

Metropolitan Ananias (Japaridze)

# **A Concise History of the Holy Apostolic Church of Georgia**

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“A Concise History of the Holy Apostolic Church of Georgia” is Metropolitan Ananias’ account of the labour and ministry which the Church of Georgia carried out throughout many centuries while serving the purpose of the spiritual salvation of the nation.

The Holy Bible is first referred to in this book as a historical source of the Church of Georgia.

The four-volume work comprises the three periods of her history, extending from the first century to the twentieth inclusive.

The present edition represents its abridged version.

## Foreword

Beloved children of Christ, let us praise the Lord our God with our words and deeds for He brought us into existence, He created heavens and earth, mankind, nations and peoples.

We read in the Holy Scripture that in the beginning people were one nation and spoke one language – “Now the whole earth was one language and one speech” (Genesis 11.1).

However, after having destroyed the Tower of Babel, the Lord’s will was to have many nations with many languages on earth. So it was that primordial nations were formed and upon each of them was bestowed their own part of the earth called “homeland” or “Motherland”. People had an obligation to take care of it, defend it from enemies. First kingdoms were formed and people were compatriots to each other; they were also neighbours and friends. Fidelity and self-sacrifice to the people’s good were the two virtues, well-pleasing to the Lord for they were fruit of love, and God is love as the Holy Scripture proclaims: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15.13).

Our blessed forefathers, the ancient Georgians even from the beginning displayed a deep love for their Motherland and devotion to each other. The foremost book of mankind the Holy Bible gives many details about them.

It is a known fact, that Noah with his family solely survived the Flood and his sons Sam, Ham and Japheth gave the beginning to the new mankind.

The well-known commentator of the Bible Josephus Flavius (the 1<sup>st</sup> c.) names among Japheth’s sons Tubal, Meshech and the son of Gomer Togarmah as the ancestors of the Iberians or Georgians: “The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Elisha, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras”. (Genesis 10.2-3). “The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah” (Genesis 10.3).

The great prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel also give considerable details about them.

The following concept belongs to the well-known Georgian scholar S. Janashia: “About 6 000 years ago the vast territory of Asia Minor and Southern Europe (the Balkans, the Apennines and the Pyrenean Peninsula) were settled by the peoples of the same origin. Subsequently, the area of their habitation was reduced. These people were the ancestors of the Georgians. As early as that period, the Georgians spoke one language, common for all of the tribes. Beyond 2000 years B.C., apart from the Caucasus, this people expanded on the lands of Asia Minor and the northern part of Mesopotamia where they founded many well-known countries”.

The most glorious of the ancient Georgian lands was Colchis. Homer and many other poets of the ancient world sang poems to her; but nothing remains immutable –beyond 800 years B.C. a hostile people – the Cimmerians invaded this country. They were tribes living in the steppes beyond the Caucasus. Having destroyed Colchis, they proceeded southwards, conquered not one country and reached as far as the land of Israel. All Asia were daunted by this belligerent people. The victorious Cimmerians drove most of the population of Colchis and those of other countries beyond their own lands and compelled to join them in their war in the south. This warfare turned into the great migration of peoples from the north to the land of Israel which is indicated in the Holy Bible. The Lord spoke through the prophet: “... behold, I shall even send a family from the north and lead them against this land, and against

those living in it, and against all the nations round about her. I will make it desolate and give it up to destruction. I will render it a hissing and a perpetual disgrace” (Jeremiah 25.9).

Thus, we can draw a conclusion that the great onslaught of the northern people on Israel was the Lord’s will; the commentators of the Bible name among the invaders “Mosoch and Tubal” the forefathers of the Georgians who were urged by the people of Gog (the Cimmerians) to go to war with them in the south. They reached the mountains of Israel, gained victory in the battles and, as King David had foreseen, were even the dominant people in those lands for a time: “Woe is me, that dwell in Meshech, that dwell among the tents of Kedar.” (Ps. 119(120).5; the Holy Bible 1989, p.555). Who were the Mosochs (Meshechs) who appeared to be the settlers of the lands which lay to the north of the Holy Land?

Hecataeus of Miletus, the contemporary author of the prophet Jeremiah and the prophet Ezekiel (the 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.) writes: “The Meshechs are a tribe of Colchis” (“Essays on the History of Georgia”. Book 1, p.395). Thus, these Mosochs are the people of Colchis who, having been induced by the Cimmerians, were present in the conquest of the southern lands.

The military aristocracy of the people, driven beyond the boundaries of Colchis, founded a new state in the south which in the earliest of the Georgian chronicles “The Conversion of Kartli” is mentioned as the land of “Arian Kartli”. The peoples of the counties of that world called it “Ancient Iberia”. Soon the Lord’s will was to move the Georgians from the south to the Caucasus. He says the following words through the prophet Ezekiel to the people from the northern lands: “I will drive you back”. “Behold, I am against you, O Gog the ruler of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal! I shall gather you and all your army - horses, and horsemen, all armed with breastplates, and a large assembly with shields and helmets, and swords and the house of Togarmah from the far North and all belonging to him and many nations with you” (Ezekiel 38: 3 - 6).

According to the Holy Scripture, the migration of the northern peoples to the south and their subsequent return to the places of their origin was a constituent part of the Lord’s great plan; for He did not will their passing away and disappearance, rather His Divine Providence was to draw them to the understanding of the True God and enlighten them “... and My holy name will be known in the midst of My people Israel”. (Ezekiel 39:7) and also: ... “I will bring you against My land, that all the nations may know Me when I am sanctified in you before them” (Ezekiel 38:16).

When interpreting the above mentioned verses, the Bible commentator, known worldwide as the Father of Church History Eusebius of Caesarea and St. John Chrysostom’s best disciple Theodore of Cyrene stated that the Lord willed to move the Georgian tribes back to their land by the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar: “Nebuchadnezzar who was mightier than Heracles, gathered his army, reached the land of the Iberians, defeated them, destroyed and subjugated them. He also moved part of them to dwell on the right side of the Pontus Sea” (Georgica I. 1961. p.30).

While giving his account on this event, Eusebius of Caesarea alludes to Megasthenus, the historian of the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. Thus, in the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. somewhere in the south was located ancient Iberia – the land of the Georgians. Part of its people moved back to their homeland – the historical Colchis (Kolkheti), precisely to the eastern side of the Pontus Sea (the Black Sea) which is the territory of the contemporary Georgia, the land which in former times had obviously been inhabited by the indigenous Georgians but now, as political

centers had been returned back to the north, it revived and strengthened in power to establish the first Georgian kingdom of the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. According to the chronicle of the 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries “The Life of Kartli”, (G.“Kartlis Tskhovreba”) the founder of this kingdom was King Parnavaz. His was the country of a single ethnos, who spoke one common language and had an integral territory. The indigenous people of this land - Egrisians (Megrelians), Gurians, Svans, Margvetians (later called “Imeretians”), Her-Kakhetians, Kartlians and others were one integral nation. The ancient Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi writes the following: “In the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (the period of Nebuchadnezzar) the settlers of the Pontus Sea coast, who had moved from the ancient “Iberia” to the north, multiplied and grew into a people of myriads” (“The History of Armenia”, p.107)

Beyond 400-300 B.C., eight principalities, gained with the support of Prince Kuji of Egrisi, were the constituent parts of King Parnavaz’s realm. These lands were: Egrisi, Argveti, Kakheti, Khunani, Samshvilde, Tsunda, Odzrkhe and Klarjeti. Both eastern and western lands were united in the new kingdom, called “Kingdom of Kartli”. “King Parnavaz instilled in people the Georgian language and no other tongue than this was spoken throughout the land. He had created the Georgian writing as well”. (“Kartlis Tskhovreba”. Book 1 p. 26).

After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostles were given the utterance of all those tongues they would preach the new teaching in. Church Tradition holds that St. Andrew the First-Called was commissioned by the Most Holy Mother of God to preach in Iberia (Georgia), the land, committed to her care by the lot. Therefore, the Georgian language had been bestowed on him.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Assyrian Holy Fathers came to this land and started their missionary work. Whilst these fathers, according to their chroniclers, hadn’t known Georgian prior to this ministry, they praised God and conducted the Church Service in this language since, the Holy Spirit had given them the gift of utterance in Georgian at the very instant of the Lord’s blessing on this endeavor in the far away country, in the same way as the Apostles were given the utterance in various languages by the Holy Spirit. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian monks laboured in the monastery on the Holy Mount of Olympus (Ulumbo). The language of their ministry and prayer was Georgian. However, the Greeks restricted them from praying in their mother tongue. And, the Most Holy Mother of God appeared in a vision to the Abbot of the Monastery and said to him: “Those who do not receive them, are my enemies”. The Georgian language was well pleasing to the Mother of God. (“The Life of Ilarion the Georgian”- selected works p.172 1979).

Late in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a young boy Ekvtime Mtatsmindeli (of Mount Athos), being at the point of death sick with some grave illness, had a revelation. He had forgotten his native language as he had lived on Mount Athos since his young age. The Most Holy Mother of God appeared to him and healing him, said: “Arise, do not fear, and speak up in Georgian”. On hearing these words, Ekvtime received the gift of utterance in Georgian and since then the Georgian word, pure as clear spring water, flowed from his mouth; and he spoke this language, genuine of all his contemporaries.

As it was mentioned above, St. Andrew the First-Called established the Church Service in Georgian and throughout millenniums this people have praised God in their mother tongue.

# **The First Period**

## **From the Holy Apostles to the Ruis-Urbnisi Church Council**

**(From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century)**

### **The First Century**

The Church of Georgia is an inseparable part of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church; therefore its history is also part of the history of the Ecumenical Church. Likewise, it is a constituent part of the history of the Georgian people. In old times the Church invariably was the driving force of the nation's spiritual life. St. Ilia the Righteous (Chavchavadze) says: "The Georgian Church always protected our people never committing its glory to oblivion" (I. Chavchavadze. Book II. p.180)

The Church of Georgia is pertinently called "Georgian Orthodox Church", but at the same time, it is called "Georgian Apostolic Church" for she was established by the Apostles of Jesus Christ our Lord. The labour of St. Andrew the First-Called and that of the others was acknowledged in ancient Georgia as the truth beyond any doubt.

In the new age, especially at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the missionary work of this Apostle was labeled as another legend. One of the arguments, this conception was grounded on, was that the Iberia of the Apostles' age was an insignificant country which could not have drawn their attention. But the truth was different – Georgia from the 30s of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the 60s of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century was a powerful kingdom which extended almost all over Transcaucasia. The Roman historians Tacitus, Dionysius Cassius and some others often highlighted in their works the full-blooded life of this land. The Europeans of the medieval centuries were better aware of ancient Iberia than their contemporary Georgians. Archaeological findings all over this country also confirm the ancient authors' accounts. The Church tradition holds that after the Ascension of the Lord, the Apostles cast lots to determine the places of their further ministry. The historical source of the 6<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries "The Life of Kartli" has that Georgia was allotted to the Mother of God, but on her Son's our Lord's will, she commissioned on this mission St. Andrew the First-Called sending with him her icon

called Not-Made-By-Hands. On St. Andrew's preaching our people received Christianity; further, the Apostle established the first diocese in the Atskuri area, ordained priests and deacons. To summarize the ministry of the Apostle Andrew the First-Called, he initiated the Church of Georgia.

On his second arrival, several of other Apostles followed him and on his third mission, Saint Simon the Zealot and Saint Matthias came to Georgia with him. Epiphanius of Constantinople (the 8<sup>th</sup> c.) gives in his work comments on this episode.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Ephrem Mtsire ("Less"), alluding to Greek sources, wrote that apart from these Apostles, St. Bartholomew the Apostle preached in our country. Arcangelo Lamberti shares this opinion. Yet, a certain Slavic source of the 17<sup>th</sup> century says that St. Thomas the Apostle founded the Church of Georgia.

And, there are some other historical chronicles which add to these names St Thaddeus the Apostle.

Furthermore, not only the Apostles from the Twelve but also some of the Seventy visited Georgia and converted people.

In conclusion, according to Holy Tradition, six of the Twelve Apostles preached in this land. They are: St. Andrew the First-Called, St. Simon the Zealot, St. Matthias, St. Bartholomew, St. Thomas and St. Thaddeus. Simon the Zealot and Matthias are buried here, in New Athos and in the Fortress of Gonio (near the town of Batumi).

The Church established by the Apostles, wherever she may be, is autocephalous; therefore, the Church of Georgia has been autocephalous since it was initiated.

## **The Second Century**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries, neither in Iberia nor in the Roman Empire did Christianity become a state religion. Nevertheless, it spread and strengthened increasingly. A 7<sup>th</sup> century author Ioane Sabanisdze indicates in his book "The Martyrdom of Abo of Tbilisi" that the Georgians were converted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Some archaeological findings also testify this date. As for instance, the archaeologists traced the remnants of a Christian community and attributed them to the period prior to St. Nino's age.

The presence of Christian burial grounds, attributed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries prove that an organized Christian Church existed continuously from the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries (the Holy Apostles' time) to St. Nino's life and labour in Georgia. Presumably, Christian communities were considerably powerful in the Iberia of those times. King Rev the Righteous' reforms, conducted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, clearly testify this assumption.

In the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, Greek and Latin historians saw Georgia as an area for missionary work which was not overlooked by worldwide Christian centers. In one of the sources we read: "Upon St. Clement the Preacher's missionary labour the Gospel was introduced in the region of Iberia which extends along the coast of the Pontus Sea and is called Colchis. He lived here in exile under the Emperor Traianeus." (I. Tabaghua. "Georgia in the European Archives and Book Depositories," Book 1. p.171).

However, Irenaeus considered that the Georgians (Iberians) or Colchis, as they are called due to their geographical location, had received Christianity before the rule of the Emperor Traianus (98-117). According to the same source, the Georgians, living near the mountains of Caucasus and expanding towards the Caspian Sea (the population of East Georgia), were converted later. This detail accords with that of “Kartlis Tskhovreba” where we read that the people of West Georgia - Megrelians and Klarjis (South-West Georgia) were the first converts.

About the year 150, St. Justinian stated that there was no place in the world where people (even barbarians) did not pray to the Crucified Jesus Christ. St. Irenaeus shares this opinion (I. Tabaghua “Georgia in the European Archives and Book Depositories”, Book 1.p.170).

Furthermore, the world missionary movement would not leave Iberia without attention as it was a powerful kingdom from the 30s of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the 60s of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries three states – Rome, Iberia and Parthia declared their claims on the control over the vast lands in the south of Transcaucasia. Iberia had enough forces to withstand Parthia without the Romans’ support and several battles brought her victory which aroused Rome’s concern over the increasing strength of Iberia. In the 30s and the 50s of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Parsman II, called “Kveli”(“Virtuous”) was King of Georgia. In his reign Kartli fought with Rome openly, leading a straightforward policy and compelling the Roman forces to withdraw from Colchis and the neighboring territories. While at war with Rome, she did not seek alliance with Parthia either. It is evident that the rulers of Kartli boldly confronted Rome and Parthia at a time (G. Melikishvili. “Georgia in the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D.”, “Essays on the History of Georgia.” Book I. 1970. p.510).

Parsman II was powerful and independent in his sovereignty. Despite his efforts, the Emperor Adriane could not reconstruct his relationships with him as the king of Georgia would not respond on them. Moreover, he turned down the emperor’s invitation to Rome. The latter’s biographer Elius Spartianus writes that Adriane sent the king a bountiful present of precious gifts which was more abundant than those, granted to other royals.

When the Emperor Anthony Pius (133-161) succeeded him, Parsman II visited Rome with his spouse and a large party of his court. They were welcomed with great pageantry. According to Dion Cassius, the emperor “broadened the boundaries of Parsman’s domain”. Presumably, Rome not only acknowledged the existing borders of Iberia but also presented to the king some more lands along the Black Sea coast and in Armenia. The distinguished guest from Georgia was granted to bring sacrifice in the Capitoline. The emperor was present at Parsman’s military practice in which the king’s son and the leaders of the Georgian army took part.

In Rome, an equestrian statue of the king was erected. Another biographer of the emperor Julius Capitolinus states that the king’s visit to Rome was accepted as his respect towards the emperor. An inscription on a marble slab, found in an ancient Roman harbor, testifies as well that it was a foremost event.

All this speaks about Georgia’s power and wealth in the age of the Apostles (the 1st-2nd cc.). She was a country of vast lands and secure borders, outstanding with her highly developed economy and progressive social relationships. Therefore she would have barely been left beyond the Apostles’ and the missionaries’ attention.

## The Third Century

The missionary labour of the Christian preachers in Iberia continued throughout the 2nd and the 3rd centuries. The Scholar I. Javakhishvili cites the appearance of the first Christian communities in the first half of the 3rd century. With the territorial extension of the land, these communities gained predominance over the whole nation. The reforms, conducted by King Rev the Righteous, provide grounds to assume that this teaching was received by the elite of that time.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, precisely in 261 the Emperor Galliano signed a decree which acknowledged Christianity as an established state religion. Almost half a century before this event, King Rev the Righteous had done the same in Iberia. The King died in 213. He knew the Holy Scriptures and was a merciful supporter of all men, yet remaining a pagan.

“Only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century did the emperors abolish human sacrifice while in Georgia it ended earlier than in Rome and the law, forbidding it, was in effect throughout the country. An ancient historical source attributes this noble step to King Rev the Righteous”. (Goralishvili. “The Issue of the Conversion of Kartli and Prince Bakur” p.38.)

Archaeological excavations confirm the existence of Christian communities in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries in this land. The scholar A. Bobokhidze describes a Christian church of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century in the valley of Nastakisi: “...in the valley of Nastakisi, larger settlements also appear early in the Middle Ages, which is testified by the ruins, found while the excavations were being conducted on the site. Each building on the valley consisted of several rooms, with one of them bigger than the others. In all those houses, one room was a small church with a projecting apses and a narthex.

Christianity was not a state religion at that time; rather it is seen as illegal and harbored in such buildings. This fact is of great significance in the study of the history of Christianity in the Kingdom of Kartli.

The structural arrangement of the Church of that time is particularly interesting. Of course, it is beyond doubt that the Christians would have clergymen who would conduct ministry to their needs – partaking of the Holy Communion, receiving the Holy Baptism and participating in other mysteries. It should be noted here that the communities of various towns or settlements were not in subordination to each other; a single Christian Church with one centre and one administration was not formed yet. Nevertheless, there were bishops who carried out the ministry and priests were called bishops.

In conclusion, the Christian Church and Christian communities existed in Georgia from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century and this period created a favorable ground for a successful accomplishment of St. Nino’s missionary work.



## The Fourth Century

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the proclamation of Christianity as of a legal religion in Georgia was neither unexpected nor imposed; rather the three-century tradition of its existence in this land had prepared its foundation.

It would not have been easy for St. Nino to inculcate the true faith of God among this people unless the Apostles had prepared the foundation for a general conversion to Christianity. It was also revealed in the chaste virgin's life when in a vision the Lord told her: "The harvest is truly plentiful, but the labourers are few" (Matthew 9:37).

These words meant that the seeds sown by the Apostles had prepared the people throughout centuries for the nation-wide baptism.

The ancient Georgian chronicle "Moktsevai Kartlisai" ("The Conversion of Kartli") which belongs to the 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, describes the spread of Christianity in Georgia. The first part of it is a selection of historic chronicles, written at different times, while the second one represents an account of St. Nino's life and labour.

Presumably, the second book with the title "St. Nino's life" was compiled in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and contains the evidence of its authorship – Queen Salome of Ujarma and the prominent lady Perozhavra Sivnieli were the two ladies who made up a record of St. Nino's life from her personal account which she gave them, while in the village of Bod (Bodbe).

Although the well-known scholars Nicholas Marr, Ivane Javakhishvili and Korneli Kekelidze place the source in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, we do not have any reasons for turning down the authenticity of the authorship, attested by the source and accept it as authentic. The following historical fact also confirms our belief - in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Prince Bakur who was the grandson of King Rev and Queen Salome and the son of their son Trdat, being on a visit in the Byzantine Empire, met with the outstanding historians Gelasius of Caesarea and Ruphinus and in a conversation he told them the story of his people's conversion to Christianity. This narration is a kind of abridged version of "St. Nino's Life".

Gelasius of Caesarea described the same event in his "History of the Church". Regrettably, the work is presumed lost. Yet, the same historical episode is preserved in the books of the later period authors among whom the earliest is Ruphinus (died in 410). He translated and included in his work Gelasius of Caesarea's account about the events which had taken place in Georgia.

Later, the three Greek historians – Socrates (born in 380), Theodoritus of Cyrene (the 5<sup>th</sup> c.) and Sozomen spoke about the same event in their works. Socrates alluded to Ruphinus while writing about it in "The History of the Church"; Theodoritus of Cyrene mentions it in his book giving it the same title. Sozomen is considered to have based his account directly on Ruphinus' "History".

This book, which afterwards was used as the original source by Greco-Roman historians, was written at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, fifty years after the conversion of Kartli. Ruphinus' detail that one of the royalties of Iberia Prince Bakur was the person from whom he learnt about the events is very significant.

To draw a conclusion, the earliest source which gives an account of Georgia's conversion to Christianity was written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Prince Bakur's grandmother Queen Salome of

Ujarma. Evidently, the prince referred to this precise book when discoursing on the subject with the Greek historians.

But, when did St. Nino come to Georgia? And did she really enlighten the whole nation?

The holy fathers of the Ruis-Urbnisi council answered this question conclusively when in the decree of the council they gave the following: “St. Nino converted all Georgia to Christianity but St. Andrew the First-Called had preached throughout the country prior to her.” St. Nino came to Georgia in 303. The Royal court believed on the Lord and established Christianity as a state religion and in 324-326 the people of the entire country were baptized.

Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi dates the conversion by the year 317 and this is a fact of paramount importance, shared by the scholars D. Bakradze and I. Gvaramadze. However, P. Ioseliani, G. Sabinin and R. Tsamtsiev considered the year 318 as the exact date of the event.

The scholar V. Goiladze names the year 324 as the date of Bishop Ioane’s ordination and sees the Church of Georgia of the Cappadocian origin rather than of Antiochian.

This is quite a conclusive consideration. Thus, Prince Vakhushti Bagrationi’s assumption should be acknowledged valid and the years 317-318 should be accepted as the date of the conversion while the years 324-326 - as the date of the people’s baptism and of the establishment of the Church. The single Georgian Church was formed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Under her jurisdiction, in accordance with the decree of the Ruis-Urbnisi Council, were vast territories in both East and West Georgia. This convocation underscored as well that St. Andrew preached not only in a definite area of West Georgia, but throughout Georgia. St. Nino baptized not only the people of East Georgia but the whole nation. The council also stated that the Church in West Georgia started enacting her jurisdiction on the precise day of her establishment. This cancels the opinion that a Greek diocese was founded with its Episcopal throne. According to N. Adonets, the well-known Episcopal thrones of Lazika were not in West Georgia but in Trabzon region (now the territory of Turkey).

## **The Fifth Century**

Early in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia was laid under tribute to Persia. Although the Persians failed to deprive this country of her statehood, they sought to assimilate the people. Restricting and forbidding Georgian traditions and customs, they forced them to receive their religion which was Zoroastrianism; but Christianity had become an established national religion by that time and the Georgian traditions and customs had deep roots in this religion. When fighting against it, the Persians were confident that the people would lose their self-awareness if they renounced their belief.

Here, it should be noted that the Byzantines did not fall short in this respect either for by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century they took over a considerable part of the southern territories (Klarjeti), joining these lands to their state and in the first part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century they occupied most of the lands of West Georgia from Egristkhali up to Tsikhe-Goji.

However, Persia controlled the most part of Georgia and it posed a serious threat. King Vakhtang Gorgasali followed the traditions of the Greek Orthodoxy. He reigned in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Before his death, the king pronounced his will in which he addressed to his people asking “not to abandon the love of the Greeks”, he meant Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, he had fought against the Eastern Roman Empire and had retrieved the lost territories.

Furthermore, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century two divergences of Christianity are seen, one of which was supported by Byzantium; the other was of Persian orientation. The Persian royal court, on perceiving that the dissemination of Zoroastrianism could gain very little ground and the Christian peoples would never renounce their faith, altered their policy choosing to subordinate them to pro-Iranian Christian Churches of which were Syrian and Persian, with their anti-Byzantine values.

Undoubtedly, these circumstances would have their effect on the Georgian community as the country was under Persia’s control.

It is beyond question that in the 5<sup>th</sup> century both groupings of Hellenic and Persian orientations were present in the Church, causing extreme tension at the royal court. According to “Kartlis Tskhovreba” the Georgian kings had to withstand both hostile neighbours or would take advantage of the animosity between them and fight alternatively against the Greeks with Persia’s support or against the Persians with that of Byzantium’s.

Christianity had not been established as the state religion until the Emperor Constantine legalized it. Therefore Christian communities did not depend on the supervision by the governing authorities and the latter could not impose their will in respect of the structural order within the Church. Consequently, until the 4<sup>th</sup> century each of the Christian communities was placed under the authority of its archbishop, and archbishops fulfilled their ministry independently from each other. They were elected by the council of the community’s clergy and the dioceses were independent, i.e. autocephalous. This order was in accordance with the 34<sup>th</sup> apostolic canon.

Things changed when the state recognized Christianity as the official religion. It is a well-known fact that by this time (the early 4<sup>th</sup> c.) “tetrarchy” or the “rule of the four” held the supreme authority in the Roman Empire and this meant the division of the state into two separate parts, with an emperor and two Caesars ruling each. Rome, Antioch, Alexandria and other major cities were places of headquarters for the magistrates and residences for the Archbishops of the same provinces. The overseers of the Church acted in concert with the lay governors who upheld the formers’ authority and influence. These were favourable circumstances for gaining wealth and power. Eventually, the whole process led minor Churches to being abolished while greater ones broadened the spheres of their influence. The Ecumenical Councils of the 4<sup>th</sup> century announced the autocephaly of minor Churches but they also confirmed the extension of bishops’ scope of authority as of the overseers of the major cities. This process totally embraced the 4<sup>th</sup> century and ended in 451.

At large, for the independent bishoprics the 5<sup>th</sup> century was an age of unification in large patriarchates. The Council of 451 founded a new patriarchate – the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in which the independent bishoprics of Palestine were united.

In the same period (the 5<sup>th</sup> c.) and in the same way was established the Patriarchate of Georgia.

It is a known fact that in all those places, where Christianity gained ground, bishops were appointed overseers of the Churches.

In the Kingdom of Georgia “Saeristavo”, otherwise “Sapitiakhsho” as it is often called, corresponded to “province” in the Roman Empire. Before the establishment of the Patriarchate the supreme hierarch of the Church bore the title of “Archbishop” and evidently, he was the head of the bishops throughout the land which was under the royal authority of the king of Georgia.

Having united all Georgia and having regained the vast lands of Klarjeti and those along the sea coast, King Vakhtang Gorgasali started to settle affairs in the Church. He held the Byzantine Church and the Churches of the East as models in this work.

The Churches in the Eastern Roman Empire and Persia were controlled by state authorities. The shah himself appointed the foremost hierarchs to different Christian Churches in his country. To that a good example would be the Church of Armenia in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Even the supreme legislative body - the Ecumenical Councils, held in Byzantium were conducted with the emperor’s active intervention.

The Church of Georgia was not subordinated to the sovereign’s power but in the 5<sup>th</sup> century King Vakhtang Gorgasali made an attempt to arrange it according to the new Byzantine rules and canons which meant some kind of submission to the royal authority. It is a well-known fact that to this Catholicos Michael answered the king with an abuse – it was a physical insult rendered to him.

Taking advantage of the created political circumstances and referring to the Church Law, the king removed Michael painlessly, without offending the believers, and sent him on trial in Constantinople. Subsequently, the Patriarch of Antioch sent twelve bishops to Kartli. Apparently, King Vakhtang replaced the bishops of Persian orientation by those sent from Greece. He also dismissed the hierarchs who, having gained fortune and power refused to submit to the King’s sovereignty.

Thus, we can summarize that the establishment of the Georgian Patriarchate by King Vakhtang Gorgasali resulted in the broadening of the territories under its jurisdiction as Byzantium returned the lands of Klarjeti (South Georgia) and those of the sea coast (from Tsikhe-Goji up to the Klisura River) to the king.

It was King Vakhtang Gorgasali’s will to organize the Church as a united and centralized Patriarchal Church; and, the title of Catholicos of All Georgia (Gr. Catholicos – “universal”) was conferred on the Bishop of Mtskheta (the capital city of the country). The almost contemporary chronicle of that age “Moktsevai Kartlisai” names Peter as the first Catholicos of all Georgia: “Since then started the supremacy of Catholicoses, and the first Catholicos was Peter”.

## The Sixth Century

Early in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Persia subjugated Georgia and abolished the royal sovereignty over the country. Here, it should be noted that Georgian and Greek sources give diverse records about this abolition.

One of the earliest Georgian chronicles says that in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. the royal sovereignty was not abolished; some Greek sources confirm this assertion. In particular, Procopius of Caesarea states that after Persia and Rome had signed a lasting truce in 552, Georgia was not ruled by a monarch. However, the Byzantine chroniclers Malala and Theophanous mention the Georgian King Dzamanarzo, the queen and the magistrates who visited Constantinople in the year 553 with the purpose of holding negotiations with Justinian Caesar.

Presumably, the Persian conquerors allowed the country to have some kind of autonomy where the dynasty of Gorgasli and Parnavaz was left in power and the political circles of Georgia, refusing to acknowledge the abolition, referred to the person in supreme authority as to “king”. Anyway, it is indisputable that till the 70s and the 90s of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the country was under the rule of Persia and the Georgian national institutions, among them the Georgian Chalcedonic Church, were severely persecuted.

After the total conquest of East Georgia, the Persians made efforts to drive the Greeks off the sea coast of West Georgia. The war for Lazika between Persia and Byzantium ended in the year 563 with a truce, according to which Lazika remained with the Byzantines; Georgia was divided between Byzantium and Persia.

In the 590s Persia lost a considerable part of Iberia (Georgia) and in 591 Persia and Byzantium shared East Georgia also between each other.

In the same century, out of the anti-Byzantine political views Persia favoured Monophysitism, patronized the Church of Armenia and, after having failed to implant Zoroastrianism in the Transcaucasian countries, started to defend this confession in the region. Church authors were commissioned to preach the ideas of Monophysitism and instill in people the necessity of union with Persia. To attain this goal, the king of Persia sent his men with a special errand. They were to promulgate a false legend about the spread of Christianity by one person throughout the three countries – Armenia, Kartli and Albania and also to teach people that the creator of the Armenian, the Georgian and the Albanian alphabets was a man of Persian origin.

Persia’s policy resulted in a long term severe pressure which turned out to be a test for the Armenian hierarchs who fell short to resist the temptation of gaining wealth from the service to the Persian authorities.

These circumstances created a favorable ground for the acknowledgment of Monophysitism (Khachetsar) as their confession and it was declared as such in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> c. by the Armenian Church Council, held in the town of Dvin under the Catholicos Nerses (548-567).

Eventually, the Armenian Church, authorized by Persia, gained the right of supervision over the other Churches in Transcaucasia which also were under Persian rule. Along with these circumstances, in the 7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> century the Arabs supported and strengthened the Armenian Church since they also favoured anti-Chalcedonic and anti-Byzantine orientations.

The Caliphate did all in their power to win over the strong Armenian Church by concessions and every help.

Furthermore, the Armenian Church succeeded to achieve its objective of spreading the influence on the adjoining Georgian and Albanian provinces where consequently the Georgian population assumed the Armenian way of life in the Church because the Holy Service was conducted in this language.

These circumstances were specific for Hereti and Gugarka (South Georgia) where Armenian inscriptions appeared on the walls of churches and on the pages of sacred books. The events of the 7<sup>th</sup> century well describe how the Armenian Church gained superiority over the Georgian community in South Kartli or Gugarka.

Here is one example, illustrating the above mentioned: our great Catholicos Kirion made attempts to restore the Georgian Church Service in Gugarka but it turned out to be totally unacceptable for the Armenian Church and a decision was taken to punish him. The Shah of Persia Khosrov convened a Church Council in 614 which adopted a decree, obligating the Christians of the Persian Empire to receive “the Armenian Christianity”. Catholicos Kirion was compelled to leave the country and flee to Lazika (Trabzon region).

In those hard times, in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century Syrian Fathers came to Georgia and started their ministry. They carried out their unceasing lifelong labour and passed away early in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. If we trace the life in the Church of Georgia from the time of their arrival and up to the end of their work, we will see those fathers as fighters against Monophysitism who won their battle.

According to the Georgian chronicles, in the 540s, before the Syrian Fathers’ arrival Monophysitism had gained steadfast positions. Father Giorgi Mtsire (“Less”) quotes the words of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli (of the Holy Mount): “...like weeds, those wicked Armenian seeds were sown in our country.” The sacred books of the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, translated from Greek, with precision were retranslated and reedited in conformity with Armenian theological literature. It was done under the influence of the Armenian Church in the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

During their thirty-year-old ministry, the Syrian Fathers attained to a complete victory of the Chalcedonic confession. Moreover, this victory provided a theoretical basis for the falling of the Georgian Church away from the Armenian. And, it happened when the Armenian clergy made attempts to spread their language and culture throughout the Iranian Transcaucasia. Therefore the labour of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers strengthened the national foundation of Georgian culture and thereby averted the danger of national and cultural degeneration of our people.

Diverse opinions exist about the national background of the Fathers. Some scholars think they were of Georgian origin. There is no definite answer to this question but one thing is certain - they promoted the Georgian language, considering it patronized by the All Holy Mother of God. “The Life of Ioane Zedazneli” (the leader of the Assyrian Fathers) says that he had not known Georgian prior to that ministry, neither had he heard about the existence of this country. But on the order of the Mother of God, he, St. Shio and others of his disciples were given the utterance of this language like the Holy Apostles who were given the same gift of speaking languages in that ancient time. They conducted the Church Services in this language and even wrote theological books. “Kartlis Tskovreba” describes the event of

meeting of the Assyrian Fathers with the Catholicos who received them on their arrival – the Fathers answered his welcoming words in Georgian. Apart from this, the Assyrian Fathers recognized Georgian as the language of the Chalcedonic confession since it was already considered the national religion in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. As the scholar K. Kekelidze observes, the Syrian Fathers led their ministry in the monasteries and adds that “there is no evidence of the existence of monasteries in the true sense of the word prior to the Thirteen Fathers. These Fathers were their first founders in this country.” ( K. Kekelidze, “The History of Old Georgian Literature”. Book I. p 88) However, King Vakhtang Gorgasali had established one in Klarjeti and the Georgians had had several in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land as well. In one of them, which bore the name of Monk Ioane Lazi, were found the first Georgian inscriptions.

Thus, we can summarize that the Syrian Fathers saved the Church of Georgia from the disastrous danger of Monophysitism or Armenian confession as it was called then, whereby making their major contribution in the life of the Church.

## **The Seventh Century**

The 6<sup>th</sup> century was most difficult for the Church as well as for the state. Nevertheless, it should be particularly noted that the Georgian national institutions did not recognize the abolition of statehood and considered this disaster of the age as temporal conditions which would improve shortly. The Church exercised her jurisdiction throughout the whole land. The language for the Divine Service was Georgian till the 7<sup>th</sup> century, excluding Tao and part of Klarjeti where, early in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Armenian was favoured by Persian authorities. The integrity of the country is also felt in the architectural similarity of the buildings belonging to the Church in both West and East Georgia. “Kartlis Tskhovreba” and “Moktsevai Kartlisai”, also some other sources permanently confirm that Georgia was a politically integral kingdom. The unity was based on the ethnic integrity of the nation. According to the above mentioned chronicles, all the land from Egritkhali to Hereti inclusive was settled by the Georgian people. In the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries East and West Georgia, taken together, were called “All Kartli”.

The end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century were marked with an overall revival. The restoration of King Vakhtang Gorgasali’s realm started with the reestablishment of the Georgian public institutions. But the campaign against Georgia, started by Heracles Caesar, did not allow the country to accomplish the process of renewal.

This revival frightened the Caesar as Georgia was a permanent rival of Rome and later, of the Greco-Roman Empire in the Caucasus. For this reason he severely avenged on the people of Georgia and massacred many Christians in the churches in East Georgia; as the chronicles have “the churches witnessed the blood-both of believers”. Heracles took over a considerable part of the territories along the Black Sea coast. However, his attitude towards the Armenian Church was totally different (sources speak about his Armenian origin). Due to flexible

approaches in her policy, the Church of Armenia was commendable to Byzantium and Heracles Caesar, after having defeated Persia, signed a treaty of alliance with her.

After the Roman campaign in Georgia, the Armenian Church returned to the Chalcedonic confession and put forth claims on the supremacy over the Georgian and the Albanian Churches. The leaders of the Church had to appeal to the Patriarch of Antioch, seeking his confirmation to the Autocephaly of the Georgian Church which would guarantee her defense against any kind of claims on predomination over her.

By that time, the sixth Ecumenical Council was convened. “Kartlis Tskhovreba” reports that the Council, held in 680-681 in Constantinople, considered the issue of the Church of Georgia, conferred on her foremost hierarch the title of Patriarch or successor to the Apostolic Throne, determined the boundaries of the territorial autocephaly of the Church and confirmed her right to sanctify the chrism in her country. The same chronicle reports that all the Caucasus was brought under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Church.

To conclude, the Patriarchate of Georgia was established in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and existed till the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The Eighth Century**

Early in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Arab conquest brought extreme hardship and tough social conditions to Georgia. Therefore, the country was unable to mitigate the power of foreign Churches, existing in Georgia. The Church of Armenia once again made attempts to broaden the scope of her influence over South Georgia. However, at the Council of Manaskert, held in 726, the Armenian clergy declared Monophysitism as the only confession their Church would adhere to, rejecting both Monotelitism and the Chalcedonic confession and terminated their contacts with Byzantium. Remaining steadfast in the Chalcedonic confession, this event gave opportunity to the Georgian Church to break up all the relationships with the Armenian Church.

The eighth century is the age of liberation for Georgian culture. Although the political circumstances were still complicated, the releasing of the Church and of the people from the Armenian influence and the renaissance of culture started on straight away. In the succeeding centuries, the treasury of the Church of Georgia – Hymnography developed without impediment. This is the age of Abo Tbileli (commemorated on January 7<sup>th</sup>) and the Princes of Argveti David and Constantine Mkheidzes (commemorated on March 20<sup>th</sup>) who shone forth as lights with their martyrdom in this land, accepting it from the Arab conquerors.

According to the Georgian historical sources, in the 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries all Georgia was called Kartli. She had secure frontiers with the adjoining kingdoms. Egrisi – in the west, Hereti – in the east and the Fortress of Tukharisi and Klarjeti – in the south were the furthestmost areas of the land. The name “Kartli” was applied to all Georgia. Therefore the Patriarchate of Kartli executed its jurisdiction both in East and West Georgia since the day of its foundation, i.e.,



from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. As for the Church of Georgia, she executed her authority throughout the country since the day of her establishment, i.e., from the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

In the 80s and the 90s of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the kingdom split into three parts: Abkhazeti, Kartli and Kakhet-Hereti. If “Kartli” had been the name of all Georgia prior to this, now West Georgia was referred to by the name “Abkhazeti” in its stead. But before those times, “Abkhazeti” had been the name of the lands beyond the Klisura (or Kelasuri) River which were subordinated to Byzantium. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the country beyond the Kelasuri River gained independence from the Greeks. The prince of this region Leon I got married to Princess Gurandukht who was the daughter of King Mir of Kartli. The king had no sons; his brother King Archill accepted martyrdom under the Arab conquerors. The princess governed her domain West Georgia by the hand of her husband, Leon I. Therefore the land was called “**Abkhazeti**” after the name of the ruling dynasty.

The foundation of the independent “Kingdom of Abkhazians” was followed by the establishment of the autocephalous Church and this fact was consistent with the Church Law.

Thus, beginning from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, two Catholicosates coexisted in Georgia, – one of Abkhazeti and the other of Mtskheta (or Kartli). The Catholicos of the latter was considered senior, while that of the former – junior. In 730, South Georgia was devastated by Murvan Kru (Deaf), an Arab conqueror. People pertinently called him “Deaf” because of the atrocities he committed while their outcry never moved him. After his withdrawal, the monasteries of Opiza started to revive in Klarjeti. The restoration of monasticism in South Georgia had begun before St. Grigol of Khandzta appeared in the spiritual life of Tao-Klarjeti; he built monasteries throughout Khandzta and Shatberdi, founded convents in Mere and Gunatle. His disciples established many more among which the most outstanding was the monastery of Ishkhani; they also founded a bishopric in this area. The construction of monasteries started in Baretelta, Tskharostavi, Nedzvi.

In West Georgia, St. Grigol founded the Monastery of Ubisa. About fifty years had passed in all this labour, before St. Grigol of Khandzta was consecrated as Archimandrite of the local monasteries. He applied the typikon of Sabatsminda (the Holy Lavra of St. Savas of Jerusalem) to the life and ministry in his monasteries; he also compiled a selection of hymnography called “Iadigari” (Eng. “Yearly”).

Another historical fact would add to the standing of the Georgian Church of those times: Iconoclasm upset the peace in the Church of Greece for almost a century. Veneration of icons was declared idolatry and was persecuted by the Byzantine Caesars and the clergy. Putting in prison and death penalty were frequently used forms of punishment. The Church of Georgia was among the few who adhered to the tradition and never rejected the veneration of icons. Gothia terminated all contacts with Constantinople, too. As Greek sources also prove, the Bishop of Gothia was consecrated in Iberia.

## From the Ninth to the Tenth Centuries

In the 9<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> centuries Georgia regained freedom. She was not dependant on the Arabs or other invaders. Independence enabled her to have her own principalities of Abkhazia, Tao-Klardjeti and Kakhet-Hereti. This process involved the revival of national culture - writers of religious books and composers of hymns appeared. Among them were Ioane Minchkhi – from West Georgia, Epiphane of Khandzta (the 8<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> cc.), Makari Luteteli of Khandzta and Sabatsminda (the 9<sup>th</sup> c.), Basil of Khandzta (the 9<sup>th</sup> c.), Giorgi Merchule (the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cc.) , Michael Modrekili (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), Ioane Mtbevari (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), Ezra (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), Ioane Konkorisdze (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), Kurdanai-Kvirike (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.). It was the time of thrive in hymnography. Authors made up songs, heirmoses, compiled selections of hymns. In those centuries lived and worked St. Nino's hymnographer I (the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cc.), St. Nino's hymnographer II (the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cc.), the hymnographer of St. Constanti Kakhi (the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cc.), Samuel Mgalobeli, the writer Ioane of Bolnisi (the 9<sup>th</sup> c.), St. Nino's hymnographer III (the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cc.), Mskhemi of Zedazeni (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), the hymnographers of David of Gareji (the 9<sup>th</sup>-the 10<sup>th</sup> cc.), Iovane Minchkhi (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), Stephanoz of Chkhondidi (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.), the author of "Abukura" (the 9<sup>th</sup> c.), Giorgi of Sabatsminda and of Sinai, Ioane-Zosime, Philip of Bethlehem (the 10<sup>th</sup> c.). To these centuries are related selections of hymnography, called Iadigari (Eng. "Yearly") which was compiled in Palestine. It was the time when the Georgian language developed to its uttermost.

Two Catholicosates coexisted in Georgia in these centuries. In the year 830, King Bagrat III (Curopalate) recognized this duality and appointed the Catholicos to the Church of Abkhazia.

It was the legal formation of the Catholicosate of Abkhazia which brought about the question of sanctifying the chrism. According to the decision of the Church Council of 451 which was to be applied to all the Churches, two options were considered – either the Catholicos of Abkhazia was to be empowered to sanctify it or the Church was to receive it from another, supreme Church. Eprem Mtsire states that the chrism had been sanctified in Georgia since the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Giorgi Merchule, the author of "The Life of Grigol of Khandzta" says in his book that the new Church unit which had emerged on the territory between the Lake of Van and Arzrum, received the chrism from Jerusalem but later, on the decision of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Catholicosate of Kartli assumed the responsibility to provide this area with it as West Georgia had been part of Kartli from primordial times: "For initially the Catholicoses of the East (Abkhazia) would bring the chrism from Jerusalem, but on the order of Christ Jesus, Patriarch Eprem established the sanctification of the chrism with the confirmation and order of the Patriarch of Jerusalem since Kartli (Georgia) is the entire land where matins and every prayer is offered in the Georgian language". We presume this is the correct interpretation of the ancient text.

The Georgian language was maintained as Liturgical until the 20s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia abolished the Georgian Patriarchate.

In the year 978, under King Bagrat III, Georgia was reunified and the Kingdom of Iberia or Kartli revived once again. The cornerstone of this process was the exalted national consciousness of the people and their unceasing yearn for it.

## The Eleventh Century

In the 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the nation's aspiration to the renewal and restoration of the integral Georgian Kingdom was so strong that up to the 8<sup>th</sup> century public reason did not acknowledge the split and Kartli was still considered an entire state which extended from the Black Sea to Bardava. Although, following the 8<sup>th</sup> century, there were Kingdoms of Abkhazia, Tao-Klarjeti, Kakheti and Hereti, each of these Georgian states sought to reconstruct ancient Iberia by reunifying the territories into an entire land.

In 978, under King Bagrat III Kartli was restored, Georgia was reunified. In 1010 the king joined the regions of Kakheti and Hereti to his realm. Thereby, the Iberian state of the house of Parnavazids and Khosroids, founded by King Parnavas in the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., was reestablished. Prior to this event, as it was already mentioned above, the Georgian Church still consisted of two administrative units, the so-called Catholicosates - of Kartly and of Abkhazia. They were gaining strength intensively. The Liturgical language in Abkhazia was solely Georgian up to the 20s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (before the so-called Church rebellion in Imereti). Shortly after the reunification, the two Catholicosates united in one patriarchate and the title "Patriarch of the East" was conferred on Melchizedek I. "The East" implied vast territories under its jurisdiction, including North Caucasus up to Lake Van.

Melchizedek was a relative and pupil of King Bagrat III whom the king himself had brought up. On taking the office, he did not delay his visit to the emperor's court in Constantinople. Obviously, the objective of the visit was to gain Constantinople's recognition of the Patriarch's primate in the Church of Georgia.

Constantinople acknowledged the primate of the Patriarch and handed over a rich monastery with 105 villages as a present to the Patriarchal centre Svetitskhoveli and to the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia Melchizedek. Historical documents of the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries testify this event.

On Melchizedek's request, the Arab Emir of Tbilisi Ali exempted the Church from taxes in the Tbilisi Emirate.

On King Bagrat's decease, a war between the Byzantine Empire and Georgia broke out. It was not a war of episodic collisions, rather it was a wide-scale warfare which lasted several decades and in which the emperors of the Byzantine Empire and the kings of Georgia participated personally. The war started in 1021 under Basil II and ended in the reign of Constantine Monomach, in 1054. This is the period when in Georgia Giorgi I was King and Bagrat IV succeeded him. Under the latter, the war ended and a peace truce was signed.

Basil Caesar hoped the Georgian state would not withstand his attacks and would fall but the Church of Georgia supported her land and led the people's rebellion against the invaders in the areas, conquered by the enemy.

In those times, Byzantium and its emperors were looked upon as the pillars of Christendom. People venerated them as performers of God's will. It is probable that out of this esteem, part of the Georgians turned away and took their side. Had the clergy not taken a sober action to arouse the common people, the enemy would have taken advantage of their sincere belief.

The steadfast fidelity of the Georgian Church in this war kindled the wrath of the Byzantine court. She was declared a heterodox Church of heretics and, not long after, it was followed by a persecution of the Georgian monasteries and monks all over the empire. Many primordial rights of the Georgian Church were brought into question.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Byzantium considered the Armenian Church heretical. In the southern parts of Georgia, the Church still bore traces of its influence and this precise fact was underscored by the Byzantine ideologues as the reason of doubt as to the right confession of the Georgian theologians.

But, it fact no “weed”, which would have profaned the Georgian Orthodox Church, was in it. The Greeks assumed the translation of sacred books as such. Nevertheless, we do not accept this opinion because a Church cannot be considered non-Orthodox only for the reason that books were translated or edited from Armenian, of necessity.

“Accusers” and “reproaches” were to be found among both Georgians and Greeks. They denounced the Georgian versions because they were not written in the similar vein to the Byzantine, widespread at that time. Early in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the number of “accusers” and “reproaches” increased all the more due to the war between Byzantium and Georgia.

With extreme precision, Ekvtime and Giorgi Mtatsmindelis and their school revised the already existed translations of the Scriptures and kept them consistent to the utmost with the Greek sources in order to exclude the reasons for the Georgians’ persecution.

Starting from the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, being a powerful state, the Byzantine Empire encountered coexistence with the unified Georgian Kingdom implausible.

However, in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, things changed drastically in the external as well as in the internal life of Byzantium. The Turkish invasion caused the empire to suffer crisis and this brought about the necessity of the revision of their attitude towards Georgia. A new age, when Byzantium would need a loyal state, dependant on its influence, had started. Therefore, three-year negotiations (1054-1057) led the two countries to a peace truce.

During the negotiations, the purpose of the Georgian ruling authorities, apart from the political matters, was to achieve the recognition of the Patriarchal primate in the Georgian Church by both Byzantium and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The first successful gain of the Georgian party was a cessation of the severe persecution of the Georgian monks in the empire and specifically in Iviron. The party was very representative. King Bagrat IV and Queen Mariam arrived in Constantinople with nobility, magistrates and prominent statesmen. Seeking to set in order things in the Church, Giorgi Mtatsmindeli, appreciated as the supreme authority of those times, left Mount Athos to join them and attend the rounds of negotiations.

From Constantinople he went to Antioch and to Jerusalem. With him the Patriarch of Antioch Peter III had a special discussion of the issues on the Church Law and true faith. Giorgi Mtatsmindeli convinced him that the establishment of the Georgian Patriarchate was not at variance with the Church Law, and respectively, it did not profane the true faith; and the Patriarch of Antioch conferred with him more intensively. Being amazed at Giorgi’s lofty spirituality and learning, he took him into his confidence, entrusting him with the arrangement of things in the Patriarchate of Antioch and often heard his admonition even on the matters of his personal life.

Under Peter III the Council of Antioch was convened at which the Patriarchal primate in the Church of Georgia was recognized. This act put an end to the persecution of the Georgian churches and monks throughout the empire. However, it would relapse at times until 1057.

Patriarch Peter III did not live long. Shortly after the council, in 1057, He died. Giorgi Mtatsmindeli had talks with his successor. Patriarch Theodosius, instigated by Greek monks, declared to him that the Church of Georgia was to be subordinated to the Church of Antioch and warned that if she didn't, the persecution would continue.

The Patriarch grounded his demand on the theory of "Pentarchy" which maintained that autocephalous was only the Church where the Apostles had preached. The Church of Antioch was considered to have been founded by the Apostle Peter while they assumed none of the Apostles had been to Georgia.

Giorgi Mtatsmindeli attested that the Georgian Church had been established by the Apostle Andrew and that Simeon the Zealot was buried in this land. This Church was original by itself. Further, he followed the Patriarch's argumentations and asserted that if subordination was in question, Antioch had to be subordinated to the Church of Georgia as Andrew the First-Called was the first among the disciples whom Christ called and Peter was his brother whom he brought to Christ.

The Patriarch was convinced conclusively that the Apostles preached in Georgia and Giorgi Mtatsmindeli's answer rendered logical reasoning to his judgment.

Thus, in 1054-1057, the Byzantine Patriarchate acknowledged the autocephaly of the Church of Georgia and stopped the lawless persecution.

# **The Church of Georgia in the Second Period**

## **From the Ruis-Urbnisi Church Council to the Abolition of Autocephaly**

**(From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century)**

### **The Twelfth Century**

Events of paramount significance took place in Georgia in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1089 the sixteen-year-old Prince David, afterwards called “Agmashenebeli” (“Builder”), acceded to the throne. He inherited a land of grave conditions; a long period of Turkish raids had left Georgia devastated. Tbilisi had been a seat of Arab emirs for 400 years; Kakheti had seceded and been transformed into an independent country; internal discords had prevailed; powerful feudal lords sought to weaken the king’s sovereignty.

In the year 1103, the Ruis-Urbnisi Council declared the Church of Georgia single and supportive of the royal sovereignty.

Authority over the fundamental state institutions (internal, financial, military affairs) was vested with the king’s immediate vizier - Mtsignobartukhutsesi, called otherwise Chkhondideli (the king’s chancellor) who, at the same time, was Bishop of the Chkhondidi diocese. The royal army also lay under his authority. Chkhondideli was the only magistrate who counseled the king about the declaration of war; at times, he participated in battles. Under Chkhondideli’s command the city-fortress of Samshvilde was released from the enemy in the year 1110; the victory in this battle was followed by the liberation of the major fortresses in Kvemo Kartli. The loss of Samshvilde was a shock for the Turks. The sultan sent an army of one hundred thousand, but King David withstood them and the enemy fled. Bishop Giorgi of Chkhondidi took over the town of Rustavi in the year 1115. King David and Chkhondideli accomplished the settling of the Kipchacks in Georgia. The army, formed from these people guarded the boundaries of the kingdom and participated in campaigns. Their

settlements extended along the borders in the contemporary Armenia and Azerbaijan (near to Shirvan). Therefore these people never mingled with the native Georgians.

Every victory of King David was the victory of Christianity and it aimed at vanquishing its enemies. The king supported the Crusaders in every way at the start of their campaign. Being a faithful Christian, King David always abided in hope on the Lord. So it was in the battle of Didgori too, when the Turks, as innumerable as the sands in the sea, gathered to fight the Georgian warriors; their troops were concentrated in Trialeti, Manglisi and Didgori. It was the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 1121. According to some sources, the army of 600 000 were stationed in these lands and no place to set foot on was left. The fearless king, immovable in his heart, put his army in battle formation opposite the enemy's.

The chronicler recounts that the Turks retreated after the first clash and later fled from the battle field. The Most High God preserved David, and St. Martyr George, visibly for everyone, led the army and the king. The battle is known to have lasted three hours. The Turks could not even withstand the Georgians' very first attack. The following year, King David liberated Tbilisi from the 400-year-old Arab oppression.

On the one hand, as an outstanding political leader of a strong willpower and wisdom, with a talent of organizing military and administrative affairs, he established a powerful centralized state; and on the other hand, being a highly educated person, he held in esteem scholars and scientists. Honesty, truthfulness and fidelity were the highest values for him. His preceptor Arsen of Ikhalto, the most illustrious person among the clergy, bore all these virtues in his character. Books were the king's inseparable friends. He maintained unceasing contacts with monks, gained a profound knowledge of theology and knew very well theological works.

David the Builder brought peace to the country, replenished and reconstructed the ruined. His age surpassed all times with peace and prosperity. He embraced a pious love of God and discerned it as the mother of wisdom. The king had a deep love for the Holy Scriptures. The Old and New Testaments were his spiritual food. Servants with mules and camels, loaded with books, attended to him always and everywhere; on dismounting from the horse, promptly they would bring them to him and the king read till the nightfall; he read even when at war, in his free time. Prayer and fasting were his way of life. Improper songs, performances, carousing, offensive language, hated by the Lord, and all kinds of misconduct were forbidden even in the army.

On Mount Sinai, where Moses and Elijah beheld God, the king built a monastery and sent an abundant offering of gold.

He would give out generously but not from the royal treasury; he helped the needy with his own property.

Monasteries and lavras were released from debts and even the elders of his kingdom were granted relief on taxes so that they could labour in the Lord without impediment.

God had endued him with a gift of perceiving every deed and word of men, whether good or evil and no one among the young or the old dared to betray or be disloyal to him. So also the hierarchs, priests, deacons, monks and nuns and every man in the land were trustworthy in their deeds. Honesty, legality, decency were primary virtues.

Once, Armenian bishops appealed to the king, asking to convoke an assembly where speakers would put forth their arguments in defense of their confessions. They also suggested that if the Armenians sustained defeat, they would accept the unity in faith and renounce their

confession; but if they won, they demanded that an order, forbidding everyone to call them heretics or condemn them, be issued. King David convoked the assembly where Catholicos Ioane of Kartli, bishops, hermits of deserts, Arsen Ikaltoeli and many other scholarly people and wise men were called to.

The debate started at dawn and lasted till nine o'clock in the evening. A tedious process of arguing the point was interrupted by the king with the following words: "You, fathers, as philosophers, penetrate obscure depths and discern the imperceptible which we, unlearned people and laymen cannot comprehend. You know that I have been brought up as a military man and scholarly knowledge and science transcend my understanding. Therefore I will tell you in simple and plain words"... and the parables which concluded these words left no room for the Armenians' argumentations.

The king answered them like Basil the Great who once silenced pagans at Athens. The heretics admitted the defeat.

The chronicler describes King David as "a paragon of virtue, admired by his enemies."

David the Builder reigned 36 years. Like the biblical King David who abdicated in favor of his son Solomon, he crowned with a crown of precious stones his son Demeter, who, in everyway, took after him; arraying him in purple, he girded his waist with his own sword, which had brought glory to him, and blessed him. Thus, the king gave up the earthly life to gain the Heavenly Kingdom, the abode of relief and joy, where there is no sorrow but life which cannot be overshadowed by death.

The glorious king died in the year 1125, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January.

Demeter I, David V and Giorgi III, the three successive kings differed from each other by moral and social standards they adhered to. Neither did they share political viewpoints. Nevertheless, the structure of the relationship between the state and the Church was maintained without alteration. However, the periods of the three kings were followed by the age of Queen Tamar (1178-1213) when all this took another shape, particularly in the early years of her reign. Here, we should mark out several major points.

Starting from the time of David the Builder, until Queen Tamar's accedence to the throne, magistrates had been appointed according to the candidates' personal virtues. Hereditary rights and class-affiliation were not taken into the consideration. Likewise, Giorgi III had chosen his loyal and deserving people from lower ranks. But now, under Queen Tamar the nobles protested their subordination to the former magistrates Khubasar and Apridon appealing to the queen with a request to confiscate their property and deprive them of their posts. Queen Tamar made concessions.

Rivalry between the people of titles for the vacant high offices started off. The queen gave prevalence to the Mkhargrdzelis. Particularly, were promoted Zacharia, Ivane, Sargis and Avag Mkhargrdzelis.

According to the chronicler, Ioane Mkhargrdzeli was put in the position of Atabagi on his request. But, later he was disloyal to the country through negligence. Nor were the other Mkhargrdzelis faithful in fulfilling their duty to the Motherland.

Many of the rights and powers, which had been held by Mtsignobartukhutsesi-Chkondideli, were shifted to the Atabagis, particularly, the power structures such as armed forces and internal forces. To follow the chronicler's words, if prior to these changes the bishop –chancellor had been called "king's father," now the Atabags were presumed as ones.



In the period of Georgia's reunification, Chkondideli (the king's chancellor) selflessly sought to create an integral Georgian state, whereas after the institution of the post of Atabagi, the unified Georgia disintegrated. Envy and treason prevailed over the consolidation of Chkondideli's times. The four Mkhargrdzelis and their descendants failed to replace the chancellor.

Purportedly, the clergy of the Orthodox Church were discontented with the promotion of a Monophysite to the office of Commander-in-Chief at the royal court. Apparently, the Catholicos as well as the nobility of the old kingdom were aware that the high standing of Monophysites could be fraught with a political failure of the state. According to the historian N. Berdzenishvili, so it happened, and Queen Tamar's son King Lasha-Giorgi (1213-1222) tried to improve this drawback. The king adhered to centrist political tendencies. Having removed all the Mkhargrdzelis from their posts, he sought the restoration of the powerful sovereignty of the times of David the Builder and his immediate descendants.

Lasha-Giorgi wished to follow in David the Builder's footsteps. But, he was vehemently defeated by the exalted nobles Atabagi and Mkhargrdzelis who defamed him by the slander that he was a weak-willed person of low morality. Lasha-Giorgi died young and his sister Rusudan, being supported by them, succeeded him.

Here, it should be noticed that Zacharia Mkhargrdzeli was a Curt by nationality, a Monophysite by confession and a Georgian military leader and statesman.

While describing Queen Tamar's life and reign, we should mark out her achievements in the foreign policy and in the domestic affairs, also her humanity which were rooted in the spiritual heritage of King David the Builder and were cherished by the state.

David the Builder's will and his "Payers of Repentance" ("Galobani Sinanulisani") were known to his following generations. Moreover, their fulfillment was obviously taken as the responsibility of every statesman, particularly of Queen Tamar. This will of the king was chosen as criterion by the queen's historian Basil Ezosmodzgvani when he described and appraised her life and work.

Queen Tamar released the neighbouring kingdoms from the Muslim rule but she did not join them to her realm; rather she gave them the status of dependant countries which were to pay tribute to her and had the right of maintaining the sovereignty to their royal houses. She even endowed the impoverished kings with wealth.

Prior to King David's time, the Georgian people had been the target of aggression for other nations and this had made them direct their efforts towards gaining independence and attaining reunification. However, on creating a most powerful integral state in the entire Caucasus, they refused to conquer the lands beyond their borders, revealing the deepest love, inward warmth and kindness. Such was Queen Tamar's state policy which, as we mentioned above, was rooted in David's policy of humanism.

Non-Georgian peoples responded to Tamar's policy with wondrous admiration. She was loved not only by the Georgians but by the other peoples of the Caucasus, especially by those, living in the mountains of North Caucasus.

The tithe of the state income, apportioned for the benefit of the impoverished was implicitly observed in her kingdom. It should be noted too that the tithe for the poor had been traditional in Georgia even prior to King David the Builder. But, Queen Tamar as well as King David supported the poor from their own property, from what they gained with their

own handwork, also. Interestingly, she made a distinction between her private property and that of the state, whereas in feudal countries, at large, this kind of difference was never known.

As the chronicler says, she brought appeasement to the community. Punishment by lashing and by chopping of parts off the body was banned. Death penalty was abolished.

The queen's attitude to other confessions should be recognized as an outstanding exhibition of her humanism.

The country expanded and flourished, gained fame and glory but her personality never yielded to pride.

Queen Tamar's policy diverged from that of King David's but it was not unexpected since the Christian morality was its cornerstone and moreover, its theoretical source had been provided by David himself - by his deeds, by his well-known will and "Prayers of Repentance". In these works he repents that he has fallen short of following a more humane policy in his life; but Tamar succeeded.

The Georgian society accepted David the Builder's viewpoint on the political order of the state as a fundamental plan and his will. Due to this recognition, Queen Tamar, seeking to fulfill it, placed the whole state system under its accomplishment.

## **The Thirteenth Century**

The prosperous country of Queen Tamar was conquered by the Mongols. But the incursion of Jalhal-Ad-Din Khan of Khorezm and destruction of Tbilisi preceded this conquest.

Jalhal-Ad-Din invaded Georgia in 1225 when Queen Rusudan was on the throne. She appointed the Atabagi Ivane Mkhargrdzeli as Commander-in-Chief of the army. The battle took place near the Georgian village of Garnisi (now the territory of Armenia). The Georgian army sustained a defeat which was an outcome of envy and enmity among high-rank officers.

Shalva and Ivane Akhaltsikhelis led the advanced regiments of Meskhetians in this war. Not once the Commander-in-Chief was asked to send additional forces to help resist the attack but Mkhargrdzeli did not heed their call for help. Ivane Akhaltsikheli was killed in battle, Shalva was taken captive. Jalhal-AD-Din did not kill him on his capture, welcomed him as an honourable guest and tried to coax him into renouncing his faith; but his persuasions were futile. Shalva, after having endured much suffer, accepted the death of a martyr and received the crown of a saint.

As the chronicler has, this battle was the starting point of Georgia's fall and destruction by the Khorezmians and later, by the Mongols. The total Georgian army were not present in the war of Garnisi; not numerous part of it solely found themselves abandoned by the main forces and were led by the Akhaltsikhelis to face the enemy, countless as they were.

The Commander-in-Chief Mkhargrdzeli fled to his own estate. Shanshe Mkhargrdzeli Mandaturtukhuthsesi (the provost marshal) only defended his own patrimony Anisi. Varlam Gageli, who also was Mkhargrdzeli, concluded a truce with the enemy. The rest of the regions of the land were devastated frightfully.

Jalhal-AD-Din's troops besieged Tbilisi. Queen Rusudan fled to Kutaisi leaving the commanders Botso and Bidzina with a regiment to guard the city. Then, the native Persians treacherously opened the city gates to the enemy and Tbilisi turned into an arena of the war. The merciless enemy massacred the townsfolk. Jalhal-AD-Din ordered to take the dome off the Sioni Cathedral and had an abominable throne put in its place. On his order, the holy icons of the Lord our God Jesus Christ and of the Most Holy Mother of God were taken out of Sioni Church, put at the starting edge of the bridge and Christian captives were to tread over them. Those who refused to do their will were killed. Martyred on that day were 100000 in number. But, the Lord our God protected Georgia and did not abandon His flock the Georgian people, showing His mercy on them in those hard times.

Starting from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the united Mongol state of Genghis Khan conquered a considerable part of Asia and Europe – North China, Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and other countries. The Georgian chronicler reports that the Mongols invaded the lands of the Kipchaks, Khazars, Osetians and Russia and reached as far as the dark lands. He calls “dark lands” the zone of North Pole. In the West, they came close to the centers of Europe – as far as the lands of the Bulgarians and those of the Serbs.

It is an incredulous but sheer fact that having as powerful a state as theirs, the Mongols could not subjugate the whole of Georgia or abolish the Georgian statehood; they never conquered West Georgia where, owing to these circumstances, the royal court was shifted to. In the time of the Mongol conquest Queen Rusudan was the sovereign. The scholar I. Javakhishvili describes her as an inexperienced person with no appropriate virtues to govern the country.

Could the supreme authorities of the state and the Commander-in-Chief fight the war up to the end and repel the enemy? Evidently, they could. Despite the latter's uttermost attempts to expend on the lands of West Georgia, they could never tread over its boundaries, and it is another prove of it.

As a matter of fact, the Mongols subjugated East Georgia without any obstruction. In that hard time, the Church of Georgia considered it indispensable to help to the appeasement of the nation. The Bishop of Chkhondidi determined to reunify Georgia in an integral country. Around 1242, Queen Rusudan sent Arsen Chkondideli-Mtsignobartukhutsesi to the regions of the Volga River to hold negotiations with Bati Khan.

The talks were successfully concluded with a treaty, by virtue of which the Mongols acknowledged the supreme authority of the Georgian king (queen) over the indivisible Georgian Kingdom. East Georgia undertook certain obligations, while West Georgia, as an unconquered side, was free of any. Nonetheless, all Georgia was laid under tribute.

In the year 1259, Tbilisi was the seat of two kings, one of whom was David Narini Queen Rusudan's son. This king rose against the Mongols and subsequently fled to West Georgia. Since then, the lands of West Georgia came from under the Mongols' dominion and her rulers maintained the former Georgian state policy.

Sadly, in the Mongols' time the country had been split into three parts – East Georgia, West Georgia and South Georgia. Nonetheless, the Church continued to maintain the country as total. This precise fact inspired the Georgian people to observe Derbent and Nikopsia as the borders of their Motherland. Here, it should be noted also that the real frontier of East Georgia lay along the “White River” ( or the Akhshu River) which was only in 60 or 70 kilometers from Derbent and the Caspian Sea. This river was the eastern border of the ethnic Georgian settlements not only in the Mongols' time, but it had been such in the centuries prior to it. As for instance, when in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Kakheti and Hereti united, their lands extended up to the Akhshu River. The region was densely populated and its inhabitants were Georgians, particularly, belonging to one of the tribes Herians. Later, the Mongols expanded their pastures over the adjoining lands and this made them leave their homes; those who remained, eventually, sustained degeneration.

The border of South Georgia lay along the River Araks (Rakhs). Anisi and Dvin were considered Georgian cities yet. Tao also belonged to Georgia. The rebels of Tao were mentioned among the conspirators of Kokhtastavi.

Under Prince Beka Jakheli even the land of Chaneti, which Byzantium had returned back, was within the boundaries of Georgia. The Jakhelis, princes of Samtskhe and their families were true Christians, pious believers who respected the clergy, bishops and monks. Prince Beka Jakheli built monasteries and churches, held in esteem monks and priests. Always present at matins, Holy Liturgies and vespers, he demanded from his army to follow the same order, and God was merciful to him.

The Black Sea itself up to Nikopsia (Tuapse) was the border of West Georgia.

In the most ruthless century of the Mongol violence the Georgian people could retain the frontiers of the kingdom, statehood and sense of ethnic unity, while their neighbours lost the ethnic character under their rule. The nomads could not settle down in Georgia while the territories near her - Ran, Mugan, Shirvan and also the lands of Armenia served them for winter and summer camps. Our neighbours - the Albanians, lost their self-awareness due to the Seljuk Turks' invasions and disappeared completely under the Mongols; as for the Armenian refugees, they found shelter in Georgia and also in other countries.

It must be underscored that the Georgian people opposed the Mongol tyranny with the high order of Christian morals, the core of which was the love of the neighbour, mutual help and self- sacrifice. Many Georgians lay their lives for the faith, their friends and the homeland. Not only ordinary people defended their king and the country in this way but also kings sacrificed their lives to their people's survival.

It may be believed that the Georgians brought this sacrifice, expecting to be worthy of inheriting eternal life from Christ, and it is true of the end of the Mongol rule. However, at the initial stage, they did not persecute the Christians (they were not Muslim then). Therefore self-sacrifice for the sake of faith was the virtue indispensable for the later period. Under Kazan-Khan (1295-1304) Islam was established as the state religion of the Mongols. Soon the word “Tatar” assumed a new meaning which broadened its sense from “Mongol” to “Muslim”, in general. Interestingly, according to the chronicler's account, they started the persecution on the instigation from the Persians.

The devotion of King Demeter II (1270-1289) to his people is an outstanding historical fact. The king followed the Mongols' custom and had three wives. Monk Basil condemned

this conduct but he did not heed his words. And, the monk prophesied to the king that if he did not accept his warning to turn away from his sinful life, he would lose the throne and his children would be dispersed. In the hard times for his people, the love of his Motherland overpowered all the rest in the king's heart and he sacrificed his life to the essential objective of his royal obligation – rescue of his own people. King Demeter went to the Golden Horde of his own volition and was arrested right upon his arrival. While awaiting the death sentence, he had a chance to escape. His faithful people counseled him to take good horses and flee for there was no one who would replace him in his realm, but he answered: “Heed my words, I have laid my life and my soul for my people although I know death awaits me here. Now if I flee, the people will suffer massacre and what will I gain if I obtain the world but destroy my soul.”

Arghun, who on March 12<sup>th</sup>, (26)1289 executed the king beheading him, a few years later, being weak with ill health, was strangled on the same day (March 12<sup>th</sup>) and at the same hour.

Precisely, for the virtue of devotion and mutual love the Mother of God saved the Georgian army in the battle of Alamut. It is a well-known fact that the fight for the fortress of Alamut turned out tough for the Mongols and the war lasted for seven years. The Georgian army was also involved in it. The owners of the fortress were Moulids (Assassins), infamous for their custom of killing people by stealth. When one of them murdered a Mongolian noin Chaghata, his people accused the Georgians and mounted attack on them. The Georgian noblemen, being determined to surrender for the sake of sparing the soldiers from the battle with the unequal Mongol forces, said: if we do not accept the fight, only we nobles will be executed whilst most of our people will be saved; but if we do, they will kill all of us. Each of them without exception, three times bowed the knee to the icon of the Mother of God and in supplication offered the prayer: “The doors of caring do now open unto us, O Most Blessed Theotokos, so that hoping in you we shall not fail; Through you we may be delivered from adversities, for you are the salvation of the Christian faith.” The Most Holy Mother of God had compassion for them and compelled the murderer to confess to his evil deed.

One can find in the annals of the Georgian history a great number of events when people exposed their selflessness, the most remarkable and glorious of which is the heroism of Prince Tsothe Dadiani (1246).

All this speaks about the people's spiritual uprightness and valour through which they could rescue Georgia and throw off the Mongol yoke in a comparatively short period of time although the high authorities of the kingdom had been unable to render a solid resistance to the enemy on their entry into the country. East Georgia endured the Mongols' presence for 100 years while the latter failed to expand their power over West Georgia. The most crucial was the fact that our people did not mingle with them and did not assimilate with the aliens, while other nations were influenced and assumed their ethnic character.

Fidelity and love are the Georgians' inherent characteristic features. Nonetheless, neither envy nor enmity is alien to them as we have already mentioned. Outstanding personalities were particularly envied. This vice bred animosity and dissociated them from each other. The Mongols noticed it and often said: “You Georgians do not like each other's prowess in battles”; and the Georgians also saw this shortcoming of theirs, saying: “we aren't obedient to each other.”

Apparently, this character turned to be one of the principal reasons of the disunited Georgian front while fighting against the enemy. The Georgian aristocracy failed to unite their troops although each of the magistrates represented a considerable force.

Apart from the internal discord, the geographical location of the land also assisted to the destruction of the country for it lay between two Mongol hordes, two mortal enemies (northern and southern). The passes in the mountains of Caucasus, Darial Gorge and partly the Caspian Gates of Derbent were under the Georgians' control. This exposed them to the enemy raids when the two hordes would rise against each other.

In such difficult times, the Georgian clergymen, in conjunction with defending the faith within the boundaries of the land, preached the Teaching beyond its borders also. The Georgian missionaries Pimen the Simple, who originated from Gareji and Anton the son of Naokhrebeli, who came from Meskheti, preached in the North Caucasus, specifically in Dagestan.

## **The Fourteenth Century**

Early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, King Giorgi the Magnificent acceded to the throne. He united West, South and East Georgia as an entire land under his scepter.

The first thing which followed his enthronement was making secure the borders of Meskheti - (Samtskhe-Javakheti) which was done on the Mongols' assent.

This act was followed by the expulsion of the Ossetians beyond the country. This people had occupied small villages and castles on this land. Presumably, by that time they were not indulged with so much support from the Mongols as they had enjoyed under the former kings. The Mongol authorities were favourably disposed to King Giorgi who took over all the passes of the Caucasus and destroyed his enemies, blocking all the ways through which the Ossetians could get into the country again, and the people had relief from them. The restriction of this people beyond the borders of Kartli was also a sign of the end to the Mongol yoke. Shortly afterwards, internal rivalry and hostilities broke out in the Mongol Kingdom, incurring the collapse of their unity, and this state almost fell. King Giorgi took advantage of these circumstances and gained independence from them. This of course speaks about Georgia's authority in that age for the Mongols, notwithstanding their fall, continued to dominate other countries later on.

The King's will was to restore Georgia in her ancient boundaries – from Nikopsia to Derbent. Initially, he strengthened the frontiers of Ran in the Derbent region; later, he determined to restore the Western borders.

Following King David the Builder's path, King Giorgi the Magnificent reunified Georgia, replenished the country and rebuilt desecrated churches. The lands of Ran, Movakhan and Shirvan were laid under tribute to him. He subdued and appeased all his enemies, using force and power where necessary, or wisdom and good reason.

King Giorgi the Magnificent did not look over the circumstances in the Church either. He convoked an assembly of clergymen where the Catholicoses of Kartli and Abkhazia and bishops of all Georgia were present. On his demand, the convocation adopted a special provision according to which the participant clergymen “renewed the order ... and excommunicated the disorderly.” By the king’s efforts, the rights of the Church of Georgia were also strengthened beyond the borders of the country, particularly in Jerusalem.

At that time, the holy places of Jerusalem and Near East were under the Egyptian sultans’ control. Nonetheless, starting from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Georgians had taken possession of the foremost sacred places of prayer. David the builder had even gained possession of the summit of Mount Sinai where, according to the Old Testament, God appeared to Moses.

With the decrease of Georgia’s political strength, the Georgians’ standing was also shaken in Palestine. In the 60s and 70s of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Muslims compelled the Georgian monks, living in the Monastery of the Holy Cross, to leave the place where they arranged a mosque. This monastery had been constructed by Prochorus. Scholars presume that although by the year 1350 the Georgians had recovered the monastery, there was much left for concern; as for instance, the Church of the Resurrection of Christ, the Golgotha and Christ’s Tomb which were the constituents of one whole monastic complex, were still in the Egyptians’ hands.

Twice, in 1316 and in 1320, King Giorgi sent ambassadors to the sultan of Egypt. Pippa, the king’s representative presented solid gifts to the sultan who, receiving them with gladness, handed over to him the keys of Jerusalem.

A foreign traveler, who visited Jerusalem, writes: “Christ’s Tomb is in the Georgians’ possession and no one is allowed to even remove a little stone from it“. This chronicle belongs to the years 1331-1341.

The Georgians held the keys to Christ’s Tomb until the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century when the Franciscans’ Order took them over.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, creative work revived in the monasteries. To this period belong the original Georgian works – “The Martyrdom of Luke of Jerusalem” and “The Martyrdom of Nicholas Dvali;” selections of theological works were also compiled and manuscripts were collected.

Petritsoni Monastery was firmly held by the Georgians in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and within its walls a Georgian seminary still functioned.

King Giorgi the Magnificent sought to restore Georgia’s political influence in Caesarea of Trabzon and attained it successfully.

The king “reigned a good reign” of 28 years and died in Tbilisi in 1346.

Georgia, as an integral and independent country, led a peaceful life until Tamerlane’s incursion. In fact, under King Giorgi the Magnificent and his sons David IX (1346-1360) and Bagrat V, this kingdom invariably extended over the entire Transcaucasia. The latter was the king who had to face the invasion.

Tamerlane established a kingdom of vast territory which in the east reached as far as the Chinese wall, in the north - as far as Central Russia, and in the west it bordered with Egypt and the Mediterranean.

Although Georgia held the whole Caucasus under her control, she was very small in comparison with Tamerlane’s realm. Nevertheless, the conqueror found it tough to fight her;

as a matter of fact, he could never subject the land though ravaged it cruelly. In the end, the long-term war between the two countries ended with a truce.

During the period from 1386 to 1403, Tamerlane invaded Georgia eight times. The Georgians not only carried on defensive wars but also, in order to help his enemies, at times invaded the lands, occupied by him (such were the capture of the Alanji Fortress, the ravage of the outskirts of Nakhchiven, granting refuge to his mortal enemy Prince Taher who had to flee from Nakhchiven). They would also make a free passage in the mountains of Caucasus for Tamerlane's another enemy the Golden Horde.

After his period, Georgia could maintain integral statehood, Christianity and national culture but the North Caucasian tribes were not only isolated from her already, but moreover, had animosity towards her and it played a significant role in the decline of Georgia as of a powerful state. Even prior to Tamerlane, the Persian Kingdom of the Ilkhanate Mongols had permanently tried to take under their control the passes in the mountains of Caucasus and thereby prevent their mortal enemy the Golden Horde from incursions into Transcaucasia and Persia. On the other hand, there were Georgian kings who, being in alliance with the Horde, hoped to get support in their struggle to repel the Ilkhans. So also in Tamerlane's time, Georgia never altered her policy with regard to this kingdom. Therefore he applied the ancient Iranian politicians' way of pressure and tried to bring under his control the Northern tribes by means of converting them to Islam. Consequently, early in the 15<sup>th</sup> century Georgia was almost surrounded by Muslim countries and the encircling was completed after the Ottoman's conquest of Constantinople in the year 1453.

Tamerlane was well aware that the force which united, preserved and strengthened Georgia was Christianity and did his utmost to wipe it out by promulgating Islam, but futile were his efforts.

The conqueror took over and sent beyond the country the countless treasures of churches, most valuable of which were books. He destroyed every church and monastery within his reach, not sparing the Christian people. Nonetheless, the Georgian Christians strongly withstood his ruthlessness. It was a tough campaign to conquer Georgia; even his biographer said, boasting – "It was not easy to war in Georgia, even Alexander the Great failed to, but Tamerlane has gained victory".

In the Monastery of Kvatakhevi, his soldiers burnt Georgian Christians, clergymen, monks. Before the martyrdom, they were suggested that they should renounce their faith, but on rejecting the proposal, they were severely tortured and then, bound hand and foot, the great holy martyrs were burnt; they accepted death, singing a hymn. For a very long time the walls of the Kvatakhevi Monastery of the Mother of God bore the traces of their burnt sacred bodies.



## The Fifteenth Century

In 1403 Tamerlane concluded a truce with the king of Georgia. The enemy had to acknowledge the existence of the Georgian Christian state. In 1405 Tamerlane died. On his hordes' withdrawal, King Giorgi VII not only cleared the land from the remains of his detachments but also shifted the warfare beyond its boundaries. He invaded Ganja, Anis and Arzrum. In 1407 King Giorgi fell in battle and his brother Constantine succeeded him but he also died in the battle in Shirvan. After him his son Alexander, later called "Great", was enthroned.

King Alexander's sovereignty (1412-1444) extended over all Georgia but her lands had been reduced after Tamerlane and the ethnic environment had changed. In the adjoining lands Turks and people, assimilated with them, had settled. This assimilation was a concomitant process to that of the Mongols' for they were the dominant people in the region. This was the reason of the restriction in the eastern lands of the country. The circumstances were the same in the lands of South-East Georgia. In particular, not only Anisi had been lost, but even Lore had been taken over by the Muslims.

Unquestionably, the Georgian state and Church would not tolerate the peoples' Islamisation especially of those living in Lore (Tashiri) - the town in a short distance from the capital of Georgia Tbilisi. The Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Church Theodore played a significant role in the battle for the Fortress of Tashiri. Before the advance of the troops, he encouraged and inspired the soldiers. I. Javakhishvili gives the following appraisal to his personality: "The preaching of Catholicos Theodore, his exhortations and encouragement inspired the Georgian army to retrieve Lore and occupy it". This event took place in 1431.

In a year, from 1434 to 1435 King Alexander joined to his kingdom even the lands of Sivnieti with the population of 60000.

The main impediment in attaining the foremost objective which was the restoration of her old glory was population decline in the entire country and especially in the east. The king moved part of the inhabitants of West Georgia to the sparsely populated areas of East Georgia. It was King Alexander's primary concern to reconstruct Georgia's ruined churches and monasteries. On his enthronement, he started to carry on to completion his blessed grandmother Rusa's work at the reconstruction of the magnificent Cathedral of Svetitskhoveli. The work was accomplished around the year 1413.

The king also supported the Georgian churches and monasteries in Greece and Palestine.

In the world of that age Georgia was looked upon as a distinguished Christian kingdom. The convention of the so called Ferrara-Florence Church Council was a well-known fact which took place in that precise century. The assembly seemed to be targeted at the unification of Churches. The diptych was observed and the representatives of the Churches had their seats in accordance with it, that is to say, on one side of the assembly hall the clergymen of the Patriarchal Churches of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem were seated. The Patriarchal Church of Georgia was represented by Metropolitan Sophron (in the historical documents he is referred to as "the representative of the King of Georgia".) Metropolitan Sophron strongly vindicated Orthodoxy at the assembly. This fact indicates that the sense of dignity of the Church was as lofty as it had been in the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Peace and unity reigned in the country in King Alexander's time and beyond her boundaries her dominion was restored over the neighboring lands. The king also displayed his love for Christ by abdicating the throne in the last years of his life as he took the vows and was tonsured.

His son Vakhtang III ascended the throne in his father's life-time. He reigned from 1442 to 1446. His brother Giorgi succeeded him to the throne in 1446. This king reigned till 1466. It was the time of continuous internecine feuds which led the country towards its political collapse. In 1451, Prince Khvarkhvare gained the office of Atabagi in Meskheta and commenced to seek the secession of the region from the state, inducing the local clergy to support his strife. As a matter of fact, by that time neither the princes of Samegrelo, Abkhazia, Guria or Meskheta acknowledged the sovereignty of Giorgi VIII.

In the year 1453 the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople. In 1461 they occupied Caesarea in Trabzon. Georgia was isolated from Europe by a Muslim -Turkish circle. In 1459 an unmerciful civil war broke out. Prince Khvarkhvare even applied for help to the Muslims (the king of Iran) and with the latter's hands gained victory over King Giorgi who was defeated in the battle of 1462. Shortly afterwards, the Prince of Imereti Bagrat also rose against the king and defeated him. King Alexander's grandson Constantine II acceded to the throne in 1478. He neither approved of nor considered legal the emergence of separate kingdoms of Kakheti and Imereti, the principality of Meskheta and others on his territory but their existence was de facto.

When reflecting upon the Georgian history, it would be wrong to take it isolated from the history of the Church of Georgia and conversely, the history of the Church of Georgia is intertwined with that of the country; even in a deeper perspective, the history of the Georgian Church is the history of the Christian Georgian nation.

It is a true fact that the Georgian people had possessed the sense of unity long before they were converted to Christianity; but, because every Georgian received this faith with a deep love, the nation's history cannot be seen as detached from that of the Church.

Therefore the division in the Church of Georgia not only drew the decrease of the faith but also caused the degeneration of culture.

Late in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a war was unleashed among the kings and princes. The Prince of Meskheta acted with utmost vehemence to separate his lands from the kingdom. I. Javakhishvili has the following in his accounts: "Khvarkhvare Atabagi was so blinded with that enmity and struggle for separatism that even shifted the discord into Church ... seeking the fall of Meskheta off the Patriarchal throne and a complete independence thereby ..."

Surprisingly, the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem did not support the Church of Georgia; moreover, they did all in their power to help disintegrate her gaining profit out of it. Infringing every canon of the Church, neglecting the provisions, adopted by the Church Councils, they intervened in the affairs of the Georgian dioceses and helped destroy the Apostolic Church of St. Andrew, founded on the Lord's Robe by St. Nino's labour. All this resulted in the decline of Christianity in the region Meskheta which was followed by the weakening of resistance to Islamisation.

Let us recall the history of the Atskhuri wonderworking icon as a testimony of a strong coherence between the spiritual life and the physical existence of the nation or any of its parts.

It is a well-known fact that St. Andrew the First-called brought an icon of the Mother of God on his first entry into Georgia. It was laid at Atskhuri and remained there till the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

While in Byzantium the heresy of iconoclasm infuriated, the veneration of icons not only was maintained but enhanced in Georgia.

The wonderworking icon of Atskuri, the greatest of sanctity was richly embellished with precious stones and pearls. The kings of Georgia brought opulent offerings to her.

In 1477, the shah of Iran waged war on Georgia. He invaded Samtskhe; of course, he took over the icon of Atskhuri and also robbed it. But the Lord's wrath came upon the area where the icon was kept and it was returned back to its home.

In 1486, Jacob Khan invaded Georgia. The icon was taken from its church and was hidden in the treasury of the castle by the Bishop of Matskhveri and the garrison of the castle. The enemy promised they would spare the walls of the castle from destruction if the garrison handed it over to them without resistance. The Georgians accepted their word. But, the enemy did not keep it; moreover, they captured the icon of the All Holy Mother of God and after having robbed it, presented it to their lawless prince. The latter threw the icon into the fire but the fire did not catch it; it got quenched and the icon survived. Having witnessed this miracle, one non-Orthodox Christian took the icon to his country. But, the All Holy Mother of God appeared to him and told, saying: "If you do not return me to my land, I shall send great tribulations upon you".

The icon was brought back to Atskhuri. The chronicler reports in his accounts that Jacob Khan, who pierced it with his sword, incurred horrible wrath on himself – later, he lost all his family and relatives.

In 1546 King Bagrat II of Imereti took the icon to Tsikhisjvari, and in 1553 it was taken to Imereti as a present to King Giorgi II of Imereti the son of Bagrat III. The king had the icon embellished anew for it had been robbed many a time by lawless hands.

After the Atskhuri icon of the Mother of God had left the region, the inhabitants of Samtskhe-Saatabago received Islam and drifted away from the Georgian people. The holy icon had been protecting Christianity and national identity in this area. At present, the icon is preserved in the Art Gallery of Georgia.

Although the Atabagis of Meskheti aspired to achieve their main goal, they failed to split Meskheti away from the Mother Church of Georgia. She was victorious in that fierce battle. Nonetheless, Christianity decreased in the end, and now remain the ruins of the once outstanding cathedral of Atskhuri, as the evidence of that deterioration. As for her parish, they assimilated with the Turkish-Tatar masses of population and are now dispersed.

In the 70s of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Patriarch of Antioch and Jerusalem Michael visited Georgia and wrote "the Commandment of the Law" in which he stipulated that in former times the Catholicoses of Kartli and Abkhazeti had been enthroned by the Patriarch of Antioch. This, definitely, was untrue.

He pursued his aim to gain authority on the enthronement of the foremost hierarch in West Georgia and in this way assist to its falling away from the Mother Church. Along with him, King Bagrat of Imereti sought the independence of the Church in the west.

Late in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an outrageous event took place in the bosom of the Church. It was an origination of separatism. Happily, it was not grounded on any

divergences in the confession since heresy and sectarian divisions were alien to the Georgian Christians. Rather, it was a fierce determination of the Church of Meskheta to gain an administrative independence from the Apostolic Throne. The hierarchs of West Georgia also willed to shift the Apostolic Leadership from Mtskheta to their dioceses.

After the separation, the Holy Services in those eparchies were celebrated in the Georgian language, traditions and customs were maintained in the same vein but no mention was made for the King or the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia during the Service. The major role in this sinful act was of the Atabagis of Meskheta who led an unreasonable religious and national policy.

Separatism did not emerge within the bosom of the Church; rather it was the result of a rude influence and intervention of lay authorities. Neither was good fruit brought forth by this disobedience. In the end, the entire nation suffered for most of the Meskhs were fallen away because other religions and Churches found passage into Meskheta and eventually, people received Islam, Catholicism, Monophysitism. The rest of the Orthodox people in the area found themselves under the supervision of the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople; this process inculcated in them Greek self-awareness and brought about their assimilation. Nor did the Church of West Georgia succeed in maintaining the parish as it was relevant – part of the Orthodox people received Islam (Lower Guria, Batumi, Kobuleti, the region of Ajara), others (Abkhazia) mingled with pagans from the mountainous areas (the Cherkis, Apsua, Adigei) who were taking refuge in this part of the land.

However, it should be noticed, that before the abolition of statehood by Russia (1801-1810), most of the assimilated Georgians – the so called “Armenians”, “French” and “Greeks” had maintained the Georgian language as their mother tongue; but, Russian authorities did not recognize their origin and by doing so rooted out all that remained from it in these people.

Thus, every Georgian who departed from the Mother Church also abandoned their people and, having degenerated, assimilated with the other nations.

## **The Sixteenth Century**

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an integral kingdom of Georgia split in three parts. One of the three kings, Alexander the son of Bagrat reigned in Imereti, the second was Alexander the son of Giorgi VIII, who ruled Kakheti; Kartli was the realm of Constantine II the grandson of Alexander I.

It was a time of permanent unrest for each of these kings fought the other two, seeking the unification of the country and considering it their own realm. After Tamerlane's incursions, external enemies reduced their campaigns against this country and the people had a period of relief and peace which the magistrates and high-rank officials could not find permanently leading wars against each other.

The sword, plough and faith were the driving force in the life of a Georgian man but lofty ideas had gone, spirituality had faded.

Georgia was disintegrated into the kingdoms of Kakheti, Kartli, Imereti, the principalities of Dadiani, Gurieli, Atabagi and had tendencies of further disintegration. These lands, being rivals, ravaged each other; but Georgia, as a whole land, expanded on a vast territory with the eastern border as close as 200 km from the Caspian Sea passing along Shak; the southern frontier extended up to the lake of Sevan, the Atabagis' appanage bordered with Valashcert and Arzrum. Guria included Chaneti; in the westernmost parts, Imereti and the Dadianis' domain were washed by the Black Sea and were bordered by the region of Jikheti.

In the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Georgia, particularly, Kakheti was an opulent country.

It was not very easy to fight the Georgians and moreover, to prevail over them. Neither Turkey nor Persia would ever have been able to defeat them if the latter had had a unified state and if they had been a people of one mind. Nonetheless, they found it tough to fight the disintegrated Georgia.

One letter of King Simeon's exhibits their valour and spirit of self-sacrifice: "I suppose, you have also learnt what suffer and tribulation we had to endure, nevertheless, we did not fall in despair. I will rather sacrifice my life and even my young child, I will spill my own blood to the last drop for the love of the Crucified Jesus Christ and the love of God as long as I live; I will not give up my struggle against the Turks, I will not make the priceless Blood, spilt by Jesus Christ for my sake futile ...". This extract explains why Turkey, the country of a strong standing in Europe, could not abolish the statehood of All Georgia, not even West Georgia, although the Turks succeeded in splitting off the third of her territory – the appanage of the Atabagi, turning it into the land of the Tatars. Due to the rivalry among the principalities, the Kingdom of Georgia suffered much loss and weakened. Nevertheless, when united in battles, the all Georgian forces were an impressive sight. The sultan of Turkey put to use this feature of the people and, according to the annals, persuaded the Georgian kings to take Jerusalem. The chronicles have accounts on the Georgians' steadfast presence in Jerusalem in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In conclusion, it can be ascertained that the Georgians were courageous warriors and could wield the sword well. Nonetheless, they were too emotional to follow reason and could not give up their selfish ambition even when it was harmful for the common cause. Although the country disintegrated into independent units as the kingdoms of Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti, the principalities of Guria, Samegrelo, Samthkhe, Svaneti, their population had maintained the sense of responsibility for ethnic unity; but the revival of the tribal system of life was concomitant with the process.

The Church alone remained loyal to the all-Georgian idea for she still encountered the country as a whole body. By that time, two centers –of Mtskheta and of Bichvinta existed in the Church. East Georgia was under the oversight of the Catholicosate of Kartli; West Georgia was the place of the ministry for the Catholicosate of Abkhazia. The kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti often united. So did the principalities in West Georgia. Probably, it was conditioned by the existence of the two unified Catholicosates of Kartli and of Abkhazia.

Being a force which helped the people to consolidate, the Church did not approve of the tribal separation of the nation.

## The Seventeenth Century

The 17<sup>th</sup> century can be described as the most difficult in the history of the Georgian people. If in former times enemies would only conquer and lay under tribute this country and were content with it, now Persia and Turkey did their utmost to destroy the nation. Hundreds of thousands of Georgians were annihilated; many more were forcibly driven to Persia. Kakheti was depopulated and Turkish nomads settled on their lands. The indigenous population of Meskheta was compelled to renounce Christianity and receive Islam; those who opposed them, were massacred or induced to leave the country. Surprisingly, West Georgia was involved in anarchy: trading in captives started. Both Georgians and non-Georgians took in captive many Georgians and sold them at the Turkish market like it was done with Africans. However, here we should remark that the Turkish-Persian social order compelled not only the Georgians but other conquered European peoples (the Bosnian Serbs, the Albanians, etc) to share the same fate.

Concomitant to these conditions was the immigration of the North Caucasian tribes into the weakened and depopulated Georgia.

On settling down in East Georgia, the Lezgines started to take in captive people and made them do slave labour; they ravaged and robbed local residents. The Osetians settled in the mountains of Shida Kartli (Inland Kartli). The Adigeyans, Apsua, Abazi, Cherkez, and Apsars settled Egris-Abkhazia.

The Georgians were intentionally harassed in the conquered lands. This, obviously, evoked the instinct of survival and, consequently, part of the Georgians renounced their origin; some of them received Islam, others would become members of the Gregorian Church (Armenian), not persecuted by Persia and Turkey, or would join the less persecuted Catholic Church.

Among them there were also some who changed their national belonging and assumed the Lezgin, Osetian or Abkhazian origin.

Happily, the major part of the Georgians took a steadfast stand against the danger of denationalization and degeneration. The contribution of the Apostolic Church of Georgia was immense in the cause of the nation's survival. The crux of the matter was the fact that by only remaining Christians the people could not maintain their nationality.

As an instance, the Gregorian Georgians were still Christians but lost their national image with time; the same can be said of the Catholic Georgians. Genuine Georgians were only the parish within the Apostolic Church of Georgia. In that most difficult time of ordeal the power of personal example was tremendous. The representatives of aristocracy - kings, queens, princes and gentry, their family members set examples to the multitudes of a lower social layer.

But, when in Meskheta the nobility received Islam, the total population followed them and soon the community, who had departed from the faith, also lost their nationality.

Under these circumstances, particularly remarkable is the self-sacrifice of the Queen of Kakheti Ketevan. The martyrdom of St. Ketevan, King Luarsab, other noblemen, clergymen and lay people can be recognized as an act, committed with the purpose of saving the Motherland and nation from the fall and from the assimilation with the other peoples.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century is remarkable for a multitude of martyrs for Christ's sake. So far, the Church of Georgia has only been able to canonize some of them since great is their number. Canonized are: 6000 holy martyrs of Gareji desert who accepted martyrdom in the year 1616, the Great Martyr King Luarsab, martyred in 1622, the Great Martyr Ketevan Queen of Kakheti, who accepted martyrdom in 1624, the nine brothers Kherkheulidzes, their mother and sister and 9000 Georgians together with them, killed in the battle at Marabda in 1625. St. Father Evdemos, Catholicos of the Church of Georgia, martyred in 1642; St. Bidzina Cholokashvili, St. Princes of Ksani Elizbar and Shalva; they were martyred in 1661; The reverend fathers of the Garedji Monastery, massacred by the Lezgins in the years 1696-1700, Shio the New, David and Gabriel and many more laid their lives for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Motherland.

Among them was also our St. Father Theodore, martyred in the year 1669, the priest attendant to Queen Ketevan and a great many others who glorified the Church of Georgia. Thus, in the time of tribulation, the Georgian people and the Church exposed a steadfast faith. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Persia gained strength under Shah Abbas. The shah was extremely perturbed about the political relationships of Kakheti with Russia and Turkey.

On September 15th, 1615 Kakhetians rose in revolt against him. As it was the feast day of "Alaverdoba", they started the action after the Holy Liturgy. Not long before, King Teimuraz had left Imereti to join them and take the leadership in his hand, the regiments from the region of Shirvani following them. King Teimuraz was Commander-in-Chief of the Georgian army in the decisive battle at Tsitsamuri where in a few hours they annihilated the enemy.

The shah invaded Georgia again but on his withdrawal, the people rose again. Although the shah could suppress the revolt, the Georgians did not give way to dismay answering his cruelty with another surprise. The fourth invasion took place in 1617.

King Teimuraz did not lose heart, but did his utmost to withstand them in a long-term war with the support from the Turkish army; however, the Turks were not successful in this action and King Teimuraz sought to get help from Russia. Shah Abbas, enraged by the ties with Russia and Turkey, avenged on the king by castrating his two sons, Levan and Alexander; leaving the eldest mentally ill, this grave act turned out lethal for the youngest.

Iv. Javakhishvili affirms that the Russian governing authorities sent clergymen instead of troops and canon guns to Georgia. They contemptuously neglected attendance in the Church and, being accustomed to heresy in their Motherland, were doubtful about the Georgian Church Service.

In 1624 St. Ketevan mother of King Teimuraz accepted martyrdom at the hand of Shah Abbas. She was severely tortured and killed. Queen Ketevan was canonized a saint by the Church of Georgia. Her personal example saved all Georgia from Islamisation and assimilation with the Tatars.

Shah Abbas's successive plan was to depopulate Kartli and drive the people away to Persia. Further, he was determined to settle his people Persians on these lands. To achieve this goal, he sent Giorgi Saakadze with countless troops to Georgia. By order of the shah, Commander Saakadze was to demolish Kartli and Kakheti. But on learning about the shah's secret plan to have him assassinated after the fulfillment of his command, the commander determined to raise the people in rebellion against the Persians. This purpose involved the

necessity of an alliance with Prince Zurab Eristavi. The battle of the year 1625 ended with the Georgians' victory and was one of the greatest in the history of the nation.

These circumstances urged the "invincible" shah to reconcile with King Teimuraz and in 1631 he recognized his sovereignty over the unified Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti.

Later on, however, since King Teimuraz struck terror among the Muslim rulers, the shah would not admit his prolonged reign and sent large troops with Rostom Khan, the king designate of "Gurjistan" after Teimuraz's banish from the country.

The 67-year-old Rostom usurped the throne in the year 1632. King Teimuraz conducted not one revolt and vehemently fought against the enemy. Nevertheless, as Rostom-Khan had support from Persia, he failed to continue on the throne and had to flee to Kakheti.

In 1642 a plot was organized against the usurper. Catholicos Evdemon (Diasamidze) was among the involved. But, the king suppressed the rebels, arrested the Catholicos and, shortly after the arrest, had him murdered and thrown from the prison tower. Fighting against the spirit, reason and idea of the Georgian Church, Rostom-Khan sent troops to Kakheti and, having defeated King Teimuraz who fled to Imereti, declared himself the King of Kartli and Kakheti. Thereafter, King Teimuraz took the vows and was tonsured. He died at 74.

But, he survived Rostom-Khan whose successor was Vakhtang (Shahnavaz). This king was a descendant of the house of Bagrationi of Mukhrani. He was a Muslim.

Thus the devotion of King Teimuraz and of other faithful sons of Georgia to the confession of Jesus Christ saved the country from a total degeneration; the faith and the Motherland were the key-stone of the Georgians' life.

Although, in those times the Persians and the Turks did not fight against Christianity as against a religion in general, they vigorously fought against the Apostolic Church of Georgia. However, they did not encumber the Gregorian or the Catholic confessions, giving priority to the Christian Armenians and their centers. The persecuted members of the Church of Georgia were restricted in the practice of their faith and were induced to receive Islam; if anyone refused to accept the demand, the alternatives, imposed on them, were the Gregorian faith or Catholicism.

## **The Eighteenth Century**

Early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia was politically disintegrated to which internal clashes were concomitant. The king's authority weakened and the principalities were ruled by princes, claiming absolute sovereignty in their domains. Outstanding statesmen did not cease their striving for the restoration of the unified Georgia. But, almost every year Persia and Turkey renewed the 1555 truce by force of which East Georgia was considered a vassal of Iran while West Georgia was that of Turkey.

The collapse of the country involved the revival of tribal systems. Separate groups of Kartlians, Kakhetians, Imerentians were gradually formed. The principalities of Odishi, Guria,



Abkhazeti and Svaneti seceded from the Kingdom of Imereti. Although politically disunited, the people revealed a strong national self-awareness, encouraged and strengthened by the Church of Georgia.

The Catholicosate of Abkhazia, which in the 16<sup>th</sup> century shepherded the population on vast territories, lost many lands in the north and in the south due to the Islamisation of their inhabitants.

As it was mentioned above, the peoples of Adygea and Cherkesia immigrated from the north and settled down on these lands. In ancient Georgia these peoples were called Apsars. The Apsars were successful in the assimilation of the lower social layers of Abkhazians while the aristocracy maintained their ethnic self-awareness never repudiating their belonging to Georgian culture.

The Lezgins expended in Kakheti, the Osetians in Kartli, so the Georgians were assimilated in these lands as well. Muslims and pagans prevailed among the newcomers and subsequently, it brought about the robbery of churches, monasteries, dioceses and even of patriarchal cathedrals. Many eparchies were abolished. The native population – the parish of the Church were destroyed. Often, they were kidnapped and sold as slaves or put as serfs and servants in their homes. These circumstances brought about the conversion to paganism of these people involving their deprivation of national self-awareness.

All this was the battle-field of the Church of Georgia whose foremost goal was to release the people from the bondage and return them to her lands, give aid to the impoverished, orphans and hopeless, fulfill good deeds and show kindness to the poor. She also supervised the provision and accommodation of craftsmen, scribes and artists.

Part of the Church possessions was spent on the reconstruction of churches and monasteries. It is noteworthy, that Church Fathers and hierarchs made donations to her from their private property.

The Holy Service in the churches of the two Catholicosates was conducted solely in the Georgian language. From St. Nino's age, no other than this was used in the Church and it continued in that vein till the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

King Vakhtang VI convened a Church Council at which Catholicos Domenti was enthroned. He was the king's brother who had returned from Russia not long before. The King himself had then newly ascended the throne. The event took place in 1705. At the initial stage of his office, the Catholicos substantially assisted his brother in improving matters in the kingdom.

King Vakhtang belonged to the junior branch of the house of Bagrationi which was the dynasty of the Prince of Mukhrani (the Mukhranbatonis). His plan, targeted at the "release and resurrection" of Georgia, was the common cause of the Georgian statesmen, devoted to the king. Under the "release" independence from the Muslim countries was meant, under the "resurrection" – the reunion of Georgia.

The "release and resurrection" was only attainable by support from Christian countries and it was envisaged in the foreign policy of the king and his statesmen.

Here, it should be noticed that when both European and Russian orientations sustained failure, among the Georgians was found the force which would uphold the strife for the "release and resurrection".

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Iran's power and might decreased and also weakened the Empire of the Ottoman Turks. It so happened, that the Georgian noblemen from the vassal kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti, living and working in Iran, were involved in the social life of the country and to some extent even conducted it. Georgian troops were also the strongest in Persia. These circumstances were a favorable backdrop for the Georgians to unite and no one would have been able to withstand them.

But, the unification was unattainable.

The Georgians' Orthodox faith was assumed by the Persians and the Turks a political orientation, directed against them. Moreover, when the Orthodox Russian Empire drew as close as the mountain chain of Caucasus, and the kings of Kartli and Kakheti, out of the common faith, promised them to make a corridor through the mountains southwards for them, this assumption took shape of a profound belief.

As it has been mentioned, in the Caucasus no other confession was as persecuted by the Muslims as Orthodoxy; they put pressure on the Orthodox Georgians and demanded that they should renounce the faith and receive Islam, Catholicism or Monophysitism. This led people to denationalization.

In 1713 a delegation of ambassadors and prominent statesmen, among who was monk Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, visited Europe seeking support in the work at the following issues:

1. Iran was to recognize the existence of the Kingdom of Kartli; the return of King Vakhtang VI was indispensable.
2. Unification of Georgia.
3. Cease of the North Caucasian tribes' raids.
4. Cease of the Georgians' denationalization.

But, in 1715 Sulkhan-Saba returned empty-handed and this meant the failure of the king's orientation on Europe.

By that time, Persia had weakened to such extent that the Afghans brought down the Persian royal dynasty and the country was in a deep crisis. All these circumstances prepared reasonable grounds for the Georgian statesmen to propose alliance with Russia.

In 1722 King Vakhtang VI declared his resolve on making the alliance. This fact annoyed the Muslim countries and the North Caucasian tribes. Russia had particular interests in the economy of Persia. Peter the Great sought to bring the trade of this country under the control of Russian merchantry. He sent his ambassador to Vakhtang VI on the matter. However, the royal court counseled the king to consider his suggestions with caution. The alliance with Russia aggravated Europe and all Near East who were overconcerned about the whole issue. In Constantinople, the question of taking intensive actions against the hostilities of Peter I and Vakhtang VI was laid down.

Iran, Turkey and Dagestan made preparations for Kartli's severe punishment. In 1724 Peter I signed a truce with Persia. It was an unexpected step which opened Georgia for the enemies' raids. Vakhtang VI had to flee to Russia.

Not long after, Russia's negligence towards Georgia was revealed to everyone and King Vakhtang's policy ended with a failure.

Things in the Church of Georgia were also blighted by the enemy's incursions. Many of the eparchies and dioceses were abolished; Church lands and serfs were taken over by lay feudal families. Nevertheless, the Church of Georgia could maintain the spiritual backbone

which later, in 1744-1745 was laid as the foundation for the revival of the Georgian Christian statehood.

In 1744 a long awaited dream of the Georgian people came true – a Christian king ascended the royal throne. It was the lot of Prince Teimuras from the royal house of the Bagrationis of Kakheti, King Teimuraz II.

There was no end to the people's joy. The Catholicos-Patriarch Anton carefully prepared the most ancient Georgian Church rite of the royal enthronement and special arrangements were made for the celebration. People decorated streets, squares and markets and went out with torches to meet their king, queen and princes. Church chants filled the streets. The Chrismation of the king filled them with boundless happiness.

The restoration of the sovereignty to the Georgian Kingdom was the starting point of the idea of “release” on which was grounded and embodied the idea of “resurrection”. The issue also embraced the regain of the lost Georgian lands.

In 1758 Kings Solomon I, Erekle II and Teimuraz signed an agreement on friendship and cooperation. A special Church Council was convened in 1759 at which the captive trade was banned; the throne of Kutaisi was restored and the Church was released from taxes.

In the 70s of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, West Georgia gained independence too. King Solomon I of Imereti drove the Turkish garrisons beyond his land.

# **The Church of Georgia in The Third Period**

**(The 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> cc.).**

Two most critical periods of the 2000-year-old history of the Apostolic Church of Georgia are to be attributed to the 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were the abolition of its autocephaly by the Russian royal court and its restoration, gained by the striving of the Georgian nation and clergy. Plethora of publications speaks about the deplorable circumstances in which the Church of Georgia had to continue life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Apostles had established her and had preached to the people, Christianity became the Georgians' national religion and remained as such throughout centuries.

Starting from the year 1811, this Church, the stronghold of Christianity for the entire Caucasus, was transformed into an additional part of the Russian bureaucracy. Before Russia's presence in Georgia, the Church had been an owner of immense property. She had been an economically independent institution by which she was profoundly different from the Russian Church. The latter had been modified into part of the state by Russian political authorities and since 1722 had been ruled by an attorney-general who was head of the Synod. He was a lay statesman and a wide scope of rights was vested in his hands. Peter the Great had abolished the Patriarchal guidance of the Church and had initiated her subordination to lay authorities; the process was accomplished by Queen Katherine II. Under these circumstances Russia would not admit the economical independence of the Georgian Church or her solid influence on the lay authorities. This purpose directed her to the reorganization of the Church of Georgia.

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1810 Catholicos Anton II was almost induced to leave Georgia and depart to Russia. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1811 a dicastery was formed; the Church of Georgia was deprived of her autocephaly. Varlam Eristavi was appointed head of the dicastery and the title of "exarch" was conferred on him. Most difficult times started in the life of Georgia as the Russian authorities commenced on restricting eparchies. It was not a newly begun business and was aimed at dismissing those personalities from around the Cathedral who were unacceptable for the Russian authorities.

On August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1815 the dicastery was transformed into the "department of Synod of Georgia-Imereti" to which the Russian government subordinated the churches of Guria and Samegrelo also.

Varlam Eristavi was called to Russia in 1817. In the same year, Archbishop Theophilactos Rusanov from Ryazan was appointed exarch and was sent to Georgia. Since then the Church

was only ruled by Russian bishops. In 1819 Theophilactos united the bishoprics of Imereti by means of restricting them in number. Guria and Samegrelo were allowed to have one diocese each. Out of twelve eparchies, only three were maintained in West Georgia. Along with it, the exarch reduced the number of churches.

The Russian governing authorities saw the Church of Georgia as another source of income. They considered it profitable to reduce the number of clergy and to cut the overall expenditure since it would help increase the income in the exchequer.

Russia's policy raised anger in the Georgian people and a rebellion for the defense of the Mother Church started in 1818. The rebels fought under the slogan "The Liberation of the Motherland". Every social layer of people was involved in the fight against the regiments and detachments, well armed with artillery.

In 1820 Metropolitan Dositheos of Kutaisi, Metropolitan Ekvtime of Gelati and other prominent people were arrested. This arrest enhanced the vigor of the struggle.

Metropolitan Dositheos of Kutaisi (Tsereteli) was an old man. He was put in a sack and taken in the direction of Russia but in the vicinity of the town of Gory was beaten to death in the same sack. Metropolitan Ekvtime of Gelati (Shervashidze) was arrested as one of the leaders of the revolt.

Metropolitans and bishops, in general, had been inviolable and even respected by the Muslims. The Russians' actions aroused a fierce anger in the rebels and at the end of ferocious battles the Russian army gained a Pyrrhic victory. The region of Racha was burnt and devastated, the fortress of Shemokmedi in Guria was razed to the ground, villages were burnt, rebels were hung; many of them sustained the forfeiture of property and were exiled to Russia their possessions being taken over by the exchequer.

On May 21<sup>st</sup> 1820, 2000 Georgian warriors laid their lives for the faith and freedom. Among them were priests, monks and other members of the clergy.

The Church of Georgia had had tens of bishoprics and eparchies in East, West and South Georgia. With their abolition, the Christian faith decreased among the people. The clergymen unceasingly demanded the restoration of the abolished eparchies.

The exarch's policy impaired the image of the Church of Georgia and brought about indifference towards the faith among the parish. Particularly outrageous was the restriction of the Georgian language in churches and at schools. Georgian theological schools were closed and Russian ones were opened. This resulted in the lack of knowledge among new clergymen. Abandoning the Georgian language, part of the youth plunged in the Russian and the European ideas of socialism, atheism and anarchy.

The Church possessions of valuable gold and silver objects, embellished with precious stones and preserved for many centuries, were lost. The exchequer took possession of the lands of the Church.

It is no surprise that under such circumstances the Georgian clergymen took an active part in the rebellions of the years 1804 and 1812 and the others of the following period which aimed at the liberation of Georgia. One of the leaders of the resistance in the revolt of 1832 was Archimandrite Philadelphos Kiknadze.

Under Exarch Paul Lebedyev, in 1826 one of the expelled students Joseph Laghiashvili killed the Rector of the seminary Archpriest Chudetski. At his funeral, the exarch pronounced a eulogy which contained a curse of the people whom the student belonged to. The statesman

Dimitri Kipiani expressed the irate Georgians' attitude towards it. He addressed to the exarch with a suggestion that if the curse which had been spread among the people was true, "the curser was to depart from the accursed land". Dimitri Kipiani was punished for these words by being exiled where later in 1887 he was killed.

The best sons of the Russian people raised their voice against the oppression of the Georgian Church. One of such defenders was the well-known scholar Slavophil Nicholai Durnov. He described the deplorable conditions of the Church of Georgia in his essay "The Fate of the Church of Georgia".

Regrettably, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Georgia was part of the Russian Empire, the fervent faith of the nation weakened. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the disintegration of the empire started and the same process also gained ground in the life of the Church. The sustenance of the empire required the alteration of its society. A population of one religion, speaking one language and devoted to the country, would save it. Thus the primary issue on the agenda was the assimilation of the Georgian people as well as of the other peoples by making them mingle with the Russians. The Georgian language was severely persecuted. The exarch's strife was targeted at the subjection of the parish to the Russian way of life. But, the Georgians rendered a relevant answer to his policy.

In 1908 Exarch Nikon was killed. The Russian hierarchs called Georgia "wild and ruthless land" and the newly appointed would shun coming here.

The Georgian Church Fathers and the best sons of the nation saw their path leading to the deliverance of the faith as the one which lay through striving for the independence of the Church of Georgia from the Russian Empire, in other words – through the restoration of her autocephaly.

The proposal for restoration was strongly supported by the Georgian statesmen: St. Ilia the Righteous (Chavchavadze), St. Ekvtime the Man of God (Takaishvili), Alexander Tsagareli, Alexander Khakhanashvili, Nicholas Marr and others. Two Russian scholars, Solovjov and Zaozersky also advocated the cause.

After the assassination of Ilia the Righteous and the rise of regressive forces in the country, the adherents of autocephaly turned to the inculcation of their ideas in people by publishing books for they considered the independence of the Church would be the foundation for Georgia's future independence. On March 12<sup>th</sup> 1977, tens of thousands of faithful people assembled at the Holy Liturgy in Mtskheta. Bishop Leonid (Okropiridze) briefly interrupted the liturgy and made a speech in which the autocephaly of the Georgian Church was declared restored. In the same year, on September 17<sup>th</sup> Bishop Kirion (Sadzaglishvili) was elected Catholicos-Patriarch of the Georgian Church. On May 26<sup>th</sup> 1918, Georgia was declared an independent state. Sadly, the power of governing authority was not vested in the National Party but in the Socialist. On June 27<sup>th</sup> 1918, St. Kirion was killed in the village of Martkhopi.

The Socialists' government failed to see in proper perspective the significance of the Church in the people's life. All this was a matter of serious concern to the Catholicos-Patriarch Leonid.

The Mensheviks failed to discern an imminent danger emerging from Russia's political unrest and in 1921 the latter, making use of this failure, conquered the country once again.

In the same year, after the death of Patriarch Leonid, the Church Council elected St. Ambrosi (Khelaia) to the Throne of the Catholicos-Patriarch.

The Bolshevik Russia, having annexed Georgia, took steady and drastic measures against the Church, targeted at her complete destruction. The Christians had to endure multiple persecutions but none can be compared with the ruthlessness of the one which the Communists conducted in the 20s and 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They destroyed churches, tortured clergymen, put pressure on them, robbed churches and monasteries.

In the 20s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more than thousand churches were closed, the service was cancelled.

Precisely, that persecution was the wave which aroused anger of the Catholicos-Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia who truly sacrificed his life to his people by sending an address to the Conference in Guinea making known for the whole world the ordeal of the Georgian people. In his report he demanded to compel Russia to withdraw the troops and allow the Georgians to “create the forms and structures of the social and political life which would be relevant to their life and not dictated or imposed by others”.

The Russian government, very indignant with the letter, arrested and brought to trial Patriarch Ambrosi; with him were arrested the likeminded clergymen: St. Nazari (Lezhava) Metropolitan of Kutaisi, Archimandrite Paul Japaridze, Kalistrate Tsintsadze who was Archpriest of Kashueti Church, deacon Dimitri (Lazarishvili) and others. In the process of investigation, they put pressure on the Patriarch, demanding from him to deny the issues, put forth by him at the conference. Nevertheless, in his profound final word the Patriarch underscored them as indispensable. He was sentenced to 7 years of imprisonment. Due to his illness, the term was reduced to 6 years. He died at the age of 66, on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1927.

Under Communist rule, it befell on the Church of Georgia that the life within her bosom was determined by the benevolence of the governing authorities. This period can be divided into three stages. The Church was still persecuted until the year 1943. When at war with Germany, the government condescended mercifully on her and, acknowledging the independence of the Church of Russia, granted her the right to elect the Patriarch; respectively, the circumstances improved for the Church of Georgia also.

In 1943 the Russian Church recognized the three rights of the Church of Georgia: her autocephaly, the Patriarchal dignity and the 6<sup>th</sup> place in the diptych.

Notwithstanding these changes, under Khrushchev's rule the things reversed to the worse as his policy of “democratic warming” did not extend to the Church.

In those times, clergymen were persecuted. However, different methods were applied to them. They were blackmailed by special state bodies. Here, we should remember the life of Patriarch Ephrem II who was persecuted thus. The same policy of moral persecution continued up to the early period of His Holiness Patriarch Ilia II and ended as late as in 1985.

The conditions sharply changed to the better side from 1985-86, but during the 70 years of the Communist rule many generations had been brought up with a negative attitude towards the Church and clergymen and this created an insurmountable difficulty for the people.

In their last years, the authorities allowed the edition and distribution of the Bible, neither was banned the publication of the Holy Scriptures in newspapers. This created a backdrop for the sects to disseminate their teaching. Denominations of Baptists, Jehovah's

Witnesses and others were provided with ample opportunity of a full-scale activity since they acknowledge the authority of the Bible but not that of the Church or of the clergymen.

Although the restoration of the autocephaly of the Church was proclaimed on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1917, the Russian Church only recognized it in 1943; the Orthodox Churches worldwide recognized it on the January 25<sup>th</sup> 1990. However, the question of her place in the diptych has not been determined so far; the place of the Church of Georgia has not been determined up to now and is still the issue of study for the Orthodox Churches the world over.

Late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II and the Holy Synod blessed the best sons of the country and prayed for them and for their cause of the restoration of Georgia's independence. After the people had regained freedom, they responded with love and gratitude to their blessing and the nation started to intensively return to the faith; new churches have been built in every town and village; the Holy Church and the state have signed a "Concordance" which is targeted at the inspiration and edification of the Georgian nation and their sacred Orthodox faith. Amen.

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**Translated by Maia Akhvlediani**