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RUMANIA

RELIGION

COMINFORM COUNTRIES

THE ATTITUDE OF THE "ORTHODOX" CHURCHES TOWARD THE
COMMUNIST STATE

The "Orthodox" Churches are State churches and do not recognize any super-national authority, as for example, the Vatican. These Churches have always looked to the State for support and have always sought the aid of the State rather than to resist such interference. We must now discuss the attitude of the "Orthodox" Churches toward the governments of the Communist States, and also the behavior of the "Orthodox" Church outside the Communist sphere of influence.

1) The Churches of the Communist States:

a) The "Russian" Church:

We have already discussed the attitude of the "Russian" Church toward the Soviet Government and can only point out here that the "Russian Orthodox Church" not only degrades itself with regard to the State, but praises the Communist social system as the source of well being for the population of the Soviet Union, and approves of the Soviet system as being authentically Christian. In view of the terror which reigns in the Soviet Union it is understandable and even excusable for the "Russian" Church, not to criticize the Communist regime openly. However, it is inexcusable for the Church to praise an ideology so contrary to Christianity. For example: In the Patriarchal Review of MOSCOW (January 1948) Archbishop IUCA of TAMBOV states: "It goes without saying that we completely reject the materialistic basis of Communist ideology." From this we can see the desperate attempt on the part of the Church to separate the Communist social system from its atheistic materialism. Such an attempt is impossible, because the system is part and parcel of this godlessness. The "Russian" Church refuses to see this contradiction as, in an interview with Patriarch ALESSIO of MOSCOW, a REUTER's correspondent asked "Do you feel the conflict between the theory and practice of Communism, on the one hand and the clergy, on the other?" The patriarch answered "That question is not clear." (Pro-Soviet newspaper "Russian News" which is printed in PARIS, 21 May 1948) "Within the limits of the State, the "Orthodox" Church is in conflict with no one." Therefore, for the Church hierarchy of MOSCOW there is no conflict between the Communist social order and the gospel. For the Church. Communism is "Truth and Social justice."

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During the war, Archbishop IUGA of TAMBOV declared: "The best representatives of humanity are those who hunger after the truth and look upon the great social truth, which has been established by the Soviet State through universal equality and the destruction of differences of nations and of classes." (Patriarchal Review, 1944, No. 9, page 22.) According to the Archbishop, "Soviet equality and comradeship are very close to the Christian ideal of brotherhood and love." (Ibid) On another occasion the same archbishop stated: "In Communism, man find truth and freedom from social evil." (Patriarchal Review, 1948, No. 1, page 63.) Patriarch ALESSIO, in praising the Soviet state, declared that it brings to the Russian people "freedom from slavery and from oppression, and the creation of a new life based on equality" (Patriarchal Review, 1948, No. 1, page 17.)

The revolution of October 1917, which brought Communism to the world, is celebrated by the Patriarchal Review as an event "so great in its meaning for humanity that the history of the whole world will be greatly changed by it. Millions of men see in the Revolution of October the dawn of a more beautiful life here on earth" (Sergij "The Great Fall," 1948, No. 9, page 52.) In his article "The Vatican and its Politics," which appeared in the Patriarchal Review of 1948, No. 10, page 48, PLESKTSKIJ N. states: "As a result of the great Revolution of October our country has become the land of triumphant labor and of military glory." The Soviet "overnment is also praised as an expression of the will of the people. "A true democracy can only exist in a socialist country such as the Soviet Union." (Ibid, page 42.)

To further emphasize the attitude of the "Russian" Church toward Communism, it is necessary to point out the praises which it showers on the STALIN Constitution, which is clearly Communistic. The "Church" calls it the most democratic constitution in the world; the one that "guarantees to all citizens freedom of conscience (article 124) freedom of speech, press, association etc. (article 125.) Article 124 of the constitution which guarantees freedom of conscience to the Soviet citizens, also grants them complete freedom of worship. This same article separates Church and State, but this does not prevent the Church from carrying on its normal activity. On the contrary, it frees the Church from many obligations which, in reality, do not enter into this sphere of Church activities." Hence, this very article of the STALIN Constitution which prohibits all religious propaganda, is praised as the ideal constitution. The Church goes on to say: "This love for the Fatherland is increased tenfold, because the Fatherland is the Soviet Union." The Church concludes "As the Church helped its people during the terrible days of enemy invasion, it will now help them in

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rebuilding a new and happy life based on the great STALIN Constitution.* (ZERNOV M.) "A Holiday for all the people" (Patriarchal Review, 1944, No. 12, page 40 to 42.) The Communist constitution is expected, therefore, to create a heaven on earth. In view of these quotations from contemporary Soviet Church literature, the Russian refugees call the "Church" of MOSCOW a Soviet Church. In fact, its hierarchy is completely loyal to the Soviet system.

b) The Rumanian Church:

The servile attitude of the "Russian Church" toward the Communist regime has set an example for all Soviet satellites, especially for Rumania. It is true that the former Patriarch NICODEM outwardly pretended to support Communism. However, he inwardly attempted to resist MOSCOW's plan to control the "Orthodox Church." When in October 1946, he was forced by circumstances to go to MOSCOW he did so, but refused the invitation to take part in the Synod planned for September 1947. The Rumanian Holy Synod, however, was willing to send a delegation even against the patriarch's will.

On the occasion of the proclamation of the Rumanian Republic the patriarch, in a pastoral letter stated that the people had chosen a new form of government, and he gave warning that the Church would continue its activities even under the new circumstances. He urged the faithful to recognize the new State and ordered the commemoration of the new authorities in Church liturgy. However, on the whole, this letter is much more dignified and reserved than those written by his successor. When Patriarch NICODEMO died in February 1948, the last obstacle in the path of "Bolshevization" of the "Rumanian" Church vanished. The government took pains to elect an authentic Communist as his successor, MARINA Giustiniano, and before the election of 28 Mar 1948, the Minister of Public Worship declared that the new patriarch must not follow the example of his predecessor. Actually MARINA Giustiniano has favored Communism since the period of the ANTONESCU regime, and despite his mediocrity and his dubious moral reputation, he was nominated Vicar of JASSI in 1945. In the spring of 1947 he succeeded in replacing the Metropolitan of JASSI. When Patriarch NICODEMO died, MARINA became temporary patriarch and during the political election he actively supported the Communist regime. Even before his election as patriarch, GIUSTINIANO issued on 14 March 1948 a pastoral letter in favor of the new constitution, stating that the "Orthodox Church" had prepared the way for the progressive "democracy" and that in his opinion such a demo-

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cracy would be able to put the precepts of the gospel into practice.

After having been elected, Patriarch GIUSTINIANO unconditionally supported the Communist regime and in his inaugural address he declared that the Church in all its 200 years of life "has never had a better opportunity to put into practice the teachings of the gospel, thanks to the 'popular regime' installed in our country." During the enthronization ceremonies which took place on 6 June 1948 in the Chamber of Deputies, in the presence of government officials and of the Diplomatic Corps, the new patriarch made a speech in which he declared that the Rumanian "National Orthodox Church" and the Democratic State are bound together and that the officials of the Popular Republic are the greatest protectors of the Church. He stated that there were four important problems to solve:

- 1) The new formation of Church missionaries. Persons who are fit for this task are to be chosen, that is the Communists;
- 2) The necessity of reorganizing the monastic orders on a new basis, and the purge of the clergy so as to place them in a position to serve "civilization;" in order to create a new and enlightened monasticism, the monasteries must be put in contact with social and cultural life.
- 3) The necessity of renewing sermons and religious press according to the spirit of the new era.
- 4) The reorganization of the seminaries in order to form a clergy fit for the new tasks.

Evidently the "Orthodox" population is not very satisfied with the attitude of their patriarch, as a catholic priest, who was recently expelled from Rumania informs us that, on various occasions, in speaking with the people he heard the following remark: "We are really ashamed of what our patriarch is doing."

Nevertheless, the "Orthodox" hierarchy is strongly Communist and its official attitude is in agreement with that of the patriarch. On 15 March 1948, in the archbishops palace at GARIOVA, in the presence of the Minister of Public Worship, a meeting of Church authorities was held and a pro-Communist motion was passed. This motion, which was later published in the official Patriarchal Bulletin and in various other newspapers declared that the Church was satisfied with the aid given

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it by the government of the Popular Democracy. The motion urged the clergy to serve the population and the government by enlightening the faithful with regard to the principles of the new constitution. Every hostile attitude toward the "Democratic" regime is to be condemned and those priests who are unwilling to abide by the new regulations are to be punished. At the end of the meeting, Rev. BRATAN (fnm) declared that "after many centuries of Christianity the time has finally come to organize the Church on the basis of the principles of the gospel which are also the basic principles of the new constitution." He added that the Church of Christ has had to wait for this era of atheistic Communism in order to seriously begin to put the principles of the gospel into practice. These statements are made with regard to a government whose ultimate goal is the destruction of all religion.

c) The "Bulgarian" Church:

The "Orthodox" Church in Bulgaria has shown in the past some resistance toward the Communist regime, but recently it seems to be yielding to the increased pressure of the government. Metropolitan STEPHEN was known as being anti-Communist and favorable toward the monarch.

In an article entitled "Present Day Paganism" which appeared in the "Spiritual Reawakening Review" of 5 May 1939, STEPHEN places Fascism, Nazism, and Bolshevism on the same level, defining the latter as the most dangerous form of modern paganism. Before Communism came to power, STEPHEN wrote a pamphlet called "The Social Program in the Light of the Gospel" in which he criticized Communism. The pamphlet was severely attacked by the Communist press (cf. the newspaper "News" (Novini) of 5 January 1948.) At the congress of the Association of Bulgarian Orthodox priests, which was held on 5 June 1947, STEPHEN proclaimed the loyalty of the church to the Communist Popular Front, and in a message dated 29 January 1948 he invited the faithful to cooperate with the Popular Front. Upon his return from MOSCOW in July 1948, he declared at a press interview that MOSCOW was the center and the moving force of the progressive activity of the Universal Orthodox Church (Patriotic Front, Ptecestven Front 5 August 1948.) However, in September 1949 he was forced to resign his office as a result of his differences with the Holy Synod and because of his poor reputation which he earned by violating the faith which the Church had placed in him. A prominent Orthodox priest once called him the "biggest faker" in Bulgaria. After his resignation the Holy Synod in an official

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declaration published in the church bulletin (called the "Church Messenger," 1948, No 31 and 32,) accused him of having attempted to discredit the members of the Holy Synod and of having given the impression that he alone supported the foreign and domestic policies of the government and was the only friend of the Soviet Government.

The tone of this declaration reveals the pro-Communist sentiments of the existing Church hierarchy. Nevertheless, before the new constitution was proclaimed, the Holy Synod had been courageous enough to send a note to the government and to the parliament making strong demands on the government, such as: freedom to preach, freedom in religious instruction and in welfare activities. It also requested that religious instructions be not banned in public schools and that civil marriage ceremonies be not made obligatory.

The fact that the government makes frequent complaints is evidence that the hierarchy is not dead. For example the director of Public Worship, JILIEV Dimitri, at the Congress of the Orthodox priests on 14 October 1948, referred to certain members of the Holy Synod as having "musty ideas." In a letter addressed to the hierarchy dated 11 May 1948 the Minister of Public Worship accused not only the priests, but also several high officials of the hierarchy of having carried on propaganda against the Popular Front (Naroden Pastir 1 June 1948.) Under the pressure of the Communist Government, resistance gradually became weakened and finally ceased. On 15 June 1947 at a reception given by Minister DIMITROV, the Holy Synod approved of the foreign and domestic policies of the government and urged all bishops and priests to support the work of the government (The Church Messenger of the Russian Exarchate of Western Europe, August 1947, page 19.) In the same speech JILIEV expressed the opinion that the Holy Synod could always find a loophole to serve their sacred office and, at the same time to serve the laws of the State.

This opportunist attitude prevails. At the special meeting of the Holy Synod which lasted from 8 to 11 October 1948, the ruling forbidding to administer the Sacraments and burial to those of the faithful who were not married in the church was revoked. The Holy Synod renounced its right to educate the youth of the country and recognized this right as one belonging to the State. In addition it gave up the right to issue reli-

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gious instructive literature and sermons, which it now considers superfluous inasmuch as the constitution guarantees freedom of religion. The clergy is authorized to take part in the activities of the Popular Front and is expected to respect the right of the state in educating the youth. (Church Messenger, SOFIA, 23 October 1948.)

It is interesting to note the attitude of the priests in this regard. An eyewitness reports at the 30th congress of the Union of the "Orthodox" Priests of Bulgaria, held on 14 October 1948, the meeting hall contained a huge picture of DIMITROV but no crucifix or other religious items. Besides the Soviet and Yugoslav delegations, some 250 to 300 priests were present. In a speech discussing the relation between Church and State the "Director of Public Worship" complained of the opposition of the clergy to the expressed wish of the government with regard to Church support to the "socialistic reconstruction of the country. One of the priests present was reported to have said: "I cannot obey DIMITROV George, nor has he the right to command me. He might some day order me to remove the cross from the cathedral and to replace it by the crescent moon." The Director of Public Worship answered by praising Comrade DIMITROV. During the meeting it was proposed that the editor of the Clerical Union Review, "Naroden Pastir" be nominated in future instead of being elected. When the objection was raised that the nomination might go to a person who was completely atheistic, the secretary of the Popular Front stifled the discussion by declaring that the argument was superfluous, because whether the editor was elected or nominated, he would always have to follow the line of the Popular Front. Only twenty of those present voted in favor of the proposal; nevertheless the chairman declared that the proposal had been accepted. At this point a modest priest asked for the floor and declared: "It is clear, that we are under the influence of a dictatorship." The chairman prevented him from going on. When the meeting came to an end and the members of the Congress were leaving the hall it is reported that some of the members stated: "We have been betrayed....this is a complete surrender....good for that little priest who dared use the word dictatorship."

This incident clearly shows what the true situation is.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: Current period

EVAL. COMMENT:

Source : reliable

Information: confirmed by other sources