

LIFE AS IDOL

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Lister Sinclair

Good evening. I'm Lister Sinclair and this is *Ideas*.

In the fall of 1988, Ivan Illich stood before a convocation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and pronounced a solemn curse on *life*. In many contemporary discourses, he said, *life* has taken on a shadowy substance and become, in effect, the ultimate economic resource. "A life," he went on, "is amenable to management, to improvement, and to evaluation in terms of available resources in a way which is unthinkable when we speak of 'a person.'" Life in this substantive sense, he told the Lutherans, is the most powerful idol that the church has had to face in the course of its history.

Challenging cherished prejudices is something that Ivan Illich has done through a brilliant and iconoclastic career that now spans nearly four decades. Once a monsignor of the Roman Catholic church, he voluntarily suspended his work as a priest in 1969 when his campaign against international development, and the church's part in it, antagonized his superiors in Rome. In books like *Deschooling Society*; *Tools for Conviviality*; and *Medical Nemesis*, he took on the great secular bureaucracies of his time as well, criticizing the way in which professional monopolies disabled personal initiative. In his more recent writings, he has investigated the historical origins of what he calls "our certainties": the taken-for-granted assumptions which form the foundation of contemporary thought.

Life is one such certainty. Whether we speak of "a life," or "life on earth," we take it for granted that we are referring to something substantial and that we have a duty to manage this something responsibly.

In 1989, on *Ideas*, David Cayley presented "Part Moon and Part Travelling Salesman: Conversations with Ivan Illich." Tonight, he continues that conversation with an investigation of Illich's ideas on *life*.

David Cayley

St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, poses the question "What is time?" and answers, "If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to someone who asks, I

know it not." The case is somewhat the same with *life*. We know what it means, but we couldn't necessarily explain it. In science, the question "What is life?" has proven so intractable that it has produced a recurrent heresy called *vitalism*. Philosophy and law have been equally powerless to produce a general definition. The word *life* has named the exuberance of nature or of God; but, until recently, it has been something that could be substantially known only through its embodiments. Today, according to Ivan Illich, this word is being used in a new and unprecedented sense—what he calls "a substantive sense"—as if life were not an attribute or an experience, but a thing in itself.

There's a good deal of evidence for what Illich says: the word *life* now crops up everywhere in current talk. In advertising, variations on the theme of "Coke adds life" now seem to be everywhere; fundraisers stage walks for *life*; rides for *life*; concerts for *life*. At a more serious level, *life* has become an important term in the discourses of medicine, ecology, bioethics, and even law. Physicians now regard themselves as advocates and protectors of life, from conception to organ harvest. At a conference in Germany last year, I heard a prominent physician say that medicine no longer treats discrete diseases but "disturbances of existence." Bioethicists ponder the quality of life and try to define the cases in which this quality is insufficient to justify further "life support." In the field of law, it is now possible, in some American jurisdictions, for persons not aborted as the result of faulty amniocentesis to sue on the grounds of "imposition of undue life." The question "What is life?" has been revived in the biological sciences, where there is hope that, by substituting cybernetic from mechanical models, systems theory can now answer the question without falling into the old heresy of vitalism. And, in popular ecology, environmentalists speak of "life on earth" as an endangered resource and propose survival as a political goal.

What worries Illich about all this is that it turns life into a resource—and all resources are ultimately economic by definition. Life as a resource calls for institutional management and manipulation and, at the same time, hallows this manipulation because of

the feelings the word *life* evokes. Churches, lawyers, doctors, bioethicists, and ecologists all find in the management of life a compelling reason for being.

Illich also believes that *life* is becoming the object of a surrogate religion, which is increasingly filling the space shaped by two millennia of Christianity. A recent column by David Suzuki in the Toronto *Star* appeared under the headline "Environmentalism Should Be a Religion." The same paper, a month later, greeted the discovery of what was described as a huge ripple of matter near the edge of the universe with the headline "It's Like Looking at God."

Life as a value, a right, a resource, is disembodied. When applied to human beings, it lacks the definite boundary and unique signature we associate with a person. There is an equivalence and interchangeability between lives that can never exist between persons. A life is a local instance of life in general; a person exists once and forever. The generality of the term *life* reflects what Nietzsche, a hundred years ago, named "the madness of general concepts." He claimed that, in an effort to make them say everything, words were being stretched to the point that all sense was washing out of them. "Language," Nietzsche wrote, "has become a power in itself, which now grabs and pushes people with ghostly arms into places where they don't even want to go." This corresponds closely, I think, with how Illich views the new sense, or non-sense, of the word *life*. He calls it a "plastic word."

Ivan Illich

The term I take from the now-published book of Professor Pörkson from Freiburg, in southern Germany—a linguist and mediaevalist. During the second part of the eighties, he came to the conclusion that there are certain words in all modern languages which ought to be labelled in a special way when you put them into a modern dictionary. You know, in dictionaries they say: This is a word which is common; in its common meaning it means this; in its antiquated meaning it means something else; when you combine it in a particular way it becomes vulgar; in another sense it is technical.

He came to the conclusion that one major category of word usage had been overlooked, for which he created the term *amoeba-like* or *plastic*. A plastic word, an amoeba word, fits about twenty-five characterizations and he doesn't admit any word into this egregious category unless they fit all these twenty-five. It's a term which has powerful connotations. A person becomes important when he uses it; he kind of bows to some kind of a profession who know more about it. He is convinced that he makes, in some way, a scientific statement. Using the word *makes waves*, but it doesn't hit anything. It has no denomination power; it does not designate anything precisely, though it has all those connotations.

Usually, it's a word which has existed always in the language, but which has gone through a scientific laundry and then dropped back into ordinary language with a new connotation that it has something to do with what other people know and you can't quite fathom. He has found these words in every language; there are everywhere only a couple of dozen and they're always the same. Pörkson puts *sexuality*, for instance, into the category of amoeba words, or *crisis*, or *information*. When I came to Pörkson and said to him, "Uwe, I think I found the worst of them: *life*," he became very silent. For the one time in my life, I had the impression that he became angry with me, disappointed with me. He was offended, and it took about nine months before we could speak about that issue again, because it's just unthinkable that something as precious and beautiful as life should act as an amoeba word.

I came to the conclusion that, when I use the word *life* today, I could just as well say, "Mm, uh uh uh uh," or "shit."

David Cayley

You called it an *idol* when you spoke to the Lutherans. Are all amoeba words idols or does this one have a peculiar property?

Ivan Illich

No. An idol, in the strong, in the theological sense, is a creation of man's hands, the Bible says, in front of which we worship, to which we attribute a power which transcends our own. I would think that terms

like *freedom, democracy, liberty*, can often be used as if they were idols, but nobody would attribute substance to them. You can be in favour of "aliveness," of "life in general," "let's live it up!" But, when I speak of "a life," I give it a substantive meaning: I am saying "This here is a life." By doing this, by giving to life this substantive meaning, I transform the being whom I would normally call a person into a life.

Now, nobody has said about himself "I am a life." Can you imagine "I am a life too"? No. Life is always spoken as something which another person is. So I began to reflect and to research: Where does the term *life*, in the substantive usage, *a life*, come from? And I found out that this usage is radically modern. I can't find people speaking of somebody else as "a life" until the sixties of this century at the very earliest. This left me as dumbfounded as it left Uwe Pörkson surprised. And I began to reflect: Where does the substantive use of *life* come from? And it became quite obvious that, in the substantive sense in which we use it today, it is simply silly to attribute to the Brahmanic tradition, the Hindu tradition, or to the Taoist tradition, or to any extra-European tradition, a similar usage.

Of course, life is there, just as in the Bible, there is *aliveness*. But the origin of the idea of a person defining himself as *life*, lies with a conversation between Jesus and Martha, the sister of the public woman Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus went to visit because their brother Lazarus had died. They had a conversation and, in that conversation, Jesus said to Martha, "I am life." And, from that moment on, in Western history, in Western languages, *life* in the singular, a life, *life tout court*, which we can have or not have, refers to a relationship with Jesus. For much more than a millennium, it was quite clear that people can be among the living and be dead, and other people can be dead and have life.

This is not simply a religious statement, this is a Christian message which became part of everyday, ordinary assumptions. If, therefore, today we use the term *life* for a zygote—you know, a fertilized egg—we abuse the word for the incarnate God. For this reason, when I once had to give that talk to a large

group of Protestant ministers in the United States, I began the talk by saying a curse, by formalizing a curse, by publicly cursing, by trying to curse in the strongest sense in which you can curse and said, "To hell with life!" three times. And these guys looked at me.

I said to them: "This is a theological statement I'll explain to you now." Because to make an attribute, created by that man in Galilee to design himself, into an object which you manipulate, for which you feel responsible, which you manage, is to perform the most radical perversion which is possible.

David Cayley

It is Illich's view that Christianity has deeply shaped the mental space in which Western people live. It is for this reason that he describes the contemporary usage of *life* as a perversion, rather than regarding it as something apart from Christianity. Without Christianity, he says, this usage would be as unthinkable as it still is in non-Western traditions. Believing this, he has been doubly shocked to find Christian churches—Protestant and Catholic—enthusiastically embracing the cause of *life*. A joint statement by the German churches in 1990 was called "God Is a Friend of Life." Rome has taken the same tack.

Ivan Illich

I find one of the most interesting texts in the papal statements on life. There I find a statement by the man who presides over the commission which formerly was called the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Rome, a German cardinal—in his youth, a remarkably famous theologian—named Ratzinger. In this text he says that it is a scientific fact that, from the moment of conception, a new life comes into existence: first statement. Second: that reason, human reason, unaided by faith or revelation, can recognize in this life which comes into existence at the moment of conception the existence of a human person. And third: that, for a Christian, this human person is the most helpless and therefore most deserving brother of Christ, or in Christ.

If you don't mind, I would like to go through these three steps. The first statement claims, in a papal document, that I have to start reflection on the basis of a scientific fact. You can analyze what happens in a laboratory not only as a discovery of truth, but also as the creation of facts by definitions, paradigms, which you impose on observations. I find it extraordinary that the man who is in charge of the protection of the traditional purity of the faith begins his argument by saying, "I oblige Christians to believe in something which is based on a scientific fact." Now, scientists, biologists, would say that, in the genetic information of a newly fertilized egg, there are some characteristics which cannot be found in any other cell of the mother organism. They would never say, biologists, "This is a life."

His Eminence connects the appearance of some new element in the genetic information with the creation of a life. He therefore translates a scientific statement into ordinary language and thereby completely falsifies what the laboratory data warrant.

Then he goes one step further and says: What I've just told you to accept as a scientific fact, reason can recognize as a person—without legs, without arms, without eyes, a person without face, whom I can't face, a person who nobody in ordinary life can see, a person who can appear as something totally unlike anything which I know as a person in certain types of photographs, electron photographs.

And then he goes on and says: And, as a Christian, you must deal with this person in the likeness of Christ, as your neighbour, as your weakest neighbour. It is most surprising for me that this statement is signed by a very intelligent theologian.

David Cayley

I would like to explore some of the consequences of speaking about *life*, about using this most abstract of terms. For example, I have the sense that, because of its abstractness, it's easily made into an object of manipulation.

Ivan Illich

Yes, but it is so abstract that, in order to make it into an object of manipulation, you have to create

emblems which are sensually powerful. The word *life* is so evidently rootless in science, the word *a life* is so patently deprived of any common-sense correlate, that it could not acquire power unless it were tied to some kind of emblem.

I'll never forget when it struck me for the first time, several years ago, in a kitchen of an apartment where some six or seven graduate students lived together. On the icebox door there were only two pictures: one was the blue planet and one was the fertilized egg—two circles of roughly the same size, one bluish the other one pink. One of the students said to me, "These are our doorways to the understanding of life." The term *doorway* struck me profoundly.

It stuck with me for quite a few months, until for some totally different reason I took out a book by Mircea Eliade, a teacher for many of us of religious science, of the study of myths, of the scientific study of religion. And, going through this book, I came to the conclusion that, better than anybody else whom I had studied, he brings out the concept of *sacrum*. *Sacrum*, the Latin noun corresponding to our *sacred*, has been used for a long time by religious scientists for a particular place in the topology of any culture. It refers to an object, a locality or a sign, which within that culture is believed to be—this young lady was right—a doorway.

I had always thought of it as a threshold, a threshold at which the ultimate appears; that which, within that society, is considered to be true otherness; that which, within a given society, is considered transcendent. And I began to reflect whether these two circles, the blue one and the red one, were not the *sacrum* of our time. They are different from other *sacra*, because they are pure science; they are not objects. They are, to speak with Cardinal Ratzinger, emblems for scientific facts, results of technological instruments.

The most violent view ever obtained was that of the earth from the outside. Imagine how many tons of explosive went into separating a Hasselblad camera from the earth so that it could photograph the earth from the outside and we now claim that we *see* the earth from there, where we only have a photograph

of it. Imagine how much violence was done to women, how much shameless violence, in order to photograph the zygote. Remember in what a powerful way the traditional—and humanly probably necessary—division between the *here* and the *there* is abolished, both when we look at the earth from the outside and when we look at the unseen in pregnancy as something already visibly here.

These two coloured circles are results of this transformation of activities which are called "scientific," so they can call for high funding, into images which can be used in propaganda and now become thresholds, doorways, to something which nobody sees, something which makes sense for nobody—a life pink, life in general blue; pink light, blue light—the *ultimate* for which any sacrifice can be justified.

The term *life, a life*, as it is used today, constitutes the perversion of the statement by the incarnate God, "I am life," and therefore belongs to hell, if there be one—and we would have to invent it if there weren't, to say where it belongs. These two images are the threshold through which life gives a justification for our total global management. It's justified because of the sacredness of this nothingness.

David Cayley

So these two objects are in that sense quite literally anti-Christ?

Ivan Illich

I have always abstained from making apocalyptic statements or interpreting the apocalypse. No, I don't want to get into this kind of fundamentalism, I'd much rather stay in history. I cannot help seeing in what you refer to a resurrection of nature, a horrible resurrection of nature, and I'll explain why. Mrs. Merchant, Caroline Merchant, has spoken about "the death of nature." She has done so by making three statements, may she forgive me for simplifying.

Statement one: all our Western traditions of philosophy, pre-Socratic and thereafter, have assumed that nature is alive—not is *a life*, but is

alive—that nature is a matrix, a womb. Pagan nature gave birth to very different, let's call them "gods."

Then came Christianity, that extraordinary world perception that lasted from the proto-Christian period through the latest Middle Ages, in which nature's aliveness was given a reason. The Greeks couldn't decide if it had a beginning or not. Christians know it was created by God—they had learned that from the Jews—the world was created by God and was maintained alive in God's hands. The aliveness of nature therefore had its roots in God, who was life.

Then Merchant says: with the various philosophical steps that led to the Enlightenment, people got rid of this dependence of nature on God, through continuous creation by God's hands, in God's womb.

She speaks, therefore, in this sense of the death of nature as a phenomenon which founds modernity and thereby becomes able to define a question which has troubled modernity without being formulated in this simple way: if nature is dead, how to explain life? And in a way she is right. The word *life*—not *a life*, but *life*—appears around 1801 and 1802 in Germany and in France for the first time in natural sciences. Biology was created. The two proposals to create this science, to name this science, to start anew in the study of nature, came from there. For some twenty or thirty years, there was a search for life going on, which then died out. By 1840, 1850, you won't find any biologist looking for life anymore.

David Cayley

Why?

Ivan Illich

Well, the simplest way to say it is, because there's nothing operationally verifiable in that term. Within biology, the plastic nature of that term was discovered a hundred and fifty years before Uwe Pörkson created the technical term *plastic word*.

David Cayley

The question "What is life?" becomes meaningful only after the death of nature and nature's god turns

life into an anomaly that apparently stands in need of explanation. The biologists of the early nineteenth century could not unravel the mystery and their efforts were soon eclipsed by the work of Darwin and a general enthusiasm for mechanistic and reductive approaches.

Today a new science, abetted by computers, is trying to solve the riddle by pointing to the autopoietic or self-organizing properties of complex systems. Illich is not impressed, believing, as he once said to me, that any explanation along these lines would be of such an abstract and general nature that it would be unable to distinguish a garden from a kidney. For him, the search for life will continue to be marked by a haunting absence.

Ivan Illich

It is only within this Christian tradition with the death of that nature which lies contingently in God's hands that the cultural space is created, through which then *a life*, as an object of management and perhaps as an object which can even be produced—for example, artificial intelligence—could come about. The social eclipse of Christian life, of the life of Christ, from culture—I'm not referring to churches—provided, if I'm not completely wrong, the empty space which almost called, or at least permitted the invasion of *a life*, of man taking charge of man and of the cosmos.

I, as mostly a reader of twelfth- and thirteenth-century documents, cannot avoid retranslating this into Latin as a cosmos contingent on man, a cosmos in the hands of man, and what formerly we called "persons," beings of a kind I don't know how to name, in the hands of man. Here you have the ultimate realization of the idea that everything can be made. And the more powerful the idea that the environment and society and man through education can be shaped and made and remade becomes in our century, the stronger appears that strange word, *responsibility*. I don't mean legal accountability, for which the word is used for a long time, but moral responsibility: responsibility *for*, rather than *to*. This concept is closely related to the social assumption that we can make the world what we want it to be, what we think it *ought* to be.

By claiming that we are responsible for the world, we also imply that we can *make* it and, by being convinced that we should pursue our so-called scientific endeavour to remake the world, we enhance the need of believing that we are responsible for it. If we can be responsible for life, we always imply that we have something to make about it, that we can improve it, that we can recover it, that we can save it. And it is in this sense that I talked about that which appears in these two doorways as a resurrection of man-conceived, man-made life, in a dead nature—*life* as the ultimate purpose of history.

David Cayley

Illich believes that the transformation of life into an abstract and transcendent value mirrors a parallel change in the nature of death. In his book *Medical Nemesis*, published in 1975, he argued that one of the consequences of medicalization is the constitution of what he called "an amortal society," a society which faces death as an alien rather than an intimate. Life began to become an end in itself, he says, when death lost its personal character.

Ivan Illich

The Jews, Christians, Arabs know an angel of death, a messenger who comes and says: "Hey, it's time now." In Jewish legend, he's exactly the same angel who called me once upon a time from the lap of Abraham, "It's time to become flesh in a mother's womb," where, according to this beautiful story, I then spent nine months with a little candle lighted next to my head. And it's the same angel who then came and said, "Now it's time to be born," and, just as in the lap of Abraham, so now in the womb of my mother, I said, "No, no, it's so good here." This angel will come again and tell me, "Ivan, now it's time to come to present yourself in front of the judge." I'm telling Jewish legend, right? An angel of death was known.

In the late thirteenth century, the sense of mortality takes on concreteness in a peculiar type of representation which we find in churches of the time, where each man—the peasant with his heavy clothes, the king with his crown and the bishop with his mitre—each dance in the arms of somebody else who is their mirror image as a corpse. This is called

The Dance of Death. Around 1340, quite suddenly, the imagery changes. It is no longer each one embracing his own mortality who dances through life, but it is a bunch of skeletons dancing at the behest of a piper, who's a skeleton man holding an hourglass. Death becomes a skeleton holding an hourglass, or a scythe or sickle, and they dance under his leadership.

As I examined these pictures, it became increasingly clear to me that I was in front of an anthropomorphical representation of something which, for the first time in history, came to be conceived as a force of nature. Death as a force of nature, not death as an intimate limit which I embrace from birth on and throughout my *bios*, my *curriculum vitae*, but death as a force came to be represented in a macabre way at this moment. And, during the seventies, I reflected much on how this idea of death as a natural force became, step by step, its mirror image: life as *a life*, my life, life personalized, not anymore in an abstract way as death here, but in that zygote, in that blueness of the earth, in that patient whom the doctor has to keep out of the grip of the enemy of that life – death.

Then came the eighties and, during the eighties, I became increasingly aware that that which was so referred to as *a life* took on a shadowy substance: it became stuffy, a thing which had stuff. It became in a modern way animistic and physicians began to think of themselves no longer as natural scientists in charge of providing relief, repair, perhaps life prolongation, for persons, but as managers of that stuff called "life."

David Cayley

As Illich's reflection has proceeded, he has become increasingly aware that he is dealing with an overtly religious phenomenon. In 1988, he was already speaking to the Lutherans of *life* as an idol and a fetish. Today, he wonders if the change around him might not be even more far-reaching than he originally thought.

Ivan Illich

We might be at the threshold, at the historical threshold, at the watershed, at the point of transition, to a new stage of religiosity. I am

speaking of a mode of being, of talking, of signalling and of perceiving, in which the creatureliness of the world is strongly accentuated, in which we speak about a fertilized egg as a creature and the rose as a creature without forever thinking about a creator, and where, therefore, the term *creature* or *critter* is detached from the term, the object of faith to which in our Western tradition it has always been connected. Therefore, increasingly, conversations – especially conversations in ecology – deal with creatures and speak as if God or the Creator would be a reasonable hypothesis.

Now, as you might remember, five years ago I scandalized these hundred and fifty reverends by saying formally and as a solemn curse, "To hell with life!" Now, with double emphasis – with triple emphasis – I must say, "To hell with God!" *as a hypothesis*. And I see the *sacrum*, the double *sacrum*, the blue and the pink *sacrum* through which life appears, life which is nothingness, as the appropriate step towards a world mood which conceives of a god who, *faut de mieux*, we have to deal with as if he existed, as if he were there.

I think today I would say a believer must be a man who, with the whole of his being and his life, objects to any argument which takes the shape *etsi deus daretur* – as if God existed. God is not an *as if*. We are here in front of the emergence of some ultimate justification for letting ourselves be administered by a clergy, a managing clergy, a planning clergy, a dictatorial clergy, worse than anything which we have ever thought about. You know how much I love and admire Orwell. Here Orwell's message comes to an end – we would need a new Orwell to speak about what we are just discussing.

David Cayley

Seventeen years ago, in *Medical Nemesis*, Illich warned against any "substantive ecological ideology which would modernize the mythic sacredness of nature." He insisted on politically determined limits as the answer to ecological catastrophe, because he foresaw the power which the engineering of an eco-religion would deliver into the hands of a new clergy. His warning went unheeded and, I think, largely unheard. Today, with this new religiosity

beginning to flower around him, he describes it as a rain dance, a mixture of sentimentality and superstition which hides the obvious fact that the rain is not ours to command.

Ivan Illich

It is a condition, a necessary condition, for thinking and reflecting with meaningful and sensual words and clear and distinct ideas to know that we have no future. There might be a tomorrow, but we have no future about which we can say anything, about which we have any power. We are radically powerless, and engage in conversation because we want to find ways of extending our budding friendships to others who with us can enjoy the experience of their own powerlessness and our joint powerlessness. The people who speak about Gaia, about global responsibility, about high time that we—some fantasy *we*, some voluntaristic *we*—do something about it, dance a crazy dance which makes them mad.

David Cayley

Why do you believe that responsibility is impossible?

Ivan Illich

I can be responsible . . . unless I'm crazy, I can be responsible only for those things about which I can do something and I can't help laughing about these kids organized by some of my friends, who walk around the streets of a mid-western town and shout, "We don't want global warming! We are against pollution!" Rain dances. *Responsibility* is a word which has been for a long time used in law. As a general concept, as a concept of woolly ethics, it's a rather new idea. In Germany at least, the word *verantwortung*, which means *responsibility*, appears only in the twenties of this century in the dictionaries.

What is this responsibility? It is a peculiar type of ethics related to a belief that I can do something about the things for which I am responsible. Now, it is a total illusion that you can do anything effective, anything which would make a difference, about all those things for which people are today being preached responsibility, by Hans Jonas or any other philosopher, not to speak of the demagogues. But

responsibility catches, because it gives people a sense that, "if that wise man tells me I should feel responsible, ah, after all I have some power, I have some influence, it makes a difference how I behave," which after some reflection turns out to be phony. So it's the ideal base on which to build the new religiosity of which I speak, in the name of which people become administrable, manageable, more than ever.

A sense of being able to celebrate the present and celebrate it by using as little as at all possible—because it's beautiful, not because it's useful for saving the world—could create the dinnertable which becomes the symbol of the opposition to that macabre dance of ecology, the dinnertable where aliveness is consciously consciously celebrated as the opposite of *life*.

David Cayley

This can be heard as a counsel of despair.

Ivan Illich

No! Of hedonism. I know only one way to transform us—*us* meaning always those whom I can touch and come close to—and that's deep enjoyment of being here alive at this moment, and a mutual admonition to do it—please don't misunderstand me, I'm not a touchy-feely man—in the most naked way possible. *Nudum Christum sequere*—"Nakedly follow the naked Christ"—was the ideal of some of my mediaeval monks whom I read.

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.

Lister Sinclair

On *Ideas* tonight, you've been listening to a conversation with Ivan Illich. His latest book is a collection of lectures and addresses given between 1978 and 1990 called *In the Mirror of the Past*. It contains a complete text of Illich's address on life to the American Lutheran Church mentioned in tonight's program. The publisher is Marion Boyars.

Tonight's program was prepared and presented by *Ideas* writer David Cayley. Technical production was by John Hollinger; production assistants: Gail Brownell and Faye Macpherson.

Later this spring, House of Anansi Press will publish two new books by David Cayley: *Ivan Illich in Conversation* and *Northrop Frye in Conversation*. Both books are transcriptions of interviews originally recorded for *Ideas*. *Ivan Illich in Conversation* will contain a much longer version of the interview on life heard tonight, as well as the interviews which form the basis for "Part Moon, Part Travelling Salesman," a profile of Illich we broadcast in 1989. They should be available in bookstores across Canada by June. The executive producer of *Ideas* is Bernie Lucht.

Transcription by Hedy Muysson.