

# Scripture

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PÈRE LOUIS HUGUES VINCENT, O.P.

(1872-1960)

The Sunday papers for 1 January 1961 contained a very short paragraph, including one quite inexcusable blunder, which brought the news of Père Vincent's quiet departure out of this life, at dawn on 30 December, at the great age of eighty-eight. He had thus out-distanced not only his master, Père Marie-Joseph Lagrange, the founder of the S. Étienne biblical school, who was eighty-three when he died on 10 March 1938, but nearly all his far more robust contemporaries. At the time of his death he had been a member of the S. Étienne community for all but seventy years, and had contributed to the *Revue Biblique* since 1896, the year in which, over the initials H.V., soon to be known to the whole world of biblical scholarship, he submitted a short article on 'Les fouilles de Jérusalem d'après M. Bliss' (vol. v, pp. 241-7), thus indicating from the start that archaeology was to be his special study.

He had arrived in Jerusalem in 1891, and was one of the small group of young Dominicans that first gathered round the founder in the building that had been the municipal *abattoir*. Père Vincent has told the story in his memoir of Lagrange in the *Revue Biblique* for 1938 (pp. 333-4) and has preserved the founder's remark in his speech at the school's opening that they were beginning *humblement, faiblement, pauvrement surtout, avec une table, un tableau noir, et une carte pour matériel scolaire*. What to the world might savour of presumption was for Lagrange simply the loyal fulfilment of a duty laid upon him under religious obedience. The last words of his opening address were: . . . *nous commencerons avec l'aide de Madame Sainte Marie et de Monseigneur Saint Étienne, dans la confiance que Dieu le veut!* Père Vincent, then, belonged to the heroic age of biblical studies in Jerusalem, to the days when the founder himself taught Hebrew, Arabic, Assyrian, general introduction to Holy Scripture, history of the ancient East and biblical archaeology. He also commented upon various chapters of the Old Testament historical books, and was responsible for the administration of the school and the house of studies. A few months

after Vincent's arrival the first number of the *Revue Biblique* appeared, in January 1892.

In the many talks we had during my student years at S. Étienne, Père Vincent often spoke to me of the beginnings of the school, of the financial difficulties of the venture, and of the hard task imposed upon the founder, of finding and training an adequate number of specialists to carry on the work he had initiated. I knew that Vincent was an almost exact contemporary of my mother, who also enjoyed his friendship while we lived in Jerusalem from 1922 to 1924. The first volumes of the *Revue Biblique* contain, between 1896 and 1899, some ten contributions in all from Vincent's pen. But it was in the years from 1900 onwards that his great fame came upon him, so that Professor W. F. Albright, when writing of the year 1909, in which Vincent celebrated his thirty-seventh birthday, referred to 'Père Vincent, already known to specialists as the foremost authority on the archaeology and topography of Jerusalem.'<sup>1</sup> His reputation had been established two years previously with the appearance in 1907 of his volume of some five hundred pages: *Canaan d'après l'Exploration Récente*. This was the first of many volumes which, from the start, became indispensable to anyone seriously interested in Palestinian archaeology and topography.

It was only two or three years later that the great work *Jérusalem*, produced in collaboration with the late Père F.-M. Abel, O.P., began to appear. The first fascicle was printed in 1912, and the final section of the New Testament part in 1926. The even more imposing book *Jérusalem de l'Ancien Testament* came out in 1954 and 1956, and was the last of Vincent's major works. But his articles and reviews in the *Revue Biblique* and elsewhere continued to appear until a year or two ago. In the interval he and Père Abel had produced between them the magnificent volumes on Bethlehem, Hebron and Emmaus, any one of which would have been a sufficient title to fame. When the long-awaited index to the *Revue Biblique* from 1909 onwards appears it will be possible for all who are interested to appreciate for themselves what Père Vincent did for the organ of the École during those fifty years.

When I left Jerusalem in May 1924, at the end of my course of studies, I asked Vincent rather timidly whether I might write to him from time to time. In his habitually kind, gracious and affectionate way he encouraged me to do so, but he added the warning: 'Do not expect many letters from me. I can never find time to write and ask how you are, but I can usually find time to answer questions about the studies that interest both of us so much.' In the event I have

<sup>1</sup> *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*, 1932 ed., p. 34

received a far larger share of letters than I can ever have deserved, and have had invaluable guidance on all sorts of questions.

Père Vincent was a man of great charm, courtesy and kindness. We who were students at S. Étienne were accustomed to unstinted kindness from all the members of the staff, but certainly nobody could have been more encouraging to a young student, or less likely to adopt any air of superior learning, than the dear and delightful Père Vincent. From the start I was charmed by his remarkable frankness and directness, and by his gift for describing a scholar or a situation in one or two memorable sentences. When he was dealing with faulty or pretentious scholarship, or with any sort of *mystification* he could be extremely severe. One of many examples of his polemical manner is the article 'Garden Tomb. Histoire d'un mythe' in the *Revue Biblique* for 1925. There can be no doubt that he became milder with increasing age, but, when he was still in middle life, it was a Presbyterian archaeologist, the late Professor R. A. S. Macalister, who told a friend of mine that Vincent's character was, in his opinion, as closely modelled as any he had known upon that of our Divine Master.

I was privileged to visit him at S. Étienne at various times since the war, and found him, as always, full of enthusiasm for the many subjects he had so ardently studied, and the kindest and most loyal of friends. On my last visit in October 1959, his health was obviously failing very rapidly, and sight, hearing and the power of walking were all gravely affected. He could no longer offer the Holy Sacrifice, and was dependent upon the many kind visits of his Dominican brethren for news of the world of scholarship. One of his greatest achievements, his life of his master Père Lagrange, though written in its entirety, still remains unpublished. It is very much to be hoped that one of Vincent's many disciples may be privileged to give this volume to the world.

*Lux perpetua luceat ei.*

JOHN M. T. BARTON

GOD'S CHOICE : ITS NATURE AND  
CONSEQUENCES

'One religion is as good as another' and 'After all, we are all going the same way' are favourite expressions of many religiously-minded people today. This mentality is based on the idea that the true definition of what religion is is 'man's search for God,' that man must make God in his own image and likeness. But the opposite is the truth :