

BS  
9 June  
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MIDDLE EAST

SOVIET INTRIGUE IN ORTHODOX CHURCH.

SOURCE ATHENS: Greek-Rumanian emigre in BEIRUT.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Current.

EVAL. COMMENT: Attention all Religious Editors.

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The intrigues which the Soviets have been spinning within the Orthodox Patriarchates of the Middle East are expected to come to a focus in July 1954 with the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Patriarch Alexander of ANTIOCH, according to a well-informed Greek-Rumanian emigre of BEIRUT who is closely connected with the Greek Orthodox hierarchy. To this event, which will be held in DAMASCUS on 4-5-6 July, have been invited the Patriarchs of CONSTANTINOPLE, ALEXANDRIA, JERUSALEM, Soviet Russia, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Georgia, and the archbishops of Cyprus, Sinai, ATHENS, Albania, Poland, Finland and Czechoslovakia.

The fact that the ANTIOCH Patriarchate has sent an invitation in the French language to "Patriarch Cyril of Bulgaria" is a significant indication of the Patriarch Alexander's pro-Soviet bias; the election of the Exarch Cyril as the Patriarch of Bulgaria in May 1953, in the face of the disapproval of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of CONSTANTINOPLE, was not recognized as legal by the Greek churches of ALEXANDRIA, JERUSALEM, ATHENS, Cyprus and Sinai.

Our source said that, while replies to the invitation have not yet been received, it is being stated unofficially by clergy of the ANTIOCH Patriarchate that all the heads of the Orthodox churches of the Iron Curtain will surely attend the Golden Jubilee celebration in person. This will pose a dilemma for the heads of the aforementioned Greek churches; they will be in a minority at DAMASCUS and if the pro-Soviet churches propose

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the convocation of a synod the anti-Soviet churches will be outvoted. For several years the Patriarch Alexei of MOSCOW has been demanding the convocation of a pan-Orthodox synod; if "packed" in favor of the Soviets, such a synod could theoretically vote to dethrone the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of CONSTANTINOPLE, an American citizen and a pillar of anti-Soviet strength within the Orthodox churches.

Our source believes that the 85-year-old Patriarch Alexander of ANTIOCH and the pro-MOSCOW prelates who surround him have willingly lent themselves to this Soviet maneuver. It is known that Soviet financial subsidies have been extended to Alexander since the end of the war to enable him to meet the expenses of the ANTIOCH Patriarchate. Despite his great age he has twice visited MOSCOW since the end of the war and is expected to make a third visit within the next few weeks.

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