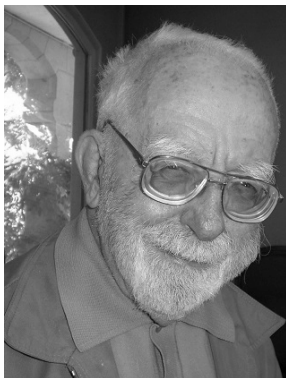


IN MEMORIAM



RENÉ LAVENANT, S.J.
(1926–2013)

DOMINIQUE GONNET, S.J.

INSTITUT DES SOURCES CHRÉTIENNES

René Lavenant was born in Davézieux, near Annonay (in the Rhône-Alpes region), in March 1926. He had two younger sisters. As he himself reported, the memory and the cult of Saint John Francis Regis, an early Jesuit saint, were very much alive during his childhood, both in his family and in his native region. He attended high school first at the Junior Seminary of Saint Charles Borromeo in Annonay and then at the École Apostolique (“Apostolic School”) of Avignon, where he graduated in 1944.

He entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in September 1944 in Francheville (to the west of Lyons) and pronounced his first vows in Yzeure (in the Auvergne region) two years later. His request to work in the Middle East was accepted and in 1946 he

started working, as part of his military service, at the Maronite Junior Seminary of Ghazir, north of Beirut, where for two years he taught the fourth grade and acted as a supervisor. This first experience was followed by a two-year period of Arabic language study in Bikfaya. When he left Lebanon in 1950, in order to continue the Jesuit curriculum in philosophy at Chantilly, near Paris, he knew that he wanted to focus on the Syriac language. As he himself reported, Father Graffin introduced him to this language during weekly Sunday sessions. In 1953 he returned to Ghazir where he was appointed assistant to the Director of Studies. He continued to work on Syriac and fulfilled requirements for a certificate in Semitic philology before returning to France for the theology component of the Jesuit curriculum, which he started in Lyons-Fourvière in 1955. He was ordained a priest in July 1958. Between 1959 and 1961 he was based in Chantilly and continued his Syriac work at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. Following his Tertianship (the final year of Jesuit training) in the Jesuit community of Paray-le-Monial (in Burgundy), he returned to Lebanon in the summer of 1962 and, for one additional year, was in charge of the program of study at Ghazir Seminary.

In 1963 he began his career as university professor. The same year saw his first major publication: an edition and translation of Philoxenus of Mabbug's important Letter to Patricius of Edessa, which appeared in the *Patrologia Orientalis*. Living initially in Bikfaya and later in Beirut, he was for thirteen years professor of Arabic at the Centre de Recherches et d'Études Arabes (CREA), which is affiliated with the Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth. He had a weekly teaching load of 20 hours. After an extended stay in the United States in 1977, he spent an additional three years in Beirut, working on Syriac language and patristics and teaching not only at the Université Saint-Joseph, but also at the Pontifical Biblical and Oriental Institutes in Rome. In 1980, at the age of 54, he was appointed professor of patristics and Syriac studies at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. He continued, however, his collaboration with Beirut, in particular for the revision of the Arabic version of the Old Testament. As the leading Syriac scholar of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, he took upon himself the task of editing the proceedings of the Syriac Symposium between 1980 (the third Symposium) and 1996 (the seventh Symposium), which all appeared in the series *Orientalia Christiana*

Analecta. In addition, from 1995 to 2002, he was the general editor of the *Patrologia Orientalis* collection. He left Rome in 2002 to join the Jesuit community of the Rue Sala in Lyons, where he contributed to the research and editorial work of *Sources Chrétiennes*. In 2009 he moved to the Jesuit community of La Chauderaie, in Francheville. With courage and peace of mind he endured the increasingly debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease. His condition rapidly declined at the end of 2012. He passed away peacefully in the morning of 13 June 2013.

Publications:

1. "Trois hymnes de saint Ephrem sur le Paradis," *L'Orient Syrien* 5 (1960), 33-46.
2. *La lettre à Patricius de Philoxène de Mabboug. Édition critique du texte syriaque et traduction française.* (*Patrologia Orientalis*, 30.5; 1963).
3. (With François Graffin) *Éphrem de Nisibe. Hymnes sur le Paradis* (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 137; 1968).
4. "Le problème de Jean d'Apamée," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 46 (1980), 367-390.
5. *Jean d'Apamée. Dialogues et traités* (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 311; 1984).
6. Various entries in *Dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, 3 vol. (Genova, 1983); French translation: *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Christianisme ancien*, 2 vol. (Paris, 1990).
7. (With Filoksinos Y. Dolabani, Sebastian P. Brock, and Samir Khalil), "Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Patriarcat Syrien Orthodoxe à Homs (auj. à Damas)," *Parole de l'Orient* 19 (1994), 555-661.
8. "La letteratura siriana primitiva," in P. Siniscalco (ed.), *Le antiche chiese orientali. Storia e letteratura* (Roma : Città Nuova, 2005), 178-207.
9. *Philoxène de Mabboug. Homélies. Introduction, traduction et notes par Eugène Lemoine. Nouvelle édition revue par René Lavenant* (*Sources Chrétiennes*, 44 bis; 2007).
10. Editor of: *III Symposium Syriacum 1980, V Symposium Syriacum 1988, VI Symposium Syriacum 1992, VII Symposium Syriacum 1996* (*Orientalia Christiana Anallecta*, 221, 236, 247, 256; 1983-1998).
11. Co-editor, with H.J.W. Drijvers, C. Molenberg, and G.J. Reinink, of *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (*Orientalia Christiana Anallecta*, 229; 1987).

12. Several articles in the *Dizionario enciclopedico dell'Oriente cristiano*, ed. by E.G. Farrugia (Rome, 2000): “Assemani, Giuseppe Luigi”, “Assemani, Giuseppe Simonio”, “Assemani, Stefano Evodio”, “Bardesane”, “Barhebraeus” (with V. Poggi], “Bnay (Bnāt) Qyāma”, “Dionigi Bar Ṣalībī”, “Edessa” [with J. Habbī], “Giacobbe (Giacome) Baradeo o Baradaī” [with C. Capizzi], “Narsaī”, “Patrologia Orientalis”, “Sources Chrétiennes”.
13. Forthcoming: Translation of the fourth and final part of Moufazzal ibn Abil-Fazail, *Histoire des Sultans mamlouks* (Patrologia Orientalis).

[Translated from the French by L. Van Rompay.]