

Symposium on Père Marie-Joseph Lagrange
30th september 2006 in Toulon

in IDI – 448 / January 07

Père Lagrange, founder of the Ecole biblique of Jerusalem, passed from this world to the Father on March 10, 1938 at Saint-Maximin (Var). This is why his cause for beatification has been introduced by the bishop of Fréjus-Toulon, Mgr Joseph Madec, on the 9th of July 1987. Before, the General Chapter of the Order of Preachers held in Avila in August 1986 had asked for the opening of the process for canonization of this friar venerated as a master of exegesis and a model of religious life.

Père Lagrange is frequently called “the new Saint Jerome of the 20th century” because of the amplitude and the quality of his biblical research, and he is considered a doctor in Church. He is offered as an example to those who, according to J. Maritain¹, “have worked to free the intelligence, that is to say to help their contemporaries to accede to the Truth that makes one free” (cfr Je 8, 32), (Acte of the General Chapter of Avila, n° 67, 2).

On September 30, Mgr Dominique Rey, bishop of Fréjus-Toulon, organized a symposium dedicated to Père Lagrange at Castille-La Crau on the occasion of the launching of two years of reflection on the Word of God in his diocese. Many people – about five hundred persons representing the active members of the diocese – took part joyfully in the conferences and the celebration of the Word of God. Fr. Marc Aillet, vicar general, opened the symposium. The historian Gerard Cholvy, professor emeritus of the Paul-Valéry University of Montpellier, spoke about the tormented era in which Père Lagrange lived, marked by the modernism that called the Bible into question. The rationalism of certain modernists aspired to a “world without mystery”. Père Lagrange answered the scientific critique with scientific critique, from which arose his attachment to professional competence in the historical and biblical studies. Bro Bernard Montagnes, a Dominican friar from the convent of Toulouse, biographer of Père Lagrange, developed the theme “Marie-Joseph Lagrange, a daring pioneer of the historical critique of the Bible and faithful servant of the faith of the Church”.

An exhibition of eight panels on Père Lagrange and a DVD were produced by Jacques Fichfeux² and the audio-visual service of the diocese of Toulon. They recall the life and work of Père Lagrange based on photos from the archives of the Dominican Province of Toulouse: family photos, photos of excavations in the desert of Israel, photos of the Ecole biblique of Jerusalem, and of the Dominican life in Saint-Maximin.

As a vice-postulator for the cause of beatification of Père Lagrange, I had the pleasure and the honour of presenting the stages we have already covered and those forthcoming in this cause, their implications and as well as the graces received by couples, families, priests and religious. The work that was accomplished by a number of historians and theologians in view of the beatification should soon arrive at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome, where a group of consultants, theologians and cardinals will pronounce themselves on the heroic virtues of Père Lagrange who would then be declared “venerable”. At present he is

¹ Jacques Maritain, philosopher and French diplomat (1882-1973)

² It is possible to ask for the text of the talk from Jacques Fichfeux. Tél 06 09 33 91 69

invoked as a “Servant of God”. In order for a venerable to be declared blessed a miracle which is recognized by the Church is needed. Following St. Dominic who, when he was dying, exhorted his Dominican friars not to be discouraged because “he would be more fruitful in heaven than on earth”, today Père Lagrange is responding by spreading graces on those who put their trust in him. This is shown by the many testimonies the La Revue du Rosaire receives.

Père Lagrange is not only a model for researchers but he can also illuminate the ways of everybody, from childhood to old age. His younger years were moulded by the Marian prayer, the education he received from his parents, fervent and demanding; his apostolic youth was fashioned by catechesis and the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, by his consecration to study, by his spirit so enamoured with light and truth, by his obedience in times of ordeal, by his humility that led him to regret his bursts of anger in the face of the ignorance of youth, by his sense of loyalty and justice, by his lack of bitterness and rancour, and by his inner life soothed by the Rosary and the prayer in Gethsemane in communion with the Passion of Jesus.

During his talk, Fr. Marie-Wladimir Gaudrat, abbot at the Cistercian abbey of Lérins, situated in front of the bay of Cannes, presented *lectio divina* as a means by which to put the Word of God in the heart of Christian life supported by quotes from the Fathers of the Church, like that of St. Gregory the Great³: “The Bible grows with him who reads it” (Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel).

A celebration of the Word of God ended this day of study and prayer. Presided by Mgr Dominique Rey, it gave an important place to the participation of laypeople. Representatives from the different parishes of the diocese were divided into groups in order to display banners on which one could read :”Your Word, a light for my path” (Psalm 119); “I am the Light of the world” (Christ the Pantokrator⁴ showing the gospel); “2006-2008, Years of the Word”.

Bro Manuel Rivero op

³ Gregory the Great, pope (590-604).

⁴ Pantokrator, in Greek « Ruler of all Sovereign Teacher », is a representation of Christ in his majesty.