of friendship, his relationship to words and Word, readiness for surprise, attention to the other, and so on. It is my contention that, given the trajectory of his life, his bios or curriculum vitae, the principal analytical concept giving intelligibility to the way he lived, to what he said and wrote, is his apophatic theological stance (Hoinacki, 2003: 384).

Without this interpretive key, Hoinacki insists, Illich’s interlocutors may end up with superficial or misleading readings that reduce him to a priest-theologian turned social critic, while in fact, Illich’s whole corpus may be read as way of “doing theology in a new way” (Hoinacki, quoted in IIC: 54). On Hoinacki’s reading, before 1971 Illich addressed audiences inside and outside the church, speaking openly as a “churchman” and “Catholic believer” (Hoinacki, 2003: 385). However, from 1971 on, beginning with *Deschooling Society*, Illich adopted an apophatic perspective, producing a series of books that were “apophatic explorations about God, the Church, and the believer’s movement toward God” (2003: 385).

In following Hoinacki’s, and Farias’, interpretation of Illich’s apophatic stance, it must be noted that, within theology, the concept of *apophasis* is a multivalent one, used variously to denote God’s transcendence, or otherness or hiddenness; a theological method also referred

to as the *via negativa*; and as a way of conceptualizing the iconic dimension of creation and, more precisely, of the human being as created in the image of God' (McFarland, 2001: 14-29; Jennings, 1996: 252-253; and Nellas, 1987: 21-104). While one could argue that Illich's use of *apophasis* overlaps with each of these three senses, I want to highlight how Illich's apophatic expression is not reducible to sheer negation, that is, 'not this', but rather is a form of iconoclasm for the sake of the truly iconic that comes to us through the Incarnation of the Word (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4). Illich engages 'what is but should not be', and in doing so, he "clears the way for surprise and mystery" (IIC: 242).

To summarize, Illich's life is expressed apophatically to the extent that it enacts an Abrahamic dispossession – a quality of creaturely freedom, a self-transcendence that is not self-referential, but rather 'ec-centric' – established in relation in the Incarnation as its 'center'. To describe Illich's stance as apophatic is to say that the shape is hidden within the act of responding to a call (Col. 3:3). This is because the fullness of his life, the "more than" of being "in Christ" (Rom. 5:9-10, 15, 17; 11:12), cannot be isolated in terms of the context of the following itself, whether that be Dalmatia, Austria, Italy, New York, Puerto Rico, Cuernavaca, or Bremen. Illich would call that "misplaced concreteness" (IIC: 287). Instead, such ec-centric fullness originates from the One who is followed: Christ, the "image of God" (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4), through whom our creaturely *imago* is being renewed (Col. 3:10).

### **Illich, Incarnation, and the Art of Suffering**

I want to return to a question posed earlier: How decisive is Jesus Christ for Illich's personal witness, not only for the art of his writing but for his art of living as well? Through the interpretive lens of his close friends, I have examined the sense in which the Incarnation is the center of Illich's Christian faith. If, as I have claimed, an adequate reckoning of Illich's

witness must take into account not only what he wrote but how and why he lived as he did, then it is crucial that we attend even more closely to the self-involving, the ‘lyrical’, contours of Illich’s incarnational imagination. Here I would like to offer a further glimpse into Illich’s own expression of living through the Incarnation (1 John 4:9), by examining his art of suffering.

By his ‘art of suffering’, I am referring to how Illich underwent, literally, suffered, bodily pain during the last two decades of his life. In the early 1980s, a small bump appeared on the right side of Illich’s face. Over time, a collection of what appeared to be small tumors began to protrude from Illich’s face, disfiguring the shape of his jaw line. Towards the end of his life, these reached the size of a grapefruit, and the pressure caused intense pain. During those years, Illich consulted with trusted friends and was approached by others concerning the growth, yet he decided to leave it alone. He neither romanticized his condition nor tried to escape from it by ‘killing the pain’. Rather, he decided to bear it “as a cross that he should not try to avoid bearing” (Cayley, in TRNOTF: 38).

The reasons for this are complex. It should be noted that this was not because Illich’s opposition to medical treatment was absolute. Indeed, he had submitted to previous medical procedures such as having surgery for a hernia, a tooth treated and extracted by a dentist, and visiting an optometrist for eye examinations in order to wear eyeglasses. As Cayley points out, Illich’s decision to leave the tumor alone was not a fatalistic gamble. In fact, a surgical intervention could have caused the growth, if cancerous, to metastasize. There was also no guarantee that surgery would remove all of the growth without removing part of Illich’s jaw and tongue. Ultimately, Illich made a choice that was not predicated on medical probabilities and risk calculation but on the conviction that his pain and affliction was a personal way of embracing “his share in Christ’s suffering” (TRNOTF: 39; Col. 1:24). Thus, for more than



two decades, Illich endured this acute pain, but it seems that he did more than ‘just bear it’.

As Cayley describes:

[He] did it with good humour, great generosity with his time and counsel, expansive enjoyment of life’s pleasure, and a growing sweetness in which whatever was left of a great man’s pride seemed simply to burn away. By the end, he had drained his cup to the last drops and one morning laid down and peacefully died. No one who knew him well would have dared to say that he died ‘of cancer’ (Cayley, in TRNOTF: 39-40).

Similarly, when asked the repeated question, “What did [Illich] die of?”, Lee Hoinacki typically responded by pointing out how this was the wrong question: “Illich did not die of *something*, as he was not living *with* something, that is, he didn’t have a disease, he didn’t suffer an illness” (Hoinacki, 2006: 101 [original emphasis]). For Hoinacki, the most adequate answer to the question, Why did Illich not have the tumors removed? has to do with the overall way that Illich lived, “as a man of deep faith, a faith focused principally on his belief in the Incarnation” (2006: 108). He writes:

Illich was a Christian, a man deeply imbued with the traditions of the Church. Among these, the most important is that derived from Scripture. Living with him, I came to sense the nature and depth of his insertion in these traditions. For example, from the way he prayed the psalms in the Divine Office with me each day, I picked up a glimpse of his understanding of these words and his faith in the reality behind them. From his casual but repeated remarks, I could infer something of the essence of this faith, namely, its childlike character. Although he never explicitly spoke of this, I have good evidence that he embraced the words of St. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians: ‘We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body’ (2 Cor. 4:10) (2006: 108).

Extending Hoinacki’s commentary, it could be said that to recognize how he lived and died in the light of the Incarnation is to recognize both the ‘No’ and the ‘Yes’ embedded in Illich’s art of suffering. In a real sense, Illich’s ‘No’ was directed towards the way the power of the medical system turns, a power generated by the practice of medical diagnosis. Illich’s

stance, as a student of the history of medical practice in the West, does not deny that mainstream medicine is capable of diagnosing human illness, but, rather, he would say that modern, or allopathic, medicine operates with a severely limited notion of diagnosis, to the extent that it reduces diagnosis to “the art or act of identifying a disease from its signs or symptoms” (Hoinacki, 2006: 104). The problem is not so much an inability to see, but rather the presumption of being able to see fully. It is a misguided perception which assumes authority of vision.

Hoinacki points out that Illich’s suspicion of medical diagnosis must be seen in the light of two other moments of diagnosis which touched him during his youth. The first episode occurred when Hitler’s Germany annexed his home country of Austria. Illich was twelve years old at the time. Through the power of Nazi diagnosis, “[i]n one moment...[Illich] was transformed from a half-Aryan to a half-Jew”, and, therefore, into an inferior body. A second episode occurred soon afterwards, when a school official effectively parroted back the same Nazi sentiment by displaying Illich in front of other children saying, “A typical Jewish profile. That is the blight we must erase from our land!” (Hoinacki, 2006: 104).

As Hoinacki recounts Illich’s own reflections about being ‘diagnosed’ as a youth, he observes two aspects which stand out. First, Illich’s self-image was not destroyed; rather, he gained “an insight into the reality of modern medical definitions and procedures” (Hoinacki, 2006: 104). He recognized that, although the school official clearly diagnosed Illich as fully Jewish, and therefore inferior, this pronouncement did not render him more or less Jewish. Similarly, after receiving (inconclusive) medical diagnoses regarding the growth on the right side of his face, Illich did not see himself as more or less diseased.

In Illich's view, such diagnostic practices both produce and are of symptomatic of a "culture of disembodiment, of *disincarnation*" (Duden, in TCII: 219 [original emphasis]). To submit oneself fully to such diagnostic practices would be tantamount to having one's experience of embodiment stripped away and inscribed inside a diagnostical profile. Thus, while both of his experiences were painful and humiliating in different ways, Illich's 'No' was his refusal to submit to the power of "any mega-technique that promises to transform the *conditio humana*" (Illich, in Hoinacki, 2006: 117). Rather than submit to such power, he resisted by bearing pain and practicing the art of suffering. He remained the same person, not a projection of another's diagnosis.

A younger Illich had written incisive critiques which focused on the way the medical establishment expropriated health. As noted earlier, however, his stance was never a fundamentalist aversion to all things medical. Illich was not against medicine *per se*, but rather against the way contemporary medicalization "lays the basis for a new model of the disenfleshed ego; the replacement of the always tragic human condition by a technogenic condition set on improvement, of hope by expectations...[of] pain management in lieu of the art of suffering" (Duden, in TCII: 228). Illich was against how the medicalization of life trumps the art of suffering, thereby distorting the human condition. In a letter to Lee Hoinacki, another of Illich's friends, Aaron Falbel, describes Illich's 'No' against that distortion:

That lump, in a way, was a gift, an act of grace, albeit a painful one. It let Ivan 'say' what he had been saying in his books in a way that went beyond words....Ivan's 'NO!' was more than just a condemnation of the medical system. I used to think when contemplating Ivan's decision about his tumor, 'Well how can the author of *Medical Nemesis* do otherwise?'...I now see that Ivan's 'No!' went beyond medicine. It was a no to the entire technological project, the whole realm of *la technique*. I see that Ivan's 'NO!' was an embodiment of everything he tried to say in *all* his books, not just *Medical Nemesis*. And, ultimately, like all his books, his decision is a reflection of his

faith...His 'NO!' was the ultimate apophatic act. So not only does the modern world prevent or discourage what you call 'genuine human acts', but it also sabotages, thwarts, usurps the possibility for one to be a good Christian – not entirely perhaps, but to a very large extent. Is this not the nature of evil, as you and Ivan see it, in the modern world, that this network of systems and institutions eclipses the good? It is as if these systems and institutions are saying: 'You don't have to be a good Christian anymore. We have taken over the job. You are relieved of your duty'. As I read Ivan, and things you have written, this voice is the voice of evil in the world today (quoted in Hoinacki, 2006: 117-118).

If Illich's 'No' was directed towards the illusory expectations of the technological project, then his 'Yes' was a response submerged in the reality of Christ's own suffering.

Once again, Hoinacki summarizes Illich's sense of this reality:

In the feelings and actions of Jesus Christ, a new tradition was begun. For the past two thousand years, Christians in pain have looked to that night in the garden. There one hopes to find, not only an example to follow, but also the divine strength to bear with one's flesh and affliction. As Illich strongly implied, to ignore this scene and seek instead a pursuit of health is to create 'the principal impediment to suffering experienced as a dignified, meaningful, patient, loving, beautiful, resigned and even a joyful embodiment'. Since Illich was a believer, a Christian, and a Catholic, he went before all to *this* tradition to find his way. He knew other traditions, but he chose his own, the one in which he was born and died (Hoinacki, 2006: 117).

With his face, Illich ultimately 'spoke' the loudest, clearest and most profound words of his personal witness, for "[t]he bump on the side of his face allowed him to live two lives simultaneously: the outward living that rejected the ministrations of mainstream medicine, and the inward living that reached into eternity" (Hoinacki, 2006: 115-116).

Through his art of suffering, Illich embraced the goodness and fragility of the human condition, a condition that includes pain and mortality. He resisted being assimilated within a technological 'mega-machine' that promised to manage human life from cradle to grave. He did so because of his faith in the Incarnation, his trust in being included to receive the gift of Life that can neither be managed, nor destroyed:

Hypostatic life has its historical roots in the revelation that one human person, Jesus, is also God. This one life is the substance of Martha's faith, and of ours. We hope to receive this Life as a gift, and we hope to share it . . . To be merely alive does not mean having this Life. This Life is gratuitous, beyond and above having been born and living (IMOP: 225).

## **Discerning Incarnational Difference**

In *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (2004), Sam Wells offers an account of the dramatic shape of the Christian story that complements Quash's insights. More specifically, Wells explores how the Christian theodrama as a five-act play might be approached:<sup>5</sup>

- Act 1: Creation
- Act 2: Israel
- Act 3: Jesus
- Act 4: Church
- Act 5: Eschaton

Wells describes the relationship of acts and our being 'placed' in Act 4 within the theodrama as follows:

This is a truly theo-dramatic model...The principles and the narrative of the first act continue through the three that follow; the covenant of the second act is alive and significant in the third and fourth; the theme of the third is the key to understanding all the other; and the character of the fourth ('the holy city') is at least partly reserved, though transformed, in the fifth. The role of the fourth balances the need for a genuinely divine shape. If the fifth act is explored too fully the drama becomes too epic; if it is ignored, the drama become too lyric. It is in preserving the delicate balance of this fivefold shape that the genuine theodrama of the five-act play unfolds (Wells, 2004: 53).

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<sup>5</sup> The notion of the five-act play is not original to Wells; rather his account amends Tom Wright's proposal (Wells, 2004: 51-53).

To say that the Incarnation is the center of Illich's faith is also to recognize how the Incarnation 'places' us within the theodrama between the climax (Act 3) and the end (Act 5). Illich offers his most explicit account of the Incarnation as an historical turning point in his commentary on the parable of the Good Samaritan, which might be read as his 'gospel in brief'. While Illich never produced a systematic reflection on this parable, his reflections on it are woven throughout the text of *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich* (2005), especially in the sections entitled "Gospel" and "*Mysterium*".

### **Beginning with the Incarnation: Act 3**

Framing his reflections on the Good Samaritan, Illich makes two observations regarding the surprise and newness that the Incarnation makes possible. First, it "explodes certain universal assumptions about the conditions under which love is possible" (TRNOTF: 47). The Incarnation, Illich argues, establishes a new basis or condition for human relationality, interrupting "the traditional basis for ethics, which is always an *ethnos*, an historically given 'we' which precedes another pronunciation of the word 'I' " (TRNOTF: 47). The *ethos*, or a collective way of living, is circumscribed within a prior *ethnos*, a 'we' given through birth and/or place, such as the way both Plato and Aristotle's account of ethics turned on their conception of the ethnic 'we' of Athenian citizenship. The logic of the Incarnation, however, cannot be contained ethnically, or within a prior 'we'. In manifesting God's love to the ethnic other and in announcing that "whomever loves another loves [Jesus himself] in the person of that other" (TRNOTF: 47), the Incarnate Savior transgressed the boundaries of the ethnic 'we'. The Syro-Phoenician woman came to Israel's Messiah in faith: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon" (Matt. 15:22). Peter can cross over into Gentile territory to share a meal with the uncircumcised,

receiving their food as clean and receiving Cornelius' household as co-members in God's family (Acts 10:1 – 11:18). The Jewish-Gentile difference, the threshold that distinguished the people of God from 'the nations', can be crossed in faith. This threshold has not been destroyed, but has become porous through the opening of incarnational difference. Now there is "one new humanity in place of the two" (Eph. 2:15). The Incarnation, it could be argued, created a new 'we' that is no longer defined in terms "of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man" (John 1:13). The new 'we' is established solely in relation to a person, the Incarnate Savior.

Second, Illich observes that in transgressing such a boundary and unleashing "a new dimension of love [that is]...highly ambiguous", the Incarnation introduces a danger. He identifies the danger as a movement from incarnation to institutionalization: "a temptation to try to manage, and eventually, to legislate this new love, to create an institution that will guarantee it, insure it, and protect it by criminalizing its opposite" (TRNOTF: 47). There are at least two senses, then, in which the Incarnation is a scandal:

- as the irruption of a novel freedom and a renewed relationality in which the only determinative border is one's relation to the 'Word made flesh' (Jn. 1: 14) ; and
- as the emergence of "an entirely new kind of power, the power of those who organize Christianity and use this vocation to claim their superiority as social institutions" (TRNOTF: 47).

To illustrate the force of this two-fold scandal, Illich turns back to the parable of the Good Samaritan. As Illich points out, the question that Jesus is answering with this parable is not, 'How should I behave towards my neighbor?', but rather, 'Who is my neighbor?' And yet, Illich's research on the history of the interpretation of this parable suggests that there is a

modern bias away from reading the parable in terms of the freedom and permission to embrace and be embraced by the other who is encountered. Illich suggests that the modern reading focuses on the normative obligation or duty to love anyone who is needy. There is an interpretive shift in which attention to the other is displaced from the 'ought' that arises from embodied relatedness to the 'ought' that conforms with a codified norm. This displacement or interpretative slippage, signals the corruption of the incarnational threshold that generates a 'new we', a new intimacy with the other who previously remained outside and untouchable.

Illich explains:

This is an act which prolongs the Incarnation. Just as God became flesh and in the flesh relates to each one of us, so you are capable of relating in the flesh, as one who says ego, and when he says ego, points to an experience which is entirely sensual, incarnate, this-worldly, to that other man who has been beaten up. Take away the fleshly, bodily, carnal, dense, humoural experience of self, and therefore of the Thou, from the story of the Samaritan and you have a nice liberal fantasy, which is something horrible. You have the basis on which one might feel responsible for bombing the neighbour for his own good. This use of power is what I call the *corruption optimi quae est pessima* [the corruption of the best is the worst] (TRNOTF: 207).

From Illich's reading, the Samaritan's response prolongs the Incarnation precisely because it "liberates from the ethnic boundary without destroying it" (TRNOTF: 199). His comments on the significance of this surprising encounter, an encounter in which a 'Thou' brings out my vocation to neighborliness, are summarized in this passage:

Our contemporary perception of self, of human relationship, so-called interpersonal relationship, has been deeply corrupted. When norms are brought into the 'ought'...the glorious side of the encounter between the Palestinian and the Jew is hidden. What the Lord told the Pharisee with this story is this: it is open to anyone who walks down the road to move away from the road and establish a relationship, a fit, a tie, with the man who is beaten up. To do so corresponds to the nature of two human beings and permits this nature its full flowering. The Samaritan has the possibility of establishing a proportion, a relatedness to the other man which is entirely free and conditioned only by his hope that the beaten-up Jew will respond to it by accepting his relationship...Any attempt to



explain this ‘ought’ as corresponding to a norm takes out the mysterious greatness of this free act (TRNOTF: 206-207).

In terms of Wells’ five-act model, Act 3 is climax precisely because the Incarnation is “the point to which the creation of the world pointed forwards, and [it] is the point to which the end of the world, as final conclusion and as purposeful *telos*, points back” (Wells, 2004: 52). Because “all things have been created through him and for him” (Col. 1:16), the coming of Christ in Act 3 points back to the mysterious truth announced in Act 1: that creation is “a world in the hands of God” (TRNOTF: Ch. 3). Similarly, Act 3 establishes the difference and the continuity between Act 2 and Act 4. It fulfills the promise of Gentile inclusion into the people of God, the promise made to Abraham at the beginning of Act 2. It makes possible, with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the sending of the church as the “body in Christ” in Act 4. And ultimately, Christ’s promise to return orientates us in hope, in anticipation of the fullness of the *eschaton* in Act 5.

### **The Corruption of the Best is the Worst**

In the Illich *feschtrift* volume, *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection* (2002), Illich’s friend and colleague, Carl Mitcham, comments that of all the challenges that Illich’s thought provokes, at least one of them, his ‘corruption hypothesis’, is clearly a theological issue. Put simply, Illich understands that the unfolding of life in the West is characterized not so much by its rejection of Christianity, but rather as the corruption of Christianity, a perversion of the gospel itself. While Illich’s earlier writings consistently evaluated the link between dominant institutions and certainties in relation to themes of the Christian faith (DS; TFC; LTM), it was only later, in his lecture entitled “Hospitality and Pain” (1987), that he began to experiment explicitly with the ‘corruption hypothesis’:

I want to explore with you a phenomenon that I consider constitutive of the West, of that West which has shaped me, body and soul, flesh and blood. This central reality of the West is marvelously expressed in the old Latin phrase: *Corruptio optimi quae est pessima* – the historical progression in which God’s Incarnation is turned topsy-turvy, inside out. I want to speak of the mysterious darkness that envelops our world, the demonic night paradoxically resulting from the world’s equally mysterious vocation to glory. My subject is a mystery of faith, a mystery whose depth of evil could not have come to be without the greatness of the truth revealed to us (TRNOTF: 29).

As Mitcham points out, the force of Illich’s so-called ‘corruption hypothesis’ lies not so much in its originality (Ellul, 1986), as in the way in which he deploys it heuristically. Indeed, the way he leans on the ‘corruption hypothesis’ provides the imaginative impetus for his turning to the Incarnation as the decisive anthropological ‘horizon’. In the light of the way in which Illich discerned a tension between incarnation and institutionalization, his corruption hypothesis can be read as an insight for discerning incarnational counterfeits. *In nuce*, Illich’s emphasis on *corruptio* presents not a challenge to isolate and retrieve some ideal or ‘presumed best Christianity’, but rather a challenge to cultivate a greater awareness of how social forms, and their corruption, unfolded historically in the West in relation to Christian witness.

### **Ecclesial Hubris: From Contingency to Control**

In historicizing this new, free relationship which the parable of the Good Samaritan enacts, Illich chronicles in great detail how the incarnational threshold mutated into the institutionalization of hospitality, a gradual shift from open Christian households, to *xenodocheia* (houses for foreigners), and eventually to hospitals. His assertion in narrating these shifts is that while the parable speaks of a personal response to the presence and call of a neighbor, the corruption of the threshold of personal action and call ultimately transformed

the practice of hospitality into an industry of service (TRNOTF: 55-56). The growth of service systems, for example, in education, transportation, medicine, in turn eclipses and even colonizes the personal freedom to be a neighbor. The result is that Christian hospitality mutates into a kind of template for a “modern service society” (TRNOTF: 56). In such a society, it becomes increasingly difficult to hear, much less be “moved in our gut”, by a neighbor’s call (Luke 10:33). Instead, services are provided based on a diagnosis of his or her needs. In short, whereas relationships within this modern service society tend towards the “impersonal”, the “planned”, and the “expected”, the Samaritan’s relationship with the Jew in the ditch is “personal”, “gratuitous”, and “surprising” (TRNOTF: 47-58). With these contrasting strands of adjectives scattered throughout Illich’s discourse, a thread can be detected which runs throughout his commentary on the Samaritan, something which might be characterized as the dialectical tension between incarnation and institutionalization, or as movements towards incarnation and de-incarnation.

For Illich, this ‘institutional turn’ within Christianity is the key to understanding the rise of Western modernity, whose roots he finds in “the attempts of the churches to institutionalize, legitimize, and manage Christian vocation” (TRNOTF: 48). Going further still, Illich interprets the “nesting” and “hatching” of this evil within the church in terms of what the New Testament calls the “Anti-Christ” and the *mysterium iniquitatis* [the mystery of evil]. He insists that:

The *mysterium iniquitatis* is a *mysterium* because it can be grasped only through the revelation of God in Christ. This must be recognized. But I also believe that the mysterious evil that entered the world with the Incarnation can be investigated historically, and, for this, neither faith nor belief is required but only a certain power of observation (TRNOTF: 60).

What Illich seems to grasp, reluctantly yet insistently, is that the history of the West was, in

effect, an unfolding from the institutionalization, and therefore, the corruption of Christianity. This corruption, this unprecedented evil, emerges within the church, mutates, and reproduces itself through other institutions.

Illich is saying that, through the eyes of faith, one can recognize that the transformation of the Samaritan's free response into hospitalization is not isolated, but instead paradigmatic of other corruptions: how "[f]aith is eclipsed by prediction, hope by planning, and charity by the studied knowledge of the other's needs" (Cayley, in TRNOTF: 37). In the light of the revelation of God in Christ, one may perceive that the freedom that comes from Christ's call to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37) has become transmogrified into what Illich sees as the anti-Christic responsibility of trying to save or change or reform the world by attempting to manage the gospel.

### **Questioning and Being Questioned by the Church**

This theme of 'gospel management' relates strongly to the interpretation of Illich by Francine du Plessix-Gray in her book *Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism*, on which I drew earlier. In this work, du Plessix-Gray explores the emergence in the 1960s of a new Catholic radicalism, a stance characterized by the tension between gospel obedience and the dictates of the institutional church (1970: ix). By utilizing anecdotal and interview materials, her biographical sketch of Illich portrays him as a priest and intellectual who manifests Catholic dissidence while remaining radically orthodox. To borrow a phrase from Robert Inchausti, what makes Illich's stance so challenging, and so threatening, is the fact that his is a "subversive orthodoxy" (Inchausti, 2005).

As du Plessix-Gray points out, from early on in his career, Illich took the work of criticism seriously, understanding it as "a work of love". Because Illich understood the

priestly role preeminently as an office of unity, his early criticisms of the American church were written pseudonymously, under the pen name Peter Canon. “A critical attitude”, Illich would insist, “is precisely one of the areas in which Christian love for the Church can develop...Criticism is the fruit of hard work and prayer” (du Plessix-Gray, 1970: 244). Later, writing in the 1960s from his learning center in Cuernavaca, Mexico, during times that moved to a strong revolutionary beat, Illich pressed on with the work of criticism. While friends with notable figures of the first generation of Latin American liberation theology, such as Brazilian Archbishop Dom Helder Câmara, Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, Illich’s stance did not map neatly onto a left-right political spectrum. Indeed, one could say that he stood outside the left-right encampments, or, better, he stood between them. This is not because he was anti-revolutionary, but rather because he insisted on being revolutionary in a correct way:

I am attacked by both the left and the right because I insist on rigorously correct behavior. I am profoundly opposed to the Underground Church because it is counter-revolutionary. You reform by staying within the system. I believe in good manners, in playing the rules of the game. If you don’t like the rules of chess, stop playing but do not try to reform the rules of chess (Illich, in 1970: 274-275).

Thus, the left attacked his ‘good manners’, while the right attacked his ‘subversive mannerliness’. As an experiment in cultivating a deeply Christian account of revolution, Illich would insist the “CIDOC is in its deepest sense a contemplative place...and this is scandalous to both the left and the right” (1970: 275).

I began this chapter by referring to the declassified CIA report which identified Illich as a radical, a minority voice, but one which managed to attract the attention of the US government. To describe him as a radical or as a revolutionary also raises the question: How was Illich’s stance perceived and treated by the Catholic Church?

Illich's activities, including his criticism of the church, did not happen in an ecclesial vacuum. As I mentioned earlier, one of the keys to Illich's witness in Latin America was his ability to assess and use his status as a priest and Monsignor, forging tactical alliances within the Catholic hierarchy. On the Northern front, the strong bond between Illich and Cardinal Spellman in New York left Illich practically untouchable from the forces which opposed him. In the South, the key to the operational success of CIC/CIDOC was the friendship between Illich and Father Mendez Arceo, Bishop of Cuernavaca, Mexico.

The Illich-Arceo tandem, however, eventually provoked much protest from conservative Catholics in Mexico, most notably from the *Comité pro Reindivisión de la Iglesia en Cuernavaca* [Committee for the Recovery of the Catholic Church in Cuernavaca]. In formal complaints to Catholic officials, this Committee described Illich in the following way:

That strange, devious, and slippery personage, crawling with indefinable nationalities, who is called, or claims to be called, Ivan Illich (quoted in 1970: 269).<sup>6</sup>

By late 1967, this same Committee eventually entered a plea to the Conference of Mexican Bishops to close CIDOC and to have Illich removed from Mexico. At first, he appealed to Spellman for support and to gain time. However, after a stage of declining health, Spellman died in early December 1967, leaving Illich without the protection of his American Archbishop. Within the same month, Spellman's successor, John McGuire, wrote to Illich, communicating that a Vatican directive had called for Illich's return to the New York diocese by 12 January 1968 (Zalvidar and Uceda, 2010: 7). After a series of Vatican reports produced for the Cardinals of the Holy Office, Illich was eventually summoned to appear by 25 June 1968 before the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith at the Vatican.

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<sup>6</sup> The original Spanish reads as follows: "*Eso personaje extraño y sinuoso, escurrido y reptante de nacionalidad indefinible, que se llama, o dice llamarse, Ivan Illich*" (1970: 269).

On 18 June 1968, Illich appeared at the Palace of the Inquisition at the Vatican for interrogation regarding his political and doctrinal views. In the presence of Monsignor Casoria and Cardinal Seper, of Illich's native Yugoslavia, Illich received an elaborate questionnaire grouped under headings such as: "Dangerous Doctrinal Opinions", "Erroneous Ideas Against the Church", "Bizarre Conceptions Concerning the Clergy", and "Subversive Interpretations Concerning the Liturgy and Ecclesiastical Discipline". Cayley chronicles Illich's impression of the interrogation as follows:

The question, as Illich said later, were of the 'When did you stop beating your wife?' variety; to have answered at all would have required him to accept numerous unacceptable premises. 'What would you answer', he was asked, 'to those who say that you are petulant, adventurous, imprudent, fanatical...hypnotizing, [and] a rebel to all authority...?' (TRNOTF: 9).

This explains, in large part, Illich's response to the inquisitorial procedure in the form of a letter:

Let me start by saying that, faced with the authoritative procedures which, at least in my opinion, are so very questionable in both substance and style, I am left – as a Christian and a priest – with a single, clearcut choice.

I can, on the one hand, simply withhold any defense of myself, without claiming my most reasonable rights or advancing my most lawful defense. Or, on the other hand, I can (not for my sake but for the sake of defending the divine constitution of the Church and the honorable status of its ecclesiastical institutions) set myself systematically in opposition to everything which I recognize as a distortion of the Gospel, contrary to the divine principles which govern the Church, contrary to what has been decided by the Councils, and even contrary to the most recent and repeated statements of the highest ecclesiastical authorities.

Eminence, I must acknowledge to you that I have decisively opted for the first way, and that I have resolved to take as my watchword, 'If a man asks you to lend him your coat, then give him your shirt as well' (Matthew 5:45) (Illich, in du Plessix-Gray, 1970: 239).

Illich later described the surprising conclusion to this inquisition as follows:

As we parted [Cardinal Seper] gave me an *embrazo* [hug], most affectionately. And then a most extraordinary thing happened. We were speaking in Croatian, and as the Cardinal led me to the door his last words to me were ‘*Hadjite, hadjite, nemojete se vratiti!*’ which means ‘Get going, get going, and never come back!’ In other words, ‘Beat it!’ It wasn’t until I was going down the stairs from his office...that it struck me that he was quoting from the Inquisitor’s last words to the prisoner in Dostoyevsky’s story of *The Grand Inquisitor* (Illich, in 1970: 240).

In response to this conflict with the Vatican, Illich took two additional direct actions. He first wrote to Cardinal Terence Cooke communicating his decision to renounce all clerical duties and privileges and to live as a layman. Although formally renouncing the clerical responsibilities of an active priest, Illich asked to renew two commitments common to all priests: the daily practice of praying the breviary and the condition of celibacy, both of which he embraced as a personal vocation instead of as institutional requirements. Illich then went public with the details of the interrogation in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, and in *The New York Times*, achieving the desired effect of shaming the Roman Curia and persuading them to leave him alone.

Later, Illich would describe his criticisms of the church as “a question of witness” (IIC: 102). In fact, he states explicitly that his criticism was “not an attempt to speak *against* the Church”, but rather, “an attempt to raise the fundamental issue of what a Church with this tradition represents in the world of today” (IIC: 103 [original emphasis]). We miss his point, or better, what he is pointing to, if Illich’s stance in New York, in Mexico, and at the Vatican, is read as a series of anti-ecclesial rants. More generally, it should be noted that Illich does not witness against the church *per se*, but rather against the dominant certainties, especially ones that both draw from and distort an ecclesial or Christian social imagination.

Here, I am approaching Illich not only in terms of his discourse or ideas, but more adequately in terms of his ‘biography as theology’. As a contrast to my approach, David



Gabbard's *Silencing Ivan Illich* (1998) offers a Foucauldian discourse analysis of Illich's double 'exclusion' from the field of education as well as from the Catholic Church. Gabbard's use of Foucault does offer insights for approaching Illich, particularly the connection between Illich's parallel critique of schooling and ecclesial power, and his parallel exclusion from the official discourses of both institutional forms. However, there are two key limitations to Gabbard's approach for my purposes. As it was written in the field of education, it therefore does not offer theological analysis; and being written in the early 1990s, it preceded the publication of two books which shed light on the relationship between Illich's life and the development of his thought.

In those books, *Ivan Illich in Conversation* and *The Rivers North of the Future*, Illich makes two crucial moves. First, he makes explicit certain theological themes expressed previously in an apophatic mode (Hoinacki, 2003: 385). Second, he reveals that his stance in relation to the Catholic Church, as well as to other academic discourses, was a "a question of witness" (IIC: 102), or the voluntary embrace of a personal vocation and not merely a passively accepted exclusion at the hands of institutionalized power. While recognizing the contribution that Gabbard makes by reading Illich via discourse analysis, I suggest that it is worth going beyond that approach in order to integrate Illich's life in a way that is congruent with its underlying theological character, and in order to make sense of statements such as the following: "out of a deep respect for the corruption of the best which becomes, in a way, the worst, some of us might have the vocation of testifying to our love of the Church by making ourselves completely powerless outside its context" (IIC: 104).

Ultimately, my reading of Illich as a witness is a theological attempt at agreeing with the CIA analyst's claim that Illich is a radical. But, in a more biblical idiom, it is to hear him as a subversively prophetic voice, as "one crying out in the [industrialized] wilderness" (Isa.

40:3) of post-World War II modernity (see Prakash & Stuchul, 2010: 511). It is to hear him as an itinerant prophet who exposes the myopias and excesses of American exceptionalism, as he traverses not only the East-West divide, but the North-South axis as well. It is to hear him as a prophetic Christian pilgrim who, like a maturing jazz musician, struggles to find an idiom and form to articulate his art. It is to hear him working out a series of variations on one of the basic riffs of the prophet Jeremiah: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and you will find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16). Like Jeremiah, who denounced the false prophets for proclaiming “ ‘Peace, peace’, when there is no peace” (Jer. 8:11), Illich denounced the false prophets of the North who, in the name of ‘order and progress’, ‘benevolently’ invaded neighboring countries and extended their empire for the sake of false peace.

To compare Illich with biblical prophets such as Jeremiah is also to recognize that Illich was more than a social critic. He was, according to friend and collaborator Carl Mitcham, an elegist, one who “witnesses to what is absent but might have been present, and in this witnessing, the act of thoughtful concern for the past...both asserts the loss and casts into the present a new kind of awareness” (TCII: 9). Such awareness turns on the following insight: “it is not the Church’s task to engineer [the future’s shape]. She must resist the temptation. Otherwise she cannot celebrate the wondrous surprise of the coming, the advent” (COA: 100).

## **Conclusion**

I have offered a theological reading of Illich’s life in terms of the motif of journey, or *itinerarium*, that is, his understanding of the Christian life as a form of pilgrimage. More specifically, I have turned to Illich’s journey as a pilgrimage into and across the Americas, as

well as the sense in which his journey finds its center through the Incarnation. In conclusion, I want to focus on how Illich's life and theological imagination contribute to a contemporary understanding of incarnational mission. To do so, I turn to the work of the late Australian missiologist Ross Langmead, who develops a useful account of incarnational mission in terms of the three interrelated aspects of:

- 1) following Jesus, or "seeing Jesus as the pattern for mission";
- 2) participating in Christ or "experiencing the continuing presence of Christ in the church as the body of Christ"; and
- 3) joining God's incarnating mission, or "understanding the activity of God in a sacramental/incarnational framework" (Langmead, 2004: 48).

Illich's motto, 'following the naked Christ', clearly highlights the first aspect of incarnational mission. For Illich, "seeing Jesus as the pattern" has to do fundamentally with Jesus' renunciation of worldly power, his refusal to align himself with the Caesars and Pilates of his day. Following, as noted earlier, has to do with a response of dispossession, an openness towards the vulnerability of love. That said, "Christianity is not primarily about the imitation of an outstanding founder; it is about the 'power of God for salvation' (Rom. 1:16)" (2004: 52). It is more than imitation; it is a following that includes participation in the life of another. Or, in the words of St John, we follow Christ so that we might share his life, so that "we might live through him" (1 John 4: 9).

The second aspect of incarnational mission highlights ecclesial embodiment, or in Pauline terms, the church as the body of Christ. Taken in the strongest terms, this aspect understands "the church as the continuing incarnation" (2004: 53). This view represents the sacramental-incarnational ecclesiology prominent not only within Roman Catholicism, but

also in Anglo-Catholic circles and in Eastern Orthodoxy (2004: 53). In his early essays on ecclesiology, Illich clearly shares this view, insisting that “[t]he mission of the Church is the social continuation of the Incarnation and Missiology is its study” (TCCD: 85).

As Langmead points out, this view has the advantage of highlighting the intrinsic link between the work of the Incarnation and God’s ongoing work in the church, but there are at least two dangers, as well. First, to speak of the church as continuing the Incarnation can lead to a position where the church “will become unchallenged as the mystique of divine authority grows” (2004: 53). Thus, a thorough account of the church as the body of Christ needs to account for the history of ecclesial failure as well as God’s promises to be present in the life and work of the church.

I have already discussed how Illich’s criticism of the Catholic Church, as well as his ‘corruption hypothesis’, clearly recognizes the danger of ecclesial hubris. It is equally important to acknowledge, however, Illich’s appreciation of what ecclesial life, particularly liturgical life, makes possible.

In one of his last essays, entitled “The Cultivation of Conspiracy” (TCII: 233-242), Illich weaves together stories about peace, the one word which evokes what he most “cherished and tried to nourish” (TCII: 238). In telling the stories, Illich reiterates his earlier insight (IMOP: 15-26) that peace is not an abstractly universal condition, but rather it is “a very specific spirit to be relished in its particular, incommunicable uniqueness by each community” (TCII: 239). This move towards historicizing the varieties of peace, which he calls “people’s peace”, sets up his commentary on the early Christian ritual of *conspiratio*, or ‘kiss of peace’. As Illich tells us, the ritual action of the *conspiratio* lies at the origin of the peace he sought to cultivate, and which he describes as follows:

The Eucharistic gathering in the very first Christian centuries explicitly claimed

to establish a new ‘we,’ a new plural of the ‘I’. This ‘we’ was not of this world. It didn’t belong to the world of politics in the Greek sense, or of citizenship in the *urbs* in the Roman sense. These guys got together for a celebration which had two high points, one of them called *conspiratio*, and the other one *comestio*...This *conspiratio* was expressed by the mouth-to-mouth kiss, *osculum*...The Christians adopted this symbolism...to signify that each one of those present around the dining table contributed of his own spirit, or, if you want, the Holy Spirit, which was common to all, to create a spiritual community, a community of one spirit. They then sat down and shared the same meal...Slave and master, Jew and Greek, each contributed equally to making the community to which, through his contribution, he could then belong (TRNOTF: 216-217).

As close readers of Illich have observed, ritual is a central concept in his social criticism. In the light of the ‘corruption hypothesis’, the contrast between what Illich calls the “ritualization of progress” (DS: Ch. 3) and the *conspiratio* as contrasting rituals of inclusion is noteworthy. The former operates as a ritual of inclusion which encloses participants within an ‘artificial’ dependence upon dominant institutions or service systems; the *conspiratio* embodies a reality of interdependence centered on a person. To return to the earlier discussion of the relationship between *ethos* and *ethnos*, it could be said that Illich highlights the *conspiratio* as a ritual action which embodies a shared *ethos* that originates from the new *ethnos*, the “new humanity” in Christ (Eph. 2:15).

With his repeated use of terms like “atmosphere”, “milieu”, and “threshold”, Illich explores how the Incarnation of the Word makes possible a reality of participation, a new ‘we’ that belongs to the ‘I’ of the Incarnation. The Incarnation makes possible an alternative social space, a new ‘inside’ that we inhabit as “co-breathing...a *conspiracy*, a deliberate, mutual, somatic, and gratuitous gift to one another” (TCII: 240-241 [original emphasis]).

Here, Illich describes the centripetal force of ‘co-breathing’, yet for Illich, there is always the counterpoint of openness, of “being surprised by the Other” (COA: 135). Here, he speaks of the second danger related to a strong view of the ecclesial mediation of

incarnational mission, namely, a kind of ecclesiocentrism that collapses Christ's presence into the presence of the church. We find Illich's response to this danger in his discussion with David Cayley on the triadic shape of friendship.

On the table, as you have noticed over the years, there is always a candle. Why? Because the text that shaped my understanding was *De Spirituali Amicitia*, a treatise on spiritual friendship by the twelfth-century Scottish Abbot Aelfred of Rievaulx...[It] is in the form of a dialogue with a brother monk, and it begins with the words 'Here we are, you and I, and, I hope, also a third who is Christ'. If you consider his meaning carefully, you understand that it could be Christ in the form of Brother Michael. In other words, our conversation should always go on with the certainty that there is somebody else who will knock at the door, and the candle stands for him or her. It is a constant reminder that the community is never closed (TRNOTF: 151).

These comments from Illich take us back to Illich's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and more particularly, to the way in which the Incarnation provides a basis for an account of friendship that transgresses the 'ethnic' boundary. It is inside this novel freedom, as opposed to the duty to be joined to others, that Illich seeks to place the missionary activity of the church. In other words, in the light of the Incarnation, mission entails the vocation towards "risky presence to the Other, together with the openness to an absent loved third, no matter how fleeting" (TPDR: 106).

Finally, the third aspect of incarnational mission highlights our "cooperating with God's 'incarnating' activity from creation, throughout history, climactically demonstrated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and continuing as the mission of God today" (2004: 55). Taken together with following Jesus and participating in Christ, this aspect of joining is the most encompassing aspect of incarnational mission. What is at stake is how the Incarnation provides the basis for holding together the dialectical tension between creation and redemption, so that one is not pulled apart or isolated from the other.

As David Burrell (1996) has argued, God's act of creation establishes not only a

context for our being creatures. More fundamentally, creation establishes a relation, such that to be a creature is to exist in relation to the Creator, and redemption, through the Incarnation of the Word, reveals and restores this relation. Burrell explores God's incarnating dynamic in relation to the creation/redemption dialectic:

[The Incarnation] is the singular point where God and God's creation meet...Jesus is the 'Word made flesh', and the Word in question is the very One 'through whom the world is made'...[thus] the emanation of all things from in the Word is in strict continuity with the generation of the Word from the Father,...[and] so creation and incarnation follow a parallel logic (Burrell, 1996: 213).

Burrell does not intend to collapse the distinction between creation and redemption, but rather he intends to reposition the distinction in the light of the Incarnation as the decisive event in God's incarnational mission, of God's enfleshment. In a similar way, understanding the Creator/creation distinction in the light of the Incarnation does not abolish the distinction, but it does suggest a non-dualistic relationship (1996: 213), one perhaps best expressed metaphorically: "the universe is to its creator as the song on the breath of its singer" (Langmead, 2004: 214).

From this tight linkage of creation and redemption, this third dimension, which I have called the 'joining' of incarnational mission, three emphases follow (2004: 56-58). Here, I simply want to highlight them, as I will return to these in the following chapters. First, 'joining' means that incarnational mission affirms the goodness of creation. Illich expresses this insight when he writes that the Incarnation provides the basis for our developing "the ability to say one great 'Yes' to the experience of life" (COA: 103). Second, incarnational mission entails a kenotic, or 'self-emptying' dynamic (Langmead, 2004: 56-58). Illich eloquently highlights this theme as well through the following:

To communicate Himself perfectly to man God had to assume a nature which was not His, without ceasing to be what He was. Under this light the Incarnation is the infinite prototype of missionary activity, the communication of the Gospel to those who are 'other', through Him who entered a World by nature not His own. The closer the pattern of a human life approximates this aspect of the 'Kenosis' of the Word the more can that vocation be called a missionary one...Just as the Word without ceasing to be what He is became man, Jew, Roman subject, member of a culture at a given moment in history, so any...missionar[y], without ever ceasing to be what he is, enters and becomes part of a 'foreign' culture at the present moment in a given place (TCCD: 113).

Closely related to this insight is the third emphasis that flows from 'joining': namely, the Incarnation as the basis for inculturation, or "the two-way, critical, dynamic and in-depth interaction between gospel and culture" (Langmead, 2004: 57). Illich's critical engagements with American Catholic missionary efforts in New York and in Mexico represent this incarnational movement towards inculturation.

I will return to Illich's nuanced understanding of inculturation in the next chapter. For now, the crucial point to recognize is that at the center of the Illich's theological imagination is a person, the Incarnate Savior. By attending to the contours of Illich's own journey, what comes into view is how his witness, his stance in the world as a Christian, offers vital insights for imagining the incarnational logic of the Christian life.

To restate this within Quash's terms, what comes into view through Illich is a way of imagining how the Incarnation is a person who is at once the decisive agent of history's 'cast', who creates a 'stage', or context, for others to act, as well as the One who embodies the 'action' by which God's purpose for all of creation in history might be discerned (Quash, 2005). What comes into focus is precisely how our lives fit with the decisively theodramatic logic of the incarnational mission, which is nothing less than our following, participating, and joining in the 'drama of incarnational inclusion'.



## CHAPTER 3

### DETOURS: NAVIGATING (DIS) ORDER AND PROGRESS

In the last chapter I turned towards Illich by telling a story through his witness. In this chapter I shift the focus away from the Illich's own story to his role as storyteller. In doing so, I explore the way in which Illich, and others, engage with the notion that "Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination" (Jennings, 2010: 6). In doing so, I weave together the voices of theologians from the conversations at Table One and the 'other storytellers' from Table Two (see Ch. 1) as a way of narrating the historical transformations in the West that decontextualize human dignity and the conditions for human flourishing (Soulen and Woodhead, 2006). In order to examine the missiological implications of these transformations, I explore how Illich and others at Table Two historicize 'progress' and 'development' as twin "project[s] of intervention" (Rahnema, in TPDR: 397) inside a Western "universalist mission initiated in Europe" (IMOP: 93).

To return to my guiding metaphor of journey, or *itinerarium*, this chapter examines modern 'detours'<sup>1</sup> from an original trajectory for human flourishing. More specifically, I examine the conflict between the incarnational ethos of Christian mission and another ethos, the "technological ethos" (Garrigós, TCII: 117), for the detour of the technological ethos is inextricably linked to a fundamental *mis*-perception, a false trajectory for "furthering humanity" (Gorringe: 2004). In the light of Illich's analysis, one could describe this as a Promethean drive characterized by a dominant, but false, idealization of 'independent

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term 'detour' in a sense that is fuller than the contemporary English usage of the term and closer to the original French, which means literally, a 'change of direction', or in the verbal form, *détourner*, to 'turn away'.

individuals' coupled with a dominant, but also false, dependence upon technological artifacts. Illich, thereby, encourages us to discern how progress and development generate a novel social space, what he calls a technological milieu (PAF: 3), which not only eclipses and even corrupts the human self-image, but also undermines and corrupts the incarnational logic of Christian mission itself.

### **Framing the Detours: Human (In)dignity and the Rise of the “Technological Ethos”**

In this chapter I provide a frame for tracking the rise, and detour, of the “technological ethos” by weaving together the following: 1) theological insights about the decontextualization of human dignity, from the conversations at Table One, and 2) an interpretation of Illich, especially his criticism of the technological ethos (TCII: 113-126) from Table Two. As I mingle between these two conversations, I am also doing so as a way of situating Illich. As I suggested earlier, those sat around Table Two illuminate the clarity by which Illich perceived ‘the world as it is’, especially in terms of his social criticism and perception of the world’s *dis*-order; those sat around Table One illuminate the fullness of Illich’s vision, of a “a world in the hands of God” (TRNOTF: Ch. 3).

#### **(De)Contextualizing Human Dignity**

The recent edited volume, *God and Human Dignity* (2006), represents a collective theological attempt to address some contemporary debates about the dignity of being human. While the concept of human dignity is prominent in public discourse, the editors note a lingering problem, namely that “the pervasiveness of the discourse of human dignity in modern Western life masks the extent to which the meaning and substance of the terms has

become vague and contested” (Soulén and Woodhead, 2006: 2). They argue, however, that abandoning the term ‘human dignity’ and settling for a ‘lowest common denominator’ is not the most promising way forward. Instead, they argue for the recovery of a thicker account of the concept itself, because:

[t]he notion of human dignity is a primitive but neither self-explanatory nor self-sustaining term. Its meaningfulness is dependent on its being embedded within a broader and more comprehensive cultural, conceptual, and social framework. The contemporary crisis of human dignity results, we believe, from the fact that intersecting tendencies of modern culture and society have stripped the concept of a sustaining context, without supplying viable alternatives (2006: 2).

In other words, human dignity must be re-embedded, or recontextualized, but doing so, they believe, entails examining how the early Christian tradition contextualized human dignity and how the terms have been appropriated and decontextualized within modernity.

The early Christian tradition, Soulén and Woodhead tell us, did not coin the concept of human dignity, rather they borrowed it from its wider Greco-Roman use and shaped it for their own purposes. In antiquity, human *dignitas* was used to refer to either a) an individual’s position, or social status, or b) humanity’s collective, and distinctive, position within the natural order. Emphasizing this second sense, the Church Fathers reconceived humanity’s status in the light of God’s works of creation, redemption, and eschatological consummation, thereby opening up a dynamic understanding of humanity’s dignity in “the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-28). Three points follow from this:

- Since creation is a gift from God, the creation, “being creaturely” means that our dignity is not self-ascribed, but rather “*human dignity is conferred by God*” (Soulén and Woodhead, 2006: 5).

- Since redemption is social and corporate and entails “an ecclesial rather than an individual horizon” (2006: 6), it follows that “human dignity is achieved in relation, not in isolation” (2006: 7).
- Since eschatological consummation perfects the union of divinity and humanity, it follows that divine and human dignity are not competitive or at odds with one another. There is no sense in which ‘more of God’ means ‘less of humanity’. As St Irenaeus puts it: “the glory of God is a human being fully alive, and the life of humanity is the vision of God” (Irenaeus, quoted in 2006: 7).

What marks the emergence of the modern notion of human dignity, then, is precisely an attempt to decontextualize, or extricate, the concept from its prior theological matrix. The result is a novel, and fragile, conception of human dignity, one “placed on a purely *internal* basis (properties integral to “human nature”) rather than on an *external* basis (the God who creates and redeems humanity)” (2006: 10). Thus, instead of conceiving dignity as a derivative concept, grounded in God as source and giver, dignity becomes foundational, grounded self-referentially as a human property. In short, dignity ceases to be a gift; it becomes a ‘given’.

For my purpose, I want simply to highlight two significant trajectories linked to this modern notion of human dignity. One trajectory, following Kant, grounds human dignity in the faculty of human reason. Here, our dignity is the natural expression of our rational freedom. As a normative principle, the concept of dignity also corresponds to and secures “specific rights inherent in and belonging to the human person” (Soulén and Woodhead, 2006: 10). Kant’s notion of human dignity is decidedly elevated, and yet, fragile. The second trajectory, following Nietzsche, effectively dethrones the foundational position of human reason, and, consequently, the Kantian basis for human dignity. In Nietzsche, reason is

exposed as another name for “deeper instincts, prejudices, emotions, and strategies of control” (2006: 11). Human reason, understood in this way, is another name for will-to-power. Within this trajectory, human dignity is still embraced, not because it rests upon a rational foundation, but because it can be grounded “in the unfettered exercise of human freedom” (2006: 12).

To recognize, then, how human dignity has been decontextualized is to recognize how it has become destabilized as a fragile, deeply contested, concept. Once extricated from the context of ‘being creaturely’ in the image of God, the anthropological enterprise becomes, in effect, a battle over ‘the human image’. When we invoke this notion of human dignity as a normative concept, we are left with the question, to whose image are we referring? I will return to this question later in this the chapter when I develop Illich’s contribution to the “program of recontextualization” (2006: 16).

### **‘We’ve Got the Whole World in Our Hands’: Hubris, History and the Rise of the “Technological Ethos”**

I turn now to a voice from the ‘other storytellers’ at Table Two, a voice that adds some nuance to the theological account of the modern shift of the decontextualization of human dignity, while also providing a bridge to Illich and his array of historical investigations. Spanish intellectual Alfons Garrigós builds this bridge not by offering a further theological reading of modernity, but through a perceptive reading of Illich, one which historicizes the shifting perception of human dignity in relation to technology, and more specifically, “the arrogance of the technological ethos” (TCII: 114).

What the ‘theologians’ describe as the modern linkage between human dignity and human self-determination, Garrigós characterizes in terms of “the logic of challenge” (TCII: 113). As Garrigós rightly observes, we tend to speak of desirable social conditions as challenges, whether that be creating more jobs, better schools, more accessible and affordable health care, or more peaceful living conditions (TCII: 113). We speak passionately about such challenges, and we even fight for them. Garrigós, however, sees a deeper problem related to the ‘challenge trap,’: namely “[a]s long as we continue proposing the main issues of our time as challenges, offenses, or crises against which we have to test our strength, we will persist in making the same mistake that gave rise to the problems in the first place” (TCII: 113). For Garrigós, “the logic of challenge” is closely linked to “an ethos of ethical norm for which every problem, if not reality itself, is a challenge” (TCII: 113). As the quintessential expression of this logic, Garrigós points to the modern turn to technology as a means of overcoming, and overreaching, any condition perceived as a limitation:

It is not difficult for technology to follow the logic of challenge. Its great efficiency in shaping reality on a grand scale is admitted by all, but this very power tends to obstruct the ability to recognize its limitations, to appreciate the point beyond which its transformations cease to promote habitable living space or truly human relations (TCII: 113).

While Garrigós’ suspicion of “the logic of challenge” rests on a subtle interpretation of the term, what he is more fundamentally suspicious of is “the arrogance of the technological ethos” itself (TCII: 114). This way of speaking has everything to do with his reading of Illich, whose work he interprets broadly as “criticism of the predominance of the technological mode in Western culture” (TCII: 114). Within the technological ethos, they both suggest, every limit represents a challenge, a limitation and a barrier “against which we must measure our strength” (TCII: 114).

Thus, within the technological ethos every limit that we encounter ceases to be an opportunity and invitation to discern appropriate action, but rather becomes a provocation to act with hubris. Indeed, by working in Illich's shadow, Garrigós frames and synthesizes Illich's thought as it outlines the history of the West in terms of "the evolution of what the Greeks called 'hubris'" (TCII: 124), a disposition towards unbounded presumption similar to what the Christian tradition calls 'pride'.

Furthermore, in suggesting that Illich's writings "recapitulate and interpret the history of the West" (TCII: 114), Garrigós expresses these transformations in terms of three epochs or stages:

- The first stage is the "classical-medieval", in which the *cosmos*, or beautiful order, provided the context, the sense of proportion and the appropriate 'measure' for human action, such that to transgress this cosmic order is to commit an act of hubris within Greek thought or pride within Christian thought (TCII: 115).
- The second stage, or "modernity", arises "when the cosmos, in its ancient and medieval sense, disappears"; when humanity no longer derives reason from the cosmos or the Creator, but from itself; and therefore, the stage at which "humans become the measure of themselves and the world" (TCII: 116), leading "to a process of self-overcoming" which casts any sense of limit or constraint on human action in a negative light (TCII: 117).
- The third stage is a time characterized by a suspicion of reason's innocence, "the rejection of any common reason", and finally, the reduction of human freedom to "mere automatism – through history, the libido, or language" (TCII: 117).

In his commentary on Illich, Garrigós summarizes the contours of these transformations in this way:

[W]e can say that in the West human beings found their measure first in the cosmos and then in God. In both cases, reason was ultimately subordinate to a trans-human norm indicating limitation to human action...Under such conditions all limitations of reality are perceived as challenges. Surmounting them, the human subject transcends itself until, having questioned reason as a foundation and reduced it to nothing more than a method of calculation, humans find no other end for themselves than self-transcendence per se via extravagant self-indulgence. For people who seek to surpass themselves, reality cannot be anything other than a provocation. One sees, then, that a simplified synthesis of the Western ethos results in a unitary focus, a stance I call 'technological' (TCII: 117).

The rise of the technological ethos, then, corresponds to seismic historical shifts in human perception. Garrigós' reading of Illich suggests that we have quite simply misperceived our place in the world. What Garrigós calls the technological ethos is shorthand for a *modus operandi* which conforms to this misperception. Illich's way of framing this shift in perception is that "a world in the hands of God" (TRNOTF: 64) becomes "a cosmos contingent on [humanity]" (IIC: 270). In fact, the latter perception could not arise without the former. This is because the medieval Christian perception of the universe turned on the notion of contingency, the perception that the world is neither necessary nor arbitrary, but rather exists as something gratuitous, "a pure gift" (TRNOTF: 65). However, "once the universe is taken out of God's hands, it can be placed into the hands of people, and this couldn't have happened without nature having been put in God's hands in the first place" (TRNOTF: 70). Drawing Garrigós' stages into a Christian conception of a contingent universe, it is possible to argue that once the world which was a gift became a given, an object under our gaze and control, it became a challenge. Thus, the world as a gift bound to and held within the promise



of a Giver, “a cosmos in the hand of God”, became a threat, an object which must be subdued and overcome: in short, “a cosmos in the hands of man” (IIC: 252).

Here, our turn to Garrigós (and through him to Illich) draws us more deeply, and more attentively, into the theological debate about human dignity. In mingling among these voices at the two tables, we are in a better position to observe the overlapping storylines that run between the modern decontextualization of human dignity, at Table One, and the rise of the technological ethos at Table Two. For in the same way that we take the world out of God’s hands, so too, we take dignity out of God’s hands. In taking it into our own hands, dignity ceases to be a gift. Like the world in our hands, it has become a given, and subsequently, a challenge.

In weaving these two conversations together, I suggest that we are in a better position to see this modern notion of human dignity emerge as a particular conception of dignity, one that emerges from and in relation to other conceptions of the dignity of being human. More specifically, in the story I have been telling through and in relation to Illich, modernity only emerges *á propos* the “colonial wound” (Mignolo, 2005), the wound inflicted by the universalizing dominance of modern subjectivities as they emerge and exert themselves in relation to those ‘non-dominant’ others. Seen not just in terms of modernity, but in terms of modernity/colonialism, we are in a position to see more clearly how the modern notion of human dignity turns on a novel and provincial perception, a perception both recent and European, though later also reinforced by the US, and yet, one that has been effectively universalized.

Thus, by recasting the debate about human dignity within terms of modernity/colonialism, it becomes clearer that we need to attend to more than the ‘modern’ debate between the neo-Kantians and the neo-Nietzscheans. We need to attend to the way that

both of these trajectories share the same detour, the same ‘turning away’. In doing so, we need to recognize the way that this modern subject not only perceives its dignity as either a secure, foundational possession, as in Kant, or as a fragile, yet attainable condition that it confers on itself through its exercise of freedom *qua* self-determination, as in Nietzsche. And, to discern the missiological implications of these transformations, we need to go further: we need to attend to the way this dominant subject, acting with hubris, assumes the god-like position in relation to the other: evaluation, measuring, and conferring dignity upon ‘less dignified’ human subjects by encountering them and refashioning them in the self-image of the dominant subject.

### **Historicizing ‘(Dis)Order and Progress’**

In the first chapter I linked my experience of disintegration to a growing suspicion that much of the missionary activity happening around me, whether in seminary, sanctuary, or street, was, in fact, counterproductive. More specifically, the more I observed and became involved in projects of social inclusion which were engaged in the business of ‘meeting the needs’ of the excluded and marginalized, the more I asked the question: Into *what* are we and others being included?

I realized that to answer that question, I needed more insight about the social space or arena in which ‘meeting needs’ and ‘sharing the gospel’ was happening. I needed a wider narration of the Christian social imagination into which I was immersed in Brazil, in the land of ‘Order and Progress’. Those two keywords were obvious to anyone who sees the Brazilian flag, but in my case, it took an encounter with Illich to enable me to see them not just as a nineteenth-century slogan, but as a religiously performed ideal, even as a ‘gospel-in-disguise’.

Here, I examine the way that Illich's friends expand his six-stage historiography of progress, to which I referred in Chapter 1. My concern in this section is to demonstrate how progress has counterfeited the Christian theodrama, not by rejecting it but by posing as its distorted mutation. In other words, without Christianity's theodramatic scaffolding, there would be no faith in modern progress. 'Faith in progress' names the anthropological enterprise of attempting to become the author or creator of history's end, its eschatological fulfillment. Faith in progress names the project of trying to exit Act 4 and inhabit Act 5.

### **The Idea of Progress**

American sociologist Robert Nisbet contends that "[N]o single idea has been more important than...the Idea of Progress in Western civilization for three thousand years" (Nisbet, in Sedlacek, 2011: 233). While 'faith in progress' may be recognized as a definitive mark of the period known as modernity, Nisbet's basic argument supports Illich's historiography: belief in progress is not so much a modern, but more precisely an ancient Western invention. In Illich's terms, what is modern about progress is its status as a certainty (COA: 11), its power to explain, but even more, its power to persuade and direct not only the lives of intellectuals but of the masses, as well.

This raises the question: How does progress offer a comprehensive explanation of the order of things? According to Russian sociologist Teodor Shanin, in order to come to terms with the impact of progress, especially its 'darker side', one must first come to terms with its power as an idea (Shanin, in TPDR: Ch. 6). In Shanin's discourse, the explanatory power of progress emerged gradually from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, together with

the rise of the social sciences. With this shift, there was a decisive transformation of the medieval worldview that understood history, and the ordering of natural processes or events, in terms of God's creative purpose. In effect, the idea of progress displaced medieval understanding by "offer[ing] a powerful and pervasive supra-theory that ordered and interpreted everything within the life of humanity, past, present and future" (TPDR: 65).

Shanin unpacks the force of this progressive vision as follows:

The core of the concept, and its derivations and the images attached to it, have been overwhelmingly simple and straightforward. With a few temporary deviations, all societies are advancing naturally and consistently 'up', on a route from poverty, barbarism, despotism and ignorance to riches, civilization, democracy and rationality, the highest expression of which is science. This is also an irreversible movement from an endless diversity of particularities, wasteful of human energies and economic resources, to a world unified and simplified into the most rational arrangement. It is therefore a movement from badness to goodness and from mindlessness to knowledge, which gave the message its ethical promise, its optimism and its reformist 'punch' (TPDR: 65).

Here, in its modern instantiation, the idea of progress takes on its air of irresistibility and inevitability. This is because progress offers "an ambiguous and yet, to its authors and consumers, remarkably satisfying solution to two major riddles the Europeans faced at the dawn of what the later came to be called 'modernity'" (TPDR: 66). First, there was the question of the diversity of cultures and human experience. With the so-called 'age of discovery', the 'discoverers' found themselves captivated with the challenge of making sense of the newness they encountered. In the face of "new lands, new people and new ways," (TPDR: 66), the first question was: How do we explain all this diversity and newness? The second question, intimately related to the first, concerned the perception of time. Whereas the ancient model of history was characterized by 'the myth of eternal return', and the cyclical pattern of birth, growth, and death, the modern shift turned on "a linear perception of time and

shift into an as yet uncharted future” (TPDR: 66). As Shanin relates, the idea of progress explained this shifting perception of ‘the other’, as well as the new perception of time, by linking the two, thereby answering the two questions at once:

What produced diversity? The different stages of development of different societies. What was social change? The necessary advance through the different social forms that existed. What is the task of social theory? To provide an understanding of the natural sequence of stages from past to future. What is the duty of an enlightened ruler? To put to use the findings of scholars and to speed up the necessary ‘advance’, fighting off regressive forces which try to stop it (TPDR: 67-68).

Thus conceived, modern progress provided a powerful, and scientifically ‘objective’, explanation for the complexity of the human world and the human condition. The ‘advanced’ peoples, Europeans, were leading the way through time. The ‘advanced’ could move forward with the expectation that the ‘backward’ could and should arrive, because this advance was necessary and natural. Progress, therefore, meant that linear time was on everybody’s side. The task of the ‘advanced’ was not to change the direction of time, but rather to speed it up:

The new orientation within the complex world of human endeavours carried the immense promise and optimism of the belief that, once understood, the human world could be reformed scientifically, that is, by taking into account knowledge of the necessary and the objective (TPDR: 68).

Converging with the Industrial Revolution and the forces of urbanization at home, and colonialism abroad, the idea of progress seemed at once inevitable and irresistible, precisely because it brought into focus “an image of the unilinear and the necessary which was also the universally right and positive in the unfolding of human history” (TPDR: 68). Thus, while it remained debatable whether the driving force of progress was human reason or the forces of production, the general direction of history as one of progress remained a certainty, comparable to a law of nature itself.

As Shanin observes, it is precisely its undisputed status as a certainty that enabled the idea of progress to exert its impact not only as a comprehensive orientation and “tool of mobilization”, but also as a dominant ideology, “a blinker on collective cognition” (TPDR: 69). In particular, the idea of progress and the rise of the modern state grew symbiotically, with the state as the primary instrument of progress, and progress as the state’s primary justification (TPDR: 69). Here, Shanin clearly positions the twentieth century’s ideological forces of progress as a self-fulfilling prophecy executed with religious zeal (TPDR: 70).

### **Progress and the Making of “One World”**

In his essay “One World” (Sachs, in TDD), Wolfgang Sachs echoes Shanin’s narration, highlighting the ‘shadow side’ of progress by casting light on its incessant drive towards universalism. Here, universalism signals the movement from a planet of particulars to a ‘*uni*-verse’ of enforced sameness. Therefore, for Sachs, as for many other post-development thinkers influenced by Illich, the story of progress cannot be told fully without telling it as a story of loss. This is not to say that progress offers no gains, but storytellers like Sachs turn our attention to what progress destroys, excludes, or makes absent. For within this progressive *uni*-verse, ecosystems are destroyed, biodiversity is diminished, the diversity of human languages dwindles, and with them, cultural logics and “entire conceptions of what it means to be human” are lost or made absent, as well (Sachs, 2010: 111). Sachs summarizes the process thus: “[w]hichever way one looks at it, the homogenization of the world is in full swing. A global monoculture spreads like an oil slick over the entire planet” (TDD: 111). For Sachs, then, a dominant thread in the storyline of progress is this universalizing vision of “one world”, a rationally constructed and managed *uni*-verse identified by a range of synonymous

buzzwords, such as “‘world society’, ‘unified world market’, or even ‘global responsibility’” (TDD: 112).

Indeed, out of the rubble of the Second World War, the United Nations announced the ‘gospel of progress’ and proclaimed its vision of “one world” as a “global hope” (TDD: 112). In Sachs’ argument, what took place in the Fairmont Hotel on Union Square in San Francisco on 4 May 1945, marks a decisive event in this story.

In Room 210, delegates from forty-six countries agreed on the text of the United Nations Charter. Hitler’s Germany was finally defeated and time was running out for Japan. The Charter promulgated those principles which were designed to usher in a new era of peace. No wars any more and no national egoism. What counted was international understanding and the unity of mankind! After devastating conflicts the Charter held out the prospect of universal peace, echoing the pledge of the League of Nations in 1919, but pointing far beyond a mere security system (TPDR: 112).

This reveals two significant and fundamental assumptions, the implications of which are important: first, violence arises when progress is impeded; second, enabling progress is the path to peace. Consequently, the Preamble to the Charter announces its vision: “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all people” (TDD: 112).

It is to be noted that the United Nations’ rhetoric established humanity, progress and peace as pillars for making “one world” (TDD: 112). By universalizing the necessary link between progress and peace, this vision also universalizes an ‘idealized humanity’, a vision of common humanity, “marching forward and upward along the road of progress” (TDD: 112). At work is the same evolutionary bias which Shanin described, a global vision “for absorbing the differences in the world into an ahistorical and delocalized universalism of European

origin” (TDD: 114). The result is that by the mid-twentieth century, and through the auspices and oversight of the United Nations, a European ideal has expanded into a global faith.

### **Faith in Progress**

A third voice at Table Two, the late Mexican intellectual José Sbert, corroborates what Shanin and Sachs have to say about progress: namely its alleged explanatory power and the failure of its grand promises for global peace. Sbert also analyzes progress as a religiously performed concept, highlighting how ‘faith in progress’ has operated as an illusory belief which “impelled people to become their own God and make their own history” (TDD: 218). Like Shanin, he argues that progress offers a “modern destiny” towards “future perfection” (TDD: 216), while explaining history’s imperfections or questions. Like Sachs, he points out how progress escalates the anthropocentric temptation to secure our own destiny through the work of our own hands, or as Sachs puts, through the “rule of science, market and the state” (TDD: 113). Read together, their analysis of ‘faith in progress’ in terms of “one world” in which “[human]kind and peace realize themselves” (TDD: 112) suggests that progress is less a rejection of a Christian vision for a “new humanity” (Eph. 2: 15) and “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1), and more that progress names a parasitic corruption, or counterfeit, of those themes.

Of course, viewed from hindsight, from this side of two World Wars, the Shoah, protracted violence, and continuing conflicts related to the necessary ‘march of progress’ throughout the second half of the twentieth century, one could argue that the idea of progress has since lost its air of irresistibility and its explanatory power. ‘Faith in progress’ as a



historical project may indeed be on the decline, but this should not lead us to minimize the ways its legacy impinges upon the Christian social imagination and mission of the West.

I have turned to these voices as a way of examining more closely the historical unfolding of ‘order and progress’, the motto on the Brazilian flag. I am suggesting that these voices expand Illich’s insight regarding the centrality of progress in “the victory of a universalist mission initiated in Europe” (IMOP: 93). To develop how that European universalism transformed into “the adoption of the American way of life as universal ideal” (TFOD: 15), I turn to the emergence of the paradigm of ‘development’ as an offspring of progress, and return to Illich directly in order to explore why he narrates “development...[as] the most pernicious of the West’s missionary efforts” (IMOP: 95).

### **Development as a Western Missionary Enterprise**

In Chapter 2, I examined the way Illich questioned ‘alliances for progress’, highlighting how those alliances, in Illich’s view, were cloaked in the missionary endeavor of extending the American way of life through the paradigm of development. To further explicate why Illich speaks of development as a missionary effort and why he speaks so vehemently against it, the following exchange between Illich and David Cayley is illuminating:

CAYLEY: [W]hen I first knew you, you were engaged in a crusade against the missionary activity of the Church, if that’s a good description of your campaigns of the early and middle 1960s...

ILLICH: No, it is not, and I reject your imputation that in the 1960s I took a stand against the missionary activities of the Church. That was the time of development mania – the years of Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress. Those were the days of the Peace Corps...[and] as a parallel to the secular Peace

Corps, an agency called Papal Volunteers for Latin America. And I denounced this...as a *corruptio* of the mission given by Jesus to his apostles. This was a mission carried out by a Catholic institution imbued with American values which kept the star-spangled banner behind the altar in every Church and justified the do-goodism called development by claiming it as a missionary activity...to reinforce American cultural domination in South America and, in this way, lead South Americans to modern values – exactly those values which I believe are a corruption, initiated by the Church itself and later secularized, of Christian mandates to love...Is that clear enough? (TRNOTF: 194-195).

For many, development is a benign concept which remains synonymous with a universalizable direction towards, and commitment to, positive social change. Development, so conceived, stands for desirable social conditions. To develop, so the logic goes, is to grow into a condition that is more mature or better than before. In Illich's view, however, development does not refer to a desirable, universal vision of human flourishing or well-being. To understand why this is the case, we have to follow Illich's trail as a historian, examining the usage and significance of the concept of development in its historical context, particularly in relation to the invention of a condition called underdevelopment.

In Illich's view, development,<sup>2</sup> as a globalized economic and geopolitical phenomenon has a birthday: 20 January 1949. He describes its birthday as follows:

That day, most of us met the term in its present meaning for the first time when President Truman announced his [Four Point Program]. Until then, we used 'development' to refer to species, real estate and moves in chess – only thereafter to people, countries and economic strategies. Since then, we have been flooded by development theories whose concepts are now curiosities for collectors – 'growth', 'catching up', 'modernization', 'imperialism', 'dualism', 'dependency', 'basic needs', 'transfer of technology', 'world system' (IMOP: 90).

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<sup>2</sup> Illich recognizes that development is a 'plastic word' whose meaning has been stretched in different directions, yet he also discerns a commonality in usage which he describes as follows: "Fundamentally, [development] implies the replacement of general competence and satisfying subsistence activities by the use and consumption of commodities; the monopoly of wage-labor over all other kinds of work; redefinition of needs in terms of good and services mass-produced according to expert design; finally, the rearrangement of the environment in such a fashion that space, time and design favor production and consumption while they degrade or paralyze use-value oriented activities that satisfy needs directly. And all such worldwide homogeneous changes and processes are valued as inevitable and good" (IMOP: 90).

This is not to say that on this date President Truman coined the term ‘development’, but rather that he deployed it in his State of the Union address in a novel way, as the stage upon which “we [the developed] hope to create the conditions that will lead eventually to personal freedom and happiness for all mankind” (Truman, quoted in Rist, 2008: 72).

The heart of Truman’s vision comes in ‘Point Four’ of his address:

Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas...The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. We envisage a problem of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing (Truman, in Rist, 2008: 71).

Thus, in same way that Pope Alexander VI divided the world between the Spanish and the Portuguese with the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1493 (Jennings, 2010: 221), so Truman, on 20 January 1949, divided the whole world into two kinds of people: the developed and the underdeveloped. Development has come to mean many things, but since then it has always meant “at least one thing: to escape from the undignified condition called underdevelopment” (Esteve, in TDD: 2).

It is difficult to exaggerate just how ambitious Truman’s developmentalist vision truly was, but as Arturo Escobar, a Columbian anthropologist and Illichian collaborator, suggests, Truman’s speech positioned development as the project of universalizing the American dream: “In Truman’s vision, capital, science, and technology were the main ingredients that would make this massive revolution possible. Only in this way could the American dream of peace and abundance be extended to all the people of the planet” (Escobar, 1995: 4).

Once unleashed, the paradigm called development, like ‘progress’ itself, has exerted

its descriptive and explanatory power with a force that is difficult to exaggerate. As Escobar points out, from Truman's decisive speech in 1949 until the 1970s, the international commitment to development was established as a given, a post-war certainty in the social imagination of the West (1995: 5). Thus, when Illich first began to direct his critique of development to a North Atlantic audience in the 1960s, one could imagine his hearers responding as to criticism of something sacrosanct, like the NHS in the UK. Illich, arguably the first post-development thinker, continued to cut against the grain of this dominant certainty, however, convinced that it offered a false vision of human flourishing, and, therefore, needed to be subverted.

In fact, Illich's unique contribution to the field of post-development studies lies in the way he entirely reframed the development paradigm, so that it became no longer the golden solution, or the magic pill, but a generative problem itself. Within the development paradigm, two key perceptions were established as social facts: first, the fundamental problem was the condition of underdevelopment, whose essential mark was poverty; second, the solution was to extend the US 'war on poverty' from the homeland to neighboring countries in the South through development. Illich began to form different perceptions about what was happening within the development paradigm:

We have embodied our world-view in our institutions and are now their prisoners. Factories, newsmedia, hospitals, governments and schools produce goods and services packaged to contain our view of the world. We – the rich – conceive of progress as the expansion of these establishments...In less than a hundred years industrial society has moulded patent solutions to basic human needs and converted us to the belief that man's needs were shaped by the Creator as demands for the products that we have invented. This is as true for Russia and Japan as for the North Atlantic community. The consumer is trained for obsolescence, which means continuing loyalty toward the same producers who will give him the same basic packages in different quality or new wrappings (TPDR: 95).

Thus, whereas Truman's 'Four Point Program' hailed "the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress" as the means for "improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas", Illich exposed the darker side of such a commitment to "industrial progress" and "greater production". In doing so, Illich repositioned development no longer as the solution to perceived 'Third World' poverty, but rather as a generative force for novel forms of consumption, and new forms of dependence upon industrially produced "packaged solutions" (TPDR: 97).

In fact, much of Illich's early critique of development turned on his diagnosis of the counterproductivity of the industrial mode of production, and more specifically, how industrial dominance generated what Illich called "modernized poverty...the new mutant of impoverishment...[characterized by] the peculiarly modern inability to use personal endowments, communal life, and environmental resources in an autonomous way" (THN: vii, viii). Thus, for Illich, development was not the strategic solution in a 'war on poverty'. Rather, Illich demystified the benevolent, US-led 'war on poverty', showing how development generated the "planned poverty" of underdevelopment (TPDR: 94), that is, the condition in which "mass needs are converted to the demand for new brands of packaged solutions which are forever beyond the reach of the majority" (TPDR: 97). At one level, then, Illich aimed his critique at the way development problematized poverty as a technical problem, but he also recognized that, as a missionary effort, development promised even more than packaged deals. As an offspring of progress, it also promised to include all people into "economic peace".

### **“Economic Peace” and/as “The War Against Subsistence”<sup>3</sup>**

According to the Truman’s Four Point Program, to which I referred earlier, which was endorsed by leading political and economic elites around the globe, development brings good news. Indeed, it is nothing less than a gospel (Gorringer, 2004: 178), which announces and delivers a peace plan for “peace-loving peoples” for the sake of “help[ing] the free people of the world” (Truman, in Rist, 2008: 71). In Illich’s view, development undoubtedly announces a ‘peace plan’, but like a Trojan horse, this gospel comes freighted with ‘bad news’ for those who await its arrival. The bad news of this gospel, however, is not intrinsically linked to its attempt to extend and universalize a particular conception of peace. The bad news is that this particular conception of peace, *pax oeconomica*, is ultimately nothing less than a war against “people’s peace”, which is also to say, it is a “war against subsistence” (SW: Ch. 3).

To bring to light the destructive fallout of “economic peace”, I want to turn to Illich’s narration of peace in his 1980 speech “The Delinking of Peace and Development”. As a historian addressing researchers in peace studies, Illich highlights the idea that peace is not an abstraction. That is, peace is not a universal condition without variation. Rather, peace is vernacular, like certain kinds of speech. There has always been a diversity of ‘people’s peace’, just as there has always been a diversity of languages, and thus: “Each *ethnos* – people, community, culture – has been mirrored, symbolically expressed and reinforced by its own *ethos* – myth, law, goddess, ideal – of peace” (IMOP: 16).

To illustrate the indelible link between *ethnos* and *ethos*, or, people and peace, Illich distinguished between Jewish *shalom* and Roman *pax*:

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “The War Against Subsistence” is the title of Chapter Three of Illich’s *Shadow Work* (SW).

[L]ook at the Jewish patriarch when he raises his arms in blessing over his family and flock. He invokes *shalom*, which we translate as peace. He sees *shalom* as grace, flowing from heaven, ‘like oil dripping through the beard of Aaron the forefather’. For the Semitic father, peace is the blessing of justice which the one true God pours over the twelve tribes of recently settled shepherds (IMOP: 16).

Having characterized Jewish *shalom*, Illich draws the contrast between it and Rome’s *pax*:

To the Jew, the angel announces *shalom*, not the Roman *pax*. Roman peace means something utterly different. When the Roman governor raises the ensign of his legion to ram it into the soil of Palestine, he does not look toward heaven. He faces a far-off city; he imposes *its* law and *its* order. There is nothing in common between *shalom* and this *pax romana*, though both exist in the same place and time (IMOP: 16).

This insight about each *ethnos*, or people, sharing an *ethos* and a particular sense of peace is what sets up Illich’s distinction between “people’s peace” and “economic peace”. People’s peace is congruent with a shared sense of limitation in a space which is shaped by a shared culture. It is the sense of harmony that arises when people live within the proportionality they establish, especially through the nurturing interchange between human beings and their place. In other words, it is their common sense of what is appropriate, fitting, or good.

This shared sense of peace establishes the first person plural; it “places the ‘I’ within the corresponding ‘we’” (IMOP: 27). Thus, economic peace generates and imposes sameness; it counterfeits “[people’s] peace [as] that condition under which each culture flowers in its own incomparable way” (IMOP: 17). And yet, just as forms of vernacular speech have been destroyed by national languages, so too has the diversity of people’s peace been destroyed by the monoculture of economic peace.

In 1980, Illich protested against a different kind of war, one that had gone largely unnoticed. He protested by arguing that “under the cover of ‘development’, a worldwide war has been waged against people’s peace” (IMOP: 16). Today, we might update his claim,

inserting neoliberal globalization or Empire (Miguez, Rieger and Mo Sung: 2009) as the concepts which name the war against people's peace. Nonetheless I believe it is the same war. These all are configurations or variations on the same theme: the advancement of industrial and technical progress that imposes economic peace, that is, "a balance between sovereign, economic powers acting under the assumption of scarcity" (IMOP: 19). Scarcity, then, has become, for Illich, a dominant assumption about 'the-world-as-it', with which he links the 'bad news', that often remains untold, to the way that economic peace wages a triple threat against people's peace. It does so by its attack:

- on popular or vernacular culture, which is condemned and suppressed as 'backwards';
- against the environment, which is transformed from a commons into a resource; and
- against women, who are 'neutered' and transformed into *homo oeconomicus*, or "universal man" (IMOP: 23).

Illich's fundamental point is that to be for people's peace, we have got to be for limits and alternatives to development. This is for two related reasons: development means extending economic peace, and economic peace means war. Of course, it is not always a visible war of militia, fighter planes, and bombs, but economic peace is always what Illich calls "the war against subsistence" (SW: Ch 3), the war against sustaining the conditions for well-being without destroying those conditions through consumption.

In *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy* (1999), German feminist scholar and activist Veronik Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies borrow and extend Illich's insight regarding this kind of war. They, too, suggest that since 1945, the war against subsistence has meant that "everything that is connected with the immediate creation and maintenance of life, and also everything that is not arranged through the production or



consumption of commodities, has been devalued” (Bennhold-Thomsen and Mies, 1999: 17). In the aftermath of this war, everyone seems to share a common double fate: to become a wage-earner in order to become a consumer, and this, so that we can afford to buy the goods and services upon which we have become dependent. As Bennhold-Thomsen and Mies point out, however, these are recent assumptions based on novel commodity-intensive social conditions. Following Illich, they also recognize that only after World War II did the war against subsistence begin systematically, and that its beginning coincides “with the new paradigm of development” (1999: 18).

In their telling of the history of the “subsistence perspective”, the decisive issue that they highlight is one which resonates deeply with Illich’s historical studies on peace and the novelty of economic peace. They assert that, “[i]f life depends, in a material and symbolic sense, on wage labour and the acquisition of money”, then an orientation towards subsistence can and should be rejected “as romantic, as backward-looking, or even as the threat of death” (1999: 17). If this is so, then Truman was right after all. If this is so, then the development paradigm can and must be embraced for what Truman declared it to be: “a bold new program...for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas” (Truman, in Rist, 2008: 71).

And therein lies the problem. For from the subsistence perspective of Bennhold-Thomsen and Mies, as well as Illich, the dominance of wage labor and the expansion of consumption within the market economy are not life-giving, but rather fundamentally parasitic on subsistence activities. Thus, like Illich, their understanding does not romanticize the past and the history of subsistence, but rather de-stigmatizes the subsistence perspective by “emphasis[ing] that it is us, the people, who create and maintain life, not money or capital.

That is subsistence” (Bennhold-Thomsen and Mies, 1999: 19). Echoing Illich, these two contemporary feminists argue that the war against subsistence is:

...[a] real war of capital, not the struggle against the unions and their wage demands. Only after people’s capacity to subsist is destroyed, are they totally and unconditionally in the power of capital.

This war is a war not only to colonise subsistence work but also to colonise language, culture, food, education, thinking, image, symbols. Mono-labour, mono-language, mono-culture, mono-food, mono-thought, mono-medicine, mono-education are supposed to take the place of the manifold and diverse ways of subsistence. A subsistence perspective means resistance against mono-culturation and putting an end to the war against subsistence (1999: 19).

Thus, in following Illich’s method of historicizing peace, it is crucial that we recognize the opposition between a) subsistence as a diverse and culturally-imbued set of activities which promote and embody people’s peace, and b) development as a strategic and global initiative in the post-World War II “war against subsistence”. “People’s peace”, writes Illich, is convivial and lies in “the peaceful enjoyment of that which is not scarce” (IMOP: 19). ‘Development’, on the other hand, destroys the means of subsistence and “inevitably means the imposition of *pax oeconomica* at the cost of every form of popular peace” (IMOP: 22).

Through the twin pillars of professionalization and institutionalization (Escobar, 1995: 44-47), development has enacted an economic mission. It has created a social space which intensified market dependence, and market relations, by transforming the means of subsistence into “packaged deals” of goods and services as the solution to “Third World” poverty. In Illich’s terms, development names the “replacement of convivial means by manipulative industrial ware” (THN: 3), and the transformation that leads to a market dependence and “life of consumption” (DS: 52) as the dominant means of needs-satisfaction. In the next section, I turn to Illich’s early social criticism which seeks to expose the anthropological fallacy behind

this dependence. Illich calls this the “Promethean fallacy” (DS: 114), or the assumption that humans flourish through dependence upon technological artifacts, especially dominant social institutions.

### **Illich’s Project of Demythologization: Illich’s Turn to Ritual and Myth**

In a revealing published conversation with long-time friend and colleague Majid Rahnmena (1997), Illich distinguishes between distinct stages in his approach to social criticism. In his first stage, begun during the 1950s, Illich “took as [his] model the pamphleteers of the Enlightenment...call[ing] on people to recognize the surreptitious injustices implicit in publicly financed professional organizations of teachers, social workers, and physicians” (TPDR: 107). Illich goes on to describe his rhetorical turn from being discursively analytical to examining institutions such as compulsory schooling, transportation systems, and health care by “look[ing] at these fantasies as at a frightful Greek ogre, a fateful destiny in the pursuit of which all but some of the rich or protectively credentialed are highly likely to be ground up by the *rituals* created to reach it” (TPDR:107). In referring to these conditions as rituals, Illich draws attention to how the dominance of these institutions exercise the power to direct and hold captive our imaginations:

These generate not just specific goals like ‘education’ or ‘transportation’, but a non-ethical state of mind. Inevitably, this wild-goose chase transforms the good into a value; it frustrates present satisfaction (in Latin, *enough-ness*) so that one always longs for something better that lies in the ‘not yet’ (TPDR: 104).

Here I turn to examine Illich’s social criticism of two prominent rituals in contemporary society in order to display what is at stake in Illich’s attempt “to challenge a social system featuring obligatory ‘health’, ‘wealth’, and ‘security’” (DS: 49).

## **Schooling and the Ritual(ization) of “Knowledge Consumption”**

With the publication of *Deschooling Society* in 1970, Illich unmistakably emerged as a leading voice in the arena of radical social criticism. Even today, it is arguably the book for which Illich is most recognized. In *Deschooling Society*, however, Illich is responding to a more general issue than schooling itself. He is questioning “the mutual definition of [human] nature and the nature of modern institutions” (DS: 2). More specifically, Illich is challenging the “institutionalization of values”, a social process that transforms legitimate “nonmaterial needs [such as learning, knowledge skills] into demands for commodities and rights to services” (DS: 1). As Illich points out, this particularly modern form of institutionalization must be challenged because it “leads inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization, and psychological impotence: three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery” (DS: 1).

Illich’s account treats schooling as paradigmatic of “modern institutions” and as a primary mediating institution for the “ritualization of progress”, and full participation in society (DS: 10). In *Deschooling Society*, Illich works with the definition of school as “the age-specific, teacher-related process requiring full-time attendance at an obligatory curriculum” (DS: 25-26). This approach builds upon and extends Illich’s earlier essays which focused the discrepancy between the futility of schooling, on the one hand, as well as the status of schooling as a protected interest on the other (COA: Chs. 8-9). Thus, Illich highlights the idea that, at a phenomenological level, compulsory schooling is economically unfeasible, pedagogically unsound, and socially divisive.

From the perspective of a historian, he is also at pains to make clear the historical aberration which obligatory schooling manifests. Historically, most learning happened “incident[ly] or informal[ly]”. As an integral part of the quotidian patterns of living, “[e]ducation did not compete for time with either work or leisure. Almost all education was complex, lifelong, and unplanned” (DS: 22). As Illich points out, with the advent of the industrial society, a significant break takes place that disrupts this porous interplay between living and learning. Borrowing from Philippe Aries’ groundbreaking work on childhood, Illich relates to this modern division between living and learning as the emergence and “mass production of childhood” as a distinct phase of human development (DS: 26). Thus, a first shift correlates schooling with industrialization and the institutional apparatus that promotes the ‘knowledge industry’. A second shift corresponds with the post-World War II emergence of compulsory schooling as a dominant institution.

It is here, in relation to the way schooling becomes established, in the same sense that the church can be legally established, that Illich directs his critique at obligatory schooling. Borrowing from Durkheim’s insight that a mark of formal religion is its power to divide social reality into the two distinct realms of sacred and profane, Illich’s “sociology of education” aims to expose the way:

[T]he very existence of obligatory schools divides any society into two realms: some time spans and processes are ‘academic’ or ‘pedagogic’, and others are not. The power of school thus to divide social reality has no boundaries: education becomes unworldly and the world becomes noneducational (DS: 24).

Illich goes beyond asking the question, What is a school?, or, What happens or should happen in schooling?, in order to ask a deeper question: What does schooling do to us? Illich shifts the focus to ‘deschooling society’ and away from merely reforming schooling, to

attending to schooling's "hidden curriculum" under the rubric of ritual. For Illich, the two go hand-in-hand:

[T]he ritual of schooling itself constitutes such a hidden curriculum...[and] this hidden curriculum serves as a ritual of initiation into a growth-oriented consumer society for rich and poor alike (DS: 33).

School is a ritual of initiation which introduces the neophyte to the sacred race of progressive consumption, a ritual of propitiation whose academic priests mediate between the faithful and the gods of privilege and power, a ritual of expiation which sacrifices its dropouts, branding them as scapegoats of underdevelopment (DS: 44).

From this perspective, schooling clearly initiates its participants into much more than what it promises through its explicit curriculum. And also much less, for its very efficiency at funneling students into 'knowledge consumption' inhibits learning as a personal activity, thereby confusing inclusion within the curricular process with the sharing and acquisition of vital competencies.

But how does it do this? In answering this question, Illich puts his school/church analogy to work:

The school system today performs the threefold function common to powerful churches throughout history. It is simultaneously the repository of society's myth, the institutionalization of that myth's contradictions, and the locus of the ritual which reproduces and veils the disparities between myth and reality (DS: 37).

To explore the sense in which schooling performs as a "myth-making ritual", and, more precisely, as paradigmatic for what he calls the "ritualization of progress", Illich highlights four modern myths that schooling reposit, reproduces, and veils all at once:

- 1) “The Myth of Institutionalized Values”, which falsely equates process with the production of “value” and “demand”. This is to confuse attendance with learning in the same way that it confuses church attendance with discipleship (DS: 38-39);
- 2) “The Myth of Measurement of Values”, which grants false privilege to ‘the quantifiable’, thereby “initiat[ing] young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imagination, and indeed, man himself” (DS: 40);
- 3) “The Myth of Packaging of Values” undergirds the ‘business’ of schooling (pun intended) as “curriculum production” designed by “educational engineers”, funnelled along the scholastic “assembly line”, supplied by the “distributor-teacher”, and consumed by the “consumer-pupil” (DS: 41);
- 4) “The Myth of Self-Perpetuating Progress” which promotes the “the value of escalation”, a more-has-to-be-better attitude, linked to “open-ended consumption” (DS: 42, 43).

In attending to the connection between schooling as a “myth-making ritual” and its “hidden curriculum”, it is important to keep in mind the overall shape of Illich’s argument. Illich is not concerned primarily with whether schooling can be improved, which is what distinguishes him from most reformers, even of the educational left. His concern is the way the ritual of schooling both assumes and conceals a false premise: namely, “that valuable knowledge is a commodity which under certain circumstances may be forced unto the consumer” (DS: 50). No doubt, this is how the ritual construes knowledge, but Illich wants to challenge this construal and name this process for what it is: “pedagogical torture” (DS: 50).

Thus, by taking schooling as a paradigm for the “ritualization of progress”, Illich is, in effect, using schooling as a case study for his more general argument against a fallacy that undergirds the “consumer ethos” (DS: 114) of contemporary society. Illich’s basic argument

is that “substantive values”, which he later refers to simply as “the good” (IIC: Ch. 5), cannot be produced, controlled, and manipulated according to a planned process. In short, the ‘good life’ cannot be institutionalized and consumed “as the result of services or ‘treatments’” (DS: 1).

### **The Ritualization of Energy Consumption**

Following the release of *Deschooling Society*, Illich broadened his critique of dominant institutions into a more general critique of the monopoly of the industrial mode of production, doing so in *Tools for Conviviality* (1973). Shortly thereafter, Illich extended his critique of the radical monopoly of industry, publishing an article in *Le Monde* that was later released in English as “Energy and Equity”. The opening lines to Illich’s essay read as follows:

It has recently become fashionable to insist on an impending energy crisis. The euphemistic term conceals a contradiction and consecrates an illusion. It masks the contradiction implicit in the joint pursuit of equity and industrial growth. It safeguards the illusion that machine power can indefinitely take the place of manpower. To resolve this contradiction and dispel this illusion, it is urgent to clarify the reality that the language of crisis obscures: high quanta of energy degrade social relations just as inevitably as they destroy the physical milieu (THN: 111).

As Illich explains, the standard account of the energy crisis promoted energy policies which presuppose that “[w]ell-being can be identified with high amounts of per capita energy use” (THN: 112). Within this account, policies may differ regarding an emphasis on energy management versus an emphasis on technological innovation, but what these positions have in common is a commitment to “huge public expenditures and increased social control”



(THN: 112). According to the logic of the standard account, any third option goes unnoticed, for, unlike the standard logic which seeks to maximize per capita energy use towards their ecological limits, the third option focuses on “the use of minimum feasible power as the foundation of any of various social orders that would be both modern and desirable” (THN: 112). Central to the third option, which Illich advocates, is an insight that the standard account overlooks, that is, “that energy and equity can grow concurrently only to a point” (THN: 112).

Thus, Illich’s underlying move in “Energy and Equity” is to debunk “the widespread belief that clean and abundant energy is the panacea for social ills” by exposing how this belief operates according to a “political fallacy” (THN: 113), namely, the assumption that “equity and energy consumption can be indefinitely correlated, at least under some ideal political conditions” (THN: 113). To do so, Illich demonstrates that just as “nonmetabolic power pollutes”, so, too, “mechanical power corrupts” (THN: 113). Just as there is a threshold for ecological destruction, so, too, is there one for social disintegration. Equitable social relations and energy consumption are, indeed, related, but they are not identical. In fact, social polarization occurs at a lower threshold than ecological degradation. Thus, even if we could keep our energy consumption from causing biological degradation, it would still be the case that dependence on energy consumption would be socially divisive. This is because “no society can have a population that is hooked on larger numbers of energy slaves and whose members are also autonomously active” (THN: 113).

For Illich, then, the energy crisis presents a “political[ly] ambiguous issue” (THN: 115). It can lead either to “the search for a postindustrial, labor-intensive, low-energy and high-equity economy”, or it can “reinforce the present escalation of capital-intensive institutional growth, and carry us past the last turnoff from a hyperindustrial Armageddon” (THN: 112). To paraphrase, in the idiom of the contemporary Transition movement, the

energy crisis can lead us to embrace an “energy descent” (Hopkins, 2008: 50-53) in which we regenerate the conditions for less energy consumption and more equitable social relations, or it can continue along the path of ‘powering up’ and greater social inequities. To return to Illich’s fundamental point about energy and equity: one cannot be committed to a high degree of social equity and addicted to high levels of energy consumption at the same time. Beyond a threshold, energy use rises at the expense of equity. The energy crisis cannot, then, be resolved by escalating energy inputs. According to Illich, “it can only be dissolved” in a way that exposes the illusion that “well-being depends on the number of energy slaves a man has at his command” (THN: 116).

To expose this illusion, Illich again turns to ritual as an analytic key. In the same way that he analyzed schooling as a paradigmatic ritual of progressive/consumer societies, here, he examines the industrialization of traffic as what we might call ‘the ritual of energy consumption’. At the level of social analysis, it is clear to Illich that the energy crisis demonstrates the need for limits on energy consumption just as the side effects of obligatory schooling call for limits on ‘curriculum consumption’. Thus, in the same way that Illich focuses on schooling as ritual to expose the gap between our expectations and the realities of schooling, so he focuses on the ritual of energy consumption as an analytical tool which accounts for the gap between what we expect from a high-speed industrialized mode of transport, and how that impacts on humanity.

To demystify the “industrialization of traffic” as the “rain-dance of time-consuming acceleration”, Illich makes some helpful distinctions. First, traffic refers to “any movement of people from one place to another when they are outside their homes”. Thus, traffic is Illich’s umbrella term that covers both transit, that which is self-powered by human metabolism, and transport, which is any “mode of movement which relies on other sources of energy” (THN:

118). These distinctions are made to enable us to see how all traffic is not the same. By distinguishing between transit and transport, Illich is able to highlight the idea that inside the industrialization of traffic, there is a negative correlation between “social justice and motorized power”, namely, how “[e]nforced dependence on auto-mobile machines [ends up] den[ying] a community of self-propelled people just those values supposedly procured by improved transportation” (THN: 118). Thus, we expect motorized transport to deliver to us increased freedom of movement and choice: in short, a greater range of mobility and access coupled with reduced time-in-travel. Nonetheless, the industrialization of traffic comes with a cost, something which Illich expresses as an overall increase in “life-time” spent within “a ritual of progressively paralyzing speed” (THN: 136).

Illich’s fundamental argument here is that “total traffic is the result of two profoundly distinct modes of production” (THN129). Whereas transit is labor-intensive, transport is capital-intensive. Whereas transit occurs through personal activity, which is to say, “natural mobility” and “autonomous outputs” of transients, transport occurs when passengers become “clients” who consume an “industrial commodity”. By definition, the natural mobility of transit has use-value, but unlike transport, it need not have exchange-value. Unlike the means of transit, human metabolism and feet, that are “native to [humanity]” and abundantly available, the means of transport, as an industrial product and commodity are, by definition, scarce. Thus, whereas conflict over the means of transport tends to be cast as fundamentally competitive, transit presents “a non-zero sum game” (THN: 128-129).

Illich is at pains to expose the counterproductive results that occur when the industrial mode displaces the autonomous means. For him, the “industrialization of traffic” results in a radical monopoly “[by] exercis[ing] this kind of deep-seated monopoly [and thereby] becom[ing] the dominant means of satisfying needs that formerly occasioned a personal

response” (THN: 130). In this way, being ‘auto-mobile’ is displaced by the monopolistic intrusion of motorized automobiles, and we are joined together in ritualized dependence on transportation. Thus, Illich claims that “[i]n this fools’ paradise, all passengers would be equal, but they would be just as equally captive consumers of transport” (THN: 132), and therefore, they would certainly be less free.

Writing in the early 1970s, then, Illich’s social criticism focused on the way that dominant social institutions ritualized consumption of their products in such a way that dependence increased even as satisfaction waned. While the characteristic mood of the 1960s was increasing frustration directed towards “further technological and bureaucratic escalation”, Illich observed that the turn into the 1970s was marked by a cry for ‘more’, and ritual was one of his ways of trying to account for this collective drive for ‘more’:

Self-defeating escalation of power became the core-ritual practiced in highly industrialized nations. In this context the Vietnam War is both revealing and concealing. It makes this ritual visible for the entire world in a narrow theater of war, yet it also distracts attention from the same ritual being played out in many so-called peaceful arenas...many Americans argue that the resources squandered on the war in the Far East could be used effectively to overwhelm poverty at home. Others are anxious to use the [war costs] for increasing international development assistance...They fail to grasp the underlying institutional structure common to a peaceful war on poverty and a bloody war on dissidence. Both escalate what they are meant to eliminate (TFC: 8).

A closer examination of this counterproductive escalation of power through dependence on industrial tools takes us to a second aspect of Illich’s project of demythologization, his turn to Greek myth.

## **Discerning the Promethean Enterprise**

As we have seen, Illich's social criticism entered into its second stage in the early 1970s, at a time when many from the left were questioning the role of dominant institutions in society. In addition to his turn to ritual, what characterized this second stage was the way "[his] rhetoric was inspired by the stories of myth" (TPDR: 107), as another way of exposing the growing dissonance he observed between a) what we say about and expect from institutions and b) what dominant institutions do to us. Illich diagnosed how we tend to speak of such dominant institutions, like schooling, transportation or health-care as primary sites of human flourishing or catalysts for social progressivism, when, he argued, careful observation suggests that their dominance also makes them crucibles of unprecedented forms of alienation. This is because they exchange vital personal activities for dependent consumption of institutional outputs, that is, scarce commodities. Thus, at the heart of Illich's social criticism in the early 1970s lies this claim: dominant institutions both call forth our trusting commitment and allegiance, while at the same time entrapping or colonizing domains of human activity in novel and fundamentally disabling ways. To explicate his claim, Illich no longer addressed his audience through reason alone; rather he clothed his argument inside his reappropriation of Greek myth.

In the "Rebirth of Epimethean Man", an essay included as the final chapter of *Deschooling Society*, Illich challenges the certainties and social conditions generated by dominant institutions, interpreting them in the light of Greek epic tragedy. It might be said that Illich reopened Pandora's box, turning to the characters of Prometheus, Epimetheus, and Pandora as a way of 'demythologizing' what he describes as the "Promethean enterprise" (DS: 104) of contemporary Western society. Illich maps the ancient myth onto contemporary

consumer society in this way: “The history of modern man begins with the degradation of Pandora’s myth....It is the history of the Promethean endeavor *to forge institutions in order to corral each of the rampant ills*. It is the history of fading hope and rising expectations” (DS: 105 [emphasis added]).

### **Marginalizing the Promethean Ethos and Recovering Hope**

In ancient Greece the story goes that Pandora, the All-Giver, was sent by the gods to live among humanity. She carried with her a jar containing various social ills that escaped. In her jar, however, she also kept one good gift, the gift of hope.

According to Illich, there is a shift between the original account of Pandora and that of the later, classical Greeks. The former emphasized humanity’s incapacity to control or manipulate the cosmos, and therefore, the importance of living in hope. Within the later view, “[c]lassical Greeks began to replace hope with expectations. In their version of Pandora she released both evils and goods” (DS: 106). As Illich points out, through subsequent retellings, and with a decidedly misogynous bias, the myth in its classical form did not remember Pandora in the same way and, so Illich claims, not well enough. That is, it remembered her primarily for the ills she brought, while forgetting “that the All-Giver was also the bearer of hope” (DS: 106). In Illich’s retelling, Prometheus (meaning ‘foresight’) warns his brother Epimetheus (or ‘hindsight’) to stay away from this woman, Pandora. Instead of disregarding Pandora and her box, however, Epimetheus marries her, thereby creating a human alliance with this bearer of hope.

Prometheus, the allegedly foreseeing visionary, perceives a future of new possibilities for humanity. Casting himself in the role of epic hero, Prometheus, in a great act of hubris, or

unbounded presumption, tricks the gods with a false offering and steals their fire to fashion new tools of iron. As the one who acts in foresight, Prometheus may have deceived the gods and may even be considered the ‘god of technologists’: the one who challenged the gods and enabled humanity to overcome the vicissitudes of necessity. Yet, even with so-called foresight, he did not overcome his mortal condition. He remained “wound up in iron chains” (DS: 115), less free than he was before and bound by the work of his own hands.

In Illich’s view, Prometheus and Epimetheus represent more than distant figures from Greek mythology; they represent alternative ways of regarding the human condition: two rival versions of approaching human flourishing. Epimetheus lives by embracing the hope that comes through another; Prometheus merely endures by being bound to his expectation. As Illich contends, recovering the art of living depends upon rediscovering the distinction between these two orientations:

Hope, in its strong sense, means trusting faith in the goodness of nature, while expectation, as I will use it here, means reliance on results which are planned and controlled by man. Hope centers desire on a person from whom we await a gift. Expectation looks forward to satisfaction from a predictable process which will produce what we have the right to claim. The Promethean ethos has now eclipsed hope. Survival of the human race depends on its rediscovery as a social force (DS: 106).

Let me explore this last statement with a brief paraphrase which illumines Illich’s use of this myth: Prometheus tried to transcend, or better, to defy his creatureliness by transgressing a perceived limit: he, a mortal, took what belonged to the gods. As a result of his transgression, he used fire to forge tools of iron. Similarly, we have tried to transcend or defy our own creatureliness by transgressing the perceived limits to what we can have, need, or want. We have done so by forging institutions as our tools of false transcendence. Prometheus’ hubris provoked nemesis, or a backlash from the gods; he ended up in iron

chains, alienated and held captive by the tools of his own hands. In the same way, our hubris has provoked a new form of nemesis, the backlash of the gods of industrialized progress, who have alienated and captivated us. We have chained ourselves in dependence upon our dominant institutions, and, more generally, upon our technological artifacts, whether they be institutions or devices. In this state of dependence, we embody the Promethean ethos. That is, we expect satisfaction from the very conditions that cause our alienation. We live no longer by a sense of trust and surprise that comes from hope. Within the Promethean ethos, we live by the double-edged sword of entitlement: ‘we should have X’, and of frustration; ‘we don’t have enough of X’. The Promethean ethos, then, is another way of naming a double alienation in consumer society, one which tends to reproduce two kinds of people: “the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy” (TFC: 47). Either way, we seem to live enclosed by the mirage of Promethean expectation.

The key note that Illich strikes here is hope, the recovery of hope as an energizing social force. What’s more, he suggests that in addition to the “Promethean majority,” there is a growing minority who do not cling to the expectations of the Promethean enterprise. There are those, Illich tells us, who do expect modern institutions to become their ‘arks of salvation’. He describes them in this way:

We now need a name for those who value hope above expectations. We need a name for those who love people more than products...We need a name for those who love the earth on which each can meet the other...We need a name for those who collaborate with their Promethean brother in the lighting of the fire and the shaping of iron, but who do so to enhance their ability to tend and care and wait upon the other (DS: 115-116).

In this way, Illich brings into view “a minority [who seek] to formulate its suspicion that our constant deceptions tie us to contemporary institutions as the chains bound Prometheus to his rock” (DS: 114). In this way, Illich’s ‘prophetic imagination’ seeks to energize “those who



yearned because the old order had failed them or squeezed them out” (Brueggemann, 1978: 105). Illich calls the manifestation of “these hopeful brothers and sisters” the “rebirth of Epimethean [humanity]” (DS: 116).

What is important here, according to Illich, is the ability to discriminate between authentic human flourishing and its institutionalized counterfeits. Expectation, Illich says simply, is “counterfeit hope” (DS: 29); it offers only a mirage of infinite possibilities instead of a real horizon by which we might shape and limit our action. At stake, for Illich, is the awareness that the Promethean ideal, while held by a majority of the social elites, operates according to an anthropological fallacy that must be exposed and renounced in favor of the Epimethean alternative.

### **Exposing the Promethean Fallacy**

It should be noted that Illich’s reading of contemporary society in the light of this myth coheres within his more general “project of demythologizing” (DS: 38) the Promethean ideal. In doing so, Illich diagnoses the symptoms, or better, the consequences of its contemporary nemesis in this way: “Everywhere nature becomes poisonous, society inhumane, and the inner life is invaded and personal vocation smothered” (DS: 113). Yet, within the horizon of the Promethean ethos, we cling to rising expectations. Through our hubris, we have transgressed and eroded any perceived limit, the proportion, the fittingness of what is good and what is enough. The result is that our hubris has also provoked a new kind of alienation, something Illich calls the “ethos of non-satiety” (DS: 113). For Illich, social inclusion within the institutional landscape of the Promethean enterprise is not the remedy for, but rather “the root of physical depredation, social polarization, and psychological passivity”

(DS: 113).

While Illich does indeed highlight the Promethean parallel between “classical” and “contemporary [humanity]” (DS: 107), he also draws attention to the way contemporary manifestations of hubris, what he calls industrialized hubris, go beyond the Promethean ideal of the ancient Greeks.

In Illich’s view, the ancients recognized that they not only inhabit the world vulnerably, but they also have the capacity actively to shape the world according to their plans. That is, they perceived their capacity “for the casting of the environment into [their] own image” (DS: 107). And yet, this perception, Illich observes, was kept in check by the following perspective: “the world was governed by fate, facts, and necessity” (DS: 107), the very conditions which Prometheus disturbed. Thus, while Prometheus led humanity into a new era by forging tools of iron, the ancients remained aware of the risk of defying the complex of “fate-nature-environment” (DS: 107). What distinguished Prometheus from Everyman or ‘common humanity’ is not his use of tools *per se*, but rather the use of *techné* as an expansive grasp of power that transgresses, and even eclipses, a perceived limit upon the range of human action. Thus, “[b]y stealing fire from the gods”, Illich tells us, “Prometheus turned facts into problems, called necessity into question, and defied fate” (DS: 107).

For Illich, Prometheus represents a particular ethos, or way of being human, a heroic aberration that has now become the norm within progressive modernity. For the ancients, Prometheus represented the, tragically, heroic exception to the ‘human rule’; now he has become the universal ideal of Everyman (LTM: 262-263). Whereas the ancients lived with this double awareness that balanced human potential and risk within the bounds of limits, “contemporary [humanity]” does not:

Classical man framed a civilized context for human perspective. He was aware

that he could defy fate-nature-environment, but only at his own risk. Contemporary man goes further; he attempts to create the world in his image, to build a totally man-made environment, and then discovers that he can do so only on the condition of constantly remaking himself to fit it. We must now face the fact that man himself is at stake (DS: 107).

This raises the critical issue of what has happened to the way in which we imagine human flourishing in the wake, and wane, of the myth of modern progress. For Illich, it has been effectively inscribed and colonized within a particular technological ethos that is perceived as universally valid. This imagination generates the certainty among citizens “that the ‘good life’ consists in having institutions which define the values that both they and their society need” (DS: 113). Within this imagination, the good as that which is fitting, or proportional, for humanity comes as an institutional output: “Man now defines himself as the furnace which burns up the value produced by his tools. And *there is no limit to his capacity*. His is the act of Prometheus carried to an extreme” (DS: 114 [emphasis added]). Thus, within this ethos, the ‘good life’ is defined, perhaps, by institutional dependence and unlimited consumption.

What has happened to how we imagine human flourishing? In Illich’s view, there has been “a corruption of [humanity]’s self-image”. More precisely, this self-image has been refashioned according to the following fallacy:

... [a] conception of [the human being] as an organism dependent not on nature and individuals, but rather on institutions. The institutionalization of substantive values, this belief that a planned process of treatment ultimately gives results desired by the recipient, this consumer ethos, is at the heart of the Promethean fallacy (DS: 114).

In exposing the Promethean fallacy, Illich diagnoses how we have come to imagine dominant institutions as the structural cradles of progressive modernity and human flourishing. As an iconoclast, Illich enters into these temples and tears the mythical veil in

two, exposing how they may become the primary crucibles of an unprecedented form of alienation and captivity. He exposes, I suggest, how the dominance of these structures generates disabling institutional dependence while undermining personal relatedness, which is, of course, fundamental for incarnational mission. In short, the Promethean fallacy ends up privileging counterproductive social forms and relations that are fundamentally dehumanizing.

### **After (the Contemporary) Prometheus?**

In his reappropriation of this ancient myth, two aspects of Illich's retelling stand out. First, Illich's commentary on the Greek myth embeds an apparent anomaly: a final allusion to the biblical narrative. As Illich points out, both Deucalion, Prometheus' son, and Noah represent a new beginning for humanity after the destruction of the Flood. It is here, Illich suggests, that "the Greek myth turns into hopeful prophecy" (DS: 115).

While Illich's allusion to the scriptural narrative is more suggestive than explicit, the connection warrants at least two comments. Explicitly, it highlights a correlation between the message of the narratives: Pandora's box and Noah's ark represent the presence of those who come bearing hope. Implicitly, Illich's turn to Noah, as a representative within the biblical imagination, suggests a compelling, albeit not absolute, convergence between what Greek mythological and biblical narrative offer us: the truth about the dignity of our humanity, as well as the depths to which this dignity can be distorted.

Second, Illich writes to persuade us that not only is the Promethean ethos built upon an anthropological fallacy, but that alternatives are at hand. There are those, Illich tells us, who imagine that another way is possible, those who by "hopeful trust and classical irony

(*eironeia*) must conspire to expose the Promethean fallacy” (DS: 114). Rhetorically, Illich turns to the stories of myth not so much to persuade us to accept prescriptions for human action, but to enlarge our imagination about which actions are possible and desirable. The recovery of “hopeful trust” means that we can “love people more than products” (DS: 115). The recovery of “classical irony” does not mean, however, that we counter the Promethean ethos with a simplistic anti-institutionalism or over-reactive technophobia. It means recovering the fittingness of limits as the condition for, not a challenge or obstacle to, our flourishing. It means that we approach institutions not as ‘arks of salvation’, but as available means “to enhance [our] ability to tend and care and wait upon the other” (DS: 116).

In the final chapter of *Limits to Medicine*, for example, Illich frames the question of alternatives by taking a step back in order to revisit the significance of myth for humanity, specifically, the way that “myth has fulfilled the function of setting limits to the materialization of greedy, envious, murderous dreams” (LTM: 261-262). Thus, for the Greeks, myth framed hubris as an imaginable, yet undesirable act of presumption, a transgression against what humans can ‘handle’. In the same way, I would suggest, industrial hubris destroys the “mythical framework of limits” and enfolds irrational expectations inside an all-encompassing framework of technological rationality and human control; it projects the illusion that through our artifacts, there is no limit to what we can ‘handle’, adapt or overcome. Thus, “unbounded material progress”, which should be considered beyond the limit of what humans can need, want, and have “has become Everyman’s goal” (LTM: 263). Similarly, for the Greeks, *nemesis* named an exceptional condition, a form of punishment or pain reserved for the hero who trespassed into what belonged to the gods; but industrialized *nemesis* is not for the hero, but “for the masses” (LTM: 263), all those who have been

included within the Promethean enterprise and, therefore, the “ethos of non-satiety” (DS: 113).

As I have argued, Illich’s social criticism attempted to “re-mythologize[] history in order to demythologize contemporary society” (Hulbert, in TCII: 164). Illich’s turn to myth operated primarily as an interruptive gesture, within which he attempts to rejuvenate the political process of establishing limits to growth as a response to development mania. For Illich was keenly aware that in their contemporary, industrialized, modalities, hubris and nemesis have eroded the perception of limits. “Inherited myths” no longer provide the awareness and embrace of limits by which humanity must live. This is all the more alarming given that “beyond a certain level of industrial hubris, nemesis *must* set in, because progress, like the broom of the sorcerer’s apprentice, can no longer be turned off” (LTM: 265). Thus, Illich argues that reversal of *nemesis* will not come from merely reclaiming our dependence on “inherited myths”, but by recovering “politically established limits” (LTM: 263).

## **Towards the Politics of Conviviality**

### **Towards Convivial Reconstruction: Or, Reconceiving the Institutional Spectrum**

Whereas Illich’s engagement with the myth of Prometheus, of the patterns of hubris and nemesis, offers critique of modern industrial society, his constructive engagement with alternatives to “the monopoly of the industrial mode of production” (TFC: ix) focuses on the key concept of conviviality. Conviviality, as used here by Illich, refers to “a modern society of responsibly limited tools” (TFC: xii). The “convivial reconstruction” of society, suggests for Illich, an inversion of “the present structure of major institutions” (TFC: xi) by reconfiguring “the triadic relationship between persons, tools, and a new collectivity” (TFC: xii). Thus, whereas some writings (DS; LTM; and DP) employ ritual and myth as a way of

inspiring the social imagination to move beyond “industrial expectations” (TFC: xi), Illich’s concept of conviviality lies at the heart of a constructive political proposal, which Illich describes as follows:

I choose the term ‘conviviality’ to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value (TFC: 11).

To appreciate the tension which Illich discerns between the industrial and the convivial, it is helpful to note that one of the key Illich strategies in *Deschooling Society* was to amplify what he called the institutional spectrum (DS: Ch. 4). That Illich was keen to advance a spectrum of institutions should make it clear how criticism cannot be reduced to a facile anti-institutionalism; rather, he attempted “to recognize [and promote] those institutions which support personal growth rather than addiction” (DS: 53). At one end of the spectrum, lie manipulative institutions, generally characterized by “forced commitment or selective service” (DS: 54). At the other end of the spectrum lie convivial institutions which are characterized by the spontaneous and voluntary. In referring to an institutional spectrum, Illich is highlighting the idea that the crisis runs deeper than Marxist insights regarding ownership of the means of production. For Illich, the crisis lies in the “industrial mode of production itself” (TFC: xi).

To illustrate the differences at the ends of the spectrum, we can turn to another of Illich’s distinctions: the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous modes of production. Autonomous production is domestic or community-based; it happens through the direct action of people doing things, such as learning, moving, and caring for themselves and

others. This mode of production generates ‘use-values’, such as self-directed learning, self-powered mobility and mutual self-care. Heteronomous production, on the other hand, is industrialized; it happens through “capital-intensive production [in which] services are designed for others, not with others nor for the producer” (LTM: 214). This mode of production results in a staple of commodities with exchange-values, such as schooling, transportation or medical treatment.

These two modes can interact negatively or positively. When society is organized to privilege “managed commodity production”, the result is a “negative synergy”, in which “people are trained for consumption rather than for action, and at the same time their range of action is narrowed” (LTM: 216). So, schooling is meant to enhance the personal activity of learning; transportation is meant to enable mobility; hospitals and health-care systems are meant to promote personal well-being. Yet when these institutions become dominant and monopolize the activity they exist to enhance, then dependence on schooling fosters incompetence; transportation demands more time and more congestion in traffic, and health-care systems lead to “pathogenic medicine”, or, at least to conditions in which people find it more difficult to care for one another. These are all examples of what Illich calls “specific counterproductivity”, the outcome of an industrially, that is, heteronomously, induced paralysis of practical self-governing activity” (LTM: 213). Towards the manipulative end of the institutional spectrum, dominant institutions monopolize activity, and therefore, heteronomous production hampers or disables the autonomous, resulting in counterproductivity (LTM: 213).

There is, however, not only a negative synergy, but an ‘optimal synergy’ between these two modes of production. Illich never imagined or promoted a social order without any schools, highways, or hospitals, but he did imagine a balance, or ‘optimal synergy’, between



the heteronomous and the autonomous, between the industrial and the convivial modes of production. With these subtle, but enabling distinctions, Illich sought to argue that personal growth is effective when one's schooling does not overprogram or interfere with informal and self-directed inquiry; traffic is effective when transportation does not overcome, but complements transit, or self-powered mobility; sick-care is effective when medicalization does not atrophy the personal ability to suffer and to care for oneself or another (LTM: 216).

Thus, by highlighting the convivial end of the spectrum, Illich does not suggest that we can or should abolish the social forms that are manipulatively industrial. Rather, he suggests that we aim to recover a balance between the manipulative and the convivial, the heteronomous and the autonomous modes of production. Manipulative institutions privilege dependence upon the consumption of commodities by enhancing efficiently organized production (DS: 62). Convivial institutions, by contrast, aim at cultivating personal activity. Thus Illich suggests that we must recover ways of inhabiting the convivial end of the spectrum, precisely because "the desirable future depends on our deliberately choosing a life of action over a life of consumption" (DS: 52).

It is to be noted that when Illich juxtaposes "compulsory consumption" and "personal autonomy" (TFC: 53), there is more at stake here than a 'lifestyle choice'. One of Illich's aims in *Tools for Conviviality* was to expose how industrial development disturbs a "multiple balance" (TFC: Ch. 3), which has threatening social and environmental consequences. Indeed, Illich's political agenda in the 1970s was to change the terms of debate beyond "the one-dimensional debate [that]...somehow human action can be engineered to fit into the requirements of the world conceived as a technological totality" (TFC: 50). Furthermore, by speaking of convivial institutions and convivial tools, Illich was clearly not advocating a reactionary technophobia. Rather, his convivial reconstruction sought to reimagine the

relationship between persons and tools in a way that was not captive to either the Promethean illusion that we can and should manage the world as a technical problem, or the more general illusion that we can cultivate a convivial way of life while clinging to destructively ‘great expectations’. Illich sought to generate a different set of expectations, not just lower expectations, but rather ones by which we might live well, and cultivate a more satisfying ‘life together’. He saw clearly that even in the industrial wilderness, a path towards convivial reconstruction remained, but that to take this path:

we must radically reduce our expectations that machines will do our work for us or that therapists can make us learned or healthy. The only [response] to the environmental crisis is the shared insight of people that they would be happier if they could *work* together and *care* for each other (TFC: 49-50).

### **Re-imagining a “Post-professional Ethos”: Or, Beyond “Professional Power”**

In the last section, I examined the institutional spectrum of how institutional structures can either disable or promote personal activity and interdependence. Here, we examine dominant subjects which are congruent within these structures, that is, the way that dominant, manipulative institutions generate and reproduce the dominance of “disabling professions”.<sup>1</sup> In Illich’s view, these “new dominant professions” (DP: 16) enact a subtle form of imperialism over the satisfaction of human needs, effectively coupling their diagnosis of need to their provision of the remedy. Thus, Illich also observes that convivial reconstruction turns on the recognition of imperialism, on not one, but three levels: “the pernicious spread of one nation beyond its boundaries; the omnipresent influence of multinational corporations; and the mushrooming of professional monopolies over production” (TFC: 43). He argues that we

must not only reckon with the military-industrial complex, but with the military-industrial-professional complex.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in addition to challenging the radical monopoly of social institutions, Illich also makes clear that convivial reconstruction would entail debunking the “social acceptance of the illusion of professional omniscience and omnipotence” (DP: 11-12). This illusion results in the technocratic power “to legislate needs”, thereby eroding people’s competence to discern whose needs are met by whom and by which means (DP: 12). The problem, Illich tells us, is not that needs have been politicized, but rather that the politicization of needs has been hijacked by a “professional élite” (DP: 15), an insight which takes us back to Escobar and the dynamic of professionalization in the development discourse (Escobar, 1995: 44-47). The way forward comes through a participatory politics “in which needs are defined by general consent” (DP: 15), and this means disestablishing the new dominant professions’ control over human needs that they alone can satisfy.

As a prime example, we can take Illich’s critique of the medical profession. As I suggested in Chapter 2, Illich’s critique of medicalization was never levelled against medical treatment *per se*. Rather, Illich stood against the disabling conditions generated and sustained by this medical monopoly, conditions described in the opening lines to *Limits to Medicine*: “The medical establishment has become a major threat to health. The disabling impact of professional control has reached the proportions of an epidemic” (LTM: 3).

Illich wrote *Limits to Medicine* in the mid-1970s, at a time when other critical voices emerged to challenge the so-called medical establishment. Research and public discussion led to a growing awareness of a new kind of medical epidemic, one characterized by

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<sup>4</sup> Here, the phrase ‘military-industrial-professional’ complex is my phrase for capturing the three-fold form of imperialism to which Illich refers in the quote above. My phrase amends ‘professional’ to President Eisenhower’s reference to the “military-industrial complex” in his 1960 presidential speech (Eisenhower, 1960: 1035-1040).

*iatrogenesis*.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Illich alludes to how “the sick-making power of diagnosis and therapy” led to “a crisis of confidence” (LTM: 4) in modern medicine. In Illich’s view, responding to this crisis meant dealing with the underlying, yet unacknowledged, illusion of doctors’ effectiveness and the “so-called progress of medicine” (LTM: 13). Summarizing his massive bibliographic research on modern medicine, Illich addressed this illusion, pointing out that “the primary determinant of the state of health of any population” is the environment, not professional medical intervention (LTM: 17). Put a bit differently, to say that professional intervention is not the most decisive factor in health-care is to say that the pursuit of health is not primarily a technical task, but a collective task, and, therefore, a political one.

In Illich’s view, this political task could not be achieved without moving beyond the illusory grip of “professional power”, that is, “a specialized form of the privilege to prescribe” (LTM: 17). In coining this term, Illich sought to highlight how professionalism enacts a triple authority: “to define a person as a client, to determine that person’s need and to hand the person a prescription” (LTM: 17). For Illich, it is important is to recognize how this authority to impute needs conforms to and reproduces a growth economy, one characterized by market-intense relations, in which human needs become coterminous with either industrialized or professionalized commodities (DP: 22).

Without this awareness, I would suggest, we succumb to a political process which turns citizens into impotent clients who must be contained within the military-industrial-professional complex in order be saved by armies, machines and experts (DP: 29). Engaging critically with this complex, and more specifically with professional power, entails recognizing how this disabling dominance operates through a series of illusions.

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<sup>5</sup> Illich employs the term, *iatrogenesis*, “com[ing] from *iatros*, from the Greek word for ‘physician’, and *genesis*, meaning ‘origin’” as a concept for discussing “the disease of medical progress” (LTM: 3).

- The first illusion affirms that “people are born to be consumers and that they can attain any of their goals by purchasing good and services” (DP: 29). This illusion underwrites the way the growth economy discounts use-values and obliterates the distinction between personal action and consumption of industrialized or professionalized “packaged commodities”, or between “personal aliveness and engineered provision” (DP: 32).
- The second illusion equates technological progress with “more complex and inscrutable” forms of technology, thereby requiring and privileging a special class of licensed operators and trained professionals over ordinary tool users. This concentrates agency in the hands of a new clergy of specialists and professionals (DP: 20-22; THN: 27-28) who erode the confidence of the lay person.
- The third illusion relates to “the professional dream that good things will be forever replaced by better things” (DP: 35), thereby reinforcing the drive towards professionalization and expertise in the search “for the ultimate bicycle, the supreme windmill, the safe pill, the perfect solar panel” (DP: 35).
- The fourth illusion claims that only experts can discern and set appropriate limits, so that “[e]ntire populations socialized to need what they are told to need will now be told what they do *not* need” (DP: 35).
- The fifth illusion corresponds with “the experts of self-help”. This is what Illich calls “the professionalization of laymen” (DP: 37), which demands that ordinary citizens be trained and licensed to help themselves (DP: 36-37). This means, for example, that the small-scale farmer who has always grown organically must now be certified to do so, if s/he wants to grow and sell freely and legally.

This emphasis on dominant illusions, or mystifying certainties, brings us full circle in order to review two fundamental, and complementary, aspects of Illich's social criticism:

- 1) His identification of the "neo-Promethean" (DP: 12) contours of consumer society with elaborate rituals of inclusion (DP: 28); and
- 2) His "project of demythologizing" (DS: 38), which culminates in a political proposal, namely, the politics of conviviality.

As we have seen, Illich's politics of conviviality aimed to illumine and promote the desirable balance "between heteronomous management and autonomous action", or, a "life of action" over a "life of consumption". At the center of his politics of conviviality, then, was the commitment to "*the expansion of freedom*, rather than the growth of services [and proliferation of commodities as] the criterion of social progress" (Cayley, in TRNOTF: 14).

What is often less recognized, however, is how Illich's conception of human flourishing cannot be isolated from his commitment to justice. In Illich's terms, there must be a balance between "distributive justice" and what he called "participatory justice", elaborating the distinction as follows:

During the last years I have found it necessary to examine again and again the correlation between the nature of tools and the meaning of justice that prevails in the society that uses them. I have had to observe the decline in freedom in societies where rights are shaped by expertise. I have had to weigh the trade-offs between new tools that enhance the production of commodities and those equally modern ones that permit the generation of values in use; between rights to mass-produced commodities and the level of liberty that permits satisfying and creative personal expression (THN: xii).

The crucial point here is that the politics of conviviality entails a robust account of justice, one that goes beyond equality as equity in the rightful access to consumption, in order to push towards equality as equity in liberty for action. Thus, Illich writes:

I am, like those I seek as my readers, so profoundly committed to a radically equitable access to goods, rights, and jobs that I find it almost unnecessary to insist on the struggle for this side of justice. I find it much more important, and difficult, to deal with its complement: the politics of conviviality. I use the term in the technical sense I gave to it in *Tools for Conviviality*: to designate the struggle for an equitable distribution of the liberty to generate use-values and for the instrumentation of this liberty through the assignment of an absolute priority to the production of those industrial and professional commodities that confer on the least advantaged the greatest power to generate values in use (THN: xii-xii).

This journey into Illich's social criticism brings us back full circle to his claim about development as "the most pernicious of the West's missionary efforts" (IMOP: 95). It is important to recall from Illich's historiography that "only during late antiquity, with the Western European Church, did the alien become someone in need, someone to be brought in" (IMOP: 93). With development, the "replacement of convivial means by manipulative industrial ware is truly universal" (THN: 3). Within development, social inclusion means "the worldwide acceptance of the Western self-image of *homo oeconomicus* in his most extreme form as *homo industrialis*, with all needs commodity-defined" (IMOP: 95).

In this last section, I want to examine how this paradigm of development, with its underlying technological ethos and ideal of Promethean humanity, relates to the Christian social imagination, and particularly how it impinges upon the incarnational logic of Christian mission.

### **Recontextualizing the Anthropological Enterprise and Incarnational Mission 'After Development'**

In the last chapter, I developed Illich's account of the Christian life as an *itinerarium*, a journey of 'prolong[ing] the Incarnation'. I also developed the incarnational logic of the

Christian life in terms of three dimensions of incarnational mission: 1) following Jesus, 2) participating in Christ, and 3) joining in God's incarnational mission (Langmead, 2004). Restated, these dimensions are: "1) the pattern of mission, 2) the power for mission, and 3) the ultimate basis for mission" (2004: 58). In this final section of Chapter 3, I want to juxtapose that incarnational logic with Illich's insight that "so-called development has increasingly turned the world into a man-made thing" (PAF: 1), by exploring how this technological milieu impacts and even distorts the dimensions of incarnational mission.

### **The Corruption of Following**

The first dimension of incarnational mission focuses on discipleship, of following Jesus as a pattern for mission. While this mission clearly includes "making disciples" and teaching others (Matt. 28:16-20), Willie Jennings stresses that Christianity's "pedagogical vision [lies] inside of its christological horizon and embodiment" (Jennings, 2010: 106). By contrast, in the colonialist encounters with new worlds and new peoples, an inversion took place in which:

[t]heology was inverted with pedagogy. Teaching was not envisioned inside of discipleship, but discipleship was envisioned inside teaching. Pedagogical evaluation was normatively exaggerated, expanded evaluation. The inversion of theology with pedagogy meant that...the native subject was formed into a deficient barbarian in need of continuous external and internal self-examination and evaluation (2010: 106).

Here, Jennings exposes how the colonialist legacy "produced a reductive theological vision in which the world's people become perpetual students" (2010: 112), an insight that relates directly to development as a (neo)colonial strategy which enacts what Jennings calls "pedagogical imperialism" (2010: 112).



As Arturo Escobar points out, development promoted a mode of encountering ‘Third World’ populations through the twin pillars of professionalization and institutionalization (Escobar, 1995: 44-47). In other words, development enacted “a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach...a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some ‘badly needed’ goods to a ‘target population’” (1995: 44). The apparent ‘success’, that is, the explanatory power of development, relied on its capacity to conceive human flourishing “as a technical problem” (1995: 52), and to generate a “discursive formation” (1995: 10) which linked scientific knowledge to the power of technical application. What is significant here is recognizing the way that “the production of the Third World through the articulation of knowledge and power is essential to the discourse of development” (1995: 12).

Escobar’s insights shed light on Illich’s attempts to expose the dark side of “the gospel of global Education and Development” (Prakash and Stuchul, 2010: 511). The problem, Illich argues, is that there is nothing clean or innocent about this coupling of education and development. Education, Illich argued, has been placed inside the development paradigm which he, and other post-development thinkers, view as a project of recolonization. As part of this project, the coupling of education and development turns on two basic assumptions: 1) that we inhabit an “inner and outer world” which may be isolated one from the other and rendered “subject to management”; and 2) that both worlds “need to be filled with some product which is scarce” (EATC: 7). As understood by Illich:

Education names the institutional enterprise which furnishes the pupil’s world with skills, competence or attitudes which are both scarce and – in the educator’s judgement – socially desirable. Development names the corresponding institutional process by which the outer world, conceived as an environment of scarce resources, is transformed into a social space filled with goods of economic value (EATC: 7).

Indeed, Illich refers to education and development as “social construction enterprises” which generate “self-fulfilling prophecies about [humanity],” operating in tandem as “mighty motors to create scarcity, expand the assumption of it, intensify the sense of it and legitimize institutions built around it” (EATC: 10). By describing them in this way, Illich draws our attention to the way these twin forces construct and usher us into a “commodity-intensive reality” which Illich also refers to as “economic space” (EATC: 11). Inside the social construction enterprise of education and development, the only space that counts is economic space. This is a space where reality becomes subject to measurement and management; a space where everything has economic value and, as such, is rendered as a potential commodity destined for consumption. Within this space, scarcity is perceived as a certainty, or a basic human condition. In other words, development extends economic space, while education, as used here by Illich, prepares, conditions and adapts us for living inside of it.

At one level, what is significant here is recognizing how development promotes what Jennings describes as “pedagogical imperialism” (2010: 112). To make the connection with incarnational mission more explicit, however, one can frame this issue theologically in terms of Docetism, not as the explicit “denial of Christ’s materiality, or his becoming fully human”, but as “faltering in the face of a new materiality” (2010: 112), a failure to discern how new encounters and new spatial logics can be shared incarnationally. As Jennings put it:

The point here is the continuation of the logic of the incarnation...it is the logic of discipleship and mission, the going forth in the triune name. The denial of incarnational practice is precisely the failure to go forward as the Son came forward and wishes to go forward in intimate joining (2010: 113).

## **The Corruption of Participation**

The second dimension of incarnational mission relates to participation in Christ as the power for mission. As Langmead points out, if the first dimension, that of following, is isolated from the second, there is the risk of conceiving our role in mission as entirely ‘extrinsic’ to the Incarnation. Thus, one crucial aspect of this second dimension relates to participation in Christ as the empowering source of grace and freedom for incarnational mission (Langmead, 2004: 52). In relation to this second dimension, what Illich highlights is the way that dependence upon technological artifacts and/or institutional mediation can displace interpersonal dependence and the role of Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5).

Earlier in this chapter, I focused on the way that Illich’s early social criticism diagnosed the industrialized and professionalized forms of hubris in terms of the Promethean “corruption [of humanity’s] self image”, namely, “a conception of [humanity] as an organism dependent not on nature and individuals, but rather on institutions” (DS: 114). With this in mind, I want to return briefly to Illich’s ‘corruption hypothesis’ as a way of expanding this notion and how it impinges upon incarnational mission.

In fact, I want to place everything that Illich says about this Promethean fallacy inside of what he says elsewhere and later about the corruption of Christianity. This is not only because the Promethean ideal and the ‘corruption hypothesis’ both illustrate the rise of the technological ethos, and a modern drive towards institutionalization over embodied presence, or, a spirit of control over “a spirit of contingency” (Schroyer, 2009: 64). It is also because thinking in terms of the ‘prometheanization’ of Christian mission might enable and require us

to relate a Christian discernment of contemporary ‘disorder’ to technological artifacts and dominant social institutions, including the church.

Christian theology has traditionally located a fittingness between a) our being created “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-28), and b) the Incarnation as “the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15), the union of the fullness of God as well as the fullness of humanity. Similarly, Christian theology has traditionally interpreted the ‘fall’ in Genesis in relation to human pride, the hubristic aspiration to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5), and subsequent disobedience by transgressing the limits and conditions for human flourishing set by the Creator.<sup>6</sup>

Illich’s insights are consistent with both of these traditional understandings, but Illich also brings into focus a distinctively modern twist to the ‘fall’, that is, not just a transgression of limits, but an idolatrous dependence upon institutions as ‘saving artifacts’. Holding the critique of the Promethean ideal and the ‘corruption hypothesis’ together, we are in a position to hear the disquieting question implied by Illich’s insights: What if the congruence between being created in the image of God and being conformed to the image of the Son has been intercepted and corrupted by either a) the colonial attempt to recreate others in our own image, or b) the neo-colonial attempt to create and live through dominant institutions and artifacts which, in turn, recreate humanity in their image? This double-question, echoes the missiological question that I raised in Chapter 1, and elsewhere: Into whom or what are we being included?

Again, there are connections with Illich to be made regarding: a) the Promethean ideal

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<sup>6</sup> In *Creation and Fall* ([1937], 1997: 113), Dietrich Bonhoeffer juxtaposes “humankind-imago-dei” with “humankind-sicut-deus” [i.e, the ‘like God’ humanity]. His biblical juxtaposition of two ways of being human resonates deeply with Illich’s contrastive reading of Epimethean humanity and Promethean humanity, respectively. Bonhoeffer writes: “Imago dei – humankind in the image of God in being for God and the neighbor, in its original creatureliness and limitedness; sicut deus – humankind similar to God in knowing-out-of-its-self about good and evil, in having no limit and acting-out-of-its-own-resources...Now [after the fall] humankind stands in the middle, with no limit. Standing in the middle means living from its own resources and no longer from the center. Having no limit means being alone. To be in the center and to be alone means to be sicut deus...Losing *the limit* Adam has lost *creatureliness*” (1997: 113, 115).

and b) “the corruption of the best is the worst”, as an impetus which brings to the surface a difficulty for theology, in general, and incarnational mission, in particular. The focus of Illich’s work in the late 1960s and through the 1970s raised a question with which contemporary theology has not yet adequately engaged, namely, “the mutual definition of man’s nature and the nature of modern institutions” (DS: 2). At the same time, Illich’s coupling of anthropology with institutionalization, specifically, and more generally with technological artifacts, raises another series of questions: Could it be that what Illich describes as the ritualization of progress has generated dominant social imaginaries in which these modern institutions, for example, schools, highways, and hospitals, have become “lordless powers” (Barth, 1981: 213-233)? Could it be that the mediation between God and humanity that is unique to the Incarnate Savior (1 Tim. 2:5), has been displaced and corrupted via the mediation of institutional forms/‘saving institutions’, forms whose rituals of inclusion tempt us towards a ‘technopelagian’ confidence in our grasp for power? Could it be that these human creatures whom God fashioned “according the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-28) and were destined to be conformed to “the image of God’s Son” (Rom. 8:29), have been lured into trying ‘to create the world in [their own] image’, only to find their image being corrupted according to the image and likeness of their artifacts, the work of their own hands?

These are some of the questions which Illich’s thought raises, because of how Illich juxtaposes a common theological idea, that of humanity created in the image of God, alongside an uncommon one: humanity (re)created in the image of its institutions as saving artifacts. More specifically, Illich invites us to reconsider how incarnational mission not only requires ecclesial embodiment, but also how our ecclesial forms can either distort or enhance our collective capacities to participate in Christ. In this technological milieu, Illich suggests, the ongoing ecclesial task is to cultivate forms of church that “challenge[] us to deeper

poverty instead of security in achievements; personalization of love...instead of depersonalization by idolatry; faith in the other rather than prediction” (COA: 100).

### **The Corruption of Joining**

The third dimension of incarnational mission deals with God’s incarnating dynamic as the encompassing framework for mission. As Langmead suggests, this third dimension also deals with mission as inculturation, or contextualization. Paradoxically, Illich points out, “[t]he Church began to define her mission as inculturation in the very decade when all that was left of local folkways had been castrated, becoming raw material for a bureaucratically staged facsimile folklore” (PAF: 3). In other words, missiology’s ‘contextual turn’ happened at a historical moment in which the paradigm of development had produced the ‘measure’ for human flourishing.

In order to see how Illich diagnoses and responds to this false universalism of development, I return to his apophaticism as a way of recontextualizing human flourishing in relation to the particularity of the Incarnation. To do so, I consider Linda Woodhead’s claim that “one of theology’s most important contributions to the anthropological enterprise is to undermine it” (Woodhead, 2006: 233). This is, no doubt, a provocative claim, but, I believe, we should not allow Woodhead’s boldness to eclipse the subtlety of her position. The paradox of human dignity, she tells us, is that it cannot be isolated “by reference to humanity alone” (2006: 233). This is because “our human nature is fulfilled through participation in God, it shares in the mystery of God – and can never be pinned down” (2006: 233). Thus, apophaticism does not aim to abolish the anthropological enterprise, but rather it recontextualizes it by “bringing the human into the sphere of the divine” (2006: 233).

So, how does this relate to Illich? Hoinacki's observation that at the heart of Illich's theological imagination is an "apophatical theological stance" is helpful here (Hoinacki, 2003: 384). This insight complements, also, Eric Fromm's claim that at the heart of Illich's vision is an anthropological core, his "humanistic radicalism" (COA: 7-10). In Fromm's view, Illich's vision is humanistic because what is driving his vision is a concern for "[humanity's] unfolding" (COA: 10), or, to use a term that is more in vogue today: human flourishing. Illich's vision is radical because he continuously questions dominant modern certainties related to human flourishing, for example, progress, development, or consumption. By linking these insights, I want to suggest that not only does Illich's theological imagination revolve around an anthropological core, but also that Illich attends to human flourishing apophatically, not by doctrinally asserting 'what the human is', but by historicizing what 'being and becoming human' should not be and yet has become.

While Illich's writings do not exhibit a great deal of doctrinal precision, what he ultimately shares in common with the Christian apophatic tradition is a crucial methodological insight, namely, that the first move in theological anthropology is not identifying and isolating the properties that 'make us human' but rather identifying the One who is 'truly human' for our sake (McFarland, 2001: 14-29; McFarland, 2005; Jennings, 1996: 252-252; and Nellas, 1987: 21-104). As Bonhoeffer puts it, the 'who' proceeds the 'what' (Bonhoeffer, 1978: 37). In other words, the key to theological discernment in the anthropological enterprise is the Incarnation as the decisive 'context' for the renewal of our participation in the "divine image" (McFarland: 2005), our joining in God's mission for the world. Thus, the Incarnation is God's flesh coming towards us to give us what we were created for and created to receive: to be joined and enclosed within a circle of life and love that is God (1 Jn. 4:16). The Incarnation is also the human movement towards God with all of

its creatureliness. Thus, the Incarnation is both from and towards God, as well as from and towards the world.

To return to Woodhead's claim regarding apophatic anthropology, the problem of a decontextualized cataphatic anthropology, that is, one that is severed from the Incarnation, is that it assumes that humanity can define itself self-referentially (Woodhead, 2006: 233). It assumes that humanity is its own measure. The tragic trajectory of this cataphaticism is that "in telling us who we are, it often becomes self-fulfilling, fixing in us the nature it claims to describe" (2006: 243).

I want to suggest that Illich's critique of development is most adequately understood in light of this apophatic stance. Illich's early essays in *Celebration of Awareness* advance the basic thesis that life in contemporary Western societies has become based upon certainties that are generated and reproduced by the dominance of historically novel institutions and systems that not only divide the world into over and under-privileged, but are fundamentally dehumanizing, and, therefore, unsustainable as well. Illich's early writings, then, are manifestos for an alternative path to development and political revolution alike. Illich, therefore, positioned Kennedy and Castro as twin paths inside the same detour, the detour of the narrative of a progressive modernity whose central device is the inclusion and assimilation of the masses into the expectations of a 'better life', which comes from the counterfeit redemptive power of ever-growing industrial productivity.

Seen in this light, the fundamental problem with development is not its inability to close the gap between the rich and poor, nor whether or not it can create better centralized channels by which to counter inequality and grant greater access to scarce resources. Rather, for Illich, the more basic problem is that the development paradigm has projected "a vision of what is desirable and possible" which has "radically distorted our view of what human beings



can have and want” (COA: 181).

In his later writings, Illich highlights the fallacy of “defining our common humanity by common needs” (TDD: 106), a dominant certainty that emerged within the development era. In *Toward a History of Needs* and *The Development Dictionary*, Illich exposes how development discourse about needs presupposes that needs are universal constants, whereas, the notion of needs as equivalent to demands for industrialized ‘package deals’ is a fairly recent, post-World War II, invention. Moreover, the flaw with this account of humanity is that it distorts creatureliness: human nature is no longer marked by the limits of necessity nor the depth of desire, but rather “by the measure of what we lack and, therefore, need” (TDD: 97).

However, an appropriately apophatic anthropology, following Woodhead, might undermine the enterprise of defining human nature self-referentially. What Illich offers repeatedly is a critique of development as “the most pernicious of the West’s missionary efforts” (IMOP: 95), which attempts to reproduce ‘blueprint anthropologies’, by defining the ‘needs’ of others in terms of “Western needs” or commodity dependence (IMOP: 93). Once naturalized as givens, development becomes the project of meeting these ‘needs’. The flaw with this project is that it is constructed upon a falsely cataphatic anthropology, that is, the assumption that takes Western needs as ahistorical constants of a universal humanity. Ultimately, the legacy of needs, as they have functioned within development discourse, has led to a redefinition of humanity in terms of neediness, and specifically, “individual units with input *requirements*” (TDD: 107). In other words, human beings are recast as “institutional avatars”, or “cyborgs” (TDD: 108), no longer as *homo sapiens*, but as *homo miserabilis* (TDD: 95).

Development, then, operates as an anthropological enterprise that ‘freezes’ a historical moment in which the human condition has already been decontextualized from an integrative

account of creation and redemption. Thus, our creatureliness becomes transmogrified into:

limitless dependence, in the sense of accumulating dependent relationships to things, persons, institutions, [which] is something other than the *fundamental* dependence we cannot avoid, dependence on whatever it is that enables our sense of being an agent, a giver (Williams, 2000: 70).

And so, to speak of Illich's apophatic anthropology demonstrates a way of decentering humanity without deconstructing it. It is created to live from and toward God, to be "alive to God" (Rom. 6:11).

For Illich, the Christian life is the embrace of life in which we are not the measure of all things. This 'not', however, does not mean lack, or *nihil*, but hope in the promise of a gift that we were created to receive and share. The Incarnation confirms and makes possible the creaturely embrace of an apophatic anthropology: an understanding of being human in which humanity is not its own measure, but rather is iconic, looking beyond itself to see itself fully, receiving the fullness of its being from a source that has the power to indwell it, while remaining beyond it. It is neither consigned to the *nihil* of postmodern dissolution nor is it cast as the 'creature-who-plays-God', attempting to recreate itself and others in relation to a false self-image. Thus, the logic of Illich's apophatic anthropology is that the human condition is not adequately conceived in terms of neediness, but rather in terms of a fragile, yet promising, openness to receive what it does not possess by nature, but may receive by grace: to share the life of the One who is "truly human" for our sake (Jennings, 1996: 239-255).

## Conclusion

At the beginning of the chapter, I referred to Willie Jennings' claim that "Christianity in the Western world lives and moves within a diseased social imagination" (Jennings, 2010: 6). Here, in conclusion, I want to return to Jennings' claim by situating Illich's critique of development inside Jennings' call for Christian theology to attend to its ongoing relationship with the "colonial wound" (2010: 114). Indeed, Jennings argues that "[t]he colonial wound is real and remains largely untheorized within Western theology" (2010: 115). It remains a wound precisely because it impoverishes our capacity to imagine life-giving forms of social inclusion and cultural intimacy into which we are invited to enter *through* "the incarnate life of the Son who took on the life of the creature, a life of joining, belonging, connection, and intimacy" (2010: 7). Thus, at the heart of the Christian imagination, there is a renewed and surprising invitation for being joined together with each other and with God. What the metaphor of wound brings into focus is the historical distortions of the Christian relational imagination, or as I have been describing it here, the historical detours, or 'turning way' from an original vision. Jennings writes:

That intimacy [of being joined through the Incarnation] should by now have given Christians a faith that understands its own deep wisdom, and power of joining, mixing, merging, and being changed by multiple ways of life to witness a God who surprises us by love of differences and draws us to new capacities to imagine their reconciliation. Instead, the intimacy that marks Christian history is a painful one, one in which the joining often means oppression, violence, and death, if not of bodies then most certainly of ways of life, forms of language, and visions of the word. What happened to the original trajectory of intimacy? (2010: 9)

In developing his critical and constructive repair of this "diseased social imagination", Jennings offers three related suggestions that are relevant here. First, to grasp the loss and

horror that comes with inclusion within the colonial wound, we have to return to a prior, fundamentally theological, error. For Jennings, this is the ecclesial failure of forgetting “Gentile existence” (2010: 25), a loss of memory that effectively effaces the Jewish-Gentile threshold, and subsequently, the awareness that *goyim*, or Gentiles, are those who were first ‘outside’ before having been brought near (Eph. 2:11-22). This means that *goyim* have indeed been included in the promises of God, but it also means that the unfolding of our entrance into the story places us as ‘outsiders-brought-in’, and not as insiders who enfold other people into our own prior forms of belonging and identity. In other words, there is a profound loss of imagination which makes sense of intimacy among those whose lives are marked by cultural, ethnic, or racial difference. The result is at once both a cause and an effect of the colonial wound. The logic of colonial missionary expansion inverts the outside-in into an inside-out. The dominant subjects of this expansion, whether they be white, male, colonial Europeans or ‘developed’ persons, become the measure of whatever ‘other’ they encounter, refashioning them in their own image. Second, in Jennings’ account, race displaces place as the determinative marker of identity and difference, and whiteness emerges as the universal or standard by which the fullness of humanity is measured. To the extent that Christian mission operates inside this displacement, it effectively becomes a project of recreating others, the Many, in relation to the (invisible) image of whiteness, the One. Third, Christian theology now struggles to imagine how the One and the Many might be reconciled in Christ, *the One for the Many* (2010: 259). Therefore, in attending to detours away from “the original trajectory of intimacy”, one of the fundamental theological questions that Jennings poses is, “How are the people of God constituted?” (2010: 250).

Indeed, Jennings’ question is but another way of interrogating the issues of social inclusion, and more precisely, incarnational inclusion. In the last chapter, we observed Illich’s

emphasis on the enfleshed particularity of the Incarnation as the scandalous new possibility and condition for inclusion into a new, unrestricted ‘we’. By the same logic, Jennings affirms the Incarnation as God’s gift of “The One for the Many” (2010: 259), and that it is the loss of our awareness of being included through and into this One, who represents Israel, that lies at the heart of the diseased social imagination and the colonial wound. Whereas Jennings takes the eclipse of “Gentile existence” (2010: 260) and the dominance of race as the lens to bring the distortions into view, Illich takes the dominance of social institutions and technological artifacts. But what the racialized humanity and the Promethean/‘developed’ humanity share in common is a hubristic attempt to assert an idealized humanity, a false universal, that displaces the primacy of the Incarnate One in order to become the ‘measure’ by which the Many can and must be included.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, this notion of an idealized humanity as its own measure characterizes technological ethos as well as the “technological imperative: all that can be done must be done” (TCII: 122). As Garrigós also argues, what animates Illich’s stance is his desire to respond to contemporary forms of hubris with the recovery of limits:

[L]imit has a positive sense in his writings. It is the condition of the possibility of hospitality. In Illich, limit is a threshold and, as such, the boundary that separates inhospitable terrain from the inhabitable, rain and storm from shelter. Without this mark, the gesture that best defines humans would not be possible: [the gesture of] welcoming reception (TCII: 122).

Garrigós speaks generally about a “philosophy of hospitality” (TCII: 122) as an ordering concept for reading Illich. I am concerned, here, with turning this insight about hospitality specifically towards the practice of Christian mission. Indeed, the colonial wound can also be seen in the way that “Christianity...inverted its sense of hospitality...claim[ing] to be the host, the owner of the spaces it entered, and demanded native peoples to enter its

cultural logics, its ways of being in the world, and its conceptualities” (Jennings, 2010: 8). In Garrigós’ view, Illich enables us to see not only overt forms of conquest and arrogance, but also the subtleties of technological as well as missionary hubris:

Missionaries, experts, planners, promoters of development or democracy, for all their goodwill, are still figures of a perverted charity. Here one sees the terrible danger in every political proposal that promises salvation. Before the arrogance of the technician, Illich counters with the humility of the guest...[indeed] each of Illich’s books may be read as an attempt to recover the blessings of such receptivity in some institutional domain (TCII: 122).

Such a posture of receptivity, like the receptivity of Epimetheus, is likely to require nothing less than a “rebirth” (DS: 105) of our social imaginations. Translating this insight into a Johannine idiom, Illich invites us to imagine ourselves as Nicodemus before Jesus and to hear once again the invitation to be “born again” so that we may “see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This death and rebirth, may enable us to evaluate in a new way, the dominant institutions which cover the ground upon which we walk and fill the air we breathe in the contemporary technological milieu. Only then, Illich would suggest, might we see the kingdom as the available alternative that Jesus promised it to be (John 3:3).

It is at this point, the question of alternatives, where some of Illich’s critics balk: reading his critique of institutionalization as an uncritical anti-institutionalism. As I suggested earlier, however, through Illich’s commentary on the Good Samaritan, and through his account of convivial reconstruction, there is another way of reading Illich: namely, as someone who calls us to reimagine and recover structures and modes of collectivity that are fitting for humanity and proportionate with humanity’s vocation in the world. Here, it is important to recognize that Illich does not suggest that we can extract personal agency from structures of formation, nor is he suggesting that we can divorce ‘following the naked Christ’ from ecclesial embodiment. Rather, I read Illich as a prophetic voice who “shows how

revolutionary a faith Christianity is” (Cayley, in IIC: 54), and who enables us to overhear the biblical call to repentance as a pledge of allegiance to the Incarnate Lord, and a renunciation of blind allegiance to institutional and systemic idols which colonize life, even as they make promises of a ‘better life’ that is to come. This repentance is a matter of discerning between incarnation and de-incarnation, between disabling technological dependence and “technological maturity” (THN: 143),<sup>7</sup> and this brings us back to Illich’s keyword, conviviality.

Throughout the history of Christian theology, Christian theologians and intellectuals have always borrowed terms of their contemporaries and used them for theological purposes. For example, *perichoresis*, originally a concept used to describing interlocking movements of choreographed dance, became in the hands of the Cappodocians and others, a useful term for imagining the mutual indwelling or ‘unity-in-difference’ of God’s triune life. In the contemporary West, as Illich has suggested, we tend to imagine the world as a “cosmos in [our own] hands” (IIC: 252). In the light of this sense of hubris which Illich and others have diagnosed, conviviality opens up a way for reimagining the goodness and dignity of being creatures, for embracing limits as a condition for human flourishing. Against the Promethean ideal, he advocates conviviality as an antidote to hubris:

- Instead of the Promethean endeavor which attempts to overcome social ills through enclosure into manipulative institutions, convivial reconstruction aims to re-embed

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<sup>7</sup> Illich describes “technological maturity” as follows: “Beyond underequipment and overindustrialization, there is a place for the world of postindustrial effectiveness, where the industrial mode of production complements other autonomous forms of production. There is a place, in other words, for a world of technological maturity” (THN: 140). He goes on to clarify that there are two roads from here to technological maturity: “one is the road of liberation from affluence; the other is the road of liberation from dependence. Both roads have the same destination: the social restructuring of space that offers to each person the constantly renewed experience that the center of the world is where [s]he stands, walks, and lives” (THN: 142).

technological ‘means’ within the limits and ‘ends’ discerned through interpersonal and communal bonds.

- Instead of the Promethean fallacy which assumes that humanity is dependent upon institutions (and not other persons and the goodness of nature), convivial reconstruction aims to regenerate and nurture our collective dependence upon nature (read: creation) and other persons, for the sake of “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence” (TFC: 11).
- Instead of the ‘great expectations’ of the Promethean ethos as an “ethos of non-satiety” (DS: 113) rooted in the perception of scarcity as a basic human condition, convivial reconstruction aims to cultivate an ‘ethos of enough-ness’, that is, a balance between means and ends that nurtures a common sense of satisfaction and abundance.

In the light of this, it is important to keep in mind that Illich is no more against the appropriate use of technology than he is against authentic missionary encounters. He is against the way the ‘good intentions’ of both can become “distracting from or destructive of personal relatedness” (TFC: xiii). He is against the way the dominance of technological artifacts extends a market-intensive society characterized by disembodied /statistical relations, depersonalized dependence on institutions – primarily the state or market – and false expectations regarding human flourishing. He is for the cultivation of greater awareness in relation to technological innovation and missionary desire alike. Both share “[t]he aim to make life always better,” but the technological has “crippled the search for the appropriate, proportionate, harmonious or simply good life. What Illich promotes is precisely those hopes, which the Western technological way of life “easily writes off as simplistic or irresponsible” (PAF: 3).



Illich expressed those hopes in what I call a ‘convivial turn’– a preferential option for freedom-in-interdependence – which is, in fact, a theological turn. The ‘convivial turn’ is a theological turn because it enables us to reclaim freedom from the false dilemma of either ‘being in control’ through technological artifacts, or from the threat of living in despair. In other words, the cultivation of conviviality enables us to reclaim the freedom of living in hope and of “prolong[ing] the Incarnation” (TRNOTF: 207).

The recovery of conviviality, then, reimagines ‘life together’ in terms of the limits, interdependence, and embodied nature of relationality. It enables us to discern and, like the Samaritan, to ‘cross the threshold’ by which we “prolong[] the Incarnation” (TRNOTF: 207). In the next, and final chapter, I explore the practical implications of Illich’s notion of conviviality for incarnational mission, and how the recovery of conviviality might enable us to recover “the hope that people may once again cross the threshold and live in this space where it is possible to look at one another face to face” (TCII: 123).

## 4

### RE-TURN: FAITH SEEKING CONVIVIALITY

In the first chapter I turned to my personal narrative as a missionary in Brazil as a lens for exploring the obstacles and possibilities of Christian mission. In doing so, I discussed my missionary experience as a series of *viradas*, or ‘turning points’, within a continuing process of conversion. In this final chapter I begin by returning to the third *virada*, how my introduction to Ivan Illich took place in the context of friendship with Claudio Oliver, and others, in the community of which he is a pastor in Curitiba, Brazil.<sup>1</sup> This final chapter explores what it means not only to think with Illich, but also after him. Whereas Chapter 2 focused on the Christian life in terms of an itinerary, or journey, and Chapter 3 attended to the detours, and false paths diverging from that journey, this chapter focuses on the way of ‘re-turn’. In other words, I am concerned with exploring, after Illich, how we might imagine the Christian life in terms of repentance, or even continual conversion, through a ‘renewed mindset’ (Rom. 12: 2) and “way of life” (Eph. 2:10) that does not offer solutions. Illich’s account of convivial recovery is explored as a way of amplifying the range of responses by which we might discover and cultivate a flourishing ‘life together’, and, therefore, how the recovery of conviviality might enable “a missionary ethic of incarnation” (Yoder, 1984: 44).

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<sup>1</sup> From 2003-2014, CdV has operated in the urban context of Curitiba, Brazil. In June 2014, at the invitation of their Mennonite friends, the members of CdV discerned a call to relocate and expand the operation, moving from an urban homestead (of 300 square meters) to 29 acres in a rural context, just outside Curitiba, in the neighboring town of Palmeira, Paraná. René Seifert, member of CdV, describes the ethos that has permeated CdV in both the urban and rural context as follows:

Casa da Videira is a collective of friends and families who have decided to turn their lives, skills and homes into flourishing spaces for balanced, relational and abundant life. It is an expression of a way of life where community, simplicity, tradition, discipline and limits guide its members’ lives in consonance with their faith and loyalty in following the steps of Jesus. In its Experimental Station in Palmeira, Brazil, Casa da Videira organizes practice-based courses sharing its members’ passion for food production, waste management, video production, alternative modes of transportation and fair-trade business (René Seifert, email, 01/07/2014).

## Reimagining Mission and/as Friendship

I recall the second time I went to visit Claudio, what I observed on his *veranda*, and what I came to describe as his *opção preferencial pelo possível* [preferential option for the possible].<sup>2</sup> The visit occurred in 2008, at a time when Claudio and his family were still living in the center of Curitiba, on the fifth floor of an apartment building. I noticed that Claudio kept making short visits to his balcony. When I asked him about what he was doing, he called me to his balcony and showed me his wormery and his vertical garden: varieties of lettuce as well as root crops growing inside recycled two liter bottles. These were filled with the rich compost taken from his wormery. In response to my questions, Claudio explained to me how it worked: instead of treating all of his food waste as *lixo* [rubbish], he fed it to his worms, which then turned what used to be rubbish into rich soil. While I was fascinated by his description of how this fifth-floor garden worked, what impressed me most were the reasons for which he was doing this. Claudio explained that his little balcony garden was an experiment in finding responses for treating creation as creation, and not as ‘rubbish’, for honoring the Creator as Creator, and for offering signs of hope and life in the midst of so much waste.

Watching Claudio tend his wormery and his 0.6 square meter garden, I knew that I was watching someone who was remaking soil and growing plants not as a solution to social issues, such as food security, but rather as someone who was sowing the seeds of hope, “I am on the fifth floor, but you can only start from where you are”, he said. Looking back to 2008, Claudio would be the first person to acknowledge his surprise at how those seeds, like the

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<sup>2</sup> By referring to Claudio’s stance as a ‘preferential option for the possible’, I mean the way his activism operates through a commitment to doing what is ‘possible’ instead of clinging to vision of an ‘ideal’ scenario. To return to the example of the apartment balcony, it may have been ‘ideal’ to have several acres of land to cultivate, but keeping a wormery and growing vegetables on the balcony was ‘the possible’ at the time. That action, in turn, led to another phase, cultivating 300m<sup>2</sup>, which in turn, led to another, a 29-acre ‘experimental station’.

mustard seeds in Jesus' parable of the kingdom (Mark 4:30-32), grew, and the impact they have had, which he describes as follows:

It has been a long road since the day...I decided to be a good steward of my little balcony garden, 0.60 square meters, and committed myself to not complaining for what I didn't have but for caring for what was possible. I shared with our team by that time that we were called to do the best with what we had and not dream about ideal conditions. Our role was to be faithful and trust.

From there, we went to our church's parking lot, transforming it into a garden; then to my personal backyard, transforming it into food garden; then to an urban homestead [of 300 square meters], with chicken coops, urban goats, volunteers, friends, inspiration, lives changed, neighborhood transformation, extended networks of service, and now we will go to the next station, a 29 acres area, 4 homes, and lots of space for people to come and see.

Even though we will call this an 'Experimental Station' (a term used for technical extension sites in agriculture) for us this term means much more. It will be a *station* because nothing in this world is our final destination, we are a people on the move, on the way, and our final destination can only be achieved in the eternal city, for which we long and wait.

Everything we do, no matter how good it is, is only a station, a moment, in our journey. It will be *experimental*, not only because of the 'experiments' we will do there, based upon our academic experience. We will call it 'Experimental' hoping that the people that will come will find a place to Experiment and Experience LIFE, the abundant kind of life with which we believe God provides us (Oliver, email correspondence, 02/04/2014).

What Claudio narrates here is the fruit of this community's capacity to be inspired by a vision without clinging to an 'ideal', the willingness to risk and take the next possible step, and then take the next one after that: from 0.6 square meters, to 300 square meters, to 29 acres. What may be less obvious about Claudio's description is the way this community's journey can be understood as an experiment in incarnational mission, that is, a creative response to "non-incarnational" forms of mission that offer "[m]erely *professional and program-oriented* mission at the expense of relationship and whole-of-life involvement" (Langmead, 2004: 218).

As Claudio states in *Relationality*, the most important issue for Christian mission is not how, but whom:

What is new and transformational in Jesus' proposal are the questions he raised and the answers he lived out: Who will we include in our relationships? To whom will we extend our embrace? Whom will we receive into our hearts? With whom will we build commonality and conviviality? And...to whom will we give access to what the Lord has given us? (2010: 21)

From this insight, a vision of community-living has emerged, not, as Illich puts it, the "statistical 'we'" that comes from "being made subject to the same technical management process" (TPDR: 106), but rather a 'we' "born out of sharing the good of convivial life" (TPDR: 106). As Claudio makes clear, their community is a convivial 'we' centered on the Incarnation:

We have been created as local people, in local environments, in a pluriverse of possibilities and expressions, instead of a universe where a unique version of reality offers 'once [sic] size fits all' solutions. To arrive in our local contexts, or to move to a different one, requires the same basic attitude that was in Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11): to arrive with a willingness to self-empty, in an attitude of service, being available to incarnate, enjoy and interact with the flavors, limits, smells and tastes that are local and from where we can become capable of finding the best way to be Good News to the friends we meet on the way (2010: 25).

What I find striking about Claudio's description of mission is not only his confidence in the power of friendship and his emphasis upon the particularity of the Incarnation as the basis for 're-turning', or the renewal of our "basic attitude" (Phil. 2:5-11), but also how his account fits with Illich's emphasis on conviviality, which in turn, corresponds with his call for the rebirth of Epimethean humanity (DS: Ch. 7). For while the Promethean ethos centers on technical or institutional control, planning, and predictability, the Epimethean alternative recognizes that the 'good life' cannot be controlled and delivered according to Promethean expectations. Rather, the convivial 'good life', towards which Claudio's description points, can only be cultivated and shared by those who are willing to relinquish the Promethean illusion of being

‘in control’ in order to “tend and care and wait upon the other” (DS: 116).

By making this link between the incarnational and the Epimethean, then, I want to weave together two threads that run throughout this chapter, and to make some early points of clarification. First, holding the incarnational logic of the gospel and the Epimethean together is not to equate them, but rather to highlight the idea that there is no “antithesis between the glorification of God and the search for a truly human life on earth” (Bosch, 1992: 426). Second, the link between the incarnational mindset, and the Epimethean embrace of contingency by living in hope, both described by Claudio above, is another way of saying that the Christian life, in general, and Christian mission, in particular, are not a matter of technique or control, but a matter of availability and “hopeful trust” (DS: 114). In other words, in a technological society, “the fidelity of the Christian community increasingly depends on its competence to express the faith...and live in a situation never before interpreted in the light of the gospel” (COA: 93). In the light of Illich’s insight and the witness of my friends in Brazil, in the next section I want to explore incarnational mission, or “being available to incarnate”, as a matter of improvisation.

### **Reimagining Mission and/as Improvisation**

In Chapter 2, I introduced the notion of Christian theodrama (Quash, 2005; Wells, 2004) as a way of undergirding Illich’s theological imagination, particularly his attention to the way the Incarnation enables us to inhabit Act 4 by ‘reading’ our historical moment between the decisive climax of Act 3 and the theodrama’s consummation in Act 5. In Chapter 3, I considered the technological issue of the ethos of progress and development as a Promethean attempt to secure and inhabit Act 5. Here, I want to extend this theodramatic approach by

turning to Wells' account of theatrical improvisation as a way of reimagining the task of incarnational mission in Act 4.

In developing his account of the Christian life "as faithfully improvising on the Christian tradition" (Wells, 2004: 11), Wells identifies an intrinsic similarity between theatrical improvisation and participation in the body of Christ. He describes this similarity as follows:

Improvisation in the theatre is a practice through which actors seek to develop trust in themselves and one another that they may conduct unscripted dramas without fear. [Wells' book] is a study of how the church may become a community of trust in order that it may faithfully encounter the unknown of the future without fear. It is a treatment of how the story and practices of the church shape and empower Christians with the uninhibited freedom sometimes experienced by theatrical improvisers (2004: 11).

I do not offer exhaustive coverage of Wells' account of improvisation here, rather I draw on Wells simply as a heuristic strategy for illuminating how the practical implications of Illich's insights are best approached in terms of improvisational responses to the fundamentally 'anti-improvisational' character of Promethean 'foresight', that is, the ethos of planning and control (DS: 105). In doing so, I highlight the way that my friends at *Casa da Videira* (hereafter CdV) show what Wells means when he says "that there is a dimension of Christian life that requires more than repetition, more even than interpretation, – but not so much as origination, or creation *de novo*. That dimension, the key to abiding faithfulness, is improvisation" (Wells, 2004: 65).

As used by Wells, improvisation does not connote a way of acting haphazardly or without intentionality. Rather, improvisation points to the fact that Christian life is more than 'performing a script'; it also provides a way of "describ[ing] the desire to cherish a tradition without being locked in the past" (2004: 66). For Wells, then, improvisation names "that process of corporate discernment and embodiment [that is] central to the mission and worship

of the church” (2004: 18). As such, improvisation is at once inevitable, scriptural and ecclesial (2004: 65-66).

Well’s account of improvisation includes an array of practices, but he lists two practices as fundamental for Christian ethics, precisely because they correspond to “God’s two primary ways of working” (2004: 20). He writes:

In the incarnation he [God] overwhelms humanity with the abundance of his grace. And in the resurrection he uses what humanity has rejected to save humanity. The first [way] describes what...I call overaccepting. The second [way] describes what...I call reincorporation...If they are the way God works in his gospel, should they not be the principal ways in which the church seeks to imitate him? (2004: 20)

Understood in more general terms, overaccepting names the practice “in which a community fits a new action or concept into a larger narrative” (2004: 13). To overaccept means to find a ‘third way’ between merely accepting a state of conditions as they are, or trying to deny or block them. Once again, overaccepting names a way of mirroring a divine pattern that occurs throughout the scriptural narrative, and of which the Incarnation offers the definitive embodiment:

In the annunciation and the nativity, God overaccepts human life. He does not reject his people, nor does he simply accept them: instead he comes among them as a Jew. If the gospel story begins with God in Jesus overaccepting life, it ends with God in Jesus overaccepting death. Jesus does not avoid the cross, nor is the cross the end of the story. In the resurrection, God shows that even the worst offer, the execution of the Son of God, can be overaccepted – even death and its causes can become part of the story (2004: 135).

As indicated above, improvisation is a useful term for describing Claudio and his community in Brazil, a community which actually began through a collective act of overaccepting. This community began in November 1993, shortly after Claudio and his wife Kátia lost their first son. In Claudio’s telling of the story, he was incapable of dealing with the pain of that loss. In addition, Claudio’s local church had divided over leadership issues, and while Claudio was not the pastor of this church, the confused and disenchanted young people looked to him for a



way forward. Instead of trying merely to accept his grief or block the pain, Claudio found another way to respond: by taking care of the teenage youth group of the his local church. As Claudio describes it, the only way he could respond to the loss of his own child was to find joy in taking care of others' children as if they were his own, and "leaving the pain of his own loss with God" (Oliver, email, 27/04/2014).

Effectively becoming the pastor of the youth group, Claudio began to engage with their questions and their desire to put Jesus' words into practice: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35). Thus, soon after having lost a child, Claudio overaccepted this loss by caring for 'a group of tots', as he describes them, and taking them to the streets of Curitiba with six liters of milk and three dozen bread rolls in order to meet and serve Jesus. From that initial response of overaccepting, a vision of relational ministry and incarnational mission emerged, a vision that the group distilled into the strapline of their new church: *servir nossa geraçao com fidelidade* [serving our generation with faithfulness]. That phrase points to the coherence that exists between a range of improvisations on the theme of faithful service: from going to the streets with milk and bread, to starting a vertical garden on a balcony, to an urban homestead that has transformed two hundred tons of organic 'waste' into soil and conditions for sharing life. In fact, the creative reception of 'waste' as unused gift serves as a bridge between overaccepting and the second fundamental practice of improvisation, reincorporation.

By 'reincorporation', Wells means the way in which Christians draw upon discarded, yet vital, elements of the past as resources for improvising on the Christian story, in anticipation of its eschatological fulfillment in Act 5. To stay within Wells' thinking, reincorporation is a vital practice for living improvisationally within a theodramatic

perspective. This is because “Christian ethics is about learning to take the right things for granted” (Wells, 2004: 143). Christians learn to take the right things for granted precisely by seeing, describing, and acting in the light of the particularities of the Christian story, itself, a theodrama. Conversely, taking the wrong things for granted is, more often than not, a matter of the church ‘mis-placing’ itself or finding itself ‘mis-placed’ in the wrong act: “It is not the church’s vocation to create (Act One) or to conclude (Act Five) the story. The Messiah has come (Act Three), and it is the church’s role to follow in Christ’s footsteps (Act Four), not to act as if the fullness of God were yet to be revealed (Act Two)” (2004: 143). Indeed, my account of the Promethean enterprise or ethos in the last chapter amplifies the sense in which the church in the contemporary West has struggled to find its place; how it has both shaped and been shaped by a ‘diseased social imagination’ which takes the wrong things for granted, such as, the assumption of scarcity and the imputation of ‘needs’ as the unlimited desire for commodities.

To assert that the practice of reincorporation is congruent with a theodramatic perspective is to argue that “the Christian story is larger and greater in depth and scope than the smaller stories that present themselves” (2004: 143). In the light of this assumption, Wells also assumes that reincorporating elements of the past makes it possible and desirable for the church to engage in two crucial improvisational strategies. First, the church is enabled to renarrate “smaller stories”, such as, the rise of the technological or Promethean ethos, in the light of the “larger story”. Second, the church is enabled to address evil, “both in the contemporary world and in the church’s own history” (2004: 144). Thus, reincorporation names an alternative to trying to escape adverse conditions or being overwhelmed by them.

To explore the significance of the past for Christian ethics, Wells suggests that we think of church history as a road “stretching from the past into the future” (2004: 144). Of

course, roads are paths for embarking and continuing on journeys that take time, but roads themselves also offer distractions, which may divert the pilgrim from the true path. In addition, Wells suggests the pursuit of particular routes may leave behind debris or ‘discards’.

This is the point Wells wants to highlight:

The revelation brought by the liberation movement in the church in the last thirty years is that the earth cast aside in making the road is at least as much a part of Act Four as the road itself...It is now much easier to see, for poor and rich alike, that the losers [the discarded] whose voice has not been heard, are at least as much a part of Act Four as those winners who have written the history... By working with and being with the poor, the excluded, the discarded ‘earth’...and in some circumstances being the poor, the church faithfully follows Act Three and anticipates Act Five. The closer the church is to the poor in Act Four, the more prepared it will be to come face to face with God in Act Five (2004: 144-5).

Reincorporation, then, is a vital practice, but it is also paradoxical, precisely because it allows us to move toward a *telos*, an end that is discernible but not yet realized. The task of the church is to re-turn, or ‘turn back’ to draw on what has already happened in the story. On Wells’ reading, the paradox is not merely a phenomenon common to theatre or storytelling. In fact, it operates throughout the New Testament itself: from Mary’s *Magnificat* as a reincorporative improvisation on Hannah’s song (Luke 1:46-55), to the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus’ ministry which recapitulates the roles of prophet, priest and king in Israel, to St Paul’s passionate meditations on God’s ingathering of the Gentiles into a Jewish hope, to other ‘echoes in scripture’ in the New Testament. The lesson which Wells draws from this pattern of reincorporation is that “the key to improvising on the Christian story is not being clever or original, but in being so steeped in the discarded elements of the story that one can draw on them when the vital moment comes” (2004: 146). For Wells, what matters more than originality is memory. A church that does not practice reincorporation is a church that has lost its memory, and it is, therefore, a church ‘mis-placed’ and misled into imagining that it can or must plan its future. Moreover, because “the future is formed out of the past”, we are called,

paradoxically, to improvise by ‘walking backwards’ into the future:

The improviser has to be like a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future. His story can take him anywhere, but he must still ‘balance’ it, and give it shape, by remembering incidents that have been shelved and reincorporating them (Johnstone, in Wells, 2004: 148).

If taking bread and coffee to the homeless on the streets was the way that CdV began to improvise, one of the ways that Claudio and his community continued to improvise was by caring for creation, literally by collecting and returning organic waste to the soils of their gardens as a profoundly symbolic example of reincorporation. Indeed, as Claudio points out, the practice of taking bread and coffee to the streets, and the practice of reincorporating tons of organic waste on an urban homestead, share the same desire to serve and the same motivation: namely, that “the best way to be Good News to the friends we meet on the way” (2010: 25) is by cultivating and sharing *Vida em Abundância* [abundant life] (Oliver, email, 27/04/2010).

Employing improvisation as a heuristic strategy for understanding the task of incarnational mission, is to take forward a fundamental direction of Illich: namely, that the conditions for “being available to incarnate” (Oliver, 2008: 24-25), arise “out of sharing the good of convivial life” (Illich, TPDR: 106). In other words, the cultivation of conviviality enables incarnational mission. In order to develop what Illich calls convivial recovery, I return to his writings of the 1970s and explore them in the context of the twenty-first century.

### **Illich on Convivial Recovery**

Writing in the early 1970s, just following *Deschooling Society* in which he initiated his “project of demythologization” of the consumer society, Illich observed and outlined a response to a crisis. While many, particularly from the left, identified the crisis as “the

capitalist control of industrial production”, Illich struggled to analyze something which these critics did not see: “the crisis in the industrial mode of production itself” (TFC: xi).

In the last chapter, I discussed Illich’s analysis of the ‘rituals’ of schools as dominant institutions, and energy consumption, linked to the private automobile, as a dominant ‘device’, as examples of radical monopolies. I described how the dominance or monopoly of the industrial mode of production generated an enclosure, inside which personal activities are transmogrified into ‘needs’ which are met by the consumption of “institutional outputs”. It was in the light of this imbalance, and false dependency on industrialized modes of production and their products or staples, that Illich called for the rebirth of ‘Epimethean humanity’, those who love “people more than products” (DS: 115).

In *Tools for Conviviality*, Illich translates his call for the ‘rebirth of Epimethean humanity’ into counter-research of the ‘convivial reconstruction’ of society, “a modern society of responsibly limited tools” (TFC: xii). Such a reconstruction, Illich argued, entails an inversion of the Promethean ethos permeating “the present structure of major institutions” (TFC: xi), thereby reconfiguring “the triadic relationship between persons, tools, and a new collectivity” (TFC: xii). Illich describes the difficulty as well as the possibility of convivial alternatives to the “the crisis in the industrial mode of production” as follows:

It is now difficult to imagine a modern society in which industrial growth is balanced and kept in check by several complementary, distinct, and equally scientific modes of production. Our vision of the possible and the feasible is so restricted by industrial expectations that any alternative to more mass production sounds like a return to past oppression or like a Utopian design for noble savages. In fact, however, the vision of new possibilities requires only the recognition that scientific discoveries can be used in at least two opposite ways. The first leads to specialization of functions, institutionalization of values and centralization of power and turns people into the accessories of bureaucracies or machines. The second enlarges the range of each person’s *competence, control, and initiative*, limited only by other individuals’ claims to an equal range of power and freedom (TFC: xi-xii [emphasis mine]).

Finding alternatives, Illich tells us, is a matter of convivial recovery. By this, he means a way of diagnosing and responding creatively to dominant forms of social addictions generated within the Promethean ethos, that is, our dependence upon institutional outputs which we equate with our 'needs'.

As 'addicts of consumption', we find ourselves "[h]aving come to demand what institutions can produce, [and] we soon believe that we cannot do without it" (TFC: 18). Illich also observes a connection between a "life of consumption", as a social addiction, and the common experience of "psychological resistance...Like heroin addiction, the habit [of institutional dependence] distorts basic value judgments. Addicts of any kind are willing to pay increasing amounts for declining satisfactions" (TFC: 82). As frustrations grow deeper, Illich argues, so too, does the sense that there is more to be gained from any given habit. From the perspective of the addict, any available alternative to remaining an addict appears as no real choice at all. The choice seems to be either to say 'yes' to the current condition of dependence, or say 'yes' to the pain of withdrawal and the undesirability of the unknown.

Illich wants us to reframe the 'addict's excuse' as a false dilemma, however. He does not deny that "[w]ithdrawal from growth mania [as a symptom of addiction] will be painful" (TFC: 83). Indeed, he recognizes that this withdrawal will be especially painful "for members of the generation which has to experience the transition and above all for those most disabled by consumption" (TFC: 83). Illich also recognizes that the alternative that recovery poses is, indeed, a risky one. There is no guarantee of recovery, but he knows that recovery is not just a matter of quitting our addictive habits and simply enduring the withdrawal symptoms. Rather, recovery entails a path, a way of return, for those who are willing to take it.

In the early 1970s, Illich described three primary obstacles to this path of re-turning as: "the idolatry of science, the corruption of ordinary language, and the loss of respect for the

formal process by which social decisions are made” (TFC: 85). Thus, embarking on the path of convivial recovery meant that:

- In relation to the professional power of the culture of experts who delimit and determine how to focus and apply ‘scientific knowledge’ to ‘knowledge-consumers’, we must demythologize science by the recovery of common sense and the direct sharing of knowledge by citizens;
- In relation to the industrialized monopoly over basic personal activities, and subsequently, “the functional shift from verb to nouns” (for example, ‘I want to walk’ becomes ‘I need transport’), grounded in the recovery of verbs as a way of designating ourselves as ‘actors’ instead of ‘consumers’ (TFC: 90);
- In relation to the cynicism and sense of impotence surrounding partisan politics and the dominance of representative democracy, we must recover more radically democratic forms of ‘social process’, ‘due procedure’ and conflict resolution in relation to the “upper limits of productivity, privilege, professional monopoly, or efficiency” (TFC: 94-5).

Illich employs the trope of addiction and recovery as a way of diagnosing disabling social conditioning. From this perspective, there is also no guarantee of full recovery, but the recovering addict knows that embarking on the path towards full recovery is worth the risk, because s/he has experienced a new sense of freedom.

Convivial recovery, then, is a matter of reclaiming the collective discipline by which we (re)discover the “competence, control and initiative” through which we experience and expand “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence” (TFC: 11). We become, then, not just ‘mere consumers’ or addicts of consumption, but ‘recovering addicts of consumption’.

## **New Social Movements Taking the ‘Convivial Turn’**

Illich wrote *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) before most of the ‘developing’ countries of the world had embarked decisively on the path of full and rapid industrialization. Nearly 20 years after its publication, Illich reflected back on that moment of crisis and the possibility of a political inversion in the following way:

It happened in a way I had not anticipated. In the last words of [*Tools for Conviviality*] I said that I know in which direction things would happen but not what would bring them to that point. At that time I believed in some big, symbolic event, in something similar to the Wall Street crash. Instead of that, it is hundreds of millions of people just using their brains and trusting their senses. We now live in a world in which people misuse most of those things that industry and government do for their own purposes (IIC: 117).

More recently, a number of contemporary thinkers and activists, many either close friends of Illich or those inspired by him, have confirmed Illich’s insights about “people just using their brains and trusting their senses”. In effect, these intellectuals and storytellers have updated and elaborated Illich’s insights regarding convivial recovery, casting a vision for and narration of new social movements taking a ‘convivial turn’.<sup>3</sup> I want to attend to those storytellers, whose vision for, and narration of, new social movements (NSMs) indicates a convivial turn, as a way of shedding light on what it means to think ‘after Illich’.

In *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (1998), Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash narrate how NSMs are finding ways of going beyond the options of modernity’s so-called “Global Project” (GP: 1), of the Promethean enterprise of social inclusion into either the nation-state or market.

For Esteva and Prakash, both close friends of Illich, “grassroots post-modernism” names “a wide collection of culturally diverse initiatives and struggles of the so-called illiterates and uneducated non-modern ‘masses’, pioneering radical post-modern paths out of



the morass of modern life” (GP: 3). It is post-modernism, because it seeks to go beyond the certainties of modernity; yet is it grassroots, because it derives from ‘the people’ and their autonomous initiatives and ingenuity, realities that do not always reach the consciousness of academic post-modernism’s field of engagement. Rather, they argue that a critical narration of modernity needs to be developed in order to move beyond modernity. For the “Two-thirds World”, or the “social majorities”,<sup>3</sup> modernity names five centuries of the death of local cultures and the enclosure of common land by the “social minorities”. The result is that the “social majorities” have been stripped of traditional and communal strategies and, therefore, have been dehumanized into a condition known as underdevelopment.

Going beyond modernity, then, entails the autonomous survival and flourishing or well-being of local communities through “the creation and regeneration of post-modern spaces” (GP: 4). This, in turn, means a) recognizing that modernity offers two great Promethean expectations, the market and the nation-state; and b) reading the signs of modernity’s breakdown: perpetual violence in the name of the state, as well as the consequence of collapsing markets. Esteva and Prakash, attempt to chronicle an array of social movements, from the Zapatistas in Mexico to Gandhi-inspired social movements in India, who “are not entering the trap of modern expectations: to count upon the market or the state” (GP: 4).

According to Esteva and Prakash, the movement beyond modernity has already begun and is well under way: at the grassroots social movements and collectives may be marked by an Illichian celebration of awareness, and an interdependent creativity, which already charts their own paths to resistance and liberation. In telling the stories of these people and their movements, Esteva and Prakash neither romanticize nor underestimate their efforts, but rather

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<sup>3</sup> The terms “Two-thirds World”, “social majorities”, and “social minorities” are used throughout the work of Esteva and Prakash. Because they are used so extensively in their work, I have placed them in quotation marks, but I have not included direct references on every occasion I cite them.

seek to ‘make visible’ how these grassroots initiatives have discovered that another way is possible, and to share inspiration for taking the path towards convivial recovery. Esteva and Prakash state their intention as follows:

[W]e seek to learn from their communal ingenuity and cultural arts for escaping or going beyond the monoculturalism of the modern world. In exploring their brands of post-modernism, we explicitly resist the urge of all modern experts: ‘helping’ or ‘educating’ the masses to join the mainstream minority march, headed onward and forward, towards global progress and development (GP: 5).

In a similar way, Esteva’s collaboration in a more recent post-development manifesto, *The Future of Development: A Radical Manifesto* (2013), offers another attempt at narrating this array of NSMs and their efforts at “reorganizing society from the bottom up” (TFOD: 95-117). Without attempting to homogenize these movements, like *Via Campesina*, Occupy, and Transition, or underestimate differences between them, the authors recognize the following ‘family resemblances’:

- They prioritize “community over the individual as the unit of human welfare” (TFOD: 99), thereby advocating communitarianism (TFOD: 99) as an alternative to individualism and/or socialist collectivism;
- They advocate collective action which challenges “the individual’s right to consume and the market’s right to produce” (TFOD: 99-100), doing so out of an awareness of the twin threats of the economic and environmental crises;
- They are deeply rooted in traditional wisdom and local culture;
- They do not seek to return nostalgically to a ‘golden age’, but rather, “[t]hey are dissolving the historical break – the rupture with the past – imposed by modernity” (TFOD: 100);
- They seek to reimagine and enact *buen vivir*, that is, “what living well is in local, rooted terms” (TFOD: 100);

- They represent a range of initiatives seeking to restrict “the sphere of the global market”(TFOD: 100) as “a common enemy” (TFOD: 101);
- They compose an ongoing insurrection, “entirely evident but at the same time invisible” precisely because it is “a reorganization of society from the bottom up” (TFOD: 101).

According to these storytellers, there is a common denominator which links these NSMs to Illich’s vision for convivial recovery, namely, the recovery of verbs:

People are substituting verbs such as learning and healing for nouns such as education and health. The latter define ‘needs’ whose satisfaction depends on public or private entities that are increasingly incapable of satisfying them. The former express the recovery of personal and collective agency towards autonomous paths of social transformation (TFOD: 101).

Here, the authors highlight this shift from nouns to verbs, from the consumption of heteronomously produced commodities to the recovery of culturally autonomous activities as follows:

- From food consumption to ‘eating’;
- From education to ‘learning’;
- From healthcare to ‘healing’;
- From housing development to ‘settling’ or ‘dwelling’;
- From market relations to ‘exchanging’.<sup>4</sup>

Two observations follow from the contemporary reading of Illich’s notion of ‘the recovery of verbs’. First, these are social movements characterized by improvisation. This means the awareness of contingencies, readiness for surprises, and collective ingenuity which creates possibilities that are not captive to the ‘planning’ orchestrated by “monolithic institutions: the nation-state, multinational corporations as well as national or international institutions” (GP: 5).

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<sup>4</sup> For a more expansive account of this shift from nouns to verbs, see (TFOD: 101-112).

Improvisation, then, does not mean attempting to live by sheer spontaneity, doing things ‘willy-nilly,’ or ‘making it up as you go along,’ but rather by an intentionality “where people refuse to be seduced and controlled by economic laws” (GP: 194). “The challenge of the ‘social majorities’ is to continue improvising creative transitions from an imposed universe to the regeneration of their more familiar pluriverse” (GP: 198) The primary way that they do so is by drawing on available “social experience,” wisdom and cultural practices of the past, and reincorporating them into the present. In doing so, they are creating spaces which do not take the logic/assumption of scarcity for granted.

Second, these are social movements that do not cling to a Promethean sense of expectation, rather they ‘shelter’ an Epimethean sense of hope. As Prakash and Esteva describe it:

To express having hope, in Spanish, one can say: ‘*Abrigo esperanzas.*’ *Abrigar* is to shelter, to protect, to keep warm, to entertain, to cherish, to nurse. People at the grassroots have few expectations, if any. But they are continually nourishing their hopes, protecting them, keeping them warm to avoid their freezing in heartless, hostile environments (GP: 106).

### **From New Social Movements to Grassroots Ecclesial Communities<sup>5</sup>**

In order to examine in more detail the congruence between conviviality and incarnation, I have explored how convivial recovery relates to, or enacts, reincorporation as a practice of improvisation in relation to contemporary social movements. In this section I discuss Illich’s concern for convivial recovery specifically in relation to incarnational mission.

Throughout this chapter, I have been exploring ways of thinking ‘after Illich’. In using the heuristic strategy of improvisation as a way of exploring post-Illichian possibilities, I have

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow the phrase ‘grassroots ecclesial communities’ from Guillhermo Cook’s treatment of Latin America base communities from a Protestant perspective (1985: Ch. 8).

turned to CdV as a way of showing how Christian community has, in the light of Illich's insights, "become a community of trust in order that it may faithfully encounter the unknown of the future without fear", doing so as a collective attempt at "faithfully improvising on the Christian tradition" (Wells, 2004: 110). More specifically, I have been interpreting CdV as a Christian community whose beginning was indelibly defined by overaccepting, and whose trajectory has been marked by reincorporation, namely the recovery of a sustainable way of life centered around the recovery of verbs, that is, shared human action.

In this section I want to focus on CdV to examine a complementary aspect of Illich's thought: namely, how convivial recovery enables vital expressions of incarnational mission.

### **'Subversive Habitation' and the Reincorporation of 'Life Around Homes'**

In November 2011, a Brazilian national newspaper, *O Estado de São Paulo*, produced a feature article on CdV, describing how three families decided to make an experiment in community living in a *bairro* [residential neighborhood] in Curitiba, Parana. Their community life focused around urban agriculture and sustainable food production. Claudio was quoted in the article confirming that they were, 'ordinary people' and that the odd thing was how three families growing food together had seemingly become exceptional, and therefore, newsworthy:

We are normal, just as enslaved as everybody else, but we decided to begin to untie the small knots...Community is the word...There is no way to think about another way of life thinking that you can do everything by yourself [*sozinho*]. Here we are completely dependent upon personal relations [*relacoes humanas*]...Seriously, I don't know why you are interviewing me. I only do 50% of what our great-grandparents did. Doing half of what they did makes the news. Just imagine if someone were to interview them? (OESP: 5)

Here, I want to uncover what was not reported in that feature article: namely, why CdV took a turn towards becoming a 'grassroots ecclesial community'. To do so, I turn to one of

Claudio's pastoral letters from 2009 (SPI, Appendix 2).<sup>6</sup> In this letter, Claudio begins to cast a theological vision and rationale for the home-based agricultural and communal regeneration featured in the newspaper article. The background to that letter included collective reflections and dialogues on 'grassroots post-modernism', Illich, and biblical reflections on the obstacles and possibilities of 'being church'. That pastoral letter was Claudio's attempt at distilling previous questions, elaborating further questions, and proposing a possible way forward. The letter began with one of Claudio's favorite questions: not *how?*, but *is it possible?*

Is it possible to live out an experience that is genuinely communitarian, biblically faithful, and genuinely spiritual and that can be established as an experience at a human scale? What are the forms of human gathering that can be identified and that might serve as inspiration for such an initiative? If such a proposal is possible, what are the possibilities? If it is impossible, what are the obstacles? Is it possible to overcome them? What and whose interests are engaged [*atingidos*] when this path is chosen? (SPI: 1)

Claudio continues by pointing out two trajectories that run throughout human history. On the one hand, different cultures have experimented with sustainable social forms of dwelling, such as clans, tribes, villages, *kibbutzim*, ashrams, *faxinais*, *quilombos*, doing so in order to find a balance between human interaction with one another and with the surrounding habitat. On the other hand, different cultures, most especially empires, have repeatedly reproduced an imbalance through forms of social organization that are not sustainable, thereby leading to collapse. After framing their contemporary context in the light of similarities and differences with previous empires and collapses, Claudio highlights the gap that he perceives between the response at the grassroots and the Brazilian evangelical church's (lack of) response to this historical moment:

The clamour for solutions is coming from the grassroots [*de base social tradicional*], and the growing number of news features and publications confirms that each day more and more people are finding ways of experimenting and committing themselves to more communitarian and sustainable ways of life (SPI: 3).

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<sup>6</sup> Hereafter, I abbreviate all references to this letter, '*Sera Possível a Igreja?*', simply as SPI.

Again, the fundamental question that Claudio is asking is: “Is it possible to live out an experience [of ‘being church’] that is genuinely communitarian, biblically faithful, and genuinely spiritual, and that can be established as an experience at a human scale?” (SPI: 1).

The letter develops a response to that question by raising three further questions. The first is: “In the midst of this, what is the good news that we receive and share?” (SPI: 4). Claudio’s response begins by returning to Jesus’ message recorded at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel: “the kingdom has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).

This [biblical] text...suffers an apocalyptic deformation [when it] places the good news out of reach and distant in time. My paraphrase of this verse – which attempts to reclaim the original force of Jesus’ message of good news – would be this: ‘*The absolute dominion/reign of God is within reach; therefore, change your whole way of thinking and believe that this is good news*’. This means believing that mercy, service, solidarity, love, humility, self-emptying, non-violence, submission, sacrifice, strength of character, receiving insults... mourning, sharing one’s possessions, renunciation, depending on others, being hospitable, losing and non-resistance are all ‘good news’. To believe is to trust [in this way of life], which is a difficult step – as well as the fundamental step towards entering and enjoying life under God’s reign (SPI: 4).

The second question returns to that of social forms, asking whether the basic embodiment of this good news is primarily individual or collective, and asserting that is it the latter. This leads to a third question: How might the collective dimension of faith, the *ekklesia*, be expressed? Based on the study of and reflection on the Bible as well as church history, Claudio offers the following insight(s) regarding the form of the *ekklesia*:

The church, even in its ‘proto-stage’ experienced around Jesus, happens around the home (*kat’ oikon*) and the family well before becoming a local church (*kath’ hole*) of the church of a city (*hole te ekklesia*), retaining, even with these wider dimensions, the prevalence of the homes and families that served as ‘ecclesial hosts’. It is from this dimension of the home and the family that the church unfolds and develops. One can observe this phenomenon for the initial expansion of Christianity, which took place in homes – both as a structure for receiving and as well as a support base for the announcing. Not only in the Pauline expansion, but also with Jesus’ sending of the seventy, we find the focus on the *home* as the structure which offers shelter and support for those who depend totally on the hospitality being offered (SPI: 5).

To be clear, Claudio is not arguing that the ‘primitive’, home-based form of the *ekklesia* is its only valid expression, rather in this letter he is attempting to recover a discarded ecclesial form. Or, to return to Wells’ language of improvisation, his is an attempt to reincorporate a collective expression of the *ekklesia* that has been discarded along the road of church history. The rest of the letter explores this possibility of reincorporation, reading the early church’s domestic improvisations, in the midst of an empire, as inspiration for contemporary ones:

The ‘church-that-gathers-around-homes’ (*syn te kay oikon auton ekklesia*) is the base from which an alternative to the empire begins: the humanization of relations, respect for women, the valorization of children, frugality in eating [*alimentação*], the interruption of an economic system based upon slavery and castes, simplicity in lifestyle, non-monetarized relationships. Above all, it is in the dimensions of the home that the greatest danger [*perigo*] to the empire gathers: that is, an assembly in search of solutions to problems they confront (the original meaning of *ekklesia*), the flagrant negation of hope in any administration of centralized solution that rests in the hands of rulers, princes, or emperors. The backbone [*espina dorsal*] of the system is broken from inside the home. My hunch is that this possibility was as real yesterday as it could be today (SPI: 6).

[Thus] [t]his domestic form [*organização caseira*] gains its importance to the extent that it does not gather ‘affinity group’ or out of geographical ease, but sees itself as an assembly called in order to come up with solutions, to deal with problems, to come up with another *locus* for action, sharing, prayer, spirituality, belonging and loyalty. In this way, it becomes a threat to the *status quo*, a chink in the system [*um desagregador dos sistema*] and a pathology to be removed [*estirpada*] at all costs (SPI: 7).

Claudio concludes the letter as follows:

We stand before a world that is falling apart through its own certainties, that fragments itself while struggling to hold itself together, unaltered before the imminence of chaos. I close by restating my initial questions: What ‘good news’ can be given to those around us? Is it more institutions, more programs, new and better methodologies, more costs? Is it possible for another way of life to emerge that establishes alternatives to either a) submission to the system and its improvement, or b) a negating escape plan [*escapismo negador*] from reality? Would these alternatives waiting to be created come from some kind of genius? Or are they available through the attentive and respectful observation of the past and the grassroots initiatives [*bases sociais*] that have come before us? (SPI: 8)

Claudio’s letter, then, is a pastoral exercise in reincorporating Christian wisdom and the



practices of a ‘domestic church’, and in dialogue with contemporary grassroots initiatives and their myriad attempts to reincorporate cultural or ‘residual’ wisdom and the arts of living from the past. It articulates the deep questioning and sense of experimentation at CdV, an attempt at faithful improvisation in recovering a sustainable social form, which offers a missional response to unsustainable social structures and related crises.

In a later document circulated among us in 2012 (QDV, Appendix 3),<sup>7</sup> the shape of this ‘home-based’ ecclesial improvisation gained a conceptual focus around the notion of *paróquia*, the Portuguese equivalent of the English word, ‘parish’. In fact, the term *paróquia* comes from the Greek, *paraikia*, which translates as ‘around the home’, or more loosely as *espaço de viver* [one’s living space]. In that document, Claudio describes *paraikia* as follows:

The importance of the term lies in the way it reveals the tension between the immediate surroundings of one’s home in relation to the wider social, political and economic context. The home (*oikos*) is inserted [in that wider context] without being totally submitted – the relation the pilgrim has with and in a foreign land. In this sense, the term connotes a sense of movement, pilgrimage and of knowing oneself to be taking a direction towards an alternative that is ‘established’. Here, there is a sense of utopia, not in the pejorative sense of a “non-place”, but as a place of coming-to-be, or becoming [*devir*]. The point of reference, then, is the *sovereignty* of the home over its surroundings, the home as a sign of hope and resistance (QDV: 1).

To be clear, the reincorporation of *paraikia*, or home-based ecclesial life, is not an attempt to immunize the church from its wider surrounding. On the contrary, *paraikia* names an attempt to regenerate the conditions for convivial interdependence, an alternative ‘security system’ (for example, Mark 10:29-31) to the illusion of independence, or the threat of alienating dependences, in a global economy.

As contemporary US theologian Eleazar Fernandez puts the matter: “global capitalism

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<sup>7</sup> Hereafter, I abbreviate all references to this letter, “*Quinta da Videira: a casa como espaço de viver*”, simply as QDV. Note that in Portuguese, *quinta* may refer to one’s ‘backyard’, or more generally, to the area surrounding one’s home or dwelling. As used here by Claudio, a functional equivalent for *quinta* might be ‘urban homestead’.

is a pervasive phenomenon. There is no place to hide outside of the reach and influence of the global market” (2006: 177). In the light of that description of contemporary imperial or market forces, the *paraoikia* of CdV names an attempt to improvise “ways of faithfulness and resistance while living in the space occupied by global capitalism” (2006: 176). For, as Fernandez insists, this vision of the church as household offers a third way between the strategies of escape or conquest, offering instead a distinct identity defined as “a stance of ‘subversive cohabitation’”:

A New Testament concept that corresponds to the posture of subversive cohabitation is *paraoikoi* (‘resident aliens’). The New Testament Christians adopted the term *paraoikoi* to speak of their identity in relation to the world (Acts 7:6; 1 Pt. 2:11). As resident aliens, they not only have a specific identity, task and burden, but also a specific promise and destiny. They are expected to behave in accordance with their identity. Following the Johannine reading of the other-worldly identity of Jesus (‘not of this world’), resident aliens know that they are ‘in’ the world, but not ‘of’ this world. They do not escape from this world but affirm both being in the world and not letting the world define them (2006: 177-178).

The search described in Claudio’s letter, then, is not a search for an ‘ideal’ church, but a possible way of being church that dwells within the tension of being a countercultural community without becoming a disengaged ghetto, an ecclesial retreat from the world. In dialogue with the voices and examples of “grassroots postmodernism”, CdV could be described as an experiment at regeneration, at grassroots ecclesial community, a way of regenerating a ‘new inside’ even “while living in the space occupied by global capitalism” (2006:177). Thus, CdV represents an attempt at offering “subversive cohabitation”, a way of ‘dwelling’ together for the sake of seeking the kingdom (Matt. 6:33), in order to receive, experience and share good news, the good news of “abundant life” (John 10:10). This might include:

- The reincorporation of waste and discarded ways of living in community;
- Interdependence through the recovery of verbs. For example, eating together, learning, caring for one another, sharing, exchanging;

- Envisioning the home, not as not as a ghetto or a place of retreat, but as a strategic site for the regeneration of people’s space, establishing the recovery of dwelling as a verb which makes possible “subversive cohabitation”.<sup>8</sup>

### **Re-inhabiting the ‘Parish’ as a Demonstration Plot for Abundant Life**

In the last section, I focused on CdV’s search to imagine and become a ‘grassroots ecclesial community’, a search for recovering or reincorporating *paraoikia*, or what Fernandez calls “subversive cohabitation”. Here, I want to explore more clearly what *paraoikia* enables: not only what it is against, but what it is for. I turn, therefore, to Fernandez’s metaphor of “the church as a household of life abundant” (2006: 172). CdV’s turn towards *paraoikia* cannot be understood apart from the intention of establishing a demonstration plot for “life abundant”, a place where people can “come and see” (John 1:46).

As a way of reiterating and summarizing the issues raised in Claudio’s pastoral letter, the following questions from Eleazar Fernandez are significant:

How do we imagine the church in the face of today’s ecological and economic challenges? What image of the church would be adequate and responsive to our globalized context? What would discipleship and ministry look like in an age of predatory global capitalism that destroys both human beings and the ecosystem?” (2006: 172)

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth highlighting how Claudio’s use of the term *paraoikia* as well as Fernandez’ notion of “subversive cohabitation” both resonate with Illich’s notion of the *vernacular*, as a way of specifying how people act and interact within a shared sense of space. Illich describes as the *vernacular* follows:

*Vernacular* comes from an Indo-Germanic root that implies ‘rootedness’ and ‘abode’. *Vernaculum* as a Latin word was used for whatever was homebred, homespun, homegrown, homemade, as opposed to what was obtained in formal exchange...We need a simple, straightforward word to designate...autonomous, non-market related actions through which people satisfy everyday needs – the actions that by their own true nature escape bureaucratic control, satisfying needs to which, in the very process, they give specific shape. Vernacular seems a good old word for this purpose (SW: 57-58).

Fernandez makes clear that while the church does not act in isolation from other social actors, it plays a crucial role “in reenvisioning an alternative economic paradigm”, a role that requires “embodi[ment] in its own life and ministries the new economic paradigm...an economy of life abundant for all members of God’s household” (2006: 172). CdV also cannot be understood apart from the process of turning from the illusions and false abundance of the dominant economic paradigm and towards seeking the reality of the “abundant kingdom” through the practices of regenerative, home-based agriculture.

Highlighting the link between this false abundance of the global economy and agricultural practices, Fred Bahnson, permaculture gardener and food activist from the US, makes a vital distinction between the “abundant mirage” and God’s “abundant kingdom” (MPWTL: Ch. 4). The market-based food system which resonates with the global economy, he argues, projects an “abundant mirage”, inside which we are conditioned to see a bountiful supply of cheap, convenient food. To call it a mirage is to highlight the falsity of this perception: how the heavily mechanized and oil-based forms of modern agriculture depend upon unsustainable levels of energy consumption; how centralized production and distribution escalates dependence upon a food system in which greater numbers are left either ‘stuffed or starved’ (Patel, 2008); how the simultaneous rise in obesity and world hunger are two sides of the same coin. The task is to see this as a “mirage” and not a reality which we are called to embrace:

To boast of one hundred bushels-an-acre of wheat while our fields erode into the sea, and to proclaim that by 2050 the world’s farmers must double production to feed a growing population while we waste as much food as it would take to feed those people: by such acts, we speak a lie...Our food system is one of the powers and principalities, fallen and in need of redemption. Perhaps the way out of such a system is not to keep shoring up the old system or try to be reconciled to it, but to step around it and create something new. To create what might look less like a *system* and more like *a way of life*... Something that might even begin to resemble the kingdom of God (MPWTL: 90-91).

As Bahnson makes clear, the “abundant kingdom” is precisely that alternative reality that we are called to embrace. To seek and enter that alternative is to take seriously Jesus’ claim to be the source of “life abundant” as well as the church’s vocation to be “a household of life abundant” (Fernandez, 2006: 172). One way of responding begins by raising the question: “What kind of agriculture would make space for the abundant kingdom of God to take root and flourish among us?” (MPWTL: 92).

At a practical level, Bahnson clarifies how taking seriously our allegiance to Jesus and the kingdom does not mean turning to Jesus as an agricultural expert, or to the Bible as an agricultural ‘manual’. Rather, it means recognizing agricultural and eating practices as part of the kingdom which we are encouraged to seek first (Matt. 6:33). It means repenting of the technological ethos, the illusion that we can and should exercise absolute control over the cosmos, much less absolute control over our food. To return to Illich’s distinction between Promethean expectation and Epimethean hope, I would argue, with Bahnson, that in the abundant kingdom, the alternative to this false expectation of the abundant mirage is hopeful trust that “centers desire on a person from whom we await a gift” (DS: 105). In Bahnson’s words:

Jesus’ admonishment is simply a call to give up control over our daily sustenance. Food is not a product. It is not ‘fuel for the machine’. It is not a commodity or a reflection of our technological ingenuity. It is before everything else an unearned gift from God, manna from heaven, a blessing. As eaters in the abundant mirage, which offers the illusion of control and limitless bounty, we need to learn how to receive food as a gift and not a given. Perhaps a more kingdom-centered approach to eating begins with the radical trust that God’s abundance is enough (MPWTL: 94).

More specifically, this sense of trust beckons us to recover and reincorporate agricultural practices which are congruent with and serve the reality of the “abundant kingdom”, the practices of regenerative agriculture. Whereas modern agriculture depends heavily on fossil

fuels and capital-intensive machinery, regenerative agriculture depends on sunlight and labor-intensive care that enhances the quality of the soil base instead of depleting it. By respecting the natural patterns and cycles of the earth, as well as trusting in the abundance of creation, regenerative agriculture can serve as “a means by which we can seek first the kingdom of God” (MPWTL, 2012: 101). This brings us back to the way that CdV reincorporates the practices of regenerative agriculture in order to ‘seek first the kingdom’.

Their urban agriculture initiative is an experiment organized around two foci: 1) reincorporating organic waste in the cycle of life, and 2) family or home-based food sovereignty. It may be noted that these regenerative practices not only address the problem of organic and food waste, but they also promote a form of more sustainable and convivial production, by making it possible to reweave the social bond inside the work itself by:

allowing a substantial aspect of one’s survival – food – to be under one’s control, instead of in the hands of innumerable intermediaries such as the ‘boss’, the market or one’s seller. These intermediaries all stimulate/oblige/promote the cultivation of monocultures all the way to the kitchen door by convincing growers that they will generate a sufficient income to buy what goods they need, when in fact, turning over the area around the home into monocultures would only serve to acquire a fraction of the quantity and quality that could be produced in one’s backyard or garden [*quintal*] (QDV: 1-2).

The practice of vegetable and animal production around the home [*na quinta*] demonstrates that, even in the face of crisis situations – from debased price quotes or environmental difficulties – it is possible to cultivate a space that guarantees that one can cope with outside pressures on the home and to do so with dignity ...

By forming a cycle, both animals and plant are integrated, problems are faced and resolved...Eggs, meats and milk are provided, as well as traditional fruits and vegetables...In addition to this, the soil is regenerated...the environment [*ambiente*] becomes more diverse, the social bond is strengthened and dependence upon money as the sole Mediator and the market as the sole Provider is questioned – and sometimes even overcome [*vencida*] (QDV: 2).

Closely related to Claudio’s description of the practices of regenerative agriculture is his description of how they have recovered the verb of ‘eating together’. Here, Claudio makes use of Esteva and Prakash’s *comida/alimento* distinction. His description also holds together the

disciplined enjoyment of the *convivium* within a larger sense of “eucharistic table manners”

(Wirbza, 2001: Ch. 5):

[A]limento is what McDonald’s and nutritionism gives to you, *comida* is what your mum makes for you...It’s a family together, people talking, warm fresh veggies, sweet potatoes with brown sugar and cinnamon in the morning (for Southerners in your country), corn bread, laughing, crying, prayer, thanksgiving, culture, old histories, yesterday morning histories, little ones learning who we are through food, love, fights, reconciliation, dating, a baby’s first meal, planning next lunch or tomorrow’s dinner. This one hour of *life* is about remembering who and *whose* we are, from where we come, memories to help us cross difficult times with hope...well...this is *comida*’ (Oliver, in MPWTL: 106).

This is a description of the *cotidiano* [everyday life], and yet this description makes profound connections between the recovery of verbs, such as ‘eating’, and the recovery of conditions for sharing abundance. This glimpse into life together at CdV also points to the way one community has entered and shared the common struggle towards convivial recovery with other grassroots initiatives and NSMs in order to regenerate a convivial way of life. At the same time, the fundamental motivation behind what CdV does together is the desire to receive and share the abundant life that comes to us through the person of Jesus Christ (John 10:10). Thus, the recovery of verbs as a means of recovering abundance remains centered on a promise: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Claudio elaborates the link between their work and that promise as follows:

[T]he Greek work *zoe*, which comes from *zao*, and means ‘I live’ or ‘I am alive’. *Zoe* is what it’s like to feel alive. So we understand that what Jesus offers for us is this sensation of being alive, enjoying life, living abundantly. All this starts when we look to those pieces of life, sent to die as garbage, and reintroduce them into the cycle of life, respecting them as part of creation. It’s a process that begins in the soil and ends at our tables. We harvest our veggies from this cycle, we breed our animals inside of it...Where the world sees garbage, we see nourishment; where the world sees death, we see life; in a world of loneliness, we discover community (Oliver, in MPWTL: 106-7).

Thus, one could understand this community as a grassroots initiative seeking, as Claudio puts it, to reclaim the home as a center of production and not merely a center of consumption, thereby challenging unbridled dependence upon commodities and the cash-nexus. But I would

also argue that in the fullest sense, CdV is a ‘grassroots ecclesial community’ whose vision of “abundant kingdom homesteading” (MPWTL: 104) represents a form of “subversive cohabitation” (Fernandez, 2006: 177). In a space of about three hundred square meters, one community has shown that it is possible to produce enough food for three families, as well providing for neighbors, thereby cultivating a demonstration plot for abundant life.

Of course, this community’s way is not the only way to respond to the economic and ecological crises generated by the predatory nature of global capitalism. The collective witness of this community does not offer an ‘ideal’ way, or model, to be reproduced. Rather, by its demonstration plot, it offers a possibility and a sign of hope. This is a sign, as Claudio prefers to say, that another world is possible, necessary, and is happening. In Fernandez’s terms, it takes seriously the ecclesial vocation to enact its faithfulness through “subversive cohabitation”. Yet, it does so without the ecclesial hubris of expecting that the church should exercise control over social issues in order to be effective. In Bahnson’s terms, it takes seriously the importance of “creating infrastructures of holiness” (Bahnson and Wirzba, 2012: 107), which enable us to see and seek the abundant kingdom as an available alternative. As signs of the kingdom, these structures do not circumscribe our action or range of influence, but rather offer a place to dwell, a place to take a stand.

### **Rediscovering Hope: Or, the Re-turn of Hope as a Social Force**

When Illich wrote about “the recovery of hope as a social force” in *Deschooling Society*, he wrote during a time when hope was a revolutionary watchword and key to the thinking of the first-generation liberation theologians. These liberation theologians, no doubt, shared Illich’s concern about the recovery of hope as a social force, as well Illich’s sense that hope is not a function of human planning and power, but rather that hope finds its source in God’s promise



and gift (DS: 105).

The twist in Illich's conception of hope, however, is a twist which contrasts the dominance of the Promethean stance with the rebirth of an Epimethean one. As we saw earlier, Promethean means 'foresight', and in 1971, it seems clear that Illich was at pains to show how Promethean foresight did not translate into nor cohere with the liberationist emphasis on revolutionary witness grounded in 'looking towards God's promised future'. The Promethean way of looking ahead meant and still means the techno-economic rationality by which we plan, engineer, and attempt to control the future, doing so in order to maintain a way of life centered around addictive and unsustainable patterns of consumption. To be conformed to the Promethean ethos, which Illich also calls "an ethos of non-satiety" (DS: 113), is not compatible with the future promised by Christian hope. For, in Illich's lexicon, the Promethean ethos 'counterfeits' hope by transmogrifying a posture of anticipation into one of Promethean expectation. Here, expectation names a posture of entitlement and possessiveness which tries to secure an outcome, when the future may only be received through a promise and as a gift (DS: 105).

In Illich's terms, then, one simply cannot be Promethean and live in hope. Restated in more explicitly theological terms: Promethean humanity cannot embrace the dignity of creatureliness and attempt to transcend it by trying to live in Act 5, or in a one-act play, assuming, either way, that humanity must write and complete the ending to the drama. Epimethean humanity embraces both the fragility and goodness of its creatureliness, recognizing that it lives in "hopeful trust" (DS: 114) of a good Giver, and therefore, lives now (in Act 4) in the light of its trusting hope for a good end (Act 5).

In returning to Illich's call for the recovery of hope and its difference from its Promethean counterfeit, it is also important to recognize what has changed since 1971.

“Rising expectations” (DS: 105) accurately described the dominant mood of post-World War II industrialization and economic booms. That period was still arguably the last years of the golden age of the ‘development decades’. It was before the landmark publication of *The Limits to Growth* (1974), which presented the urgency of searching for alternatives to the twin forces of ecological degradation and economic growth. That period was also before the 1973 economic recession which, among other things, exposed the fragility of linking economic growth to foreign oil dependency. It was a time before the effects of industrialized hubris, more commonly known now as the economic and ecological crises, became mainstream concerns.

Some forty years after Illich’s first published indictment of the Promethean ethos, there are still rising expectations, but the difference is that the fragility of the Promethean enterprise and dark underside of the Promethean ethos have been exposed. Some still cling to “rising expectations”, but there is a growing sense that there is no abiding hope in ‘expecting’ to reform dominant social institutions, be it the nation-state or the market. There is a growing sense that neither the nation-state nor the market can solve all social ills, a sense that things are not generally improving, but possibly getting worse. For this reason, I would suggest that returning to Illich’s distinction between Promethean expectation and the rediscovery of hope is all the more relevant and urgent today, and to do so, I want to situate Illich once more in relation to my ‘two tables’.

At Table Two, I turn to Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos, a scholar-activist whose recent work has focused on new social movements (NSMs), specifically on the World Social Forum (Santos, 2006). Through his engagement with the World Social Forum, Santos’ research highlights “the re-emergence of a critical utopia, that is to say a radical critique of present-day reality and the aspiration to a better society” (2006: 11). Santos

juxtaposes critical utopia with the dominant conservative utopia of neoliberal globalization and the way that market dominance and its laws offer only “a closed horizon, an end to history” (2006: 11). Santos suggests that this conservative utopia has established global monocultures, thereby resulting in “the waste of experience” (2006: 31). Santos goes on to link the recovery of critical utopia with a ‘turning back’ to the past in order to reincorporate social experiences that have been eclipsed. He does so for the sake of recovering conceptions of human flourishing that are possible alternatives to the global monocultures produced within the conservative utopia.

I turn to Santos, here, not only because he approaches the question of utopia or hope in a way that resonates with Illich’s stance of thinking ‘in the mirror of the past’, but also because he is a voice from the table of ‘other storytellers’ (Table Two) who has mingled directly with the table of the theologians (Table One). In 2005, on the margins of the Third-World Social Forum, Santos was invited to address the First-World Forum for Liberation and Theology. His topic was the role of religion and theology in the contemporary world, an appropriate request given that two-thirds of the delegates at the WSF identified themselves as ‘religious’. In his address to this largely religious audience, then, Santos’ basic point is that critical theory, his area of expertise, and theology can and should work in tandem. In other words, as a neo-Marxist sociologist, Santos is quite happy to tell theologians that theology, like critical theory, is not just about understanding the world as it is, but also about this world’s transformation. On this basis Santos believes theology has a part to play. To do so, he insists, it must grasp the growing discrepancy “between current [social] experience and expectations of a better world” (Santos, in Peixoto, 2005: 1).

Santos suggests that through the revolutionary impulse of the late 1960s, the call for reform meant change ‘for the better’. A radical shift in the meaning of reform, however,

means this concept is no longer synonymous with ‘positive social change’. Calls for reform abound, and yet, argues Santos, the gap between negative social experience and expectations seems to be ever-widening: “Today, when we see a reform, we know or we have the expectation that it will lead to something worse, not better” (2005: 1).

The result is a growing shift towards what Santos calls an “uncivil society” (2005: 2). By “uncivil”, Santos is suggesting the way in which reform has given rise to the apparent spread of political democracy, defined as electoral representation, coupled with increasing signs of social fascism, something he sees manifested through regimes of heightened surveillance, control, and ‘security.’ Within this inversion of reform, he argues, the freedom of citizens atrophies into the freedom of consumer choice. Thus, the agency of citizens, or, at least, their sense of their own capacity to accomplish things by direct action, becomes more and more circumscribed within the tyranny of consumerism and consumption. Beyond the sphere of consumption, a conglomerate of social and economic powers and institutions extends its reach into the overall shape of lives. This controlling reach, he argues, is symptomatic of an “uncivil society” (2005: 2), a society in crisis and on the edge of chaos. Santos captures the existential pressure of coping with such incivility with a word-play on the verb *esperar*, which means either ‘to wait’ or ‘to hope’. He claims that in contemporary conditions of incivility, we live “*em espera, mas sem esperança*,” that is, “in waiting, but without hope” (2005: 1).

Santos recognizes that theology, in its colonizing and extremist manifestations, has played a significant role in the shaping of incivility. Nonetheless, he also affirms that theology has a crucial role to play in the necessary transition from ‘just waiting’ to the recovery of hope, not just in hope as a concept, but, as Illich puts it: “the rediscovery of hope as a social force” (DS: 106). Santos concludes his challenge to theologians in this way: “It makes total

sense that salvation exists in another world, what doesn't make any sense is the notion that salvation doesn't exist in this one" (Santos, in Peixoto, 2005: 3).

Some might argue that invoking salvation is a curious trope from Santos, the sociologist. In fact, it is wholly congruent with his insight regarding the critical function of theology. For Santos, if theology is going to remain critical of the dominant social forces which reduce social experience to 'just waiting', and if theology is going to celebrate hope in the midst of this waiting, then it must give an account of its hope (1 Pet. 3:15b), the hope in which we have been saved (Rom. 8:24). I read Santos here as a critical friend who wants to know if theology can face 'incivility', and chaos, without flinching and without projecting an illusion of control. Can theology be radical without resorting to manipulative forms of witness which displace others through fundamentalism and violence, or more subtly through captivity to the cultural logic of neoliberal globalization and a global economy? Can it offer 'signs of salvation' that transform 'just waiting' into hope in action? In effect, Santos is asking: Can theology speak into the reality of threatening disorder to resist it and embody a "living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3) in a promise regarding not only an 'afterlife' but 'life otherwise,' that is, another way of life together?

At Table One, I turn to Tim Gorringer as one of the theologians who has taken seriously Santos' line of questioning. In his theology of culture, *Furthering Humanity* (2004), Gorringer explores, among other things, how Christian theology is capable of engaging "the continuing fallout of modernity" (2004: 259) and the signs of contemporary incivility, especially the coupling of a hegemonic global economy with the threat of ecological collapse (2004: 261). Gorringer reads the postmodern turn critically, alongside Frederick Jameson, in terms of "the logic of the market", "the captivity of consumer choice", and, therefore, "the absolutization of the individualism" (2004: 261). Like Santos, Gorringer is against the waste of

past social experience, and he believes that the way forward lies with recovery and the reincorporation of religious/theological experience:

Doubtless we are in a new situation...If it is true that human beings are *homo orans*, creatures which pray and contemplate, at least as deeply as they are *homo sapiens*, and if, therefore, the idea that the great religions would all disappear was a rationalist pipe dream, then these religions will have to build on the new situation and not repress it. At the same time, if there is anything to be learned from the sum of human experience so far, it is that no society can be structured around the principle that 'anything goes'. Limits are vital not just to ecological but to cultural and spiritual life. They represent guidelines for the long revolution, the process by which we become and remain truly human (2004: 261).

I cannot do justice to the nuance and complexity of Gorringe's extensive treatment of culture, power, and mission, rather I want to highlight how he gestures towards reincorporation of past theological experience in order to envision a 'third way' between cultural imperialism and cultural relativism. For Gorringe, this third way entails a double-awareness. First, the Church must recognize its complicity in the religious imperialism that refashions the other in its own image and renounces this as a way of negotiating difference. Second, the Church must not capitulate and retreat into a "benevolent relativism" (2004: 262). Neither is necessary; neither is possible as a way of continuing faithful Christian witness. What is necessary and possible, Gorringe argues, is "rethinking mission and evangelism" (2004: 262). Thus, in a situation "characterized by the imperialism of the market and the postmodern – disintegration which follows from that" (2004: 262), Gorringe asks two related questions: Where does the Church stand? And, What does the Church offer to the ongoing task of "the long revolution?" (2004: 262).

What I find striking about his approach to 'the long revolution' is the way Gorringe turns back towards the past in order to attend to clues for enacting a renewal in the present. What is more, he makes two moves that resonate deeply with an Illichian perspective. First,

like Santos, he seeks to rehabilitate the significance of “a ‘residual’ form of culture” (2004: 263). By residual, Gorringer does not mean backwards, or “out of date” (2004: 263). Rather, the residual “can represent a challenge to the present which effectively shapes the future” (2004: 263). In Santos’ terms, the residual makes visible forms of social experience which are yet available, but which the monoculture of linear time tries to eclipse. This is why Gorringer insists that the Church responds to the hegemony of the market, and cannot flee to the past. In other words, it does not reincorporate the residual “by a regress to a pre-modern fantasy world, [but rather by] an appeal to the wisdom of the past” (2004: 263). This ‘turning back’ to reincorporate a treasury of wisdom represents the Church’s way of making social experience of the past available in the present. Ultimately, this turning back “represents, as it has always done, a call to *metanoia*, repentance and a new way of doing things” (2004: 263).

Second, this *metanoia*, or renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2), does not culminate in passive or detached reflection, but rather in renewed action. Reincorporating the prophetic wisdom of Isaiah, Gorringer insists that this will lead to “action for justice, action for liberation and action for peace for both people and planet” (2004: 263). Extending the logic of Isaiah, this will be action that refuses “to accept capitalism as the narrative of the world” (2004: 263), but rather action which brings forth “a new kind of economy, an economy for life” (2004: 263-4), while enacting “*a change in cultural attitudes [which] is essential to that*” (2004: 264). This action is grounded in the reality of the Incarnation and resurrection, and so it will necessarily challenge dominant assumptions about what is possible. It will be action taken in hope, by taking for granted “that history under God both can be and is full of surprises because it exists within the field of force of God’s kingdom” (2004: 264).

As an example of reincorporation that refuses “to accept capitalism as the narrative of the world” (2004: 263), the following description of CdV’s work on a ‘new economy’ may be

relevant:

We understand the questions that we are asking and investigating in terms of what we are provisionally calling ‘Economy of Grace’ or ‘Upside-Down Economy’. Instead of believing in the two founding myths of [the science of] economy (scarcity and unlimited needs), an ‘Economy of Grace’ is based on two basic insights: 1) a perception of the ‘setup’ of the planet as abundant, not scarce; and 2) a perception of the place of the human being on this planet as one defined by the acceptance of limits, by renunciation, and by the celebration of the sacredness of every created thing as being created for specific ends, and not as ‘resources’ for profit...

...This implies experimenting with new commercial, productive, relational ‘arrangements’ that are based upon that which for us has always been our epistemological point of departure: theological reflection.<sup>9</sup>

...[Therefore] we understand that, unlike [the dominant mode of economic thought] which primarily seeks the generation of jobs, income and maximum profit, we are invited to promote a different objective through our work and activities: namely, life in abundance [*Vida em Abundância*]...in all the ecological, relational, spiritual, and existential dimensions of human life.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of these conversations about ‘turning back’ in order to rediscover hope, it is important to highlight that while turning back could be enacted as a nostalgic flight into the past, it does not have to be that. While Illich attempted to view the present ‘in the mirror of the past’, he also makes clear that he does so to live fully in the present, not as a nostalgic return to the past itself:

I do not oppose growth-oriented societies to others in which traditional subsistence is structured by immemorial cultural transmission of patterns. Such a choice does not exist. Aspirations of this kind would be sentimental and destructive. I oppose to the societies in the service of economic growth...those which put high value on the replacement of both production and consumption [i.e., industrial productivity] by the subsistence-oriented utilization of common environments (SW: 12).

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<sup>9</sup> Claudio Oliver, email, 17/04/2014. Here, in commenting upon how CdV draws inspiration from a particular “tradition of thinkers”, he gives special mention to the biblical prophets and this following passage from Isaiah: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have not money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food” (Isa. 55:1-2).

<sup>10</sup> Claudio Oliver, email, 17/04/2014.



In light of these comments from Illich, what CdV offers, I would suggest, is a way of enacting reincorporation and ‘return’ as a way of “rethink[ing] evangelism and mission” (Gorringer: 2004: 262). The way that CdV enacts hope as a social force in the present points to Illich’s insight that:

it is not the church’s task to engineer [the future’s] shape. She must resist the temptation...Otherwise she cannot celebrate the wondrous surprise of the coming, the advent....The change which has to be brought about can only be lived. We cannot plan our way to humanity. Each one of us and each of the groups with which we live and work must become a model of the era we desire to create (COA: 100).

### **Reimagining Responsibility as Respons-ability**

In the last section, I highlighted the significance of hope in Illich’s theological imagination, specifically his emphasis on hope as a way of return, a way of turning back, from an illusion of control over the future, for whereas Promethean “[e]xpectation tries to compel tomorrow; hope enlarges the present” (Cayley, in TRNOTF: xix). Indeed, the following quotation from Lee Hoinacki captures the sense in which Illich’s stance embodies “living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3):

Because of his rootedness in his own tradition, Illich knows that no word or action is complete on its own. The current running through everything that Illich writes or does is an anticipatory belief in his action’s ultimate eschatological consummation. The power of his practice – in life and art – derives from his recognition that he faces a crisis, that is, a crossroad. There are only two choices for him: Either he follows the contemporary world in its postmodern *acedia*, or spineless boredom, sauntering toward nihilism, or he lives in hope, eyes fixed on a future eschaton (TCII: 6).

In the light of that quotation, I want to link the Illichian theme of hope to the closely related theme of responsibility, doing so once again, by situating Illich in relation to two other voices.

In her work entitled *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Susan Buck-Morss offers a narration of the history of the twentieth century as the dreamlike “construction of mass utopia” (Buck-Morss, 2002: x). What makes her

narrative so compelling is the way that she shows how both the capitalist and socialist visions have been, in fact, two variations on the common theme of mass utopia. Buck-Morss argues that this form of utopia is nothing other than the common vision of an industrialized modernity in which technological progress promises, packages, and delivers the ‘good life’ to the masses, whether through privatized accumulation of capital or through state-driven collectivization.

The problem, she tells us, is that this ‘dream’ is transitory and with its abandonment, the political landscape has become a truncated vision of personal, or individualized, utopia, coupled with collective political cynicism. Neither of these stances offers a constructive way forward, and as she explains, we need to gain a different perspective on our entrenchment in the present historical moment:

‘History’ has failed us...There is real tragedy in the shattering of the dreams of modernity – of social utopia, historical progress, and material plenty for all. But to submit to melancholy at this point would be to confer on the past a wholeness that never did exist, confusing the loss of the dream with the loss of the dream’s realization. The alternative of political cynicism is equally problematic, however, because in denying the possibilities for change it prevents them; anticipating defeat, it brings defeat into being. Rather than taking a self-ironizing distance from history’s failure, we – the ‘we’ who may have nothing more nor less in common than sharing *this time* – would do well *to bring the ruins up close and work our way through the rubble* in order to rescue the utopian hopes that modernity engendered, because we cannot afford to let them disappear (Buck-Morss, 2002: 68).

Buck-Morss wants to renew a political sensibility of the collective, one that is forged out of contemporary fragments. To do so, she argues that we must “come to terms with the mass dreamworlds at the moment of their passing” (2002: x). This, she insists, is the first step towards illuminating the terrain of the contemporary political landscape, thereby navigating between the extremes of nostalgically clinging to a passing dreamworld, on the one hand, and cynically anticipating an imminent catastrophe, on the other.

Even though she does not use the categories of ‘epic’ and ‘lyric’, categories

introduced in earlier chapters, Buck-Morss clearly sees how the passing of the dreamworld of mass utopia results in a tragic fracturing of both the epic and lyric dimensions of human existence. As she sees it, an epic, or comprehensive, account of catastrophe has replaced the narrative of mass utopia, and the lyric dimension has atrophied into a privatized utopia.

What I find most striking about Buck-Morss' account here is not the content of the hope, a revitalized leftist vision of cosmopolitan democracy, but the orientation towards the past as the way of locating 'our' hope. As she puts it, we must "bring the ruins up close and work our way through the rubble" because we cannot afford *not* to do so.

Still, Buck-Morss' hope is not an eschatological hope, but a modern hope, and the urgent task, she tells us, is to "rescue the utopian hopes that modernity engendered". While I appreciate the urgency of Buck-Morss' proposal to move beyond post-modern fragmentation and the individualism of privatized utopias, I also wonder whether that urgency renders our responsibility for a collective utopia inside or outside the Promethean shadow. In other words, I wonder whether the collective utopia she imagines is reducible to "results which are planned and controlled by [humanity]" (DS: 105).

To further emphasize the importance of relating hope to human responsibility, I turn to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 1932 lectures, later published as *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*. The methodological insight that shapes these lectures is that theology is always an exercise in "beginning from the middle" ([1937] 1997: 28), as it is for Williams. Two aspects of this seem most significant for my work. First, that we, as creatures, live and think 'in the middle'. We live embedded in history and without direct knowledge of history's beginning or end. To illustrate this, Bonhoeffer describes our condition as living within history as within "a circle" ([1937] 1997: 26). His argument highlights the creaturely limits of thought and knowledge. Thus, he suggests, not only does our thinking necessarily

originate and remain conditioned by our access to knowledge within the circle of history, but, Bonhoeffer contends, against the Hegelian idealism of his time, that we cannot think our way outside of the circle. The Bible, however, begins by speaking of the beginning in which God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), a claim which poses the following question: Who can speak of the beginning? Bonhoeffer's answer is that there are two and only two possibilities:

- either a claim from someone who has been a liar from the beginning (John 8:44);
- or a claim from someone who truly was with God "in the beginning" (John 1:1-2) and whose Word comes to us "in the middle" ([1937] 1997: 28-29).

Bonhoeffer's theological exposition relies on the insight that the key to understanding our beginning and our end, and therefore, how we "account for the hope that is in [us]" (1 Pet. 3:15b) is our access to and trust in the witness of another. This, Bonhoeffer argues, means that the Incarnate Word is the key not only to reading the world as creation, but also to the methodological dynamic commonly described as contextualization. In addition, Bonhoeffer points out, that while this knowledge through witness is always mediated through another, yet, it cannot be contained within any social or ecclesial context; rather, it is disclosed in relation to the Incarnation. Thus, following Bonhoeffer, I want to suggest that for theological inquiry to be adequately contextual, it must always be an exercise in recontextualization, the repositioning of our own knowledge and witness in and through the witness of the Incarnation.

As I read Bonhoeffer, then, for theology to 'begin in the middle', it must share Buck-Morss' urgency for recovering an awareness of our own historical locatedness. Yet, as an act of hope, it also has to remain open and alert to the revelation of God in Christ, or the Word, as the Christian alternative to conceding history's 'failure'.

In this way, I believe, Illich's understanding of the Incarnation exemplifies

Bonhoeffer's axiom about beginning from the middle, a methodological awareness of both the fragility of Christian witness as well as its foolishness. This awareness eventually led Illich to the conclusion that, "one of the ways of understanding the history of Western Christianity is as a progressive loss of the sense that the freedom for which Christ is our model and our witness is *folly*" (TRNOTF: 58, [italics mine]). This echoes a Pauline sense of foolishness (1 Cor. 1:25) and freedom:

That God could be man can be explained only by love. Logically, it's a contradiction. The ability to understand it depends on what my tradition calls faith, but that too is something which contemporary people have trouble grasping. Faith is a mode of knowledge which does not base itself on either my worldly experiences or the resources of my intelligence. It founds certainty on *the word of someone whom I trust* and makes this knowledge which is based on trust more fundamental than anything I can know by reason. This, of course, is a possibility only when I believe that God's word can reach me. It makes sense only if the One whom I trust is God (TRNOTF: 57, [italics mine]).

Thus Illich's understanding of history resonates with and yet differs significantly from the Buck-Morss position, outlined earlier. Both thinkers are acutely aware of our ineradicable situatedness in the middle of history, the sense in which we have been 'placed'. Yet unlike Buck-Morss, the source of Illich's hope is not "the utopian hopes that modernity engendered", but rather, a hope which "centers desire on a person from whom we await a gift" (DS: 105). Thus, like Bonhoeffer, Illich locates the source of hope by returning to the difference the Incarnation makes, as the Word made flesh (John 1:14), and as the renewed anthropological horizon which may be prolonged as a movement within history, a movement that works through and not above the rubble and ruins of history. In other words, Illich shows us a theological way of beginning again in the middle, a return to the difference of incarnational inclusion.

Illich's comments also resonate with Bonhoeffer's idea that the revelatory character of the Word makes possible something we would not have imagined or done otherwise, as it comes to us in a fallen, or "broken middle" (Rose, 1992). That is, it comes to us as a source of

hope precisely “as we bring the ruins up close” (Buck-Morss, 2002: 68). Illich also reminds us that what the act of God’s revelation makes possible is not an escape, but an encounter, not so much a way out as a way forward. This enables us to renew our awareness of how to find our way amidst the ruins. Or better, it is to sense the fundamental difference between the despair of being trapped under the rubble and ruins, and the hope of being turned towards a face, and knowing that God is coming towards us, even through the face of the closest Samaritan. The real question, therefore, that Illich’s stance poses for Christian mission is not whether God’s Word can reach us, but whether we are willing to embrace responsibility, that is, to live by responding to the call of ‘Another’, to live in trust and hope before the face of the One who speaks, even in the middle of history’s rubble and ruins.

To put the matter in this way is to recognize how Illich provokes us to discern between different conceptions of responsibility. There is the Promethean responsibility for the other, and for the planet, which leads to “global ecological management” (Sachs, 1996: 239-252). From an Illichian perspective, to claim responsibility from within Prometheus’ shadow would mean to live and act from the illusion that the future is in our hands, and, therefore, that we can control and direct it to the shape of our desires. Such ‘foresight’ leads to the hubristic conclusion that there is no such thing as ‘too much’ or ‘too far’. This temptation, Illich tells us, is not a responsible solution to a problem, but rather an illusion that must be renounced.

Indeed, as one of the contributors to *The Post Carbon Reader* (2010) makes clear, regarding multiple sustainability crises, we are not dealing with problems that correspond with isolatable, one-off solutions; we are dealing with predicaments (Miller, 2010: xvi). Nevertheless, while predicaments are undesirable, persistent, and seemingly insurmountable, there is no reason to treat them as absolute, or final. Predicaments are conditions that bear a sense of urgency, and it is an urgency that is not overcome by one-off solutions, but rather

illicits a range of responses.

I am not suggesting, however, that from an Illichian perspective one must, in principle, rule out the possibility of joining with activists who raise important questions, for example, about global impact. Such activists, however, may fall under the shadow of the Promethean. Inside this shadow, climate change and poverty may be simply two more undesirable conditions for which we have yet to find an appropriate technological or political solution. Inside this shadow, climate change and poverty are measurable, isolated, and even unrelated problems, and the responsible ‘solutions’ to these problems will come from making adjustments to the system, adjustments that are just a matter of ‘foresight’ and matter of time.

Illich’s critique of Promethean responsibility, however, is ultimately for the sake of amplifying our range of possible and desirable responses. Moreover, in terms of Christian mission, Illich enables us to reimagine our responsibility to become respons-able to God’s Word that comes to us ‘in the middle’. As a response that reframes mission in terms of our respons-ability to God’s Word, I turn again to Claudio Oliver and a speech given at the People’s Summit for Rio +20, on the theme of “Christianity and the Environmental Crisis: The Church’s Role in Sustainability” (CAC, Appendix 4).<sup>11</sup>

[We are considering] the embrace of responsibility for the planet as an expression of our relationship with God.

This possibility, however, implies a risk – that, even without realizing it, we might continue to allow the narrative which drives and informs the agenda and the action of the church to be imposed from the outside – from the center and logic of the present system and of the empire.

[Here’s a different center and a different logic.] The relationship between human beings and the earth opens and closes the biblical narrative. We are creatures formed from the fertile soil [in Hebrew, *adamah*]...We are beings of the...soil. *Adamah* is the raw material from which *Adam*, or the earth-creature, is made. Or, if you prefer the Latin version, it is *humus*, this fertile matrix of

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<sup>11</sup> Hereafter, I abbreviate all references to this letter, “Crise Ambiental e Cristianismo: O Papel da Igreja na Sustentabilidade”, simply as CAC.

soil, that gives rise to *humanity* as well as *humility* – the virtuous posture or disposition that is fitting with this relationship (CAC: 1).

Here, Claudio's argument involves reframing a missional account of responsibility in terms of responsibility to God, and this, he insists, happens by returning to the biblical narrative in order to "remember once more in whose image we were created" (CAC: 4). Cultivating responsibility, then, is a matter of "allow[ing] God's image in us to determine the shape of our lives" (CAC: 4). As an alternative to the dominant self-image of human beings as consumers, then, Claudio describes the biblical alternative as follows:

The first statement of the Bible is that we are created in the image and likeness of a God who is generous, creative, kind and attentive to the details of life. This God puts us in a garden to observe (*avad*) and to keep and preserve (*shamar*) (Gen. 2:15). Looking at the earth as our origin and home and reimagining our primary identity as 'people of the soil' is to reclaim vital principles for taking a stand in the midst of a world that is suffering the pains of childbirth and is awaiting the manifestation of those who call themselves 'children of God' (CAC: 4).

The last line of Claudio's speech reflects on creation as suffering the pains of childbirth, and the role of those who attend to this pain and suffering. It is a biblical allusion which evokes Illich's metaphor of mission as midwifery (TCCD: 105). In Romans 8:19, Paul writes: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God". He continues by connecting the revealing of "the freedom of glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21) with the virtue of hope: "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom. 8:24-25).

I identify a deep resonance between the Pauline passage and what Illich suggests in the "Rebirth of Epimethean Man", namely, that the rediscovery of hope is the key to the rediscovery of human flourishing. Illich's insight makes clear that living in hope in 1971 and, by implication, in 2014, means being freed from living with either rising Promethean



expectations or despair. Perhaps the freedom from either being in control, or from the fear of not being in control at all, is what it means for the church to reveal “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). What the metaphor of midwifery suggests is a mode of incarnational respons-ability that exchanges the hubris of being “like God” (Gen 3:5) and ‘playing God’ for the humility of being “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26-28) and ‘playing creature’ once again.

### **Conclusion: Overhearing the Gospel According to Samba, or Being Interrupted by the Peace of Christ**

This section concludes this thesis by returning to the samba circle as a primary context for the renewal of my imagination as a missionary (Rom. 12:2). This context enables me to connect Illich’s insights regarding the perception of scarcity with the notion of peace and the notion of *conspiratio*, ‘conviviality’, with the ‘missionary ethic of incarnation’, and even with prolonging the Incarnation.

I return to the way participation in the samba circle offered me a way of imagining “what it means for *the Christian church* to embody Christ in its mission” (Langmead, 2004: 13) by linking the image of the samba circle with the sending narrative of John’s Gospel (mentioned in chapter 1). For just as the samba circle includes a group of musicians gathered around their *maestro* [leader] who stands in the center, so too, the sending narrative describes a group of a participants, disciples, who are gathered around a person in the center, in order to follow, participate, and join in the ‘mission’ that the One in the center makes possible.

## **Creating Abundance and Dispelling the Perception of Scarcity**

In Chapter 3, I explored the way that Illich discerned ‘detours’ away from human flourishing as happening inside a social wound which might be described as a techno-colonial wound. I also explored how inside this wound, “economic peace” has emerged as a counterfeit panacea. Within this wound, I suggest now, we are conditioned to ‘see’ scarcity as natural. In other words, we are conditioned to perceive the human condition as rooted in an original insufficiency or lack that we must overcome by what Illich calls “economic peace”.

As the shadow cast within the myth of progress and the rise of development, this perception of scarcity seems to have replaced, eclipsed, or obscured an earlier perception of an ordered creation that is ‘good’ and abundant and to which we relate in care and with limits (Gen. 2:15). To this way of thinking, if scarcity is a basic condition, then creation itself is not only finite, but also defective. If scarcity is a basic condition of creation, then God cannot say ‘good’ over it. Indeed it would call into question the goodness of the Creator. Living with the perception of scarcity tempts us, also, to imagine ourselves as either “like God” (Gen. 3:5) or ‘less than human’ – that is nothing except what we manage to consume. In other words, it turns us away from the humility and dignity of being creatures who bear God’s image, in a cosmos which God created out of love and deemed good.

We find ourselves, therefore, in a vicious cycle in “the world where the good life is measured and defined by the sum of goods and services” (McKnight and Block, 2012: 16). Modern industrial progress makes possible more efficient production of goods and services, and therefore, a greater capacity for consumption. On the one hand, we perceive this apparent abundance of commodities and imagine that the good life consists in having them. Yet, the

threat of scarcity grows ever more menacing, precisely because the social space of consumer society conditions us to expect that our flourishing depends upon those institutions, systems, operators and experts who alone can provide what we need.

The paradox is that by assuming that we can overcome scarcity by consuming our way out of it, we end up escalating the conditions that give rise to the problem, a social imbalance between means and ends, a widening gap between our needs and desires and our capacity to satisfy them (Leiss, 1978: 38-42). Thus, within the social space of consumer society, we no longer inhabit a world that is created good and with abundance. We no longer inhabit a world of proportions, of action that is determined by what is good, fitting, and enough. We find ourselves in a world in which the means for enjoying what we need to flourish are not just limited, but scarce.

What I learned in the samba circle, however, is that the means for creating a shared sense of abundance are limited, but never scarce. Indeed, one of most common refrains that I heard in the samba circle was that *menos é mais* [less is more]. Here, it is important to recognize that unlike the “more formalised concert and operatic performance” (Begbie, 2000: 205) of classical music, the performance of samba depends upon an improvisational disposition which is closer to jazz performance. While jazz and samba are both highly improvisational in different ways, both forms require musicians to respond creatively to “occasional constraints” (2000: 204) such as space, other participants, and even the audience. In other words, both musical forms entail a “stress on social process rather than finished text [or musical score]” (2000: 205).

In samba, therefore, the phrase ‘less is more’ is a way of highlighting how the constraints which particularize and limit one’s participation in the ensemble can and must be approached as a “liberating constraint” (2000: Ch. 8). Begbie illustrates how “liberating constraint” relates both to musical improvisation as well as to participation in the body of

Christ:

All the skills which promote reciprocal ‘undistorted communication’ – which should characterize the Church as persons-in-communion – are present in a very heightened form [in musical improvisation]: for example, giving ‘space’ to the other through alert attentiveness, listening in patient silence, contributing to the growth of others by ‘making the best’ of what is received from them...in a process of concentrated dialogical action, where the constraint of [ourselves and] others is experienced not as essentially oppressive but as conferring and confirming an inalienable particularity and uniqueness (2000: 206).

From inside the samba circle, I began to imagine anew how communities might dispel the false perception of scarcity as a basic condition, by creating a shared sense of abundance through “the invisible structures of an abundant community” (McKnight and Block, 2012: 81). As a way of illuminating these invisible structures of community, the following description of playing jazz may be an apt description of the playing of samba as well:

Think of an after-hours jazz club, where musicians gather because they want to play their music together...they start playing something. It sounds wonderful, and even though they may not have ever seen each other before and have spoken only a few words, wonderful music emerges. To an outsider it is magical.

What is operating is a clear structure, but if you are not part of the jazz culture, the rules and customs that make the music possible are invisible. Similarly, the properties of gifts, associations, and hospitality are the hidden structure of [abundant] community life...

...The jazz way is the community way of playing. The invisible structure of gifts, associations, and hospitality creates the possibility and are the rules of a competent community. They are always available and essential (2012: 82).

Like the jazz way, the samba circle is a community way of playing. It is a social space in which people share their gifts, associate for a common purpose, and extend hospitality. Furthermore, in the samba circle the means for creating and sharing abundance are always available, and therefore, never scarce. This leads me to imagine that the same could be true inside the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).

## Cultivating Conspiracy

In order to explore further this connection between the samba circle and the body of Christ as a circle gathered around the Risen Christ, I want to return to the ritual action of the *conspiratio*, that, as I observed in Chapter 2, lies at the origin of the peace Illich sought to cultivate and share. In the essay “The Cultivation of Conspiracy”, and in his other comments about the Eucharistic gathering, Illich highlights the new ‘we’ and the “almost unimaginable intimacy” of the *conspiratio*, the shared peace made possible by the ritual inclusion in the “‘I of the Incarnation’” (TCII: 240), and which enables us to prolong the Incarnation.

Although Illich does not refer to the Gospel of John directly, the sending narrative dramatizes the incarnational interruption of the *conspiratio* and the new ‘we,’ the new inside, which arises around the risen Christ:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, ‘Peace be with you’. After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’. When he had said this, he breathed on them [*con-spiratio*] and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:19-23).

Here, the peace of Christ is shared as an intensification of the Jewish *shalom*. As *shalom*, the peace of Christ is still shared life and harmony under God’s blessing, but now it can be shared among the community that arises around the risen Christ himself, the One who inspires us with his breath and words, the One calling us into an intimacy which makes it possible for our lives to share his word of peace and breathe his Spirit upon one another.

Indeed, what we find in this text is not only a sending narrative, but also a re-creation narrative.<sup>12</sup> Whereas God began creation on the first day (Gen. 1:5), John 20:19 states that it

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<sup>12</sup> I owe this insight to a conversation and email correspondence with James Alison.

was “the first day of the week”, a Johannine reference to ‘resurrection day’ as the beginning of a new creation. In the original creation narrative, God came to walk with Adam and Eve in the garden, but they hid from God out of fear. In the Johannine text, the disciples were hiding out of fear, but, like God searching out Adam and Eve in the garden, “Jesus came and stood among them” (John 20:26). Just as God originally breathed into the nostrils of *adam*, the earth-creature (Gen. 2:7), here in John 20 the Risen Christ breathes God’s Spirit [back] into his disciples. Thus, God’s “original peace” (Burrell and Malits, 1997) has been unleashed into the world through this small circle gathered around Jesus to receive and share his peace.

Of course, from a Promethean perspective, we would have expected something bigger, grander, and more systemic than a ‘conspiracy’ of peace as an interruption of “economic peace”. But, as Illich insists, “criticism of the established order of our modern, technogene, information-centered society can only grow out of a milieu of intense hospitality” (TCII: 242).

As we have seen, Illich elaborated the hospitable alternative to alienation within the technological milieu and economic peace in terms of the recovery of conviviality. The Latin root for conviviality, *con-viver* simply means ‘living with’ or ‘life together’. The noun form, *convivium* refers more specifically to common life around a table or a feast. For Illich, then, conviviality marries the Latin overtones of joy and pleasure with a positive notion of self-limitation and discipline. Conviviality is his term for the cultivation of the intense hospitality that is necessary to dispel the perception of scarcity. As such, conviviality is always personal, but never individualistic. Rather, it is “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence” (TFC: 11). It refers to a quality of freedom that comes from being included within a ‘we’ that is not the statistical ‘we’ of market relations that compete for economic peace. As such, cultivating a convivial way of life enables us to conspire, that is, to share and to receive the peace of Christ relationally.

To recognize, then, that conviviality enables “courageous, disciplined, self-critical renunciation accomplished in community” (Illich, in TRNOTF: 44), is to recognize a basic Illichian point about Christian peacemaking in a consumer society. For Illich, even as we attend to the presence of the Incarnate One in our midst, we cannot forget to attend to the alienation this One has come to suture.

Illich argues that alienation conditions us into being one of two kinds of slaves: “prisoners of addiction or prisoners of envy” (TFC: 47). Thus, Illich reminds us that in a consumer society we might not all be cash-poor, but all of us are impoverished, because the “ethos of non-satiety” (DS: 113) threatens “to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10) the “abundant life” we were created to receive.

On my reading, then, Illich’s emphasis on convivial recovery and his insights about peace, represent a way of living by the promise and gift of peace without denying our impoverishment. That is, Illich will not allow us to turn peacemaking into a defensive strategy for insulating ourselves from the suffering and alienation that is in us and between us. He makes us attend to the wound, but he also encourages us to do so with a sense of hope. Thus, Illich invites us to cultivate a disposition of gratuity, which does not demand results which we can control, but instead “centers desire on a person from whom we await a gift” (DS: 105).

In Illich’s view the Incarnation is “a surprise, remains a surprise, and could not exist as anything else” (TRNOTF: 48). It follows, therefore, that a disposition of gratuity means that we are called to embrace the paradox of ‘preparing ourselves to be surprised’. For even within the social space of economic peace in which the threat of scarcity leads us into an escalating and competitive sense of fear, the Incarnation extends to us and through us, creating a new ‘inside’ in which we do not have to be afraid. The first disciples did not know in advance how they could possibly live beyond those locked doors without being afraid, but

they found a way. We do not have to know in advance exactly how to regenerate a convivial life of action and interdependence or how to delink “seek[ing] first the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33) from the manipulative and disabling life of consumption. We could, however, begin to prepare ourselves to be surprised by becoming fully alive as a response to Christ’s gift of peace.

This emphasis on gratuity and becoming alive leads back to what I encountered in the samba circle. To be clear, I do not intend to collapse or equate being incorporated into the *roda* with the fullness of being incorporated into the body of Christ, but I do want to maintain the parable. For, if I had to pick one word to sum up the experience of being in the *roda*, I would pick one of the Illichian keywords that I have come to cherish: aliveness.

Towards the end of his life, Illich had this to say about the condition of ‘being alive’:

So I say let’s be alive and let’s celebrate – really celebrate – enjoy consciously, ritually, openly, the permission to be alive at this moment, with all our pains and with all our miseries. It seems to me an antidote to despair or religiosity – religiosity of that very evil kind (IIC: 284).

For Illich, aliveness arises from an awareness of our vocation to live between the false dilemma of clinging to the illusion of human control and falling under the temptation to despair. In other words, aliveness arises from an awareness of both the humility and dignity intrinsic to the human vocation of being creatures.

Similarly, the pulsating swing of samba gestures towards this sense of aliveness. Indeed, once a year at Carnival, “the mystery of samba” (Vianna, 1999) becomes a privileged expression for dramatizing and celebrating an interruption of time and space, an inversion in which, at least for a few days every year, the old social order dies and something else comes alive. Of course, after Carnival, the old returns. But nonetheless, the music and the mysterious experience of samba can be a parable of the aliveness which Christians are called to celebrate with their lives. It gestures incompletely, but compellingly, towards an aliveness which



Christians celebrate, that in the life, death, and resurrection of one person, a different kind of interruption and inversion has taken place, that the world has been reconciled to God, so that “in Christ there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). So, finally, the sense of gratuity embodied in the samba circles points beyond itself to the gratuity of creaturely existence itself, the gift not only of being, but also the gift of vocation to enter a way of life through which we are being made alive, of being included in the life of the Son, of prolonging the Incarnation, “*so that we might live through him*” (1 John 4:9).

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## APPENDICES

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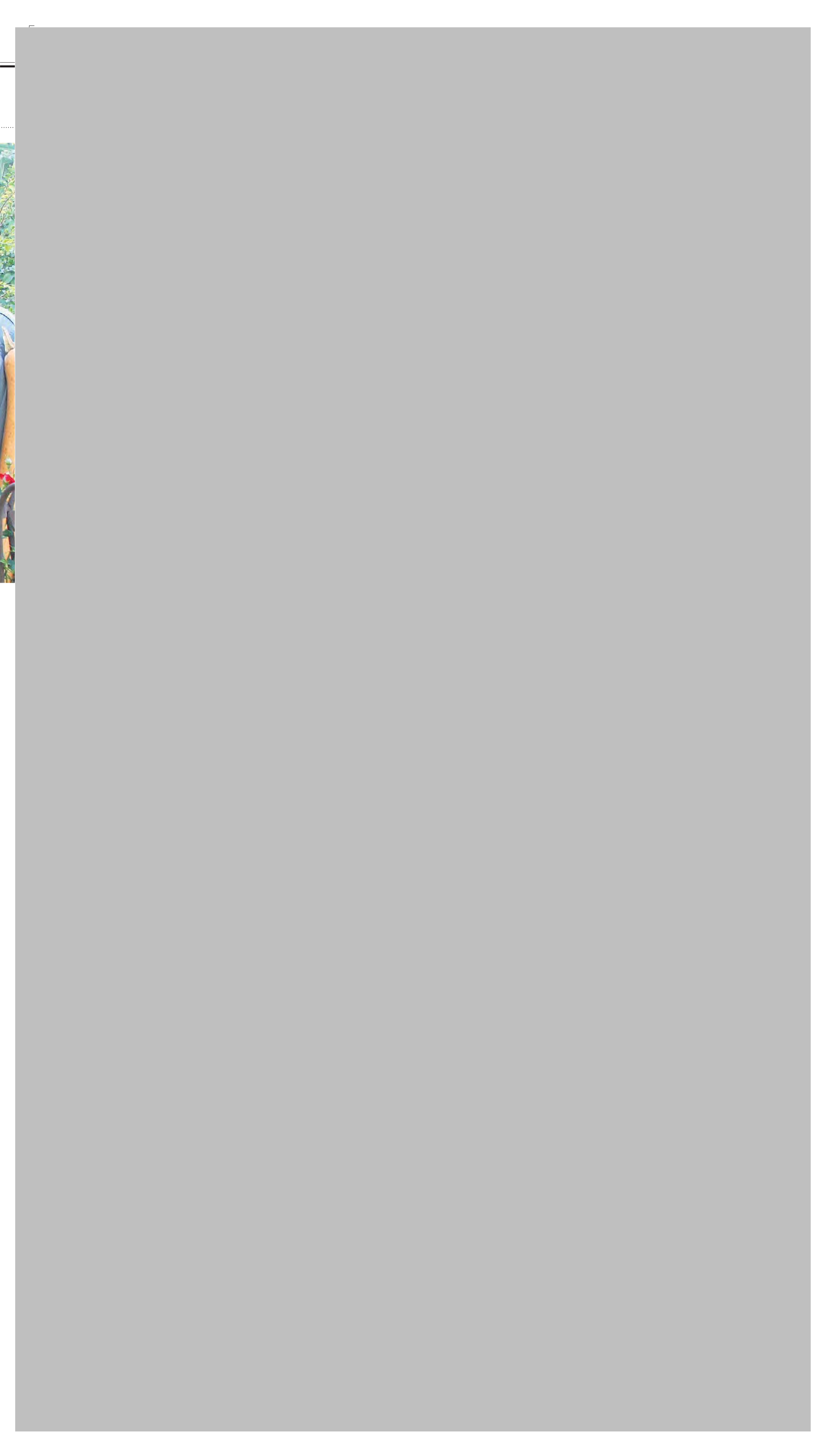
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## **Appendix 2: Será Possível a Igreja? (SPI)**

## Será Possível a Igreja?

Claudio Oliver – um ensaio com a barriga

Há cerca de 6 ou 7 anos atrás eu me fiz a seguinte pergunta:

Será possível viver uma experiência genuinamente comunitária, humanamente consistente, bíblicamente leal, genuinamente espiritual e que se possa estabelecer como uma experiência em escala humana? Quais são as formas de ajuntamento humano que podem ser identificadas e que possam servir de inspiração em tal iniciativa? Se tal proposta é possível, quais são estas possibilidades? Se é impossível, quais são os obstáculos? Será possível superá-los? Quais e de quem são os interesses atingidos quando se decide incursionar por esse caminho?

O primeiro ponto de partida da busca das respostas acima foi tentar conhecer algumas formas de organização tradicionais e que fazem parte da trajetória do ser humano. Representadas por estruturas de vila em nossa cultura, mas igualmente legitimadas em outras culturas quando se expressam como clã, aldeia, kibutz, ashram, faxinal, quilombo, tribo ou qualquer outro arranjo que prescindia de formas impessoais de identificação garantida e certificada por elementos externos à própria comunidade, estes arranjos tem feito parte da maior parte da história da humanidade e parecem ser a forma pela qual melhor se encontra o balanço entre ser humano e criação (ou natureza, ou como apraz ao pensamento moderno “recursos do meio ambiente”) e entre os próprios seres humanos.

Igualmente honesto deve ser admitir que se encontram registros tão antigos quanto os destas formas de organização com as características de construções artificiais da realidade na forma de cidades – que na tradição bíblica teve como primeiro de seus idealizadores a famigerada figura de Caim, - polis, repúblicas, impérios, reinados. Sejam

os primeiros arranjos artificiais os da Mesopotâmia, os da América Andina e Central, ou Norte Africanos, todos apresentam como marca em comum sua insustentabilidade no longo prazo, a exaustão de recursos - muitas vezes permanentemente - as catástrofes e a decadência da saúde bem como da própria humanidade.

Desta forma me arriscaria a dizer, sob pena de receber todas as acusações e questionamentos por uma impressão de simplificação ou naturalismo, que às primeiras poder-se-ia chamar de arranjos naturais, em contraposição aos citados arranjos artificiais.

As características dos antigos arranjos, aqui chamados de artificiais, são semelhantes ao que experimentamos em nosso tempo e estruturas igualmente artificiais, A não ser por uma diferença: aquelas experiências mal sucedidas sempre tiveram natureza localizada, e sempre auto-limitadas do ponto de vista geográfico, se tomarmos como referência uma escala planetária. Já em nosso presente estado de coisas, as mesmas características: desumanização, decadência moral e econômica, relativização do valor da vida, esgotamento de recursos, hierarquização, administração central, calamidades, epidemias e fome, se apresentam pela primeira vez e escala global e numericamente inconcebível há não mais que 100 anos. Pela primeira vez nossa extinção torna-se um fato imaginável de forma concreta.

A razão dessa diferença pode ser atribuída pelo menos a três fatores logrados na fase mais recente da modernidade: a criação da economia baseada no duplo mito das necessidades ilimitadas e da escassez; o desenvolvimento de vacinas e da indústria farmacêutica, que possibilita a aglomeração artificial de seres humanos sem a ocorrência de epidemias incontroláveis e a tecnologia de utilização de combustíveis fósseis e, mais recentemente, nucleares. Estes fatos são facilmente verificáveis pela medicalização da sociedade promovida e sustentada pela indústria farmacêutica – que não por acaso é a mesma indústria fabricante de venenos agrícolas e adubos químicos; pela economia como real administradora das relações humanas por meio da política representativa e a



preeminência econômica que determina desde a formação, pela ferramenta da educação escolar que determina o emprego a ser dado a cada unidade individual do sistema (também conhecida como ser humano) até a constatação de que os mecanismos financeiros são a base de sustentação de todo o sistema calcado na indústria automobilística e nos consumo irresponsável, que permite o emprego de enormes quantidades de recursos, pessoas, ferramentas financeiras e manipulação psicológica em troca da eterna cenoura pendurada adiante do nariz das massas transformadas em muarees carregadores do interesse de poucos.

Pela primeira vez, a derrocada de tais artificialidades, que outrora se manifestou em tragédias e sagas de caráter local ou regional, se expande como força destruidora de escala universal. Se no passado os egressos dos impérios tinham florestas e espaços livres para onde fugirem a fim de se reorganizarem em novas escalas humanas ao fim de cada império, desta feita, quando da derrocada, talvez já não estejam disponíveis matas e campos onde se refugiar.

O clamor por soluções de base social tradicional (grassroots), comunitária e sustentável encontra a cada dia mais e mais experimentos e realizações, interesse e compromisso, como pode ser verificada pelo crescente numero de publicações, notícias e iniciativas.

A observação do comportamento da igreja nesse cenário denuncia não somente sua alienação da realidade percebida, bem como a aliança e comprometimento da igreja institucional com as próprias causas primeiras do caos que se nos acerca com uma proximidade não mais distante que o tempo que nos separa de nossas próximas nove refeições. A ética da igreja institucional, e de sua forma protestante reformada ou evangelical conservadora, de forma especial, estão na raiz da matriz do espírito do sistema. Sua liturgia e práticas clericais inspiram e dão a forma litúrgica do sistema de consumo e administração, controle político e educação que sustentam nossa

insustentável forma de ser. De forma ainda mais assustadora, a resposta frequente aos inkomodos do sistema acaba sendo a busca de um modelo, de reformas e de novidades que permitam um funcionamento adequado dentro deste sistema, e seu aperfeioamento, o que literalmente melhora as possibilidades destrutivas do próprio sistema.

Em meio a isso, e fiel à concepção de que Deus não se encontra em estado vegetativo, surgem perguntas sobre as quais me sinto chamado a me debruçar.

A primeira delas é: E em meio a isso, qual é a boa notícia?

Talvez a resposta possa surgir com uma visita a um resumo usado por Marcos em seu evangelho para expressar a mensagem de Jesus: “O Reino está próximo, arrependam-se e creiam no evangelho”. Este texto, que sofre de uma deformação apocalíptica nas garras do poder clerical estabelecido, coloca a boa notícia fora do alcance e distante no tempo. Em uma tradução livre e ao mesmo tempo que busca resgatar o sentido original, a boa notícia talvez pudesse ser assim expressa: “ O domínio absoluto de Deus está ao alcance das mãos, mude a maneira de pensar e creia que isso é uma boa notícia”. Crer que misericórdia, serviço, desapego, solidariedade, amor, humildade, esvaziamento, não violência, submissão, sacrifício, firmeza de caráter, receber insultos, não revidar, chorar, compartilhar bens e direitos, renunciar, depender, ser hospitaleiro, perder e não resistência sejam boas notícias, depende da fé para esperar os resultados de tais atitudes e aparentam ser um passo difícil e fundamental para a entrada na usufruição do completo domínio de Deus e dos frutos dele consequente.

A segunda pergunta poderia ser, se esta boa notícia pode ser uma dimensão individual ou coletiva. Em um contexto séculos anterior à invenção do indivíduo burgues moderno e sua consequente “necessidade” de salvação individual vertical, é difícil imaginar qualquer dimensão em que tal proposta fosse vivida desconectada da expressão comunitária e familiar. Por isso talvez seja justo pensar que em um mundo sem registro de identidade individual numérica ou fiscal, as implicações familiares e coletivas da recepção,

aceitação e consequência desse anúncio parecem inevitáveis. E mesmo quando implicavam no abandono forçado destas relações mecânicas primárias, traziam como promessa a possibilidade de continuar existindo identitariamente com uma nova família e comunidade, “já no presente” tendo não só o abrigo, mas o amor, a identidade e a possibilidade de segurança da nova família criada por laços de fé.

Como se daria então e como se expressaria esta dimensão coletiva da fé? Seria a *ekklesia*. uma expressão disso?

A natureza inicial da igreja, pelas razões até aqui apresentadas e por outras ainda a serem expostas parecem ter um caráter e dimensão distintos, e na verdade oposto, dos templos, seja judaico ou pagão, caracterizados como lugares distantes da casa e relacionados ao espaço público e impessoal. A igreja, mesmo em seu proto-estágio vivenciado por Jesus, acontece em torno do lar e da família (*kat' oikon*), muito antes de ser uma igreja local (*kath' hole*) ou de uma cidade (*hole te ekklesia*), e ainda assim resguardando, mesmo nesta dimensões, a prevalência das casas e das famílias que a elas hospedavam.

É a partir da dimensão da casa e da família que se desdobra a igreja. Isso se observa desde a expansão inicial do cristianismo, que se dava de casa em casa tanto como estrutura que recebe quanto como base de apoio a quem divulga - não somente na expansão paulina, mas desde o envio dos 70 por Jesus, com o foco na casa que os abrigasse e na instrução de não levar nada e depender totalmente do acolhimento e manutenção a serem oferecidos.

### **“A igreja que se reúne na casa deles”**

“A igreja que se reúne na casa deles” (*syn te kat oikon auton ekklesia*) é a base a

partir da qual se propõe uma alternativa ao império: a humanização das relações, o respeito à mulher, a valorização da criança, a frugalidade na alimentação, a quebra do sistema econômico baseado na escravidão e nas castas, a simplicidade de estilo de vida, as relações não monetarizadas e, acima de tudo, é na dimensão de uma casa que se reúne o maior perigo para o império: uma assembléia em busca de soluções e em torno dos problemas enfrentados (o significado original de ekklesia), uma negação flagrante da esperança em qualquer administração ou solução centralizada nas mãos de governadores, príncipes, chefes ou imperadores. A espinha dorsal do sistema se quebra dentro de casa. Minha suspeita é que essa possibilidade era tão real ontem, como pode ser hoje.

Do ponto de vista religioso, os membros do “caminho” adoravam no templo como bons judeus, mas “partiam o pão em casa” (Atos 2:46; 5:42). Era a casa e não o templo que provia os cristãos primitivos da necessária privacidade, da intimidade e da estabilidade.

Além do mais, a casa que acolhia a igreja permitia a formação de redes com outras casas e que proviam a “subestrutura econômica para a comunidade”, estabelecia uma plataforma para o trabalho missionário, abrigava a estrutura para a liderança e autoridade local e permitia um papel definido, valorizado e de expressão para as mulheres.

Quando a igreja, séculos depois, criou seus templos, a liderança passou a se concentrar em poucas mãos, e estas passaram a ser pertencentes a uma classe especial, com elas as atividades “eclesiásticas tornaram-se rituais estilizados”. Nesse ponto coincide, em minha percepção limitada, o momento de uma mudança de natureza epistêmica: A ideologia passa a “determinar o meio” e não mais “o meio a determinar a ideologia”. A reflexão sobre a prática, a observação e aprofundamento e exploração das possibilidades e o uso da doutrina como questionadora da realidade na qual se vive e passam a ser substituídas por uma ideologia atualizadora e determinadora de uma

realidade, do tempo e sobretudo do espaço legítimo. A institucionalização da igreja, muda o lugar da igreja e sua expressão no mundo. A catolicidade ganha mais força e dimensão que a localidade, e o equilíbrio se rompe junto com o estabelecimento de uma hierarquia rígida.

A igreja doméstica, no entanto, não está presente, sobretudo nos escritos de Paulo, como centro de uma fé desconectada. Bem ao contrário, a *Kat' oikon* é parte de uma rede que se manifesta como igreja local (ainda que permanecendo relacionada a uma casa mais ampla, mesmo que não hierarquicamente superior) e como parte integrante e membro de uma igreja na cidade, ainda assim de caráter domiciliar e catalizada por famílias hospedeiras.

A dimensão da igreja como *par oikia* (ao redor da casa), ou paróquia, e que se manifesta na implicação de peregrinação e movimento que o termo implica (Genesis 12:10), ajuda a entender a terminologia usada originalmente na igreja, onde não se mencionam sacerdotes e oficiais, sócios e executivos, mas irmãos (*adelphos*) e irmãs (*adelfes*), onde os fundadores, como Paulo, são pais, conversos são filhos na fé, os pregadores são “mães grávidas” (Gl 4:19; I Tess. 2:7) ou são acolhidos por aquelas que eles consideram suas mães adotivas (Rom. 16:13), edificar a igreja é *oikodome* (I Tess. 5:11; 2 Cor. 10:8; Rom 14:19...) a igreja é *oikeoi*, ou família. O apóstolo é um *oikonomos* (I Cor. 4:1,2) ou um sábio arquiteto. em um certo sentido a vivência em família ajudou a constituir e gerar a teologia que emergiu da prática cristã inicial.

Esta organização caseira, ganha importância na medida em que não se trata de mero grupo de afinidades, ou de facilidade geográfica, mas se vê a si mesmo como assembléia chamada com a finalidade de prover soluções, encarar problemas, estabelecer um outro locus para a ação e o compartilhamento, a oração e a espiritualidade, o pertencimento e a lealdade. Ao se organizar assim, torna-se de forma imediata uma ameaça ao status quo, um desagregador dos sistemas e uma patologia a ser

estirpada a todo custo.

Diante de um mundo que se dissolve em suas certezas, que se fragmenta e ao mesmo tempo luta por manter-se inalterado, e da eminência do caos. Encerro esse pequeno ensaio com a pergunta inicial: Que boa notícia pode ser dada aos que nos cercam? Seria mais instituição, mais programas, novos e melhores métodos, mais custo? Haveria a possibilidade de surgir uma outra forma de vida que estabelecesse alternativas à submissão ao sistema e seu aperfeiçoamento ou o escapismo negador da realidade? Estariam estas alternativas esperando para serem criadas por um gênio, ou disponíveis em uma observação atenciosa e respeitosa do passado e das bases sociais que nos antecederam?

Provavelmente irei aperfeiçoar esse ensaio, colocar as citações, dar forma mais adequada, melhorar a pesquisa histórica, buscar mais fontes, mas fica aqui lançada o primeiro passo para alguma coisa que talvez venha a fazer algum sentido.

Claudio Oliver – Abril - 2009

### **Appendix 3: Quinta da Videira, a casa como espaço de viver (QDV)**

## Quinta da Videira, a casa como espaço de viver

Claudio Oliver - Curitiba, 2012

A Quinta da Videira é um experimento *in situ* que se propõe a investigar e responder questões relacionadas a dois grandes temas: o manejo de resíduos orgânicos e a soberania alimentar familiar.

As principais perguntas da investigação se relacionam a quais sejam os limites, as dificuldades, os desafios e as possibilidades de enfrentar esses problemas por meio das práticas da agricultura e pecuária urbanas, usando como referências principais o diálogo com as tradições na produção; as práticas próprias dos sistemas produtivos agroecológicos, orgânicos, naturais, permaculturais e de populações tradicionais, e a disciplina acadêmica do estudo, da reflexão, da pesquisa e da sistematização.

Apesar de estar localizada no meio urbano e estar sujeitas às suas limitações, a Quinta da Videira procura ir ao encontro de seus desafios transcendendo o foco para além do meio onde está situada a casa - seja ele urbano ou rural - reposicionando seu marco social para o ambiente do entorno e do interior da casa, esteja ela no campo ou na cidade. O conceito fundamental para tal exercício é o de paróquia.

O termo paróquia deriva do grego Paraoikia que significa “espaço de viver” (STRONG, 2007), guardando o sentido de estranhamento com relação ao espaço maior e ao meio circundante. A importância do termo reside na revelação da tensão existente entre o entorno imediato da casa e o meio social, político e econômico ao redor, com o qual se mantém uma relação de estar sem ser totalmente submetido, como o que ocorre com um peregrino em terra estranha. Neste sentido o termo guarda relação com movimento, peregrinação e com saber-se em direção a uma alternativa ao que se encontra estabelecido, ressaltando o sentido utópico, não como de um “não lugar” mas como lugar de vir a ser, ou de devir (BLOCH, 2005). A referência maior é assim a soberania da casa sobre o meio como sinal de esperança e resistência.

A casa, no sentido como é entendido no projeto, inclui além do lugar de habitação, seu entorno, suas relações de parentesco, compadrio e amizade, as parcerias, os arranjos econômicos locais e seus desdobramentos. É casa no sentido mais amplo, incluindo os moradores, os visitantes, os animais, o espaço, a paisagem, tudo com o que a pessoa identifica como sua localidade.

A importância de um experimento como a Quinta da Videira para o meio urbano tem sido amplamente explorada em outros documentos, e inclui a transformação de poluentes em nutrientes pela reinserção nos ciclos vitais e a interrupção de uma etapa da cadeia produtiva: o descarte; a soberania alimentar, a integração familiar, as ações de regeneração do solo e do espaço urbano, e etc.

Do ponto de vista do rural, a relevância do experimento, ao se referenciar no seu entorno e não no meio onde está inserido, reside no fato de demonstrar o que é possível fazer para diminuir a vulnerabilidade do morador às pressões do meio ao permitir que uma parte substantiva da sobrevivência – a comida – esteja sob seu controle, ao contrário de na mão dos inúmeros intermediários que incluem o patrão, o Mercado ou o dono da venda que estimulam/obrigam/animam o plantio da monocultura até a porta da cozinha



mediante o convencimento de que naquele espaço se gerará renda para a compra de gêneros e bens, quando na verdade a renda ali gerada serviria somente para adquirir uma fração da quantidade e da qualidade possíveis na área diminuta do quintal bem manejado.

A prática da produção vegetal e animal na quinta demonstra que, diante de situações de crise, preço mínimo aviltado ou dificuldade ambiental é possível desenvolver um espaço que garanta o enfrentamento das diversas pressões sobre a casa com dignidade e soberania.

Atualmente, manejando somente restos, rejeitos e dejetos, por meio de Unidades Processadoras vegetais e animais, em um espaço de pouco mais de 300 m<sup>2</sup> de área útil, consegue-se uma produção suficiente para a alimentação de três famílias além de excedente fornecido a parceiros. Formando um ciclo, animais e vegetais se integram, problemas são enfrentados e resolvidos, odores e vetores são vencidos. Ovos, carne, leite são garantidos, bem como hortaliças comuns e tradicionais, frutas, legumes e raízes. O solo é regenerado - o que vem sendo comprovado tanto por análises convencionais (N, P, K, pH, Al,...) quanto por métodos alternativos (cromatografia de Pfeiffer) - o ambiente se torna mais diverso, as relações humanas ampliadas e a dependência do dinheiro como único mediador e do mercado como único provedor é questionada e por vezes vencida.

Longe de ser ou tentar ser um modelo, a Quinta da Videira se propõe a ser uma inspiração a outros atores que descubram possibilidades ainda maiores e capacidades que superem e ultrapassem os resultados ali encontrados. Cada lugar, cada situação e cada época tem seus desafios diferentes, e modelos não servem para tal variação. O objetivo esperado pelo grupo de agentes da Quinta é de que ao deixar o local, qualquer pessoa possa ter a sensação de que poderia fazer ainda melhor do que o que ali é feito.

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**Appendix 4: Crise Ambiental e Cristianismo: o papel da Igreja na sustentabilidade (CAC)**

## **Crise Ambiental e Cristianismo: o papel da Igreja na sustentabilidade**

Uma mesa de Diálogo com Marina Silva, Michelin e Dellambre  
Cúpula dos Povos – durante Rio +20  
Claudio Oliver

Como algumas pessoas me pediram, segue abaixo a transcrição de minha fala na mesa de diálogo realizada no dia 16/6/2012, no Rio de Janeiro

“Que bom é que se reúnem representantes de igrejas para poder falar sobre o tema da crise ambiental e poder ver a igreja finalmente se debruçando sobre este tema.

Obviamente não se pode deixar de notar que esta preocupação chega com 20 anos de atraso (seriam 40? O que estávamos discutindo quando o relatório do Clube de Roma nos alertou quanto à necessidade de darmos limites ao crescimento em 1972?). Vinte anos de atraso para a igreja moderna.

É bom que se esteja discutindo tal tema, pois pelo menos se pode observar que parte da igreja deixa de confundir o fim do presente sistema ou do sistema-mundo (*aion*) com o fim da criação (*Kosmos*). Consciente ou inconscientemente isso representa a retomada de uma tradição que inclui a vitória sobre a morte, a perspectiva da restauração e a retomada da responsabilidade sobre o planeta como expressão da relação com Deus.

No entanto, essa possibilidade implica em um risco de, sem perceber, se continuar permitindo que a narrativa a dirigir e informar a agenda e a ação da igreja (como tem sido praxe na história moderna da igreja) continue sendo imposta de fora para dentro, a partir do centro e da lógica do sistema e do império presentes.

A relação do ser humano com a terra abre e fecha a narrativa bíblica. Somos seres formados da terra fértil (Adamá), não da argila pouco intemperizada. Somos seres do horizonte A do solo. Adamá é a matéria prima da qual é feito Adam (o ser humano), ou se preferir a versão latina, o húmus dá origem à humanidade e também à humildade, posição necessária para se aproximar e tratar do tema. Nossa rebeldia é a primeira coisa a trazer maldição sobre a terra, o solo se torna gerador de plantas daninhas e de luta para comer (Gen. 3:17). Da mesma forma no fim da Bíblia, os vinte quatro anciãos cantam a pauta que guiará o julgamento final: “E iraram-se as nações, e veio a tua ira, e o

tempo dos mortos, para que sejam julgados, e o tempo de dares o galardão aos profetas, teus servos, e aos santos, e aos que temem o teu nome, a pequenos e a grandes, e o **tempo de destruíres os que destroem a terra.**” Apocalipse 11:18 (sem grifo no original).

Ao deixarmos de lado essa abertura e fechamento do tema nas escrituras e o fato de que o tema da terra e do cultivo está presente em um de cada três capítulos da Bíblia, para assumirmos a lógica do sistema (a da economia e das finanças) e do Império presente (o do deus mercado e de seu único e suficiente mediador: o dinheiro) como ponto de partida – agora como uma tal “economia verde”, patinamos, somos mais uma vez rebocados e corremos o risco de deixar de enxergar possibilidades.

Na minha humilde opinião, insistir em não tocar em algumas “vacas sagradas”, em alguns “dados como certo”, nos coloca na posição e na agenda que nos leva de reboque por um mundo correndo em velocidade máxima para o abismo e para o colapso. No mínimo e por misericórdia tal posição pode nos fazer inócuos.

Algumas “vacas sagradas do sistema precisam, como eu disse, ser desafiadas:

- O MITO DO PROGRESSO ETERNO. Um mito que só pode ser crido por um louco ou por economistas da ordem presente, que crêem em um crescimento permanente em um mundo finito, sem se darem conta que a única coisa a crescer indefinidamente é um câncer.. Este mito que divide e oprime seres humanos que optam pela vida simples como se fossem cidadãos de segunda categoria, ou que acusa de sectários aqueles que não aceitam acriticamente a máxima de que todo progresso é bem vindo.

- A CRENÇA NO DESENVOLVIMENTO COMO OBJETIVO. Ao ser aceito como objetivo a ser buscado nos desvia de um outro objetivo estabelecido e proposto por aquele que nos chamou a ser sua igreja. Ele não disse “ Eu vim para que vocês se desenvolvam”, mesmo que esse desenvolvimento seja sustentável. Nosso objetivo proposto é outro: a vida abundante, uma expressão infelizmente confundida com vida com excesso, como a que nos propõe a lógica do consumo e da intermediação

monetária, seja esta consciente, sustentável ou qualquer outra. Precisamos reencantar e reassumir a abundância no lugar do excesso e nos arrepender do excesso de tudo que o mercado nos oferece, de comida a educação, de facilidades a delegação de responsabilidades. E para que todos tenham acesso a esta abundância é mister que se mexa em outra “vacina sagrada”: A ECONOMIA.

- Essa ciência somente existe se crermos, como ela nos insiste em fazer crer, em um mundo escasso, o que coloca Deus em uma posição de incompetência de origem como criador ao ter pensado e realizado tal mundo. E nos diminui a seres plenos de necessidades ilimitadas, das quais somos insaciáveis, o que nos torna à imagem e semelhança de uma bactéria patogênica causadora do consumo (o nome antigo da tuberculose). Esta auto-imagem de consumidor nos afasta do caminho proposto do domínio próprio e da celebração dos limites, da renúncia e do sagrado que estão na origem do caminho proposto.

- Precisamos recordar que o termo “desenvolvimento sustentável” foi estabelecido pela médica norueguesa Gro Harlem em 1983, como reação à constatação feita quase onze anos de sua invenção pelo Clube de Roma de que era imperativo IMPOR LIMITES AO CRESCIMENTO, e que deu origem a uma outra agenda bem mais interessante, a do DECRESCIMENTO (proposta por Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, o pai da bioeconomia e propagandeada hoje por Serge Latouche). Mas antes de tudo, ela nos remete a lembrança de algo muito anterior e próprio do cristianismo: aprender a viver satisfeito, celebrar os limites, abraçar a renúncia e sacralizar a vida – aqui ditas não como palavras bonitas mas como proposta de agenda agressiva e antissistêmica radical. Na minha humilde opinião esta me parece muito mais coincidente com o ensino do mestre Jesus e com o caminho que a de um desenvolvimento, seja ele de que tipo for. Jesus é aquele que assumiu sua agenda pelo princípio da *Kenosis* (o esvaziamento das prerrogativas e direitos). Impõem-se a nós a mesma atitude que nele houve (Fil. 2:5) e assumir uma “agenda kenótica para o planeta” COM URGÊNCIA! Abrindo mão de direitos e assumindo, ou reassumindo, as nossas obrigações. Deixando de

lado os sonhos de grandeza, não só dos mascates da telefê, como se costuma ter em mente, mas também de nossos pequenos reininhos ministeriais e colocando no lugar desses sonhos, a imaginação necessária para se aprender a viver uma vida simples, pacata e quieta. Abrindo mão de prerrogativas e voltando a indicar o caminho pelo exemplo e não pela liderança.

Por fim, podemos assumir uma postura de lealdade se voltarmos a lembrar à imagem de quem fomos criados e a partir dessa imagem construir outras narrativas a nos informar para a vida. Como já disse, não somos consumidores, a defender nossos “direitos”. A primeira declaração da Bíblia é de que somos imagem e semelhança de um Deus generoso, criativo, bondoso e cuidadoso nos detalhes. Ele nos colocou em um jardim para o observar (Avad) e para o guardar e preservar ( Shamar), Gen. 2:15. Olhar para a terra como nosso origem, nossa casa e nossa primeira identidade, como gente do solo, é reassumir tais princípios e assim nos colocarmos na dianteira de uma mundo que sofre com dores de parto e aguarda a manifestação daqueles que se chamam a si mesmos de “filhos de Deus”

A quem , toda a glória.”

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