

PHILIP MCSHANE: REMINISCENCES[†]

Ivo Coelho

My acquaintance with Philip McShane goes back to my first Lonergan Workshop in 1991. We were sharing a condominium—he and Sally on one side, and Andres Ancona and myself on the other. Early one morning I was trying to pray the Office, and there was Phil reading a Lonergan book I could not recognize. I was intrigued, because in those doctoral years I prided myself on knowing every one of Lonergan's books. It turned out to be half of *Insight*—the paperback version that used to split easily. And I thought: reading *Insight* early in the morning—what a wonderful thing! Years later, in Nashik, Phil said to me: Aren't they both part of the same thing: praise of God in different ways?

That chance being thrown together—or perhaps it was because of Fred Lawrence's thoughtful way of bringing people together—marked the beginning of an interesting relationship. I learnt much from some of Phil's casual remarks. My thesis centred around the fate of the universal viewpoint in *Method in Theology*, and I was familiar with Terry Tekippe's answer.¹ Phil's suggestion was simple and different: the universal viewpoint, he said, became the method of theology. That, in fact, was the line I followed in the end.²

After the defence in 1994, Phil asked for a copy of my dissertation and went through it carefully. And when it was published as *Hermeneutics and Method* in 2001, he even wrote a piece comparing the thesis and the book and remarking on the evolution of thought between the two.³ I don't

[†] A version of this paper was delivered at the online Lonergan Workshop, June 24, 2021.

¹ Terry J. Tekippe, "The Universal Viewpoint and the Relationship of Philosophy and Theology in the Works of Bernard Lonergan," doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, New York, 1972. Tekippe had given a course on Lonergan at the Gregorian, and that was how I had met him and become familiar with his doctoral thesis. It might have been Terry, in fact, who was instrumental in my choice of thesis. See Ivo Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method: The 'Universal Viewpoint' in Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 4–7.

² See Coelho, *Hermeneutics and Method*, esp. chapter 12 and Conclusion.

³ Unfortunately, I don't seem to have kept a copy or even a reference to this piece. Or perhaps it is lying somewhere among my papers in Nashik.

remember what he said now, but I was certainly flattered with that kind of attention.

Over the years, Phil took the trouble to keep in touch, sending me his writings, engaging in dialogue, and nudging me to actually begin using the method. I tried to keep up with his voluminous output, but of course it was quite impossible. Reading Phil was difficult but invariably rewarding. I often asked myself whether Phil was making Lonergan more difficult than he was, and whether that made it more difficult for people to use Lonergan's method. I fully agreed that the Lonergan of *Method in Theology* had by no means abandoned the quest for the scientific interpretation he had championed in chapter 17 of *Insight*, as Phil kept insisting. But in my opinion, he had also created a method that was open to all comers. Such a method does need a group of 'fully converted' investigators and scholars (in the triple sense of intellectual, moral and religious conversion), but I do not believe it is meant to exclude others, and I still feel there must be a 'gentler' way of using the method.⁴

Ongoing collaboration with Phil included publication of some of his writings in *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* (Nashik – India). We even came out with several dedicated issues, such as the one on Lonergan's Economics ("Do you want a sane global economy?" vol. 21/2 [2010]) of which, at Phil's request, we printed 1000 copies. He was confident he could sell them, but I think we still have some 700 copies lying around in Nashik—just in case anyone needs some!

⁴ See Ivo Coelho, "Implementations of Lonergan's Method: A Critique," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 15/3 (2004) 381. See Philip McShane, *Cantower XIII*, "Functional Specialization and Chapters 17 and 18 of *Insight*" (available at <http://www.philipmshane.org/cantowers>) and *SURF* 2, "Ivo Coelho's Challenge, with a Preliminary Context" (available at <http://www.philipmshane.org/surf>), commenting on my effort to relate functional specialization to Sankara's interpretation. McShane helpfully reproduced this unpublished effort, which is also available as "Fr. Ivo Coelho: Applying Lonergan's Method" (posted November 15, 2007, available at <http://lonerganwebsite.blogspot.com/2007/11/fr-ivo-coelho-applying-lonergans-method.html>). See also "Alison Bender's Response to Fr. Ivo Coelho" (available at <http://lonerganwebsite.blogspot.com/2008/01/alison-benders-response-to-fr-ivo.html>, posted January 24, 2008,).

In 2010 we invited Phil to Nashik for a workshop on economics with the title “Towards a new economic order” (September 9–11, 2010). The idea was to reflect on current thinking about economics: do we know what we are saying? And: is that thinking and that saying good enough? And again: do we need new thinking? A blog entry of the time gives an idea of what Phil was due to say:

1. Distinguish basic and surplus circuits: the basic circuit concerns consumer goods; the surplus circuit concerns producer or capital goods.
2. What is fundamental in the economy is production, not money. Money, while essential, has a redistributive function.
3. The aim of the economy is not, therefore, “making money,” but improving the standard of living for all.
4. Money is a promise, a note. The betrayal of this promise seems to be at the bottom of the current economic crisis.
5. The true problem is the failure to understand the workings of the economy. Economics has not yet become a genuine science. Most economists and textbooks concentrate on money, when they ought to recognize production as basic. If they were to identify the real variables, economics would become a science.⁵

Our audience consisted of graduates working towards a master’s degree in philosophy and some lecturers in economics from Nashik and Mumbai, but also several undergraduates, so, knowing how complex Phil could be, I begged him to make an effort to communicate. He tried, I think, and though my memory tells me he was not able to tune in to the wavelength of the audience, my blog entries composed at the time tell a slightly different story.

The first day began with Dr. Agnelo Menezes of St. Xavier’s College, Mumbai and Dr. D.R. Bachav, Head of the Department of Economics, KTHM College, Nashik presenting what Phil termed “a magnificently gloomy picture” of the Indian economy. Phil’s first session consisted of introducing his audience to their Whats and inviting them to be Whats. He dedicated the other three sessions to analysing a small business (his

⁵ See Ivo Coelho, *Philosophical Musings*, <https://ivophil.blogspot.com> (September 4 and 9, 2010). See also *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* 21/2 (2010) with the general title “Do You Want a Sane Economy?”

father's bakery shop): the basic circuit of demand function and supply; the need to set aside money for repair, maintenance and replacement; the recognition of a surplus circuit with its own demand function and supply. The standard diagrams found in elementary textbooks of economics, instead, tended to fuse the two circuits, talking only, for example, of households and businesses and the flows of labour and money. Dr. Menezes said he was delighted to hear this kind of analysis and that his college was actually making students study the local economy and analyse it carefully. Many of the participants—most of them innocent of economics—felt that what McShane was presenting was quite acceptable and sensible.⁶

The second day of the workshop began with Phil talking about the *new culture of the future*. Just as we know when a person is driving badly and tell him he should change gears, so in the future we will know when the economy is being driven badly, and there will be widespread agreement about this, together with knowledge about what must be done.

The topics of the day were the rhythms of innovation, and promises, notes and credit. The diagram introduced the previous day was completed, with basic and surplus circuits, demand functions and supply functions on both levels, and the redistributive function in the middle.

Taking his example from the little barber shops on the Nashik streets, Phil introduced the idea of *pure surplus income*. An American comes in for a haircut. The usual cost of the haircut is Rs 25; but the American pays \$5. The excess over Rs 25 is pure surplus income for the barber. Why pure? Because it is not needed for basic expenditures or for surplus expenditures. The barber can do what he wants with it. He can donate it to a temple or charitable organization, or use it for his family. In his later years Lonergan referred to this as the *social dividend*, since it can be used for the benefit of humanity.

“What about *profit*?” someone asked. Phil pointed out that profit tends to include both the surplus demand function (D") and pure surplus income, and so is a term that is imprecise. He also said that in traditional economics there was no criterion for determining pure surplus income and robbery (making profits by underpaying workers, or by over-pricing the goods).

⁶ Ivo Coelho, *Philosophical Musings* (September 9, 2010).

Phil went on to introduce the term *innovation* with the help of his famous Irish island and the invention of the horse-drawn plough: the banker giving credit to the inventor; the time taken for production of ploughs and the effects on the economy; the rise in wages on the surplus circuit; the problem created if these wages are immediately pumped into the basic circuit; the possibility of redistribution in terms of savings and re-investment; the eventual slowing down of the surplus surge; the need to allow then a basic surge; and so on.

Towards the end of the day Phil remarked that for Lonergan the goal of the economy was, strangely, dis-employment. This might be a difficult idea to digest, because we are surrounded by a mythology of work. But human beings really need to aim at a life in which there is place for leisure and contemplation. With adequate technology—including biomimicry and nano-technology—we should be able to bring forth a sufficiency of consumer goods so as to permit leisure for all. The economy might thus slope up into a preparation for eternity!

But perhaps the most interesting part of the day was the awakening Whats: some students and novices raising interesting and intelligent questions on the floor, little groups of questioners in between sessions, Dr. Agnelo Menezes thinking of getting St. Xavier's Mumbai to invite Phil for another workshop.⁷

Phil began the third day with an attempt to image global economics along the lines of global hydrodynamics. In 1897 we had Howard Lacey's 800-page book on hydrostatics, which remained in use for over half a century. In 1997 we had Lighthill's four volumes of 1000 pages each on the history of hydrodynamics. Perhaps in 2097 we will have a book on global economics, Phil suggested.

The next two sessions were dedicated mostly to questions: about the mechanism of price increases when there is excess money and the quantity of consumer goods remains static; the 'idealism' of Lonergan's exclusion of centralist controls and expectations that the economy will one day be controlled by the good sense of people, given that there will be a culture in which his 'diagram' has become a molecular image, something that people carry in their bones; the role of politics (no role, Phil answered, just as today politicians would never dare to pontificate on hydrodynamics); the role of religion (great role in shaping the hope of a fair and just society); the role of the common man and woman (tree-

⁷ Ivo Coelho, *Philosophical Musings* (September 10, 2010).

hugging; making a noise; spreading the word; nudging economists or friends of economists).

The concluding session consisted of some remarks by two of the participants. I myself wound up by saying, among other things, that since the majority of us were going to be teachers and educators, the seminar invited us to be educators who enabled Minding and allowed Whatting, rather than suppressors of Minding and Whatting.⁸

In the Salesian religious community and in informal interactions with the students, Phil was magnificent. One of the students asked Phil how he had come to Lonergan. He said he had been given the text of *Insight* to read even before it had been published. Later Lonergan had travelled to Dublin to give five lectures, and Phil had been in charge of seeing him to his room and so on. That was when he first met Lonergan. He remembered that Lonergan had a book open on his desk: an Agatha Christie novel!

A question about the new book Phil was planning to write on physics, economics, and history gave him a chance to speak about how he came to Lonergan's economics. He had a background in mathematics (Dublin) and philosophy (Oxford). At Heythrop he met Fr. Louis Watts, the Jesuit who had introduced Lonergan to economics during his Heythrop days. In 1968, Phil received a postcard from Lonergan: "Find me an economist who can read my manuscript." A day later he received another postcard saying much the same thing. Lonergan had written the essay in 1944. He had spent 10 years reflecting on the matter. He had given it to Eric Kierans, who later served as minister of finance in the Trudeau cabinet in Canada; the man did not get round to reading it. Phil said he himself had spent 20 years trying to read the manuscript before it finally began making sense. But he was still on the lookout for an economist!

Economics today, Phil said, is in the position of Ptolemaic astronomy with its epicycles: it was possible to make certain predictions using the model, but it would be impossible to send someone to the moon on that basis. Ptolemaic astronomy reigned for a

⁸ Ivo Coelho, *Philosophical Musings* (September 11, 2010).

thousand years. Economics has been around for 200 years. Perhaps it will begin changing now. Lonergan's aim was to transform economics into a proper science.⁹

It's hard to accept that Phil is no longer physically with us and that I will not receive any more emails from him.... But I guess conversion to the really real is something that needs to be undergone again and again, day by day. In the meantime, I cherish the memories of a man who was able to reach out and touch and make grow. As Sally said in her thank you email after Phil's death, "One of his gifts was to point you to your own bright light."

That is so clear to me just now, as I look back to my first meeting with him in 1991, read my blog entries of his visit to Nashik in 2010, and think of the books and papers and emails I would keep receiving from him. In his emails Phil would often remind me "to take time out for gardening":

Meantime I presume you battle on a variety of fronts, with little time for gardening! (19 August 2010)

Greetings Ivo and Bon Voyage and fresh hope in Jerusalem

May be a little garden on the roof or at least a flower box on the window sill? (18 August 2011)

Meantime, I do hope you have time for your own work,

And perhaps a little roof-gardening?! (13 April 2012)

This correspondence is a treasure, something to be relished slowly, chewed, and digested—as Phil kept inviting people to do. And I think closer study of his voluminous output will not only keep shedding light upon the work that Lonergan began, but also reveal to us a man who kept growing and making grow so that, in the end there was to him an unmistakable glow, a *lambence*¹⁰ that did not fail to come through and

⁹ Ivo Coelho, *Philosophical Musings* (September 7, 2010).

¹⁰ *Lambence* was a word Phil liked to use, and, not surprisingly, I discovered recently that it is a very Joycean word.

touch. That was certainly the case in the few days he spent with us in Nashik.