

Book Review by Giorgio Fedalto, *Studia Patavina* 59 (2012), pp. 278-9:

Patulli Trythall, Marisa, *Edmund Aloysius Walsh: La Missio Iraquensis* (supplement of "Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano", 14, 2), Accademia Angelica-Costantinopolitana di lettere arti e scienze, Rome 2010, pp. 446.

There is certainly no lack of documentation in this volume which researches the origins of the *Missio Iraquensis* and traces its support of the Christian community in Iraq. Going beyond commonly repeated clichés, Ms. Patulli Trythall has reconstructed with certainty the details of a story which focuses on an American Jesuit of Irish descent, Edmund Aloysius Walsh, SJ (1885-1956), and various events decided in Rome at the Vatican. The presence of Catholic missions throughout the world is rooted in the distant past and, if these are better known since the foundation of the *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide)* in 1622, it should also be recalled, that this Congregation included a section which had, as its declared institutional end, the support of the oriental churches. The Papal delegates were to gather the requests of these churches and to seek the resources to satisfy them. Father Walsh, as representative of the American Jesuits, was following this course when he went to Iraq in 1931. Walsh was already known for his handling of other demanding missions, not the least of which had been his direction of the Papal Relief Mission to Russia (1922-23). The Church's concern with the Orient was hardly new. In 1917 Pope Benedict XV had organized a specific Congregation "for affairs of the oriental rites", separating it from the above mentioned *Propaganda Fide* after 3 centuries. Even earlier, in 1573, Pope Gregory XIII had established an organism related to the Greeks and other Popes (Clement VIII, Gregory XV, Urban VIII, Pius IX) had acted consequently.

The interest of the Jesuit Walsh for the Christian Orient was connected with the Catholic missions in Mesopotamia where, already by the mid-seventeenth century, there were Jesuits, Carmelites, Capuchins as well as Dominicans and their Peregrinantes brothers - active since the fourteenth century. It was obvious, of course, that, parallel to this missionary interest, there would be a political interest on the part of the European powers in the area's oil production and that this interest would wedge itself between the Arab ethnic and religious groups. One of Walsh's distinctive accomplishments was to have consolidated several American Catholic organizations dedicated to raising money for the Eastern Churches into a single fund, headed personally by the Pope, which was used, eventually, also to fund the founding of an American Jesuit-led High School in Baghdad.

Before reconstructing the events leading to the founding of Baghdad College, Ms. Patulli Trythall makes a thorough examination of the Iraqi scholastic system as it passed from the Ottoman Empire to Iraq under the British mandate. This details many aspects of the Iraqi educational system which included public schools for boys and girls, Koranic schools for boys and various private schools and discusses the problems facing the development of a national school system - the languages to teach, French or English, the programs to follow given the diverse "nations" present in Iraq (Jewish, Chaldean, Jacobite, Syrian, Armenian, Nestorian, Protestant, Dominican). Additionally it discusses the French Apostolic Delegate's educational proposals which were seen as unacceptable to many of the other Christian communities in Iraq. An example is provided by his proposal to unify all the Catholic Schools under a single direction. This was not acceptable, for example, to the Chaldean Patriarch and, in reality, no religious order had yet been found by the *Congregation for the Oriental Churches* that was prepared to run such a school. Given the quantity of documents the author cites here, it is difficult not to lose one's place while reading!

Meanwhile Father Walsh was gathering funds for the school. Certainly he was an extremely capable person both because of his talents and personal integrity and because of the way his relations with ecclesiastical superiors, civil authorities and agencies were interwoven. *Missio Iraquensis* became the name for the task which the Jesuits had assumed towards the Iraqi Catholics. For various reasons - and notwithstanding their meritorious past, the Salesians, Marists, Carmelites and Dominicans did not feel up to this task. The selection fell instead on the American Jesuits and

on Father Walsh - because of his previous experience in missions and education, his knowledge of languages and, also, because of a new treaty between Iraq and the United States which favored the establishment of American scholastic institutions within Iraq. Times were changing and there had been difficulties for the Iraqi Christian students who wished to continue their education at a high school level. Pope Pius XI was, therefore, personally interested in the school which would become Baghdad College. For this reason it was necessary to overcome the difficulties which Father Walsh encountered, including the proper disposition of the funds which had been gathered.

The correspondence which the author has presented covers dozens of pages. This documentation is - in large part - justified by the scarce consideration which has been given to the said Jesuit father who, in reality, had an essential role in this operation. Walsh envisioned a sort of American Junior College, a modern school with the possibility for student boarding. Even though Baghdad College remained active for only 36 years, from 1932 to 1969, when the Jesuits were expelled and while the entire history of the *Missio Iraquensis* lasted for about 50 years, it should not be forgotten that the institution was of benefit not only to the Christian minority. In fact, in 1969 Muslims comprised approximately 70% of the student body while the representatives of other religions confessions had remained unchanged. (In 1956 the Al-Hikma (Sapienza) University was added to Baghdad College, beginning with three faculties.)

The complex research demanded for the documentation of this work and for the re-evaluation of the role played by the Jesuit, Edmund Aloysius Walsh, leaves open many further questions as to the work subsequently carried out within the school, the education received, the pupils and their influence in the Iraqi society. In short one can continue this research in several areas with good result, perhaps better, however, collecting the documentation in a single appendix where it can be viewed by the curious reader.