

***The Founding of Baghdad College: Father Edmund A. Walsh
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Thank you. It is a pleasure to talk with you this morning about something we all love – *Baghdad College*. My relation with it, of course, is indirect – yours is direct, but, nevertheless, I feel very much a part of *Baghdad College* and of you. First of all, I wish to thank the two people who have made this opportunity possible: Father Solomon Sara, S.J., my mentor at Georgetown University this past year and a treasured member of the *Baghdad College* community, and Mr. Ramzi Hermiz, our host today, who graciously invited me to attend this reunion and to speak this morning. I deeply appreciate the opportunity.

I was introduced to *Baghdad College* about three years ago, when I began my Doctoral studies at the *Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome*. In the discussion of possible thesis topics, my advisor, Father Robert Taft S.J., who had taught at *Baghdad College* in the 1950's, suggested that I do research on the founding of that school and its relation to the *New England Jesuit Province*.

This subject sounded very interesting to me. I had just completed my Masters Degree in Political Science at the *University of Rome* with a thesis on Libya and its relations with the West and I was, and still am, fascinated by the Near-East. The opportunity to continue working in this area was too good to pass up.

Since then I have done extended research on the founding of *Baghdad College* and, in particular, on the “Fadheria” who went to Baghdad on a Papal mission to study the possibility of establishing a dormitory in Baghdad for young Catholics and, instead, ended up by establishing an American Jesuit-led High school in Baghdad: Father Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., a member of the *New England Province of the Society of Jesus* and, by that time, already a well known educator from Georgetown University.

This research has taken me through all of the important Church Archives in Rome. In 2006 it took me to the New England Jesuit Archives at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts and, in 2008-9, it brought me to Washington DC and Georgetown University as a Visiting Researcher in the Georgetown University *Special Collection Research Center* where Father Walsh's personal papers are collected. It has been a fascinating trip all the way.

Of course, working in Libraries and Archives, spending the day inside them searching through old documents, making copies, taking notes, (arguing with librarians!), etc. may not sound like fun. But there is, in fact, a certain “Indiana Jones” excitement about unearthing the past, discovering a forgotten fact, finding that “missing link”. The next old page you look at, the next yellowed document you read, may - just may - solve that mystery and explain what seemed unexplainable the moment before. It may completely change the way you view the past. This can be a real thrill and quite as much fun as being dropped into a vault full of snakes with one torch and a lasso – that's for sure!

This morning, then, I would like to share with you some of my research/adventures regarding the man who made *Baghdad College* possible, Father Edmund Walsh, and about how the founding of *Baghdad College* came about. Father Walsh was an extraordinary man and I would like to recall him to you this morning, because the experience which we are celebrating today, with this

marvelous *Baghdad College* reunion, was born in Edmund Walsh's imagination and of his labors and, one might say, of his sacrifice. It is, therefore, only proper that we remember his achievements on this occasion.

Edmund Aloysius Walsh, the last of six children, was born in 1885 in South Boston, Massachusetts, to a second generation Irish immigrant family. At the age of 13, he was admitted to Boston College High School on scholarship. In 1902, he entered the Jesuit Seminary in Frederick, Maryland, "Saint John's Church and College". His studies would take him through Europe until the First World War broke out. Subsequently, in 1918, Father Walsh was appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown University and in 1919 he founded Georgetown's famous *School of Foreign Service* – the first such school in the nation - now known as the *Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service*. He would remain on the faculty of Georgetown University for the rest of his life.

During the next decade, Pope Pius XI conferred several assignments on Father Walsh: the direction of the aid program for famine relief in Russia (*Papal Relief Mission to Russia*) in 1922-23; the organization and direction of *The Catholic Near East Welfare Association* from 1926 through 1931; a mission to Mexico to aid in the settlement (*Arreglos*) of the church-state conflict with the Mexican revolutionary government in 1929; and, finally, his mission to Iraq in 1931 – which resulted in the establishment of *Baghdad College*.

The American government also entrusted Father Walsh with a series of responsible positions. In 1942, he was appointed Consultant and Lecturer by the Geopolitical Division of the War Department and carried out lectures and courses at major Army centers throughout the country. From 1945-46, he was Consultant to the U.S. Chief of Counsel, Judge Robert H. Jackson, at the Nuremberg War Trials researching and giving advice on matters relating to Nazi religious persecution. In 1946 he was selected by President Truman as a member of a 9 person civilian commission, the *President's Advisory Commission on Universal Military Training* and, from 1948 through 1951, he was a member of the *President's Committee on Religion and Welfare in the Armed Forces*.

In Washington, Walsh was a well known public figure – not only due to his association with Georgetown's *School of Foreign Service*, but also because of the public stances he took on a number of important issues having to do directly with the political life of the United States. For 18 years beginning in 1924 - immediately following his return from Russia, he delivered a public lecture series devoted to Russia and the dangers which international communist expansion posed to the free world. His insistence on this issue throughout the years, in fact, was to make him a national symbol of anti-communism.

Father Walsh died in 1956 and he is buried in the small Jesuit graveyard on the campus of his beloved Georgetown University. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his letter of condolence to President Bunn of Georgetown University in 1956, summarized Walsh's lifelong contribution in the following words: "*The death of Father Edmund A. Walsh is a grievous loss to the Society in which he served so many years, to the educational and religious life of the United States and to the free peoples of the Western World. For four decades, he was a vigorous and inspiring champion of freedom for mankind and independence for nations. His voice was influential throughout this country and in many lands overseas because he spoke with knowledge and conviction and a sympathetic concern for all peoples. And, at every call for duty, all his energy of leadership and wisdom of counsel were devoted to the service of the United States. His University and his Society - all who knew him well - mourn his death. But they can find in his memory the deathless inspiration of a life that was dedicated to the advancement of human rights and dignity and spiritual stature.*"

Will you extend to the members of the University family and the Society of Jesus my personal sympathy in the death of Father Walsh? Sincerely, Dwight Eisenhower.”

This is a very condensed version, of course, of the accomplishments of Edmund Walsh, but it allows us to see the stature of the man who placed the importance of international relations and of education at the center of his life. His involvement with the birth of *Baghdad College* was part of a lifelong crusade which, like Georgetown’s *School of Foreign Service*, put education at the top of the list of priorities for developing successful international relations – only through educated people, aware of history, sensitive to religious identities and differences, united in the fellowship of good will and friendship, was there hope for a society which was truly international.

Let us turn now to the pre-history of *Baghdad College*:

In 1930 The *Congregation of Oriental Churches* contacted the Superior General of the *Society of Jesus*, Włodzimierz Lédochowski, with a request to send an American Jesuit to Iraq to explore the possibility of opening a dormitory for Catholic students in Baghdad. The *Congregation of Oriental Churches* made this request after 10 years of un-answered requests to other Orders in Europe and in Canada. When Lédochowski asked the Maryland Provincial, Edward Phillips, S.J., for recommendations, he suggested Fr. Walsh (“aptissimus”), and General Lédochowski, who knew quite well of Father Walsh’s achievements in Russia and Mexico, accepted the suggestion. So began Father Walsh’s fourth – and last – Papal assignment.

The instructions given for this mission were detailed and stringent: Walsh was not to take initiatives; he would be the “eyes and ears” of the *Congregation of Oriental Churches* - not their spokesman. He was to gather information and report on the feasibility of opening a dormitory for Catholic students in Iraq – i.e. not a school, but a dormitory in support of the educational institutions which were already active in the city of Baghdad.

How much this stringency was necessitated by political concerns, most particularly by the presence of the French Apostolic Delegate to Mesopotamia, Mons. Antonio Drapier, who was extremely intent on protecting French influence in the area, can be seen by the following diplomatically worded letter. This letter was sent to Mons. Drapier, on the 25th of April, 1930, by Emo. Luigi Sincero and Msr. Cicognani of the *Congregation of Oriental Churches* and it is addressing concerns raised by Mons. Drapier:

1. with regard to the location of a new “academic institution” in Baghdad rather than Mosul – (where Mons. Drapier was)
2. with regard to Jesuit control of the “new institution”
3. with regard to political issues raised by an American Jesuit presence in the area.

“In reference to your letters of February 1 and of March 12, this *Congregation* deems it necessary to clarify the following points:

1. The decision with regard to the location in which the projected academic institution will be built, i.e. Baghdad: The Oriental Prelates have petitioned repeatedly for Baghdad, Mgr. Berré also, and so it was decided, after thorough consideration, in plenary, with the approval of the Holy Father.

2. The project which culminated in the invitation to the Fathers of the *Company of Jesus* to assume control of the new institution was communicated to the Revmo. Priore General of the Carmelites (editor’s note: already present in Mosul) on the same date which the news was given to you - that is, on December 6, 1929, - and encountered no reservation or difficulty.

3. The considerations of a political nature which you mention in your report of March 12 should not enter into a question which concerns the vital defense of the faith among youthful scholars; on the contrary, Article IV of the Anglo-Iraqi-American agreement (which has been sent to you) and the second paragraph of the attached Protocol seems to support the projected dispatch of American churchmen.

The *Sacred Congregation*, after having reached agreements with the Superior General of the *Company of Jesus*, is now able to anticipate to you that an American Father of the *Company of Jesus* will very soon be going to Baghdad, passing first through Rome so that he may better understand local needs and all of the other requirements necessary to begin an institution whose realization is so urgent. I can only heartily recommend, therefore, that you actively favor this project, offering your support to the Father who is coming to Iraq for that reason. I am sure that he will lend the precious contribution of his experience and his preparation to this project and I am confident that through this institution, located in the capital of Iraq, the young Catholics of secondary school age will find a source of protection and a providential and healthy home.”

Effectively this letter answered Mons. Drapier’s complaints clearly, but, of course, it did not resolve the French worries about this turn in events.

Walsh arrived in Baghdad on March 7, 1931, and I will quote from his diary:

March 7: “Arrived, by Nairn Bus, from Damascus, at 9:00 am. Went to Hotel Carlton to wash up as Carmelite Fathers had been informed auto would not arrive till 10. Typical Oriental city characteristic: dirt, primitive sanitary arrangements, room in hotel would be deemed miserable in West; small, looking into court, stone floors etc.

At about 9,30, while washing and shaving, Carmelite Fathers arrived, with Secretary of Apostolic Delegate and his auto. ... Luncheon with Delegate (40 years old). Learned that I have been “multiplied” to 3rd power, as letter has been written here from Bassrah, from Protestant School (in Baghdad since 1900), that 3 Jesuits had entered Irak these days.

Began to learn something of the politics, mutual distrust, suspicions and intrigues of country. Delegate said reason why Chaldean Patriarch so anxious to have American Jesuits was because of his hostility to Carmelites. Others say reason is money that American will bring. But all agree that something must be done in organized way to offset Mussulman hostility and Protestant activities.

Home 3.30 pm. Long conversation with the French priest - Assyriologist, doing excavations for Louvre. Had been Jesuit; He rehearsed history of case. Suggested that nothing be done to seem to repudiate Carmelites, whose mission, he admitted, was moribund. Used word “agonisant”, dying.”

March 9. “Succession of visits to “high personalities” - notables - as they are called here. Same rigid procedure at each visit: one is ushered into the divan.”

This succession of visits to “high personalities” is typical of Walsh’s way of operating. In fact, in the next days he took contact with all of the most important local dignitaries and was soon able to produce a detailed report and budget. He realized, however, that the development of a dormitory was a fairly straightforward task – and that the local churches, with adequate funds, could easily administer a dormitory for Catholic school children within Baghdad - i.e. it was not necessary to send Jesuits all the way from America to operate a dormitory! Instead, in the course of his meetings, he recognized the need for a strong, high quality educational institution in Baghdad and he encouraged local Catholic authorities to petition the Vatican directly for the opening of a new American Jesuit College in Baghdad – a move which, by appealing directly to the Pope and over the heads of the *Congregation of Oriental Churches*, - angered the very group which had asked

Walsh to go to Iraq. Furthermore, Walsh personally conducted negotiations with King Feisal I with regard to opening this school and, thanks to the fact that he was also head of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, he suggested that the Fund would provide \$50,000 for the first year of the school and \$5,000 for each of the next five years! While Father Walsh's enthusiasm, organizational ability and commitment "jumpwired" the beginning of the American Jesuit-led *Baghdad College*, he had of course, far exceeded his mandate. His artful maneuvers - and the prospect of a diminished French influence in the area, quite naturally, provoked the enmity of Mgr. Antonin Drapier, the French Apostolic Delegate, towards Walsh and towards the American Jesuits as well. It also provoked a great deal of dissatisfaction within the *Congregation of Oriental Churches* that had seen its strictly limited mandate to Walsh, disregarded.

Not surprisingly, even before Walsh was to touch American soil on his return from Iraq, he had been removed from the *Missio Iraqensis* and Cardinal Hayes of New York took over the direction of the *Catholic Near East Welfare Association*.

Father James Leo Burke, S.J., historian of the New England Province, summarized this year in Edmund Walsh's life in this way:

*"For whatever reasons, perhaps because he had not been able or willing to carry out the pensione plan [il convitto], Fr. Walsh appeared to have been in the dog-house of the Congregation. It was made clear to Fr. Phillips, in a interview in July, 1931, with the assessor of the Congregation, that Fr. Walsh's part in the project had ceased. **He was not to be dealt by the Congregation on the subject, and he was not to be assigned any task of obtaining clearance for the school from the Iraq Government.** He had likewise to understand that he had no jurisdiction over the disbursement of funds of the Near East Relief Association. Funds for the project up to \$ 50,000 would come from the Middle East Relief Funds, which were then under the management of Cardinal Patrick J. Hayes of New York. Requests for the funds were to be made directly by the American provincial in charge to the Secretary of the Congregation. The Secretary would alert Cardinal Hayes about their dispersal. **When Fr. Lédochowski was informed of this impasse by Fr. Phillips, replied in a letter dated August 3, 1931, acquiescing in the matters, and indicated that there were people who feared Fr. Walsh.** For many months after the visit, it was assumed and expected in Iraq that Fr. Walsh would head the first contingent of Jesuits to Baghdad."*

Walsh's spirit of service was not deterred, however, and, in 1932, along with 8 presidents of the most prestigious American Jesuit Universities (Georgetown University amongst the others), he formed an association in support of the *Missio Iraqensis*: the IAEA (Iraq American Educational Association), of which he was the official representative. (This association continues to exist.) He watched over the institution in many other ways throughout the rest of his life – bringing students from *Baghdad College* to attend Georgetown University, interceding with the United States State Department on its behalf, sending supplies, etc.

It remained close to his heart for the rest of his life and I am sure he would be pleased to know that we are gathered here in honor and memory of what, very likely, was the second most important school in his life following Georgetown University - *Baghdad College*.

Thank you for your attention.

Marisa Patulli Trythall