

Fr. Engelbert van CROONENBURG 86 NL USA

* February 27, 1909 The Hague

+ April 3, 1995 Pittsburgh

Born on February 27, 1909 at The Hague, he was eighteen years old when in 1927 he left the technical school where he had been preparing himself to make precision tools and decided to follow in the footsteps of his older brother Jan and study for the priesthood. He did his secondary schooling at Weert and then entered the novitiate at Gennepe, ranking tops in his class. It was there that I met him for the first time because I had studied at the gymnasium in Roermond. He belonged to the senior members of the class of 1931, while I was the second youngest. Both of us were considered to enjoy only indifferent health, but we outlived nearly all the strong fellows with whom we made our vows in September 1932. He professed for one year at Weert after doing philosophy at Gemert.

In 1935 both of us were sent to pursue theology abroad—he at Fribourg and I at Rome. He was ordained on July 24, 1935 in Holland. He earned his doctorate officially in 1945 by the publication of his dissertation “Critique of Marian Devotion”, though his studies had been concluded in 1941 at Fribourg.

After teaching theology for eleven years at Gemert, he was happy when in 1952 he was transferred to teach at Duquesne. At that time Duquesne had not yet a graduate program in theology or even a theology minor for undergraduates, and he could not fully give himself academically to the simpler and repetitious courses in theology that were then in vogue. The Philosophy Department, however, had both a major for undergraduates and a doctoral program, and was happy to take him under its wing.

He gave himself wholeheartedly to it with the cheerfulness that was characteristic of him in all he did. “A song and a smile” said a student sketch of him dating from that time, “is characteristic of this baritone philosopher.” He literally sang his way around the campus and never stopped joking. Fr. Vernon Gallagher, who was President of Duquesne at that time, wrote to his Dutch

Provincial, "He is an exemplary religious and an excellent scholar. I would like to get fifty men like him here."

His lectures were always very carefully prepared; stacks of papers in his room show this. When he lectured, no one could complain that he whispered. What he at the top floor of Canevin Hall taught could be followed down on the street below.

He did not publish many books, but we have from his hands Gateway to Reality, 1963, (an introduction to philosophy) and Don't be Discouraged, 1972. He also co-authored with Fr. Adrian van Kaam The Emergent Self, in four small volumes (1968). The last title shows that in the 60's he gradually became a collaborator with Fr. van Kaam in his Institute of Formative Spirituality. Together they criss-crossed America, giving workshops, retreats and participating in renewal congresses. Sometimes he did it alone, for instance, in Columbia.

How much he devoted himself to this kind of work can be gauged from his reply to a letter asking why he had not come to the annual retreat of the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1979. His health was no longer very good, but he wrote that in the past five months he had given five weeks of conferences to the Christian Brothers and two retreats to Sisters and was just then going to a month-long session of renewal with the Sisters of Charity. At that time, he had already been retired for two years.

For forty years he lived in the same room at Trinity Hall and moved down to the first floor in 1992, when climbing the stairs became too difficult for him. As his infirmities increased, he began longing for death, but never out of depression. Like St. Paul, he preferred to be dissolved and be with Christ and longed to be liberated from his body. Asked how he was, he would invariably reply, 'Lousy' and then smile again, without a word about his pains.

His hobbies were photography, electronics, and in his later years, knitting. They were characterized by the painstaking accuracy, perhaps learned in the

technical school of his youth, and he studied each of them in detail, as the books he left behind demonstrated. He became an expert photographer and electronics man, but I don't know how well he could knit, having never seen a sample of it.

The last survivor of the Croonenburg family, he leaves no brothers, sisters, nephews, cousins or even remote family members behind. He had willed his body to medicine, but his sudden death (it was hours before he was found on April 3, 1995) made his offer unacceptable for that purpose.

Burial was in the Holy Ghost Fathers' section of St. Mary's Cemetery in O'Hara Township.

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