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MIDDLE EAST  
SOVIET UNION

RELIGION

Orthodox Church

Communist-inspired religious movements

PRO-SOVIET CHURCH OF ANTIOCH ACCUSES OECUMENICAL PATRIARCH  
ATHENAGORAS.

SOURCE ISTANBUL : Article published in the Lebanese Orthodox review "Al Harakat" of 19 September 1953, a translation of which was made available through circles closely associated with the Oecumenical Patriarchate of ISTANBUL.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : September 1953.

EVALUATION COMMENT : None.

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In 1953, His Holiness the Oecumenical Patriarch ATHENAGORAS declared that he would visit the Orthodox churches of the Middle East during Lent 1954. This declaration met with unfavorable comments from the usually pro-Russian Patriarchate of ANTIOCH and from the other Patriarchates which have shown pro-Soviet sympathies. In September 1953 an article appeared in the BEYROUTH religious review "Al Harakat" which clearly indicates the anti-ATHENAGORAS stand of the Patriarch of ANTIOCH and his fellow pro-Russian clergymen. The article speaks against the right of the Oecumenical Patriarchate to convoke an Oecumenical Synod and it accuses the Patriarch of Papacy. The article also criticizes the decision of the Patriarchate of Phanar (ISTANBUL) concerning the Bulgarian effort to establish an independent Patriarchate in Bulgaria.

It is evident that the purpose of this article was to poison the atmosphere and create bad conditions for the travel of His Holiness to the Middle Eastern countries. It also shows that MOSCOW had fears about the influence such a visit could have on the clergy of the Arab

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countries.

A Full Translation of the Article.

"The Greeks in the Orthodox Church resemble the Italians of the Roman Catholic Church. In the eyes of these two people, Christ was crucified and the Bible was preached for only one purpose: that the Pope be an Italian and that the Oecumenical Patriarch be a Greek, and that both people from the religious centers of Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Really, this is a nice form of political domination where religious affairs are subject to temporary changes contrary to the spirit of the Bible and the preachings of Christ.

"If such racial, nationalist and fanatical ideas could prevail during centuries it does not necessarily mean that they can remain in effect in our days when, due to the emancipation of the masses, all the people of the universe demand equality and want to see the true principles of equality preached in the Gospel put into effect and exercised as a basis of modern democracy.

"We have read in the Arab-language review "Le Bon Pasteur" of the patriarchate of ALEXANDRIA a translation of an article of Monsignor GERMANOS, Metropolitan of ENOS, which was published in the last issue of the quarterly of the Oecumenical Patriarchate, the "Orthodoxia." In his article, Monsignor GERMANOS criticizes the opinion of the Russian Professor TROISKY N. who defends the right of the Russian Patriarch to convoke his colleagues, the other Patriarchs, for an oecumenical council. The Metropolitan of ENOS claims that such a right is given only to the Oecumenical Patriarch, and that no other Patriarch has the right to convoke such a meeting.

"We ask ourselves: where is there such an evangelical text or ecclesiastic script that limits the right (to convoke a council) only to the person of the Oecumenical Patriarch as if the interests and urgent needs of universal Orthodoxy would be left to the sole discretion of the Oecumenical Patriarch? Where is it stated that no other Patriarch may convoke such a council, particularly the Head of the Russian Orthodox Church who represents three-fourth of the world's Orthodox peoples.....?

"This pretentiousness of the Oecumenical Patriarchate reminds us of an incident which took place between the Caliph Omar-ben-Khattab and the then governor of DAMASCUS, Moawya-ben-Safyan. After the conquest by the Arabs, the Caliph

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wanted to make an inspection trip to the newly-conquered territories in the Orient. He visited DAMASCUS in a manner true to his proverbial modesty: he entered the city on camel-back clad as a simple traveller. The governor, Moawya, who hastened to welcome the Caliph, was on the other hand dressed in all the fineries known to the Persians and Byzantines. The Caliph, surprised by the sumptuous attire of the governor which was unknown to the democratic Arabs shouted to the face of Moawya: "What luxury is this in the manner of King Cyrus of Persia?" The clever governor had his answer ready. He explained that he was compelled to wear all the fineries and jewelry because only by doing so could he command the respect of the local population in the name of Arab sovereignty because the conquered people would not obey someone who would be more poorly dressed than the former rulers. This action on his part did not prevent Moawya from becoming the founder of the first Arab power and from becoming the most feared and respected ruler of all the Arab states.

"Does His Holiness the Oecumenical Patriarch want to play the same role in the history of the Orthodox Church as did Moawya in the history of the Arab nations? The schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches was brought about by an action on the part of the then head of the Roman Catholic Church which resembles the pretentiousness of Monsignor GERMANOS of our day. This new opinion, will it be an introductory note to a further schism, this time between the Orthodox Churches of the world? Or will the interest of the Church and the Christian spirit dominate over such religious racial policy?

"We hope that on the occasion of the visit which His Beatitude the Oecumenical Patriarch wishes to undertake to the Patriarchates of ANTIOCH, ALEXANDRIA and JERUSALEM as well as other Orthodox centers in the Middle East, it will be the true Christian sentiments which will guide him on his brotherly trip and that the interests of the Orthodox Church will dominate the temporary dictatorial and racial policy which is far from the true spirit of ecclesiastic Orthodoxy. We wish that everyone act with brotherly solidarity so that universal orthodox unity may be safeguarded against the attacks which are directed against our Church from all quarters.

"For the same reason we can here but express our grief over the decision of the St. SYNOD of the Oecumenical Church which did not recognize the fact of the enthronement of the Patriarch of Bulgaria. This decision was caused by racial and political factors which have taken on an aspect of historical tradition but which should no longer exist in present days."