

# The Conspiratio of Ivan Illich and the Kiss of Peace

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## Introduction

This essay aims to elucidate a surprise in the writing of Ivan Illich. It begins and ends with his writing on the mouth-to-mouth kiss of early Christians which he refers to with the term '*conspiratio*'. This essay will argue that Illich is not using *conspiratio* as a historically technical term, but instead as his own unique means of unveiling the surprising nature of early Christian sociality and liturgy, and, even further, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

In search of the significance of this term in his work, several adjacent discussions will also be undertaken. The first will consider how to interpret Illich's work and offers a brief survey of his use and understanding of *conspiratio* across his writing and speaking. The second will test Illich's historical and theological insights against other researchers who have commented extensively on the kissing practices of the church. The third will consider how Illich's *conspiratio* relates to his concept of peace and will argue that the *conspiratio* theologically adjusts his work in its entirety.

## Interpreting Illich

Ivan Illich is an ambiguous intellectual who is often unhelpfully labelled with broad titles, such as in *The Powerless Church's* synopsis of Illich as a 'philosopher, theologian, and historian'.<sup>1</sup> While Illich makes important contributions to

1 Ivan Illich, *The Powerless Church and Other Selected Writings, 1955-1985* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, (2018), back cover.

these realms of thought, he exceeds, evades, and challenges each. This is compounded, as David Cayley notes, by the distinctly ‘occasional’ nature of his literary works.<sup>2</sup> These works are constituted by short tracts like *Tools for Conviviality*, historical studies such as *In the Vineyard of the Text*, or as interviews later documented in books such as *The Rivers North of the Future*. Conversely, for Illich’s commentators, one word threads together his priestly, academic, and political work – friendship. John McKnight, for example, regards Illich as the ‘wildest man and best friend’ he has ever known.<sup>3</sup> Further, when Illich is asked about his faith in Jesus in an interview, he responds by saying: ‘I don’t like to speak about friends in a superficial way.’<sup>4</sup> Here, Illich is not avoiding the question. Rather his answer is expressive of an understanding of friendship as being ‘too deeply personal’ to speak about easily.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, just as Illich regarded his study of medieval writers such as Hugh of St Victor as fostering friendship,<sup>6</sup> the contemporary reader may relate in a similar manner to Illich, and share in a similar faithful hermeneutic wherein truth is known through careful engagement, trust, and discretion.

In concert with this briefly sketched hermeneutic of friendship, this essay will suggest that reading Illich must be a *peaceful* enterprise. It is an enterprise that Illich himself exemplifies:

2 David Cayley, *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), p. 14.

3 Lee Hoinacki & Carl Mitcham, ed., *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection*, (New York, State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 51.

4 Tomasz Goetel, Ivan Illich: Un Certain Regard – A 1972 Interview, online video recording, YouTube, <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=L\\_ByKXCr9TA&t=1208s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_ByKXCr9TA&t=1208s)> [accessed 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022], 7:52.

5 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 152.

6 David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich* (Toronto: Anansi, 2005), p. 27

I must talk to you about the recovery of a true sense of peace, while bearing in mind always that I know nothing about your vernacular tongue. Therefore, each word I will speak today will remind me of the difficulty of putting peace into words. To me, it seems that each people's peace is as distinct as each people's poetry.<sup>7</sup>

With these words, Illich acknowledges the care that needs to accompany one's search for a meaning that remains implicated in a vernacular and that 'cannot be exported'.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, I contend that interpreters of Illich should take care to avoid offering pithy or concise summaries of his ideas and be slow to critique others for doing the same. Both Giorgio Agamben's suggestion that 'the entirety of Illich's thought appears as a thought of the kingdom',<sup>9</sup> or David Cayley's suspicion of an underlying commitment to 'complementarity',<sup>10</sup> betray the peaceful reflections of a friend. This essay aims to provide a similarly faithful approach to Illich's writing as it is shaped by the personal nature of peace.

### **The *Conspiratio* of Ivan Illich: Background to the Term.**

With the word '*conspiratio*', Illich alludes to what he understands as being a central ritual in the early Christian church. However, this essay will argue that Illich doesn't use *conspiratio* as a technical term or as a direct synonym for Christian ritual kissing. Rather, it will be demonstrated that Illich uniquely uses the term to elucidate surprising and mys-

7 Ivan Illich, 'The De-Linking of Peace and Development' in *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses 1978-1990*, ed. By Valentina Borremans (London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1992), p. 15.

8 *Ibid*, p. 17.

9 Illich, *Powerless Church*, p. xi.

10 Cayley, *Intellectual Journey*, p. 451.

terious aspects of early Christian practice to contrast his own milieu. In *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley*, Illich first uses the Latin word *conspiratio* to refer to the early Christian practice of ‘breathing together into each other’s mouths. That’s what Christians did. They came together to eat and to kiss, to kiss on the mouth. In this way they shared the Holy Spirit and became members of a community in flesh, blood, and spirit.’<sup>11</sup>

In a follow-up interview two years later, when further asking Illich about the meaning of the *conspiratio*, David Cayley conflates the term with the ‘kiss of peace.’<sup>12</sup> Sam Ewell does likewise as he comments on the *conspiratio* while reflecting on Illich’s sense of Christian mission.<sup>13</sup> Illich also does the same when he states that the social entity of the church comes into existence by ‘sharing the spirit through the kiss of peace, the *conspiratio* of which we spoke.’<sup>14</sup> While these accounts appear to use the term *conspiratio* as a synonym with the kiss of peace, Illich, notably, is the only writer in the history of the Christian church to use the word to refer to the ritual kiss. The term is used sparingly in history for both negative and positive reasons. In one of his epistles, Augustine uses it positively where it is translated as ‘*unanimous agreement of Christian people’s in the faith (emphasis added)*’.<sup>15</sup> He uses it negatively in his commentary on Psalm 143 as people ‘conspired for evil ends.’<sup>16</sup> The former sense is used in *Dei Verbum* 10

11 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 85.

12 Ibid, p. 215.

13 Samuel E. Ewell, *Faith Seeking Conviviality: Reflections on Ivan Illich, Christian Mission, and the Promise of Life Together* (Oregon, Cascade Books, 2020), p. 76.

14 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 143.

15 Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Letters 156-210, II/3*, trans. by Roland Teske, ed. Boniface Ramsay (New York, New York City Press, 2004), p. 302.

16 Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms: 121-150*, trans. by Maria Boulding, ed.

of Vatican II where '*singularis conspiratio*' is translated as the 'single common effort' that should characterise the sharing in and handing on of sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

Further, because Illich is unique in his use of the term, it is important to clarify the distinction between Illich's *conspiratio* and the kissing rituals of the early church. With the *conspiratio*, Illich ambiguously refers to the practice of the 'very first Christian centuries',<sup>18</sup> and thus implies that the kiss of peace had a primitive and central relation to the Eucharist. Notably, the first Christian to refer to a ritual kiss as a 'kiss of peace' was the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Church father, Tertullian, where it was related to prayer and not the Eucharist. Crucially, therefore, this essay will aim to de-link the *conspiratio* from the ritual kiss or kiss of peace in the Christian church, not because the rituals are mutually exclusive, but because conflating them, firstly risks simplifying a complex and varied historical practice and, secondly, risks losing Illich's unique insights into a past reality that contrasts our own.

Illich's unique use of the term instead suggests that he is using it to creatively elucidate the significance of past Christian social practice. This is evident given that, on various occasions in his work, Illich feels compelled to re-use or create new words to highlight and recover senses of the past that are lost in the present. For example, Illich employs the term 'vernacular' to 'resuscitate some of its old breath' and as an adjective to 'name those acts of competence ... that we want to defend from measurement or manipulation'.<sup>19</sup> Or, as he considers the loss of gratuity in modernity,

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by Boniface Ramsey (New York, New City Press, 2004), p. 373.

17 Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, <[www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2022] Ch 2 Para 10.

18 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 216.

19 Ivan Illich, *Shadow Work* (New York, London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1981), p. 57-58.

Illich makes up an entirely new word:

Is there another word for the non-purposeful action, which is only performed because it's beautiful ... In German I invented the word *Unmsonstigkeit*, for no purpose at all, and it seems to have stuck, though it's in no dictionary.<sup>20</sup>

With the term *conspiratio*, Illich is combining his re-use of 'vernacular' with his invented '*Unmsonstigkeit*' in order to, literally, resuscitate some of the church's old breath. Furthermore, while Illich is unique in his use of *conspiratio* to refer to a Christian kissing ritual, it is apparent that, like 'vernacular', he hasn't pulled the term from a semantic vacuum. The French Jesuit priest and scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was a scholar with whom Illich was both familiar,<sup>21</sup> and fond of.<sup>22</sup> Teilhard uses the term 'conspiration' extensively through his writing to contrast the 'enforced mechanization of human energies'<sup>23</sup> with an:

'entirely new form of connection that distinguishes the human layer from all other departments of earthly life, [and] is the aptitude of different consciousnesses, taken in a group, to unite (by language and countless other, more obscure links) so as to constitute a single All.'<sup>24</sup>

As David H. Lane notes, Teilhard uses the term '*conspiration*' to refer to what he believed to be an inevitable future

20 Cayley, Rivers, p. 227.

21 Hoinacki & Mitcham, *Challenges*, p. 44.

22 Francisco Bravo, *Christ in the Thought of Teilhard De Chardin*, trans. by Cathryn B. Larme (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. v.

23 Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Future of Man*, trans. by Norman Denny (London, Collins, 1965), p. 54.

24 Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, *The Vision of the Past*, trans. by J. M. Cohen (London, Collins, 1966), p. 60.

cohering of humanity in love and peace.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Jean Daniélou, the Jesuit priest and patristic scholar with whom Illich was also familiar,<sup>26</sup> similarly identifies the eschatological scope of *conspiratio* in the writing of Gregory of Nyssa. Here, Daniélou notes that Gregory transposes the term from its implication in medicine, where it denotes bodily harmony, and physics, where it marks ‘the cohesion of the physical world,<sup>27</sup> towards the cohesion of the trinitarian God and to ‘the eschatological union of wills in membership with Being’<sup>28</sup>

Although Illich doesn’t make any explicit reference to either of these writers, two possible connections can be found in his work. Firstly, since Illich was aware of the work of Teilhard and Daniélou, it is possible that he was also aware of their use and explication of the term. Given its inclusion in Vatican II and, as we will see later in the writing of David Jones,<sup>29</sup> ‘conspiracy’ was a fairly well-known word at the time of Illich’s writing. This is made even more likely given that Illich’s near ubiquitous use of ‘*conspiratio*’ is interrupted by a singular use of the term ‘*conspiracy*’.<sup>30</sup> Considering its lack of historical use but recent revival in the writing of some of his contemporaries, this is strongly suggestive of the influence of Teilhard and Daniélou. Secondly, there are conceptual links between their sense of the harmonious cohesion of be-

25 David H. Lane, *The Phenomenon of Teilhard: Prophet for a New Age* (Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1996), p. 107-112

26 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 54.

27 Jean Daniélou, *L’être et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse*, trans. by Samuel Cardwell (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1970), p. 63.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

29 René Hague, *A Commentary on the Anathémata of David Jones* (Wellingborough, Skelton’s Press, 1977), p. 26.

30 David Cayley, ‘The Corruption of Christianity: Ivan Illich on Gospel, Church and Society’ (2007) < <https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts> > [accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022] (part 3), p. 22.

ing in love, and Illich's *conspiratio* as prolonging the love of the Incarnation via the cohesion of breathing together. The claim of this essay, however, is that Illich is using the term afresh, and it will be apparent in the following sections that while *conspiration* is universal and eschatological in scope, Illich's *conspiratio* refers to a local and unique intimacy that is available in the present.

### **Illich's Use of the Term**

Illich makes references to the *conspiratio* three times towards the end of his life; the first in a series of interviews with David Cayley later published in the book: *The Rivers North of the Future*; the following year in his address entitled 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy'; and a year later in the interviews published as the 'reiterations' in *The Rivers North of the Future*. In each instance, Illich aims to confront his readers with what he believes to be both forgotten and striking aspects of early Christian practice.

David Cayley records two references to the *conspiratio* in the first series of interviews wherein Illich claims that the practice was a central Christian ritual.

The high point of Christian ritual and ceremony still consists in a communal meal of bread and wine, a *symposium*, but in the first centuries of Christianity there was also *conspiratio*, that is a breathing into each others' mouths.<sup>31</sup>

Via the *conspiratio*, Illich suggests that breathing-together formed a central aspect of early Christian practice and that the church was contingent not just on the Eucharist, but on a kiss constituted by a sharing of breath or spirit. Further, Illich alludes to its liturgical nature, where he notes that the *conspiratio* is a ritual that:

31 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 85-86.

## *Conspiratio*

...does more than merely remember a faith which we already have. When we celebrate the faith by sharing bread and sharing the spirit through the kiss of peace, the *conspiratio* of which we spoke, the social entity comes into existence.<sup>32</sup>

Both references to a *conspiratio* place distinct emphasis on the sharing of breath, rather than the act of kissing. Both also refer to an action of the church and emphasize the activity itself against questions of its nature as a formal ritual. This suggests that Illich's aim isn't to analyze and clarify an ancient practice but to confront his audience with the intimacy and centrality of breathing-together and a mouth-to-mouth kiss in early Christian liturgy. Notably, the semantic ambiguity of *conspiratio* expands in Illich's reflections published as the 'reiterations' where he links the term more explicitly to distinct liturgical functions, and even suggests that the term was a title:

The world was changed forever by the appearance of a community ...based entirely on the contribution of each one, no matter what his rank, in the *conspiratio* of the liturgical kiss. A community was created by a somatic interchange and not by some cosmic or natural referent.<sup>33</sup>

These guys got together for a celebration which had two high points, one of them called *conspiratio*.<sup>34</sup>

In light of these statements, it is understandable why commentators would assume Illich is discussing a formal aspect of early Christian liturgy – a primitive 'kiss of peace'. Indeed, it could be that Illich has access to sources that explicitly

32 Ibid, p. 142-143.

33 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 178.

34 Ibid, p. 216.

name this practice as a *conspiratio*. Nevertheless, in each quotation above, it is clear that Illich wants to use the *conspiratio* as a way of highlighting not only the radical nature of early Christian sociality, but also the radical form that it took with a mouth-to-mouth kiss. This purpose is brought to the fore in a series of interviews with David Cayley broadcast on his CBC radio show entitled *The Corruption of Christianity*.

In these interviews, Illich introduces the *conspiratio* as a ‘strange oddity’ which is foreign and ‘shocking’ to the modern individual.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in the second episode of the series, Cayley recollects Illich’s thoughts on the *conspiratio* insofar as it contrasts ‘modern ideas of political community’ and the establishment of the church as a legal entity.<sup>36</sup> Here, Illich presents the ritual breathing-together of the church in stark antithesis to modern notions of contract. Cayley also records Illich making an explicit connection between the Incarnation and the *conspiratio*. The Incarnation, for Illich, enabled a ‘new respect for the human flesh, not as social entities, but as uniquely and enfleshed persons.’<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the social reality of the church is constituted by enfleshed persons who feast on the Eucharist and share in the spirit through the ‘mouth-to-mouth kiss.’<sup>38</sup> Thus, by referring to the ancient kissing ritual as a *conspiratio*, Illich isn’t just highlighting a title, or a technical term, but is inviting his listeners to confront the intimacy of the liturgical Christian breathing-together and its implications for living within modernity.

35 Cayley, <<https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts>> (part 2), p. 14.

36 Ibid, p. 14.

37 Cayley, <<https://www.davidcayley.com/transcripts>> (part 3), p. 22.

38 Ibid, p. 22.

## The Cultivation of Conspiracy

A year after the interviews which constituted *The Rivers North of the Future*, and prior to the later discussions comprising the *reiterations*, Illich delivered one of his final public addresses on receiving the culture and peace prize in Bremen, later entitled 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy'.<sup>39</sup> Throughout this address, Illich connects the liturgical kiss and breathing-together of the early church with peace. As such, in order to further uncover the meaning and significance of the *conspiratio* in Illich's writing, one must also attend to his understanding of peace.

In this address, Illich presents a meandering and poignant account of his life that reflects upon his journey as a thinker, priest, friend, and celebrant. Here, Illich glosses distinctive aspects of his past via a myriad of synonyms such as atmosphere, spirit, aula, or mood. He lovingly refers to his friendships as a bouquet of flowers which 'varies which each breath',<sup>40</sup> a metaphor that is vividly imaged by the presentation of flowers by each of his friends on his birthday.<sup>41</sup> Illich refers to 'peace', as 'the one strong word with which the atmosphere of friendship created among equals has been appropriately named'.<sup>42</sup> And such peace, Illich suggests, finds its origin in the intimate breathing-together of the *conspiratio*:

In the Christian liturgy of the first century, [kissing] assumed a new function. It became one of two high points in the celebration of the Eucharist - *conspiratio*, became a solemn liturgical gesture by which participants in the cult-action share their breath or spirit with one another.

39 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 233-242.

40 Ibid, p. 238.

41 Ibid, p. 233.

42 Ibid, p. 238.

er. It came to signify their union in one Holy Spirit, the community that takes shape in God's breath. The *ecclesia* came to be through a public ritual action, the liturgy, and the soul of this liturgy was the *conspiratio*. Explicitly, corporeally, the central Christian celebration was understood as a co-breathing, a con-spiracy, the bringing about of a common atmosphere, a divine milieu.<sup>43</sup>

With these striking statements, Illich roots his conception of peace within the liturgy of the Christian church whose physical and spiritual body was most efficaciously signified and engendered by a liturgical kiss. As before, Illich subverts Teilhard's universal and eschatological milieu with one that is - distinctly local and always possible. Indeed, Illich's journey of discovering the significance of the *conspiratio* began in an attempt to 'dismantle any universal notion of peace' and instead make it clear that 'peace is not an abstract condition, but a very specific spirit to be relished in its particular, incommunicable uniqueness by each community'.<sup>44</sup>

### **Peace in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy'**

Illich's 'peace' refers both to the atmosphere that cultivates friendship and to the atmosphere that friendship cultivates. Illich suggests that the 'climate' that fosters 'the growth of friendship',<sup>45</sup> is friendship *itself*, insofar as 'only persons who face one another in trust can allow its emergence'.<sup>46</sup> This ambiguous causality also attends to the breathing-together, the *con-spiratio*, of the church which 'is peace, understood

43 Ibid, p. 240.

44 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 239.

45 Ibid, p. 235.

46 Ibid, p. 238.

as the community that arises from it.<sup>47</sup> Peace, in this sense is both a noun and a verb, it denotes an atmosphere and the act which generates it.

Additionally, for Illich, this peace is personal to the point of being 'frail and often discounted' and he likens it to 'the air that weaves and wafts and evokes memories, like those attached to the Burgundy long after the bottle has been opened.'<sup>48</sup> With this analogy, Illich clarifies peace as that which lingers as an atmospheric trace of friendship while also enabling a type of *anamnesis* as it makes those memories present once again. With this analogy, Illich also highlights the corporeality of a peaceful atmosphere wherein, to 'savor the feel of a place' Illich says, 'you trust your nose; to trust another, you must first smell him.'<sup>49</sup> Therefore, just as peace cannot be abstracted from the concrete realities of a local community, spirit cannot be abstracted from the smell of someone's breath. Notably, it is this very particularity that makes peace 'fragile' to efforts to guarantee its appearance. As he discusses the peace of the *conspiratio*, Illich traces how the intimate and sensual kiss became institutionalized, 'sanitized' and mediated by an 'instrument' called the pax-board. The pax-board, Illich notes, was an instrument developed and used between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries which the priest would kiss and hand around the congregation to be kissed.<sup>50</sup> Thus, while Illich identifies the *conspiratio* with peace *itself*, he also narrates the history of the practice as it becomes camouflaged by a utilitarian '*pax*',<sup>51</sup> is evacuated of its carnal dimension and gratuitousness, and is corrupted into an unprecedented cultural commitment to contract.

47 Ibid, p. 241.

48 Ibid, p. 237.

49 Ibid, p. 237.

50 Cayley, Rivers, p. 217.

51 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 239.

Another key area of Illich's peace explored in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' is its implication in temporal peace and in the peace of the Incarnation. The first realm of peace that Illich alludes to in this address is 'the people's peace'. Illich uses this phrase in a lecture given to the Peace Research Association in Japan entitled 'The De-Linking of Peace and Development'.<sup>52</sup> In this lecture, Illich explicates a peacefulness that is mysterious, intimate and is essentially embedded within the freedom of subsistent cultures. 'Each people's peace', Illich says, is as 'distinct as each people's poetry'.<sup>53</sup> Throughout this lecture, Illich contrasts this notion of local peace to modern development and to a *pax* which 'has now lost the boundaries of its meaning'.<sup>54</sup> The 'people's peace', for Illich, is violently pacified by development and economic uniformity. Illich's peace, therefore, is neither the absence of war, nor is it dependent on war, rather it is the 'condition under which each culture flowers in its own incomparable way'.<sup>55</sup>

One of Illich's key accomplishments in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' is to go beyond his de-linking the people's peace from development and to link it to what I call 'the Incarnation's peace'. In so doing, Illich clarifies the intrinsic connection between these realms while also highlighting their radical difference. The peace that is the result of 'a deliberate, mutual, somatic and gratuitous gift to one another',<sup>56</sup> starkly contrasts the 'cultivated distrust', of early Western civic culture.<sup>57</sup> With the *conspiratio*, therefore, Illich isn't only aiming to highlight an aspect of early Christian sociality that starkly

52 Ivan Illich, 'De-Linking Peace and Development', p. 16-26.

53 Ibid, p. 15.

54 Ibid, p. 17.

55 Ibid, p. 17.

56 Ibid, p. 241.

57 Ibid, p. 237.

contrasts his own, but also the surprising revelation of the Incarnation that dwelled within and transformed the ‘people’s peace’. Lastly, in this address, the *conspiratio* also provides an example for Illich to trace the corruption of Christianity into modernity as he argues that *modern peace*, for better or for worse, originated in the *conspiratio*. Therefore, in ‘The Cultivation of Conspiracy’, Illich briefly alludes to a peace that is coincident with the activity of a subsistent community, is radically altered by the Incarnation, continues in the *conspiratio*, and declines into modernity.

### **The *Conspiratio*, Ritual Kissing and the Kiss of Peace**

It has been demonstrated that Illich’s primary aim in discussing the *conspiratio* is to highlight the surprising social reality of the early Christians. However, this essay will argue that Illich’s *conspiratio* cannot be identified strictly with early Christian ritual kissing, which was multivalent, nor with the kiss of peace, which was only linked to the eucharistic meal as church liturgy developed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards. Conversely, and despite the ambiguous history of the *conspiratio*, I will argue that Illich’s insights are still historically substantial and richly capture the reality of a church that expressed its sociality with a kiss.

#### **Early Ritual Kissing**

In his book *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*, Michael Phillip Penn narrates the unfolding of Christian ritual kissing in the life of the first five centuries of the church. His aim in the book is to explicate how ‘the ritual kiss became an important tool in the formation and manipulation of early Christian identity.’<sup>58</sup> By adopt-

58 Michael Philip Penn, *Kissing Christians: Ritual and Community in the Late Ancient Church*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 121.

ing Catherine Bell's notion of a ritual as an 'insistence on distinguishing its actions from that of nonritual activities',<sup>59</sup> Penn first aims to close up the supposed 'vast chasm' of Christian rituals and 'everyday gestures',<sup>60</sup> while also highlighting the distinguishing features of Christian kissing, such as his discovery that 'there are no non-Christian references to a widely exchanged ritual kiss'.<sup>61</sup>

One of the most prominent historical allusions that Illich makes about the *conspiratio* is that it was a practice shared by Christians in the earliest centuries.<sup>62</sup> While Illich's historical claims in this respect are implicit and ambiguous, Penn only furthers Illich's ambiguity by highlighting the extreme difficulty of making any concrete claims about the kissing practices of the earliest Christians. Indeed, Penn is at pains to highlight the 'dearth of source material' regarding the practice of the ritual kiss in the first decades of the church's life. According to Penn, the biblical references to a 'holy kiss' or to the 'kiss of love',<sup>63</sup> represent the only allusions to the kiss before Justin's *First Apology* written between 155-157AD.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, while explicit references to the practice are extremely limited, when understood alongside aspects of broader kissing practices and related theological themes, these references can provide some significant insights into the Christian ritual kiss. To this end, Edward Phillips conducts an excellent study of the biblical references to a ritual kiss where he aims to clarify its possible pneumatological connotations. For example, Phillips notes that the kiss being called 'holy' indicates that its

59 Ibid, p. 35.

60 Ibid, p. 105, 17.

61 Ibid, p. 150.

62 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 216.

63 See Romans 16:16, I Thessalonians 5:26, I Corinthians 16:20, II Corinthians 13:12, I Peter 5:14

64 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 18-21.

meaning may be found ‘within [Paul’s] pneumatology’,<sup>65</sup> and as such, suggests that to share in the kiss is to ‘share in the life of Christ’ himself.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, Penn himself concedes it reasonable ‘that the combination of early Christian’s desire to share each other’s spirit ... may have helped motivate the creation of the Christian ritual kiss.’<sup>67</sup> Further to the pneumatological aspects, Penn and Phillips note the strong connotations of the kiss to Christians’ sense of creating a radical kinship.<sup>68</sup> Penn, for example, notes a unique aspect of the Christian kiss with there being ‘no non-Christian references to a widely exchanged ritual kiss.’<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Nicolas James Perella also highlights the sensual significance of the act and suggests that ‘without doubt the senses that are brought into active play during the kiss point to a connection with eating.’<sup>70</sup>

The phenomenological and pneumatological conceptions which orbit around the kissing ritual are both ambiguous and conjectural. However, they do suggest that the earliest Christian kissing rituals carried an abundance of meaning and were intertwined with their sense of being the body of Christ. Illich’s claims that the kiss ‘came to signify their union in one Holy Spirit’ and that ‘the *ecclesia* came to be through a public ritual action’ therefore, insightfully capture what is a unique aspect of the early church and its ritual kissing.

While Illich’s understanding of ‘*conspiratio*’ is cogent with this abundantly meaningful kissing ritual, his historical claims are more tenuous. For example, Illich suggests

65 Edward L. Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge, Grove Books Limited, 1996), p. 8.

66 *Ibid*, p. 12.

67 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 20.

68 Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss*, p. 36, Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 21.

69 *Ibid*, p. 150.

70 Nicolas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane* (California, University of California Press, 1969), p. 1.

that the *conspiratio* was a distinct embrace that both preceded the communion,<sup>71</sup> and functioned as one of two ‘high-points’ within the ‘very first Christian centuries.’<sup>72</sup> While it has already been shown that this claim cannot be substantiated due to the lack of written material, it is also possible that in the earliest practices of the church the kiss wasn’t its primary spiritual encounter. In his book *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Dennis E. Smith seeks to root the early Christian community meals within ‘the larger phenomenon of the banquet as a social institution.’<sup>73</sup> Here, Smith argues that Christians ‘utilized the banquet institution with its rich symbolism and adapted it according to their own needs and emphases.’<sup>74</sup> The natural form of entertainment adapted from the *symposium*, which occurred after the meal, would be ‘communal worship.’<sup>75</sup> Smith notes that this time of worship had distinctly spiritual aspects and aligns with Paul’s discussions on spiritual worship as it follows his teaching on eating practices in I Corinthians 11-14.<sup>76</sup> Smith’s research troubles Illich’s claim that the kiss represented the spiritual ‘high point’ that preceded the communion in the early church’s liturgy. Instead, according to Smith, the spiritual high point followed the common meal and was unrelated to the kissing ritual which would have been most commonly offered as a greeting. Nevertheless, Smith’s work does provide some substance to Illich’s claim that a liturgical high point in the earliest Christian

71 Illich, ‘The Cultivation of Conspiracy’, p. 240.

72 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 216.

73 Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2002), p. 20.

74 Ibid, p. 174.

75 Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, p. 179.

76 Ibid, p. 187.

worship was constituted by spiritual exchange and related intimately to a common meal.

Further to this critique of Illich's historical claims, Penn's analysis of the increasing references to ritual kissing from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards gesture toward a multivalent practice that occurred outside of the formal liturgical gatherings of the church as much as it did within them. According to Penn, after the biblical references the earliest reference is made by Justin Martyr, where the kiss follows the common prayer and precedes the Eucharist.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, while referring to the ritual kiss as a kiss of peace, Tertullian understands it as relating directly to the prayers as their 'completion'.<sup>78</sup> Other 2<sup>nd</sup> century sources describe a kiss of greeting such as in *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, where Thecla kisses the fetters imprisoning Paul.<sup>79</sup> Penn highlights the kiss' presence in increasingly liturgical contexts within the third and fourth centuries where Origen is the first to 'directly link the ritual kiss with the Eucharist'.<sup>80</sup> He notes that various sources in these centuries 'speak of the ritual kiss in a variety of contexts: as part of prayer, Eucharist, baptism, ordination, penitence, martyrdom, and epistolary salutations'.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the multivalence of the kiss in the early centuries of the church highlights how ritual kissing exceeds Illich's conception of the *conspiratio* as a definitive ritual performed in connection to the Eucharist.

77 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 22.

78 Tertullian, *De Oratone* 18 (PL 1:1282) cited in Foley, Michael P. 'The Whence and Wither of the Kiss of Peace in the Roman Rite', *Antiphon* 14/1 (2010), p. 50.

79 Penn, *Kissing Christians*, p. 22.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

## **The Later Kiss of Peace**

Moving into the Middle Ages, Michael P. Foley explores how the ritual kiss developed as a liturgical kiss of peace in his article 'The Whence and Whither of the Kiss of Peace in the Roman Rite'. In contrast to Illich, Foley ties the kiss of peace to the peace of the risen Christ, while abstracting it from its concrete context in temporality. Further to Penn, it is apparent that this liturgical development continues to refine the theological significance of the kiss while evacuating it of phenomenological intimacy. One core aspect of Illich's conception of the kiss is his identifying peace with kissing itself, while being wary of its opposite conflation where the kiss is 'camouflaged' by the *pax*,<sup>82</sup> which, for Illich, is invariably linked to the violence and domination of *Pax Romana*. Therefore, in contrast to Illich, who ties 'peace' to the concrete and mysterious reality of the *conspiratio*, Foley conflates the kiss with notions of *pax* and with a theological conception of the peace of the risen Christ.

Foley's abstracting the kiss of peace from its initial and laudable 'substantial realism'<sup>83</sup> is realised in his primary aim to advise that, in spite of its multivalent significances, the Roman Rite focuses on one specific meaning. In support of this argument, Foley narrates how the kiss gradually became hierarchically distributed and shifted from an initial egalitarian sharing of the peace to the 'Twelfth-century manuals [that] show the celebrant FIRST kissing the altar ...[who] would then pass the peace on to the deacon, who in turn passed it on to the lesser ministers and the congregation.'<sup>84</sup> Coincident with this 'gradual shift in the kiss' administration,<sup>85</sup> Foley also

82 Illich, 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy', p. 239-241.

83 Foley, Kiss of Peace, p. 52.

84 Ibid, p. 63.

85 Ibid, p. 62.

notes how the kiss' placement within the liturgy further refined the practice from a gesture of peace itself to a theological concept of peace: 'the distinctive ordering of the *pax* in the Roman Mass set the conditions for a distinctive theological appropriation of the patristic heritage in the western Church.'<sup>86</sup> Consequently, Foley interprets the kiss of peace in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century in the following manner:

Simply put, if the kiss in the Eastern rites is a conciliatory kiss with pneumatological and paschal corollaries, the kiss in the Roman Rite is a pneumatological and paschal kiss with conciliatory corollaries.<sup>87</sup>

Despite Foley's reference to its decline in the 1200s,<sup>88</sup> and in contrast to his referencing its lively liturgical function alongside its secular counterpart, the historian John Bossy provides further insight into the practice of the kiss outside of the liturgy where it retains both theological significance and a certain gratuitousness that the liturgical kiss of peace did not. In his survey of the Christian West between 1400-1700, Bossy affords some excellent insights into the kiss' implication in fraternities which offered Christian solidarity as an object of free choice<sup>89</sup> and were often entered into via a ritual kiss.<sup>90</sup> These fraternities celebrated occasional feastings, reminiscent of the ancient love feast and whose peacefulness, Bossy notes, 'equalled friendship ... not peace the opposite of war'.<sup>91</sup> Such practices contrast, for Bossy, kissing practices within the church, where congregants would 'try not to quarrel about

86 Foley, *Kiss of Peace*, p. 64.

87 *Ibid*, p. 67.

88 *Ibid*, p. 70.

89 John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400-1700* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 58.

90 *Ibid*, p. 59.

91 Bossy, *Christianity in the West*, p. 59

who would kiss [the pax-board] first'.<sup>92</sup> Like both Penn and Illich, Foley offers a narrative of the phenomenological decline and instrumentalizing of the kiss. Each writer tells of a ritual that began in a substantive intimacy and ambiguity and developed into a hierarchically distributed and instrumental exchange. While Foley believes that these later practices often continued to 'evince the rich scriptural, patristic, and medieval traditions from which it was derived',<sup>93</sup> Illich, in contrast, lamented the decline of the essential intimacy that sharing the kiss first demanded. Here, Foley's effort to limit the meaning of the kiss to a theological conception of peace contrasts with Illich's understanding of a *conspiratio* which shares both in the multivalent particularity of temporality and in the peace of the Incarnation.

Therefore, in contrast to Foley who argues that the kiss of peace should signify Christ's peace in the Roman rite at the expense of temporal peace, Illich's *conspiratio* gathers up temporal peace into the perfection of Christ via the Incarnation. Indeed, as Catherine Pickstock intimates in *The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, in the Middle Ages, 'there was simply no duality of the liturgical and the mundane'<sup>94</sup> such that the peace of Christ, 'could be incarnated in all particular, even "extra-ecclesial" activities'.<sup>95</sup> Peacefulness in this respect, and in the fraternities referenced by Bossy, 'was characterized by a state of being attained through repeated affirmations of ecstatic collectivity'.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, despite Illich's tenuous historical claims about the ritual kiss, in contrast to the scholarly analyses of Penn and Foley, it may be suggested that he more

92 Ibid, p. 69.

93 Ibid, p. 71.

94 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1998), p. 146.

95 Ibid, p. 147.

96 Ibid, p. 146.

adequately reveals its gratuitousness and intimacy, even as they decline with its continuing liturgical development.

### **The *Conspiratio* is a Kiss of Peace**

The above section clarified Illich's *conspiratio* in the context of early Christian ritual kissing and a later more theologically refined kiss of peace. Having argued that Illich's *conspiratio* is not a historical technical term, I now demonstrate that the term may still refer to a kiss of peace, insofar as it is understood in light of Illich's conceptions of peace. This will be achieved by dividing Illich's thought into the distinct realms of 'the people's peace' and the 'Incarnation's peace'. This section will conclude by discussing how the *conspiratio* prolongs the Incarnation's peace and represents a distinct and surprising theological turn in his writing and work.

### **The People's Peace**

As previously mentioned, the 'people's peace' is a phrase used in Illich's address, 'The De-Linking of Peace and Development'.<sup>97</sup> This lecture functions as a useful guide to the meaning of the people's peace as it is present throughout Illich's work and summarized by his stated thesis:

...under the cover of 'development,' a worldwide war has been waged against the people's peace. ...I believe that limits to economic development, originating at the grass roots, are the principal condition for people to recover their peace.<sup>98</sup>

Here, Illich contrasts peace not against war, but with the violence of modern development. This violence, for Illich, shares in the tendency of war to make cultures alike as it

97 Illich, 'De-Linking Peace and Development', p. 15.

98 Ibid, p. 16.

dis-integrates subsistence-oriented cultures into an economic system.<sup>99</sup> ‘Development’, for Illich, represents the prime form of violence against local patterns of reciprocity and exchange. It is responsible for eradicating the freedom that constitutes a peaceful condition, both by its capitalizing on the ‘utilization values’ of the environment and consequent failure to respect its gratuity and the manner in which it is used by subsistent living.

One of the primary means by which Illich aims to establish the condition of peace is by exposing and delineating the reach of development, the modern economy, and its institutions. These aims motivate one of his most well-known works, *Tools for Conviviality*. In this tract, Illich discusses a notion of freedom that doesn’t just denote the capacity to choose but also gestures towards a broader anthropological category: a freedom to be human. Such freedom denotes an individual’s capability to creatively use their energies for the sake of personal and communal flourishing and Illich laments how this capacity to act freely has been lost due to the hegemony of modern institutions and monopolizing tools.<sup>100</sup> This modern institutional state where individuals are defined more by their consumption than their creativity contrasts the realization of human freedom within a personal interdependence that Illich calls ‘conviviality’:

A convivial society should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others. People feel joy, as opposed to mere pleasure, to the extent that their activities are creative; while the growth of tools beyond a certain point increases regimentation, dependence, exploitation, and impotence.<sup>101</sup>

99 Ibid, p. 21.

100 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 53.

101 Illich, *Tools*, p. 20.

For Illich, human freedom can only be truly realized within personal interdependence,<sup>102</sup> and therefore by placing limitations on tools.

The dynamic interplay between freedom and limitation that characterizes conviviality is coterminous with what Illich terms the 'vernacular domain': a notion that he develops in both *Shadow Work* and *Gender* to delineate a space that exists in distinction and apart from the 'limitless' economic and institutional sphere. It is a space where individual sovereignty is violated by professional services. He deftly and insightfully summarizes this violation by remarking that 'the siren of one ambulance can destroy Samaritan attitudes in a whole town.'<sup>103</sup> This concept of the vernacular, as Cayley notes, is rooted in the Latin *vernaculum*, which doesn't just refer to local language, but denotes whatever was 'homemade as opposed to what was commercially exchanged.'<sup>104</sup> By defining a 'vernacular' space, Illich aims to recover both the creative capacities of human beings and to resist the capitulation of subsistence and freedom to modernity's developmental ends. With conviviality and the vernacular, Illich alludes to a realm where individuals and communities flourish according to their own freedoms in a 'tender complexity' where 'each vernacular architecture is as unique as vernacular speech.'<sup>105</sup>

Crucially, Illich recognizes that the destruction of peace, perpetuated by development and institutionalism, is not a violent 'other' but is instead its corrupted antithesis. Illich first alludes to this observation in 'The Rebirth of Epimethean Man' where he claims that 'the history of modern man

102 Ibid, p. 11.

103 Ivan Illich, *Limits to Medicine: Medical Nemesis – The Expropriation of Health* (New York, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, 1982), p. 16.

104 Cayley, *Intellectual Journey*, p. 182.

105 Ivan Illich, 'Dwelling' in *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses 1978-1990*, ed. By Valentina Borremans (London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1992), p. 55-56.

begins with the degradation of Pandora's myth.<sup>106</sup> He develops this notion most fully two decades later in *The Rivers North of the Future*, by explicating the thesis that modernity is a mutation of Christianity and that the Incarnation represented 'the beginning of the end' of - people's peace. In defence of this thesis, Illich draws upon all of the major aspects of his work, such as healthcare, schooling, embodiment, freedom, and the senses. Like in 'The Cultivation of Conspiracy' and 'The De-linking of Peace and Development', Illich articulates a peacefulness that is coterminous with a Plato's *philia* that was the 'flowering of civic virtue and its crown'.<sup>107</sup> Illich also finds such peace within pre-modern schooling and healthcare where a student is not educated, but freely learns,<sup>108</sup> and a patient is not diagnosed, but freely volunteers 'his stance within himself'.<sup>109</sup> For Illich, the freedom inherent in peacefulness is further realized within sensual participation with the world wherein he notes that 'seeing was once felt to be an act of bodily intercourse with the object of my gaze'.<sup>110</sup> Illich's notions of a pre-modern goodness, fitted-ness and proportionality, are all constitutive of the people's peace, and he contends that each are lost to the violence of modern values, systems, and utility.<sup>111</sup>

This brief survey highlights that one of Illich's primary purposes in his work is to articulate and recover the people's peace – especially as he endeavours to resist its loss in modernity. Indeed, Illich's work on 'the people's peace' inspires most of the later commentary on and application of his work.

106 Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, Harper & Row, 1971), p. 103.

107 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 147.

108 Illich, *Deschooling Society*, p. xix.

109 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 127.

110 *Ibid*, p. 107.

111 *Ibid*, p. 132-138.

However, as discussed by Illich in *The Rivers North of the Future*, this purpose does not constitute the entirety of his aim as a writer and speaker. Rather, the people's peace is complemented by something altogether more beautiful *and* sinister. Illich traces the destruction of the people's peace to its very perfection in the Incarnation. While Illich doesn't expressly state a conception of the Incarnation's peace, the following section will demonstrate that his discussion of the Incarnation represents a crucial turn in his understanding of the people's peace, its history and its recovery.

### The Incarnation's Peace

In his 'testament' as documented in *The Rivers North of the Future*, Illich regards the Incarnation as the prime locus for the loss of the people's peace in modernity. The Incarnation, for Illich, functions as the origin of the sin which destroys the people's peace, so much so that he reluctantly confesses his temptation to 'curse' it.<sup>112</sup> It represents 'the beginning of the end',<sup>113</sup> revealing both a new possibility of love and a new possibility of sin. The revelation of this newness, therefore, has a distinct relation to the people's peace. The following section will argue that the Incarnation both deepens and disrupts the people's peace and, though not inevitably, comes to threaten its very existence.

Illich begins this 'testament' by stating:

I believe that the Incarnation makes possible an entirely new flowering of love and knowledge. For Christians, the Biblical God can now be loved in the flesh. ...A new dimension of love has opened, but this opening is highly ambiguous because of the way in which it

112 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 61.

113 *Ibid*, p. 175.

explodes certain universal assumptions about the conditions under which love are possible.<sup>114</sup>

Here, Illich articulates the radical newness of the Incarnation. Just as the *conspiratio* refers to an actual breathing-together and just as the people's peace is coincident with the particularities of a local culture, the peace of the Incarnation *is* the face-to-face encounter with the God who may be seen, touched, heard, and smelled. Illich images this conception of the Incarnation most thoroughly in his recollection of the encounter of the Good Samaritan with the beaten-up Jew. With this biblical story, Illich aims to work out the implications of the Incarnation wherein the Samaritan 'commits a kind of treason by caring for his enemy',<sup>115</sup> and establishes a relationship which is 'arbitrary from everybody else's point of view'.<sup>116</sup> Its hidden perfection, Cayley notes, 'contains an intimate and incommunicable depth that must necessarily remain shaded from other eyes'.<sup>117</sup> The Incarnation opens up, for Illich, a 'new dimension of love' and a 'realm of gratuity',<sup>118</sup> a peaceful space.

This 'newness' can be explicated via two interrelated movements; Illich's Incarnation both *disrupts* and *deepens* the people's peace. One primary instance of the people's peace which Illich works to recover is 'friendship'. Illich notes that an aspect of premodern (and indeed modern) friendship is its '[arising] from a place and the practices appropriate to it'.<sup>119</sup> For example, A.C. Grayling notes how, for Aristotle, friend-

114 Ibid, p. 47.

115 Ibid, p. 51.

116 Ibid, p. 177.

117 David Cayley, 'Christ and Anti-Christ in the Thought of Ivan Illich' (2015) <[www.davidcayley.com/blog/2015/10/22/christ-and-anti-christ-in-the-thought-of-ivan-illich?rq=shaded](http://www.davidcayley.com/blog/2015/10/22/christ-and-anti-christ-in-the-thought-of-ivan-illich?rq=shaded)> [accessed 28<sup>th</sup> August 2022], (para 9 of 16)

118 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 49.

119 Ibid, p. 147.

ship cannot be realized by many, because many lack the degree of virtue required to be a friend.<sup>120</sup> Conversely, Illich contends that this notion of friendship as the fruit of virtue or likeness, is dramatically inverted by the Incarnation to being a gratuitous ‘source, condition, and context for the possible coming about of commitment and like-mindedness.’<sup>121</sup> While friendship may be understood as being contingent on certain affinities, Illich suggests that the Incarnation instead ‘[disrupts] the frame that limited the conditions under which friendship could appear.’<sup>122</sup> Consequently, the peace of friendship made possible by the Incarnation is infinitely more unique than a culture’s peace as it may arise from an encounter with *any* other. The Incarnation deepens friendship to the gratuitous encounter of any *one* with any *other* and facilitates their faithful bearing with the other’s ‘impossible way of being.’<sup>123</sup>

This movement of disruption and deepening may also be found in Illich’s account of ‘proportionality’ where things in the world are ‘complementary and mutually constitutive’,<sup>124</sup> and the good is constituted by the capacity for things to ‘fit’.<sup>125</sup> Against Cayley’s suggestion that the Incarnation destroys proportionality, Illich argues that it deepens it:

The call of charity *agape*, which the Samaritan hears, does not destroy proportionality but rather elevates it to a level which formerly was not perceived . . . It says that your *telos*, your end purpose, the goal of your being, is in an other whom you freely choose.<sup>126</sup>

120 A.C. Grayling, *Friendship* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013), p. 34.

121 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 147.

122 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

123 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

124 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

125 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

126 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 197.

Notably, the deepening of proportionality and coincident perfecting of creation is dependent on it first being disrupted. The Samaritan must first step outside the boundaries of his ethnos to lovingly face the beaten-up Jew,<sup>127</sup> just as the Christ who became human also did, as one who, Kierkegaard states, is 'heterogeneous from first to last'.<sup>128</sup> According to Illich, the Incarnation can only fully enter into the infinitely varied particularity of human life if it is also thoroughly *unlimited*. As Charles Taylor comments: 'This shakes up the cosmos and the proportionalities which are established in it ...but it does not deny proportionality. It creates a new kind of fittingness, belonging together'.<sup>129</sup>

This both validates and contrasts the ideas of the philosopher Alain Badiou who notes that Christianity is only universally relevant to all people because it arises from a nothingness and is deprived 'of an established place ...is necessarily generic [and] indiscernible, indifferent, the stuff of a radically egalitarian homogeneity'.<sup>130</sup> That is, for Badiou, the universality of Christianity is contingent on the proclaimed 'nondifference between Jew and Greek'.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, for Illich, the Incarnation opens up the limits of locality towards a universal possibility of radical new relationship and, like Badiou, he argues that the Incarnation undoes cosmic totality as it reorients creation to the divine. In contrast to Badiou, however, Illich argues that a universal gospel can *only* be fulfilled within the particular – as its *telos* can only be another per-

127 Ibid, p. 50.

128 Søren Kierkegaard, *Training in Christianity*, trans by. Walter Lowrie (London Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 170.

129 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 739.

130 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003) p. xvii.

131 Ibid, p. 56.

son.<sup>132</sup> The universal gospel, for Illich, leads to the establishing of new places and generates new particularities. The universally applicable Incarnation, for Illich, must dwell *within* the particular and thus resist any tendency to abstract its peace to theological concepts, academic arguments, or in Badiou's case, generic proclamations. Indeed, it is essentially particular, the Incarnation *is* the face-to-face encounter and not an abstract theological principle.

Like the Samaritan, this movement is imaged in the Christian practice of kissing in the earliest centuries. Here Christian kissing thoroughly threatened the sign's intimate connection to familial relations, while also signifying an altogether deeper, more universal, and more particular type of kinship – the *ecclesia*. The Incarnation *disrupts* peace – ‘do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth ...but a sword’ (Matt 10:34) – but also *deepens* it – ‘and everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.’ (Matt 19:29)

Nevertheless, we cannot overlook that Illich's tale of disruption and deepening does not only narrate the revelation of a new love, but also the possibility of a betrayal that destroys the people's peace. The radical peace of the Incarnation ushered in the possibility of a ‘denial, infidelity, turning away ...sin.’<sup>133</sup> The ‘best’ which is the gratuitous love of the Incarnation, was corrupted into the ‘worst’ which is legislated love. Illich draws on the full breadth of his previous work to develop his thesis of ‘the corruption of the best is the worst’ in *The Rivers North of the Future* as he implicates the utilitarian tools of healthcare and schooling into the need to guarantee what could only be accomplished by the free turning in love

132 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 197.

133 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 52.

to another. Illich believes that the people's peace is destroyed when love is evacuated of personal freedom and instead animates the purpose of an institution that seeks to love by any means necessary. For Illich, this 'worst', legislated love, represents the beginning of this principle or gesture to the meaningless universal, to expansion of systems and dismantling of the vernacular. Crucially, therefore, Illich sees the Incarnation as the genesis and revelation of the modern destruction of the people's peace. However, it is crucial to note that while the Incarnation only *disrupts and deepens* the people's peace, it also ushers in the possibility that it may be *destroyed* by institutions that seek to guarantee it.

### **The *Conspiratio* Prolongs the Incarnation's Peace**

Illich's *conspiratio* relates intimately to the disruption and deepening of the Incarnation. In the 'reiterations', he recollects the new form of relating made possible by the Incarnation as it is exemplified by the Good Samaritan's capacity to create a relationship with the beaten-up Jew. This creative act, of freely establishing a relationship with an other, is an act which Illich says, 'prolongs the Incarnation'.<sup>134</sup> Notably, this phrase accompanies his contention with labels such as postmodernism and post-Christendom which, for Illich, fail to comprehend the Incarnation's significance for the nature of time and reality. Illich instead labels the time after Christ as 'apocalyptic',<sup>135</sup> by which he isn't intending to evoke a sense of disaster, but instead an 'unveiling' or revelation. Crucially, therefore, Illich contends that any discussion about living within modernity must take place in light of the Incarnation's unveiling new possibilities of love and revealing a new form

134 Ibid, p. 207.

135 Ibid, p. 179.

of sin as an ‘indifference to what has been revealed.’<sup>136</sup> For example, as he confesses in an interview with David Cayley: ‘In my opinion, Christ opened our eyes, in a unique and definite way, to the relationship between David and Ivan at this very moment.’<sup>137</sup> By locating modernity within a distinctly theological event, Illich suggests that the ‘good’ is not ultimately realized via the recovery of the people’s peace, but via the prolonging of the Incarnation.

For example, Illich’s movement from the people’s peace to the peace of the Incarnation can be traced from his article, *The Need for a Common Roof* co-written with Valentina Borremans in 1971 to his later conceptions in *The Rivers North of the Future*. In this short tract, both Illich and Borremans purport a new politics which ‘consists of the search for a community agreement on the technological profile of a common roof under which all the members of a society want to live.’<sup>138</sup> It calls for a ‘voluntary and communitarian self-limitation’ aimed at recovering the ‘vernacular’ in communities. It represents the quintessential perspective of Illich as he aims to cultivate the people’s peace. Later in the article, Illich puts some flesh to the call by asking ‘what is the maximum speed limit for the transport of people that allows the optimum use of public resources to guarantee optimum mobility to the largest majority?’<sup>139</sup>

Yet, Illich’s efforts to recover peace in this article undergo a shift as he returns to consider the Incarnation and its prolonging in the *conspiratio*. In *The Rivers North of the Future*, Illich doesn’t renounce the need to establish limits,

136 Ibid, p. 32.

137 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 177.

138 Ivan Illich & Valentina Borremans, ‘The Need for a Common Roof (the social control of technology)’, trans. by Gustavo Esteva and Rebecca Gamez, *Conspiratio* (Fall 2021), p. 157.

139 Ibid, p. 159.

but instead aims to root the recovery of peaceful limits not in their establishing, but in the Incarnation. The Incarnation, for Illich, was the 'beginning of the end' of 'timeliness and spatiality and frontier'.<sup>140</sup> The Incarnation, for Illich, *disrupted* the peaceful union of time and space while also *deepening* them and revealing a creatureliness that lives 'in a now and forever ...contingent at every moment on the creative act of God'.<sup>141</sup> As we have seen, this disruption and deepening also leads to the eventual unraveling of time and space as a unity, to the point where Galileo, for example, claimed to 'observe time apart from space'.<sup>142</sup> Here Illich provocatively suggests that an isolated sense of 'speed' in distinction from place is an artificial concept, and claims that the hope for a 21<sup>st</sup> century of 'Slow but Better Workers' is a 'millennial fantasy'.<sup>143</sup> For Illich, it seems like the revelation of sin and the seeming inevitability of capitalism requires one to return to the Incarnation, where, instead of aiming to recover a vernacular domain, Illich states:

We have to engage in an asceticism which makes it possible to savour nowness and hereness, here as place, here as that which is between us, *as the kingdom is*. This is a most important task if we are to save what remains in us of the sense of meaning, of metaphor, of flesh, of touch, of gaze (emphasis added).<sup>144</sup>

Previously in this interview, Illich expresses this new sense of now-ness and here-ness by pointing to a world that 'was changed forever by the appearance of a community ...in

140 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 180.

141 *Ibid*, p. 182.

142 *Ibid*, p. 181.

143 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 181.

144 *Ibid*, p. 182.

the *conspiratio* of the liturgical kiss.<sup>145</sup> These interviews reveal a re-focusing of Illich from the people's peace to the Incarnation's peace. Here the *conspiratio* functions as the window *into* and prolonged reality *of* the Incarnation. It reveals a new unity between time and space, a new place and a new peaceful way of concretely *being* together. And Illich's kingdom is the prolonged Incarnation – as he suggests elsewhere, 'it is a social reality at a transcendental level'.<sup>146</sup> Its form is a celebration, using bread and wine – to remember the final blessing and eating of the God who was made flesh.

Illich's friend, Carl Mitcham, insightfully highlights how Illich's *conspiratio* reveals 'the trajectory of his thinking ...[where he] suggested that a very incarnated, flesh-based breathing together is the real root of any convivial community that might become the effective arbiter of its tools'.<sup>147</sup> But this essay compels further commentary: historically, it has been shown that the *conspiratio* and associated kissing rituals were never merely carnal, but that they were also liturgical and spiritual. Additionally, a study of Illich's *conspiratio* suggests that the *conspiratio* is not only the root of the people's peace, but also its *uprooting*. As narrated by Illich, it prolongs the beginning of the slow tumble into modern instrumentality, while also revealing the futility of peace projects such as 'slow but better workers'. But perhaps most importantly, for Illich, it also revealed the perpetual possibility that incarnational peace may dawn as a surprise. Illich's *conspiratio*, therefore is not only 'a flesh-based breathing together' but it is also 'in the strictest sense, non-worldly, in spite of its somatic, bodily depth'.<sup>148</sup>

145 Ibid, p. 178.

146 Illich, *Powerless Church*, p. 87.

147 Carl Mitcham, 'The Challenges of This Collection' in *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection*, p. 13.

148 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 218.

## Thinking After Ivan Illich and Prolonging the *Conspiratio*

Illich is not alone in his use of language and images like conspiracy and kissing to refer to early Christian soci-ality and peace. He is complemented by the poet, artist, and essayist David Jones who Rowan Williams says gives ‘the best account in English this century of sacramental theology’.<sup>149</sup> Both Illich and Jones narrate the history of an increasingly utilitarian culture, both regard ‘*corruptio optimi quae est pessima*’ as their muse of modernity’s significance,<sup>150</sup> and both are steeped in – but not dominated by – the Roman Catholic tradition. A short reflection on the writing of Jones will provide further insight into two areas of Illich’s *conspiratio* in need of further development. The first concerns the term itself: with Jones, it will be suggested that Illich’s use of *conspiratio* is itself a conspirational act and that he seeks to unite time and space in its use. The second concerns the relation of a *conspiratio* to its corrupted antithesis – with Jones, I suggest that the term elucidates a peaceful act that resists temptation to utility.

## David Jones’ Sacrament: A Showing Forth in Little Space

Writing in 1960, Jones writes how the ‘compact and concise words’ of the first Preface, ‘show forth “in little space” ...the wide implications of a religion which is explicitly dependent upon small, intimate, enclosed, known and dear creaturely signs’.<sup>151</sup> This understanding of a sacramental showing forth ‘in little space’ is tied to Jones’ affinity for Celtic religion and art which is ‘intricate, complex, flexible, exact, and abstract’.<sup>152</sup> This sense of a sacramental ‘showing

149 Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 2000), p. 199.

150 See Cayley, *Rivers*, 29 and Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, 182.

151 David Jones, *The Dying Gaul: And Other Writings*, ed. by Harman Grisewood (London, Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 173.

152 Jones, *The Dying Gaul*, p. 58.

forth in little space' is implicit throughout *The Anathémata* where Jones recalls the peripheries of Celtic history and twines it with the axiomatic movements of the gospel in beautiful knots of poetry and informative prose.

Towards the beginning of *The Anathémata*, Jones refers to the last supper of Jesus with his disciples as a 'conspiracy' and in so doing evokes an abundance of meaning:

where few are, gathered in high-room  
and one, gone out.

There's conspiracy here:

Here is birthday and anniversary, if there's continuity  
Here, there's a new beginning.<sup>153</sup>

Jones' reference to 'conspiracy' represents one such instance where a breadth of meaning is knotted within a small space. Indeed, Jones, '[abhors] any lopping's off of meanings or emptying out ...any loss of recession and thickness through'.<sup>154</sup> The same is true for *conspiracy* as René Hague comments on Jones' use of the term by which he:

artfully combines *conspiratio*, conspiracy, breathing together, concord (in the sense in which Teilhard is fond of using it), which may be applied to those gathered, all of one mind, to celebrate the Pasch, with the conspiracy or plot of Judas.<sup>155</sup>

Jones' 'conspiracy' is an abundantly meaningful term by which he juxtaposes and fits together the hidden concord and love of the disciples in the upper room, with Teilhard's final universal love, with the conspiring of Judas, with the peaceful

153 Jones, *The Anathémata*, p. 51.

154 Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, p. 120.

155 Hague, *The Anathémata of David Jones*, p. 26.

conspiring of the disciples against Roman *pax*, together with his own conspiring against the utilitarian projects of his contemporary milieu.

Further, in this small portion of this epic poem, Jones also evokes the aspect of sacramentality which gathers up time into a 'little space' and where 'conspiracy', as Hague notes, is suggestive of this sharing between times as 'there is also "conspiracy" ...between "now" and "then"'.<sup>156</sup> By glossing the gathering of the disciples as a conspiracy, Jones seems to be inviting the reader to peer into the upper room, like he did the 'dim lit byre',<sup>157</sup> while also 'forging links'<sup>158</sup> to its past in Judaic tradition, to its future in our contemporary context, and to our own warring against the sacramental and the gratuitous.

As with Jones' 'conspiracy', Illich's *conspiratio* can also be understood as a showing forth of abundance in little space. Concerning his use of the term itself, it is apparent that Illich similarly re-applies the term to highlight the abundance of meaning that is latent in pre-modern experiences of the body and sociality, together with them being wholly affected by the Incarnation and *Pneuma*. Illich's *conspiratio*, therefore, represents a similarly Celtic showing forth of the mystery and newness of the Incarnation as it also dwells in a broader complex of people's peace and their associated histories of ritual and gesture. Additionally, further to Jones' allusion to the 'conspiracy' between past and present, Illich's *conspiratio* also gathers up time into the little space of a kiss. It tips the *ecclesia* into an eternal 'forever' insofar as it also signifies a supreme 'nowness'.<sup>159</sup> In contrast to Teilhard's eschatological *conspiratio*, both Jones and Illich, by way of a 'conspiracy', reach

156 Ibid, p. 25.

157 Jones, *Dai Greatcoat*, 248-249.

158 Powell, *Becoming Beauty*, p. 62.

159 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 182.

back and strain forward to highlight the secret triumph of a militant church. Illich's *conspiratio* prolongs the Incarnation as an abundant sign that is intertwined with reality, a history of significances and the Divine life – just as God himself first dwelled in human flesh, cultic rites, gestures, signs, and art. Creation, for Illich, 'through the Incarnation, will perdure',<sup>160</sup> but not without first being changed, disrupted, and deepened.

### Jones' *Efengyl*: A Peaceful resistance to utility

Published shortly before his death in 1974, Jones' poem *The Sleeping Lord* forms a part of the larger volume of short poems entitled *The Sleeping Lord: And Other Fragments*. This poem, as Dilworth notes, 'eulogizes Celtic culture',<sup>161</sup> and uncovers 'the antithesis between utility and gratuity'.<sup>162</sup> In the poem itself, Jones narrates '[the] post-Roman Celtic leader' King Arthur's sitting at table and directing defences against the 'the treason-tangle of the sub-reguli of equal privilege, the bane of the island'.<sup>163</sup> Here, Jones brings pause to Arthur's toiled defence of the land with a knotted recollection of memorials and Oblations made by 'Athletes of God' in various wastelands and desolate places.<sup>164</sup> After making this *anamnesis*, he continues to further interrupt Arthur's toiled defence with the 'confused' wanderings of one 'Faustus ... "of Regensium"' who makes his own *anamnesis* of the gospel:

But anyway his main concern was with Yr Efengyl Lan and he liked to dwell on the thought that the word *efengyl* (owing, he supposed, to the kiss given at that part of

160 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 214.

161 Dilworth, *Reading David Jones*, p. 218.

162 *Ibid*, p. 218.

163 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p. 78.

164 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p. 79.

the Oblation called the *pax*) could, in the tongue of his countrymen, mean a kiss. For what after all is the Hagon Evangelion if not the salutation of kiss of the eternally begotten Logos?<sup>165</sup>

Like his ‘conspiracy’ in *The Anathémata*, the peaceful kiss – *efengyl* – takes place within a liturgical interlude where the priest recalls a history of sign-making. Here the priest enfolds the gospel within a kiss, even as the kiss is itself enfolded within the broader complex of Jones’ poem – it represents another example of a sign which shows forth abundant meaning in little space. While the kiss owes its significance to the conflation of the *pax* with the gospel, here Jones, in like manner to Illich, returns its significance to the salutation of Christ in the Incarnation.

While *efengyl* evokes the art of the Celts, Jones shows forth the utility of the Romans in the little space of the ‘*pax*’. This is made clear in his recently published poem the ‘*Traverse of the Wall*’ where Jones images, according to Tom Goldpaugh, ‘imperialism at its height’ with the celebration of the ‘*pax*’:

The signators, the sub-reguli, the delegates, the notables  
The negotiators, who with the love-cups celebrate the plan  
Pledge the *pax*, who with the golden style signature  
The draft, with the golden pen ratify the formula,  
Promulgate the edict of deification, pledge with the *pax*  
Golden cups the triumph of the Ram, & of the opulent  
Queen, the Ram’s wife, who with the Ram sustains  
The megalopolis, generates death within urbs  
Throughout orbis.<sup>166</sup>

Jones’ small allusion to the *efengyl* in the priest’s pause returns Arthur’s defensive peace-making to a kiss. Both Jones

165 Ibid, p. 83.

166 Tom Goldpaugh, ‘On the Traverse of the Wall: The Lost Long Poem of David Jones’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1, 19 (1994), p. 39.

and Illich, therefore, refer to the kiss of peace as a mysterious and sacramental act that facilitates one's participation in the peaceful work of Jesus Christ. Illich, for example, understands the peace of the *conspiratio* not just as the antithesis to the *pax*, but as its origin and Jones, too, regards a kiss of peace as being a means of recalling Christ within the wasteland. The Incarnation, prolonged for both Jones and Illich by a kiss, represents how development, utility and the war waged against peace are resisted and avoided. For both writers, the kiss represents a conspiracy of the Incarnation's and the people's peace, showing forth in little space the abundance of the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Illich's *conspiratio***

Like a scalpel to a wood engraving – Jones has allowed us to cut into and deepen the lines of thought that run through Illich's writing. *Conspiratio*, for Illich, is not an idea or an ideal – but an act. This final section will consider that while Illich's own re-enactment of the *conspiratio* did not prolong its specific form, a liturgical mouth-to-mouth kiss, but that he did prolong its carnal and spiritual aspects.

Illich's conspiratorial practices are latent in his work and life prior to *The Rivers North of the Future*. For example, Illich's peace, which is at once both universal and particular, is prolonged by different people in different contexts. This is intimated by Illich during an interview when he is asked if his 'free university' at Cuernavaca could be 'exported'. Visibly frustrated, Illich responds to the question by saying:

I really think that anyone, if he were to lose that sense of inferiority produced by damned schooling, mental schooling and say, "I'm going to get some friends to-

gether to discuss this – and – that, and I’m opening a café to do it is doing just what we do.<sup>167</sup>

Illich makes these remarks around the same time of those made in his essay ‘How Shall We Pass on Christianity’ wherein he critiques efforts to guarantee the continuance of the church through education. Alternatively, Illich commends a theological and sacramental approach to handing over tradition as he recommends that the church prolong the ‘mood of the end of time ... That is the mood in which the first mass was celebrated.’<sup>168</sup> Illich wants the church to perdure through con-celebration and commemoration, just as Cuernavaca must perdure through the free and local commitment of unique communities.

Both these accounts inform ‘The Cultivation of Conspiracy’ wherein he draws on the peace of the *conspiratio* to inform his own studiousness and hospitality and he highlights the early Christian *conspiratio* to confront a modern dependence on contract and to reveal the legal ‘fulfilment’ of love as a corruption of what the Incarnation made possible. The *conspiratio* isn’t prolonged by repetition, but by participation and cultivation, and Illich’s own peaceful work is an example that inspires peaceful practices in others.

Illich didn’t seek to prolong the *conspiratio* with a kiss. Rather, he was, as Neto Leão beautifully identifies, his own example of a ‘vanishing clergyman.’<sup>169</sup> His liturgical services appear to vanish into the dining room as the *conspiratio* vanished into the *convivium*. Illich prolonged the *conspiratio* by gratuitously committing to and celebrating with the other – from David Cayley to Hugh of St Victor. Therefore, while

167 Goetel, Ivan Illich: A 1972 Interview, <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=L\\_ByKX-Cr9TA&t=1208s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_ByKX-Cr9TA&t=1208s)>, 21:00.

168 Illich, *Powerless Church*, p. 160.

169 Neto Leão, ‘Not a Clergyman Just a Man’, *Conspiratio* (Spring 2022), p. 151.

the kiss as a sign of peace has all but vanished in the contemporary church, Illich it seems, would seek to root its form in an openness to Jesus Christ as he continues to dwell, even as a 'flickering' in the present moment.<sup>170</sup> As Illich states in his later reflections with Cayley: 'faith in the Incarnation can flower in our time precisely because faith in God is obscured, and we are led to discover God in one another'.<sup>171</sup> It re-orientated his work from being preoccupied with achieving the good to gratuitously participating in goodness itself. Illich's *conspiratio* in-spires into his whole life and as such, the form of a contemporary *conspiratio* and the peace it brings should be as varied as vernacular speech - it should vary with each breath. Illich's surprising work to return peace to the Incarnation might inspire his readers and commentators to do the same and to smell, feel, and see the other as if they were Christ himself.

170 Cayley, *Rivers*, p. 36.

171 *Ibid*, p. 176.