

“Savonarola: democracy, tyranny, prophecy”.
Conference about Girolamo Savonarola
Pistoia, 23/24 May 1997*.

by Ivan Illich

Thank you, Professor Miegge,¹

Now, what should be done is to start a three-day-long discussion! Unfortunately, our host here, Father Verde,² tells

* This speech was given by Ivan Illich on 24 May 1997 to celebrate the conclusion of a two-day long conference organized by various scholars for the coming fifth centenary of Savonarola's death (1498-1998). While all the academic interventions of the participants were in the book: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia* a.c.d. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998, Illich's contribution was omitted. This speech was transcribed in Italian and then translated into English by Leonardo Christopher Eck Glenewinkel, supported by Sajay Samuel and Samar Farage. The speech itself was delivered in Italian by Ivan Illich and is still available online: <https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/94189/savonarola-democrazia-tirannide-profezia-convegno-su-girolamo-savonarola?i=2073054>. The speech itself was not in any way modified in its content, but the grammatical structure was minimally altered and adapted to the current written form for better readability; the English translation tries to follow the rhythm of the original Italian speech, but the inevitable gap between the spoken and the written form required some structural interpolations for the English-speaking audience. To contextualize and promote a better understanding of this speech, a rich apparatus of footnotes is added. It was formulated following Illich's example as he exemplified it in one of his books: "These footnotes are not meant to prove but to illustrate and qualify my arguments; they are marginal glosses written in counterpoint to the text, outlines of my lectures to students who have prepared themselves by reading this book. The notes relate to the text as formerly *quaestiones disputatae* related to the *summa*" (*Gender*, ed. New York edition, Pantheon Books, 1982, New p. vii).

1 Mario Miegge (1932-2014). During the conference M. Miegge, protestant theologian from Aosta and professor at the university of Urbino and Ferrara, participated with a piece on the interconnection between prophecy and policy during the age of Hugo Grotius and Immanuel Kant: *Profezia e politica tra Grozio e Kant*, in: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia*, a cura di Gian Carlo Garfagnini, 1998, pp. 231-242.

2 Armando Felice Verde (1926-2010). Father Verde was a Dominican friar, who was the prior of the Convento di Pistoia from 1998 to 2001. He studied at the University of Florence under the guidance of Eugenio Garin; much of his study was focused on Girolamo Savonarola. Cfr. Alessandro Cortesi, Adriano Oliva, *Una vita di studio nel convento di San Domenico a Pistoia: Padre Armando Felice Verde*, Firenze, Nerbini, 2007.

Illich, I. Savonarola: democracy, tyranny, prophecy.
Conference about Girolamo Savonarola.
Pistoia, 23/24 May 1997. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 19-45

us that this [meeting] is going to end within the next half an hour [...]³.

What I would like to know is *how* it is possible, in our world of risk, probability and virtuality, to talk [not only] about Savonarola but also about Kant, who are almost equidistant to each other.⁴ Almost! Once, for some reason, I had to work on the worst of all heretics, a prophet, who during the Middle Ages was represented –as you well know⁵– sitting on a horse and dressed like a cardinal,⁶ and this heretical cardinal had the name Mohammed. I know that in Arabic, the horse *Buraq*⁷, which then enters the *Book of Muhammed's Ladder*⁸, is seen as a nightmare on which someone can ride ... how wonderful would it be to now start such a conversation!

[But] first a confession. All my close friends here know it: I was never frightened to give a speech. This is the first time that I am frightened! My friendship for Paolo Prodi⁹ drove me

3 Here Prof. Miegge interrupts Illich saying ironically: "Sta arrivando la fine del mondo!" "The end of the world is coming!", to which Illich replies, a bit irritated: "Ah, no, hopefully not!"

4 Again Prof. Miegge interrupts Illich saying: "equally far away [from each other]!".

5 Here it is not quite possible to establish to whom Illich was talking, Father Verde or professor Miegge.

6 Here Illich is referring to iconological tradition in use during the Middle Age to represent the prophet Mohammed as an apostatic cardinal, who once was Christian but afterwards renounced his faith, becoming therefore the Prophet. Still in Dante's *Commedia*, Inf., XVIII, vv. 22-31, Mohammed is represented according to his schismatic and separating past as someone who is split in half, with his bowls hanging out of his broken body.

7 In Islamic tradition the *buraq* is a supernatural equine-like creature, which is mounted by Mohammed during his famous Night-Journeys. Abraham is also said to have sat on the back of this mythical creature.

8 The *Book of Muhammad's Ladder*, known to the West as *Liber Scalae Machometi*, is one of the first literary and historical accounts of Mohammed's Night-Journey and his ascent to heaven. However, the work is spurious and dates to the 13th century.

9 Paolo Prodi (1932-2016), famous and well known Italian historian, worked on many fields but especially on the Council of Trent (*Il Concilio di Trento come crocevia della politica europea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1979), the papacy (*Il Sovrano Pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino,

to start this foolishness, this foolish idea to conclude a meeting of great philologists, historians of philosophy etc, with an *intermezzo*, a thematic reflection, a bit like a clown who ends a great theatrical performance. It is friendship which drives me. This is not the friendship of *Phaedo's philia*,¹⁰ which leads to the flourishing of the *politeia*. That art of living together according to virtue requires a “we” —the first plural form of the personal pronoun— formed of those who were born from the womb of the same city. [However,] in my own experience –I was born in 1926– friendship doesn't rise any more from an *us*, but –in the forms I have experienced it– it rises sometimes with great surprise from a *thou*: the “thou” which has been fostered with discipline.¹¹

But why do I say this at the beginning? Because today, the organizers have chosen me to give a speech on prophecy. I remember, Paolo, how I once had the inkling that perhaps I

1982), the history of Justice (*Una storia della giustizia. Dal pluralismo dei fori al moderno dualismo tra coscienza e diritto*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000), the relationship between power and Christianity (*Cristianesimo e potere*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012), and on the relationship between prophecy and utopia (*Profezia vs utopia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013). He briefly accounts on his friendship with Illich in his book, *Giuseppe Dossetti e le Officine bolognesi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016, pp. 93–116, pp. 205–218. At the end of this book some letters of him and Illich are printed, pp. 253–271, covering the years 1968–1970.

10 *Phaedo*, also known as *De anima*, in Marsilio Ficino's first Latin translation, cfr. *Omnia Divini Platonis Opera*, ... Basilae in officina frobiana, 1532, pp. 491–521.

11 Already in his book, *In the Vineyard of the Text. A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago Press, ed. 1996, pp.15–17, Illich points out the importance of the Latin term *disciplina*; cfr. Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Notes de lexicographie philosophique médiévale: disciplina*, in: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* Vol. 25, 1936, pp. 686–92. *Disciplina* is closely related to the Greek term *Askesis*: “By askesis I mean the acquisition of habits that foster contemplation. For the believer, contemplation means the conversion to God's human face”, in: *Philosophy ... Artefacts ... Friendship*, ed. in: Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. 70: Philosophy of Technology, 1996; cfr. *Ascesis in the Age of Systems. Philosophical propaedeutics to the Christian use of instruments*; this talk was delivered to the American Catholic Philosophical Association at the annual meeting in Los Angeles, California, 23 March 1996; cfr. *Die Askese des Blicks im Zeitalter der Show - INTERFACE*. In: *Weltbilder, Bildwelten*. Computergestützte Visionen. Hrsg von Klaus-Peter Dencker, Hamburg, Hans-Bredow-Institut 1995, pp. 206–222.

too could somehow be a prophet.

So let me tell you a story! Four years ago,¹² the text I was working on during that semester, during the whole year, every Friday, from two to seven p.m., in the *Aula Magna*, was a text by Aelred of Rievaulx, a Benedictine monk from Scotland around 1100 AD. From an audience of two hundred –in order to tell you to whom I was speaking–only seventeen knew the prayer of the *Pater* in any language. The text on which I was working was *De ortu amicitiae*¹³ and this dialogue of Aelred had an incipit: “Ecce, ego, tu et spero tertius, evidente, qui est Christus”.¹⁴ But that was not what I discussed with the students during the evening in the aula. No, but I must tell you what happened with the students! Those conversations were shaped by two authors¹⁵ who in that particular year, one in London and one in Chicago, both –more or less– *respectable*¹⁶

12 In Bremen, Germany, probably around 1994. But Illich started to hold lecture on Aelred of Rievaulx already in 1992; cfr. *Texte und Fragmente. Bremer Vorlesunge in den Wintersemestern, 1991-1994*, pp. 36-37.

13 The correct title is *De spirituali amicitia*, cfr. In: *Patrologia Latina* (PL), Paris, Migne, 1855, Vol. 195, pp. 659-702. The first book of this treatise, organized as a dialogue between a master and a disciple, has the title *De ortu amicitiae*. But it should be also mentioned that there is a letter by Saint Jerome, who wrote a letter to a close friend with the same title, *De ortu amicitiae*, in: PL, Paris, Migne, Vol. 22, p. 336 [Ep. IV ad Florentinum sive de ortu amicitiae].

14 Cfr. PL, Vol. 195, p. 661 A: “Ecce ego et tu, et spero quod tertius inter nos Christus sit”; Mark F. Williams translates this passage as follows: “Here we are, you and I, and I hope that Christ makes a third with us” (in: Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Spiritual Friendship*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, London and Toronto, 1994, p. 29).

15 Here Illich is, probably, referring to Mark F. Williams in London, who in 1994 published his new translation in English of Aelred’s book, *De spirituali amicitia*. In his long introduction he dedicated a chapter entitled *Aelred on Homosexuality*, pp. 91-103. The first scholar who acknowledged Aelred’s behavior as a homosexual one is John Boswell, in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Chicago University Press, 1980, cited by M. F. Williams in his acknowledgment. The second scholar to whom Illich is, perhaps, referring is Brian Patrick McGuire and his *Brother & Lover. Aelred of Rievaulx*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.

16 The ironic doubt by which he expressed his opinion on these two scholars is vividly represented by the sound of the adjective “rispettabile”, which in his mouth was pronounced with a doubling sound on the “b”.

medievalists, had published two heavy books which presented the abbot Aelred as a model –I don't know the term in Italian– of a *gay* person. A concept, which according to my knowledge, did not exist in 1148.

Anyway, after four hours of class, two dozen students and some professors came to my home for a plate of *pastasciutta*. This *pastasciutta* is eaten in a land where another concept is unthinkable: you cannot present it –as you say in Italian– *al dente*. It's impossible!

Around 11 p.m. –with my head bursting– I went to rest in my room under the rooftop, but at around 2 in the morning I went downstairs again to the kitchen to prepare myself a cup of tea, without anyone noticing me, because there were still a dozen people discussing. And what do I hear? A professor of linguistics, a colleague of mine, says to the biologist¹⁷: “Professor Illich is smart. He knows quite well what he's doing. Look! All of us here who have earned a certain right–to enter this house, Barbara's house, with its keys¹⁸–have gotten used to lighting a candle when we meet, even if we drink just a cup of tea.” “And the professor,” she continued, “is smart, he knows what he's doing. And you know that the professor believes in this *spero tertius*. And without willing it, we all have come to suspect what he believes”. For this reason, I was happy for a moment.

Now, when the organizers sent me this invitation, I told myself: “How do I come to know about my topic when I talk about prophecy?” Therefore, I went to my computer and requested from the university library two years of periodical abstracts and articles from the social sciences and humanities about prophecy. And within two minutes I got three hundred eighty-one of them. You have them here! This word has lost

17 According to Silja Samerski, who met Ivan Illich only in 1995, some of her former colleagues.

18 Barbara Duden and her house in Bremen, Kreftingstr. 16.

all its semantic borders!

For me, the introduction to the historicity of prophecy, to the idea, as you Paolo said, that Savonarola was probably the last one who could appear to be a prophet¹⁹, opened my eyes! It opened my mind! But I don't know where all this is going to take me!

"The professor usually knows what he's doing. He eventually took inspiration from the Indios"²⁰ Yes. Yes. Yes. I started with friendship, with *philia*: the *philia* which today is the only possibility that I know of by which to establish what, in a second moment, becomes a *us*. In other ages it was the consequence [of *politeia*], when I²¹ knew how to consciously blend the wine, the *krasis* (mixture) of the wine, of a city, of a *politeia*. As far as I know, friendship is the only balance which I can oppose to utopia.²² The *ecce*²³ you see when gazing in her

19 Cfr. Paolo Prodi, *Profezia vs utopia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013.

20 Here Illich is probably integrating his story in Bremen.

21 Here Illich takes the point of view of an ancient Greek living the political life of his *polis*.

22 Illich, already in a speech in 1980 he stated: "... con tutta la disciplina a mia disposizione, insufficiente, - mi critico io stesso per il [mio] passato - cerco di parlare di quello che *non* è possibile; cerco di evitare, sempre, l'utopia, la descrizione di quello che *dovrebbe* essere [...] la buona legge che tratta dell'habitat dovrebbe, anzitutto, essere una legge proscrittiva e non una legge prescrittiva, una legge che dice quello che non puoi fare, che nessuno può, nemmeno il governo può fare, e non una legge che dice quello che per ognuno si *deve* fare" (Convegno "Autocostruzione e tecnologie conviviali", Rimini, 1 marzo 1980).

23 Here the Latin term *ecce*, taken from Aelred's before mentioned incipit, defines the incarnation of the Other, my vis-à-vis. *Ecce* is an exclamation which can be translated with "Look, there!" or "Here, he/she is!", like in the famous biblical phrase: *Ecce homo!* Erich Auerbach (1892-1957) on the word *ecce* wrote: "This is found less frequently in the elevated style than in Plautus, in Cicero's letters, in Apuleius, etc., and especially in the Vulgate. When Abraham takes the knife to sacrifice his son Isaac, we read: *et ecce Angelus Domini de caelo clamavit, dicens: Abraham, Abraham*. I think this linguistic maneuver, which effects so sharp an interruption [scharf unterbrechende Sprachbewegung], is too harsh to stem from the elevated style of classical Latin; but it corresponds perfectly with the elevated style of the Bible. And furthermore, Dante uses the Biblical *et ecce verbatim* on another occasion where a state of affairs is interrupted by a sudden, though not quite so dramatic occurrence [Ereignis]" (in: *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard R. Trask, 1953, pp. 180-

eyes and seeing in the *pupilla*—this strange thing about which [Titus] Livius and others have very interesting texts—through which I receive *Ivan* from her²⁴, because I cannot meet nor find *him* elsewhere. This *ecce* is the only response I can develop against—and now I'm saying something very risky—the tyranny of our days, which is the tyranny of need. I would like to talk about that!

But let us return to Paolo Prodi. I immediately obeyed because he, more than a friend, is a *maestro*²⁵ of the historical enterprise done by a believer. He –more than anybody else except Gerhard Ladner²⁶ –left a visible impression on my mind. Ladner opened my eyes to the fact that the *reformation*, after which comes the *revolution*, is a concept which was mediated by the Gospel. And it was he who helped me to think about this peculiar problem.²⁷ As an historian, I

181). I don't know if Illich was aware of this passage, but in his book *In the Vineyard of the Text* he mentions Auerbach's books, especially *Mimesis*, in his bibliography.

24 Here the *pupilla* becomes the mirror in which the individual, Ivan or whoever, sees himself as reflected in someone else's eyes. Here the human being becomes literally an *I* thanks to the *thou*; cfr. Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (1923): "Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich". In the English translation: "Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I*", in: *I and Thou*, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1937, p. 28.

25 I would like to maintain the word *maestro* instead of teacher because it is closer to the Latin word *magister* with all the connotations of devotion and respect.

26 Gerhard B. Ladner (1905-1993): "One of the *great* and overwhelming fortunes of my life has been the teachers I've had, and among them, Gerhart Ladner is one of the foremost. He is a professor of medieval history, mainly of the history of images, of iconography, in the Middle Ages, a very learned man who in the early 1960s wrote the first volume of a work which will probably remain unfinished. The second, he might finish as a gift to me. For the third, he's too old now, he'll die before he writes it. His book deals with the idea of reform. Reform, in Latin, means turning around, like a wheel, *revolutio*. In this first book, Ladner looks at the end of antiquity, Roman antiquity, and notices that three characteristic types of *revolutio*, turning around, or *reformare*, putting back into form, can be conceived", in: *Ivan Illich in Conversation. The Testament of Ivan Illich* ed. by David Cayley, Toronto, Anansi, 1992, pp. 210-211.

27 Cfr. *The Idea of Reform Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* by G. B. Ladner, Harvard, Cambridge, 1959. G. B. Ladner is quoted by Illich already in his book *Limits to Medicine. Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, New York, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 182 in a bibliographic footnote, as well in *Gender*, 1982,

must recognize that there were people who believed in personal reformation, in conversion as the only contribution which can be done—to change myself so that I can change the world. And it is Paolo Prodi who has said what yesterday Professor Leonardi²⁸ had beautifully called “la conoscenza soprannaturale per profezia,”²⁹ referring it to *this* concrete historical person: me! But more than anything else, it was the love and the esteem of this disciple³⁰ that drove me to say “yes” to Paolo, despite my great discomfort.

May I be excused for talking in such ways about an experience. The audience will understand that otherwise I have no clue how to conclude this very rich *paella* –I don’t know how to say it in Italian– this *pasticcio fantastico*³¹, because I deeply believe it is absurd that I should speak on

New York, Pantheon Books, p. 6, pp. 158-159, and of course in his famous book on Hugo of Saint Victor: *In the Vineyard of the Text A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago University Press, 1996, p. 5, p. 17, p. 19, pp. 31-32: “whose grateful pupil I am”.

28 Claudio Leonardi (1926-2010). He was a very important medievalist who, beside an intensive academic life, concentrated all his intellectual effort to reshape the idea of the *Latin* Middle Age as a specific cultural manifestation and interpretation of this peculiar historical period of the West. His magnum opus *Medioevo Latino. La cultura dell'Europa Cristiana*, Firenze, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004, is the concrete result of this intellectual enterprise. Leonardi especially highlighted Savonarola's figure as historical and not as an apocalyptic prophet: “Savonarola non ha interessi apocalittici ma storici” (p. 739). He places Savonarola (cfr. pp. 693-740) in a long line of specific individuals who shaped this particular type of historic prophecy: from Gregorius Magnus to Caterina da Siena, passing through the spirituality of Thomas Becket, Jean d'Arc and finally Thomas Morus. For Leonardi, martyrdom and prophecy shared a common, deeply historical, dimension. Here I would like to thank *ex imo cordis* Alice Musso because of whom- I discovered all this.

29 “The supernatural knowledge thanks to prophecy”; cfr. Thomas Aquinas, *In de divinis nominibus*, cap. 2, lec. IV: “[unitionem per fidei] *indicibilem*, idest quae humano magisterio doceri non potest; *et mysticam*, idest occultam, quia excedit naturalem cognitionem.”

30 Illich speaks about himself.

31 In Italian *pasticcio* means “mess”, something confused and unformed, but it also defines a common dish where pasta, ragù, and cheese are put all together in the oven. Like a *paella* where different elements are mixed together, a *pasticcio* becomes the gastronomic emblem for a combination of different things which then create something new.

this topic. My competence in this matter—Florence in its last decades of the Quattrocento or Savonarola [himself]—is abysmal compared to the academics here, this dozen scholars to whom Father Verde—to whom I say: two times *felice*³²—has exposed us. My competence is abysmal because until the day you, Paolo, called me in Mexico, I was—I didn't find a dictionary today in this beautiful library— *vergine*³³ in front of Fra Girolamo. And as you may see immediately, I didn't lose this *verginità*. Some months later, this more than seventy-year-old man had to say to him: "This time, Girolamo, you caught me!"³⁴ I cannot add anything to the knowledge about this man or his background. However, I do know one thing about prophecy. I did for theology the same thing I did for the social sciences, and I was surprised by how much the concept of prophecy in the Old Testament has changed in the last thirty years. I want people to understand that prophets do not appear among the Jews, but the Jews appear because there were prophets. The causality is reversed!

32 Here Illich is playing with words: Felice, is the second name of Father Verde, Armando Felice Verde, and at the same time *felice* in Italian means "happy". So, in this sense he is happy twice: for his name and for the occasion.

33 *Vergine* means "virgin", but in a deeper sense, also, "untouched", "pure", "innocent".

34 I would like to underline how in the original text, "Questa volta, Girolamo, m'hai colto" the verb *cogliere* means not only to "catch", but also to "harvest" (*raccogliere la frutta*), to "pick up" (*raccogliere qualcosa*), to "perceive" (*cogliere qualcosa*), to "surprise" (*cogliere di sorpresa*), to "caught red-handed" (*cogliere in fallo*).

Here Illich, in his Italian speech, is somehow echoing some words by Savonarola himself, who said: "Orsù, uditemi. Iddio, tu mi hai colto [...] Gesù aiutami: questa volta tu m'hai colto", cit. in: *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola* di Roberto Ridolfi, terza edizione, Sansoni editore, 1974, prima parte, p. 390. An English translation of this text is available as *The Life of Giovanni Savonarola* by R. Ridolfi, translated by Cecil Greyson, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1959, p. 263. If we compare the pages to which Illich refers in his notes *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), pp. 161-166, we can establish that this was the edition on which he worked to prepare this speech.

This passage, where Savonarola begs in front of the Lord Jesus for forgiveness because he, Girolamo, renounced him because of fear and pain, is already reported by P. Villari in his *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi narrate da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti*, Firenze, Felice de Monnier, 1861, p. 197, and in its appendix, Documenti: CCXVIII, CCXCII.

All I can do is to explain the effect which it had on me, not the person you see present now, but on the person³⁵ who came in first contact with these slopes, these Pre-Alps –this huge mountain of books which go under Savonarola’s [name]– [all] these studies on Frate *Giovanni* Savonarola –it was really beautiful, you couldn’t foresee it.³⁶

It made me laugh when the ecclesiastical authorities insisted three times on *Giovanni*, because when I arrived in New York³⁷, instead of going to Princeton where Kantorowicz³⁸ was waiting for me to write a thesis, I discovered the Puerto Ricans. I applied for work in a Puerto Rican parish as a young priest of twenty-five years. I entered to meet monsignor Casey, but while going up the stairs, where I saw my first television showing MacCarthy between his lawyers, Casey asks me³⁹ “Excuse me, but don’t you have a *Christian* name?”

35 This passage is quite unclear. Probably Illich talks about his “older” self, when he just began to work on Savonarola.

36 At this point Illich starts to grunt and to laugh like a teenager pleased by his own joke. Savonarola’s name is purposely changed from Girolamo to *Giovanni*.

37 Ivan Illich arrived in New York by ship in Winter 1951. Cfr. *Ivan Illich (1926-2002). Sein Leben und Denken* by Martina Kaller-Dietrich, Wien, Bibliothek der Provinz, 2007, p. 51; *Ivan Illich. Cronologia della vita* by Fabio Milana, in: *Pervertimento del cristianesimo. Conversazioni con David Cayley su vangelo, chiesa, modernità*, a cura di Fabio Milana, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2008, pp. 128-129.

38 Ernst Kantorowicz (1895-1963). Famous medievalist and historian, author of *The King’s Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957). As far as I know, this is the first record by Illich on Kantorowicz, who after the famous events of the *Fundamental Issue* was called from Berkely to Princeton on 29 December 1950 by Oppenheimer. Cfr. *Ernst Kantorowicz. Eine Biographie* by Robert E. Lerner, Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2020, p. 396 (Engl. orig. *Ernst Kantorowicz. A Life*, Princeton University Press, 2017). According to Illich previous accounts he went to Princeton because: «I thought of doing a postdoctoral thesis [...] on alchemy in the work of Albert the Great. There are some very good documents at Princeton, and I had an invitation», in: Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 84. This «invitation» could have been issued by Kantorowicz, but also by an old friend, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), who was lecturing in Princeton on Thomas Aquinas. Cfr. *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 61-62. Kantorowicz was also a good friend of Gerhard B. Ladner, both met in Berlin in Autumn 1929 at the MGH-Bibliothek, and together with Ernst Robert Curtius Ladner was a visiting member in Princeton in Autumn 1949; cfr. R. Lerner, *op. cit.*, 2020, p. 166-168, p. 395. On the relation between Illich and G. B. Ladner, see fn. 27.

39 This story was already told in 1970: “In 1951 Father Ivan Illich, a young Euro-

I say: "Ivan, Johannes". [Casey]: "Ah, that's all right! We will call you Father Johnny."⁴⁰ I lived for five years as Johnny Illich, or Don Juan for *los puertorriqueños*. Father Verde, it was this symbolic gesture of the [ecclesiastical] authority that you could not foresee.⁴¹

This morning, during your virtuous *canto*⁴²—I heard it as I say it because it was a speech but also a *canto*— I continuously thought about Savonarola, not as [he is] usually discussed—as an incarnation of contradiction, or a coat-hanger of an *arrabbiato*,⁴³ or complexions of a *cordero*,⁴⁴—but as vis-

pean recently ordained in Rome, had arrived in the United States and been assigned to a church in New York's Washington Heights, a conservative Irish neighborhood which was receiving a startling influx of Puerto Rican immigrants. He was welcomed to his parish by its pastor, Monsignor Casey, a hearty Irishman who had once served as secretary to Cardinal Spellman. "Ivan Illich?" Monsignor Casey asked incredulously as he greeted his new curate. "What kind of a name is that to go around with?" "Ivan is Johann, Jean, John", the young priest answered affably, always enjoying his control of many languages. "Ivan sounds Communist", said his superior, "we'll call you Johnny", in: *Divine Disobedience. Profiles in Catholic Radicalism* by Francine du Plessix Gray, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1970, p. 241.

40 Here Illich, talking directly in English, mimics the broad Irish-New Yorker accent of monsignor Casey.

41 Here Illich draws a direct line between the incorrect naming of Savonarola's name, *Giovanni* instead of Girolamo, and his own name, *Ivan*, the Slavic version of Giovanni, which was "transformed" by the same ecclesiastical authority in *John*. Playfully, Illich identifies this as an invisible and spiritual bondage between him, Ivan, and *Giovanni* (sic!) Savonarola, both "equally heretics".

42 Father Verde's held a speech, *Girolamo Savonarola: ideologo e profeta. Il quaresimale del 1491*, in: in: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia*, a cura di Gian Carlo Garfagnani, SISMELE, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998, pp. 127-147. I have preferred to maintain the Italian word *canto*, instead of "song", because it is directly linked to the Latin word *cantum*, which has to the traditions of hymns in honor of God but also to the Italian verb *incantare*, to "enchant", to "putt a spell". Father Verde's *canto virtuoso* was a powerful hymn which enchanted the audience.

43 A man full of rage and anger. However, this term should not be linked to the political faction of the *arrabbiati* present in Florence during the Medici's era, since this political "party" was related to papal Rome and Ludovico il Moro, duke of Milan. They contrasted the Medici family but, at the same time, they were anti-savonarolian because they fought for an aristocratic republic. Therefore, their historical rivals were the Piagnoni, those who were filo-savonarolian.

44 "Lamb" in Spanish.

age, as a face, as a gaze. Savonarola died a *bella morte*,⁴⁵ and when you spoke, I told myself: “This man is so right! Yes!”

However, your words did not say anything about what most fascinated *me* about this man, what happened to *me* during the last fifty days of reading him. Because his writings, conceived in the moment when Savonarola was confronted with his own death, that had the greatest influence—which destiny gave me to verify, not in Tuscany, but beyond the Arno, beyond the Apennine Mountains, beyond the Pyrenees, beyond the Ocean—were those written in his last days. Already in 1939, Vicente Beltrán de Heredia⁴⁶ documented the influence of these writings on the reformation under Cisneros⁴⁷ in Spain, on the convents of Toledo, on the Colegio de San Gregorio de Valladolid.

For some reason this remains forgotten: this was a Savonarolian convent, a place where the *via espiritual* and the *Libro de la Oración y meditation* by Luis de Granada⁴⁸ were conceived.⁴⁹ But that is my fault! I’m the curator—as

45 *Bella morte*. This expression means literally “beautiful death” and it recalls a long tradition which the Middle Ages categorized in the title *De bono modo moriendi*, an invitation to practice the *ars moriendi*: cfr. Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, 1974. Illich knew Ariès quite well (cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 75-77). It is also very interesting that Claudio Leonardi, who was in Pistoia too, in his book *Medioevo latino. La cultura dell'Europa cristinana*, 2004, entitled one of his chapters on Savonarola: “L’arte del ben morire di Girolamo Savonarola”, pp. 693-702. Cfr. in: *Una città e il suo profeta. Firenze di fronte a Savonarola. Atti del convegno internazionale (Firenze, 10-13 dicembre)*, 1998, pp. 119-128.

46 Vicente Beltrán de Heredia (1885-1973) was a famous scholar at the University of Salamanca who studied deeply the spiritual currents, which wanted a reformation of the Spanish Christendom: *Historia de la reforma de la provincia de España (1450-1550)*, Roma, 1939; *Las corrientes de espiritualidad entre los dominicos de Castilla durante la primera mitad del siglo XVI*, in: *Miscelánea Beltrán de Heredia*, 1973, Pt. 3, p. 519-671. He also wrote on Antonio de Nebrija: *Nebrija y los teólogos de San Esteban de principios del siglo XVI*, in: *Ciencia Tomista* 191/4 (1932), pp. 37-65.

47 Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517).

48 Luis de Granda (1504-1588).

49 *Libro de la Oracion y Meditacion: en el qual fe trata de la Consideracion de los principales mysterios de nuestra Fe, con otras cosas provechosas*, Compuesto por Fray

you may know⁵⁰—together with Valentina Borremans of this fantastic enterprise: 98 percent of printed books, pamphlets and stamped stuff with the ecclesiastical *imprimatur*, from 1820 onwards, has never been catalogued. They are considered ecclesiastical byproducts. And we catalogued hundred thousand of them and we inscribed them on microfilm.⁵¹ But, again, my fault! I never collected, until now, the works by Luis de Granada and never took note of Savonarola's influence in these books. Bataillon,⁵² by simplifying it, sees in Luis de Granada the synthesis of Erasmus⁵³ and the theology of the cross of Fra Girolamo.

Let us admit that this can take us a bit too far away. I have shown you this citation [to a homily by] the great bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo⁵⁴ of Cuernavaca, who had reformed his

Luys de Granada de la Orden de sancto Domingo. Impresso en Salamanca, en casa de Andrea de Portonaris, 1554.

50 I suppose Illich is still referring to Father Verde.

51 Cfr. *History of Religiosity in Latin America, c. 1830–1970*, The CIDOC Collection, Edited by Valentina Borremans with the assistance of Ivan Illich. The difficulties endorsed in this path were clarified by Ivan Illich in a letter to Paolo Prodi, dated 15 January 1970, where he recalls how the ecclesiastic power sabotaged his work by burning important documents: “Quanto alla questione della ricerca che dobbiamo facilitare in America del Sud vado da fregatura in fregatura. Il cardinale di Lima ha fatto bruciare la stanza dove avevo dei libri [d]a collettare (aveva bisogno di un ufficio per la Caritas) e le suore della compagnia di S. Paolo, su ordine di un prete americano a Lima, hanno bruciato 4 casse grandi nelle quali avevo raccolto la collezione più completa di lettere pastorali, giornaletti di chiesa etc. del Perù dell'ultimo secolo: dicendo che era pericoloso che questo cada nelle mie mani! Dallo stomaco monta verso il cuore una certa stanchezza”, in: Prodi, *op. cit.*, 2016, pp. 270–271.

52 Marcel Bataillon (1895–1977), French Hispanist who mainly worked on Hispanic spirituality in 16th Spain; cfr. *Erasme et l'Espagne: recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVI^e siècle*, Paris: Droz; Bordeaux: Feret & Fils, 1937; *Sur la diffusion des oeuvres de Savonarola en Espagne et en Portugal (1500–1560)*, in: *Mélanges de philologie d'histoire et de littérature offerts à Joseph Vianey*, Paris, 1934. This work by Bataillon is cited by de Heredia, *Historia de la reforma de la provincia de España (1450–1550)*, Roma, 1939, p. 128.

53 Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536).

54 Sergio Mendez Arceo (1907–1992) was the bishop of Cuernavaca from 1953 to 1983, and he supported Ivan Illich, when in 1961 he founded the CIDOC. An intellectual double-portrait of Arceo and Illich is found in: Francine du Plessix Gray, *op. cit.*,

dioceses. In it, I found, looking for Savonarola, this phrase by the seventh bishop of Cuernavaca, as [Mendez] used to call himself: “Decirle a un obispo que es profeta no es añadirle nada. ¡Es decir que es obispo!”⁵⁵ Take note of how the Church can deal with someone, even if he is a good man like Mendez, who studied the influence of Erasmus on the first ecclesiastical foundations in Latin America! He doesn’t use the name *Giovanni*, but he says the same thing regarding prophecy.

For my part, when I said “Girolamo, this time you amazed me, this time you caught me,”⁵⁶ it was because of this beautiful sentence from the *Miserere*⁵⁷ about his very last day when all things have turned into torment and bitterness: “Let the abyss of misery be absorbed by the abyss of mercy.”⁵⁸ I meditated [on this sentence], and I say that in a very personal way, every day over the last two and a half months.

Let me immediately talk about the meeting of the three brothers⁵⁹ in case someone does not know this last

1970, pp. 233-322.

55 Kindly translated by the help of Jose-Antonio from Madrid, who translated and reported as follows: “To tell a bishop that he is a prophet is not to add anything to him. It is saying that he is a bishop”. Illich borrowed this sentence from *Compromiso cristiano y liberación*, Mexico, Centro de estudios ecuménicos, 1985, Vol. 2, p. 366. Large excerpts of this text are found in Illich’s note, in: *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), pp. 158-159.

56 Cfr. fn. 35.

57 Cfr. Vulgata Latina, Ps. 50: 3.

58 Illich is quoting from *L’Ultimo Scritto Di Fra Girolamo Savonarola Il Salmo Miserere Mei Deus Commentato In Carcere*, Milano, ed. Lodovico Ferretti, 1901, p. 18; the Latin text: “abyssus peccatorum invocat abyssum gratiarum. Maior est abyssus misericordiae quam abyssum miseriae. Absorbeat ergo abyssus abyssum. Absorbeat abyssus misericordiae abyssum miseriae. (Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam) Non secundum misericordiam hominum: quae parva est. Sed secundum tuam: quae magna est: quae immensa est: quae incomprehensibilis est. Quae omnia peccata in immensum excedit”, in: *Fratris Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis Expositiones in psalmos*, 1517, Venetiis, XVIII [v].

59 Savonarola was hanged, and his body burned, on May 23, 1498, in Florence, together with him, Fra Domenico Buonvicini (1450ca.-1498) and Fra Silvestro Maruffi (1461-1498).

day! I cite directly from Ridolfi's book.⁶⁰ [Savonarola] speaks [to] Fra Domenico: "It has been revealed to me that you desire to be burned alive. Know you not that it is not permitted to choose one's manner of dying, but that you must joyfully accept that which is prepared for you by God? Who knows whether you will be able to bear that which is made ready for you?"⁶¹ And then he turns to Fra Silvestro, about whom another text says: "qui timidissimum omnium [...] futuraeque mortis horrore tremebundus"⁶² –this is what the text says–, and tells him that he [Savonarola] knows already that he, [Fra Silvestro] wants to declare their innocence before being burned alive, and says to him: "And it has been revealed to me that you intend before dying to protest to the people that we are innocent. You must not do that, for not even Christ proclaimed his innocence from the cross."⁶³ And both kneel and Frate Domenico starts [to say]: "Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum."⁶⁴ Fi-

60 Roberto Ridolfi (1899-1991) was an important writer and poet, writing books on Machiavelli, Guicciardini and Savonarola. He edited the major biography of the monk in 1952, which quickly became canonical, even if a certain hagiographical tone displeased certain people. As already said, (cfr. fn. 35) Illich used Ridolfi's book *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, terza edizione, Sansoni editore, 1974. An English translation of this text is available as *The Life of Giovanni Savonarola* by R. Ridolfi, translated by Cecil Greyson, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1959. The following direct quotes are taken from this edition.

61 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 267; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 397.

62 Here Illich is citing from the first biography on Savonarola, written few years after his death by Gioan Francesco Il Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533), nephew of the more famous Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), but published only in the 17th century in France: *Vita R. P. Fr. Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis, Parisi, sumptibus Ludovici Billaine*, 1674, Vol. II, p. 90: "qui timidissimum omnium ad id usque temporis fuerat, futuraeque mortis horrore tremebundus." Illich notes this Latin phrase in his notes too: *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), p. 163, fn. 17. Illich's cited Latin text-part can be translated as follows: "... he, who was so deeply frightened by everything [...], was quivering because of the horror of coming death".

63 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, pp. 267-268; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 397:

64 Here Illich quotes from Savonarola, *op. cit.*, 1679, p. 90; cfr. *Vulgata Clementina*, Ps. 132: 1: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (in: Saint James Bible, Ps. 133, 1).

nally, he leaves and those sent by the General, come “to strip them off the habit [and Savonarola] “flevit”⁶⁵! In Mexico we are used to this, because the *hidalgos* in Morelos—[the federal Mexican] state in which I live—still during the Revolution of 1820, had their internal organs, which were consecrated before killing them, cut away.

And, finally, comes the declaration that they are “heretics and schismatics”⁶⁶, in front of [Francesco] Romolino⁶⁷, who not only condemns them, but who also says: “It pleases His Holiness to free you from the pains of Purgatory, giving you plenary indulgence for your sins, and restoring you to your pristine innocence. Do you accept this? And the [heretical and schismatic] friars piously bowed their heads and signified their consent.”⁶⁸

What happened here? I cannot ever forget these three bowed heads. Expelled, separated from the community, they accept the indulgence, which the *boia*⁶⁹—you say *boia*, right?—grants them. They die testifying in name of the Church. I believe that this attitude is the attitude by which I can indicate the direction towards which I have tried to act over

65 Savonarola “shed tears” when they strip him off his “holy habit”. Here Illich quotes from Savonarola, *op. cit.*, 1674, pp. 89-90: “In descendendis autem Patatij gradibus, spoliatus Religionis habitu, quem ubi comprehendit minibus, flevit, eum se olim appetivisse cupidè, & immaculatum hactenus custodivisse testatus”; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 399: “O abito santo, quanto t’ho desiderato! Dio mi ti tenne, e insino a ora t’ho conservato immacolato; e ora io non ti lascerei, ma tu mi sei tolto!”; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 269.

66 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 265; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 393.

67 Francesco Romolino [alias Francisco de Remolins, 1462-1518], future bishop of Fermo (1503), was the head of the papal legates, sent to Florence by Pope Alexander VI Borgia (1403-1503) to judge Savonarola.

68 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 270; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 401.

69 Executioner.

these thirty-five years of apophatic ecclesiology.⁷⁰ [With their bowed heads] they prophesize⁷¹—but not with their promises, not with the threat of torments⁷² and not even with their suffering⁷³—the face of Jesus, which they disclose and which is

70 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 65: “When I studied theology, my preferred subject was ecclesiology, which is the scientific study of that particular community which the Church conceives as its ideal, and has since the fourth century. It is the first attempt to study a social phenomenon which is not the state, nor the law, as such. Ecclesiology, therefore, can be taken, in a funny but very real way, as the predecessor of sociology but with a tradition about twenty times as long as sociology since Durkheim. Now I was very much interested in the traditions and the disputes about this phenomenon, which really exists only in Western culture, of a community which claims to be as all-embracing, as catholic, as the state — or what civil law governs — and yet claims to be independent from it.” Friends like Lee Hoinacki, Barry Sanders, Domenico Farias and Jean Robert have pointed out how the ‘apophatic theology’ is the central core of Illich’s spirituality; cfr. *The Challenges of Ivan Illich. A Collective Reflection*, ed. by Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, New York, State University Press, 2002, p. 12, p. 68, p. 100, p. 178.

71 The Greek word προφητεία reminds us that a prophet not simply “says something” but it always “says something in front of someone”: you prophesize only *coram Deo*, in front of the face of God.

72 Illich is here following, more or less, the division of prophecy in three main groups, following Thomas Aquinas: *prophetia praedestinationis*, *prophetia prescientiae*, *prophetia comminationis*, in: *De Veritate*, q. 12, a. 10; *Summa Theologiae*, II^a-II^{ae}, q. 174, a. 1.

73 Usually, the original Italian term *gesto* is translated with “action” because in Latin, the word *gestum* or *gesta* in its plural form indicates exactly what in English resembles “deeds” or “actions”. However, Giorgio Agamben has also pointed out that Varro, who: “taking up the Aristotelian distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, doing and acting, introduces among them a third type of action (*tertium genus agendi*), which he expresses by means of the verb *gerere*. [...] Those who *gerunt* are not limited to acting, but in the very act in which they carry out their action, they at the same time stop it, expose it, and hold it at a distance from themselves” (*Karman. A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture*, Stanford University Press, California, 2017, pp. 83-84). Therefore, Agamben continues: “Gesture is not in fact simply lacking a work but instead defines its own special activity through the neutralization of the works to which it is linked as means” (ibidem., p. 84). Sajay Samuel has brilliantly pointed out how the specific term “gesture” becomes, in Illich’s spiritual horizon, equivalent to his notion of “suffering”, which for him was the *gestum gestorum*, the main gesture among all other gestures. Cfr. Illich: “I believe in the art of suffering, in the art of dying, in the art of living, and, so long as it is in an austere and clear-sighted way, in the art of enjoyment, the art of living it up” (in: *Ivan Illich in Conversation, The Testament of Ivan Illich* ed. by David Cayley, Toronto, Anansi, 1992, p. 189). Therefore, I translate the Italian term “gesto” with “suffering”.

disclosed within them,⁷⁴ as the acceptance of powerlessness!⁷⁵

74 The *vultus Dei*, this supreme gift (donum) given to mankind though the mediation and incarnation of the Son, is also a gift which can be shared in the terms of *conspiratio*; Thomas Aquinas defines "gift" as follows: "... donum vocatur gratia gratis data, quia supra facultatem naturae, et supra meritum personae, homini conceditur, sed quia non datur ad hoc ut homo ipse per eam iustificetur, sed potius ut ad iustificationem alterius cooperetur, ideo non vocatur gratum faciens»" in: *Summa Theologiae*, II, q. 111. a. 1. [resp. dic.]. So, the "face of Jesus" is disclosed in the hearts of these monks not according to a *gratia gratus faciens*, which refers to martyrdom, but according to a *gratia gratis data*, which refers to prophecy. Cfr Illich's definition of "gratuity" (Umsonstigkeit); cfr. *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich*, Toronto, Anansi, 2005, p. 227.

75 I'm translating *impotenza* here with "powerlessness" according to the distinction made by Illich himself few weeks later in his interview with David Cayley in Mai 1997; cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 182: "What I want to cultivate, in myself, and with friends, is not impotence but powerlessness, a powerlessness which does not forego awareness of the here and now between the Jew and the Samaritan". The Italian translation is in trouble here because it translates "impotence" with *impotenza* and "powerlessness" with *assenza di potere* (cfr. *I fiumi a nord del future. Testamento raccolto da David Cayley*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2005, p. 177), while the German translation is more precise by translating "impotence" as *Unvermögen* and "powerlessness" as *Ohnmacht* (cfr. *In den Flüssen nördlich der Zukunft. Letzte Gespräche über Religion und Gesellschaft mit David Cayley*, C.H. Beck, 2020, p. 208). I suggest translating to Italian "impotence" with *impossibilità di potere* and "powerlessness" with *assenza di potere* or, directly, with *impotenza*. Illich in 1991 uses the German term *Ohnmacht* in order to delineate his own position toward the term "Responsibility", in: Ivan Illich, *Die Substantivierung des Lebens im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert - eine Herausforderung für das 21. Jahrhundert*, in: *Was macht den Menschen krank? 18 kritische Analysen*, Springer Basel AG, herg. von Klaus Jork etc., p. 226: „Was die Epoche seit der Kristallnacht bestimmt, ist die anwachsende Selbstverständlichkeit des bodenlos Bösen, das Hitler und Stalin noch vertuscht haben, das aber heute zum Thema für die gehobene Diskussion über Atom, Gen, Gift, Gesundheit und Wachstum geworden ist. Das sind Übel und Verbrechen, vor denen wir sprachlos sind. Ungleich Tod, Pest und Teufel, lassen sich diese Übel nicht nützen. Sie sind unmenschlicher Ordnung. Sie zwingen uns zur Ohnmacht, Hilflosigkeit, Gewaltlosigkeit, *ahimsa*. An diesem Bösen können wir leiden, wir können an ihm zerbrechen, aber es nicht deuten. Erleiden kann es nur der, der in Geduld sich und seine Freunde gut leiden kann. Unser «Nein!» ist also himmelweit entfernt von jedem Ja' zu den Begleiterscheinungen des Fortschrittes"; cfr. *Gesundheit in eigener Verantwortung: Nein Danke!* in: Ivan Illich, *Selbstbegrenzung. Eine politische Kritik der Technik*, Beck'sche Reihe, 1998, pp. 164-175.

In 1980, during the Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie in Bad Boll, Illich said about his concept of powerlessness: „Irgendwie wird Ohnmacht als etwas angesehen was überwunden und ausgeschaltet werden muß. Ich glaube, Ohnmacht überwindet man dadurch, daß man leiden lernt [...] und der Mensch, der nicht leiden können will, ist typisch der Mensch, der an den Fortschritt glaubt" (cit. in: *Gruppen und Klassen-Menschen und Bürokraten-Lebensstile und Massenmärkte*, in: Protokolldienst Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll Vol. 13, 1980, pp.13-26, p. 18).

Illich already in his essay *The Eloquence of Silence* spoke about this: "It is the mys-

Now, our meeting here was not only—as I believed—about prophecy but also about the *relation* between tyranny and prophecy [...].⁷⁶ I don't know if —because of this invitation you made me—what I started to grasp here with great surprise can be considered *doctrina communis*⁷⁷ or not. But in the sense that the prophet is an individual who appears somewhere in Palestine, and a community is formed just because there is a prophet —it is not possible any more to be a prophet today. You⁷⁸ said the same thing—excuse me if I'm exaggerating another time and I drive you crazy: let us say that you are very patient with me, but you gave me the possibility to say what I want—something like the tyranny of what [today] is called “need”, something which was unimaginable for Savonarola, not to mention Amos.⁷⁹

What am I trying to say? Father Verde, forgive me for the way I talk here—I will write it down in a more appropriate manner.⁸⁰ There is this Palestinian —no, you don't say Palestinian, you say Samaritan, but he is [in fact] a Palestin-

terious silence through which the Lord could descend into the silence of hell, the acceptance without frustration of a life, useless, and wasted on Judas, a silence of freely willed powerlessness through which the world was saved. Born to redeem the world, Mary's Son had died at the hands of His people, abandoned by His friends and betrayed by Judas whom He loved but could not save—silent contemplation of the culminating paradox of the Incarnation which was useless for the redemption of at least one personal friend”, in: *Celebration of Awareness. A Call for Institutional Revolution*, Anchor's Books, 1971, p. 37.

76 At this point Illich interrupts his speech to ask if he still has fifteen or sixteen minutes to talk.

77 Common knowledge or opinion.

78 Here Illich is probably referring to Father Verde.

79 Amos, the third of the Twelve Minor Prophets in the Old Testament, and the second in the Greek *Septuaginta*.

80 Illich intended to write down, in Italian, together with Lee Hoinacki a more articulated version of this conference but, for one reason or another, this project was never completed. I thank Fabio Milana for this information.

ian—whose deed⁸¹ Jesus⁸² does not take as an answer to how I ought to behave towards my neighbor. That is the canonical interpretation of this passage, which we discovered when we once studied it in hundreds of cases. But rather the question is ‘who is my neighbor?’⁸³ And Jesus says: “Who you want, who *you* choose!” By saying that, Jesus broke, in a certain way, the frame of decency. Zeus [was] Xenios⁸⁴ for the Greeks but not for the barbarians.⁸⁵ [But] Jesus made and, as in many other things—and I take this as a particular example—turned topsy-turvy the tradition of hospitality in such a way that I can actually *choose*! And what does the Church do in order to realize that? [It creates] the institution!

Confronted with that, I would like to be like Savonarola [...].⁸⁶ The Church establishes the *xenodocheia* (ξενοδοχεῖα)

81 Cfr. fn. 74.

82 Cfr. Luke, 10: 25-37.

83 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 50-51: “Jesus tells the story in response to the question of “a certain lawyer,” that is, a man versed in the Law of Moses, who asks, “Who is my neighbor?” [...] Once, some thirty years ago, I made a survey of sermons dealing with this story of the Samaritan from the early third century into the nineteenth century, and I found out that most preachers who commented on that passage felt that it was about how one ought to behave towards one’s neighbor, that it proposed a rule of conduct, or an exemplification of ethical duty. I believe that this is, in fact, precisely the opposite of what Jesus wanted to point out. He had not been asked, how should one behave towards one’s neighbor, but rather, who is my neighbor? And what he said, as I understand it, was, My neighbor is who I choose, not who I have to choose. There is no way of categorizing who my neighbor ought to be”.

84 This was one of the titles given to Zeus in his mythical form of protector of the strangers of Hellenic tongue looking for refuge and shelter.

85 The Greek term *xénos*, which is usually translated as “stranger”, indicates within the historic background of Classic Greece only the Greek-speaking stranger: an Athenian was a “stranger” to a Spartan, but both recognize the mutual belonging to the same “Greekness”; all the others were simply “barbarians”. Therefore, *xénia*, the Greek term for “hospitality”, is usually granted only to those belonging to the Hellenic cultural community. Cfr. Maria Elena De Luna, *La comunità linguistica fra alloglotti nel mondo greco. Da Omero a Senofonte*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 2003.

86 Here Illich stops and loudly complains about his personal physical state, but he never fails to reply ironically, even to himself: “my head is dizzy, I should receive some indulgences, but ...”. Illich laughs.

this extraordinary invention, the houses for the poor, for the miserable, an institution, which never existed in other parts of the world. And, immediately, John Chrysostom⁸⁷ replies, in the same year of the so-called Constantinian Peace⁸⁸: “Don’t do that! Otherwise, what characterizes a household, the threshold of a Christian, and the fact that there is a mattress and a bit of candle, in case Jesus should knock⁸⁹, will become obsolete.”⁹⁰

I must thank Jean Daniélou⁹¹ who opened my eyes to this event, because he knew a Chinese person who was baptized. This guy went on a pilgrimage by foot from Peking to Rome; and he was always tolerated as a pilgrim and [always] found shelter when he still was in Asia; also, in the world of the Orthodox Church things still went for him in this way, but as soon as he reached Poland, people gave him money so that he could go to the house of pilgrims.

I take him to exemplify the idea that there is a need; that we are born into a society made of individuals who need services for a roof, who are in need [because] they are born

87 John Chrysostom (347 ca.- 407) was a Church Father and archbishop of Constantinople. For his eloquence he received the name *Chrysostomos*, the golden-tongued.

88 In 313 Constantine the Great issued the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity.

89 In the form of a stranger looking for a roof and shelter.

90 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 54; Illich quotes the paraphrased citation of John Chrysostom from one of his homilies: *In acta apostolorum, homelia XLV, 3-6*, in: *Patrologia Graeca* (PG), Paris, Migne, 1862, Vol. 60, pp. 317-322, where we can read the central quote: «ποιήσει ἑαυτῷ ξενοδοχεῖον ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας: στήσων ἐκεῖ κλίνην, στήσων ἐκεῖ τράπεζαν καὶ λυχνίαν» (ibidem., p. 319), which translated means: “Make for yourself a shelter in your own house: set up a bed there, set up a table there and a candlestick”. Already in 1987 Illich in *Hospitality and Pain*, presented at the McCormick Theological Seminar, Chicago, used this passage to point how “Some Church Fathers claim that this [institutionalization] became necessary because the ardor of Christian charity cooled. Chrysostom speaks for others, urging all the faithful of his community to return to the old ways, keeping ready in their homes, beds of straw, food and candles for those who have no roof over their head”; cfr. Ivan Illich, *La perte des sens*, Fayard, 2004: *L’origine chrétienne des services* (1987) pp. 9-44.

91 Jean Daniélou (1905-1974), French Jesuit theologian; cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 54-55.

with [the] deficiency of knowledge, which only an institution can give. Some of you may know about my reflection for over forty-years on this theme: from where else does the *homo educandus* come? Cicero tells me: “Educat nutrix, docet, vero instruit magister.”⁹² And [if] I give a look into the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*⁹³, it tells me and shows me that *educere* requires a feminine subject, till Tertullian’s times. [The concept that] Christ’s milk⁹⁴ –the supernatural revelation– cannot be obtained, unless by *docentia*, is transferred into a society which [then] develops the idea that everyone is in need of education.

Time is running out! My idea –let us say my intellectual experience–is to [discover], to dig in order to find out from where, historically, all these concepts, all these axiomatic notions, which are so characteristic of the West come from:

92 This quote comes not from Cicero but from Varro, who was quoted by the lexicographer Nonius Marcellus from the fourth century: “EDUCERE et EDUCARE hanc habent distantiam. Educere est extrahere; educare nutrire et provehere. Varro Cato vel de liberis educandis: educit enim obstetrix, educat nutrix, instituit paedagogus, docet magister” (*Noni Marcelli De compendiosa doctrina*, emandavit et adnotavit Lucianus Mueller, Pars II, Lipsiae, in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1884, p. 41).

93 Cfr. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (TLL), Vol. 5, 2: pp.113-12: EDUCO.

94 Cfr. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* by Caroline Walker Bynum, University of California Press, 1984. Already Saint Paul compares newly converted Christians to children that need to be nourished with milk and not with solid food (in: 1 Cor., 3: 2 and Heb. 5, 12-14); then Augustine directly talks about the *fidei lac*, the “milk of faith” (cfr. *Conf.* I, 1: “Exceperunt ergo me *consolationes* lactis humani, nec mater mea vel nutrices meae sibi ubera implebant, sed tu mihi per eas dabas alimentum infantiae secundum institutionem tuam et divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispositas»), and a Pseudo-Augustinian Text cites: «[Ecclesia] ramos suos in universam terram copia ubertatis extendit, profluentes largiter rivos latius expandit; unum tamen caput est et origo una, et una mater foecunditatis successibus copiosa. Illius foetu nascimur, illius lacte nutrimur, spiritu ejus animamur”, in: *Liber de unitate Ecclesiae*, cap. 5 [Cyprian of Carthage], PL, Vol. 4, p. 502; cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 143-144.

from the *conjuratio*⁹⁵ to the image⁹⁶, from the idea of the text⁹⁷ to the possibility –let us say– [...] ⁹⁸ of the criminalization of sin.⁹⁹ I find [that all this] is an effort by the Church to guarantee, to give [permanence], to make better than what the individual—who is the only who is actually called to do it– could do [by himself], and it creates the institution, which then becomes secularized. It is about the *corruptio optimi* –the grace–*quae est pessima*.¹⁰⁰

95 This topic was studied by Illich under the influence of Paolo Prodi, who wrote a book on it: *Il sacramento del potere. Il giuramento politico nella storia costituzionale dell'Occidente*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992.

96 Cfr. Ivan Illich, *Guarding the Eye in the Age of the Show*, in: RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, Autumn, 1995, No. 28, pp. 47-61; Ivan Illich and Barbara Duden, *The Scopic Past and the Ethics of the Gaze. A Plea for the Historical Study of Ocular Perception*, German Translation: *Die skopische Vergangenheit Europas und die Ethik der Opsis. Plädoyer für eine Geschichte des Blickes und Blickens*, in: Historische Anthropologie, 3. Jahrgang, Heft 2, 1995, Böhlau Verlag Köln/Weimar /Wien, pp. 203-221.

97 Cfr. *In the Vineyard of the Text. A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago University Press, 1993.

98 Illich confesses that in this moment he is “sottosopra”, “confused”, “disorientated”, “out of order”.

99 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 80-94.

100 “The corruption of the best is the worst”. This phrase stands for the very heart of Illich’s thought. He uses it without any further references for the first time in *Pain and Hospitality* (1987): “This central reality of the West is marvelously expressed in the old Latin phrase: *Corruptio optimi quae est pessima* - the historical progression in which God’s Incarnation is turned topsy-turvy, inside out. I want to speak of the mysterious darkness that envelops our world, the demonic night paradoxically resulting from the world’s equally mysterious vocation to glory”. Illich, *Part Moon Part Travelling Salesman: Conversation with Ivan Illich*, 1989, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: “Dawson has a passage where he says the church is Europe and Europe is the church, and I say Yeah! *Corruptio optimi pessima*. We attempt to ensure, to guarantee, to regulate the revelation that at any moment we might recognize, even when we are Palestinians, that there is a Jew lying in the ditch whom I can take in my arms, embrace him”; cfr. *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, Anansi, 1992, p. 242. In 1993, this phrase is used again by Illich in his *Hommage à Jacques Ellul*. Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 213: “Since the 1970s, always growing stronger, this has remained a motive of my research. Powerful and unprecedented ideas, brought through Christianity and through the Gospel into Western history, have been perverted into normative notions of a cruelty, of a horrifying darkness, which no other culture has ever known. The Latin adage, *corruptio optimi pessima* – there’s nothing worse than the corruption of the best – became a theme in my reading and reflection”. Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 56, p. 180, p.

And only if I look to the history of the axioms of the West without refusing to see it as a substantial part of the history of the Church, as the [history] of the assurance by Church, the [history] of institutionalization by the Church, can I reach the point from where I can grasp the Abyss in which we are today! This is because, after the last thirty or forty years of fighting for development, only now, finally, do people understand what “development” really means: “In the West as it is in Heaven”! My students didn’t know where this phrase comes from—only seventeen of them knew the *Pater noster*.¹⁰¹ [But] In this condition I see not Evil but the

207, p. 2018. It is difficult to define exactly the source of this quotation. Although its meaning is present in many classical authors like Plato (Rep. 6, 495b) and Aristotle (Eth. Nic. 1150a [7]), its concise form is taken from Thomas Aquinas, who commends a Latin version of Aristotle: “sicut regnum est optimum regimen, ita tyrannis est pessima corruptio regiminis” (Sum. Theo. I^a-II^a, q. 105, a. 1, arg. 5). Giuseppe Mansi (1607-1697), archbishop of Lucca, is according to my knowledge the first, who quotes this adagio in its proper form, linking it to corruption as a medical term: “Vulgaris est ille medicinae aphorismus: ‘*Corruptio optimi pessima*’, et ideo sicut manna adeo turpiter putrefiebat, ut exinde nauseabundi scaturient vermes, eodem modo quanto benignior suique liberalior est divina bonitas, ita si illa abundamus et contemnamus, inscuriora supplicia convertetur”, in: Bibliotheca moralis, tom. III: [De morte, discursus XIX, 4], Moguntiae, sumptibus Joannis Petri Zubrodt, et haered. Joannis Baptistae Schoenwetteri, 1673, pg. 307. However, Ennio de San Ignazio (1630-1719) links our adagio to Gregorius Magnus and Thomas Aquinas: “Primo itaque gravitas essentialis peccati petitur ex magnitudine boni, quod per peccatum corrumpitur, juxta illud Philosophi 8. Ethic. 3. ‘Pessimum est quod contrarium optime’. Unde axioma: *Corruptio optimi pessima*. Et ideo peccata spiritualia multo graviora esse carnalibus, uno ore pronuntiant sanctissimi patres, signanter Gregorius [Magnus] 33 Mor. II et divus Thomas [Aquinas] Sum. Theo. I^a-II^a, qu. 73, art. 6», in: Ethica amoris, tomus primus de generalibus principiis, amoris et morum: Pars secunda de generalibus principiis amoris et morum, Liber X: Amor inordinatus, sive de peccatis, caput XIX, Venetiis ex typographia Balleoniana, 1771, pg. 276. The sources cited by Ennio de San Ignation, however, don’t report the exact quote. Beside Illich, one other theologian, but this time a protestant one, who quotes this sentence is Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977): “There is nothing human which cannot be perverted or falsified. And indeed, we find that the higher a thing, the worse its perversion and falsification—*corruptio optimi pessima*. The devil apes God” (*The Heart. Human and Devine Affectivity* by Dietrich von Hildebrand (first ed. 1977), ST. Augustine’s Press, South Bend, 2007, p. 16). Illich could have been inspired by his book.

101 By *perverting* the famous line from the Lord’s Prayer – On Earth as it is in Heaven – Illich exemplifies the *perversion* of the West. Apparently, most of his students didn’t recognize the obvious textual allusion, when in German he provocatory said:

Horror¹⁰² [and] the consequences of the sin in which I live—which takes away my breath.

Yes, I say it! There is a friend, who you all know. We were close –[I’m speaking of] Alex Langer¹⁰³– and when I knew about his death, I thought I knew where he must have hanged himself, but when I was told: “No, no [it happened] elsewhere”, I said [to myself]: “Thanks God!”, because it was there that we talked exactly on this topic.¹⁰⁴ I mention Alex to you because he is one of my many friends—I call them *friends* and not students—who had understood Evil in its mysterious aspect, that is Evil as *mysterium iniquitatis*,¹⁰⁵ the mystery of

“So im Himmel so auch *im Westen*”. Illich gave a talk about the *perversion* of the Gospel within medical terms already in Bologna, 24 October 1998 with the striking title: “Non indurci in tentazione della diagnosi, [ma] liberaci dalla ricerca della salute”, or in English “Lead us not into Diagnosis, but deliver us from the Pursuit of Health”.

102 How not to think about the last phrases in Joseph Conrad’s book *Heart of Darkness* (1899): “The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. “The horror! the horror!”

103 Alexander Langer (1946-1995). Writer, politician, Christian: he was Illich’s friend since 1985; born on the watershed of languages in Süd-Tirol/Alto-Adige, he was well aware of the problems of identities in a globalizing world. A very touching portrait of Illich made by Langer can be found in a collection of essays: *Il viaggiatore leggero: scritti 1961-1995*, Palermo, Sellerio editore, 2011, pp. 98-102 (this article was firstly published on *La Nuova Ecologia*, 19 October 1985). In 1988, Langer and Illich both participated in the first edition of the “Fiera delle Utopie Concrete” at Città di Castello. Here Illich was talking about the four elements. Langer remembers his first meeting with Illich in Bozen, 15.06.1985, in a brief article written and published in Geis-Maier-Kalender 1990; Langer’s speech of 1985 had the title: *Alpine Mißverständnisse um Fortschritt und Widerstand gegen Modernisierung*. This article was later inserted in the *Liber amicorum*, a single-printed book in honor for Illich’s 70th birthday.

104 Illich is here thinking of his last meeting with Langer in Bozen. Fabio Milana kindly told me that according to Edi Rabini, Langer’s secretary, Illich with Barbara Duden, traveling to Germany, made a stop in Bozen, and tried to convince Alex to retire from politics and join his studying group of friends, insistently! Langer’s body was found the day after his death, 03.07.1995, hanging from an apricot tree, surrounded by the beautiful landscape of Pian dei Giullari, which can be translated as “the plain of fools”. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, Langer was, in a secular way, a *giullare di Dio*, a fool of God.

105 The concept of *mysterium iniquitatis*, taken from Paul, *Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, 2: 7, translated in the Saint James Bible as “the mystery of iniquity” became a very important topic in Illich’s later thought. Illich was particularly drawn to this

impiety. And I firmly believe that to look in someone else's eyes, by offering him what you see of him and permitting him to give you what he sees in you is the [only] way by which we can help each other to *not* hang ourselves.

Therefore, since we remain with the idea that we can further develop what you, [Father Verde] have so beautifully presented, which is that we can [actually] continue to talk about prophecy, we are perhaps –the Germans would say ... Heidegger¹⁰⁶ [would] say– on the *Holzweg*.¹⁰⁷ [This] is the disciplined [and] serious offer of friendship which establishes

after reading again in April 1997 Sergio Quinzio's book, *Mysterium iniquitatis: le encicliche dell'ultimo papa*, Milano, Adelphi, 1995; cfr. Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), pp. 166-173; Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 205-206: "Before he died – we never got together physically, unfortunately – he sent me his little book about the mystery of God's failure, and about the difficulty of accepting the existence of a God who fails in his intentions and who has, as far as we can judge it, limits to his omnipotence". Quinzio died on 22 March 1996; however, it's not exactly true that Illich didn't meet Quinzio because, according to Franco La Cecla, they both met in September 1980 in Montebello together with other great minds like Carlo Bo, Italo Mancini and Massimo Cacciari; cft. Franco La Cecla, *Ivan Illich e la sua eredità*, Milano, Medusa, 2013, p. 12.

106 This is one, if not the only one of very few references to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). According to Thierry Paquot (here I'm referring to the German edition of his book on Illich: *Ivan Illich. Denker und Rebell*, München, C. H. Beck, 2017, p. 41) Illich never wanted to discuss Heidegger's philosophy, since he found him personally a coward and philosophically, he couldn't stand his jargon-filled way of expressing himself; cfr. Thierry Paquot, *Introduction à Ivan Illich*, Paris, La Découverte, 2012.

107 Here illich is referring to Heidegger's book, *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, V. Klostermann, 1950, translated in English with *Off the Beaten Track*. *Holzweg* is a very old German word in use since the Middle Ages (cfr. *Grimms Wörterbuch*, Leipzig, 1877, Bd. 10, p. 1784: HOLZWEG), originally designating the pathways within woods used to easily transport trees which were cut down. Until the 19th century, the German word *Holz* appointed both the wood as a forest and wood as the stuff as trees are made on. The English language still maintained this double meaning for the same word. But soon *Holzweg* turned to be used as a metaphor that indicated the falling apart from the way of righteousness and virtue. Dante, for example, finds himself in a "selva oscura/ che la dritta via era smarrita" (Inf. I, vv. 2-3). Still in modern German the phrase, *Auf dem Holzweg sein*, means "to be on the wrong path", "to be wrong", "to be in a dead-end". Heidegger tried to reshape the word in a more positive light. For him it referred to the path of his own philosophy. Illich tries to do the same, but in his own way: for him, we can say, the path of friendship is a *Holzweg*, because it is off the beaten track of modernity; to be on the *Holzweg* means for him *not* to follow the road that modernity design for us. For Illich a *Holzweg* is a path, not more than a trail, but never a street or a road.

an *us*: not [the kind of friendship] in which the “us” finds its flowering, but the one which enables us to see the truth, to have the courage to pick it up, to consider it as something possible, along the lines you have shown.

Father Verde, I thank you for the present you have given *me*! But I imagine that you gave it also to the others who are here, in whose name I would like to say thank you, to this extraordinary gathering of colleagues, both women and men, that made it possible to do [all this] and to all those, who spoke here, from whom I have learned [a lot]; even if some colleague told me: “All this is well-known!” [But] I did not know it, and I remain fascinated by it.
Thank you.