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V/173

MIDDLE EAST

RELIGION

Orthodox Church
Soviet Influence

THE MIDDLE-EAST ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATES, THEIR LEADERS AND THEIR
STAND IN THE EAST-WEST CONFLICT.

SOURCE ISTANBUL : John Allen, Orthodox Priest, with good
connections in the Oecumenical Patriarchate in ISTANBUL.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : Until December 1953.

EVALUATION COMMENT : This short survey gives an interesting
overall view of the Middle Eastern Orthodox Patriarchates. It
is too brief to go into much detail, and more profound reports,
as well as reports covering specific situations within the
Orthodox Churches, have been published by the News and Informa-
tion Service and are in the hands of RFE Religious Editors.

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The Eastern Orthodox Church nominally includes all Orthodox communities which originated before the schism between the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in 1054 A.D. Four autocephalous communities originally founded by the Apostles are still in existence, and they form the four patriarchates of PHANAR (ISTANBUL), ALEXANDRIA, ANTIOCH and JERUSALEM. The Patriarch of PHANAR is recognized as the Oecumenical Patriarch and according to canonical ranking is the highest dignitary of the Greek Orthodox Church. The patriarchates of ANTIOCH, which now has its seat in DAMASCUS, JERUSALEM and ALEXANDRIA form the three Middle East patriarchates. (Other existing Orthodox patriarchates are the Georgian with TIGLIS as its seat, the Russian with MOSCOW as its center, the Serbian with BELGRAD as its seat and the newly created autocephalous patriarchate of Bulgaria with headquarters in SOFIA. The Bulgarian Patriarchate was set up in 1953 with Russian support and this move is being contested canonically by the Oecumenical Patriarchate. The Orthodox Churches of the

(Over)

satellite states of Rumania, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary are also under Soviet influence.)

The Patriarchates and their Leaders.

Of the three Middle East patriarchates, that of ANTIOCH is the largest and politically speaking the most important. The Patriarchate rules over one-third of the Arab population of Syria and Lebanon not only in the religious field but also -- to some extent -- politically. This very ancient Orthodox church with its predominantly Arab following was already supported by the Russians some 500 years ago in opposition to the Greek hegemony in Orthodox church affairs. The main difference between the Greek and Arab Orthodox Churches thus arises from the fact that most Arab Orthodox clergymen are Russian-trained; a seminary and a Syrian compound still exist in MOSCOW. On the other hand, Greek Orthodox clergymen receive their theological training in Greece. The Patriarchate of ANTIOCH, which also has some influence in Iraq and Iran, is divided into pro-Russian and pro-Western camps.

ALEXANDER IV., Patriarch of ANTIOCH, old (88) and sick although mentally alert, is the first Arab patriarch of the Orthodox Church. Educated in MOSCOW and long financially dependent on the Russian Church, ALEXANDER is known as a not too enthusiastic sympathizer of the Soviets and an undeclared enemy of the Oecumenical Patriarch.

KARAM Ilia, Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, is definitely pro-Russian but is strongly opposed to Communist ideology. Also an Arab, KARAM often visited the Soviet Union and MOSCOW and does not hide his admiration for the Russians, although he does not agree with Soviet policy. Not long ago he was decorated by CHRISTOPHORUS, pro-Russian Patriarch of ALEXANDRIA.

Politically opposed to ALEXANDER and KARAM is the strong and rich Metropolitan of BEIRUT, SALIBI Ilia. Also an Arab, he is popular among Lebanese politicians, many of whom belong to the Greek Orthodox faith. The Metropolitan of BEIRUT, although by far richer than ALEXANDER, still is subordinate to the Patriarch canonically. Other pro-Western clerics of the Patriarchate of ANTIOCH are SALIBI Gabriel, vicar of BEIRUT and SALIBI Said, physician of the Patriarch.

The Patriarchate of ALEXANDRIA is a relatively small community but is one of the foremost authorities

on Canonical Law and holds a leading position in the conflict among the Greek and Arab Orthodox Churches. This Patriarchate is generally viewed as pro-Russian, although there is a strong opposition to such a stand by the Greek Orthodox faithful living in Egypt. CHRISTOPHORUS, Patriarch of ALEXANDRIA, is openly pro-Russian in his actions but he does not outwardly antagonize the Oecumenical Patriarchate of PHANAR.

The Patriarchate of JERUSALEM is one of the seven "Ancient" patriarchates. The most "aristocratic", i.e. Greek, among the Middle East patriarchates, this community has been in the hands of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher ever since 500 A.D. and tries to keep a neutral position in the Greek-Arab conflict in order to maintain their "guard over the Holy Sepulcher." This does not mean, however, that the leaders of this community are not divided into two camps. TIMOTHEY, the old and aging OXFORD-educated Greek Patriarch of JERUSALEM, is definitely on the side of the west but ATHENAGORAS, Metropolitan of JERUSALEM (not to be confused with the Oecumenical Patriarch) and acting representative of TIMOTHEY, is in the camp of the pro-Soviet clergy. The Metropolitan BENEDICT, another assistant of TIMOTHEY, and the Archimandrite KYRIAKOS, Guardian of the Holy Sepulcher and business manager of the JERUSALEM Patriarchate, are both strong supporters of the Patriarch and side with the West. ISIDORE, Archimandrite of JERUSALEM, and PALLADY, another Archimandrite, follow ATHENAGORAS and his pro-Soviet ideology.

Russian Interest in Orthodox Affairs.

An important role is played by the Russian Imperial Palestine Society and the Russian Orthodox Mission in the religious-political affairs of the JERUSALEM Patriarchate.

The Russians were always interested in the Middle East countries both politically and in the field of religion. For this reason a non-official mission was established by the Russian Orthodox Church in JERUSALEM as early as 1830 with the aim of facilitating the coming and going of Russian pilgrims to the Holy Land. In 1854 the mission became officially known as the Russian Orthodox Mission and slowly began to accumulate large real estate holdings in what was Palestine. In support of the Mission, a private society, the Russian Imperial Palestine Society, was formed to handle the financial and non-religious administrative affairs of

(Over)

the Mission. During the second half of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth, the Society and the Mission grew in importance and wealth and at one time 180 schools, hostels and hospitals all over the Middle East, in BEIRUT, JERUSALEM, JERICHO and BETHLEHEM, belonged to the two organizations.

Offices of the Russian Orthodox Mission in the United States.

After the Arab-Israeli war, the Israeli government turned over most of the properties of the Mission to the Soviet government and presently the Mission is left with only two convents, one workshop for blind Arab women and one orphanage, it has under its care 120 nuns, forty children and five priests. Despite its greatly reduced wealth and importance, the Russian Orthodox Mission has taken the strongest stand against Communist ideological infiltration. During the visit of the Soviet Patriarch to the Holy Land in 1945, the Russian Mission bluntly refused to take notice of the visit and paid him no religious deference. This was a strong blow to Soviet prestige in the Arab region, the more so as it was generally known that the Soviets tried best to weaken and disperse the remnants of the Mission. The Mission is under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan ANASTASSY of the Russian Church in Exile, which has its headquarters in NEW YORK. The Mission is supported with funds made available through the following non-profit organizations: "American Friends of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Inc.", BOSTON, the "Friends of the Russian Orthodox Monasteries and Pilgrims in the Holy Land, Inc." of NEW YORK and the "Tolstoy Foundation, Inc." NEW YORK with branches in the Middle East.

The properties of the Russian Imperial Palestine Society were not turned over to the Soviets as the Society was a private organization. It has retained most of its property although the institutions are less efficiently administered and without special funds. The Society has its head offices in PARIS, France.

The Social-Political Situation.

The social-political situation in the areas of the above three Eastern patriarchates differs greatly for each country. In the Lebanon, roughly one-third of the Arab population is Orthodox; the high society of BEIRUT is almost exclusively Christian which in almost all cases means Orthodox. There are also Bedouin tribesmen who belong to the Orthodox faith. Although the Lebanese government main-

(Over)

tains an equality policy for all religious and creeds, there exists a latent underground conflict with regard to politics, property ownership and influence in education between the Orthodox and Moslem factions of the population.

In Jordan the government shows great tolerance although it is exclusively Moslem. This soft-handed policy on the part of Jordan authorities is often a handicap because it gives freedom of movement to Soviet religious activities, but the authorities refuse to take action because such a move could be interpreted as a violation of religious peace in the Holy Land,

The Holy Places of JERUSALEM (both in Israel and Jordan) are still governed by the unwritten law left over from the days of Ottoman rule. Both the Moslem and Christian religious groups are very careful in their statements and activities and thus try to safeguard the rights based on precedents established many centuries ago.

End.