

**DARING TO STRETCH TOWARD THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION  
A Tribute to Philip McShane**

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I first met Philip McShane at a Lonergan Workshop at Boston College early in my “Lonergan days,” the late 1970s. Phil was lecturing, and I, arriving late, did not know who he was or what his topic was. But this remark struck me: “Consciousness reaches down to your toes.” This idea made little sense to me, but I pondered it, wondering what it might mean. Or was this statement just an exaggeration to match the exuberance, enthusiasm, and urgency of his high-spirited presentation? If consciousness was the topic, he was eager to get it out, to help people grasp it using any trick he could muster. I soon let go thinking about the conscious toe but did now, at least, know who Phil McShane was. He was one of the inner circle, he knew Lonergan personally, worked with him, socialized with him. He was a man to be respected.

Sometime later I decided to learn something about Lonergan’s economic theory. Although I was in Lonergan’s course on economics at Boston College, my curiosity exceeded my understanding. I never did appreciate the matter of two cycles. Later I worked my way through McShane’s book, *Wealth of Self and Wealth of Nations*. I was still at sea after reading the book. It treated much more than economics, and some of it I got, but economics *per se* was not a special interest of mine, so I let the reading experience pass and went on to other things.

More recently I began reading Phil’s *Futurology Express* and for the most part found myself bewildered again. Phil’s style is complex and free-flowing, oftentimes more inspirational than didactic. His breadth of knowledge is exceedingly wide, so he frequently makes references and allusions to authors, artists, or scientists, and even sites them as examples. But if one is not familiar with the reference or allusion, one continues reading without appreciating the point. His text is also filled with stories, puns, metaphors, and musings. Sometimes the point comes across. Sometimes it gets lost in a detour discussion. I suspect that someone unfamiliar with Lonergan’s works would be baffled. In many ways the book reads like a puzzle, and it is clear that Phil wants the reader to work to get the point. Through the haze, I discern that there is profound understanding in his writings, a struggling stretching toward focusing the fulfillment of a yet unknown future, one possible only through the costly efforts of authentic human beings working in collaboration. I was able to

discern that McShane was fitting Lonergan's method to a field besides theology, namely, economics. He recognized that understanding economics is essential for understanding the concrete good and implementing its integral heuristics. He also recognized that implementing sound economics would require a division of labor that would parallel a restructuring of theology.<sup>1</sup> Grasping some inkling of the matter, I was pleased to see this new tack that accords with my own discernment of spirituality in secularity in the first instance.

Once I asked Phil about his style of presentation, especially in his later little books. He was well aware of what he was doing and even calls out his own detours and ramblings and his frequent need to get back to the topic. I wondered if he might be following the style of his innovative, modernist avant-garde countryman James Joyce, whom he sometimes cites; but he said, "No." Rather, to my surprise, it was Chopin who inspired him—another indication of McShane's novel, free-flowing, wide-ranging genius. I pondered the matter; and yes, I thought, it fits. One brilliant characteristic of Chopin's music are the flights of melody that break away from the main theme, flying into unknown space, provoking the question whether the music will ever come back to itself again. And melodically, how could it? But Chopin does return to his main theme, and the musical flights enhance the beauty and mysteriousness of the piece. They are examples of creative imagination and intelligence reaching out to a possible novel emergence. An appreciation of Chopin helps me make sense of Phil's flights of fancy, and to the knowing reader, they may also enhance the impact of the book, always stretching toward a vaguely sensed, completely positive future.

The question remained, "Why write in an almost inaccessible style about a topic so important to get across?" Phil's answer was to this effect: This material is exceedingly difficult; one may betray it by supplying convenient terminology which, memorized and parroted, replaces genuine understanding. One needs to be willing to dig in, into oneself and into the text, to grasp the issue.

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<sup>1</sup> See "A Rolling Stone Gathers *Nomos*," *Economics for Everyone* (3rd ed.), 111–121. See also "Y – Stalking Jesus" in *Interpretation from A to Z* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2020) 166–170 and "Finding an Effective Economist: A Central Theological Challenge," *Divyadaan* 30/1 (2019): 97–128.

No doubt Phil has a profound understanding of Lonergan's work and its far-reaching implications. I could detect as much through the maze of his texts. His commitment was to implement method, not just study it, and he was doing so in *Futurology Express*. In contrast, well-known is his criticism that Lonerganians are not moving in that direction.<sup>2</sup>

Phil was well aware how challenging Lonergan's thought and project are. Along with Lonergan, Phil did not expect it would go over easily. Only half-jokingly he would identify the year 2097<sup>3</sup> or even 9011<sup>4</sup> as the date Lonergan's breakthrough would finally become accepted common knowledge. Nonetheless, he pushed forward to the edges of his own understanding, putting out his little books that must someday open intellectual doors for many of his readers.

I remember his realism about such matters. Sometimes I would share with him a new paper or idea, intending it for my colleagues in psychology, hoping they would see how Lonergan's analysis of consciousness fills a crucial gap in current psychological theory. To be sure, no current study of consciousness, whether in neuroscience, psychology, or philosophy, match the depth and expanse of Lonergan's analysis.<sup>5</sup> Phil would respond to me with a playful but prescient "Ho, ho, ho," knowing from his own experience that these new ideas hardly get much of a reception. I know only one colleague in psychology who appreciates Lonergan's works, my friend and co-researcher Barnet D. Feingold.

Another of Phil's frequent comments was that I was still playing the lone ranger, that is, working alone rather than in one of the collaborative

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<sup>2</sup> McShane, *Futurology Express*, 124. *The Everlasting Joy of Being Human: A Sequel to Futurology Express* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2013) 53–56.

<sup>3</sup> McShane, *Futurology Express*, 98.

<sup>4</sup> McShane, *Everlasting Joy of Being Human*, 54; *Futurology Express*, 145, n. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Blackmore and Emily T. Troscianko, *Consciousness: An Introduction* (3rd ed.) (London & New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2018). Daniel A. Helminiak, "Clarifying the conception of consciousness: Lonergan, Chalmers, and confounded epistemology," in *Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences* 8/2 (2015): 59–74, available at <http://www.crossingdialogues.com/Ms-A15-06.htm>. *Brain, Consciousness, and God: A Lonerganian Integration* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015): 121–159. Eugene Webb *Philosophers of Consciousness: Polanyi, Lonergan, Voegelin, Ricoeur, Girard, Kierkegaard* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1988).

specializations of Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. Of course, locked into a standard academic environment, it was impossible for me to find colleagues to engage in such collaboration and even difficult to know how my projects would break down into functional specialties, and Phil knew it. Nonetheless, he was striving to find a way, and he did not want me to forget that grand project that Lonergan set out and almost all of us are ignoring.

Phil was the only one from the inner circle of Lonergan scholars to support and encourage my work once I had graduated and was "on my own," as Lonergan would say. I had shifted away from doing theology and, with a second PhD, I affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of West Georgia. My interest has been spirituality, and I long believed that psychology, more than theology, was the discipline that would advance one's personal spirituality and the study of it. I was doing something that Phil labored to do throughout his life: I was striving to implement generalized empirical method in the field of psychology where, ironically, the data of consciousness are typically not considered. With the availability of Lonergan's analyses, a much-needed groundbreaking move was simple: just insert consciousness as another distinct essential factor in the standard psychological human model, "body and mind." Then mentality reveals its duality, and the model becomes illuminatingly tripartite: organism, psyche, and consciousness. Moreover, since Lonergan frequently referred to consciousness as "spirit" or "spiritual,"<sup>6</sup> attention to consciousness in psychology would constitute spirituality—the matter of ever greater integration of the spirit into the human make-up through a therapeutic alignment of the psyche.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the transcendental precepts—Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible—would provide innate moral or ethical guides, allowing psychology, no longer a supposed "neutral science" or else the mirror of some particular culture, to claim authority over such poignant human concerns and thus to competently disqualify some

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<sup>6</sup> Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3, 372, 394, 538–543, 640–642, 670–671, 696–697, 711; *Transcendental Philosophy and the Study of Religion*, CD recording 3481. Toronto: Lonergan Research Center, 2006. (Original work published 1968), tracks 46, 48, 51; *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 13, 210, 302, 352.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel A. Helminiak, *The Human Core of Spirituality: Mind as Psyche and Spirit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996) 129–191.

religious claims based on an array of incoherent “revelations.” Psychology would finally be well on its way to becoming a genuine science. The measure of one’s authenticity (fidelity to the precepts) would be the measure of one’s spirituality. Indeed, consciousness or human spirit can account for most of the reported characteristics of spiritual experience,<sup>8</sup> providing this elusive phenomenon an empirical basis in the human being. Relationship with God and then also with Christ could be incorporated as higher viewpoints on this basic humanistic theory of spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

Phil was the only senior Lonerganian to support me in this project. I am deeply indebted to him. In addition to his basic good will and generosity, no doubt Phil was also happy to see someone applying Lonergan outside the fields of theology and philosophy. Whereas most accounts of spirituality are defined by a relationship with God, my grounding of spirituality in the human spirit was fully acceptable to Phil. If I was not implementing Lonergan’s method in my work collaboratively, at least I was working in an interdisciplinary arena. I suspect that most of my other colleagues—theological as well as psychological—have, in fact, paid little regard to my work for a number of reasons: it treats spirituality without appealing to God (in the first instance); this tack requires a long-term commitment to grow in an understanding of Lonergan’s work; and this treatment of spirituality presumes that spiritual reality exists. Phil was completely supportive of this approach—which accords with the “secularity that was [Lonergan’s] bent throughout” *Insight*.<sup>10</sup>

Grappling with these matters, Phil and I began to look for a term to name the study of spirituality in contrast to the lived spirituality itself. Terminology in the field is so fluid and undefined, even claimed impossible to be precise, that just one small step toward clarity would be welcome. We finally came up with a simple term: *spiritualogy*. Phil suggested it, and I have been advancing this new usage whenever possible.

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<sup>8</sup> Helminiak, *The Human Core*, 121–127.

<sup>9</sup> Helminiak, *The Human Core*, 21–23; *Religion and the Human Sciences: An Approach via Spirituality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988) 69–150.

<sup>10</sup> McShane, *Futurology Express*, 133.

Phil's passing has been a great loss—to me, personally, of course, but also to so many others who knew him and ultimately, as with any of the “greats,” to all humanity. In tribute to him and to Lonergan, we must continue to build that future society, that framework of authenticity, a Tower of Able, a secularity suffused with spirituality, cosmopolis, the Reign of God. Our times are certainly in need.