

1981

Expectatio Israel

John W. Carven C.M.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj>

Recommended Citation

Carven, John W. C.M. (1981) "Expectatio Israel," *Vincentian Heritage Journal*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 2.
Available at: <http://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj/vol2/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Vincentian Journals and Publications at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vincentian Heritage Journal by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact mbernal2@depaul.edu, wsulliv6@depaul.edu.

Expectatio Israel

John W. Carven, C.M.

On November 12, 1665 Saint Vincent wrote to M. Etienne Blatiron, the Superior at Genoa:

I thank God for the uncommon devotions which you have proposed for yourself to perform in order, through the blessed Saint Joseph, to request of God the spread of the Company. I beg His Divine Goodness to find them acceptable. For more than twenty years I have not dared to ask God for that, thinking that, the Congregation being His work, it was necessary to allow to His Providence alone the care for its preservation and its increase; now, by dint of thinking of the recommendation which is given in the Gospel of asking Him to send workers to His harvest, I have become convinced of the importance and usefulness of this devotion.¹

Saint Vincent's concern for the preservation and increase of the Congregation of the Mission should be viewed in light of the personnel he guided in 1655. Between 1625 and 1636 thirty-five priests and clerics and twelve laybrothers entered the Little Company; after 1637, when the first seminary was established for training new candidates for the Congregation, 318 priests and clerics and 146 laybrothers collaborated in the work guided by Saint Vincent.² In evaluating these figures it should be remembered that during this period, 1625-1655,

¹Pierre Coste, *Saint Vincent de Paul, Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents* (Paris: Gabalda, 1922), Vol. V, No. 1956.

²*Notices sur les Prêtres, Clercs et Frères Defunts* (Paris: Dumoulin, 1881), Première Série, Tome Premier, pp. 453-509.

Saint Vincent had established 26 houses³ and dispatched missionaries to Poland, Ireland, Madagascar, and the Hebrides, and had been requested to supply confreres for works which the Community had not previously undertaken, e.g., army chaplains. Moreover, of the confreres who had entered the Congregation before 1655 the *Notices* lists thirty who had died;⁴ there is no concise indication of the precise number of clerics who did not persevere in their commitment to the Congregation, or of priests who returned to their dioceses, or of confreres whom St. Vincent dismissed from the Congregation.

Just as it is beyond one's ability to give an exact figure of the number of confreres available to Saint Vincent, so also is it impossible to arrive at an exact enumeration of Daughters of Charity at the disposition of Saint Louise de Marillac. The *Genesis of the Company* states that in 1645 "the Sisters were by now a good hundred."⁵ At an Assembly in 1655, forty Sisters, those who lived in Paris, were present.⁶ Like her director, Saint Vincent, Saint Louise was unable to respond favorably to requests for new establishments, to add to the sixty houses the Daughters of Charity already staffed.⁷ This prompted her to write to Sister Barbe Angiboust, March 29, (1656):

I beg you expressly to ask Our Lord to send good workers for His work, for you would not believe how many places are requesting our Sisters and how few we have for them.⁸

³*Ibid.*, pp. 510-535.

⁴*Ibid.*, Tome Cinquieme, pp. 127-144.

⁵*Genesis of the Company, 1633-1968*, p. 8.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁷Mgr. Baunard, *La Vénérable Louise de Marillac* (Paris: Ch. Poussiélgue, 1904), p. 553.

⁸*Correspondance, Méditations, Pensées et Avis de Sainte Louise de Marillac*. 1961, No. 471.

While Saint Vincent applauded M. Blatiron's devotion of praying for vocations through the intercession of Saint Joseph and Saint Louise requested prayers for the same intention, there is no available information that the Double Family formulated any special prayer for vocations until the Superior Generalship of Fr. A. Fiat (1878-1914).⁹ He not only composed the prayer *Expectatio Israel*, which has been used in the Double Family of Saint Vincent as their own particular prayer for vocations, but also applied to the Holy See for its approbation for the prayer.

Fr. Jean-Baptiste Borgogno, C.M., Procurator General at the Holy See, petitioned the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, "to grant an indulgence of 200 days, once each day, to members of the Double Family of Saint Vincent de Paul who, with devotion and contrite heart," recite the following prayer to beg God for good workers according to His heart:

Expectatio Israel, Salvator ejus in tempore tribulationis, propitius de coelo respice, vide et visita vineam istam, rivos ejus inebria, multiplica genimina ejus, et perforce quam plantavit dextra tua. Messis quidem multa, operarii autem pauci. Rogamus ergo te Dominum messis, ut mittas operarios in messem tuam.

Multiplica gentem et magnifica laetitiam ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem. Domus tua haec, Domine Deus, domus tua haec: non sit in ea, quaeso, lapis quem manus tua santissima non posuerit. Quos autem vocasti, conserva eos in nomine tuo, et sanctifica eos in veritate. Amen.¹⁰

⁹I am indebted to Fr. John B. Murray, C.M. for the material used in composing the remainder of this article. Much of this material, obtained from Fr. William W. Sheldon, C.M., was originally prepared by Fr. Maurice Vansteenkiste, C.M., a French scripture scholar.

¹⁰This petition can be found in *Annales de la Congregationis*, T. XLIX (1884), pp. 323-324. The English version of this in use in the Eastern Province of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States is as follows:

In the audience of March 15, 1884, Pope Leo XIII, at the request of the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Indulgences and Sacred Relics, granted, *in perpetuum*, this indulgence to members of the two families of Saint Vincent who recite this prayer in any language.

In a Circular Letter, dated June 13, 1909, Fr. Fiat ordered that the *Expectatio Israel* should be recited after the evening general examen. To it should be added the triple invocation: St. Joseph pray for us. On November 27, 1919 the Superior General, Fr. Francois Verdier, C.M., notified the Community that the General Assembly mandated that the *Expectatio Israel* should be maintained at the conclusion of the general examen.

This final corporate act of the Double Family which is recited each evening consists of direct quotations of sentences, phrases or thoughts contained in the Old and New Testaments and blended to form a remarkable composite. Fr. Maurice Vansteenkiste, C.M. has traced to their textual origins these quotations and offered some commentary on each phrase. Although Fr. Fiat's original version used the Vulgate translation of the Bible, in which it is easier to see the roots of this prayer, the following exposition of the Biblical texts employs the *New American Bible* to which is added an adaptation of Fr. Vansteenkiste's commentaries.

O Hope of Israel, its Savior in time of trouble, look down with kindness from Heaven. Take a close look at your vineyard, and provide whatever is necessary for it. Swell its streams, increase its fruits, and bring to maturity the vineyard which your right hand has planted. Indeed the harvest is great, but the laborers are few. We ask you, therefore, Lord of the harvest: send laborers into your harvest.

Multiply your people and increase their joy, so that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up. This is your house, O Lord God, this is your house. Let there not be in it, I beg you, even one stone which your most holy hand has not placed there. Preserve in your name those whom you have called and make them truly holy. Amen.

O Hope of Israel, O Lord, our savior in time of need! (Jer. 14:8)

Once again, O Lord of Hosts, *look down from heaven, and see; Take care of this vine.* (Ps. 80:15)

Thus have you prepared the land: *drencing its furrows, breaking up its clods, softening it with showers, blessing its yield.* (Ps. 65:11).

Protect what your right hand has planted [the son of man whom you yourself made strong]. (Ps. 80:16)

He said to His disciples: *"The harvest is good but the laborers are scarce. Beg the harvest master to send out laborers to gather his harvest."* (Mt. 9:37-38 [Lk.10:2])

Without doubt this prayer dates from the reign of Jehoiachin (609-598) during a great drought. The dialogue of Jeremiah with Yahweh is in the form of a lamentation (7:9) which follows the description of the scourge.

This Psalm is a prayer for the restoration of Israel, either the kingdom of the North laid waste in 722 or that of Judah ravaged by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar after the sack of Jerusalem (586).

This is a song of thanksgiving wherein, after a fruitful and abundant rain, the people thank the Creator. This verse forms part of the second half of a song which joyfully describes the Judean spring-time.

A phrase taken from the psalm prayer for the restoration of Israel.

In Matthew's account the exclamation of Christ is provoked by the sight of a weary crowd prostrated like sheep without a shepherd. In Luke this verse begins the mission of the 72 disciples to whom Jesus gives His instructions for the mission.

You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as men make merry when dividing spoils. (Is. 9:2)¹¹

Taken from the celebrated prophecy of Isaiah which announces the coming of a child (Puer natus est nobis) who will be called Wonder-Counselor, Mighty-God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. This prophecy probably was pronounced at the time of the deportation of the Galileans following the campaign of Tiglath-pileser III in 732. It announces the "day of Yahweh" which will see the deliverance of the exiles and the pacification of the empire by a child of the royal lineage. The coming of Christ in Galilee gives to this prophecy its full realization.

Afterwards I said to them: "You see the evil plight in which we stand: how Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been gutted by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer be an object of derision!" (Neh. 2:17)

Jehemiah, cupbearer at the court of King Artaxerxes, had obtained permission, in March-April 445, to return to Palestine to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This is a passage of exhortation addressed to the priests, the leaders, to the Counsellors responsible for the nation.

Therefore David said, "*This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of*

The exclamation of David after he had chosen the threshing-floor of Ornan

¹¹The Vulgate (Is. 9:3) is more concise than the New American Bible: Thou hast multiplied the nation, and has not increased the joy. They shall rejoice before thee, as they that rejoice in the harvest, as conquerors rejoice after taking a prey, when they divide the spoils.

holocausts for Israel. (1 Chr. 22:1)

Let there not be in it, I beg you, even one stone which your most holy hand has not placed there.

He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, *You called me.*" (1 Sm. 3:8) . . . "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. (1 Sm.3:9).

I am in the world no more, but these are in the world as I come to you. O Father most holy, *protect them with your name which you have given me* [that they may be one, even as we are one]. (Jn. 17:11) . . . *Consecrate them by means of truth* — Your word is truth. (Jn. 17:17).

where there had been an altar and where he proposed to build a temple to Yahweh, which was finally realized by *David's son Solomon.*

This phrase does not correspond to any particular scriptural text. Nevertheless, it has been constructed around the words "stone," "hand," and "place" which are used frequently in the Scriptures.

Reference to God's invitation to the young Samuel and the explanation which the High Priest, Eli, gave to him.

Two passages from Jesus' beautiful priestly prayer at the Last Supper, the grand prayer of oblation and intercession by the Savior at the hour of His Passion. Consecrate means set aside for God. Those consecrated to God's service are called holy, called to a blameless life which makes them holy as God is holy.

* * * * *

Today the Double Family of Saint Vincent experiences personnel needs similar to those of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise. It behooves us to pray "with devotion and contrite hearts" this prayer for vocations which has been authorized for the Double Family alone.



We should raise our hearts to God and say to Him: 'O Lord, send good workers to your Church, but may they be good. Send good Missionaries to work hard in your vineyard, men, O God, such as they ought to be, utterly detached from themselves and their own comfort and worldly goods. Let them even be few in number, provided they are good.'