

ITEM No.12083/53

SPEC. ATTENTION : Mr. Griffith
All Church Editors

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Religion
Foreign Relations

Soviet Intrigue In The Orthodox Church.

SOURCE ATHENS : A Greek-Rumanian exile in BEIRUT.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : current

EVAL. COMMENT : After World War II, the Communist-sponsored Russian Patriarchal Church which had previously maintained no relations with foreign countries and whose activities within Russia herself had been very limited, suddenly occupied an important position in reopening relations with all Russian and Satellite Orthodox communities in the Diaspora, including trips abroad of the Patriarch for the purpose of submitting all Russian communities and later on all other Orthodox Churches to the MOSCOW Patriarchate.

The first of these trips abroad was Patriarch ALEXEI's visit to the Holy Land, Syria and Egypt in May 1945. The importance attributed then to this trip by the Soviet Government may easily be gathered from the fact that it placed a special plane at the disposal of the Patriarch, and that Minister KARPOV himself accompanied the Patriarch to the airport. The purpose of this trip was to obtain the return to the Soviet Government of the property formerly owned by the Russian community in JERUSALEM and in the Holy Land. But it immediately resulted from a speech made by the Patriarch on the occasion of a reception in the house of the dissident Metropolitan of BEIRUTH, that this visit also aimed at the reopening of relations
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with representatives of the various Orthodox communities in the Near East in order to create a favorable atmosphere, toward the Russian Church and the Soviet Union.

Other visits paid by the Russian Patriarch to Bulgaria in May 1946 /celebration of the Millennium of the Blessed Ivan RILSKY, / and to Rumania in the summer of 1947, as well as the commemoration of the fifth centennial anniversary of the independence of the Russian Church in 1948 in MOSCOW, were directed against the Oecumenical See of CONSTANTINOPLE, whom the MOSCOW Patriarchate denies the right of primacy over the autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

Item No. 1035/53 reported on consultations between the Russian Archbishop GREGORY, the Patriarch ALEXANDER of ANTIOCH, and Patriarch TIMOTHEOS /mentioned in the present report/ regarding the preference given by theology students of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Aethiopia to such Greek Orthodox theological schools as those of PATMOS, CORINTH and CHALKI over theological schools in Soviet Russia. It appears now that Archimandrite POLYCARP tries to influence a number of needy Orthodox Churches to recommend Russian theological schools, by letting the MOSCOW Patriarchate assume their debts. This counteraction is aimed as well at those students who want to complete their studies at the Orthodox Theological Seminary at ISTANBUL. Soviet propaganda is mainly based on the denunciation of the Oecumenical Patriarch of CONSTANTINOPLE /formerly Archbishop of North America/ as a U.S. "agent." Recent information /see Item No. 9592/52/ pointed to a growing reapproachement between the four principal Orthodox religious centers of the Levant; JERUSALEM, ANTIOCH, ALEXANDRIA and the Oecumenical Patriarchate of CONSTANTINOPLE. A serious obstacle in the way of a Soviet reapproachement appears to be the bad reputation of the corrupt Rumanian Patriarch JUSTINIAN who is considered in the Near East as well as in Rumania to be a murderer and voluptuary. Nevertheless, in June 1953, a delegation representing the Orthodox Church in Syria and Lebanon and including Metropolitan ATHANASIOS of KAUKAH, IGNATIUS of EPIPHANIA, ALEXANDER of EMESA and Archimandrite Basil SAMAHA, visited Patriarch JUSTININ on the occasion of the Synod of the Rumanian Orthodox Church, transmitted the greetings of Patriarch ALEXANDER III of ANTIOCHIA and promised to spread the "truth" about religious freedom and the Rumanian Church, in the Near East...

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As far as the conditions in Israel are concerned, it is known here that small groups of Rumanian monks established themselves in JERUSALEM.

The information of an impending influx of 40,000 Soviet pilgrims to JERUSALEM has not been confirmed from any other source and appears as yet to be rather improbable.

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Soviet politico-religious intrigue in the Palestine holy places has reached an all-time high, according to a reliable Greek-Rumanian source of BEIRUT who has close contacts with the Orthodox Church hierarchy in the Middle East. Our source spent the first two weeks of November visiting the Russian Orthodox monasteries in the environs of Arab JERUSALEM. He discovered that great apprehension reigns among the monks of those monasteries which have thus far steadfastly repelled the advances of the MOSCOW Patriarch, ALEXEI.

The anti-Soviet religious of the great Russian cloister on the Mount of Olives are particularly worried by the influx of some 40,000 "pilgrims" from the USSR to the holy places which, it has been announced by MOSCOW, will occur between Christmas and Easter. The superior of the cloister told our source that "it is certain that ALEXEI will send us MVD agents among those pilgrims."

Aided by seemingly illimitable funds, the Archimandrite POLYCARP - ALEXEI's envoy to the Holy Land - is working night and day to negate the influence of the Oecumenical Patriarch, ATHENAGORAS, in the Middle East Orthodox Patriarchates. An astute and energetic operator, POLYCARP is promising the younger Orthodox clergy an assured future if they cast in their lot with MOSCOW. He promises to send them to Soviet theological schools to study and to assume the debts of the needy Orthodox churches of the area. He is also intriguing to forestall the plans of the Oecumenical Patriarch to pay a personal visit to the holy places in the near future.

Our source learned that POLYCARP's intrigues
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are distinguished by a shocking cynicism and unscrupulousness; while pressuring the Israeli government, with a good deal of success, to turn over to MOSCOW's dominion the Russian Orthodox Church properties in Israel, POLYCARP simultaneously disseminates anti-Israel propaganda among the Arab Orthodox communicants. His agents appeal to Arab nationalism by preaching hatred of the Anglo-Americans "without whose help the Jewish state could not have come into existence." The Soviet propaganda has been particularly effective among the Orthodox Arabs of the region of NAZARETH.

In the Israeli sector of JERUSALEM the Soviets have already succeeded in inducing the Israeli government to recognize the MOSCOW Patriarchate as the legal owner of the Russian monasteries and those of their properties which have not been taken over by the Israeli state. Until then, some of these monasteries and their properties belonged to the White Russian Orthodox Church in NEW YORK, headed by the anti-Soviet Metropolitan ANASTASIE. It is now POLYCARP's aim to win over the Russian monasteries in Arab JERUSALEM which acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan ANASTASIE. To this end the Patriarch ALEXEI recently addressed a letter to TIMOTHEOS, the Greek Patriarch of JERUSALEM, in which he denounced the Metropolitan ANASTASIE as a "rebel" and implored the aid of TIMOTHEOS in taking over the monasteries.

The resistance to POLYCARP's intrigues centers among the monks and nuns of the above-mentioned Mount of Olives cloister. Except for about 20 of the religious who succumbed to POLYCARP's lures, the religious of this cloister have remained faithful to the prelate they regard as their only chief - Metropolitan ANASTASIE. While visiting the monastery, our source witnessed a graphic example of the hatred which these Orthodox clergy feel for the Soviets. One of the group of 20 monks who had come under POLYCARP's influence died on the premises of the monastery. The great majority of the monks and nuns refused to allow this "instrument of the devil," as they called the dead man, to be buried in the cloister's cemetery and he was interred outside the walls in unconsecrated ground.

It was the reception which Patriarch ALEXEI re-

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ceived at the Mount of Olives monastery which spoiled his "triumphal" tour of the Middle East Patriarchates in 1946. When the MOSCOW Patriarch came to the monastery the monks shut themselves up in their cells and refused to come out until the "Red Devil," as they called him, left the grounds spluttering protests and denunciations.

Our source reported that there are about 40 Rumanian monks and nuns in the Holy Land who do not recognize the jurisdiction of JUSTINIAN, the "Red" Patriarch of Rumania. They are supported by the Greek Patriarchate of JERUSALEM. Of the two Rumanian monasteries, the larger is in the Israeli sector of JERUSALEM; badly damaged during the Arab-Israeli war, it is no longer habitable. The second is in Arab JERUSALEM; it has been deprived of all its lands and hence is without revenues. Since they have received no letters from home for a long time, the Rumanian monks and nuns are ignorant of the fate of their families.

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