

51

R E L I G I O U S   N E W S   S E R V I C E

FOREIGN SERVICES

-6- WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 1963

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH CONFERS WITH VATICAN REPRESENTATIVE

By Religious News Service (12-11-63)

ISTANBUL (RNS) -- A letter from Pope Paul VI to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, supreme leader of Eastern Orthodoxy, was delivered here by a papal envoy, reportedly in answer to the patriarch's proposal for a meeting of top Christian leaders in Jerusalem when the Pope visits there in January.

The letter was handed to Patriarch Athenagoras by Father Pierre Duprey, a French-born White Father who is an undersecretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. The two remained in conversation for almost an hour.

Patriarchate sources said the letter -- its contents were not disclosed -- would be discussed at a meeting of the Holy Synod, comprising 12 metropolitans under the jurisdiction of Patriarch Athenagoras, who is recognized as "first among equals" of all the Orthodox patriarchs.

So far, there has been no official Vatican reaction to Patriarch Athenagoras' proposal for a meeting with the Pope of the heads of all Christian Churches of East and West -- Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant -- during the pontiff's Holy Land pilgrimage.

Vatican authorities, it was reported here, have described Father Duprey's visit to Istanbul as simply a courtesy gesture preparatory to the Pope's visit to Jerusalem. The Pope will be in the Holy Land at a time when Christmas observances will attract a considerable influx of Catholic, Orthodox and other Christian pilgrims.

At the same time, the Vatican authorities repudiated what they implied were unfounded press speculations regarding the Pope's pilgrimage by stressing that it was of a purely religious nature.

On top of this came a Vatican Radio broadcast denying reports that Father Duprey had gone to Istanbul to explain why a meeting between the Pope and Patriarch Athenagoras in the Holy Land was "impossible."

Father Duprey, it was recalled, was commissioned last summer to go to India to extend invitations to three Indian Churches -- the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, and the Church of South India -- to send delegates to the second session of the Second Vatican Council.

Last March, Father Duprey, who at one time taught at the St. Anne Seminary in Jerusalem, was named undersecretary of a separate department of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity set up to handle relations with the Orthodox Churches.

The priest has studied in Athens, Greece, and enjoys a close friendship with leading personalities of the Orthodox world.

035 PA0038