Chapter XIII

MORE TEHERAN (1950-1957)

The plan for a Jesuit institution in Teheran and the need for land did not appear to get out of the blood of the members of the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches. On January 13, 1950, its secretary, Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, wrote to Fr. General about some property that might interest him in the work of penetrating the Iranian educated classes. There was a reference to a loan from the congregation to the Sisters of St. Zita to enable the sisters to purchase a wide tract of land for a school in Teheran. Since the land could not be used for the desired purpose, the sisters were said to be embarrassed by the debt. In view of any possibility of the Society being ready to have a cultural institute, this tract of land could be purchased through the congregation. Fr. General referred this letter in Italian to the New England Province where Fr. James H. Dolan had become acting provincial on the appointment of Fr. John J. McEleney, in late January 1950, as Vicar Apostolic of Jamaica and Titular Bishop of Zeugma.

The letter was forwarded on March 6, 1950, to Fr. Frank Anderson at Jesuit Missions located at 45 E. 78th St., New York City. His comment was requested. Fr. Anderson wrote a four-page memorandum dated March 10, 1950. He first called attention to parts of his Teheran report dealing with the land purchase by the Sisters of St. Zita, and also on the financial problems involved in establishing a cultural center. While he
could understand the laudable rescue of the sacred congregation by the Society's purchase of the property in question, he did not believe that the situation had been expressed with frankness. He cited as his first source the oral report made to him by Archbishop Pappalardo, of which he was to report orally to Cardinal Tisserant. This he had done. Secondly, he had been supplied added data and consequences of the transfer by Fr. James Streit, the Salesian who served as the provisional secretary to the delegate.

Before commenting on the five points in the Cardinal's letter, Fr. Anderson remarked that the letter was perhaps written by some bright young men in the congregation's office, and that the cardinal had signed it without careful reading. A careful reading would have shown its variance from the conversation Fr. Anderson had with him on December 14, 1949, one month before the dating of the cardinal's letter.

As to the loan to purchase the property in 1948, it was taken out by the Sisters of St. Zita at a twenty percent interest from a professional money-lender without the knowledge or consent of the congregation. The purchase of land by the sisters was at the urging of the delegate who had hoped that the purchase would come prior to the highest price in a rapidly rising market. By the end of 1948, the sisters could not meet interest payments. At this juncture, Pappalardo, who after service in the Teheran Delegation, had just been made delegate, was in Rome for consecration.
From November, 1948, Msgr. Giacomo Testa was serving as delegate. Since it was the delegation that had urged the purchase, help was sought there by the sisters. Msgr. Testa completely on his own made a bank overdraft of $100,000, and thus freed the sisters of the property and its debt. The overdraft was meant as a short-term loan at 11%. He planned to sell the land for 300 reals, fifty more reals than it had cost the sisters. He declined offers for 280 and 270 reals.

Pappalardo, on his return, tried to sell and, even after being forced down to 200 reals, could find no purchaser. He did not wish the situation to be too widely known, so he asked Fr. Anderson to inform Cardinal Tisserant orally of the situation. So it was the land originally bought by the sisters and purchased by an overdraft that the Society was now being asked to buy. So it was not the sisters who were being rescued, but the Teheran Apostolic Delegation which had raised money by an overdraft to take the property off the hands of the sisters.

Some other questions on the property arose. It was a tract of 17,000 square meters, and not of 19,000 as the Roman letter stated. No mention had been made in the offer of sale that the land was divided by an intervening strip. Fr. Anderson gave slight weight to any purchase of this strip since the preceding December. The location of the property was a satisfactory one close to the United States Library and Information Center and in a developing residential area. Since some water supply system and roads were being added in this part of Teheran, it could be possible that some section of this
property being offered would be subject to eminent domain. Another interesting sidelight on this property now being offered for the Society to buy was the plan of the delegate in December of 1949 to buy it in the name of the Holy See and to give it to the Society. A final remark was the reminder that, without a cultural accord, there can be no cultural institute to have need of this property. And the cultural accord was still problematical.

Fr. Anderson's memorandum of clarification and caution was distributed to the province consultors. Three of the responses are available. Neither Fr. John A. O'Brien replying on March 20, nor Fr. Henry T. Martin, writing on March 22 favored the purchase. Fr. William A. Donaghy, who was the first to respond on March 19, found Fr. Anderson's comments reasoned, temperate and substantially supported by facts. He did believe that the Society, through trusted intermediaries, should learn whether the two tracts of land were still separate or possibly united, and just how government improvements might affect the land. It would also be well if all involved realized that the province knew more than was assumed in the official letter of the cardinal.

Just what happened about a cultural institute as a result of Fr. Anderson's report and meeting with Fr. General, or what happened about Cardinal Tisserant's request to sell this property in Teheran is not directly known. No cultural institute eventuated and no land was bought. There is a memorandum dated November 18, 1951, from Fr. Anderson to Fr. William E.
FitzGerald, Provincial of the New England province (1950-1956). It disclosed that the Salesian school in Teheran had been forced to close and that the Iranian government was declining to authorize any school to begin in 1952-53 if it were directed by foreign religious. All of this clearly implied that the legal benefits hoped from the proposed cultural accord had evanesced.

Yet, in another few years after this gloomy memorandum, another attempt was made to have New England Jesuits in Teheran. Msgr. Giuseppe Paupini was at that time Apostolic Internuncio at Teheran. According to this original request there would be a Jesuit high school primarily to educate non-Iranians, and thereby, somehow, penetrate the Muslim world. The delegate believed that such a school would be approved since private schools appeared once again in favor. On October 22, 1956 Fr. General had forwarded this request to Fr. Thomas F. Hussy without submitting it to the New England Province Provincial, Fr. James E. Coleran.

Due to Mid-East turmoil at that time, Fr. Richard J. McCarthy, the official visitor from the Baghdad Mission, could only be sent to Teheran on January 31, 1957. There he remained until March 2, 1957. Fr. McCarthy, it should be noted, was teaching, during the first year of Al-Hikma University, the prescribed course in Arabic language and literature. In this respect, Al-Hikma University differed from all the public college curricula of Baghdad, except the Arts College, which offered no such course to its students.
During his stay, Fr. McCarthy reported that he had come to know and appreciate the nuncio who had been only ten months in Iran on what was his first diplomatic mission following his ordination to the episcopacy. He was fluent in Italian and Spanish, and had slight speaking knowledge of French. His Iranian contacts were limited to people more apt to avoid giving offense to speak out their minds. Fr. McCarthy believed that his own contacts with Salesian and Lazarist veteran missioners helped him to grasp the situation more fully.

Toward the end of Fr. McCarthy's visit, Msgr. Paupini learned he was soon to go to Guatemala and El Salvador as nuncio. Hence, there would soon be a chargé d'affaires at Teheran, but no one had been named. A somewhat rapid change in command of the delegates, who also served as the Latin ordinaries, was believed to have held up growth of the church. Each one, with the best of intentions, had his own ideas. Msgr. Paupini did plan to urge Rome to continue favoring Jesuit educational presence in Iran.

A capital change in the delegate's plan took place on the day after Fr. McCarthy's arrival. It was a result of a three-way discussion between him, the delegate and Fr. Fideli, the superior in Teheran of the Salesians (who also had the power of visitor). The idea of a secondary school for non-Iranians was abandoned. Such young people were few, very mobile, and already sufficiently cared for. Even when Iranians could take vacant places in a non-Iranian school, their diplomas would not be recognized for entrance to Iranian colleges.
Furthermore, if permission were given to an American group to found such a school, a reciprocal arrangement must be supplied whereby Iran could establish one in the United States exclusively for Iranians. This was neither easily said nor done. By treaty there was such an arrangement between Italy and Iran. Hence the Italian Salesians had a free hand.

The second plan of the delegate was the opening of a so-called Melli secondary school. Such a school was distinguished from a government school. Any one could enroll in it. It must have an Iranian principal and follow the government syllabus. The first three years had a common curriculum for everyone. Studies included Arabic, and four hours of either English, French, German or Russian. In the last three years, there was a concentration in mathematics, sciences or literature, although all three of these options need not be available. One or two were sufficient. The one in greatest demand was mathematics.

All the courses over the six years except the modern languages had to be taught in Iranian. The Lazarists were allowed to teach some subjects in French since they were preparing students for official French examinations. Jesuits teaching in their school would be limited to the four hours of English over the first three years. Nor would they find their students in the least proficient in English, since it was illegal to teach any modern languages in a grammar school. Muslim students, too, must receive instruction in their religion. The clear predominance of the Shia group in Iran had effected this
law, whereas the rather equal division of the population in Iraq between Sunni and Shia Moslems had held off such a legal requirement.

The Christian schools had an odd way of giving religious instruction to Moslems. The teacher merely presided during the religion period, and answered individual questions if they were raised. The official religious exams could be held, as generally were all government exams, in the classrooms. The Holy See had granted authorization for this use of the classrooms in Christian schools. All government exams were so conducted that examiners did not know the names of the students whose papers were corrected.

This second plan of the delegate gave rise to the topic of school directors. One would suffice for the whole six years of secondary work. He must be a Muslim with proper degrees, thirty years of age, and with character verified by the police department. The Chaldean school had a Christian director. This was explained by the length of time the Lazarists had conducted the school and by the influence of their former pupils. When the Salesians applied for a similar arrangement, they were refused. The Muslim principal of both primary and then limited secondary school sent his own children to the school, but rarely appeared himself. By default the Salesian superior served as principal. The absence of the official director caused problems at times of unannounced visits.
As a result of these experiences, the nuncio and the Chaldean Patriarch thought that a chance could have been taken with a Christian lay principal in a proposed Jesuit school. In estimating why a Jesuit secondary school might thrive despite legal disabilities, it was suggested that there be a long-range plan to have the secondary school culminate in a four-year college. The less religious Iranians might favor such a plan, but it would have been opposed vigorously by the mullah group.

Fr. McCarthy was interested in learning why the delegate wanted a Jesuit secondary school when another Christian school (the Lazarists) was there and when the Salesians had some plans to add the last years of secondary schools to their then intermediate one. There was also the possibility of Catholic Armenian priests opening a school for their students. Reasons of a general nature appeared. There could be a clearer affirmation of the presence of the church in Teheran. The Moslem mind might be better penetrated. There was hope of influencing the Orthodox Armenians and Nestorians.

Fr. McCarthy learned there was more of a possibility of added animosity if a totally new school were begun. The time was one, it was true, of a friendly attitude to the American government, but too close a connection even with a popular American embassy was not a good way for a mission school to operate. The school could seem only as an arm of American benevolence or imperialism according to the mood of the times.
Fr. McCarthy concluded that it was the hope of generous manpower and money that had brought about the invitation to U.S. Jesuits. What was really needed was the strengthening of the present schools rather than the expenditure of $1,500,000 on new buildings and either purchased or rented land. Such a sum of money would more advisedly be used to aid Al-Hikma University.

When no clear need for the proposed school had surfaced, and many problems had arisen on costs and government restrictions, the delegate made a third proposal. He was assisted in formulating this view by Archbishop Cheikho and Don Del Mistro, a Salesian parish priest and founder of the Salesian school. Two young Jesuit priests of a philosophical and theological bent should come to Iran for two years to study Persian and to observe the possibilities of a school or some other instrument to advance the cause of the church. A knowledge of Arabic would be helpful. Fr. McCarthy looked with favor on this proposal as a way of showing real concern for the church in Iran. This study could lead to the setting up of a cultural center. The cost of some $20,000 a year might be met by the N.E. Province with some possible aid from the sacred congregation.

The two visitors should wisely appear either as students or professors. They should not spend time on apostolic work for English-speaking people since there were two priests in the country for that purpose. Should this plan be accepted in Rome, Fr. McCarthy asked that he not be one of the two visitors. The time and money spent on his education in learned Arabic should continue to eventuate in more Arabic publications such as
he had begun. But it did seem clear that one, if not both of these visiting priests, would come from the Baghdad Mission which was in its first year of university work and in greater need of trained men than even of money.

Two days after the date of Fr. McCarthy's report to Fr. General, Fr. Hussey, who had designated Fr. McCarthy for the visit to Teheran, wrote his own observations on the report to Fr. General. He also included remarks by the four consultors of the Baghdad Mission. Since Fr. Coleran had not been informed of the official visit, he enclosed a copy of the report that could be forwarded to him. In his personal comments, Fr. Hussey stressed opposition to the final proposal to send men to Teheran for further observation. Two such men would presumably come from the Mission which needed such men badly for its university. The expenditures for living in Teheran, even if less than the sum mentioned, could more profitably be used in Baghdad. In order not to be too negative in his appraisal, he would favor two members of the Baghdad community going to Teheran for the summer. Their conclusions could be fully reported to Fr. Provincial Coleran when he visited Baghdad at the close of the upcoming General Congregation.

Fr. Robert J. Sullivan, the principal of Baghdad College, limiting himself to the third plan, said he failed to see the utility of a year's survey on what appeared full of difficulties in manpower and money. If the survey were for some other apostolic ventures that would be less vague and more justifying of crippling the Baghdad Mission while it was being
made, he might see some point. If Fr. General did favor some other apostolic work than a school with all its problems, he would gladly volunteer for it.

Fr. Leo J. Shea took up the proposal which Fr. William J. Sheehan had made in a consultors' meeting, that two men go for the summer. Any proposals could be presented to Fr. Provincial on his upcoming visitation. The provincial might wish to go to Iran himself to see the situation. When Fr. Sheehan wrote, he made no reference to the suggestion of a summer visit. He concentrated on the need of men and resources for Al-Hikma which was already outgrowing its temporary quarters at Baghdad College. He found what Al-Hikma could do was far more real and tangible than any plan for Teheran.

Fr. Joseph L. Ryan, the Dean of Al-Hikma, spoke to all three points. He marvelled that serious men presented a plan to Fr. General, and then dropped it after one day's consideration. A secondary school for Iranians seemed an unneeded task, without any solid legal foundation and calculated to arouse latent hostilities. As for sending men to study and survey, this project was well postponed until a new apostolic delegate arrived and his views were known. The proposed center would require the same type of people now being sought for Al-Hikma, and being found hard to obtain. Moreover, their linguistic requirements could have a bad effect on the Arabic study house in Sadu'un. However, since more could be learned about an institute, having two men study that possibility during the coming summer could help.
There is no documentation to show if a summer survey was made. No project was taken up by the New England Province along these lines. The legal problems, which Fr. Anderson had pointed out and which Fr. McCarthy had reiterated, remained since no form of cultural agreement waiving or softening them had materialized. There appears general agreement that no Jesuit secondary school in Teheran was needed, and the potential good from a cultural center which both Fr. Anderson and Fr. McCarthy could glimpse, depended on a governmental cooperation that did not eventuate.