



Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts 02167 Telephone (617) 969-0100

College of Arts and Sciences
Office of the Dean

November 3, 1978

Rev. Bernard Lonergan, S.J.
St. Mary's Hall
Boston College
140 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts 02167

Dear Father Lonergan:

Your name has been suggested to the Promotions Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences as one who is familiar with the scholarly work of Father Harvey Egan, S.J. Father Egan is being considered by the Promotions Committee for promotion to the rank of Associate Professor with grant of tenure.

The Promotions Committee usually writes to outside consultants asking their opinions on the scholarly work done thus far and the scholarly potential of the candidates before it. I hope that you are familiar enough with the work of Father Egan to be able to give us your opinion of it; it will be tremendously helpful to us in coming to a well formed recommendation to the President.

I know that I speak for the Committee in expressing my gratitude to you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

T. P. O'Malley, S.J.

T. P. O'Malley, S.J.
Dean
Chairman, Promotions Committee



Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts 02167 Telephone (617) 969-0100

November 8, 1978

Department of Theology

The Reverend Thomas O'Malley, S. J.
Dean of Arts and Sciences
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA 02167

Reverend and dear Father,

In response to your letter of November 3rd., I write to recommend unreservedly The Reverend Harvey D. Egan, S. J., for promotion to the rank of Associate Professor of Theology with tenure. I cannot imagine that it would be hard for him to find employment elsewhere, but I feel it would be a disaster for the theology department at Boston College to lose not only an outstanding teacher but as well a prolific writer on matters of the greatest importance at the present time to Catholic theology.

His initial goal in life was to become an electrical engineer, and to this end he spent four years at Worcester Polytechnical Institute where he obtained his B. S. cum laude. It was largely there I feel that he acquired the clarity and precision of thought, the attention to detail and the thoroughness, that characterize his teaching and writing in theology. After all, engineers have to make things work.

His studies in philosophy at Weston and in theology at Woodstock were completed magna cum laude to be followed by four years at the University of Münster in Germany where he earned his doctorate, again magna cum laude. As German students used to wander from university to university before settling down, I asked him how he happened to go straight to Münster and stay there. He answered that his only reason for going to Germany was Karl Rahner. He had written Rahner while still in America telling him his desire (1) to pursue the

line of thought Rahner had developed in his The Dynamic Element in the Church, (2) to promote the study of mysticism in Catholic circles, and (3) to clarify traditional doctrine on the discernment of spirits. Since it is rare for doctoral candidates to know in advance just what they wish to do, Rahner promptly accepted to guide Egan to the doctorate.

I got to know Fr. Egan in 1975-76 when he addressed the Jesuit community at St. Mary's Hall on "Consolation without a previous cause." I had been hearing those words since 1922 at the annual retreats made by Jesuits preparing for the priesthood. They occur in St. Ignatius's "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits in the Second Week of the Exercises." But now, after fifty-three years, I began for the first time to grasp what they meant. What had intervened was what Rahner describes as the anthropological turn, the turn from metaphysical objects to conscious subjects. What I was learning was that the Ignatian "examen conscientiae" might mean not an examination of conscience but an examination of consciousness; after all in the romance languages the same word is used to denote both conscience and consciousness, both Gewissen and Bewusstsein. I was seeing that "consolation" and "desolation" named opposite answers to the question, How do you feel when you pray? Are you absorbed or are you blocked? I was hearing that my own work on operative grace in St. Thomas (cf. Theol. Stud., 1941-42) brought to light a positive expression of what was meant by Ignatius when spoke of "consolation without a previous cause:" in Aquinas grace is operative when the mind is not a mover but only moved; in Ignatius consolation is from God alone when there is no conscious antecedent to account for the consolation.

In time I came to know Fr. Egan's views on mysticism. It is not just a series of exceptional events. It is a whole way of life. It is the way to which St. Paul refers in Rom 8: 14: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." It is of a piece with Newman's "Lead kindly light, lead thou me on." It replaces Socrates' obedience to his daimon with the Ignatian rules: In desolation change nothing; rely on consolation when there is no conscious antecedent that accounts for the consolation. Or, in the words of Aquinas, grace is operative

when you become willing to do the good that previously you were unwilling to do. The succession of such changes in willingness is the way of the mystic that first purges one of one's inordinate attachments, then opens one's eyes to things as they are, and eventually brings those that persevere to a transforming union with God.

As many of the Fathers of the Church, saints Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas were mystics. But the Aristotelian-Augustinian row of the closing thirteenth century with its Correctio fratris Thomae, its Correctio corruptorii fratris Thomae, and its succession of Correctiones correctionum, came to end by taking refuge in Aristotle's Posterior Analytics, which conceived science as a body of self-evident principles and demonstrable conclusions. It was a view that, for Aristotle, held only for mathematical science and, for our contemporaries, does not even hold for mathematics. But in the fourteenth century it led first to skepticism and, down the centuries, it has ensured the separation of mysticism and theology. Catholic theologians may be mystics but they used to think it wiser not to let that appear in their discourse. The sad result has been that today Catholic youth in their desire to learn to pray too often has turned to Indian gurus and even prays to pagan gods.

Fr. Egan's resume of his studies and writings is forceful evidence of how radically the situation has changed. The nineteenth-century German Historical School innovated in hermeneutics and history. Their example spread to the universities of the world. Their influence has penetrated into the study of the bible, of the Fathers, of the Scholastics, and of modern and contemporary theologians. Control has shifted from rules of logic over general propositions to the authenticity of subjects doing research, interpreting documents, discerning historical movements, and evaluating key decisions. For a Catholic theologian to become an authentic person there is no more efficient instrument than the cultivation of the spiritual life.

Fr. Egan is a master of the spiritual life. Carmelites are shrewd judges yet for five years in a row they have had him direct their annual retreat in their convent at Santa Clara. Now on the east coast several times a year they journey from

a number of other convents to their convent in West Roxbury for four-hour sessions in which they put to him their questions and breathe in his spirit.

Again, I have had indications that he is a very successful teacher. Students like him and his ways and, on at least one occasion, they have given him top rating among teachers of theology.

I have been able to consult his dissertation and found it a mine of erudite information. I have worked through his second book which, in about one third the space, reworks and updates the dissertation. It is an original work and a signal contribution to Ignatian studies.

He has become a regular contributor to the quarterly, Theological Studies, which by a wide margin for nearly forty years has been the leader among U. S. periodicals publishing scholarly articles and reviews in Catholic theology. Besides his full length article in the September issue of this year and a review article on Rahner's Grundkurs des Glaubens, he has contributed twenty-two book reviews (ten on Rahner's writings), and he has been invited to review for TS the sixty books on mystics that Paulist Press is in the course of issuing.

Communio is an international Catholic quarterly. It was initiated by Ratzinger (now Cardinal Archbishop of Munich), Urs von Balthasar, and de Lubac, when all three were on the International Theological Commission. In undertaking to publish Fr. Egan's "Reflections on Christian Mysticism" in Communio, the editor was enthusiastic about his referees' praise for the article.

Thought, the Fordham quarterly, has become a venerable institution and under its new editor, Fr. Richard Dimler, S. J., is giving promise of new life and vigor. He has been canvassing new contributors and in a reply I recommended Fr. Egan to him. He wrote Egan and Egan submitted his paper on "The Cloud of Unknowing and Pseudo-Contemplation." In undertaking to publish the paper Dimler and his editorial board praise it as an outstanding contribution to Thought.

Besides a number of reviews in lesser quarterlies, there is the very relevant paper he presented last June to the Catholic Theological Society of America on "The Challenge of Mysticism for Contemporary Catholic Theology." It is due to appear in the 1978 Proceedings of the Society.

A final note would draw attention to the categories of projects for coming papers and books; commissioned works in process; potential commissioned project; on-going projects; long-range projects; other professional projects. He apparently is not aiming at being a weekend celebrity.

To conclude, I again most heartily recommend that Boston College recognize Fr. Egan's remarkable qualifications as an exceptionally up-to-date teacher and scholarly writer by advancing him to the rank of Associate Professor of Theology with tenure.

Respectfully yours,

Bernard J. F. Lonergan S. J.

Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J.

Visiting Distinguished Professor of Theology

P. S. The University of Chicago Press has just published Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure as a Supplement to volume 8 (1978) of the Journal of Religion.

Background for our concern is provided by Gerald A. McCool, S. J., "Twentieth Century Scholasticism," pp. S198-S200.