

Pope Replies to Orthodox Patriarch

By PAUL HOFMANN

Special to The New York Times

ROME, Dec. 10—The Vatican emphasized today the "ecumenical significance" of Pope Paul's pilgrimage to the Holy Land next month.

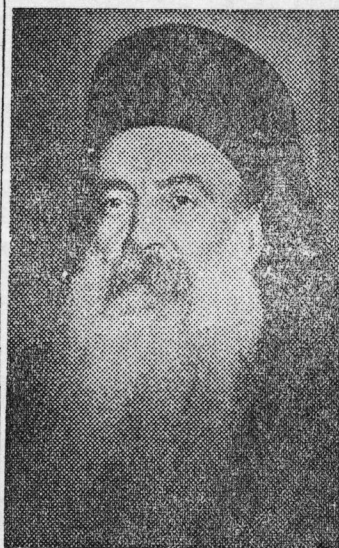
It voiced the hope that the journey to Jordan and Israel would contribute to unity, enabling all Christians to pray and worship "around the same altar." The comment was broadcast by the Vatican radio in various languages.

Meanwhile, Pope Paul VI was reported to have sent a message to Athenagoras I, Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, accepting his proposal for a meeting in Jerusalem on Epiphany, Jan. 6.

One account asserted that Pope Paul had suggested to the Patriarch, who resides in Istanbul, that they and such other religious leaders as may want to join them in Jerusalem offer common prayers for Christian unity in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

This version would imply that at this stage the Pope would rather make a symbolic gesture than enter formal top-level talks as a means to promote ecumenism, the movement for Christian unity.

Joint prayers in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would indeed be an ecumenical symbol,



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Athenagoras I

it was explained, because the site—where, according to tradition, Jesus lay buried for three days after the crucifixion—has often been the scene of rivalry between Roman Catholics and other Christians.

Last Friday Athenagoras urged a meeting of the heads of all Christian churches of East and West—Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant—in Jerusalem during Pope Paul's visit, which is to begin Jan. 4.

While it is generally under-

stood that the Pope and the Patriarch have been in communication, there has been no official Vatican reaction to the Orthodox leader's proposal.

No detailed itinerary has been announced. A report that a speech in Bethlehem Jan. 6 was planned by Pope Paul remained unconfirmed.

Athenagoras Gets Letter

Special to The New York Times

ISTANBUL, Turkey, Dec. 10—A Vatican envoy, the Rev. Pierre Duprey, delivered a letter from Pope Paul VI to Athenagoras today.

Athenagoras received Father Duprey in his apartment at the Patriarchate. They talked for almost an hour.

The contents of the letter were not disclosed, but Patriarchate sources indicated it concerned Athenagoras's proposal for a meeting of Christian leaders in the Holy Land when the Pope visits there.

The letter will be discussed tomorrow at a meeting of the Holy Synod—the 12 Metropolitans under the authority of the Patriarch, who is first among equals.

Father Duprey, who is under secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, went to Beirut, Lebanon.

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Pope Paul