

La Chiesa in Iran (The Church in Iran) by Annibale Bugnini - Roma - Edizioni Vincenziane - 1981. 471 pages, plus 32 pages of illustrations. In Italian only. 20,000 Lire. Reviewed by Gladys Warda

The late Annibale Bugnini was born in Italy in 1912. Ordained a priest in 1936, he would later be elevated to Archbishop. On January 5, 1976, he was appointed Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in Iran.

This book is written in Italian, and the author makes an excellent use of this beautiful language. He is a great story teller. A reader can imagine him as a speaker, keeping his audience enthralled. He relates amusing anecdotes, and displays a keen sense of humor. Sometimes, his anecdotes are not amusing but dramatic, but all of them portray the everyday life of Christians in Iran.

Even if it is in Italian, *La Chiesa in Iran* can be used as a reference book. It is replete with information regarding priests, bishops, places, dates; names and numbers are understandable to all. It includes an extensive bibliography, and photographs of various items discussed by the author can be admired, even with no knowledge of Italian.

The Church in Iran actually is more ambitious than its title implies. Yes, of course, it encompasses the history of the Church in Iran (in particular, that of the Catholic Church). But in the process, Bugnini gets into the history of Iran, and the theological contents of the different religions and congregations in that country. He blends all of this with a deep political analysis. It must be said that Bugnini does not hide his preference for Catholics and for Armenians. As a good Catholic, Bugnini has the power to envelop his reader in an aura of mysticism, and perhaps convert a non-believer.

While Bugnini's erudition is overwhelming, nevertheless he has a teacher's ability to transmit his concepts. When he talks about the history of Iran, he mentions important religious men; when he tells about the men, the history of the country is always present. He uses the "cyclic" method of teaching: the same event, or the same character, will appear in different chapters, seen from different angles.

Bugnini's love for Iran and its people is a recurring theme. After reading *La Chiesa in Iran*, places such as Khosrova or Isfahan, or names like Paul Bedjan or Shah Abbas, will ring a familiar bell even for someone whose previous knowledge was limited to Teheran and Reza Shah Pahlavi. Of course, when one reads about the Soviet Union, or about present-day Armenia, it must be taken into account that the political map of the world has changed since Bugnini wrote the book.

A word must be said about the errata. Regrettably, no one was able to take the time to go through the book before its final edition to avoid the numerous typographical errors. For example, a reader might wonder why Father Bedjan wanted to perform a "*sagigo*" (some kind of song?) with his harmonium, until one realizes the sentence makes sense when it is read as "*saggio*" (practice).

Following the preface, *La Chiesa* divides into six parts, then concludes with an Appendix where the author presents abundant data and documentation about the history of Iran and about the Church in Iran. Here is some of what Bugnini has to say.

The Preface

When Bugnini arrived in Iran in 1976, he realized he needed to know more about Iran, its people, and their customs. First, he read a number of books on the Church in Iran. Then, he learned the highways, the small roads that join the villages lost in the mountains or dispersed in the plains. One by one, he wanted to visit the villages of Salamas and Urmia which historical sources had described as active Christian centers (he found almost no Christians, only a cemetery or the remains of a church here and there). His mission in this book is to make the Church in Iran known to the world.

Part I - *The Light of Christ in the Persian Plateau*

Bugnini summarizes the history of Iran, and of the Church in Iran, from Biblical times through the 13th century. The Old Testament tells us that Tobiah, Esther, and Daniel were present in Persia. The New Testament speaks of the Wise Men, and the question arises whether they were Zoroastrian priests. Local tradition supports this notion.

Tradition holds that Saint Thomas evangelized Iran. But other traditions mention Saint Bartholomew and Jude Thaddeus. The Bible, in Acts 2:9 mentions "*Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers of Mesopotamia*".

The Bible tells us that the first preachings were by the Israelite communities of the diaspora. Both Hebrews and Christians had their places of worship along the route to the East. Deportees also helped in the founding and growth of the Church in Iran. Thus, the Church arrived in Persia by way of the Apostles, the diaspora and the exiles. "*Assyro-Chaldean, Armenian, Syrian, Greek merchants were bearers of Christian faith.*" (p.38)

At first Christians could live in peace and expand. But when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, Christians were considered Roman allies and therefore political enemies of Persia.

Yazdegard III was the last Sassanid representative, a dynasty which elevated Iran to a position of political prestige, while at the same time shedding the blood of many innocents merely for professing faith in Christ. Persecution did not hurt the vitality of the church in Persia, it only made it stronger and more compact. According to Bugnini, other factors harmed it, such as divisions, heresy, and the schism.

After summarizing the history of Iran and the Church in Iran during the first four centuries of the Christian era, Bugnini gives us his view on the

beginnings of Nestorianism. Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (450-451) had a special interpretation for the mystery of Incarnation. Jesus the man was only the temple in which the Word lived. It was an adhesion, not a real union. So God the Word was not born of Mary but only of the Father. Pope Celestine I rejected this doctrine. The Council of Ephesus (January 431) condemned it and removed Nestorius who finished his days in exile in Panopolis. But his doctrine did not die with him.

The Nestorians looked for refuge in other places. One of the hospitable countries was Persia, where the church led quite an isolated existence. The acceptance of Nestorianism seemed like the best means to separate the Persian Church from the Roman Empire. Nestorians abolished the celibacy of priests in 484.

In 486 there was a third Synod in Seleucia. Here, the bishops proclaimed Nestorianism as the official doctrine of the Persian Church, and the abolition of celibacy was confirmed. This religion enjoyed the protection of the Sassanids and later of the Caliph of Damascus and Baghdad. The Persian church was the first national “*heretic-schismatic*” church and it acquired the name “Church of the East”. Interestingly, though officially Nestorian, the Persian Church always considered itself united to the Roman Church.

In 637 the Arabs defeated the Sassanid troops and assumed control. The expansion of the Church slowed down. While the Church was recognized and respected by the authorities, it was of marginal importance. But in any case, Nestorians were trusted with political and civic tasks which required knowledge and culture. The doctors, astronomers, and philosophers were Nestorian Christians. The Nestorians translated Aristotle, Euclid, and Ptolemy to Arabic. Science and culture were a way of religious penetration.

But in due course, Christians once again would become “*the enemy*,” as in the time of the Sassanids. They had to go into exile and take refuge in neighboring countries. Persian, once synonymous with Zoroastrian, now became the equivalent of Moslem. Yet the seed did not die.

To this point, Bugnini has told us the history of Iran, and particularly of Christians in Iran, from what might loosely be described an “objective” point of view. But beginning with the 13th century, we begin to see him as a Catholic priest showing partiality to his faith. But this notwithstanding, his opinions need to be understood, because they shed light on relevant religious issues.

As he explains, the arrival of Catholic missionaries in the 13th century initiated the first contact between Rome and Iran. Catholic missionaries had a triple task: (1) to encourage unity in opposition to the Turkish threat and the Islamic menace from Egypt; (2) to convert Mongols to Christianity; and (3) to unite the Nestorians and the Armenians in the orbit of Rome.

Under the Mongols intellectual activity waned. The influence of great theological schools and cultural centers was minimal. Christian life was concentrated in monasteries, monks abandoned the world to embrace a life of

austerity. The use of Syriac in liturgy rendered prayers incomprehensible, reducing it to an arid formalism of gestures and formulas, which was neither understood nor felt. Relations with the Pope ceased. For a period of two centuries nothing is known about Nestorians. When they reappear in history in the 16th century, they are concentrated in Mesopotamia and in the Kurdistan mountains, between Lake Van and Lake Urmia.

In 1256 the province of Azerbaijan enjoyed the most flourishing period of its history. The first city of religious relevance is Urmia, on the Western coast of the homonymous lake. According to local tradition Christianity may have appeared in Urmia at the time of the apostles. The “Mart Maryam” church now belonging to the Assyrian community goes back to that time. At the end of the 12th century Urmia received a Western Assyrian bishop, Ignatius Gabriel. According to Bugnini, to this day [1979] churches, centers and other Christian relics dotted throughout Urmia stand as a vivid reminder to historians.

Bugnini mentions another focal point of Azerbaijan Christianity: Salamas or Khosrova, located on the west of the northern point of Lake Urmia. The Episcopal succession alternated between Nestorians and Chaldeans, and continued uninterrupted up to our days. Khosrova had a beautiful Cathedral dedicated to Saint George, destroyed several times by earthquakes and always rebuilt. But it did not survive the 1930 earthquake and today [1979] it shows broken walls and a ruined roof.

Tabriz was the most important city of Iran after Teheran, a city where, according to Marco Polo, merchants could do “golden business”. From the Christian point of view, states Bugnini, Tabriz experienced three phases:

a) With oriental Assyrians. The church, which still exists, dedicated to Mart Maryam and to the saints Stephen and George, suggests a thriving Christian community in the 13th century. Marco Polo, in the 13th century, speaks of a convent “*at the end of Tabriz, dedicated to San Barsamo; the monks wore a robe similar to that of the Carmelites and lived from their work and from begging. They made woolen belts which they blessed by placing them in the altar during Mass, and then when they went to “quest” (that is, asking for alms for the Church) they distributed them among the people who held them in high esteem ‘against rheumatism’.*”

b) With western Syrians or Jacobites. The presence of Western Syrians in Azerbaijan began in the 7th century. The exiles and merchants took the South route to the west of Lake Urmia. Commerce led a good number of them to Tabriz where they began to build a church (1264) which became an “ecumenical” center where all rites (Christian, Greek, Armenians and Nestorians) co-existed harmoniously.

c) With the Latins. After the middle of the 13th century, a colony of Venetians settled in Tabriz (1264). The Treaty of Commerce between Venice

and the Mongols presaged freedom of cult choice for Latins, Dominicans and Franciscans.

Part 2 - *The Golden Century of the Mission in Persia*

To this reviewer, this is the most interesting segment of the book. Here, Bugnini shows his fascination for Shah Abbas, relates the most amusing anecdotes about this Shah and the priests of that time, and he reveals his unabashed preference for Catholics over all other Christians.

The beginning of the 16th century saw the resurrection of Iran. A new dynasty, authentically Iranian, dominated the scene. These were the Safavids, descendants of ancient families, based on a pronounced religious inspiration and a strong nationalistic sense.

Shah Khudabanda finished his days in tragic fashion. He lost his eldest son, probably due to a conspiracy. His second son, Abbas, power-hungry, had him blinded and imprisoned, and took control of the country. In 1588 he became Shah Abbas and elevated the country to the highest degree of power (p.102).

Shah Abbas' first task was to consolidate the internal front. The country was fractured into small states, governed by "*rayis*" who fought each other and eluded the arm of the central power. According to a contemporary observer, "*he began to govern conquering his own kingdom with the sword and then beheading all the great ones he could fear*" (p.102). In 1598 he transformed Isfahan into one of the most beautiful and luxurious capitals of the world in his time. He created in all Iran a network of roads and seraglios, still today the object of admiration. In order to provide Iran with sufficient water he had the idea of burrowing through the Kuhrang and transporting the water to the other side of the mountain. This was indeed an ambitious project which he was not able to finish due to insufficient technical means. The project was resumed in 1950 and converted into the Kuhrang tunnel.

But his most difficult task was border security. The northeastern borders were the most frequently attacked, as the Turks were always on a war stand. Hormuz was occupied by the Portuguese, and the ports and islands of the Persian gulf and of the Indian Ocean coast were dominated by the British and Dutch.

In 1599 two English officers, Anthony Sherley and his brother Robert Sherley asked to be placed at the service of the Shah. Shah Abbas took them on as counselors. First of all he asked them to organize his army. Expert artillery men taught the art of making and using cannons and gunpowder.

The war against the Turks was the riskiest but also the most necessary for Iran, both politically and commercially. Anthony suggested the Shah should ask for the help of European rulers and for the Pope's support. The Shah accepted the idea and sent Anthony as his ambassador while his brother Robert remained in Isfahan as a hostage. A mission of twenty-five persons was sent, among which

was the Augustinian Nicola De Melo. In Russia, for reasons not clear, Sherley quarreled with Father De Melo and denounced him as a spy. De Melo remained in prison during several years and was finally burned alive in Astrakan in 1614. He was the first Augustinian “martyr” of Persia.

The Shah offered the Pope allegiance and an open door to preachers. It was even said that the Shah wanted to become a Christian. In exchange the Shah asked for substantial support in the war against the Turks. The Pope accepted, declaring his interest in this war. But Western promises did not translate into action. Shah Abbas could only count on his own forces. He spent four years on the Turkish front and reconquered six provinces. The devastation caused by this war was atrocious and the booty immense. In regard to Catholics, the King’s attitude from that moment on began to change. Putting it mildly, the lack of participation by the Europeans in the war irritated him.

As Anthony Sherley’s mission failed, the Shah sent Anthony’s brother Robert to Europe in 1607. He returned in 1615 not having accomplished much.

Shah Abbas had esteem for the Pope and the European princes. Certainly politics played a big role in his attitude. But Bugnini says probably it was not *all* politics, and that some of his gestures and declarations appeared to have religious overtones. Shah Abbas said he was a Christian at heart. When he was told that this was not enough, and that a spoken confession was needed, he answered “*yavash, yavash*” (little by little).

In 1608 he took part in a Christmas celebration with Portuguese priests, and in 1620 in an Armenian rite. In 1621 he organized a public discussion between Catholics and Anglicans.

In the summer of that same year (1621), suspecting his oldest son was plotting against him, he had him blinded. Bugnini seems to have mixed up some of his data because he adds “*as he had done thirty years before with his oldest brother*” (p. 155). The reader will find that on page 102 Bugnini said: “[*In 1588/ Khudabanda’s second son, Abbas, had him blinded and imprisoned*”. That is, in 1588 Abbas blinded his father, not his oldest brother.

Unfortunately before dying Abbas published a decree stating that the Christian who abandoned his faith and adhered to Islam could reclaim the properties of all his relatives up to the seventh generation. This was confirmed by Shah Abbas II and by Shah Soleiman, and for centuries this weighed like a Damocles sword over the Christian community.

What was Shah Abbas’ religion? Moslem? Christian? Not even his contemporaries knew for sure. “*I love the Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mary*”, he stated publicly. According to Bugnini, we can believe in the sincerity of this testimony, spontaneous and naïve as a profession of faith, in a man that personified an era in the history of his country.

An important aspect of *La Chiesa in Iran* is Bugnini’s references to Armenians in Iran. In 1604 Shah Abbas, in order to weaken Turkish power,

destroyed the Armenian cities of Erevan, Julfa and Nakhchivan. The Armenians had to leave their homes; they buried their riches and many were killed.

Shah Abbas then created the “new” Julfa, the satellite city of Isfahan, where he moved the inhabitants of ‘Julfa on the Araxe’. This new Julfa was inhabited by Armenians only, while Isfahan was reserved to Moslems. To link the two cities, Allah Verdi Khan, the powerful first minister of Shah Abbas, had the “bridge of the thirty three arches” built over the river that separated them.

Shah Abbas also gave the Armenians many villages and places to live in, offered them freedom to practice their religion, and asked the Persian people to be cordial to them. Armenians had an “instinct for commerce” and they were Christians, so Shah Abbas used them to improve his relations with the great Indian companies of the British, the Portuguese and the Dutch, at the same time wanting to destroy the Turks’ commercial power. He sent many Armenians to India, keeping their wives and children as hostages. In Persia, the Armenian colony grew. They had their own governors, “sheriff”, church and schools.

Shah Abbas was most interested in the Armenians’ efficiency and their loyalty to the State. So when he needed money a religious persecution would start and he would seek to extract funds from the Armenians before all others. Some paid, others apostated. These persecutions also involved other Christians such as Assyrians. Fortunately, their commercial activity and organization were very important to the State. To this day, maintains Bugnini, great industrial Iranian complexes are inspired and directed by this wonderful people who never lost their Christian faith (page 111).

During the years 1651-53, the Carmelites, the Jesuits and the French Capuchins arrived in Julfa. The Armenian merchants were pleased with this “invasion”. One reason was that they felt that with the help of the European missionaries their children could learn the foreign languages they needed for their contacts. Also, the presence of the missionaries meant they had a point of support for their dealings in Europe. But their religious leaders were not so happy, surprised to see three Catholic communities established in Julfa.

In 1682 an intelligent and dynamic man, Elia di s. Alberto began converting the Armenians. The Sarrat-Shariman family accepted the union with Rome and gave Father Elia some houses, where he built a chapel and a school which at once received thirty children. At the church he placed an Armenian priest and this brought him the favor of all Armenians. Some years later another church was built and the school had ninety students.

The funds for keeping four or five religious men came from the Shariman family. Nothing was asked from Rome. As a counterpart, the Sharimans had the support of the missionaries for their business in the European markets. But in 1706 they had difficult financial problems and to save themselves from the shipwreck they did not hesitate to look towards Islam. Thus the principal source of the subvention to the missionaries came to a stop.

The Holy Year of 1700 was celebrated in Julfa with a broad

participation of the people. Father Elia preached in Armenian in the churches of the Carmelites, the Jesuit and the Dominicans. Each service was followed by a procession from one church to the other.

The death of Monsignor Elia slowed down but did not end missionary activity in Julfa. Another Carmelite, Father Filippo Maria, was responsible for the community. He remained there for twenty years, working hard, making many conversions, and living on alms. During the Afghan invasion he “*suffered hunger, sold many things to survive and lived on bread and water*” (p.149).

In 1758 the city was devastated. In 1765 there were no more than 30 Catholics left in Julfa.

Augustinians.

In 1571, the Portuguese branch of the Augustinians created a special “*Augustinian Congregation of East India*” with Goa as its see. In 1572 twelve missionaries reached their destination.

The Augustinian missionaries arrived first on the island of Hormuz, in 1573. There, they bought some houses from a Hebrew and founded a church and a convent. Their multiple tasks included pastoral guidance, conversion of infidels, reconciliation of schismatics, and preaching of the gospel. They also added a hospital. According to the first priests, Hormuz only produced “salt stones” and “even the water had to be brought from outside”. However, it was an active and commercially important seaport.

But Hormuz was not Persia. The Augustinians in order to prepare themselves to enter Persia started a school in the convent of Hormuz where the priests studied the Persian language. In 1602 they were able to found a convent in Isfahan.

The convent in Hormuz lasted until 1622 when the Persians occupied the island and destroyed the Portuguese fortress. The fall of Hormuz meant a loss not only for Portugal but also for the Catholic missionaries.

In 1601 the King of Spain and Portugal Philip III wrote to Shah Abbas inviting him to: 1) declare war against the Turks; 2) intensify commercial exchange with the Portuguese; and 3) open the doors of Persia to Catholic missionaries. This triple mission was entrusted to three Augustinians who impressed the Shah favorably. He gave them permission to build a church and monastery, which was done in 1604. For this they used a big building that already existed, with marble fountains and rooms colored in gold and blue.

The Augustinian Father Antonio de Gouveia knew the Persian language thoroughly and he became a friend of the Shah. On one occasion, in 1607, the Shah “*hugged him and kissed him several times, offered him a drink with his own hands, and even invited him to visit his harem*” (p.123).

But things went wrong. In 1608 Shah Abbas sent his ambassador Ghengis Beg, along with Antonio de Gouveia, to Philip III to renew his request for an

alliance against the Turks. The two messengers, along with the usual presents, took fifty bales of silk to sell on behalf of the Shah who badly needed the funds. Maybe to more easily influence Philip III to accept the Shah's desires or because of magnanimity or for petty personal reasons, the two messengers had the unfortunate idea of giving the silk to Philip III instead of selling it to him.

When they returned to Isfahan five years later, the news of how things had gone reached the Shah even before their arrival in Hormuz. As soon as Ghengis Beg fell to his knees to kiss the Shah's feet, the king gave him a resonant kick on the chin. Then the king had Beg's tongue, lips, ears and nose removed before having him killed. De Gouveia left the country and finally died in Portugal in 1628.

Some Moslems were converted. Father Girolamo della Croce writes: "*Once, we asked some Mohammedans why they did not become Christians. They answered: 'If the king does not become Christian, no Islamic can become Christian'.*"

The Augustinians' convent was very hospitable. Missionaries of all orders, priests and Christians, foreigners and local Christians -- everyone was received with brotherly charity at the convent of Isfahan, regardless of their limited economic means.

The convent of Isfahan was never very populated. It had three, four or, at the most five priests. The work of approaching the schismatic was slow and sown with many prejudices. Life was not easy in an atmosphere mixed with so many interests. Any language intemperance or excess of zeal could cost one's life. The spirit of fraternal understanding that today guides interconfessional relationships was not evident. Every road towards truth, even the most luminous, says Bugnini, is sown with tribulations, and every rose, even in the country of roses, conceals its thorns (p. 132).

The Augustinians, while they did their missionary work, were also representatives of the King of Spain and Portugal. They were chaplains of the Portuguese garrisons and were helped financially by them. No wonder then that in exchange for this help they rendered diplomatic or commercial service. Besides, they were among the few who knew the language of the country, indispensable for the relationship with the court and the Shah.

When the first missionaries arrived in Isfahan they decided to live in the strictest poverty. But after a while they realized that European ways of life could not apply as such in Persia, where they could not expect anything from the Shah, nor could the small Augustinian community maintain them. These were hard times. Thanks to the generosity of the Portuguese King the Augustinian community could devote itself full time to the mission work without worrying too much about material subsistence. From this modest well-being they were generous to all the needy Christians at Isfahan.

Carmelites

In 1604 Pope Clemente VIII sent five Carmelites to Persia, one of them, Paolo Simone di Gesù e Maria, only 28 years old. They accepted three other vows beyond the traditional ones: 1) to go wherever their superior sent them; 2) to voluntarily accept death because of faith; and 3) neither to receive nor to have gold, silver or precious stones except in cases of absolute need.

They traveled by land through Poland, Russia, Tartary [now Turkmenistan], and Armenia. In Russia they suffered cold and hunger, were persecuted by the schismatic and incarcerated. In Tartary two of them died and the other three reached Isfahan after a trip three and a half years long.

At first the Carmelites had difficulty in obtaining a house for a convent, because the Shah harbored strong ill feelings over the unkept promise of the Pope, and he took it out on his representatives. When they finally had a church, it was frequented not only by Catholics but also by Assyrians, Armenians, Georgians, Arabs and Chaldeans. The Carmelite community at Isfahan was never very large. In 1702 there remained only two missionaries. The Shah prohibited them from proselytizing Mohammedans, but they were free to preach to Armenians, Chaldeans, schismatics, heretics, infidels, and bring them to the Catholic Church.

The most relevant conversion was that of the Anglican Sir Robert Sherley. This made the Shah's esteem for the Carmelites grow, and he allowed them to exercise their ministry in his entire kingdom.

In 1608 Father Paolo Simone left for Europe, with letters from the Shah for Pope Paul V and for Philip III. He also carried a message for his superior, asking permission to celebrate mass in Turkish and in Persian. This was allowed for Arabic and for Armenian, but not for these other two languages. However, allowing the mass in Armenian enhanced the possibility of attracting these Christians and to celebrate it in the schismatic churches.

A singular initiative was carried out by Father Dionisio della Corona di Spine in those years: he searched for moribund newborns and baptized them "so they could, as Christians, go directly to Heaven" (p.141). How did he manage to have Moslem parents accept the baptism of their children? Ignorance and superstition no doubt had their part. Certainly the parents were not aware of what the missionary father was doing. Perhaps they thought he was administering a medicinal cure to help the child recover. After some time the religious doubted whether this was really legitimate, taking into account the cases in which the baptized child did not die but reached adult age. The question was transmitted to the Pope who answered that they could continue the practice. The chronicler, in wry reference to the clinical acuity of the fathers, noted: "*They all died, while the non-baptized remained all alive*" (p.141).

The Carmelites bought a house in Shiraz, to be paid in installments over six years. The people were friendly towards them and frequented the convent, to the point that it provoked the anxiety of the authorities, until the day the vice-

governor decided not to let the people go in. The worst was always the economic situation, the installment payments and the expenses of daily subsistence. Even after the last installment was paid, food and other living expenses were great while income was almost nil. The religious began to abandon the house that was turning into ruins. Also, there was no real justification for their presence, since there were no Christians and the conversion of Moslems was very rare.

In 1649, the Carmelite Father Dina found in Shiraz many Georgians who had been forced to turn to Islam in order to save their lives and their possessions. A missionary recalls that in 1930 he found a Moslem family and saw the mother make the sign of the cross over the food before eating. He asked the reason for that. She answered she did not know but that it was a custom in those parts. In all probability it came from that immigration of former Christians from the North, who were forcibly "islamized".

In 1724, following the onset of Afghan domination, conditions worsened. Finally, in 1738, the last missionary at Shiraz abandoned everything and took refuge in Basra.

Bugnini makes special mention of Kharg, a small island in the Persian Gulf thirty-five miles northwest of Bushire. Almost in the middle of the island, in natural caves carved out of the rocks, there are traces of Christian symbolism, and not far, the ruins of a small church and cells of an old monastery, maybe from the 7th century and belonging to a group of Assyrian monks, or perhaps the vestiges of a colony of Christians from Edessa, made prisoners at the time of the Sassanids' war with Rome. The presence of Carmelites is linked to the brief occupation of the island by the Holland company of East India.

Today Kharg contributes significantly to the wealth of Iran. In fact, all of the oil extracted on land is transported to enormous storage facilities built on the island and from there it is shipped the world over. In that corner of land, one can still see the ruins of the Dutch fort, the monastery, the small Christian church, the Christian symbols of the caverns. Here Bugnini shows the poetical facet of his personality when he says: "*An angle of silence, of history and of nostalgia drowned in the blue of the gulf*" (p.151).

Capuchins

In the 17th century the Capuchins volunteered to go to Persia. They had the support of French Cardinal Richelieu, who had the intention of weakening the position of Spain and Portugal. The Shah received them cordially and gave them two houses, one in Isfahan, the other in Baghdad. The Capuchins asked to buy the houses, but Shah Abbas decided to make them a gift saying he "*gave them to the King of France, his brother, for the Capuchins of his country*" (p.160).

The religious Capuchins met with hostility from the English and Dutch merchants, who thought they had come to establish a French commercial center which would compete with them. But when they realized that their mission was purely religious the opposition ceased. Their task consisted mostly in trying to

effect the union with Rome of Armenians, Assyrians, Mandeans and other schismatics.

Jesuits

Shah Abbas, who enjoyed being surrounded by scholars, authorized the Jesuits to have houses in Julfa and in Shiraz. At Shiraz they opened a school and edited publications in Persian.

At Julfa, at first they were opposed by Apostolic Armenians who felt the three religious communities (Carmelites, Capuchins and Jesuits) wanted to take over the Armenian citadel. Then the situation calmed down, and the Jesuits befriended their enemies who called them their defenders. At Julfa they had a small house with a stupendous church and a big garden "*near the mountain*" which as recently as 1930 was called the "garden and house of the Jesuits" when finally it was sold to the Catholic Armenian bishopric to build the Cathedral of Teheran.

The arrival of the Jesuits was the beginning of an interesting initiative by Shah Abbas himself to organize at Isfahan public debates on religious questions with representatives of Moslems, a Catholic priest and a Gregorian Armenian (p.166).

The Jesuits remained in Persia a little more than a century. At the time, it seemed that the presence of a new religious family was unnecessary. On the contrary, it proved to be providential. The renowned men sent on that mission left behind a significant doctrinal imprint, enhancing the image of the church through their preaching and writing, to say nothing of their exemplary religious life. To this day, their memory remains alive in Isfahan as that of authentic apostles and skilled defenders of the faith.

Dominicans

The Dominicans, from the very founding of their order, directed their efforts towards the East. They remained in Armenia and Azerbaijan almost without interruption, working for the union of Armenians with Rome. At the end of the 17th century, they arrived in Isfahan and in neighboring Julfa with a similar mission.

In the 18th century, Iran experienced invasions, destruction and ruin. These setbacks affected the Catholic missions perhaps more than any other institution. In 1736 the Turks invaded Armenia and destroyed all traces of Christianity.

Bugnini returns to his political analysis and to Shah Abbas and states that "*a genius is born, not made*" (p.172). Without doubt, Shah Abbas was a genius of politics and of government. He had no successors who could in any way equal him. Nor was he able to groom anyone for the position. His successor on the

throne was his nephew Shah Safi (1629-1642) under whose kingdom no Christians were persecuted. However, the political situation turned for the worse. The Turks took Hamadan and threatened to take Isfahan, thereby causing some of the Carmelites to abandon the city and to take refuge in Basra. But once the danger was over they returned and thanks to the generosity of a Genovese merchant they were able to build their beautiful church at Isfahan.

Shah Safi's successor was Shah Abbas II who was nine years old when he ascended to the throne. During his kingdom Persian politics changed its course. The "hated enemy" of all time, the Turks, now became a friend. Bloody wars ended and old hatreds were forgotten. The two united in a politic of cooperation, joining forces against the West. The moral and commercial influence of the West in Iran began to dissolve.

It was a difficult time for Europeans. Missionaries at first felt the consequences but did not lose heart. It was in these years that the Jesuits arrived and the Carmelites had their first contacts with the Assyrian communities around Lake Urmia, where forty thousand families lived in extreme poverty.

In the meantime, Shah Abbas II succumbed at age 34. He was succeeded by the "vicious and degenerate" Shah Soleiman. In 1672, a missionary wrote: "*The king is always busy drinking. No one governs, there is no order. And everything is done to oppress Christians*" (p.174). In 1678 the oppression of the minorities reached its peak. Many Jews were killed. The Armenians, who at other times had been deprived of their property, were once again tormented and threatened with extermination if they did not give up their possessions. Boys and girls were bought for a few coins, enlarging the imperial harem.

Monsignor Francesco Picquet was the French consul of Aleppo for a period of eight years. He was loved by all, even by the Turks. While there he learned several Eastern languages and had a great knowledge of theological doctrines. When he returned to France he became a priest and in 1675 was appointed Apostolic Vicar of Babylon and Isfahan. It took him seven years to reach Isfahan. He had an audience with the Shah, who received him splendidly, with a banquet "*served on golden dishes so big that they were carried by two men*" (p.174). The knives, forks and spoons, however, were not golden, because there weren't any. "*Each one took the rice and the rest of the food with his fingers, consistent with local custom.*" Picquet would be buried in the church of the Apostolic Armenians.

Shah Soleiman died in 1694. His successor, Shah Hossein (1694-1722), completed the ruination of the kingdom. Unfortunately the Catholic community in Iran went through a period of crises, desertions among the religious and scandals in the Western diplomatic sector. But it was in those years that the Dominicans established themselves in Julfa where they built their beautiful Church of the Rosary, which to this day remains an object of admiration.

An important event in the political religious field was the treaty between France and Persia signed in 1708, which included terms favorable to the

missionaries. They could practice their religion, they would enjoy the protection of the Shah, reside where they wished, receive Armenians and Christians in their schools, and bury their dead according to their rites and enjoy legal rights. The agreement seemed to promise a future of peace and prosperity. However, says Bugnini, it was a sunray filtered through the clouds of a hurricane. The Safavid dynasty was on the verge of complete annihilation.

The day to day political situation in Iran was increasingly precarious. In 1722, the Afghans reached Isfahan and Julfa. Shah Hossein was forced to abdicate and, with extreme humiliation, he crowned the Afghan Mir Mahmud. Taking advantage of Persian weakness, the Turks attacked the North and reached Hamadan. The missionaries were concentrated in Julfa. For years, all contacts with their superiors were cut off and they were deprived of any help. The situation was pitiable.

Fortunately the Afghan domination did not last long. In 1736, Nader proclaimed himself king. Nader was not a fanatic Moslem. In 1740 he had the idea of having the Bible and the Koran translated into Persian with the intention of achieving an agreement among the three religions. The Hebrews were to translate the Old Testament, the Catholics the Gospels, and the Armenians the rest of the New Testament. They were given six months, too short a time for an undertaking of this magnitude. When they took the translations to the king, they were made to wait at the entrance of the garden. There they saw in horror men of every class taken in with halters at their necks, strangled and then carried out as animals, their bodies thrown to the beasts. The translators -- Hebrews, Armenians, Moslems -- began to tremble. The Carmelites prepared for martyrdom. When it was their turn to enter, the Shah greeted every group, received the texts with respect, asked about their lodgings and then bid them farewell, giving them 100 "toumans" to divide among themselves. This occurred at the end of 1741.

The Carmelite Monsignor Filippo Maria di San Agostino was responsible for this project. He had arrived in Persia when he was 28 years old and in 1719 he was assigned to the Convent of Julfa where, knowing Armenian, he worked hard, was loved by all and made many conversions. "*Those 5 years at Julfa*", he wrote, "*I never had a peaceful day. I suffered a lot, even hunger, to the point that I had to sell the household contents in order to eat*" (p.179).

For several years the missionaries were left to live in peace. But in 1745 Nader Shah, in his last visit to Isfahan, was most cruel. Hated by everyone, in 1747 his days were ended when he was murdered by one of his bodyguards. This date of 1747 also marks the end of the Catholic mission in Persia.

In 1789, "*because of government tyranny, the once flourishing mission in Persia was reduced to just seven Catholics, while the rest either had fled or were dead*" (p.185). Even the United Friars of the region of Araxe took refuge in Smyrna. It had been, expresses Bugnini, a glorious period of 200 years

interwoven with sacrifices, of humiliations, of persecutions and of courage, of illusions and of hope, of faith and of charity.

Part III – Renaissance

Bugnini continues with the history of Persia, and of the Church in Persia, from the 19th century up to the second decade of the 20th century. He begins by mentioning Napoleon who, in 1808, renewed the friendship treaty of 1708 with Persia. Two of the articles in that treaty touched upon the religious question. One of these provided that the Christians in Persia would be under imperial protection, although they could not interfere with the Moslem faith nor act in any way offensive to Moslem believers. Another article allowed the French consul and the priests to make wine in their houses for their own use, provided they did not sell any of it to the Moslems.

In the middle of the 19th century the Vincentian missionaries arrived in Persia. One of them, Giuseppe Darnis, reached the mission at the age of 28. His first problem was his health. Bugnini shows his humor again when he tells us that in the trip from Trebizond to Tabriz, having eaten an excessive amount of eggs, “*instead of eating the animals that the eggs produced*”, Darnis contracted an illness that left him bedridden for two years. Only death rid him of it (p.196).

In this part Bugnini continues to show us his Catholic bias, and his antagonism towards Protestants, particularly towards Methodists. The Methodists, to the Catholics’ horror, described the cross, the mass, the Madonna, fasting, prayer and sacraments as “*fables*”, asserting the need to return to the only religion of the spirit, preached by Protestants.

Fathers Cluzel and Darnis gave life to the mission of Khosrova in Salamas. First, the Cathedral of Mar Givargis was built, a source of pride for the Catholics. This was followed by a seminary directed by Fathers Cluzel and Darnis who taught there. They created a home atmosphere where the young men could keep their traditional customs. “*The serious and prolonged education greatly impressed the Assyrians, who were satisfied with only six months of education for their candidates to priesthood*”(p. 192). Of 18 seminarians, 11 achieved the priesthood. Among these was Paul Bedjan of Khosrova, known for his scholarly work on the Syriac language.

Everything mentioned by Bugnini about Paul Bedjan is extremely interesting. From Khosrova Paul Bedjan went to France, and returned to Persia in 1861. He brought a “*harmonium*”. As soon as he arrived, he began using the instrument to sing the mass in Latin. He sang at the top of his voice with five other men. Father Cluzel wrote: “*The faithful filled the church and the plaza; they had never heard anything like it. The women of Khosrova said to Bedjan’s mother: ‘How great you are to have brought to the world such an intelligent son who sings with his mouth, with his hands and with his feet! Let us hope that*

being so intelligent he won't become mad!' And the poor mother cried with joy and with fear" (p.196).

Ever since 1876, the bishops of Mesopotamia were preparing a good edition of the Chaldean missal. Father Bedjan offered to compile in a single volume all of the parts which at the time were located in separate volumes. He proposed doing this along the lines of the Latin missal and, in the process, to include a new selection of readings. However, he wanted to undertake this project on his own, excluding all help from the Chaldean clergy in Mesopotamia. But the latter prevailed on Rome not to entrust the missal to Father Bedjan. When he saw the manuscript (prepared in Mosul) he criticized it unmercifully. The missal was published years later by the Dominicans.

After failing to produce the missal, Father Bedjan shifted his attention to Syriac literature. Seeking to be of service to Chaldean missions, churches and schools, he wrote several books in the Chaldean dialect, and later in literary Syriac, a prodigious production of 36 volumes. To prepare his books, Father Bedjan did his research in all the libraries of Mosul, Urmia, Seert, Berlin, Petrograd, in the British Museum, in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris and in the Vatican Library. Conscious of the great needs and the poverty of his religious brothers, he distributed his publications free.

An important aspect of Part III of "The Church in Iran" is the description of the events of 1914-1918. On January 3, 1914 the Russians, with problems at home, left Urmia, promising protection to all those who wanted to follow them. Many did. The missionaries and sisters thought it best not to abandon their place, and opened the doors to all who sought refuge in their compound. They admitted three thousand. On the night of January 4, 1915, first the Turks entered the city, and then the Kurds. Christians thought the end had come. Monsieur Sontag distributed communion. In the entire region, the Moslems took advantage of the disorder to rape women and girls. An epidemic of typhoid fever broke out. On February 12 the Turks forced open the doors of the mission and forcibly conscripted one hundred and fifty men. Some of them were shot and the rest drafted. The Turks took everything they could lay their hands on. In the villages the situation was worse. The dead were not even counted. In the middle of April the Turks received reinforcements and they attacked the Russians who were returning. In Urmia something unusual took place. Waiting for the Russians, the great personages of the city came to beg for the help of the Apostolic Delegate. On May 25 the Russians entered the city. The Christians were saved.

On January 5, 1914, thirty thousand Chaldeans and Armenians abandoned Salamas and fled towards the Caucasus, taking all they could, especially their animals. The missionaries and sisters decided to accompany the Christians. At Dileman they were joined by the Christians who fled from Urmia. They arrived in Julfa, decimated, in temperatures 20° C below 0, the streets buried in snow, most of them barefoot, without food (p. 231).

There is a name these people will never forget: Father Giorgio Decroo, who in that long march was the angel of comfort; he would provide his horse to a lame person or to a woman with children while he went on foot, soothing, comforting everyone. In the evening he would go into the villages looking for food. He even sold his watch to buy some bread. He finally sold his horse. In the Caucasus he was able to obtain from the Russian authorities some train wagons to transport the people to Tiflis, Baku and other centers.

In April 1914 the Russians decided to return to Persia. Father Decroo sent some seminarians to Khosrova to recover what was left of the mission. The Turkish-Kurdish occupation had eliminated all Christians. One day a commander ordered all the Christians to meet in Aftouvan, an Armenian village near Khosrova. Most of them were old men and women, and they were killed and buried in a common grave.

The invasion of Azerbaijan by the Russian troops brought the World War to Persian territory. Persia was invaded by the armies of five countries: the Turks, who wanted to extend their border to Hamadan; the Russians, who coveted Azerbaijan and more; the British, who settled in the South, with headquarters in Shiraz; the Germans, who infiltrated everywhere; and the Kurds and Ottomans, who pilfered where and as they could. Persia remained neutral and Monsieur Sontag remained loyal to the authorities.

But the Christians of Urmia and of Salamas, Catholic and non-Catholic were organized under the leadership of Commander Agha Petros Ellof. The English initially provided them weapons, but later would abandon them to fend for themselves.

There was a second armed movement, guided by the Nestorian patriarch Mar Shimun, who was killed by the Kurds in February 1918, betrayed by the Tabriz authorities. In revenge, Agha Petros assaulted and plundered Dileman, where the murder had taken place.

In June 1916 the troops of Ali Hassan Pasha, Kurdish hordes and Moslem bands massacred everyone at Khosrova, except the women and girls. These latter enlarged the harem of the masters. Khosrova, the "*little Rome of Persia*" was dissolved.

After Salamas, Ali Hassan Pasha directed his forces against Urmia. His attack was barely contained by the Christian army of Agha Petros. On July 30 the Christian population received the order to abandon the city. Monsieur Sontag was killed, as well as most of the one thousand refugees of the Catholic mission. The women were taken to the Salamas plain to work in the harvest. Of the two thousand that left, only three hundred arrived. The Urmia-Khosrova road could be called the "*Sacred Path*" of the martyrs of Salamas.

While these horrors occurred in the city, the Christian population -- from sixty to eighty thousand -- along with horses, mules, oxen, buffaloes and carrying all they could, fled towards the South by any means possible. They lacked food and water, because of the continuous attacks of Kurds and Turks.

Even a bridge fell and several were drowned, until finally they reached Hamadan. The “remains” of the Chaldean people were safe!

At Urmia the mission was completely destroyed.

The initiative to relocate this martyred people through the League of Nations came from various places, but all efforts came to naught due to political intrigues and tribal rivalries.

In 1918 there was practically nothing left of the mission in Persia. In 1923, in some places the jungle had returned, full of reptiles, wolves and savage animals. Churches, schools and houses were in ruins.

Part IV - *The Church in Iran, Today*

Bugnini tells about the Catholic Churches that exist in Iran. To be more accurate, he writes about them up to the Islamic Revolution of 1978. When Bugnini wrote this part, he was still referring to the “pre-revolution” Church.

The Catholic Church in Iran, in 1978, was organized in three rites and five dioceses. The rites were: the Chaldean (or Catholic Assyrian), the Armenians, and the “Latin” or Roman. There were three “territorial” dioceses, and two “personal” dioceses. The three territorial ones (Teheran, Urmia, Ahwaz) were of the Chaldean rite. The personal dioceses corresponded to certain categories of persons in the country. There was the Armenian diocese that included all Armenian Catholics living in Iran, and the “Latin” diocese, with jurisdiction over all Catholics of the Roman rite.

Bugnini makes a special mention of the Chaldeans and of the Armenians. The Assyrians who have turned Catholic are called “Assyro-Chaldean”. Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) in the Papal Bull “Benedictus Deus” of July 6, 1445 called them “United Chaldeans”.

Beginning in the middle of the 19th century, the Chaldean Church opened schools even in the most humble villages. These have now been absorbed or replaced by similar state institutions. Today the diocese of Teheran directs and maintains three schools.

The Chaldean Church promotes the schools for Christians, not only for their general education, but also to keep alive the Chaldean language. If the latter disappeared, it would undermine the understanding of the liturgy and the Assyro-Chaldeans would lose one of the elements that keep them closely and firmly united.

Bugnini states that no Christian religious minority in Iran can boast a tradition and a glorious history so great as the Assyro-Chaldeans. From the first centuries to our days the flame of Christianity has never been extinguished in the Persian Plateau. It has known periods of weakness, but it remained alive. And it never changed color. It never surrendered under persecution or death. In the 19th century both Protestant and Catholic missionaries turned their attention to the Assyro-Chaldean community with their schools, medical assistance, religious

instruction, slowly elevating their cultural level and improving their living conditions. This represents a spiritual and human patrimony that must not be lost, even if modern existence in large cities seeks to destroy the dearest values of life.

Although the focus of the book is Catholicism, Bugnini also shows his love for the Armenian people. The Armenians, he reiterates throughout "La Chiesa", are a wonderful people. Scattered all over the country, they maintain their identity. Wherever they emigrate, their first task is to build a place of worship. They settle in but they do not mix, they cooperate but they do not blend with the others. They have their own language, their own schools, newspapers, clubs, radio station. Bugnini's grasp of the political situation of the world and his deep insight is shown in the following comment about Armenians: "*Christian faith remains the intimate binding of a people who have all the means to recover, in the human family, a national home of their own, violently taken away from them and unjustly denied to them*" (p. 287).

Part V - A Single Faith

Bugnini speaks about the non-Catholic Christian communities in Iran. One of these is the Russian Orthodox Church formed essentially by "*white Russians*", who broke away from Moscow, first under the aegis of Istanbul, and later of New York. The Russian Community lives mostly in Teheran, counts almost three hundred members, most of them elderly people and political refugees.

Of course, Bugnini's view of The Assyrian Church of the East will be of special interest to JAAS readers. According to the author, in the 8th and 9th centuries the internal and cultural vitality of the Assyrian Church of the East, its splendid missionary work in China, Mongolia, Manchuria, Japan, were admirable. But regression set in with life under Islam, accentuated by the invasion of the Mongols (1220) and the ascent of the latter to the throne of Iran (1258). In the first two decades of the 14th century, there still existed a vital Christianity. But the cultural level declined, Christian life was concentrated in the monasteries, the Syriac tongue made the language of prayer incomprehensible, Christians weakened, while Islam knocked at the doors of the religious minorities.

However, external factors were not the real cause for their decline. This began in 1450 when the "Catholicos" (i.e., "*head of the Persian Church*") Simon IV Denkha (1437-1497) established, contrary to tradition, that the condition of being an Assyro-Chaldean "Catholicos" should henceforth be hereditary.

In 1551, when Simon VII died, a segment of the Nestorians refused to accept his nephew as a Patriarch and chose Simon Sulaka. His election was confirmed by Pope Giulio III in 1553, in Rome. Simon Sulaka returned to the East, to Dyarbekir in Turkey. But the Simon Denkha faction had him imprisoned and in 1555 had him drowned.

Thus began a difficult period of dissent and internal struggles for the Assyrian Church. There were alternate currents of rapprochement with Rome and of total independence, while the church was slowly brought to destruction by Kurds and Turks. There were Nestorians who looked towards Catholic unity and Catholics who returned to the Nestorian Church.

Again we find here Bugnini's antagonism towards Protestants. In the 19th century, he says, Protestants from America (Methodists, 1830), from England (Anglicans, 1835), and from Germany (Lutherans, 1881) came to evangelize the Nestorians of the Urmia and Salamas plains, complicating things even more, and creating Assyrian communities based on their line of religious expression. Add to this the 1897 invasion of the Russian Orthodox, which lasted some two decades. Many Chaldean families moved to Russia or traveled there in search of work. The Russian "popes" threatened to expel them from the country or to deny them employment unless they turned Orthodox. This resulted in a massive movement of Assyrians and Chaldeans to the Orthodox Church.

Today the Assyrian Church of the East is searching for its unity and for a new vitality, trying to remain faithful to tradition and to the Syriac tongue, derived from Aramaic, the language of Jesus. Its administrative see [in 1979] is at Teheran. The Assyrian Church is a member of the "World Council of Churches" in Geneva.

Liturgy is celebrated in ancient Syriac. Priests and deacons can marry, and marry again if the wife dies. It uses no images or pictures. The Gospel rests on a stand, covered by a veil with a simple cross, and it is venerated by the faithful with a kiss, as is done in other churches with icons.

In the world, asserts Bugnini, there are one hundred thousand Assyrians (p.330). To this reviewer, these figures are clearly too low under any scenario. The author has placed his reliance on a 1974 publication issued by the *Near East Council Church*. In Teheran, besides the church, there is a school where Syriac is taught. Syriac continues to be the liturgical language and it is often the language spoken in the family, although the young have difficulty reading and writing it.

Part VI - *An Only Father*

Bugnini expresses his opinions about the rapprochement of the Moslems and Christians.

But if, as previously noted, he considers Protestants as practically the "enemy" of Catholics, how can he imagine unity among the Moslems and Christians?

Is a dialogue possible between Moslems and Christians? he asks. History says it should be. In the middle of the 17th century, under Shah Abbas I, who established Shi'ism as a state religion, and also under Abbas II, there were public debates among Ayatollahs, Catholic missionaries and Armenian priests. The

Shah, the first minister, and high dignitaries of the court, all took part in them, and they lasted well into the night. There was more freedom than what was allowed in the following centuries.

According to Bugnini, dialogue will be very difficult because for Christians the last word of God in this world is Christ, while for the Moslems it is Mohammed. Dialogue is difficult but not impossible. For Christians, true faith -- integration of religious and civil life -- characteristic of Moslems, is something worth contemplating. For Moslems, the acceptance of a sincere, charitable, open Christianity can only be a positive element. Islam explicitly denies fundamental truths of Christian faith, such as the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Redemption, but has many points in common with the Christian religion and follows the same spiritual line, that of monotheism.

In 1976 a delegation of cardinals, bishops, etc., accompanied by Annibale Bugnini himself met in Iran and had colloquies with Shi'a Moslems in an atmosphere of understanding and affable courtesy.

In 1977 an Iranian delegation visited the Vatican. The lively discussion ended with the formulation of two possible topics for a continuation of a Shi'a-Christian dialogue: 1) the dialogue of man with God in the Islam-Christian tradition; and 2) the fundamental rights of man in the light of Christian and Islamic revelation.

With these two acts the Shi'a and Christian dialogue was opened. Ensuing events, continues Bugnini, did not allow immediate progress. In just half a year, between the end of 1978 and the beginning of 1979, Iran underwent a complete change. The replacement of the monarchy by the Islamic Republic did not just change a regime. It created in the Iranian people a new mentality. It has destroyed not only a political system, but a way of life, opening the doors to a general renewal, spiritual, moral and social. The Shi'a religious clergy has tried to base it on a return to Koranic teaching in the customs and in the guidance of the country; while laic tendencies intended to channel it through a freedom of action and thought based on modern mores.

In December 1979 the new Constitution, in its articles 12, 13, 14, 15..., asserted freedom of expression, of teaching and of cult choice, but Bugnini's opinion is that in their ambiguous wording these open the door to arbitrariness and they set fundamental limitations.

Bugnini regrets that during the first two years of existence of the Islamic Republic, even taking into account the extenuating circumstances of the revolutionary atmosphere, it cannot be said that either the letter or the spirit of the Constitution has been respected. School reform has particularly had a negative influence in the Christian sector. Of fourteen Catholic schools, once pride of the country, only seven remain, and religious men and women have had to abandon the country.

In the last paragraph of "*La Chiesa in Iran*", Bugnini expresses what he expects of the Iranian Revolution. In Iran, he says, cradle of one of the most

fervent and heroic Christian communities, religious practice cannot be simply “tolerated”. It must be respected and favored. Only then will the Iranian Revolution really be able to say it has inaugurated a new era of spiritual well-being and peace, and that it has shown the world community the most coveted of all qualities: A real, total, and unrestrained freedom.

As we consider the events transpiring since publication of the book, one remains guarded about its prognostication. While Iran has witnessed some slight winds of change, and an occasional hopeful sign, it is fair to say that for Bugnini’s beloved Church the outcome continues to be in doubt.



IN MEMORY OF ARCHBISHOP ANNIBALE BUGNINI*
(1912-1982)

With the twentieth anniversary of the Constitution on the Liturgy before us next December, we recall with gratitude the life of Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, who died suddenly in Rome last July after minor surgery. Born near Orvieto in 1912, he entered the Lazarists, was ordained priest in 1936, and then devoted almost the whole of his career to reform of the liturgy. At the time of his death he was serving as apostolic pro-nuncio to Iran. He held this position under both the Shah and the revolutionary regime, which witnesses to his skills as diplomat and peacemaker. His willingness to continue this difficult work despite his own desire to return to pastoral ministry in his native Umbria was characteristic of his responsiveness to the needs of the church.

He is best known to readers of *Worship* for his work in liturgical renewal and reform. In his almost twenty years as editor in chief of *Ephemerides Liturgicae* (from 1944), he set a high standard of scientific scholarship. From 1948 until 1975, he served on a number of Roman commissions for liturgical renewal, first as secretary of the commission which instituted the reforms of the Easter Vigil (1951), Holy Week (1955), and the code of rubrics (1960). He helped to establish the last *editiones typicae* of the preconciliar missal, breviary, and pontifical (1962). In 1960 he was also named secretary of the commission deputed to prepare for the further liturgical reform expected from the recently announced Second Vatican Council. Instrumental in securing the development and adoption of the Constitution on the Liturgy, he served as secretary of both the conciliar liturgical commission and the postconciliar Consilium. With the creation of the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1972 he was made secretary

* We are grateful to *Worship*, (St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, MN), where this homage appeared in Vol. 57, No.2 (March 1983). Bugnini’s lifetime works are set out in considerably greater detail in another remembrance published in German. See Von Balthasar Fischer, “Annibale Bugnini (1912-1982) und die Zukunft der Kirche,” *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 1983, v.33, pp. 69-75

and named titular Archbishop of Diocletianum. He served the Congregation until 1975.

The knowledge and great tact required to help prepare and implement the liturgical reforms since 1948 are obvious. Insight, courage, and patience, guided by a deep pastoral sense and avoidance of either reactionary or unrealistically progressive positions, enabled him to provide steady leadership for the official development of the revised rites. His willingness to help institute policies with which he may personally have disagreed commands our respect. Despite the inevitable discontent with the progress of reform, whether the complaint be of too great or too little action, all sense that without Bugnini things could have been far worse. His legacy to us is his example of consistent devotion to understanding and renewing the church's life of prayer.

Columba Steward O.S.B.