The Biennial Celebrations: the Living Legacy of Alumni

Love shows itself in deeds, not just in words
Love consists in mutual sharing of goods
Note Preliminary to the Contemplation of St. Ignatius

Summary

Early reunions of alumni were held in Baghdad both for Baghdad College and for Al-Hikma and were so successful that annual meetings were planned.

The first [Baghdad College] reunion was held on 12 January 1957, at the Hindia Club in Karrada. It was attended by a huge gathering where the Jesuits welcomed the participants. The food was delicious with Iraqi hot dishes and qouzies with the usual oriental stuffing. Bingo Band played the whole night. The place was so crowded that one could hardly breathe. The party ended in the early hours of the morning. The party was such a success that it became the talk of the town for weeks. This gave us an idea for future reunions once a year.

In 1958 Fr. Connell was at Al-Hikma University. The group decided that the second reunion be at the Hindia Club too while the third was held at Al Mansur Club. The sole reason was to change to a larger hall as the hall of the previous reunion was
too small. (Carlo Tonietti)
"Fr. Connell ran the first reunion of the Graduates of Al-Hikma on 11/2/64. 49 of the 52 known to be in Baghdad at the time attended. The evening consisted of a dinner and a discussion concerning starting an alumni association."
(Fr. McDonough letter 11/2/64)

The phenomenon of biennial reunions in this country, far from the two Baghdad campuses and decades after the two schools had ceased to exist, baffles alumni from other schools. So far there have been 8 reunions and the 9th is set in everyone's calendar. The date, location and attendance of alumni (estimated) and Jesuits are listed here.

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How and why the reunions started

No Jesuit schools in the world can boast of alumni as loyal as those of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University. Both teachers and alumni had a much deeper impact on each other and formed much stronger attachments than they ever thought possible when they were in the same classrooms long ago. Other Jesuits express their astonishment at the large numbers attending these reunions and wonder what on earth one could possibly do at a reunion of schools that ceased to function 25 years ago? Although the Baghdad Mission no longer exists many "tales told by the Tigris" were retold at these eight extraordinary reunions of the Baghdad Jesuits and their former students.

One would have to experience Iraqi and in particular Chaldean enthusiasm to believe it is real. The alumni come from all four corners of the United States: from Seattle, San Francisco, Atlanta, New York Muslims and Christians come, engineers, doctors and grocers come, graduates of the class of 1938 through to the class of 1969 come. Finally, about 30 Jesuits come. In 1986 one even
arrived in his khaki cassock.

The weekends are spent in a favorite Baghdad pastime - in conversation. Evident was the obvious delight of the alumni at seeing their old teachers and visa versa. Sixty-year old anecdotes are told and an elderly graduate produced from his wallet a Sacred Heart badge given him in 1947 - carried there ever since. The highlight of the weekend is a six hour dinner-dance with Iraqi music and Baghdad College comedians mimicking the idiosyncrasies of their favorite Jesuit teachers.

![The Saturday night dinner/dance party](image)

Further evidence of the warm affection for and gratitude to the "Fatheria" came in a spontaneous outburst in the very first meeting when a graduate placed some money on the central table and asked others to join him in contributing to the Jesuit retirement fund. In a very short time a large sum was pledged. Apparently the Jesuits did not look as fit as they looked when they were last seen in Baghdad. Since that first meeting every reunion has raised in excess of $20,000 for the retired New England Jesuits. Most of the money comes from the ads in the yearbook paid for not only by alumni but also by American/Iraqi admirers of the Jesuit schools but who themselves did not have a chance to attend the Jesuit schools.

The efforts of the 143 Jesuits (and their colleagues) who for 37 years served Iraqi youth and demonstrated their deep concern for them and their families led to a strong and lasting bond of mutual respect and affection. In celebrating this fact our alumni are expressing their gratitude for what they have learned, something more than the periodic chart, the quadratic equation and how to play baseball. They learned a set of values and a way to implement them in their daily lives. They appreciate the fact that
the quality of their lives has been enriched, that compassion for
others has been deepened, and that they understand the spiritual
dimension of life. Now they ask of what service they can be to
others.

It is true that we do not hold these celebrations in Sulaiikh or
Zafarania, but in Chicago, Detroit, Boston and San Diego far from
Baghdad. Who would have guessed that 25 years after the
expulsion the spirit of service would still be so vigorous among
alumni, which is the precise point of the discussions at the
celebration! How can we be of service to others?

As with many other Jesuit alumni they found one another,
reflected on a common experience and decided to have a reunion
honoring their former teachers. Jesuits and Iraqis have perhaps
been somewhat surprised at how useful and practical these
meetings have been. Unlike many school reunions, which are
merely exercises in nostalgia we do not just retell (and re-enact)
student pranks of the past, but quite seriously face the question of
what can we contribute to our societies both here and in Iraq.
Jesuits for their part, play an unaccustomed role. Now, they are
unable to direct things, and disinclined to tell others what to do,
but their presence at the reunions accentuates their continued
support of their alumni of whom they are justifiably proud.

Over 300 alumni plus hundreds of family members and
friends participate in each of these reunions. Shirts and jackets
marked with Baghdad College and Al-Hikma emblems - much more
elaborate than could be afforded during the days in Baghdad - are
displayed and sold to raise money for Jesuit Missions. To underline the joy of these weekend reunions, plans are always made for future reunions. Even more significant, however, are the remarks made more than once that the spiritual direction of the "Fatheria" was still needed for these Iraqis in the "Diaspora" - if such a word can be used for Iraqis. One graduate put it this way: "We have been very busy in our professions earning money and in our affluence here in America, we sometimes wonder why the Jesuits ever left America to work with us in Baghdad. The sacrifices they made reminds us that there is something much more valuable in life than our status and our jobs". In between these meetings some of the alumni meet for monthly Days of Prayer at Manresa Retreat House in Detroit. It seems that while the overwhelming theme of these unique gatherings was gratitude to the Fathers, the more important message to them as well as to the Jesuits is how intertwined were the lives of the Jesuits with the families of their students.

The alumni support of the Jesuit retirement fund indicates their concern that the present appearance of the "Fatheria" falls short of their memories of younger more vigorous Jesuits of past decades. They also discuss how they can find ways to help their children find a system of values which they had learned and a way to implement them in their daily lives. The reunions have been the occasion for many young Iraqis meeting one another, which in some cases have ended in marriages. The alumni appreciate the fact that their lives have been enriched, that compassion for others has been deepened and that they understand the spiritual dimension of life. Now they ask how can they be of service to others and how they can help their children find what has enriched their lives.

As one of the alumni put it: "The purpose of the reunions is to respect and honor the Jesuits who spent their youth in Iraq, educating us, caring for us, and praying for us. Besides a quality education, I gained discipline, a deepening of faith in God, charity, and hope. Also, that certain ends do not justify the means employed in achieving them." (WaieI Hindo, B.C. '60, A.H. '64)

The spirit of gratitude and loyalty that characterizes the Reunions is ample proof that our work in Baghdad has been truly worth while. Through these Reunions we are able to keep in touch with the spectacular success of our graduates in so many fields of activity. And this confirms its fact that the influence of Baghdad College continues on, even though the Jesuit presence has been taken away. The Reunions offer concrete evidence of the educational soundness of this
curriculum of Baghdad College.

One of my great joys at these Reunions is talking over old times with those I had taught 40 and 50 years ago and who now proudly present to me their sons and grandsons. It amazes me how my students recall things I had said to them back in these days which profoundly influenced their lives. (Fr. Sullivan)

Every year there are thousands of school reunions that are held across the U.S. However, this reunion that brings us together this weekend is special in more ways than one. It is a reunion of former students and friends of two schools that no longer exist as we knew them, but that must have left a lasting influence on many of us to remember after many years and thousands of miles away.

In a reunion, people get together to reminisce about their common school experiences of growing up, to renew old acquaintances and to learn about the paths their friends have followed in life. All of this we are looking forward to, in this our third reunion of alumni, former students and friends of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University. However, to many of us, there is another underlying and deeper motivation to be part of this reunion. This is to express our gratitude and appreciation to a group of dedicated people who gave so much of their lives and efforts to a worthy cause, and who have touched our lives in many and different ways. These are the Jesuits who founded and served at Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University.

![Dave Nona makes a point](image)

Where we are and what we are at this stage of our lives, are the results of many factors and influences, some of which were consciously chosen, and others we had little control over.
However, if we reflect deeply on our experiences, it is not hard for many of us to conclude that our education and association with the Jesuits were some of the more fortunate and enhancing experiences of our lives. Whether an experience led us to the career we are in, or taught us to be competitive and persistent through athletics, or caring and compassionate through good example, or helped us to better understand ourselves and the reality of the world around us, or contributed to shaping our outlook on life, we are grateful for the experience.

The challenge before us now is to synthesize our varied experiences in Iraq and the United States into a meaningful and optimistic outlook that sees value in the interaction and interdependence of seemingly different peoples and cultures. We have a unique opportunity, I dare say the responsibility to serve, both on the personal level and as a group, as bridges of understanding between our original and host cultures. We should strive to transcend differences and bring out what is of value and life-enhancing in both cultures, to attest to the richness and unity of the human experience. (Dave Nona, B.C. '64, A.H. '68, Reunion Yearbook III, 1982, p. 8)

Putting what they learned at Baghdad College to good use

Baghdad Jesuit Alumni Association: B.J.A.A.

Humanitarian Efforts

This [1992, eighth] Reunion coincided with the second anniversary of the tragic events which precipitated the Gulf War and the continuing tragedy in Iraq. These past two years have been difficult and agonizing for many of us, and particularly the sense of frustration and helplessness for not being able to do much to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people. It is a small consolation, however, to know that many
graduates and former students of the Jesuits have contributed to humanitarian relief efforts and work in other ways to improve conditions in Iraq. The following article illustrates the modest efforts initiated and single-handedly managed by Ramzi Hermiz with help from the Jesuits. The presentation during this reunion by Dr. Eric Hoskins about humanitarian relief efforts to Iraq is meant to emphasize the continuing dire need for help, and to remind us, who have been blessed with much, to remember the suffering people of Iraq. (Dave Nona, B.C. '64, A.H. '68, *Reunion Yearbook* VIII, 1992, p. 7)

The Chaldean-Iraqi fund was initiated on February 12, 1991 by Ramzi Yousif Hermiz and Majid Aziz Shammami to solicit donations and assistance for the people of Iraq during and following the Gulf War. The Jesuit Mission Bureau and Seminary Bureau in Boston, through Brother James Mc Davitt and Fr. William Russell, agreed on that day to become the recipient of donations and the disburser of expenses for the humanitarian assistance. In addition, Jesuit Missions agreed not only to allow the use of our directory mailing list for communications, but also to become a co-sponsor of the effort to solicit contributions.

Initially, it was intended to deliver one truck load of medicines and medical supplies (worth approximately $100,000) with the expectation that the medical supplies would have to be purchased. After a few days of investigation on an international scope, it became evident that instead of "purchasing" the medical supplies, the value of our donations could be multiplied by working with other humanitarian organizations in collecting donated medical supplies from various countries and arranging to deliver the medical supplies directly to Iraq. By a timing coincidence, on that same week of February 12, 1991, an international organization called the "Gulf Peace Team" was organizing an effort to collect and deliver to Iraq the first medical supplies since the beginning of war on January 16, 1991.

An agreement was made with the "Gulf Peace Team" to deliver to Iraq in the name of, and as donations from the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund, 10 truck loads of medical supplies with a wholesale market value of about one million dollars. Our first truck (out of a four-truck medical supplies convoy) left Amman on February 17, 1991 and reached Baghdad on February 18, 1991 (that is during the war, when the Amman-Baghdad Highway was being bombed continuously day and night). After that, our fund was credited for three convoys, each with three trucks that arrived in Baghdad on
March 6, March 11 and March 25, 1991.

For each medical supplies truck (containing about 4 tons of medical supplies) we have item-by-item detailed formal receipts (listing the individual medical items and their individual quantities) from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society in Baghdad acknowledging the medical supplies as donations from the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund. Credit for each convoy was shared with another humanitarian organization from another country: convoy one and two from Germany, convoy three from Austria, and convoy four from Canada.

The Chaldean-Iraqi Fund also donated approximately $17,600, which was distributed directly to about 111 Iraqi families in 5 refugee camps in Turkey and 4 refugee camps in Syria. But probably the most memorable donation by the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund was the $14,000 sponsoring the publishing expenses of the 300-page Harvard Study Team report titled, "Health and Welfare in Iraq after the Gulf Crisis." Information and excerpts from the report have been the subject of many U.S. and international TV and radio programs and news articles.

All of these achievements were financially taken care of from approximately $68,118, donated by about 240 alumni and friends. Included were 18 donations of $1,000 each, and seven other donations between $1,000 and $5,000.

(Ramzi Hermiz, B.C. '48, Reunion Yearbook VIII, 1992, p. 7)

The Gulf Peace Team of the B.J.A.A. One of the ten Medical Convoy trucks sponsored by the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund of Alumni & Friends

Available public records indicate that the four-truck Medical Convoy co-sponsored by the "Chaldean-Iraqi Fund", leaving
Amman, Jordan on 2/17/91 and arriving in Baghdad on 2/18/91 (that is, during the war, when the Amman-Baghdad Highway was being bombed continuously day and night), carried into Iraq the very first desperately needed medical supplies since the beginning of the war and its destructive bombardments. This was two days before the arrival of a two-truck United Nations Medical Convoy.

To reduce the possibility of potential complications, the word "Iraqi" was sometimes "deleted" intentionally from the title of "Chaldean-Iraqi Fund" as in the "banner on the truck, and as in the "Acknowledgments" page of the book: "Health and Welfare in Iraq - after the Gulf Crisis" researched by the "Harvard Study Team". However, the "full title" is indicated in the formal communications and acknowledgments from the "Iraqi Red Crescent" and from the "Harvard Study Team" as is indicated in the following two letters.

Harvard Study Team 29 June 1992

Mr. Ramiz Hermiz  Chaldean-Iraqi Fund 4N 321 Route 53 Addison, Illinois, 60101 United States

Dear Ramiz,

This letter is to confirm receipt of funds totaling 4,000 United States dollars which the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund has kindly donated towards additional printing and publication of the Harvard Study Team report on Iraq.

As you recall, the total contribution of the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund to the Harvard Study Team is now 14,000 United States dollars.

The Harvard Study Team would like to express their sincere gratitude for the support given to them by members of the Chaldean community in America, and by the Chaldean-Iraqi Fund.

Best regards,

Dr. Eric Hoskins  Co-coordinator of the Harvard Study Team.

Iraqi Red Crescent Society  General Headquarters
Al-Mansour - Baghdad  P.O. Box 6143
Tel-  5375940  March 17, 1991

To: The Chaldean-Iraqi Fund of the Chaldean Community in America

Medico-International, Germany  Gulf Peace Team
The Iraqi Red Crescent Society acknowledges receipt of the medicines described in the enclosed list (five pages).

These medicines and their transportation to Baghdad were donated jointly by 'The Chaldean-Iraqi Fund' of the Chaldean Community in America, and Medico-International, Germany.

The medical supplies were taken to Baghdad on a humanitarian convoy jointly organized by the Jordanian National Red Crescent Society, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, and the Gulf Peace Team.

The humanitarian convoy departed from Amman, Jordan on 17 February 1991 and reached Baghdad on 18 February. The medical supplies were delivered to the Iraqi Red Crescent Society at their hospital in El Mansour, Baghdad.

We thank you for your contribution.

With best wishes

(Seal)

Dr. Ibrahim A. Al-Nouri

President [of Iraqi Red Crescent]

Occupations of Baghdad College Alumni

As professionals and as contributors to their communities and adopted countries

Graduates of both schools have distinguished themselves in many fields. Some of the alumni tell of their work.

A high percentage of former students of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University have distinguished themselves in the professions of business and politics in Iraq as well as in their adopted countries, particularly the United States. The contribution of the alumni who stayed to serve in Iraq are too varied and numerous to include here. Also contact with many of them has been infrequent because of the current situation in Iraq. The list of alumni includes doctors and engineers who, out of a sense of commitment, gave up lucrative opportunities outside of Iraq to teach and help at home and who were instrumental in the industrialization of the country.

Many of the former students who had emigrated to the west and particularly the United States were well equipped to pursue graduate and professional studies. They excelled in their studies and later in their careers because of the strong academic background and set of values they had acquired through their Jesuit education.

In areas of heavy concentration of Iraqi and Chaldean emigrant communities in the U.S. such as Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; New York and California, it is common to find
alumni on the faculties of colleges, on the medical staff of hospitals and as successful associates and owners of professional firms in engineering, architecture, accounting and law. Furthermore, many of the alumni who started in business upon completing their studies have built successful and thriving enterprises in retailing (primarily in the grocery and food areas), in real estate development and in financial services.

*A few Al-Hikma geniuses*

The schools can also boast of several scholars and politicians such as Fr. Stanley Marrow, S.J. who had authored several books in Theology, Fr. Solomon Sara, S.J. who is a linguistic scholar at Georgetown University, Dr. Faraj Abdulahad who became the Dean of the Business School at Manhattan College and Mr. Wadie P. Deddeh who for over 20 years, was a State Senator in California from the San Diego area. (Dave Nona, B.C. '64, A.H. '68)

*Some B.C. graduates: The hope for the future*

After finishing Baghdad Medical College in 1937 I obtained a Ph.D. in Dermatology and later became the Professor of
Dermatology and Venereology at the Baghdad Medical College in Baghdad. In 1970 I brought my family to England and took a consultant job, then retired in 1985. The late Albert Sabbagh studied Ophthalmology, and Harbi Merroghe Delli worked as a G.P. In the year 1938 Armand Bahoshy and the late David Mesayeh joined the Medical College and probably few other graduates as well. From my class Edward Toma Zoma joined the College of Pharmacy and Abboudi Talia went to the Law College, and both went to USA where I lost contact with them in spite my inquiries in 1990 and 92 when I was in Detroit. Tariq Munir Abbas went to Scotland to do medicine and took up Midwifery and Gynecology and later on became a consultant and the last time I spoke to him on the phone in 1984 was working in Scotland. Alumni meetings in Baghdad used to be a common yearly event which I always used to attend and every time see some new Fathers have joined the College. Many a time we took our families to these gatherings as well as during Christmas and Easter. One of the outstanding features of Baghdad College and later of Al-Hikma graduates was that they were sought after by companies looking for recruits. Baghdad College graduates became a model for which banks and even government institutions used to look for. Even those lads who spent only a year or two gained some privilege. (George Rahim, B.C. '37)

My father, God bless him, moved us from Al-Sinak to Sulaikh, across the road from Baghdad College, because he wanted us to be influenced by the Jesuits. [It is surprising how many families moved to Sulaikh for similar reasons; some of these are listed by Mouwaffak in the map on page 30.] My four brothers and I lived there and got to know the Jesuits very well: all five of us went to Baghdad College. Later we sold our house moved to the United States in 1969. But while I was there, the Jesuits taught me to be humble, down to earth and to help those who needed help by sacrificing their lives for others without expecting return back on this earth. They are true Catholic, excellent Christians, true disciples of Christ. Although I can't be like them, I am trying to follow on the same footsteps of the Jesuits.

The curricula at Baghdad College was excellent as I noticed when I left for further studies. I found that I did not have to study as much as I did at Baghdad College. Today, I am more thorough because of Jesuit teachings. Apart from academics I learned discipline. The campus was the best in Iraq, with the
best facilities as well as the cleanliness of the campus. I am an expert because more than once I had to clean up the trash from the fields as a punishment. When I was pronounced as the most valuable player at the end of the 1960 basketball season I realized it was Jesuit training and discipline that did this to me, then and today.

When I was a teenager, I used to go to the church everyday around 6:00 A.M. to serve masses and I participated in the Christmas midnight services for many years. After all, we used to live across from Baghdad College, within thirty feet from the school. After earning a Bachelor's degree from Baghdad University, school of architecture, and Master's from the University of Detroit I became an Architect and opened an architectural firm in Detroit in 1975 through 1981. There I designed many homes and parish buildings for the Chaldeans in Southfield, Michigan. Now I am the architect for the St. Peter's Church in San Diego, CA. and am the architectural branch manager for the Naval Facilities Engineering Command at Southwest Division in San Diego, CA. I have twenty-three architects, engineers and interior designers working in my branch. (Mouwaffak {Michael} Sitto, B.C. '59)

Other alumni projects, programs and adventures are listed in Appendix D.

The Retreat movement

In the late 70's and as a direct consequence of the first reunion in Chicago, Fr. Joseph MacDonnell, S.J. offered to direct a day of recollection for a group of alumni and former students in the Detroit area. The first one was held at Colombiere Retreat House in Clarkston (outside Detroit). For the next five years he came out to conduct annual days of
prayer at Manresa Jesuit Retreat House in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. As a result of these days of recollection, a prayer and study group was formed that met on regular monthly basis at Manresa for dinner, Bible study, reflection and Mass.

The group continued to meet for many years because the hospitality and involvement of the Manresa Jesuits, as well as the grounds and environment at Manresa reminded the group so much of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma. Through these meetings, members of the group and other alumni renewed the practice of making regular retreats at Manresa. The relationship between the alumni and the Detroit Jesuits has grown and developed to the point where some alumni are serving on fund raising committees for programs sponsored by the Detroit Province of the Society of Jesus. In fact, the Detroit Province of the Society of Jesus can rightfully claim some connection to the Baghdad Jesuit Mission. Since Fr. Edward Madaras, S.J. who was one of the founders of Baghdad College grew up in Defiance, Ohio and was a member of the Detroit Province.
Most importantly, however, there has been a deeper realization and appreciation on the part of the alumni of the universality, wide-ranging and dedicated mission of the Jesuits. The Detroit Jesuits, in turn, have come to value and appreciate in their midst, the presence and contributions of men and women who had been shaped by the dedication of their brother Jesuits at a different time and a far away place, near the Garden of Eden. (Dave Nona, B.C. '64, A.H. '68)

Fr. Ryan, Premjit Talwar and Dave Nona

Almost 30 years ago I passed through Al-Hikma gates and glanced at the vast grounds that would be my second home for the next four years. I sat in my first terraced classroom, taking the entrance exam. At the time, my first preference was to study architecture, a subject not offered at Al-Hikma. What made me change my mind was not the sound logic and persuasion of my parents, but the impersonal treatment, depressing atmosphere and lengthy bureaucratic application process at Baghdad University. My non-Arabic name was carelessly mispronounced eliciting the laughter of those present. Contrasting that to the efforts the Jesuits made to make sure they spelled and pronounced my name correctly, I decided to join Al-Hikma. I knew then that what the Jesuits stood for was far more than textbook education. In addition to their ready smile and quick hello, they were dedicated and paid attention to small personal details. They treated me with the same dignity and respect given to the son of a Emir.

Unlike the Iraqi teachers and administrators, the Jesuits were not absorbed with self-importance. Obviously they took their work extremely seriously. But they did this with a smile on their face and a passion in their heart. They were very approachable, always considering my thoughts and suggestions as worthy, a treatment that was foreign in my prior experience. This is especially remarkable since I attended Frank Iny School, a private Jewish school of very high standards. Humble as they were, the Jesuits easily
commanded the respect they deserved. They did this not by fear or intimidation as was common from their Iraqi counterparts, but by their humanity and humility. They possessed solid knowledge and a commitment to excellence long before it became the business fad of the late 80s. They impressed me with their lack of ego (not too many Iraqis would admit in front of a class that they did not know the answer), generosity, flexibility, self-discipline, tremendous energy and industry, a wonderful sense of humor, openness and the ability to give one all the time one needed. They genuinely cared.

In the ethics class, Fr. Campbell encouraged debate and questioning. He suggested that I explore similarities and differences between the Judeo-Christian religion and Buddhism, a subject beyond the scope of the classwork. Fr. Kelly approached me to help identify needy Jewish families who could benefit from free food, a lesson in social responsibility. Fr. William Larkin encouraged me to participate in a summer science project which was later presented to visiting dignitaries, an extra curriculum activity. Fr. McDonough supported my efforts to perform music during the festive parties. And Fr. Mulvehill was ready to display my new paintings. To the Jesuits, education went far beyond the learning of a book. It focused on the shaping of a personality.

This preparation perhaps explains the relative ease with which I faced studying at MIT. Don't misunderstand me. I worked very hard and put in long hours. But I also played hard and enjoyed the "free" times. I did not allow problems to overwhelm me nor did I succumb to the temptation of an easy way out. I graduated with two masters (the only one to do so in that year), a tribute to the discipline and training instilled in me by these outstanding men of the robe. Today, I can't help but live by their example.

I was so taken by their selfless dedication, that many times I seriously considered joining their order. However, their mission was not one of proselytizing, and they discouraged me even from attending Mass. Ironically, even though I have not changed my faith, I now often attend Mass with my Christian friends. (Premjit Talwar, AH '68)
Epilogue

The Christians cherished the work of the Jesuits from the start and the earlier suspicions of Muslims dissolved once they realized that the Jesuits were not covertly trying to convert their sons but were offering them an excellent education. In fact Muslims are listed among the Jesuits’ strongest supporters. They saw them as religious men whose only purpose was to take seriously Jesus’ admonition to serve others. That service came in the form of education. Muslims and Christians alike came to realize that the Jesuits introduced to the Baghdad community unanticipated intellectual, spiritual and social benefits.

The most interesting part of the Baghdad College and Al-Hikma story does not concern buildings, curricula or huge campuses but concerns rather the people that built and used these creations. It still is the students, their families, the Jesuits and their colleagues that make us remember that “fleeting wisp of glory” with such emotion. This story of the Baghdad Jesuit adventure focuses on the interaction between young American Jesuits and youthful Iraqi citizens and their families. It started in 1932 and then grew into a strong bond of affection and respect.

Much more than other Jesuits in their American schools the “Baghdadi” Jesuits entered the family lives of their students frequently and intimately through home visits to celebrate Muslim and Christian feast days as well as a myriad of social events, both happy and sad. There was much more than ordinary student-teacher bonding. On campus the Jesuits participated in games, debates, drama, contests, athletic events almost as much as the students. Jesuits became enthusiastic about their Iraqi charges when they noticed early on that there was a great affinity between these Iraqi students and themselves. Jesuits found the Iraqi students warm, hospitable, humorous, imaginative, receptive, hard-working and appreciative of educational opportunities. This story presents evidence that the Iraqis found the Jesuits happy, fun-loving and dedicated.

As the years went on Iraqis increasingly liked them and were proud of the two schools as part of the Iraqi scene. Each of the many government crises were opportunities for successive governments to force the Jesuits to leave. The fact that they were always allowed to continue is testimony to how widely Jesuits had been accepted. The exception was the Baathi coup in 1968. In spite of the Jesuits’ strenuous efforts to remain in Iraq, they joined the long line of Jesuits in various lands at various times who were expelled from their adopted country.