

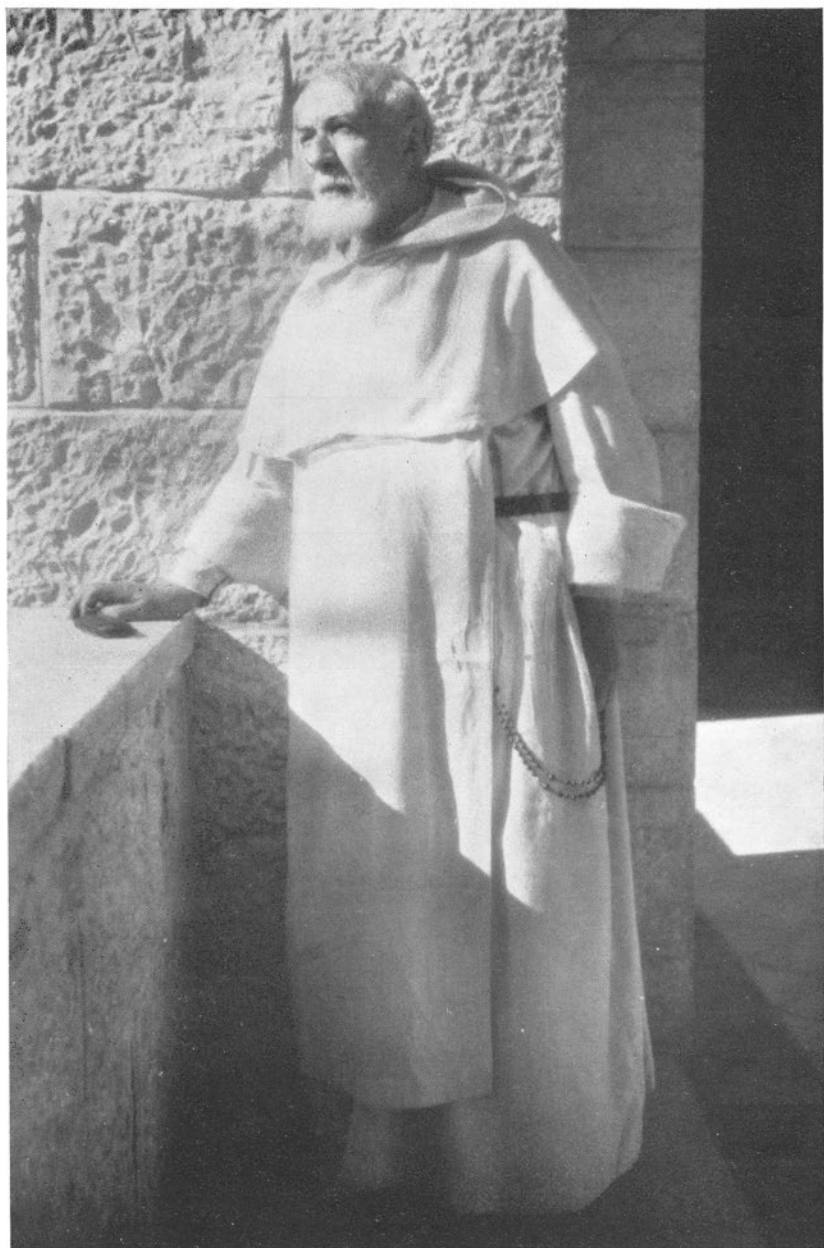
## PERE MARIE-JOSEPH LAGRANGE, O.P.

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DEATH came to Père Marie-Joseph Lagrange, O.P., the outstanding Catholic scriptural scholar of modern times, on March 10, 1938, in the Dominican convent of Saint Maximin, near Marseilles. Founder of the famed Biblical School of Saint Stephen in Jerusalem and of the equally famed *Revue Biblique*, Père Lagrange had labored for almost fifty years in the difficult field of Scripture studies. His passing is mourned not only by the Church and by his brethren in the Order, but by thousands of scholars throughout the world, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, who have long lauded his labors and appreciated the true worth of his intellectual accomplishments. Professors of Sacred Scripture in hundreds of Catholic seminaries and colleges feel a particular loss, for Père Lagrange, without doubt, stood at the head of Catholic exegetes, a bulwark of strength and courage in the face of the most insidious and cleverly planned attacks ever levelled against the Written Word of God.

Père Lagrange was born at Bourg-en-Bresse, France, on March 7, 1855, the Feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and made his secondary studies in the seminary of Autun. He received the doctorate in Law on July 6, 1878, after five years of study at Paris. In October of the same year he entered the Seminary at Issy where the Sulpician Fathers were the first to awaken his interest in philological and scriptural studies, and where he met for the first time his life-long friends and collaborators Abbés Batiffol and Hyvernat. In 1879 he was admitted into the Dominican novitiate of the Province of Toulouse at Saint Maximin, a convent for which he never lost his love and the one in which, of his own desire, he spent the last years of his life. All religious having been expelled from France in 1880, Père Lagrange pursued his theological studies at Salamanca in Spain, where he was ordained priest on December 22, 1883, and where, from 1884 until 1886, he taught ecclesiastical history. Returned to France, he taught Scripture at Toulouse during the two following years and in 1888 repaired to the University of Vienna, then the centre of Oriental studies. "Such were the stages of the



PÈRE MARIE-JOSEPH LAGRANGE, O.P.



long technical preparation of Père Lagrange. At thirty-five years, apart from a grasp of the classical languages, including especially a profound knowledge of Greek, he had completed thorough philosophical and theological studies, knew German, English, Spanish and Italian, and also was acquainted with the Oriental languages: he was ready for his work."<sup>1</sup>

In 1890, at the completion of his studies in Vienna, Father Larroca, then Master General of the Order, commissioned Père Lagrange to found the Biblical School which Leo XIII had long counselled the Dominicans to annex to their convent of Saint Stephen at Jerusalem. Accordingly he betook himself to the Holy Land where he opened the school on November 15, 1890, the Feast of Saint Albert the Great. Those who today behold the beautiful basilica of St. Stephen and its surrounding buildings might find it hard to believe that the first lectures given at this now world-famed institute were delivered in what was originally the municipal slaughter house. Ground was broken for the present buildings on December 7, 1891.

As with all great enterprises the early days of the school were trying. Professors were few, students were scarce, and the meagre library gave little promise of becoming the splendid collection it is today. However, Père Lagrange and his first associates multiplied themselves and the Director made it a point to develop specialists among the newly-arriving Dominican students from France. So well did he gauge the special abilities of his first charges that some of them, such as Père Jaussin, the authority on Arabic customs who reached the Holy Land in 1890, and Père Vincent, one of the foremost authorities on Palestinian archeology who followed in 1891, have not ceased after almost fifty years to make valuable contributions to Biblical science. Later on came Père Abel, the master geographer of Palestine and Père Savignac, the Semitist.

As his entire training might lead us to suppose, "Père Lagrange wished to do scientific work: a review was necessary. . . The first number of the *Revue Biblique Internationale* appeared at the beginning of 1892. It was an immediate success, thanks to its thoroughgoing scientific character and its sound comprehension of men and of systems. Today it is one of the rare

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<sup>1</sup>L. Beaudou, "Le Père Lagrange" in *L'Année Dominicaine* (May, 1938), p. 133.

Catholic reviews which has access into non-Catholic scientific circles."<sup>2</sup>

Besides contributing to every issue of the *Revue Biblique* during the forty-six years of its continuous publication, as well as to other reviews such as *Correspondant*, *Revue Thomiste*, *La Vie Intellectuelle*, *La Vie Spirituelle*, the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, the *Constructive Review* and the *New York Review*, Père Lagrange left behind him many monumental works.<sup>3</sup> Foremost among these are the many volumes which he contributed to the collection, *Etudes Bibliques*, which in the words of Cardinal Lienart, "constitutes the most complete ensemble, one might say the *Summa*, of scriptural teaching of our time."<sup>4</sup> In 1903 appeared *Le Livre des Juges*, the first of the series of commentaries on the Old Testament. It was followed in 1904 by *La Méthode historique*, in 1905 by *les Etudes sur les Religions sémitiques*, in 1909 by *Le Messianisme chez les Juifs* and in 1931 by *Le Judaïsme avant Jésus-Christ*. Beginning with 1909 Père Lagrange turned his attention to the New Testament and restricted his considerations of Old Testament problems to the pages of the *Revue Biblique*. His *L'Evangile selon saint Marc* was first published in 1911, *L'Épître aux Romains* in 1916, *L'Épître aux Galates* in 1918, *L'Evangile selon saint Luc* in 1921, *L'Evangile selon saint Mathieu* in 1923, *L'Evangile selon saint Jean* in 1925, *Synopsis evangelica graece* in 1926, finally in 1928 came *L'Evangile de Jésus-Christ*, which is really a Life of Christ and sums up in popular style the profound conclusions so well presented in the afore-mentioned commentaries. In the last years of his life appeared *Histoire du Canon du Nouveau Testament* (1933), *Introduction à la Critique Textuelle du Nouveau Testament* (1935) and *L'Orphisme* (1937), his last published work. Among his less pretentious books should be mentioned *Saint Justin*, *Le Sens du Christianisme d'après l'exégèse allemande*, *La Vie de Jésus d'après Renan*, *La Morale et les Morales de l'Evangile*, *M. Loisy et le Modernisme* and the abridged editions of his commentaries on Saint Mark and Saint Luke.

The outbreak of the Great War disrupted the intense scientific activity of Père Lagrange and his associates in the Holy Land. His brethren departed to take active service in the conflict but he, being beyond the military age, remained in Jerusalem to guard the church and convent of St. Stephen. At one

<sup>2</sup> M. B. Humeau, O. P., "Le Père Lagrange" in *La Vie Spirituelle*, LV (April, 1938), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. *L'oeuvre exegetique et historique du R. P. Lagrange* in *Cahiers de la Nouvelle Journée*, no. 28. (Bloud & Gay, Paris, 1935).

<sup>4</sup> *L'oeuvre exegetique*, p. 6.

time during the War, Père Lagrange was taken into custody by the Turks and forced to travel afoot to Syria. His release was granted after Pope Benedict XV had interceded in his behalf with Kaiser Wilhelm II who, in turn, brought pressure to bear upon the Turkish authorities. Père Lagrange went then to France and continued there the publication of the *Revue Biblique*. His erstwhile associates, now scattered about on various fronts, somehow managed to carry on their work and even to contribute articles to the *Revue*,—coöperation of which Père Lagrange was extremely proud and to which he loved to call attention.

When the War was over Père Lagrange and his staff reunited at Jerusalem. Shortly after their return, L'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, in its meeting of October 15, 1920, decided that "the Biblical School of Saint Stephen, by reason of its organization, its scientific location and its authority, is eminently fitted to constitute the French Archeological School of Jerusalem."<sup>5</sup> And Père Lagrange, about this same time, received the Cross of the Legion of Honor because of the renown which his learning had lent to French prestige. However in 1922, Père Lagrange thought the time had come to hand over the direction of the Biblical School to a younger man; he was then sixty-seven. The work of many of his disciples had already received official recognition so he could make the change without misgiving. Circumstances, nevertheless, forced him ten years later, at the age of seventy-seven, to take upon himself once more the direction of the School.

On December 22, 1933, Père Lagrange celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his Dominican priesthood. Thereafter his health began to fail rapidly. In the summer of 1935, now eighty years of age, his condition was such as to make a change in climate imperative. "One day in October, 1935, Père Lagrange bade farewell to the convent where he had lived for forty-five years, to his dear Saint Stephen's; he bade farewell to the school which he had founded and nourished; he bade farewell to Palestine which had become his second Fatherland; he bade farewell to the country of Jesus. What sorrow must have welled up in his very sensitive soul! But he let no signs of it appear . . . during his homeward journey never did a word of complaint or of regret escape from his lips; the strength of soul which so many trials had tempered and the abandonment to the good God which would once more be on his lips at the moment of death made

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<sup>5</sup> Cfr. *L'Année Dominicaine* (May, 1938), p. 135.

him forget his own concerns and think only of others; profound peace filled his soul; he was happy to think that the spirit and methods which he had not ceased to defend and propagate for forty years had finally acquired an honorable place (*droit de cité*) in the Church and were the inspiration of true Catholic scholars throughout the entire world.”<sup>6</sup>

Having returned to the convent at St. Maximin he immediately set about the composition of his last works. In spite of the frailty of his health he taught Holy Scripture to his younger student-brethren and even gave conferences outside the convent. Students, teachers, priests and professors who sought counsel and direction from Père Lagrange during these last two years of his life found him always agreeable and helpful. Among his former students who travelled to Saint Maximin were His Eminence, Cardinal Tisserant and Père Vincent, and their visits gave him great joy.

In the early days of March, 1938, he went to Montpellier to deliver a series of conferences. Upon his return to his convent his final illness overtook him. Two days after the Feast of Saint Thomas he received the last rites of the Church and at nine-thirty on the morning of March 10 he breathed his last surrounded by more than eighty religious chanting the *Salve Regina*. He was eighty-three years old. He had lived for almost half a century in Palestine, the earthly home of Christ and His Mother, and now he had gone to be with them forever in their heavenly home.

The following letter was written by the Master General on the occasion of Père Lagrange's death. In it Father Gillet pays eminent tribute to the simple, genuine humility and religious fervor which marked the entire career of the brilliant Dominican exegete.

TO THE VERY REVEREND FATHER PROVINCIAL,  
MASTERS IN SACRED THEOLOGY, PREACHERS  
GENERALS, PRIORS, FATHERS AND BROTHERS  
OF OUR ORDER, HEALTH AND  
BLESSING IN SAINT DOMINIC

The Very Reverend Père Marie Joseph Lagrange, sometime prior of the convent of St. Stephen in Jerusalem, and director of

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<sup>6</sup> Humeau, O.P., "Le Père Lagrange" in *La Vie Spirituelle*, LV (April, 1938), pp. 67-68. Père Humeau accompanied Père Lagrange on his homeward journey.

the *École Biblique*, has just passed away peacefully amidst his brethren in the convent of Saint Maximin, which was the house of his novitiate. In him the Province of Toulouse loses one of its best sons; the Order, one of its glories; the Church, one of its greatest and most devoted servants. We have therefore deemed it proper to inform you of his death, asking of you all a remembrance of him in your prayers.

It will be accounted to the honor of the Province of Toulouse, that after having given the saintly Père Cormier to the Order, it has given also Père Lagrange who, during the half century that he spent in Jerusalem, filled alike the highest and the humblest offices without sacrificing anything of his religious life. This moving aspect of the personality of Père Lagrange is not well enough known either in the Order or outside it. Every one knows that he was an incomparable exegete, a savant of rare culture, an indefatigable and tireless worker, but the majority do not know that he was, and remained all his life, a very holy religious.

As long as his health permitted, which is to say until the last years of his life, he never consented to take advantage of any of the ordinary dispensations to which he was entitled by our Constitutions in order that the whole of his time might have been devoted to study. It was not that he undervalued such dispensations, but he considered—we have heard him say so—that in a convent where the religious were dedicated to the study of the Sacred Scriptures, an integral conventual life was an absolute necessity. That is the reason why he was in choir every day to recite the Divine Office with the other Professors of the School. He assisted at the Conventual Mass every morning; at the community Meditation; and he made it a duty for himself to perform in his turn the humble functions of hebdomadarian.

He was Prior several times and he ruled as much by the example of his own personal life as by the authority of his office. As a simple religious he gave more than once proof of the most scrupulous obedience towards his superiors. During the seven years that we have governed the Order—and every time that, for one reason or another, we came into direct relations with him—we never found in Père Lagrange the slightest resistance to authority. Indeed, on the contrary, his great joy was to obey, and he did so with the simplicity of a child. He had a deep inner piety that ruled his whole life. Above all things he loved God,



and God, according to him, must be served first. Nothing mattered more than the will of God, and the will of God was expressed for him by his superiors. Obedience was the royal road in which this Prince of Learning loved to walk.

After God, he loved the Virgin Mother. For her he had, and manifested always, the greatest filial devotion. We find a touching expression of this in his "spiritual testament": "I am a son of Mary. *Tuus sum ego; salvum me fac!*" Have we need to add that, among the other saints he venerated, Saint Dominic held first place in his heart? He thought of himself as a debtor of St. Dominic, and he always maintained that in entering the Order he had given nothing to it, because he had received everything from it, even those things which to many seemed the result of his own natural talents and of his personal efforts. Charity in him had sharpened thus his sense of justice. He never made use of the Order except to better serve it. In its turn the Order esteems that it loses in the person of Père Lagrange one of its glories.

From the time of its foundation, the Order of Saint Dominic has ever had at heart to give to the Church along with an army of preachers, who would spread the truth among all nations, also men of study, capable of consecrating their lives to research and to the teaching of Christian doctrine; exegetes, such as Hugh of Saint-Cher; theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas; philosophers and savants, such as Saint Albert the Great; canonists, such as Saint Raymond of Pennafort; historians, such as Natalis Alexander, Quétif and Échard; jurists, such as Vitoria; and even artists, such as Fra Angelico. When we read attentively the history of the Order we are struck by the fact that, in all the difficult times in which the scorching breath of heresy has passed over our Church, the very well-springs of whose life it would dry up, the good God has raised up great spirits, great hearts, of a stature fit to combat such scourges. And did not Saint Dominic himself in the thirteenth century indicate to his sons the way to follow when he went into the south of France to fight against the Albigenses and destroy the progress of heresy there?

A little later, in the University of Paris, in a reaction to false sentimentalism that had been introduced into theology, the driest sort of rationalism struck at the very roots of faith. It was then that Albert the Great and Thomas of Aquin fused their strength to reestablish normal relations between Reason and

Faith and to save at a stroke Philosophy and Theology.

In the sixteenth century, when the Reformation attacked the authority of the Church and contested her right to teach all nations, one of our greatest theologians, Cardinal Cajetan, set all his learning, all his genius to demonstrating the infallible magistracy of the Church in the matter of teaching.

And, finally, in our own times, when the biblical crisis arose in the very heart of Christianity, our Order had the glory of possessing in the person of Père Lagrange, an exemplary religious who was all the better fitted to combat these new heretics on their own grounds, in that none of them, not even the greatest, ever dared call into question either his learning or his orthodoxy. As the years pass over the tomb of Père Lagrange, when those who knew him best are free to speak of him without fear of offending his very real modesty, we shall know better to what extent he has surpassed the exegetes of these times, of whom the greatest have always considered him the master. The disciples are legion who weep sincerely for him; who recognize that to him, under God, they owe what is best in their learning and in their life. In him they admired as much the perfect religious that he was in all simplicity, as the professor who initiated them with an incomparable mastery into the beauties and the secrets of the Holy Writings.

The Order has, then, the right to glory because of such a son and to count him as one of its glories. But, indeed, the Order did not wait to do that until Père Lagrange had closed his eyes in death. Those of you who will take the trouble of reading the Acts of the General Chapters of these last years, will see there with what consciousness of their obligations and their responsibilities, the Capitular Fathers have insisted upon rendering homage to the personality and the work of Père Lagrange, enveloping, moreover, in the same eulogy, the same expression of gratitude, the *École Biblique* itself, where the Master has left disciples worthy of himself and busy, as was he, in becoming ever more and more servitors devoted and submissive to Holy Church.

And the Church, indeed, in him has lost one of its most devoted servants. See what we read in the "spiritual testament" of Père Lagrange, published in *La Croix* of March 12th, 1938:

"I declare before God that it is my intention to die in the Holy Catholic Church to which I have always belonged with my whole heart and soul since the day of

my baptism, and to die there faithful to my vows of poverty, of chastity, and of obedience, in the Order of Saint Dominic. To that end I commend myself to my good Saviour Jesus and to the prayers of His most holy Mother who has always been so good to me. I declare also most expressly that I submit to the judgment of the Apostolic See all that I have written. I believe that I can add that I have always had the intention in all my studies, of contributing to the good—I mean to the reign of Jesus Christ, to the honor of the Church, to the good of souls.”

His whole life through Père Lagrange desired to serve the Church. One cannot doubt his intention—it was always sincere. His works attest the same fact. In the opinion of those who have most authority in this matter, there is no other monument raised to the glory of the Church comparable to the ensemble of the works of Père Lagrange. When time shall have accomplished its work of appeasement, when the outcry sometimes raised around his name by those who, sincerely or through prejudice, did not understand at all or understood only very badly, the figure of Père Lagrange will appear in its full light. He will be accounted one of the greatest of the servitors of the Church; that is to say, he will be accounted not only among those who purposed always to serve her, but among those who have rendered the most signal service.

When in 1930 Père Lagrange published that most beautiful of his works *L'Évangile de Jésus-Christ*, and offered it to the Holy See, he received from the Secretary of State the following letter:

“My Very Reverend Father:

It is particularly agreeable to me to tell you with what paternal benevolence the Sovereign Pontiff has accepted the homage of your beautiful labor entitled *L'Évangile de Jésus-Christ*.

His Holiness thanks you with all his heart for this testimony of filial veneration towards his august Person, and he felicitates you upon your adding to the series of *Études Biblique* these pages which form a new sounding in the unfathomable depths of the Divine Word. In making his prayer that your *L'Évangile de Jésus-Christ* may bring to the greatest possible number of souls the nourishment of which one stands so much in need in our day, the Sovereign Pontiff accords from his inmost heart to the worker and to his work, as a pledge of his

paternal benevolence and of the best favors from on high, a particular Apostolic blessing. Deign to accept, my very Reverend Father, the assurance of my religious attachment.

E. CARD. PACELLI."

After such testimony, which, more than all others, gives honor to Père Lagrange, there only remains for us to commend his soul to your prayers; to propose his life as an example for all; and to ask that you accept, with our paternal blessing, the assurance of our devoted affection in Saint Dominic.

BRO. MARTIN S. GILLET, O.P.

Master-General.

New York, March 28, 1938.

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## ON THE EVE OF ORDINATION

RAYMUND VIVIER, O.P.

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No miser ever counted hoarded gold  
More eagerly than I the busy years.  
No fairer dreams could heaven itself unfold  
Of sinner saved, of penitential tears.  
How often hard the way, what bitter hours!  
The soul doubt stricken, temptation plagued, a prey  
To Darkness; a thing of sport for all its Powers  
Till shone again the Light, till came the day.

Tomorrow I ascend the altar stair.  
The sanctuary portals open wide,  
Embracing arms of welcome. O happy hour  
When earth and heaven meet! A thing so fair,  
Angelic Choirs pause and turn aside  
In wonderment at priesthood's awful power.