

A Gentle Patriarch

Athenagoras I

THE spiritual leader of the world's 350 million members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, who called on Pope Paul VI yesterday to meet other Christian leaders in Jerusalem, is one of the most imposing figures in Christendom. His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, stands 6 feet, 2 inches tall, weighs about 200 pounds, speaks in deeply sonorous tones, and has a full beard reminiscent of the early prophets.

The 77-year-old prelate is regarded by his intimates as a warm, gentle man with a lively sense of humor. He makes his surprisingly simple headquarters in a section of Istanbul that has for centuries been the center of the Orthodox world.

His full title is Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch. "Ecumenical," for the Greek "oekumene," in this sense means, the inhabited world.

The see of Constantinople is the spiritual center of the great Eastern Orthodox Church. The Ecumenical Patriarch is the highest spiritual authority of the Orthodox, being "first among equals" of all other Orthodox patriarchs of the East.

Reunion a Main Concern

Athenagoras's interest in the reunion of Christendom has been a hallmark of his reign. His proposed meeting with Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem in January would be the high point of his ecumenical concern.

The Patriarch has a wide acquaintance among church leaders in the United States, where he served from 1931 to 1949 as Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church of North and South America.

Athenagoras was born in 1886 in Epirus, then under Turkish rule but since 1913 a part of northwestern Greece. His given name was Aristokles Spirou. His father was a physician in Epirus.

The boy was enrolled at the Theological Seminary of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is on the island of Halki near Istanbul. In 1910, shortly after his graduation, he was ordained a deacon. He took the ecclesiastical name Athenagoras in honor of his spiritual guardian.

Ordained a Priest in 1919

After serving in Macedonia he was called to Athens in 1919 and ordained a priest. In 1922 he was elevated to bishop and named Metropolitan of Corfu and Paxos. His great success there led to his election in 1931 as Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church of North and South America. He was elected by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which since 1922 has had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Eastern Orthodoxy abroad.

His energetic work here was marked by the establishment of a theological seminary, an orphanage, a training school for teachers and several groups for the Orthodox laity, both men and women.

Soon after his arrival he began visiting many of his 300 churches in the Americas. "One forlorn lamb in Patagonia's wilds is as important and gets as much attention as any of the 75,000 in New York," he once said.

In 1939 he became a citizen of the United States. "I have waited and prayed for this day," he told the Brooklyn



The New York Times

Energetic scholar

that on Dec. 8, 1941, he presented himself at his draft board to offer his services, but was rejected as too old. He was 56.

His American friends remember him best for the impulsive bear-like embraces he conferred on dignitaries when he liked them. A 1947 photograph shows the towering prelate hugging President Harry S. Truman and enveloping the President's head in his beard. Richard Cardinal Cushing of Boston received the same treatment.

In January, 1949, Athenagoras "The name is pronounced A-THEEN-a-goras" was installed as the 268th Ecumenical Patriarch, thus becoming the spiritual father of some of the most contentious and schismatic demonstrations in Christendom.

His predecessor, Maximos V, had resigned from the post after two years. Maximos was subjected to spells of melancholia soon after he became patriarch and when, at the age of 53, he became too ill to continue he said, "This confined job is not one for a young man."

Athenagoras has had some success in bringing together disputing factions. He once described his mediating principle thus: "Leave your arguments and opinions outside the church door. You will find them there when you come out."

At his headquarters in the Phanar quarter of Istanbul, Athenagoras often greets visitors personally and invites them to dinner. Custom forbids his dining with women so they are taken to a separate room where a bishop presides. The Patriarch speaks Greek, Turkish, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Athenagoras is not married. Orthodox priests may marry, but only before they are ordained. However, all prelates are drawn from the celibate clergy.

YORK, he once said.

In 1939 he became a citizen of the United States. "I have waited and prayed for this day," he told the Brooklyn judge who administered the oath. However, he had to give up his American citizenship and get Turkish papers when he became Ecumenical Patriarch.

During World War II he was an active worker both for the United States and for war-torn Greece. It is said

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and meet with Orthodox religious leaders on that occasion.

A proposal made in Istanbul today by Athenagoras I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, that the heads of all Christian churches of the East and the West should hold a summit meeting in Jerusalem was hailed by Roman Catholics here who are engaged in the ecumenical movement for Christian unity.

Earlier, a patriarch of the Eastern Church in communion with the papacy predicted that Pope Paul would have talks with Orthodox leaders in Jerusalem.

While there was no immediate official reaction from the Vatican, ecclesiastics expressed hope that Athenagoras would be in Jerusalem Jan. 6 for a top-level discussion with Pope Paul.

It was recalled that the pan-Orthodox conference on the Isle of Rhodes last September authorized Orthodox churches to open a "dialogue" with Roman Catholics. An interview between the Pope and Athenagoras may be a first step toward formal conversations for unity, churchmen here said.

It was generally predicted here that Pope Paul would worship at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Epiphany Day. A meeting on that occasion with Orthodox religious leaders was thought to be likely.

Catholics here who are engaged in the ecumenical meeting for Christian unity had high hopes that Athenagoras I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and an outstanding figure in the Orthodox faith, might be in Jerusalem Jan. 6.

Political overtones of the Pope's pilgrimage became distinct with suggestions that it might contribute to lessening tension between Israel and the Arab states.

The Vatican was weighing an invitation to the Pontiff to visit Lebanon after pilgrimage to the holy places of Christianity in Jordan and Israel as a tribute to the old Christian communities in that Arab country.

It is reported that the Lebanese authorities are prepared to waive their ban on direct travel between Israel and their territory for the papal visit.

L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, published on its front page a statement by the Lebanese Foreign Minister voicing hope that Pope Paul might stop over in his country.

In an adjoining column of its front page the Vatican paper quoted the Israeli Minister of Religious Affairs, Zerah Wahrhaftig, and a spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry as welcoming the Pope's pilgrimage.

Churchmen here said tonight they were disappointed by the reaction in the United Arab Republic to the Pope's plans. Leading Cairo newspapers were reported to have criticized the Pope's intention to visit Israel.

An unofficial Vatican source

furnished the following tentative itinerary for the Pontiff:

Saturday, Jan. 4—Departure from Fiumicino International Airport near Rome before dawn by chartered jetliner. Arrival at Jerusalem (Jordanian sector) airport or Amman airport around 8:30 A.M. Visits to Bethlehem and other holy places in Jordan. Spend night in apostolic delegation in Jerusalem (Jordanian sector).

Sunday, Jan. 5—Visits to Nazareth and other holy places in Israel, possibly using a military airport in Israeli territory. Return to Jerusalem (Jordanian sector). Spend night in apostolic delegation.

Monday, Jan. 6—Rites at Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem (Jordanian sector), possibly meetings with Orthodox leaders, and return to Rome, either direct or with stopover in Beirut. Arrival at Fiumicino Airport Monday night.

This itinerary would avoid direct travel between Israel and Lebanon if the Pope decided to make a short visit to the latter country, it was suggested.

The timing of the pilgrimage appears to have taken into account also that Orthodox Christians, observing the old-style or Julian calendar, celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7. The Vatican was understood to have felt that the Pope's visit in the Holy Land should not coincide with the Orthodox Christmas.

At Epiphany, Orthodox Christians commemorate the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. The Western church, including Catholics, recalls on Jan. 6 the coming of the Magi.

Tisserant May Be Aide

Vatican officials said that Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, French-born dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals, would probably accompany the Pope. Cardinal Tisserant, who is 77 years old, is an expert on the Middle East. He is suffering from a slight indisposition, but it is hoped that he will soon be well again.

It was thought that Augustin Cardinal Bea, 82-year-old German-born Jesuit and leading Biblical scholar, might also be asked by the Pontiff to take part in the pilgrimage. Cardinal Bea heads the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Ecumenical Council.

During the Pontiff's absence from Rome, the Vatican administration will be headed by Amleto Cardinal Cicognani, Pope Paul's 80-year-old Secretary of State. However, the Pope remains the supreme head of the Catholic Church wherever he goes.

Questions Raised in Cairo

Special to The New York Times

CAIRO, Dec. 6—Cairo's most influential newspaper said today that Pope Paul's visit to the Holy Land would raise political implications if he entered Israel.

Al Ahran, whose editor, Mohammed Hassanein Heykal, is a confidante of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, said that Pope's decision to visit the Holy Land had "stirred several conjectures." Among them, the newspaper said in a front-page article, is the question whether the Pope intends to recognize "usurpation and aggression."

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