

IN MEMORIAM

FRANÇOIS GRAFFIN, S.J. (1905–
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BIBLIOTHÈQUE DU CAUCASE

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FRANCE

Father François Graffin was an outstanding figure in the world of French oriental studies and of Syriac studies in particular. His gentle energy allowed him to work for many years in order to make known the field which had become dear to him: the theology of those who wrote in the Syriac language, especially of the poets.

Born in the West of France, in the *Département de la Sarthe*, on January 1, 1905, he always remained attached to his family and to his native village, to which he used to return every year.

He received a solid education in the *Collège Sainte-Croix* of Le Mans, with the Jesuit Fathers, and subsequently he himself joined the Society of Jesus.

However, the fate of Father Graffin was to be determined by the work of his uncle, Monseigneur René Graffin (1858–1941), editor of the *Patrologia Syriaca*, which was soon expanded into the *Patrologia Orientalis*, enabling the inclusion of texts in the other languages of Eastern Christianity.

François Graffin loved to tell the humorous tale of how he was appointed his uncle's successor by Pope Pius XI, to whom his uncle submitted every year the new installments of the *Patrologia Orientalis*. In 1931, the Pope suggested that the work should be entrusted to a religious order, which would guarantee its continuity. "I have

been educated by the Jesuits,” was Monseigneur Graffin’s reply, “and I have a nephew who is a Jesuit.” – “Well then, take him!”

Ten years later, after additional studies in Paris, François Graffin succeeded his uncle as editor of the *Patrologia Orientalis*. He himself became a specialist in the Syriac language, which he taught at the *Institut catholique* in Paris from 1951 to 1975.

His interest remained focused on theology. In 1957, he published one of the “bases” of the “Lamp of the Sanctuary” (a major work by Gregory Abu ’l-Faraj Barhebraeus), devoted to theology (*Patrologia Orientalis*, XXVII, fasc. 4).

Father Graffin was a faithful man in the fullest sense of the word. He took care to complete the work left unfinished by his teachers, a heavy task to which he gave priority over his own work. He thus brought to completion the publication of the *Cathedral homilies* of Severus—no less than six fascicules of the *Patrologia Orientalis*—and subsequently of the *Dissertationes decem de Uno e sancta Trinitate incorporato et passo* by Philoxenus of Mabbog (four fascicules).

For fourteen years he was deeply involved in bringing these works to completion and it was only in 1984 that he published anonymous Syriac homilies, based on a sixth-century manuscript, and then co-authored the publication of the *Letter on the Three Degrees of Monastic Life* by Joseph Hazzaya.

In fifty years of intense activity, François Graffin supervised the publication of fifty fascicules of the *Patrologia Orientalis*, thirty-two of which deal with Syriac texts.

He was also in charge of the publication of the last volume of the *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien*, and he was considering resuming the publication of this journal after the death of Monseigneur Khouri-Sarkis (1968) and the termination of *L’Orient syrien*, the journal to which he had contributed regularly, from its third issue onwards, and of which he had become vice-director.

However, a different solution was adopted, which consisted in the merger with the journal *Melto* and the creation of *Parole de l’Orient*. François Graffin was particularly pleased with this solution, which highlighted the special relations which he had developed with his Eastern students, in this case those of the Maronite University of Kaslik, in Lebanon. He was a member of the editorial committee of this recreated journal and published in it several articles.

Of course, he was in love with Saint Ephrem, and because he also loved the beauty of French, he contributed to two volumes

with translations of hymns which appeared in the collection *Sources chrétiennes*.

Always speaking with the rigor and the clarity of a teacher, he remained humble, amiable in all circumstances, and generous.

The impulse that he was able to give to Syriac studies in France resonates far beyond, in space as well as in time!

A printed bibliography of François Graffin, up to 1975, can be found in volume 6–7 (1975–1976) of *Parole de l'Orient*, which was offered to honor him on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

On the web, see:

<http://www.jesuites.com/bibliographie/auteurs/graffin.htm>.

[Translated from French by L. Van Rompay]