

# **IVAN ILLICH CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY, HOW IS IT ALSO THE CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Ivan Illich was a historian, a social critic and a philosopher. After reading his work, I have realized that his discussion of education has moved from dangers of institutionally generated knowledge to how technology and knowledge are connected to our self-perceptions. Within his many roles, he appears to be a man of contradiction. Ordained into the Roman Catholic priesthood, he questions all institutionalized religion. The recipient of numerous graduate degrees from respected educational institutions, he advocates "deschooling of society" as an antidote to "modernized poverty of spirit," which results from endless consumption in the post industrial world. Having come from a family of wealth, he remains faithful to his vow of poverty and suggests lives of austerity for all. (Illich)

Ivan Illich criticism of modernity can be understood from his criticism to the institution. He criticizes the institution of education which he thinks is a modern form of educating people. He does not believe in the whole system of the institution. His critique of institutionalisation of many a social welfare issues is deeply rooted in his critique of modernity. He talks about how modernity is impacting the society at large. In this paper, I will be talking about two things that Illich thinks the institutionalization is doing- praised materiality of modernity and the deteriorating spiritual Mind. The first part will be understood from his criticism of education and medical institution and second part we will see how churches have institutionalized and have deteriorated the spiritual well being of an individual. We will also see how Illich's critique of modernity is also a critique of Christianity.

## **CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY (INSTITUTION)**

Illich in his work talks about the consequences of expanding institutional compulsory schooling worldwide which can be found in his book *Deschooling Society* (Illich, 1971). The main theme of deschooling as to my understanding is the relationship between schooling and the modern notion of education, he sees these phenomena in more general terms as ritual (schooling) and generating myth (education). Thus, the "education myth" generates the "school ritual" with the latter sustaining and reinforcing the former. (Ibid)

In his critique of institution Illich talks about three problems of the institution that surrounds education. First is the institutionalized value, meaning that we conceiving the institution as a process that produces something of value and because of which production creates demand. Putting it an example of the school, where it teaches that instruction produces learning while attendance in class produces the demand for schooling, once this is learned at school, "all of our activities tend to take the shape of client relationships to other specialized institutions" (Ibid, p. 39). The consequence of this is that any non- professional activity is seen as something which is self-taught by an individual and is disregarded by the institutionalization of learning. Therefore the institutionalized value makes an individual who is addicted to being taught to look for compulsory education. (Zaldívar, 2015)

Second is the measurement of value this refers to the way in which institution make people believe that everything can be measured including their imagination and the man himself. Illich thinks that personal development cannot be measured; you cannot compare one's achievement to others. What needs to be done is to emulate others in using their imagination rather than copying someone else (Ibid, 2015).

Thirdly, he criticizes the self-sustaining progress, the function of institution consists of ensuring the distance between what the system promises and what it actually achieves. Even if there is nothing that can be truly achieving the social welfare institution never fails to make false promises (Ibid, 2015).

With the above three points we can understand that how important it is for Illich to fight the role of institution. This involves questioning the notion that the benefits provided by the institution must be monitored by the state. The problem that Illich thinks with the state-controlled institution is that modern societies limits in geographic expansion and institutional

invasion into the personal domain as a way to ensure a "free flourishing of human autonomy and creativity" (Illich, 1978, p. 41). Illich thinks that there is a need to put consensual limit to the spread of institution that directs how people live together in the society. (Zaldívar, 2015) This way he is criticizing the educational institution calling it a form of modernity.

Illich turned to health care after Schools. "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health," Illich wrote at the beginning of his 1976 *Medical Nemesis*. He talks about the physician caused diseases which called as social iatrogenesis which happens " when all suffering is ""hospitalized" and homes become inhospitable to birth, sickness, and death; when the language in which people could experience their bodies is turned into bureaucratic gobbledygook; or when suffering, mourning, and healing outside the patient role are labelled a form of deviance."(Calder and Boyards, 1975) There is cultural iatrogenesis beyond these which "undermined the ability of individuals to face their reality, to express their own values, and to accept inevitable and often irremediable pain and impairment, decline, and death." (Calder and Boyards, 1975) Because of iatrogenesis, we have started conceiving our body by the norms which are set by the medical practitioners. Our bodies have become in constant need of more healthcare products, making our bodies a perfect companion to our mind which is conditioned to the passive consumption of educational products.(Ibid)

This is Illich's critique of modernity. He thinks that the institutionalized modernity has made us and our bodies dependent on the institution. We might not even need them, but institutions have portrayed and marketed themselves in a way in which we felt that it is important part of our life and is necessary of one's well being. He says that modern societies are making more institutions and changing the way we live our lives and making it institutionalized. He calls this process of undermining people, which reduces their confidence and also the capacity to solve problems. It will kill convivial relationship and will colonize life like a parasite that will kill creativity. (Finger and Asún 2001: 10)

## **CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY DERIVED FROM THE CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY**

Coming to the part where Illich talks about reform of institutional church and how it is derived from his critique of modernity, It took a long time for Illich to come down to the part where

he can openly criticize the institution of the church as he himself was a believer of it. It was in his last years of his life that his attention turned towards discrepancy between what he called the church as it or the institution of church and the church as she, the one he believed in which was held together by bonds of faith and love. He talks about corruption of Christianity where the best become the worst same as he talks about institution where he sees the same thing, he talks about how institution rather than focusing on the abilities of an individual focuses on every other thing. It instead of bringing out the best in people brings out the worst. (Web, 2018) He discovered that church has become the pioneer and model of western institutionalization. He confirmed the old adage the "the corruption of best is the worst" in the way he saw how the institutionalization of Christianity attempt to ensure, to guarantee, to regulate Revelation, "the best becomes the worst." He calls institutionalization a deadly danger, which was first established by the church, and later by the many secular organizations which helped give rise to it. (Ibid)The direct and intimate personal involvement in the institutional structure is always threatened to be swallowed up. He has given the example of the Church in early ages. The Christian then use to take strangers into their houses with joy and to fulfil the order of the Christ which was that if you do something for the poor you are doing it for Christ. But later when the church became institutionalised such care was no longer the free choice of the household, it was seen as a task of an institution. The thrust of Illich's ideas lies in the phrase, "the corruption of the best is the worst," and in Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan. The idea – revolutionary for its time – that anyone could help a stranger, even an enemy, soon became corrupted as the Church took away from individuals the need, and even the right, to provide assistance, leading to today's labyrinthine institutionalization, and the creation of society's "helping professions" and legal system. This, in Illich's view, corrupts Jesus' message of seeing God in any individual who comes across our path, and destroys our individual freedom and will to act. (Ibid)

Centrality of Christianity to the development of western civilization cannot be argued, Illich's claim that much of this development springs from a misrepresentation of Christianity which invites further debate and study. Vitally important to Illich is the cultivation of collegial friendships across disciplinary and social borders as a context for continual revelation and reevaluation of important ideas. These friendships were, for him, more than a progressive learning forum, but also the highest expression of the Christian faith that guided his life.(Snyders, 2005)

The relationship between schooling and the church, which had been seen before as a vague analogy, had started to appear to have "a closer and more deeply determined" connection (Cayley, pg 143). "The Church made attendance at various rituals compulsory" (Ibid., p. 144) and this inculcated a belief "that you need an organized institution to make people competent to understand what is good for them and their community, that knowledge does not come from living but from education, the milk of wisdom flowing from the breasts of an institution." (Ibid)

There has been a relentless institutionalization of the personal in Christianity. Icons, for example, were meant to point to the realities of faith, but in the absence of a sense of the inspiration we are left with virtual space and with countless images that point nowhere. Or a new view of the body was brought about by the Christian belief of the rebirth of the body, which would give way over time to a medically induced iatrogenic body in which we see our bodies as the medical profession tells us to see them. (Ibid)

We see how Illich's thought took him from deeper criticism of institution to a deeper critique of church as the model for these institutions. He feels that secular institution has reached a point where they have defeated the purpose of why they were established this we have also seen in his criticism of educational institution. He has the same radical critics of the church which he had for other institution of the society and when he left his position as a priest he could see it more clearly from the outside. As in his criticism of other institutions, and their tipping points, I also believe that many people might have agreed with this criticism of the church. In fact, the church, in its institutional structures, inserts itself between us and God and it way to often hinders and obscures those relationships by the way we treat each other. It has ability for alienating people from seeking a deeper union with God and finding comfort in the healing words of Jesus, and reaching out instinctively and generously to serve up Jesus in others. The corruption of the best has, without a doubt, become the worst. (Web, 2018)

Christianity was started to be viewed as religions of modernity. The commandments and performing of Religious rituals as duties came with the commandments. And modernity which became gradually appealing as against traditionalist sidelined the spiritual well.

Religion under modernity became an act of institutionalisation of rituals and religious duties; it became a problem and also became an electoral asset which makes duties as a way to spiritual well being. It sidelined the existence of god and people forgot about dwelling with God and dwelling in the sense of their being. Illich is a critique of the super dominance of materiality

which modernity imposes. He is talking about a systemic problem of institutionalising social welfare things. (Web, 2018)

## **CONCLUSION**

As now we have come towards the end of this paper, I will conclude it by summarizing the paper and then giving my opinion on the same. We understood that Illich started his criticism of modernity by way of critiquing all the social welfare institution, he first started with Institution of education which can be clearly understood from his book *Deschooling society*, where he talks about how institution become a place where people lose their inner value and think that they are bound by compulsory education. He thinks these institutions have made people materialistic and they have forgotten their true value. After education institution, Illich draws a critique of the medical institution, where he talks about the diseases which are caused by the doctor during the treatment. We have become so dependent on the medical institution that we have forgotten the home care system. If I understand correctly what Illich want to say is that these institutions are making people worse off. They claim that they are working for the public good but that is not the truth. In fact, institutions are making people more dependent on them, people have lost their value and have become machines which works according to the institution.

The similar critique has been made by Illich while he talks about how church under modernity has become an act institutionalization of rituals and religious duties. People no more have the true feeling of faith and love towards God. What previously was done as an act of kindness is not done with fear, and this fear has been created by the institution of the church. Here also people have lost their true value and have become pawns of the institutionalization which Illich term as modernity.

As per my view, I understand where Illich is coming from and I somewhere agree with his critique of modernity. It is true that people are becoming more materialistic and the basic act of kindness has been lost somewhere on our path to becoming "modern". We are losing our values and are becoming more dependent towards these institutions. On the other hand, the benefits of institutionalization cannot be ignored out rightly. People have been benefited by this institution in various forms. Illich, when wrote his critique of modernity at the time, was

different and in today's world his theories might not be that applicable and it can be seen that it has been proven true. People have turned towards institution and all the fear which Illich have that institution will create had turned out to be true. But now we can't get away with institutions as it has become our basic requirement.

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