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TURKEY
USSR
MID EAST

RELIGION
Orthodox Church

THE PATRIARCH ATHENAGORAS DECIDES NOT TO VISIT THE MIDDLE EAST

SOURCE ISTANBUL : John ALLEN, Orthodox priest with
good contacts in Patriarchate.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : March 1954.

EVALUATION COMMENT : None.

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The Oecumenical Patriarch ATHENAGORAS announced last year his intention of visiting the Patriarchates of the Middle East during the Lenten period of 1954. An invitation was also extended to the Patriarch by the President of Syria. One of the purposes of the trip was to repay a visit to the Patriarch of ANTIOCH, ALEXANDER, who came to ISTANBUL last year with a delegation of the Patriarchate of ANTIOCH. The second reason was to renew the links between the four ancient Patriarchates of the Eastern Orthodox Church (the Oecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchates of ALEXANDRIA, ANTIOCH, JERUSALEM) and to strengthen the collaboration in important matters of these main members of the Orthodox Church, and thus to combat the strong Russian propaganda which has had some effect on some clergymen and on many of the Arabs.

The anomalous political situation in Syria and Egypt, however, caused the Patriarch to postpone his trip. The situation has now been complicated by an invitation sent to his All Holiness to attend the ceremonies to be held on 3-5 July on the occasion of the Golden

(Over)

Jubilee of His Beatitude, the Patriarch of ANTIOCH ALEXANDER (who is 88 years old and every bit as alert as when he was much younger,) celebrating the 50th anniversary of His ordination as Bishop. Of course, such invitations have been sent to the other Orthodox leaders as well. It is not yet known in ISTANBUL if the Patriarch of MOSCOW ALEXI will go himself. Perhaps he will if he is informed that the other Patriarches are going to attend because this would give him a good opportunity of discussing some matters with them and particularly to influence the vacillating Patriarch of ALEXANDRIA. Because of the instability of the Patriarchates of ANTIOCH and ALEXANDRIA, and because of the possibility that Patriarch ALEXI will come, His All Holiness the Patriarch ATHENAGORAS has decided that he will not attend in any case. In reply to the invitation, His All Holiness stated that he will not attend because of pressing business in ISTANBUL, but that the Oecumenical Patriarchate will participate with a delegation.

End.