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Church Diplomacy in the USSR of the 1960s in a Private Report of Bishop Pitirim (Nechaev) to Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov) on the Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Abstract

The article attempts to consider the nature and features of the Orthodox church diplomacy of the 1960s as an element of state-church relations and intra-church management practices. In the context of a documentary complex on the history of the Moscow Patriarchate and state-church relations of the 1960s and on the basis of a unique “private message” compiled by one of the active and prominent figures of church diplomacy, Bishop Pitirim (Nechaev, 1926–2003), addressed to the head of church diplomacy, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov, 1929–19), the practice of church diplomatic missions of the second half of the 1960s is reconstructed. The study is to reconstruct one of the powerful vectors of public diplomacy of the Soviet Union in the mid-20th century, ecclesiastical diplomacy; drawing on a unique corporate source, its values and objectives are emphasized. The publication is based on the methods of modern archaeography, reconstructive method, and factor analysis of church diplomatic practice. Its relevance is due to acute shortage of research and publications devoted to the church diplomacy of the era. The study shows that bishop Nikodim began his church diplomatic career as head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem (1957–59) and did not leave the Middle East agenda. The published document is unusual and informative; unlike known official reports deposited in separate copies in the fond of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers of the USSR (fond 6991 of the State Archive of the Russian Federation), mostly inaccessible, it contains personal and emotional characteristics, lifting the veil over informal communication of the church hierarchs when discussing issues of church diplomacy. Bishop Pitirim’s report is distinguished by psychologism and attention to detail and mood of correspondents and participants of interaction, as their assessment was an important part of diplomatic analytics of the era. Introduction of such unique sources into scientific use enriches our notion on church diplomacy of the second half of the 20th century, its personal dimension, means and practices.

### Keywords

Historical source, church diplomacy, Moscow Patriarchate, Bishop Pitirim (Nechaev), Metropolitan Nikodim (Rotov), Holy Land, pilgrimages

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