Chapter XI

WIDENING THE BAGHDAD MISSION (1945-1947)

In addition to its need of standard problems, the spring and summer of 1945 brought to the Baghdad Mission the strong possibility of new outside burdens. Either veterans from the mission or possible recruits for the mission were to be supplied to Transjordan. The mission at this time in 1945 would show that, in the school year ending in June, it had, after thirteen years of existence, eighteen members. All, however, were not in Iraq. Fr. Nadaras had been given a sabbatical leave as the oldest continuing veteran of the mission. Fathers Michael J. McCarthy and Joseph P. Merrick were in Basra in school and apostolic endeavors. Only halfway through that year, when they had finished theology at Kursecq in India, did Fathers Thomas J. Hussey and John J. Williams join the college staff.

At the beginning of that year new recruits had been added. These included Fr. James Larkin who was to remain there until 1956 and Fr. Leo J. Guay. Although the latter had just concluded a Ph. D. program in chemistry at Clark University and for many ensuing years taught chemistry at Baghdad College, he became known as an architect and superintendent of the works. Thus he was responsible for planning, and building several structures at Baghdad College and all the buildings at Al-Hikma University. His acumen saved thousands of dollars for the mission and for other Christian groups for whom he served in a similar architectural capacity.
Despite the static numbers in personnel (seventeen in 1939 and seventeen with three dispersed in 1944-5), the school had increased in number of students and in its buildings. Directly on the mud-walled campus had been constructed a dormitory-faculty residence with students on the second floor, and faculty on the first. A chapel on the first floor served both as a boarders' and domestic chapel. There was also the conveniently reached roof-top where sleeping could occur in the warm seasons. Members of the faculty for whom there was no space in either of the two dormitory-residences lived in nearby dwellings, some more nearby than others. In this very summer of 1945, there was completed for fall use (if a bit late) a one-storied building with six classrooms. Some of the space allocated in the original classroom and administrative building to more general school purposes had been meanwhile converted to classrooms.

One diminution in the Baghdad College staff had been effected in 1940 when an appeal was made, sanctioned by the Sacred Congregation, to have Baghdad Jesuits replace Carmelite Fathers in the supervision of a grammar school in Basra. The school was first supervised by Fr. Leo J. Shea from 1940-1942. Fr. Michael J. McCarthy took over this task when Fr. Shea returned to the college to replace Fr. Madaras as Minister and procurator. Likewise, Fr. Merrick had gone there in 1942 for apostolic work including armed forces chaplaincy work.
Earlier it seems there had been raised the possibility of establishing an equivalent of Baghdad College in Haifa. This plan, if carried out, would call on some veterans from Baghdad or drawn on the same reservoir of men which had kept the Baghdad Mission static in personnel as it increased its potential between 1939 and 1945. Fr. Nadaras had made the survey and recommended against it. His conclusions were accepted by the Roman authorities that had requested the study. So this possible leakage had been avoided. When Fr. Anderson had been dispatched in 1939 to Transjordan, his assignment was viewed as a diminution of the task which Pope Pius XI in 1929 had urged on Fr. General for a school in Iraq and -- as a weakening at the same school project which the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches, after an initial toying with the possibility of a pensione rather than a school, had approved after Fr. Edmund A. Walsh's 1931 visit and report. Now that a new project in comparison with the original purpose was being proposed in 1945, the letters of protest of Fr. Sarjeant to Rome and Boston were very vigorous.

The first intimation that another raid on the mission staff was contemplated came in April of 1945 when Fr. Sarjeant was visiting Fr. Anderson in Cairo. Then there seemed to be a desire on the part of Msgr. Hughes to have two or three auxiliary priests in Cairo if not from the Baghdad Mission, at least from the Near East Vice-Province. There was also indication that some few might be called upon to serve in Palestine. Through the diplomatic pouch available to Fr. Anderson, Fr. Sarjeant sent a letter to Fr. Provincial John J.
McEleney on May 15 with these intimations and with the view that
the mission could not spare men even if more time on school
inspection in Transjordan was a practical possibility for Fr.
Anderson. Fr. McEleney replied on May 18, 1945, that, while he
would give serious consideration to requests for men for Cairo
and elsewhere, he wished categorically to state that the
essential task of the Baghdad Mission was to run Baghdad College.

When a letter on further work for the mission came
officially, it came from Fr. Zacheus Maher, in a letter dated
June 18. Fr. Vicar de Boynes wanted two men to serve as school
inspectors in Transjordan. The task was to be made light for the
mission. Two new men would be sent from the United States to
replace two veterans selected from Baghdad College for the work.
To this request Fr. Sarjeant wrote in dismay on July 5, 1945.
He noted that the new work was not in Palestine as had been
intimated to him that spring in Cairo. It was to Transjordan
where Fr. Anderson for five years had labored all but in vain.
He especially noted that, to Fr. Anderson's official report, no
official response had been received any more than one had been
given a report of another apostolic visitor fifteen years
previously. Had not Fr. Anderson been the soul of tact, all the
work would have been a fiasco. This was an intimation that the
school visitation task in Transjordan needed a reassessment
rather than a reinforcement.

Shortly after Fr. Sarjeant had written this letter to
Fr. Provincial, he received a letter from Fr. Vicar directly.
The Vicar wanted two Baghdad men for the Transjordan work but
gave no intimation such as Fr. Mahé had given that two new recruits would replace them. Writing to Fr. Anderson of this instruction, Fr. Sarjeant sought Fr. Anderson’s views by a letter of July 15. Fr. McElaney was similarly informed of Rome’s views. To expedite matters, on July 11, the provincial wrote to Fr. Madaras, who was on leave in the States, for names of potential "Baghdadis" to be sent.

On July 21 Fr. Madaras proposed either Fr. Merrick or Fr. Robert J. Sullivan, the latter of whom had joined the mission in 1943 with a doctoral degree in anthropology which he had received during regency from Catholic University. Fr. Merrick, he pointed out, was nearly through with his military-chaplaincy work at Basra and knew some spoken Arabic. Fr. Sullivan whose severance from the mission would be a serious loss, could be relied upon to do a sterling job. Fr. Madaras also proposed that Fr. Sarjeant, whose term as superior was expiring, could be a choice. Fr. Sarjeant did not know Arabic, but in this sense he would be no more handicapped than Fr. Sullivan. His knowledge of French would be a help.

Before receiving Fr. McElaney’s telegram on July 23 that two new fathers would be sent from the States for the Transjordan work, Fr. Sarjeant, on July 27, set forth his views on new personnel. If the two new men in Transjordan were to act at the instructions of Fr. Anderson, two new men would be preferable. If they were not to be under Fr. Anderson and this work was to be considered outside the assigned educational scope of Baghdad College, one man from the States and one from the
mission would be preferable. His choices from the mission would be either Fr. Devenny or Fr. Connell or Fr. McCarthy. The removal of anyone of them would be catastrophic for the school. Both Fr. Devenny and Fr. Connell had been ill at times during the past school year, and Fr. McCarthy at Basra would have to be replaced. But in view of the unsatisfying experience of Fr. Anderson in Transjordan for so long a time, the whole plan should be opposed as he had consistently argued.

It should also be kept in mind that the task of inspection in Arabic-speaking schools and in Arabic-speaking villages required a real knowledge of Arabic. If a second language were substituted, it would be French. The man or men selected should not so much have good nerves, but no nerves at all. The work was truly a watering of a dry stick where responsibility lay without authority. He repeated again that this work was outside the scope of that which Pope Pius XI had designed for the mission. Anyone who had been in Baghdad knew of the frustrating character of the work; hence, if any one went, it should be some one or two who knew nothing of the situation. They might have clearer minds. By all means, oppose the assignment was the final reiterated advice.

On August 13, Fr. McEleney wrote with the definite word (reinforcing his telegram of July 23) that two men would come from the States. While he would discuss the whole matter with Fr. Vicar (de Boynes) he had to say that de Boynes was mandatory with his instructions. By letter dated September 27, Fr. Sarjeant was informed that Fr. Maddaras had been read in as
superior on September 24, while still on sabbatical. The two extra men for Transjordan were Fr. Thomas J. Kelly and Fr. Thomas F. McDermott who hoped to sail about October 20. They were not, however, to leave for Transjordan until the return of Fr. Nadaras.

On his return from the United States to the mission, Fr. Nadaras was to confer in Rome with Fr. Vicar. This same news was cabled by Fr. Nadaras on September 30. Fr. de Roynes was reported by Fr. Nadaras as not in favor of assigning present Baghdad missions to the new task. The most important point was the news that Fr. Maher had induced the Vicar to confer in Rome with both Fr. Nadaras and Fr. Sarjeant. Until then, all was to remain as it was.

Prior to the meeting, in December 1945, Fr. Nadaras wrote an account of the Baghdad Mission to Cardinal Tisserant. This showed its own need of personnel. It also explained why some financial aid might be expected if the mission were to expand and capitalize on its current dominant position in education. He pointed out that an anonymous American benefactress had given money making possible the classroom and administration building. This building constructed for 300 students now housed 400. A combined student dormitory and a faculty residence had gone up due to the benefaction of this same lady. It originally housed thirty students and eighteen faculty. With pressure for more and more boarding space for students, it then housed fifty students, and faculty space had been reduced. Faculty, therefore, lived in rented residents as close by as
possible. A house had also been rented for additional boarders bringing their total up to seventy.

Hopefully the Sacred Congregation could see the need of a new dormitory, a classroom building, a school chapel and a faculty residence. At this time, and much later, too, it could be added, outdoor campus space served for auditorium purposes, while formal affairs such as graduation were held in public halls. This whole group of needed facilities might be built for $750,000. Toward a chapel and faculty residence, $80,000 had been given by the same benefactors, now deceased. When in New York, Fr. Madaras had asked Archbishop Francis J. Spellman for $50,000 from the Catholic Near East Association on the score that $50,000 had been the cost of the 1937-8 building. Archbishop Spellman stating his own inability to grant this fund, proposed that it be requested of Cardinal Tisserant. With such written data, conferences could proceed between Fathers Madaras and Sarjeant with Cardinal Tisserant and Msgr. Antonio Arata, one of his assistants.

From the 9th to the 14th day of November 1945, a series of conferences took place. They were summarized by Fr. Madaras. The mission, the cardinal agreed, should concentrate on Baghdad College. Editorially it should again be noted that this was a change in thinking on the part of the congregation. In 1931 it had clearly instructed Fr. Edmund A. Walsh to probe exclusively the possibility not of a school in Iraq, but of a hostel only. Only when Fr. Walsh had made clear that nothing short of a school would meet the needs and the hopes of the various
ecclesiastical groups in Iraq did the Congregation agree to a school. Then, as had been recorded, it was not very kind to Fr. Walsh.

However, over the years (1932-1945) the fame of Baghdad College had come so often and so loudly to the attention of Roman officials that the apostolic value of the school was very evident. The mission itself, seemingly unaware of the contretemps concerning school or hostel, always insisted that it was founded to conduct a school. So Pius XI had appealed to Fr. General, and so, too, Fr. Walsh, without trying to bring people to that conclusion, had found as the desideratum from the earliest days of his visit to Baghdad.

There was also a decision about Basra. The cardinal approved a request to the Apostolic Delegate of Mesopotamia to have this work discontinued. This request was made and the Carmelites resumed control over their mother project in Basra. In September 1939, the Carmelite Fathers had asked the apostolic delegate to have permission to close St. Thomas Primary School in Basra. Their contention was that, during the war, they could not obtain the funds for equipment and lay personnel. It was suggested that the school be turned over to the Jesuits for the war's duration. If the school were closed, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to have a government permit to have it reopened under Catholic auspices.

So with the beginning of the 1940-41 school year, the task devolved on the Baghdad Mission one year after it had supplied one of its missioners to Transjordan. The first
director, as has been pointed out, was Fr. Leo Shea (1940-42), then came Fr. Merrick for one year (1942-43) and then Fr. McCarthy (1943-45). Fr. Merrick continued there from 1943-45 as a chaplain.

At the time of the conference it seemed feasible that the school be returned to the Carmelite Fathers. They seemed to want back their original mission in Basra and, moreover, they had Iraqi members who could be assigned there. It is important to point out that the Carmelites, because of their long tenure in the area, were considered the representatives of the Latin community of Iraq by the government and that the Latin community was not considered a foreign entity in the eyes of the law. One might wonder if the Jesuits who soon outshone the Carmelites in prestige might not have been made a part of this official Latin community.

Until the data on the Carmelites concerning Basra came to light, the author (who was fortunate to spend some months twice in Baghdad) never heard of this curious bit of erudition. Since their arrival in early 1932, both Fr. Rice and Fr. Madonna lived with the Carmelites and since its then excellent cathedral grammar school supplied the cream of its early Christian applicants, and since relations continued in a friendly fashion, one would suppose that this possibility was explored and found either impossible or unfeasible.

An undated and anonymous report prepared prior to this conference with Cardinal Tisserant indicated that, at least during World War II, American religious were preferred in Iraq as
less suspect of nationalism than French or Italian religious. With prescience this report added that the preferred position in Iraq of American clergy "may be changed by future oil developments and by American support of the Jewish side of the Palestine question." How true! Also how ironic since the sympathies of the Baghdad Jesuits were favorable to an Arab point of view and to the Palestinians dispersed with the formation of Israel.

As to the thorny subject of Transjordan which had occasioned the interview between Fr. Naderas and Fr. Sarjeant with the Cardinal as well as with the Vicar, the views so insisted upon by Fr. Sarjeant were answered. While documentation on the meeting with Fr. Vicar is not available, the conclusion is known. No one, not even men directly from the States, had to be deployed there. From the meetings with Tisserant and Arata, it was made clear that the original idea for and continued insistence on Union Schools in Transjordan was attributable to Msgr. Testa, now relieved of his task as apostolic delegate. The whole subject needed reexamination rather than reinforcement. As to Fr. Anderson, the Cardinal approved the writing of a letter to Msgr. Hughes asking for his release. It could expedite this release if an interview on the subject was had with Msgr. Giovanni Battista Montini of the Secretariate of State.

In speaking of eventual Catholic higher education in the whole area, Jerusalem was proposed by the Cardinal as a future site for such a university. It might well be discussed
with Msgr. Hughes and with Fr. Charles de Bonneville, the local Jesuit Vice Provincial. It would receive the support of the Sacred Congregation. The $50,000 requested for Baghdad College was granted and the money was made available during that very month. Nothing further was heard of the Jerusalem University.

By 1955-1956 plans were well advanced for opening in Baghdad of a four-year college to be known as Al-Hikma (Wisdom) University. By that time, the relations between the government and Baghdad College with its educational prestige were such that, while Fr. Thomas F. Hussey was rector and Fr. Joseph Connell and Fr. Joseph Ryan were consultors along with the province prefect for higher education, Fr. J. L. Burke, the Iraq government made a generous grant of land in the deep south of the city, and a U.S. agency plus philanthropic agencies (Gulbekian, Ford, Near East) made gifts available for a series of buildings. This was well off into the future in 1946.

The time came when the plans reached in the Roman conferences had a bearing on Fr. Anderson. On May 20, 1946, Fr. Madaras wrote to Fr. McElaney that the time for Fr. Anderson's freedom was about to arrive. Some changes in the Cairo legation both helped and slowed this freedom. Already in 1945, Fr. Anderson had written to his sister that Msgr. Hughes was soon to be ordained a bishop. Just as Msgr. Hughes in writing to Jesuit authorities in Rome had sincerely and amply praised Fr. Anderson, so Fr. Anderson did in a letter to his sister on April 11, 1945:
"In my varied experience I have worked with no one more completely the priest than Father Hughes, no one more ardently zealous for the things of Christ nor more profoundly sympathetic toward his fellow-men. I have been with him among the great, the near great and the obscure. I have seen him among the little innocents in the schools and among the sophisticated of Cairo's brilliant and cosmopolitan society. He is equally the priest with the one and the other, and with all the varied ranks between them. Everywhere I have seen people attracted to him by the magnetic force of his priestly character. In the whole range of human problems and perplexities it would be a rare type of such [problems] that had not been brought to him by some anxious person seeking counsel or guidance or sympathy or help of more material sort. I know of no man more universally loved by all classes of people. We who are blessed in our intimate relationship with him are supremely happy in the honor conferred upon him for we know how worthily he will wear that honor and how truly he will be that which is a bishop's noblest function — 'a shepherd of the flock'."

The episcopal ordination originally scheduled for May 6 in Cairo was postponed to Pentecost Sunday, May 20. Fr. Anderson was in charge of arrangements and ceremonies; hence his continued presence was required for this function and ordinary business. In a letter to his sister a year earlier (August 7, 1945), Fr. Anderson had described the multiple activities of mere ordinary work in the Cairo legation. The place was a "rare combination of legation, consulate, bank, employment agency,
travel bureau, beneficent society, judicial court, refugee for matrimonial shipwrecks, and almost any other conceivable sort of human institution that, can help distressed humanity and [sic] all that, of course, in addition to its normal function as an ecclesiastical clearing house of religious problems".

Not too long after his ordination, Hughes (his rank was that of a titular archbishop) took off to England for his first vacation in twelve years. This meant further ties of Fr. Anderson to Cairo. By January, 1946, the archbishop was expected to stop in Rome, and to be back in Cairo by late January. By that time a new secretary had arrived to replace Msgr. Oddi who had served in Transjordan in Fr. Anderson's absence. By March Fr. Anderson was serving as the chaplain to armed forces near Cairo since most of the regular chaplains were gone. Finally, by April 26, 1946 he began the process of obtaining his own passports and visas.

Another visit to Transjordan was requested to have the schools ready for the fall. With Msgr. Oddi's transfer, no other secretary was as experienced with the work. There was some doubt about a visa for Transjordan which had recently become the Kingdom of Jordan.

One of the last spiritual functions of Fr. Anderson in Cairo was to give first communion to the children of Cecil Lyons of the British Embassy, a Catholic who had married the daughter of Joseph C. Grew, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan at Pearl Harbor time. Mrs. Lyons was not a Catholic, but she was serious about the Catholic upbringing of her children in her husband's Catholic
faith.

When the departure came, it came with a pleasant surprise. Fr. Andersen was designated as a courier to Rome on some ordinary business. He was the only secretary in the delegation who had never been in Rome, and Archbishop Hughes used the opportunity to show his satisfaction. Three days after his arrival in Rome, Fr. Andersen wrote to his sister on May 12, 1946 of his reception at the Curia, his visits to Jesuit spots with Fr. Vincent A. McCormick, S. J., American Assistant, and other visits to numerous ecclesiastical places and structures. On May 20 he said Mass for his sister Agnes in the church over the prison in which her patron saint had been contained prior to her martyrdom. Before he left Rome on June 5, he had learned that Emir Abdullah had been crowned king in Amman. He spoke of Jordan in an address over the Vatican Radio, but said little about the Union Schools which he was to visit that summer. He travelled via Cairo to Amman.

By September 2 in Jerusalem Fr. Andersen had booked flight on a TWA flight on September 25 to arrive in Boston on Friday, September 27, shortly before noon. To add to her joy, Archbishop Hughes wrote on September 26, 1946 to Agnes Anderson, whose careful keeping of her brother's letters has aided in the writing of this manuscript. The titular archbishop spoke of the years in which glorious moments of his life had been filled with the companionship, wisdom, learning, patience and kindness of her brother. Together with his radiance of good humor and sparkling wit, the pair of them laughed and enjoyed themselves as they
poured over their problems. Thus was concluded the first and most extended of the assignments from the Baghdad Mission for tasks in other parts of the Near or Middle East.

Once again, in 1949, Fr. Anderson was to go there on his way to investigate the possibility of a school in Iran. To fill in the years from late 1946 to the middle of 1949, it should be noted that Fr. Anderson for a time lived at Georgetown and served as a liaison on acquiring material for war-stricken Jesuit establishments. He was part, as it were, of a Jesuit UNRRA or part of a Jesuit Marshall Plan. Perhaps the narrative might jump ahead to note the final visit with Archbishop Hughes, and the belated learning of this man's death.

On June 25, 1949, from the Jesuit residence of the Holy Family in Cairo, Fr. Anderson wrote to his sister. He had arrived in Cairo via Rome and Athens on his way to investigate in Iran and landed in the newly set-up King Farouk Airport on the site where he had often said Mass for members of the armed services. Although invited to stay at the internuntiatuare by Archbishop Hughes, he preferred lodging at the Jesuit houses. Yet each afternoon he was conveyed to the archiepiscopal residence and brought back in the evening. He found Hughes in quite poor condition, and on the verge of a visit to England.

Since after a stop in Rome he was to return to Cairo, another visit was planned when Fr. Anderson was returning from Iran. Fr. Anderson, setting out from Cairo to Iran, first visited Basra, then Baghdad and on July 18 arrived in Teheran. In the Baghdad College Library he had boned up on Iran from its
collection of Middle East books. He looked forward to meeting in Teheran the Chaldean Archbishop who once was a staff member in Iraq when Fr. Anderson was at Baghdad College. Nor was the apostolic delegate there a stranger, since during World War II, he had been a visitor at Cairo. There was also the possibility of greeting some Baghdad College alumni, and some of the Salesian and Vincentian fathers he had known in Cairo.

The journey brought one sorrow. He learned without details that Archbishop Hughes had died while on vacation in England. Later when Fr. Anderson was returning through Cairo, he found a letter written from Cairo and mailed to him at Georgetown. From there it had been directed to Rome, and from Rome to Cairo. It was from the secretary of one of the English Catholic generals who was a Cairo friend of Fr. Anderson.

The secretary in postwar years had come to know Archbishop Hughes, and had been received into the church by him. Not knowing what Fr. Anderson knew of the death, she relayed news she had received directly from the family. She wished also to let Fr. Anderson know of the deep regard that the archbishop had expressed to her about his English secretary. Since he had gone, no one had given him in his illness the loving care which Fr. Anderson as an infirmary-secretary had bestowed.

It could be said that this way of caring for the sick had rubbed off on Fr. Anderson from the practice which many scholastics and fourth-year fathers had seen or experienced or partaken in when the Weston infirmary and added rooms were filled with patients as epidemics ran through the closely-knit
community. "Any a winter at Weston this task was done by its rector, Fr. Kilroy, and his corps of assistants such as Fr. Pat Collins. So with Archbishop Hughes posthumous praises of Fr. Anderson ringing in our ears, this episode of Amman, Jerusalem and Cairo can be brought to a close.