

# THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GEORGIA AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT (BEFORE AND AFTER 1997)<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Although there are quite a few parallels in development of the Orthodox Church of Georgia (OCG) with other post-Soviet countries after 1991, the OCG is the only one among the Orthodox churches to have completely unexpectedly abandoned the Ecumenical Movement.<sup>2</sup> This raises the question about possible peculiarities of the post-Soviet history of the OCG. It is true that, like the other post-communist countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia had to undergo the same national and religious processes of self-realization, but only the OCG cut off completely its former ties with the Ecumenical Movement. Who or what fostered this? How did it become possible for such a decision to be made and where did the inspiration originate: from higher up (the hierarchy) or from lower down (the people)? To date, there has been no publication devoted to systematically examining this issue.

The word 'ecumenism' is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene*, meaning 'populated land'. For Christians this meant the entire Christian world. This is why the Church Councils are remembered as being *ecumenical* for example. A movement calling itself *ecumenical* originated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Protestant West. On the basis of this movement the largest ecumenical organization – The World Council of Churches

<sup>1</sup> This article is the extended version of a paper read at the international seminar 'The Orthodox Church of Georgia: Forging New Identities in a Global Post-Soviet World' organized by the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies, Radboud University (Nijmegen, The Netherlands), 15 September 2017.

<sup>2</sup> It is true that the Orthodox Church of Bulgaria followed suit later on, but then announced a return to the WCC in 2006.

(WCC) – was founded in 1948. Next to Protestant initiatives, the Orthodox churches played a significant part in the movement from the very beginning.

For example, the Patriarchate of Constantinople took an important step in 1920 through its circular encyclical ‘Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere’.<sup>3</sup> The encyclical was addressed to Christian churches of various traditions, ‘which bear the sacred name of Christ’,<sup>4</sup> and urged them towards collaboration with the Ecumenical Patriarch in spheres through which ‘friendship’ and a ‘kindly disposition’ could be established and strengthened. The encyclical, for example, stressed the necessity of examining the issues of working up a common calendar, the close relationship of theological schools, student exchange programs, an objective study of ‘doctrinal differences’, and mixed marriages.

In the Soviet Union, a majority of Orthodox churches at the beginning took a negative stance towards the ecumenical dialogue taking place within the WCC. For example, the Russian Archbishop Seraphim harshly condemned the ecumenical movement<sup>5</sup> at a council of Orthodox hierarchs gathered in Moscow in 1948. The Cold War also played a role because churches were conceded a limited existence and used in order to increase Soviet influence on the international stage. So it was also due to a change in political strategy by the Soviet Communist party that several Orthodox churches became active members in the WCC in the early 1960s. In theological terms, the aspiration towards Christian unity can be examined as caring about fulfilling God’s will as expressed in the words of Christ’s prayer: ‘So that all might be one’ (Jn. 17:21).<sup>6</sup> Attempts at overcoming arguments

<sup>3</sup> ‘Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere’, Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920, in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism. Statements, Messages and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement 1902-1992*, comp. Gennadios Limouris (Geneva, 1994), pp. 9-11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Serafim, ‘Should the Russian Orthodox Church Participate in the Ecumenical Movement?’, July 1948, in *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: The Essential Texts*, eds. Bryn Geffert and Theofanis Stavrou (New Haven, CT, 2016), pp. 410-412.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that, in accordance with a decree of the Synod of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, this prayer of Christ must be perceived ‘in an Orthodox sense’, i.e. ‘there is no indication of the union of “churches” but of the integrity of individuals in the One, Holy, Catholic Church’. (‘Decree of the Holy Synod of the OCG, Conclusions of the Theological Commission’, 08 July 1998 (Tbilisi, 1999), p. 13. საქართველოს მართლმადიდებელი

between branches of the Christian Church on the verge of splitting are as old as ecclesiastical schism itself. They are hardly just a matter of modernity. ‘Therefore, the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement does not run counter to the nature and history of the Orthodox Church. It constitutes the consistent expression of the apostolic faith within new historical conditions.’<sup>7</sup>

In 2016, the Pan-Orthodox Council held on Crete once again confirmed and approved the participation of local Orthodox churches in ecumenical dialogues ‘in spite of the deep crisis that has arisen in the Ecumenical Movement.’<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, the modern ecumenical movement is accompanied by its own difficulties. Georges Florovsky attributed many of the current (20<sup>th</sup> century) difficulties to earlier and misguided attempts to restore union: ‘And nothing hinders really drawing closer and unification [of Christians, D.T.] as exactly these unsuccessful attempts themselves.’<sup>9</sup> Florovsky, however, wrote this against the background of his own ecumenical vision, which was probably not far away from that of the Catholic theologian Yves Congar: ‘The schism and heresy are the fruit of impatience and violence. Reunion will be the fruit of long enduring patience.’<sup>10</sup>

ეკლესიის წმინდა სინოდის განჩინება, საღვთისმეტყველო კომისიის დასკვნები, 08.10.1998. (თბ., საქართველოს საპატრიარქო 1999, გვ. 13]. In particular, see the document officially adopted by the Synod, ‘Conclusion of the Theological Commission regarding the Balamand document of 1993’ [‘საღვთისმეტყველო კომისიის დასკვნა ბალამანდის 1993 წლის დოკუმენტის შესახებ’].

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Orthodox Churches and World Council of Churches’, §15, Report of the inter-Orthodox Consultation of orthodox WCC member churches, 12-16 September 1991, in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism* (see n. 3), p. 191.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World’, §7, Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete, June 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/rest-of-christian-world> (accessed on 28 September 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Georges Florovsky, ‘Problems of the Christian Unification’, in Georges Florovsky, *Faith and Culture: Selected Works on Theology and Philosophy* (Saint-Petersburg, 2002), pp. 492-499, on p. 497. [Георгий Флоровский. *Проблематика Христианского Воссоединения*; Флоровский, Георгий. Вера и Культура: Избранные труды по Богословию и Философии. (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Христианского Гуманитарного Института 2002), сс. 492-499, с. 497].

<sup>10</sup> Yves Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (Westminster, MD, 1966), p. 174, cited in: Gillian Evans, *Method in Ecumenical Theology: The Lessons So Far* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 225.

The role of modern advocates of Ecumenism has been described as being between two fires set by fundamentalists on one side and liberals on the other, because no doubt ecumenists ‘will face criticisms both from those who charge them with compromising doctrine and those who chastise them for being unwilling to compromise doctrinally.’<sup>11</sup> Orthodox Christians are no exception to this. At any rate, as John Meyendorff wrote ‘the greatest mistake the Orthodox can make is to think that they can avoid involvement and responsibility.’<sup>12</sup> This is particularly true if one believes the testimony of the Romanian Orthodox theologian Ion Bria that regardless of sometimes meager results within the ecumenical dialogue, there exists a ‘real desire to listen to the Orthodox and learn from their tradition.’<sup>13</sup>

Dialogue with ‘the other’ already represents a value in itself. In the words of Archbishop Anastasius Yannoulatos, the head of the Orthodox Church of Albania, ‘in the process of trying better to understand the other, we understand ourselves in a deeper way.’<sup>14</sup> Many Orthodox theologians would claim that it had been like this throughout history, but in modern times the Orthodox seem to be particularly skeptical, tempted by a vision of only being defined by the condemnation of the heterodox. In the words of Metropolitan John Zizioulas, ‘Very often they [Orthodox theologians, D.T.] display a negative spirit at meetings, as if they were seeking confrontation rather than co-operation. There is also in certain quarters a spiritual terrorism against ecumenism which paralyses church leaders who fear that they may lose their “good reputation”, since genuine Orthodoxy has become identical with negativity and polemics.’<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> David Nelson and Charles Raith II, *Ecumenism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, 2017), p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> John Meyendorff, ‘True and False Ecumenism’, in John Meyendorff, *Witness to the World* (New York, 1987), pp. 45-47, on p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Ion Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition: The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox* (Geneva, 1991), p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Anastasios Yannoulatos, ‘Problems and Prospects of Inter-religious Dialogue: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective’, *The Ecumenical Review*, 52, Issue 3 (2000), pp. 351-357, on p. 351.

<sup>15</sup> John Zizioulas, ‘The Self-Understanding of the Orthodox and Their Participation in the Ecumenical Movement’, in *The Ecumenical Movement, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches: An Orthodox contribution to the reflection process on ‘The Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC’*, ed. G. Lemopoulos (Geneva, 1995), <http://www.>

Understanding Christian unity has never been uniform; clearing that up is itself a part of ecumenical dialogue. Should it be enough to restore the relationship between churches without formal and structural re-unification ('unity in diversity')? Or should there be joint humanitarian and social activity; or close collaboration and a peaceful co-existence? Would even intercommunion be a final goal?

Orthodox Christians made a significant contribution in the preparation of a text as fundamental as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM).<sup>16</sup> Correspondingly '[t]he majority of the Orthodox Churches expressed themselves positively towards the text.'<sup>17</sup> In the US and in some European countries this text 'not only became part of daily life but also figured in theological education programmes.'<sup>18</sup> Steps towards unity were reached on the basis of this document: for example, the restoration of the relationship between European and North American Anglicans and Protestants (the so-called Porvoo Agreement),<sup>19</sup> or recent rapprochement of the Lutheran and Reformation Churches in Europe (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe).<sup>20</sup>

Beyond such formal progress, there is another dimension implied in the experience of personal encounter: 'As a result, we have genuinely stopped being suspicious of one another, for the most part. With a few exceptions,

orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/ecumenical/john\_selfunderstanding\_ecumenical.htm (accessed on 28 November 2018).

<sup>16</sup> 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', Faith and Order Paper No. 111, the 'Lima Text', Lima, Peru, 1982, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text> (accessed 20 October 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, 'Memory Against Forgetting – the BEM Document After Twenty-Five Years', in *BEM at 25: Critical Insights into a Continuing Legacy*, eds. Thomas F. Best and Tamara Grdzeldze (Geneva, 2007), pp. 161-169, on p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, *Method* (see n. 10), p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> 'Christian Ecumenism Today: Crisis or Transformation?', Discussion with Ecumenical Leaders of Different Christian Churches, *State, Religion, Church in Russia and Abroad*, 35, No. 1 (2017), pp. 301-311, on p. 306. [Христианский Экуменизм Сегодня: Кризис или Трансформация? Беседа с Экуменистами разных конфессий, 'Государство, Религия, Церковь в России и за Рубежом' №1 (35), 2017, сс. 301-311, с. 306].

Christians no longer caricature one another as children of Antichrist, which was a way of expressing ultimate alienation from each other.<sup>21</sup>

## 1. THE CRITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE ORTHODOX IN THE WCC

In order to understand the general context of the overall attitude regarding the WCC in the Orthodox world, it is necessary to briefly recall some key moments that had a crucial significance for the WCC as well as for Orthodox churches.

Several key factors became manifest already before the current period that started in 1991. The first protest from the Orthodox regarding the WCC was heard on July 17, 1948, issued from a symposium of Orthodox churches held in Moscow. Some demanded that the Ecumenical Movement would honor the principles of Orthodox ecclesiology and more clearly express its own position in connection to ecclesiological issues. The ratified resolution stated that working in the 'political arena' is the 'practical aim of the ecumenical movement'<sup>22</sup> and that the WCC is trying to gain international influence through 'social and political activity'. This critique addressed the pragmatic patterns involved in the WCC's aims and visions. In other words, the Ecumenical Movement 'has too early lost faith in the possibility of union in one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church'<sup>23</sup> and 'the reduction of requirements and conditions for unity to the simple recognition of Christ as our Lord denigrates the Christian faith to such a degree as to be accessible even to the devils (James 2:19; Matt. 8:29; Mk. 5:7).'<sup>24</sup> The document ended with stating that due to all these deficiencies there was no way for the Orthodox churches to collaborate with the WCC. In response, the WCC worked up a document known as 'The Toronto Statement' in 1950, which confirmed that the WCC was in no way rejecting the hope of unifying the Christian churches. According to this statement concerning its ecclesiological status, then, the WCC is neither a church, nor a super-church and will be unable to be the expression of any one church or theology (III.3). In the same way,

<sup>21</sup> Evans, *Method* (see n. 10), p. 224.

<sup>22</sup> The word 'practical' has been omitted in the Georgian translation of the resolution.

<sup>23</sup> 'Resolution on the Ecumenical Question', Moscow, USSR, 1948, in *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism* (see n. 3), pp. 18-19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

‘membership does not imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word’ (IV.4).<sup>25</sup> The primary goal of the WCC, according to the document, was in fact not to gain political authority in order to carry out political aims, as had been the fear of the Orthodox hierarchs gathered in Moscow.

Another conflict with particular relevance for the OCG occurred at a council held by Orthodox churches in Thessaloniki in 1998. The protest issued there had mainly to do with procedural issues: Due to a numerical minority status (there were up to 350 Protestant churches in comparison to the 14 Orthodox churches) Orthodox churches were often unable to have the appropriate influence during the process of ratifying resolutions in the WCC. The Orthodox went over to a boycott implying temporary non-participation in ecumenical prayer and voting procedures. The document worked up by the Orthodox noted, ‘These mandates will be maintained until a radical restructuring of the WCC is accomplished to allow adequate Orthodox participation’. (Para. 13.d)<sup>26</sup>

A special commission at the WCC, created during the same year (1998) after three years of work, presented the *Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC*.<sup>27</sup> The document envisaged a radical change of the ballot system at WCC meetings: a so-called ‘model of consensus’ granted a *veto* to minorities and would guarantee the equal participation of minority members during voting procedures. Accordingly, the temporary measures put forward by the Orthodox churches were automatically withdrawn: all the Orthodox churches participated in the voting process as well as in an ecumenical prayer at the following WCC General Assembly on

<sup>25</sup> ‘The Church, the Churches and the WCC’, Toronto Statement, 1950, in *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963*, ed. Lukas Vischer (St. Louis, MI, 1963), pp. 166-171.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Evaluation of New Facts in the Relations of Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement’, Thessaloniki Statement, 1998, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/first-plenary-meeting-documents-december-1999/thessaloniki-statement> (accessed on 19 October 2017).

<sup>27</sup> ‘Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC’, September 2002, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/final-report-of-the-special-commission-on-orthodox-participation-in-the-wcc> (accessed on 13 October 2017).

February 14-23, 2006, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Already in 1999, however, the Georgian Synod had made the temporary measures of Thessaloniki final and unchanging, also because of a general prohibition for its clerics of participation in common prayers with the non-Orthodox.<sup>28</sup> Radical Georgian anti-ecumenists perceive the Thessaloniki declaration in the same way and deem the later restoration of Orthodox co-participation in common prayer to be a ‘violation’ of the Thessaloniki agreement.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. EMBRACING ECUMENISM IN THE CHURCH OF GEORGIA

The Orthodox Church of Georgia became a member of the WCC in 1962 through the initiative of Catholicos-Patriarch Ephrem II. In the same year, the Patriarch gave an extensive speech at a WCC conference, expanding the allotted 40 minutes to an actual three hours.<sup>30</sup> Georgian delegates were also actively involved in WCC Assemblies in Uppsala (1968) and Nairobi (1975). These were times when the Soviet government strictly controlled international visits, resulting in Georgian hierarchy being unable to frequently travel out of the country and participate in similar councils. Bishop Ilia Shiolashvili was also one of the active participants in ecumenical relations, later becoming Ilia II, Patriarch of the OCG, in 1977. In 1979 he was elected as one of the presidents of the WCC. It was ‘a sign that Ilia II and the Orthodox Church of Georgia were being recognized for their contributions in the transformation of Georgian society.’<sup>31</sup> In the years to

<sup>28</sup> ‘Decree of the Holy Synod of the OCG’, 9 November 1998, Tbilisi, The Georgian Patriarchate (1999), p. 23 (see the document ‘The Theology Commission’s Conclusion Regarding Ecclesiology’).

<sup>29</sup> *Ecumenism: The Religion of the Antichrist*, colls. Gelasi Aroshvili and Zurab Aroshvili (Tbilisi, 2002), p. 195; also see: *The Georgian Patriarchate’s Activity During the Years 1997-2001*, colls. Gelasi Aroshvili and Zurab Aroshvili (Tbilisi, 2001), p. 11. [გელასი აროშვილი და ზურაბ აროშვილი (შემდგ.). ეკუმენიზმი: ანტიქრისტიანული რელიგია. თბ., მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია საქართველოში 2002, გვ. 195; იხ. ასევე: გელასი აროშვილი და ზურაბ აროშვილი (შემდგ.). საქართველოს საპატრიარქოს მოღვაწეობა 1997-2001 წლებში. თბ., მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია საქართველოში 2001, გვ. 11].

<sup>30</sup> Sergo Vardosanidze, *Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia, His Holiness and Beatitude Ephrem II, 1960-1972* (Tbilisi, 2007), p. 39. [სერგო ვარდოსანიძე. სრულიად საქართველოს კათოლიკოს-პატრიარქი, უწმინდესი და უნეტარესი ეფრემ მეორე, 1960-1972. თბ., თბილისის სასულიერო აკადემია და სემინარია 2007, გვ. 39].

<sup>31</sup> Paul Crego, ‘The Georgian Orthodox Church’, in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucian N. Leustean. (London & New York, 2014), pp. 140-160, on p. 146.



come, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II proved an energetic supporter of the idea of Christian unity, which became apparent in many of his public announcements. Among others, he boldly declared at the WCC Assembly of 1979 that a Christian must be an ecumenist with everything, to be expressed in ideas and in practice as well, for example, 'in mutual attendance of our services and sermons.'<sup>32</sup>

Patriarch Ilia II was not just a fervent supporter of such 'a practical ecumenism' at ecumenical gatherings held in the international arena. He also preached the same thing in his own country. Among the clearest manifestations of this are his speeches given in various villages while traveling in the Georgian region Meskhet-Javakheti in 1988. He proved especially open to Roman Catholics. For instance, he addressed a Catholic population in the village of Vale: 'I can send you such a priest, who prays together with you with the same sort of equal love in an Orthodox church, as well as in a Catholic one.'<sup>33</sup> The Patriarch's address to the people in the village of Ude struck a similar note:

There is frequently an argument in your region that I am a Catholic, you are Orthodox, and thus we are different. Don't forget that we are one and we believe in the Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And if some schism still occurred between Rome and Byzantium in the eleventh century, this was more of a political character and not dogmatic or theological, while despite this schism, no schism has occurred between Rome and Georgia.<sup>34</sup>

During this same trip, the Patriarch also recalled how he prayed together with Catholics while on a pilgrimage in Rome.

<sup>32</sup> Patriarch Ilia II, 'We Must Find Our Ways', Speech delivered at WCC, 1979, *The Verge*, No. 1 (2005), p. 4. The speech was originally published in the official periodical of the Patriarchate of Georgia: *The Grapevine Cross*, No.2 (1979), p. 24. [პატრიარქი ილია II. 'უნდა ვეძიოთ ახალი გზები'. ეკლესიათა მსოფლიო საბჭოს სხდომაზე წარმოთქმული სიტყვა, 1979 წ., ჟურნალი "ზღვარი" №1, 2005, გვ. 4. სიტყვა თავდაპირველად გამოქვეყნდა საპატრიარქოს ოფიციალურ ჟურნალში 'ჯვარი ვაზისა' №2 (1979), გვ. 24].

<sup>33</sup> 'Patriarch Ilia II's Journey to Meskhet-Javakheti', *The Grapevine Cross*, No. 4 (1988), pp. 22-35, on p. 29. [კათოლიკოს-პატრიარქ ილია II-ის მოგზაურობა მესხეთ-ჯავახეთში, ჟურნალი 'ჯვარი ვაზისა' №4 (1988), გვ. 29].

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

In 1984 Patriarch Ilia II even personally gave the Eucharistic communion to the Revd Ernst Christoph Suttner and Revd Coelestin Patock, two Catholic priests visiting Georgia, which was announced by the Patriarchate's official press service.<sup>35</sup> (Later on, he was forced to publicly express repentance for this act of intercommunion.) Others in the episcopate openly shared his fervent ecumenical engagement and desire for unity. Metropolitan Nikoloz Makharadze proudly noted in one of his articles that the involvement of Orthodox churches in the Ecumenical Movement is 'inevitable' and that the Patriarch 'is a founder of the Ecumenical Movement in Georgia.'<sup>36</sup>

Patriarch Ilia II warmly received representatives of the WCC. The Rev. Philip Potter, the General Secretary of the WCC, visited Georgia in 1983. During this meeting, the Patriarch openly approved Dr. Potter's service for the rapprochement of churches and of Christians in general.<sup>37</sup> Around the same time, Bishop Nikoloz Makharadze positively recorded the visits of other ecumenical representatives, like Dr. Lukas Vischer, the chairman of the Department of Faith and Ecclesiastical Order at the WCC, or Dr. Glen William the General Secretary of the CEC (Council of European Churches).<sup>38</sup> Such visits needed great effort to become possible at all, and took place despite Communist Moscow doing everything to hamper these kinds of international contacts of the OCG.<sup>39</sup> Paradoxically, the Georgian (Communist) government, due to external pressure from either Moscow or the West, was often forced to take visit requests of foreign delegations into account.

<sup>35</sup> *The Grapevine Cross*, No. 2 (1984), p. 17. (The text is without title). [ჯვარი ვაზისა №2 (1984), გვ. 17. ტექსტს სათაური არ აქვს].

<sup>36</sup> Nikoloz Makharadze, 'The Church of Georgia at the Modern Stage of the Ecumenical Movement', *The Grapevine Cross*, No. 1 (1983), pp. 10-13, on p. 11. [ნიკოლოზ მახარაძე, 'საქართველოს ეკლესია ეკუმენური მოძრაობის თანამედროვე ეტაპზე', *ჯვარი ვაზისა* №1 (1983), გვ. 11].

<sup>37</sup> 'Dr Phillip Potter, the Secretary General of the WCC, a Guest of the Orthodox Church of Georgia', *The Grapevine Cross*, No. 2 (1983), p. 15. [ემს-ს გენერალური მდივანი, დოქტორი ფილიპ პოტერი საქართველოს მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესიის სტუმარი, 'ჯვარი ვაზისა' №2 (1983), გვ. 15].

<sup>38</sup> Makharadze, 'The Church of Georgia' (see n. 36), p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Witness Through Troubled Times: A History of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, 1811 to the Present*, eds. Tamara Grdzeldize, Martin George and Lukas Vischer (London, 2006), p. 235.

Even religious minorities within Georgia recall this period, up until the 1990s, as one of the best concerning inter-confessional relations. As I was preparing several articles concerning non-Orthodox denominations in Georgia, the leaders of these churches stressed to me (a member of the OCG) how precious this period was for them. Oleg Khubashvili, a bishop of the Pentecostal church,<sup>40</sup> recalled that, despite them not being Orthodox, everyone knew well that ‘the Georgian people favorably met with our religious services’<sup>41</sup> up until the 1990s.

At that time, Baptist pastors preached from the pulpit at Sioni Cathedral; Patriarch Ilia II invited the leader of the Evangelical Baptist Church, Archbishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, to work on a modern Georgian translation of the Bible at the Patriarchate. What is more, a theological commission was created in 1979 in which clergy members of the Baptist and Orthodox Churches were represented.<sup>42</sup> The commission’s goal was the ‘reconciliation and unification’<sup>43</sup> of these two churches, as well as the offering of joint liturgies. An agreement was achieved on a few important issues. Eucharistic communion, however, was set out as a future goal. Interestingly, the works of non-Orthodox saints were freely printed at the Patriarchate’s official journal; for example, *De Imitatione Christi* by Thomas á Kempis (1378-1471).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> David Tinikashvili, ‘The Evangelical Pentecostal Church’, *Solidarity: a monthly journal of the Public Defender of Georgia*, No. 5 (2006), pp. 18-20, on p. 20. [დავით თინიკაშვილი. ‘ევანგელურ-ორმოცდაათიანელთა ეკლესია, სოლიდარობა: საქართველოს სახალხო დამცველის ყოველთვიური ჟურნალი №5 (2006), გვ. 20].

<sup>41</sup> David Tinikashvili, ‘The Social Service of the Church of the Faith of the Gospel in Georgia’, *Liberal* (19 June 2012), the article was written for the web-site of the magazine *Liberal*, <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/2456/saqartvelos-sakharebis-rtsmenis-eklesiis-sotsialuri-msakhureba> [დავით თინიკაშვილი. ‘საქართველოს სახარების რწმენის ეკლესიის სოციალური მსახურება’, (19 ივნისი 2012), სტატია დაიწერა ჟურნალ ‘ლიბერალი’-ს ვებ-გვერდისთვის] (Note: Later on the Pentecostal Church of Georgia changed its name precisely in this manner: ‘The Church of the Faith of the Gospel’) (accessed on 17 July 2017).

<sup>42</sup> At that time, the Baptist Church was the largest denomination in Georgia after the OCG.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Fiddes and Malkhaz Songulashvili, ‘A dialogue between the Orthodox Church of Georgia and the “Evangelical Christians-Baptists” of Georgia (1979-1980) with its wider Baptist context’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 13, No. 3 (2013), pp. 222-254, on p. 222.

<sup>44</sup> The publication of Thomas á Kempis’ work *De Imitatione Christi* in installments was begun in the journal *The Grapevine Cross*, No. 2 (1982), pp. 38-39.

### 3. OMINOUS SIGNS

Since the 1990s, the things described above were subsequently considered almost a sacrilege. The wave of anti-ecumenism did not originate among the upper hierarchs, but from lower down, particularly in monastic circles. Brochures and newspapers gradually appeared among believers that clearly conveyed fundamentalist content and assisted in the dissemination of exclusivist theological ideas. Many observers agreed that the dissolution of the Soviet Union had caused no real change in the thinking style of a significant part of the population: slogans, instead of autonomous thinking, governed the atmosphere. Communist ideology, in a sense, was simply replaced by Orthodox nationalism, which meant that any different idea or faith was suppressed. Pluralism and freedom of faith were declared to be anti-Christian phenomena. Orthodoxy became one of the necessary components of a Georgian identity. Thus, a Catholic or a Protestant could no longer be considered a Georgian, because this posed a danger to a Georgian national and religious sense of self.<sup>45</sup> As my older colleague once noted: ‘It is a paradox but a fact that these anti-ecumenical and thus anti-Western tendencies took root in our country in parallel with the national emancipation and anti-imperialist movement.’<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Regarding the connection of religious and nationalistic identities in post-Soviet Georgia, and Georgian religious nationalism in general, see: Ana Chelidze, ‘Ethno-Nationalistic and Religious-Nationalistic Components of Identity in Post-Soviet Georgia’, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 34, Issue 2 (2014), <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol34/iss2/1/> (accessed on 17 July 2017); Paul Crego, ‘Religion and Nationalism in Georgia’, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, 14, Issue 3 (1994), <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol14/iss3/1/> (accessed on 17 July 2017); Aysegul Aydingun, ‘The ethnification and nationalisation of religion in the post-Soviet Georgian nation-state building process: a source of discrimination and minority rights violations?’, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 17:7-8 (2013), pp. 810-828; Giga Zedania, ‘The Rise of Religious Nationalism in Georgia’, *Identity Studies*, 3 (2011), pp. 120-128; Sergo Ratiani, ‘Differing Political Theologies of Differing Eras’, *Identity Studies*, 3 (2011), pp. 51-75; William Eastwood, ‘Reframing National Locality: Religious Minorities Using History to Transform Local Experience in Georgia’, *National Identities*, 17, No. 1 (2015), pp. 25-43; Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country* (Budapest & New York, 2010), pp. 67-114; Tamara Grdzeldze, ‘The Orthodox Church of Georgia: challenges under democracy and freedom (1990-2009)’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10, issue 2-3 (2010), pp. 160-175.

<sup>46</sup> Nugzar Papuashvili, ‘The Occupation of Thought and The Anti-Ecumenical Rebellion in Georgia’, *Apra [The Sail]*, No. 15 (2009), pp. 274-290, on p. 280. [ნუგზარ პაპუაშვილი, ‘აზროვნების ოკუპაცია და ანტიეკუმენური აჯანყება საქართველოში, ავრა №15,

Perhaps a first sign of the appearance of a fierce, negative stance towards inter-confessional relations among the parish and clergy of the Church of Georgia was the non-admittance of Miguel Arranz, a Catholic priest and Professor of Eastern Liturgy, who had been invited to Georgia by Patriarch Ilia II in 1989 to read a lecture at the Theological Academy. Two lecturers of the Academy, Proto-priest Giorgi Gamreli, and Archimandrite Raphael Karelini, along with their faithful students led the protest.<sup>47</sup> The same period saw activities such as those of Priest Basil Mkalavishvili with his fanatic parish, who considered the extirpation of non-Orthodox religious assemblies their sacred obligation (this priest was excommunicated from the Church in 1996 by the Patriarchate). Generally, the situation in view of religious openness and tolerance changed for the worse, and by this time also influenced the Patriarch's public appearances.

The Patriarch's words pronounced at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, the ancient capital, on July 13, 1991 clearly express a deterioration of the situation: 'Anyone who betrays Orthodoxy, our Church, the living pillar, will be a traitor of the homeland, thus every man having a hand in spreading sectarian teachings and various religions among us will be declared an enemy of the Georgian people.'<sup>48</sup> The change of tone continued. In a Christmas epistle from 1994 the first hierarch of the Church of Georgia quite strictly charged other Christian denominations with proselytism. Protestant churches and unions, now mentioned in a derogatory manner as 'sects', 'are trying to carry out a religious expansion' and 'are sowing antagonism and hostility between people.'<sup>49</sup> The Patriarch expressed public repentance and apologized to his flock for

2009, გვ. 280.] (This article had been published earlier as a slightly abridged version, cf.: Nugzar Papuashvili, 'The Ten-year Anniversary of the Anti-Ecumenical Rebellion', *Archevani* [The Choice], No. 5 (2007), pp. 7-16 [ნუგზარ პაპუაშვილი. 'ანტიეკუმენური აჯანყებისათვის წლისთავი', არჩევანი №5, 2007, გვ. 7-16]).

<sup>47</sup> In more detail about this occurrence see the article: Nugzar Papuashvili, 'He Who Portrays Darkness as Light and Light as Darkness, or Obscurantism Outside and Within', *Liberty*, No. 5 (2003), pp. 21-31. [ნუგზარ პაპუაშვილი. 'ვინც ბნელსნათლად სხავს და ნათელს – ბნელად ანუ ობსკურანტიზმი გარეთ და შინ', თავისუფლება №5 (2003), გვ. 21-31].

<sup>48</sup> *Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia. Epistles, Speeches, Sermons. Book II* (Tbilisi, 1997), p. 314. [საქართველოს კათოლიკოს-პატრიარქი ილია II. ეპისტოლეები, სიტყვანი, ქადაგებანი. წიგნი მეორე. (თბილისი: საქართველოს საპატრიარქოს გამომცემლობა, 1997), გვ. 314].

<sup>49</sup> *Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II's Christmas Epistle, 1994*, an e-version of the text is available on the Patriarchate's website: <http://patriarchate.ge/geo/1994-2/> (accessed on 16 July 2017)

joint prayer and intercommunion with non-Orthodox in the recent past on February 21, 1991, Forgiveness Sunday:

There has been a case when some non-Orthodox have come to us, Catholics for example, and we gave them communion. This is a mistake. But we must remember also that we did this not in order to partake in their Creed, but to preach Orthodoxy to them and draw them closer. There have been some occasions when a certain clergy member has attended common prayer with the non-Orthodox. This is also a great error. But I must also note that our clergy members have never betrayed Orthodoxy and if they were attending a common prayer, they were praying with our prayers, our rules, our tradition, the Georgian custom. They were praying in the pure Orthodox manner.<sup>50</sup>

Such a change of tone probably represented not so much a change of mind on the part of the Patriarch himself and a change of his ecumenical convictions (which cannot be fully separated from his Soviet background and upbringing in Moscow), but a sensitivity for changing mentalities among the population, and the wish to avoid further splitting.

#### 4. A SURGE OF ANTI-ECUMENISM

Next to the protests of monks and conservatives intending to preserve what they considered the purity of faith, there were probably also factors of a more politico-ecclesiastical character that sparked the intensification of an anti-ecumenical mindset in Georgia. To a great extent, the Church of Georgia was unable to carry out ecumenical relations independently from the directives of Moscow. Also, in the mind of the Moscow Patriarchate, the OCG was supposed to be just a single-minded ally at WCC forums. The very fact that the large Church of Russia and the smaller Church of Georgia were each

[კათალიკოს-პატრიარქის ილია II-ის საშობაო ეპისტოლე, 1994 წელი, ტექსტის ელ-ვერსია ხელმისაწვდომია საპატრიარქოს ვებ-გვერდზე].

<sup>50</sup> 'Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II's Speech on Forgiveness Sunday', February 21, 1991, *The Enlightenment of Iveria*, No. 2 (1999), p. 4. (The speech is reprinted from the official paper of the Patriarchate of Georgia: *Patriarchate's News*, No. 8 (1999), p. 3). [კათალიკოს-პატრიარქის ილია მეორის სიტყვა მიტევების კვირას, 21 თებერვალი 1999, ჟურნალი 'ივერიის გაბრწყინება' №2 (1999), გვ. 4. სიტყვა გადმობეჭდილია გაზეთიდან 'საპატრიარქოს უწყებანი' №8 (1999), გვ. 3].

represented with the right to vote (i.e. one voice for Russia and one for Georgia) was perceived with discontent in Moscow. Yet the final decision regarding procedures of voting did not belong to the Moscow Patriarchate, so the latter tried to make the Georgian vote work to their advantage. The main members of the Georgian delegation at WCC Assemblies were always confirmed in Moscow.

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Georgia became more or less independent from the influence of Russian politics and religion. The autocephaly of the Church of Georgia was recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in January, 1990.<sup>51</sup> Moscow lost its previous direct influence in Georgia. Due to existing conflicts, the former unconditional ally threatened to turn into a problematic neighbor. Georgian isolationism would, therefore, plausibly work in favor of Russian interests.

Georgians might have informed the world how Russia and the Russian Church acted towards its small and weak neighbor through international tribunes (hinting at, for example the annexation of certain territories and extant churches and monasteries within them, or other ‘heroic acts’ committed against Georgia). It is not intended to prove here that the Church of Georgia left the ecumenical movement due to a direct demand from Moscow, but it seems more than plausible that an isolationist step such as this served Russia’s interests and that Russia would do everything (indirectly) to aid this process.

For the moment, the rise of an anti-Ecumenical mentality can sufficiently be described by evidence from inside the OCG. Starting from the 1990s, the activeness of the so-called ‘defenders’ of the purity of the faith becomes all the more noticeable, especially in the monastic circle which intensified anti-ecumenical agitation, frequently implying even the reprehension of bishops. On April 27, 1997, the monks of four monasteries and one diocese (Betania, Shiomghvime, Davit Gareja, Zarzma, and the Shemokmedi Diocese) addressed Patriarch Ilia II through an open letter announcing that they were severing Eucharistic communion with him due to participation in the ecumenical

<sup>51</sup> Levan Tkeshelashvili, *Basic Issues of the History of the Autocephaly of the Church of Georgia*, PhD thesis, Akaki Tsereteli State University (Kutaisi, 2012), p. 247. [ლევან ტყეშელაშვილი. *საქართველოს ეკლესიის ავტოკეფალიის ისტორიის ძირითადი საკითხები*. სადოქტორო დისერტაცია. ქუთაისი 2012, გვ. 247].

heresy.<sup>52</sup> If the OCG would not straightaway revoke its membership of ecumenical organizations, they would enter into schism and form a separate church. The announcement meant a serious threat to the patriarch's position because all these monasteries enjoyed great authority among the people. Even some married clergy members announced that they would enter into schism if the Patriarchate did not take the monks' demand into account.<sup>53</sup> The situation became even more serious when politicians harboring excessive patriotic sympathies and a large portion of media outlets supported the monks in 'preserving' the purity of the faith. Thus, 'ecumenism became associated with the West and anti-ecumenical hysteria acquired the essence of an anti-Western campaign within Georgia. The strange fact was that those political parties agreed with anti-ecumenical slogans, who, in their words, had set course for the civilized countries of the West.'<sup>54</sup> As it seems, a statement made by Eduard Shevardnadze, the country's president, played the final role, as he noted that for him as a believer, 'it is unacceptable to talk of splitting up the Church.'<sup>55</sup>

## 5. THE THEOLOGICAL COMPONENT OF THE ANTI-ECUMENICAL SURGE

In what follows, I will try to document and to reconsider some of the main theological arguments used by the anti-ecumenical movement in Georgia. These arguments are often at odds with what could be called an Orthodox theological mainstream. For one, the anti-ecumenical argument falls victim to a so-called 'category error', confusing rules and constitution of the WCC,

<sup>52</sup> 'An Open Letter to Patriarch Ilia II of Georgia', signed by the abbots of the monasteries, (April 27, 1997), <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/georgia.aspx> (accessed on 22 October 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Basili Kobakhidze, 'The Departure of the OCG from the Ecumenical Movement', A Conversation with Archpriest Basil Kobakhidze, head of the Press center of Patriarchate of Georgia, June 19, 1997, *Church and Time*, No. 1 (1998), pp. 55-64, on p. 56. [Василий Кобахидзе. «Выход Грузинской Православной Церкви из Экуменического Движения», Беседа Протоиерея Василия Кобахидзе, руководителя пресслужбы Грузинской Патриархии, 19 июня 1997, журнал «Церковь и Время» №1, 1998, с. 56].

<sup>54</sup> Papuashvili, 'He Who Portrays Darkness as Light and Light as Darkness (see n. 47).

<sup>55</sup> See the secular newspaper *Asaval-Dasavali*, No. 21 (144), May 20-26, 1997, p. 3. [«სავალ-დასავალი» №21, 20-26 მაისი 1997, გვ. 3].



a completely secular organization in its own right, with an ecclesiastical teaching which ‘must be given to anathema.’<sup>56</sup> The ecumenical movement cannot be a heresy – as it is often labelled by anti-ecumenists – simply because it in itself implies no sort of ecclesiastical, theological doctrine as such. The movement only represents an aspiration for churches to become mutually close to each other. It is a trying to create an appropriate environment, a space for discussion. In the aforementioned Toronto Statement of 1950, already by then conceived as a response to Orthodox objections, the WCC made clear that ‘it is not a superchurch. It is not a world church’ (para. 3:1), and that ‘the Council is far from desiring to usurp any of the functions which already belong to its constituent churches, or to control them, or to legislate for them.’ (Introduction)<sup>57</sup> Apart from this, even if the ecumenical organization would promote a theological doctrine, declaring it heretical is the prerogative of an official Church Council. ‘For a doctrine to be considered heretical, it must be proclaimed such by the Church, not simply by an individual, be he bishop, priest or monk.’<sup>58</sup>

At this point, another important remark is necessary. Participation in ecumenical gatherings including the WCC, even for open-minded Orthodox participants never could have been justified by any other goal except for giving witness for the truth of the Orthodox faith – ‘to give witness to the world’, in the words of John Meyendorff. It derives from this that the Georgian anti-ecumenists (who can conditionally be divided into moderate and radical anti-ecumenists) were trying to prove that even a serious theological dialogue was forbidden at the meetings of the WCC. Archimandrite Lazare Abashidze, a moderate anti-ecumenist wrote: ‘the regulations of ecumenical gatherings

<sup>56</sup> ‘Twelve Questions from the Brotherhood of Betania Monastery for Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II and the Synod of the Church of Georgia’, *New Generation*, No. 205 (July 28, 1997), p. 6. [‘ბეთანიის მონასტრის ძმობის 12 შეკითხვა საქართველოს ეკლესიის კათალიკოს-პატრიარქს ილია მეორეს და სინოდს’, გაზეთი ‘ახალი თაობა’ №205 (28 ივლისი 1997), გვ. 6].

<sup>57</sup> ‘The Church, the Churches and the WCC’, in *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement* (see n. 25), pp. 166-171.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Ladouceur, ‘On Ecumenoclasm: Who is a heretic?’, *Public Orthodoxy* (July 13, 2016), <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/07/13/on-ecumenoclasm-who-is-a-heretic/> (accessed on 22 October 2017)

themselves forbid the debate of dogmas of the Faith.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the radical anti-ecumenists also shared in this accusation: ‘It is officially forbidden to preach one’s own faith within the WCC.’<sup>60</sup> The argument was repeated still thirteen years later: ‘It is officially forbidden to preach one’s own faith within the WCC. “Proselytism” is also prohibited.’<sup>61</sup> Vladimer Tsamalashvili, a relatively young representative of the Georgian anti-ecumenists, follows the same line: ‘We are really in opposition to ecumenism because it hinders the conversion of heretics and pagans to Orthodoxy and it turns even the Orthodox towards the heretics.’<sup>62</sup>

The anti-ecumenists, therefore, misrepresent the WCC rules, constitution and foundational texts, which are characterized by terms such as ‘theological dialogue’, ‘discussion’, ‘exchange of ideas’.<sup>63</sup> A special commission of the WCC, again mainly in response to Orthodox grievances, in a final report of 2002 once more made it clear that ‘the Council is a necessary and helpful instrument ... to confront honestly their differences by exploring them in the light of doctrine, liturgical life, and holy scripture.’ (IV.30.d)<sup>64</sup>

The radical vision of a unity simply by conversion of the non-Orthodox as held up by anti-ecumenists in many respects contradicts statements issued elsewhere and by other Orthodox theologians familiar with the ecumenical

<sup>59</sup> Lazare Abashidze, *Resurrection without the Crucifixion or Ecumenism* (Tbilisi, 1997), p. 8. [ლაზარე აბაშიძე. აღდგომა ჯვარცმის გარეშე ანუ ეკუმენიზმი. (თბ., 1997), გვ. 8].

<sup>60</sup> *Ecumenism: The Religion of the Antichrist* (see n. 29), p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Gelasi Aroshvili, *Orthodoxy and the Glorification of Men: Catholicism, Ecumenism, Nominalism* (Tbilisi, 2015), p. 57. [გელასი აროშვილი. მართლმადიდებლობა და კაცთმადიდებლობა: კათოლიციზმი, ეკუმენიზმი, ნომინალიზმი. (თბ., 2015), გვ. 57].

<sup>62</sup> Vladimer Tsamalashvili, *Regarding Ecumenism and Ecumenical Tolerance: A Response to Levan Abashidze’s Letter ‘Orthodoxy and Ecumenism’* (Tbilisi, 2005), p. 15. [ვლადიმერ წამალაშვილი. ეკუმენიზმის და ეკუმენისტური შემწყნარებლობისათვის: პასუხი ლევან აბაშიძის წერილზე ‘მართლმადიდებლობა და ეკუმენიზმი’. (თბ., 2005), გვ. 15].

<sup>63</sup> ‘Constitution and Rules of the WCC’, Busan, Republic of Korea, 30 October 2013, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules> (accessed on 13 October 2017).

<sup>64</sup> ‘Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC’, September 2002, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/final-report-of-the-special-commission-on-orthodox-participation-in-the-wcc> (accessed on 13 October 2017).

movement. 'Proselytism' in writings from these anti-ecumenical circles is a positive word. Radical anti-ecumenists are convinced that through the outlawing of proselytism, 'the ecumenists hinder the non-Orthodox Christians searching for truth in the bosom of Christ's holy Church.'<sup>65</sup> The negative connotation of the word 'proselytism', often mentioned also by Orthodox theologians, has escaped their attention.<sup>66</sup> Alexander Schmemmann also spoke of sharing the truth of Orthodoxy with others and of witnessing to it within an ecumenical dialogue, which clearly did not rule out the conversion of others (although Schmemmann gave more preference to the word 'mission' than 'conversion'). Of Orthodox theology, '[t]his mission is impossible without some degree of love for the West and for the many authentically Christian values of its culture.'<sup>67</sup> In Schmemmann's opinion, the Orthodox must overcome a 'childish certitude' when having a dialogue with others, according to which everyone is obliged, by love towards Christianity, to simply embrace the 'brilliant' Byzantine tradition. Other theologians have called for an acknowledgment of the existing plurality. According to Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, the head of the Orthodox Church of Albania, the dominance of any faith in a multicultural environment today and its 'imposition' upon others is artificial because 'the existence of religious diversity in the world is taken for granted, and it does not seem likely that this diversity will decline.'<sup>68</sup> To treat any other parts of this plurality as just heresy, as anti-ecumenists tend to do, often with direct comparison of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century ecumenism to ancient Christianity and the fathers, is a method equally rejected by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. On a visit to Georgia in September 2003 he said:

<sup>65</sup> *The Activities of the Georgian Patriarchate from 1997-2001*, comp. Gelasi Aroshvili and Zurab Aroshvili (Tbilisi, 2001), p. 45. [გელასი აროშვილი და ზურაბ აროშვილი (შემდგ.). *საქართველოს საპატრიარქოს მოღვაწეობა 1997-2001 წლებში*. (თბ., მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია საქ-ში 2001), გვ. 45.]

<sup>66</sup> In regard to the characteristics of proselytism, cf.: 'The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness', §IV.19, 25 September 1995, in *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998*, eds. J. Gross et al. (Geneva, 2000), pp. 891-899, on p. 895.

<sup>67</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, 'The Task of Orthodox Theology Today', Paper read at the first Conference of Orthodox Theologians in America, Sept. 26-27, 1966, in Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, NY, 1979), pp. 117-126, on p. 123.

<sup>68</sup> Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Geneva, 2003), p. 16.

Some say a dialogue is excessive and is harmful, since Christians of other denominations will again follow their own different teachings. The Apostle Paul tells us to not have a discourse with heretics, we must depart from them after the first and second admonishment. The Apostle's advice, of course, is worthy of note, deserving of respect and to be followed, but we also must consider that the Apostle is speaking in regard to individual heretics. Today, dialogues are taking place with delegations of churches from different denominations and likewise with the millions of members of these churches through them. These people have not made the systematic decision to separate from the Orthodox Church, but to transmit from their own ancestors as a legacy. A dialogue is taking place precisely through them and the benevolent people among them ... The aim of the dialogue is represented by a weakening of the animosity between people of different faiths, which indubitably must come before preaching the Truth (cf. Acts 17:22-34). Time-worn polemics, animosity, and the attacks extant between religions and dogmas have been unable to bring representatives of different dogmas and religions to repentance. We are obliged to try a method of mutual understanding, revealing good will, reconciliation, and dialogue.<sup>69</sup>

For Orthodox anti-ecumenists there is no difference whatsoever between the non-Orthodox living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and heretics of the fourth century. An example would be the critique of the ecumenical movement by Archimandrite Raphael Karelin, one of the leaders of Georgian fundamentalists: 'St. Athanasius and Arius did not scant slogans of unity; St. Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius did not restore a joint communique in regard to their teaching being different only in formulation, whereas in essence it was the same.'<sup>70</sup> Priest Gelasi Aroshvili notes the following in a letter, 'Ecumenism as an Ecclesiological Heresy': 'At the Holy Ecumenical Councils, heretics were given to anathema that is to say cut off from the Church, but ecumenists do not recognize the authority of the Holy Ecumenical Councils. This is equivalent to a denial of the authority of the world Orthodox Church.'<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *The Ecumenical Patriarch in Georgia: A Collection of Essays*, translated from the Greek into Georgian with a foreword added by Tamar Meskhi (Tbilisi, 2004), pp. 67-69. [მსოფლიო პატრიარქი საქართველოში: სიტყვათა კრებული. ბერძნულიდან თარგმნა და წინასიტყვაობა დაუროთო თამარ მესხმა. (თბ., 2004), გვ. 67-69].

<sup>70</sup> Raphael Karelin, *A Challenge of the New Modernism: Regarding a Distortions of the Truth in the Theological Insights of Deacon Andrey Kuraev* (Moscow, 1999), p. 4. [Рафаил Карелин. Вызов Новомодернизма: Об Искажениях Истины в Богословских Опытах диакона Андрея Кураева. (М., Лествица 1999), с. 4].

<sup>71</sup> Aroshvili, *Orthodoxy and the Glorification of Men* (see n. 61), p. 46.

Vladimer Tsamalashvili responded to a point made by Dr. Levan Abashidze according to which today's Catholics and Protestants are not 'founders of the heresies basically implied by the Fathers of the Church. Instead, they are very distant descendants of the founders of heresies and thus it will be a great injustice to show the same strictness towards them.'<sup>72</sup> Tsamalashvili poses the following question: 'Did the Ecumenical Councils really forbid prayer only with the founders of heresies?'<sup>73</sup>

Not only were heresiarchs (i.e. those expressing or founding heretical teachings) condemned in the earlier centuries at church councils, but also those who consciously and insistently followed them. Sergius Bulgakov notes that what the earlier councils did was to apply 'protective measures, which were then in accord with the acute struggle with heresy. But measures of defense lose their significance when there is no attacking party – and we see this state of affairs in a whole range of interconfessional relationships in our own time.'<sup>74</sup> Nikos Matsoukas, a Greek Orthodox theologian, adds that prohibitions regarding common prayer received in the past were just a reaction to the hostile attitude defining the heretics in opposition to the Orthodox of that time, for heresy is not just 'having certain ideas, but enmity. This is why members of the Church were forbidden to pray with people malevolently biased towards the faith.'<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, today's non-Orthodox Christians, notes Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, 'are kindly disposed towards Orthodoxy, which cannot be said for the heretics about which we have

<sup>72</sup> These words cited by Vladimer Tsamalashvili belong to the Orthodox theologian Dr. Levan Abashidze, see the article: Levan Abashidze, 'Orthodoxy and Ecumenism', *Emmaus*, No. 3 (2004), pp. 82-94. [ლევან აბაშიძე. 'მართლმადიდებლობა და ეკუმენიზმი', ემაუსი №3 (2004), გვ. 82-94].

<sup>73</sup> Tsamalashvili, *Regarding Ecumenism* (see n. 62), p. 22. Unfortunately, the theologian Levan Abashidze has not responded to Mr. Tsamalashvili's critique.

<sup>74</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, 'By Jacob's Well', *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, No. 22 (1933), pp. 7-17, on p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Nikos Matsoukas, 'According the Christian Apocalypse, Ecumenism Means "Fullness", An Interview with Nikos Matsoukas, Professor of Theology at the University of Thessaloniki, July 1997', in *So That They May Be One: The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Tamar Meskhi (Tbilisi, 2002), p. 184. [ეკუმენიზმი და ქრისტიანული აპოკალიფსის მიხედვით 'სველებს ნიშნავს ინტერვიუ თესლონიკის უნივერსიტეტის თეოლოგიის პროფესორთან, ნიკოს მაცუკასთან, ივლისი 1997, თამარ მესხი (რედ.). რაიას ყოველნი ერთ იყვნენ: მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია და ეკუმენური მოძრაობა. (თბ., 2002), გვ. 184].

information in the Law and patristic literature.<sup>76</sup> John Meyendorff focuses on the personal choice connected to religious confrontation in the past: ‘The prohibition of church law regarding prayer with heretics implies apostates from the Church and not the fervent Christians who have personally not left the Church.’<sup>77</sup>

Thus, according to many respected theologians, blindly copying old Church laws and mechanically applying them to today’s situation is in opposition to the Orthodox understanding of the Church’s essence and nature. Canons forbidding all kinds of relationships (including nonreligious<sup>78</sup>) with people having a different religious faith do not belong to the dogmatic realm (which most Orthodox theologians agree must indeed remain unchanged forever). Such canons were drafted by the Church Fathers in response to the circumstances of the time. Today however, the situation has fundamentally changed and demands a different approach from the Church. According to Nicholas Afanasiev, a well-known Orthodox theologian, the Holy Spirit guides the Church in a different manner in each epoch.<sup>79</sup>

In fact, not only contemporary Orthodox theologians take such a position, but also those writing in the early centuries. Even in the epoch itself when these canons were drafted, the Church fathers considered a creative and free stance towards similar restrictions to be permissible. For example, St. John Climacus wrote in ‘To the Shepherd’: ‘As defined in the holy canons, let the weak not sit at the same table with heretics. However, if those who are strong in the Lord are invited in good faith and disposition by heretics, then they should go.’<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Kallistos Ware, ‘The Salt of Orthodoxy, A Conversation with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, 6/19 September 1997, Tbilisi, Georgia’, *Emmaus*, 1 (2004), p. 91. [‘მარილი მართლმადიდებლობის’, საუბარი მიტროპოლიტ კალისტოს უერთან (თბილისი, 6/19 სექტემბერი 1997), ჟურნ. ‘ემაოსი’ #1, 2004, გვ. 91].

<sup>77</sup> Meyendorff, ‘True and False Ecumenism’ (see n. 12), p. 46.

<sup>78</sup> See for example the eleventh canon of the Council of *Trullo*, through which members of the Church are forbidden to have any contact with the Jews. Christian were forbidden to receive medical treatment from Jews, as well as bathing in public *Thermae* together with them, etc, by a sufficiently severe punishment (the threat of being excommunicated from the Church). It is interesting that Orthodox fundamentalists are not demanding that this canon be kept today.

<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Chapter 8:1, trans. Vitaly Permiakov (Notre Dame, IN, 2007), p. 245.

<sup>80</sup> John Climacus, ‘Letter to the Sheperd’, §65, trans. J. Chrysavgis, in *La theologie Byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. I/1, ed. Carmelo G. Conticello (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 313-325, on p. 319.

Today's Orthodox anti-ecumenists, however, see this differently. Raphael Karelín's view in connection to the distant legacy of heretics from the early centuries is that '[L]ike children with promissory notes for a father's debts, the Nestorians inherited the sin of their own community whether they know their own teachings or not.'<sup>81</sup> According to Karelín, this parallels 'Adam's primeval sin being handed down to his descendants, although they personally have not participated in this sin.'<sup>82</sup> As an aside, note that the concept of original sin (in the Augustinian tradition with the notion of hereditary guilt attached to it) is otherwise rejected by the Orthodox mainstream. This viewpoint has been thoroughly critiqued on the basis of teachings by the holy fathers of the Church in a work by Edisher Chelidze, a professor of patristics at the Tbilisi Theological Academy.<sup>83</sup>

## 6. THE UNEXPECTED VICTORY OF THE GEORGIAN ANTI-ECUMENISTS

On May 20, 1997, the Holy Synod of the OCG officially decided to exit from ecumenical organizations. This in a way meant also to attribute, implicitly and *en passant*, to the WCC an 'ecclesiological character', which it would have acquired in recent times, becoming unacceptable for Orthodox Christians.

The synod did not yet completely surrender to the theology of the rebel clergy, but took measures against them as well. Due to their severance of the Eucharistic communion or liturgical unity, deemed 'an anti-ecclesiastical and anti-national act' in the decree, they were placed under various penalties (being relieved of an abbot's duties, a suspension of priestly functions, or being banned from communion).<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Karelín, *A Challenge of the New Modernism* (see n. 70), p. 56.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>83</sup> Edisher Chelidze, 'Teachings of the Church Fathers Regarding Sin and Punishment', Patrological newspaper *Holy Relics of the Church*, No. 1 (10 May, 2000), pp. 6-7. [ედიშერ ჭელიძე. 'ეკლესიის მამათა წმკლებს ცოდვის და სსჯელის შესახებ', პატროლოგიური გაზეთი 'საეკლესიო სიწმინდენი' #1, 2000, გვ. 6-7]; see also: Edisher Chelidze, *Who Really Is Introducing Agitation and Perilous Teachings to the Apostolic Church of Georgia?* (Tbilisi, 2004), p. 175 [ჭელიძე, ედიშერ. *მართლაც ვის შემოაქვს შფოთი და დამღუპველი მოძღვრებანი საქართველოს სამოციქულო ეკლესიაში?* თბ., 2004, გვ. 175].

<sup>84</sup> See the official periodical of the Patriarchate of Georgia: *Grace*, No. 6-7 (July 1, 1997), p. 2. [იხ. საქართველოს საპატრიარქოს ოფიციალური ბეჭდვითი ორგანო, გაზეთი 'მადლი' №6-7 (1 ივლისი 1997), გვ. 2].

Several observers, like for example, Stephen Jones came to the conclusion that it was the ‘Patriarch Ilia II’s decision to abandon the WCC’.<sup>85</sup> Others, such as Stephen Rapp, found the main reason in the ‘proselytism’ of competing Protestants: ‘Much of this anti-ecumenical attitude was the result of Protestant missionary activities in post-Soviet Georgia’.<sup>86</sup> There is hardly sufficient evidence for both hypotheses – rather the opposite. When the patriarch and the episcopate expressed their attitude shortly before the synod’s decision, they demonstrated something quite different. In a Sunday sermon on May 18, 1997, two days before the session, Patriarch Ilia still declared: ‘The presence of Orthodox churches in the WCC has brought many good things ... I am convinced that other anti-ecclesiastical, unbelieving powers stand behind these people [the Georgian anti-ecumenists, D.T.]’.<sup>87</sup> In light of such statements, it seems more likely to presume that the patriarch had rather given in to a strong demand raised from elsewhere during the synod’s session. In particular, Archimandrite Ioane Sheklashvili was considered to be the instigator of an anti-ecumenical revolt. Along with some others, he also had a close relationship with Archimandrite Lazare Abashidze, who until then, had been the abbot of Betania Monastery for ten years. Following the Synod session in 1997, he published a brochure containing interesting hints at the tactics of the anti-ecumenical monks. It turned out that Archimandrite Ioane Sheklashvili had envisaged separating from the Church of Georgia from the very start. The ‘heresy of ecumenism’ appeared to be only an excuse to achieve this aim. According to Fr. Lazare’s insistent claim, Fr. Ioane actually had little hope in the Synod making a decision to leave the WCC. Still, would such a miracle occur, then his group was ready to go even further and demand a cessation of Eucharistic communion with all the Orthodox churches which were still members of the WCC. As such a demand was unlikely to be fully satisfied, they would have a ‘legitimate’ and ‘worthy’ foundation for abandoning the Church. Archimandrite Lazare writes:

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* (London, 2013), p. 228.

<sup>86</sup> Stephen Rapp, ‘Georgian Christianity’, *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry (Malden and Oxford, MA, 2007), pp. 137-155, on p. 154.

<sup>87</sup> *Grace*, No. 6-7 (July 1, 1997), p. 3 (also cf. secular newspaper *The Republic of Georgia*, No. 114 (May 20, 1997). [მაგალი №6-7, 1 ივლისი 1997, გვ. 3; იხ. ასევე გაზეთი ‘საქართველოს რესპუბლიკა’ №114, 20 მაისი 1997, გვ. 2].



Neither Fr. Ioane, nor his allies supposed for even an instant that the Patriarch would take this step [leaving the WCC, D.T.]. Fr. Ioane and his like-minded people made their first announcement with the calculation that, of course, the Patriarch would punish them, whereas the Synod council would decide to remain in the WCC; everyone however would be outraged by this and many would follow them! (It was exactly like this and we know this). But in the case 'if the synod still unexpectedly abandoned it', the following action was already decided (and this was truly known to us before the departure from the WCC) – Then we will demand the connection to be severed with all the churches that have not left, they however will not go for this. Taking refuge in another 'jurisdiction' had been decided from the very start and don't let them now try to lie to us.<sup>88</sup>

The version belonging to Archimandrite Lazare is the same, which Archimandrite Ioane himself would corroborate. Later he told 'Metaphrasis', a religious news agency based in Moscow: 'We expected a long struggle, [and] thought that the Synod would create a special commission which would slowly consider this issue'.<sup>89</sup>

On May 22, 1997, Patriarch Ilia II sent a letter to the WCC to inform it about the Georgian departure from ecumenical organizations. On one hand, this letter says that his Church left the WCC due to 'an actual danger of separation'; on the other hand, it expresses discontent about the ineffectiveness of the WCC's work: '... interests of the Orthodox are not often taken into consideration at the WCC'. The letter continues with complaints about the WCC's 'ecclesiological character'.<sup>90</sup> Later on, the Patriarch stated in an interview that the departure from the WCC was connected to envisaging the 'sentiments'<sup>91</sup> created among a portion of believers. He no longer mentioned some type of theological claim.

<sup>88</sup> Lazare Abashidze, *Does Ecumenism Really Bring Schism into the Church of Georgia?* (Tbilisi, 1997), p. 25. [ლაზარე აბაშიძე. *ნუთუ მართლაც ეკუმენიზმს შეაქვს განხეთქილება საქართველოს ეკლესიაში?* თბ., 1997, გვ. 25].

<sup>89</sup> Andrei Zolotov, 'Georgian Orthodox Church to Leave WCC and CEC', *Ecumenical News International, ENI News Service*, May 26, 1997, [http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/georgia\\_wcc.aspx](http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/georgia_wcc.aspx) (accessed on 21 July 2017).

<sup>90</sup> '...during recent years there have been certain attempts to confer the WCC with an ecclesiological character' – 'Country profile: Georgia', January 1, 2004, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/ecumenical-solidarity/country-profile-georgia> (accessed on 04 September 2017).

<sup>91</sup> Patriarch Ilia II, 'I think as a Georgian and I Act as a Georgian', *Fire*, No. 06 (23 February 2004), <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2293198> (accessed on 22 October 2017). [Патриарх

Thus, according to the public declarations by the Patriarch and other bishops,<sup>92</sup> the foremost and main reason for leaving ecumenical organizations was connected precisely to being pressured by the danger of schism. The fact that they announced this publicly as well, caused serious irritation among the radical anti-ecumenists. Criticizing the Georgian patriarchate they went so far as to emphasize that indeed the exit from the WCC ‘did not have a religious, but a diplomatic reason,’<sup>93</sup> and that this was why the Georgian Patriarchate did not cease Eucharistic communion with other Orthodox Churches which were still members of the WCC. So there was no doctrinal problem with ecumenism. Moderate anti-ecumenists who did not enter into schism with the radicals considered the assertion unfair that the Synod decided to leave the WCC due to so-called diplomatic reasons and not because of religion. ‘Such a perception of the event greatly diminishes the Holy Synod as well as every hierarch of our Church.’<sup>94</sup> They had yet to acknowledge the facts publicly announced by the patriarch and other hierarchs. Curiously, in spite of their theological arguments being rather weak, no one had entered into any theological dialogue with the rebels previous to the Synod’s decision. Only afterwards did the Patriarchate respond to the letter<sup>95</sup> published by the monks of Betania Monastery in August, 1997, criticizing the various ‘anathemas’ expressed there.<sup>96</sup>

Вся Грузия Илия II, ‘Я Думаю по-Грузински и Поступаю по-Грузински’, Огонек №06, 23.02.2004].

<sup>92</sup> Ex., Bishop Nikoloz had also named an avoidance of schism as a reason for leaving the WCC (see an official newspaper of Georgian patriarchate *Madli* [*The Grace*], No. 12-13 (1998), p. 220).

<sup>93</sup> *The Activities of the Georgian Patriarchae from 1997-2001* (see n. 65), p. 46. (Primary source of the info cited by Aroshvili: *The Republic of Georgia* newspaper [გაზეთი ‘საქართველოს რესპუბლიკა’] 17.07.1997).

<sup>94</sup> *Who is Bringing Turmoil into the Apostolic Church of Georgia?* (Tbilisi, 2003), p. 16. [ვიმშემოაქვს შფოთი საქართველოს სამოციქულო ეკლესიაში? (თბ., წმინდა მეფე დავით აღმაშენებლის სახელობის მართლმადიდებელი მრევლის კავშირი 2003), გვ. 16.]

<sup>95</sup> ‘Anathemas to the Heresy of Ecumenism’, A letter from the monks of Betania Monastery, *New Generation*, (August 14, 1997), pp. 5-6. [‘ეკუმენისტური მწვალებლობის ანათემატიზმები’, ბეთანიის მონასტრის ბერთა წერილი, გაზეთი ‘ახალი თაობა’ 14 აგვისტო 1997, გვ. 5-6].

<sup>96</sup> ‘A Response to the Anathemas of the Betania Monks’, Press-center of the Georgian Patriarchate, *Kavkasioni*, No. 149 (30 August 1997), pp. 4-5. This response was prepared by a theological group working under the direction of Proto-priest Giorgi Gamreli

Already during the synod's session the anti-ecumenist monks had been imposed with various types of epitimias 'for attempting to introduce a schism', according to the Synod's edict. It went on as predicted: Once the demand to cease Eucharistic communion with all other Orthodox churches, which were 'in the heresy of ecumenism', was not satisfied, the ultra-radical wing declared separation. The patriarchate, however, probably did not only surrender to the pressure from the radicals, but its fear of a long term inner division was also motivated by sentiments widespread among the population. In connection with this, probably the most important problem was the informational vacuum that came about due to physical limitations as well as some policy decisions. According to Tamar Meskhi (a former collaborator in the Patriarchate's Foreign Department until 1995), only about three people had the right to travel to international ecumenical meetings. Consequently, they were 'constantly on the road', having virtually no time and space left to inform clergy members and parishes of the work, goals, and work style of ecumenical organizations. Sometimes even the patriarchate's periodicals would reject publication of interviews with guests from ecumenical organizations in Georgia, like those of the CEC in September 1990, fearing that this would 'lead to controversy' in the church.<sup>97</sup>

## 7. INTERNAL DISPUTES OF MODERATE AND RADICAL ANTI-ECUMENISTS

Archimandrite Lazare Abashidze, one of the leaders of the moderate anti-ecumenists, rejected the radical demand to cease Eucharistic communion with other Orthodox churches: 'We do not dispute that the canons were seriously being broken. Demanding an account from prelates is necessary, but the demand to cease Eucharistic communion is an extreme and evil step.'<sup>98</sup> In

(currently Bishop Ioane Gamreli). [*პასუხი ბეთანიელ ბერთა ანათემეტიზმებზე*, საქართველოს საპატრიარქოს პრესცენტრი, გაზ. 'კავკასიონი' №149 (30 აგვისტო 1997), გვ. 4-5. აღნიშნული პასუხი მომზადდა პროტოპრესვიტერ გიორგი გამრეკელის (ამჟამად ეპისკოპოსი იოანე გამრეკელი) ხელმძღვანელობით მომუშავე საღვთისმეტყველო ჯგუფის მიერ].

<sup>97</sup> *So That They May be One* (see n. 75), p. 16.

<sup>98</sup> Lazare Abashidze, *A Double-edged Sword: Regarding Those Bringing Schism into the Church of Georgia* (Tbilisi, 1997), p. 8. [ლაზარე აბაშიძე. *ორღეღული მახვილი: საქართველოს ეკლესიაში განხეთქილები შემომტანთა შესახებ*. (თბ., 1997), გვ. 8].

Archimandrite Lazare's opinion, if the Church of Georgia broke Eucharistic communion with all the Orthodox churches participating in the WCC, then 'they should have ceased praying' for the clergy and Christians of these churches, with true Orthodox Christians being among them.<sup>99</sup>

Radical anti-ecumenists thought differently, as becomes clear from Priest Gelasi Aroshvili's letter, addressed in opposition to Archimandrite Raphael Karelin:

If patriarchs and bishops pray together with heretics – Catholics, monophysites, Protestants, etc., – here we can only conclude that those in union with them are no longer in communion with Christ's true Church, despite them possibly being completely honorable and workers of virtue. Because the Orthodox teaching regarding separation from the heretics does not only imply that we are not in agreement with the heresy in mind, but that we shall not have union with the bishops preaching in the words and deeds of this heresy.<sup>100</sup>

Archimandrite Raphael Karelin had argued similar to his fellow Lazare Abashidze: 'Hierarchs might be mistaken in issues of the faith, even patriarchs. There were some cases when local churches fell into heresy, but the fullness of the ecumenical Church – the totality of all local churches – has never in history received a false dogma.'<sup>101</sup> The same author attempted a demonstration of the inner conflict of the radical anti-ecumenists' position, by stating that the Creed mentions only one unified Church. He then asked: 'Which group of apostates can be called "the only Catholic Church"? One part of those in schism certainly fights the other with the same sort of irreconcilability as each one of them opposes the only Catholic Church.'<sup>102</sup>

Apparently, moderate anti-ecumenists still had not considered ecumenism to be just a heresy. Lazare Abashidze wrote: 'Ecumenism is not similar to heresy at every level. It is spiritual deception at a certain stage, heresy however

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>100</sup> *The Church, The Pillar and Strength of Truth: Against the Ecclesiology of Archimandrite Raphael*, comp. Gelasi Aroshvili (Tbilisi, 2003), pp. 33-34. [გელასი აროშვილი (შემდგ.). *ეკლესია სვეტი და სიმტკიცე ჭეშმარიტების: არქიმანდრიტ რაფაელის ეკლესიოლოგიის წინააღმდეგ*. (თბ., 2003), გვ. 33-4].

<sup>101</sup> Raphael Karelin, *A Tragic Mistake That Might Be Corrected* (Tbilisi, 1997), p. 5. [რაფაელ კარელინი. *ტრაგიკული შეცდომა, რომელიც შეიძლება გამოწვრილებს* (თბ., 1997), გვ. 5].

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

is something else ... Ecumenism attempts to bypass dogmas and take us to heresy by another way ... It is not possible to call any ecumenist a heretic, he might be in spiritual deception, which still does not mean a loss of grace.<sup>103</sup>

In his opinion, ecumenism is a path to heresy or the loss of grace, although it is possible to turn from this path. He challenged the radical wing: 'Today, these people are only frightened to say that there is already no longer grace in our Church because we are right then asking: Since when?'<sup>104</sup> It is indeed a question of 'already' or 'not yet' that divides the moderate from the radical. The priests Gelasi and Zurab Aroshvili, leaders of the radical anti-ecumenists, answered Archimandrite Lazare: 'Many people say we have still not crossed the dividing line. But then tell us, what is or where is this dividing line, where do you know that this current line is before the last one and that some future line is the last one?'<sup>105</sup>

Edisher Chelidze, a professor of the Theological Academy and usually a defender and voice of the Georgian Patriarchate's position, commented on the issue, writing that since 'being in ecumenism really meant dogmatic depravity', this was why the Church of Georgia denied and condemned it. In his opinion, a non-cessation of Eucharistic communion with other Orthodox churches participating in the Ecumenical Movement does not mean sharing in the heresy of ecumenism, because this will only occur if the Church of Georgia is given to 'useless self-placation' and does not resort 'to its labors of reasoning with and pastoring other churches (remaining in ecumenism).'<sup>106</sup> In fact, even this idea of 'pastoral care' for the allegedly erroneous ecumenists among all the remaining fourteen Orthodox churches has evidently not resulted in any visible activities by the Georgian Patriarchate.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Exit from ecumenical organizations for the OCG did not mean the suspension of every kind of ecumenical activity. For example, there are still official

<sup>103</sup> Abashidze, *Does Ecumenism Really* (see n. 88), p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> *Ecumenism: The Religion of the Antichrist* (see n. 29), p. 166.

<sup>106</sup> Edisher Chelidze, 'Dogma and Oikonomia', *Wise Heart*, No. 3 (2011), pp. 122-132, on p. 130. [ედიშერ ჭელიძე. 'დოგმატი და ოიკონომია', გული გონიერი #3, 2011, გვ. 130.]

theological dialogues with the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches.<sup>107</sup> There is also the ‘practical ecumenism’ mentioned above: The Patriarch himself and, through his blessings and permit, other Georgian bishops continue to participate in common prayers along with the representatives of other Christian or non-Christian religious congregations. In 2005, a delegation consisting of members of Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious congregations extant in Georgia meeting in Oslo first visited a synagogue, Muslim mosque, and Catholic, Lutheran, and Baptist churches there. Finally, the delegation attended the Divine Liturgy along with Georgian Orthodox bishops, Daniel Datuashvili, and Gerasime Sharashenidze.<sup>108</sup> On July 7 of the same year, Patriarch Ilia II himself served a paracleses for the Azerbaijani people in Baku, which was attended by Father Ian, the leader of the Catholic parish in Baku, and by Semion Ikhiilov, a representative of Azerbaijan’s Jewish community.<sup>109</sup>

During a meeting with Abraam Miquelashvili, the chief rabbi in Georgia, held at the initiative of Patriarch Ilia II on December 29, 2005, the Patriarch gave his greetings to the Jewish people for the feast of Hannukah, lit some Hannukah candles, and chanted the first Psalm together with the chief rabbi.<sup>110</sup> Two Georgian bishops, Daniel Datuashvili and Nikoloz Pachuashvili attend a liturgy served by the Russian Patriarch Aleksy II along with Archbishop Antonio Mennini, the Vatican’s Nuncio, in Moscow on July 6,

<sup>107</sup> Tamara Grdzeldidze, ‘Ecumenical Dialogue in the Perspective of the Orthodox Church of Georgia’, in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism: Recourses for Theological Education*, eds. P. Kalaitzidis et al. (Oxford, 2014), p. 382.

<sup>108</sup> See a letter by one of the participants, Gabriele Bragantini, a Catholic priest serving in Georgia, ‘A Journey to Oslo’, *Saba: a monthly bulletin for Catholics in Georgia*, No. 8 (1 June 2005), p. 13. [იხ. ხსენებული ვიზიტის ერთ-ერთი მონაწილის, საქართველოში მოღვაწე კათოლიკე მღვდლის, გაბრიელე ბრაგანტინის წერილი ‘*შოგ ზაურობა ოსლოში*’, საბა: საქართველოს კათოლიკეთა ყოველთვიური მაცნე, №8, 2005, გვ. 13].

<sup>109</sup> ‘Patriarch Ilia II visits Orthodox and Catholic Churches in Baku’, *Regnum: News-Agency*, 7 June 2005, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/466688.html> [В Баку Патриарх всея Грузии побывал в православной и католической церквях, *Regnum: Информационное Агентство*] (accessed on 21 July 2017).

<sup>110</sup> ‘Patriarch Ilia II and rabbi Abraam Miquelashvili lit Hannukah candles together’, Portal *Credo.ru*, 30 December 2005, [Патриарх Илия II и раввин Абрам михелашивили зажгли ханукальные свечи, Портал *Credo.ru*], <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&cid=39334&topic=301&type=forum> (accessed on 22 June 2017). This act caused a great deal of outrage among Georgian Orthodox fundamentalists.

2006.<sup>111</sup> The list of such events taking place even after the official decision of 1997 could easily be continued. Generally, there emerged a paradoxical picture for outside observers: on one hand, the national government strives for integration with Western organizations; on the other hand however, the ecclesiastical government is leaving Western religious organizations.

At any rate, the tension within society has grown in recent years. Within the country a sense of ‘Georgian Orthodoxy’s’ distinction and holiness was further strengthened by the rejection of ‘the heresy of ecumenism’, which perceptibly worsened the situation in view of inter-confessional relations also inside the country. According to some reports in Georgia, ‘non-Orthodox Christians were targeted in more than 100 violent attacks from October 1999 to July 2003’.<sup>112</sup> Even before that, during the 1990s, the attitude of Georgians towards ethnic minorities was not enviable. Meanwhile, the Georgian Patriarchate is again attempting to preserve positive relationships (formally at least) with religious minorities within the country at the level of official relations. Testifying to this are memoranda and contracts by the Church of Georgia with the Jewish community and with the Armenian, Baptist, and Lutheran churches in January and February of 2001, in which all parties condemned proselytism and affirmed mutual respect.<sup>113</sup>

The OCG’s continuing membership in the Interreligious Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) since 2004 belongs in the nearly the same context. Georgia left the CIS itself as a political entity after the Russian-Georgian War of 2008. Yet the OCG remains a participant of CIS Interreligious Council to this day. Churches of ‘Western origin’ (i.e. Catholic and Protestant) were not given the means to become members in this council founded in Moscow. On the other hand, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists are represented along with Orthodox Christians. Apparently, membership in this Oriental pan-ecumenical council is no cause of irritation among Georgian orthodox fundamentalists. Only the radical branch of Georgian

<sup>111</sup> ‘First Performance of Divine Liturgy Composed by Bishop Hilarion of Vienna and Austria’, Russian Orthodox Church, Department for External Church Relations, 7 July 2006, <https://mospat.ru/archive/en/2006/07/32168/> (accessed on 17 July 2017).

<sup>112</sup> Sabrina Ramet, ‘The way we were – and should be again? European Orthodox Churches and the “idyllic past”’, in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, eds. T. Byrnes and P. Katzenstein (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 148-175, on p. 162.

<sup>113</sup> *The Activities of the Georgian Patriarchate from 1997-2001* (see n. 65), pp. 42-45.

anti-ecumenists ironically announced that in being a member of this council ‘the Georgian Patriarchate relieves ecumenist nostalgia.’<sup>114</sup>

It might be appropriate to conclude by alluding to a tradition of ecumenical openness that is also part of the Church of Georgia. Already at conferences in Vienna (1926) and Lausanne (1927) the orthodox Archimandrite and theologian Grigol Peradze expressed unity as a main Christian value to be opposed against a spirit of exclusivist hostility.<sup>115</sup>

Not only will the Roman and Greek churches join together, the Evangelical Church will join them too, which also represents the Church of our Lord and about which we are unable to say, “it also exists”. For it truly exists and brings its goals and tasks to fruition ... When has the essence of Christianity been in animosity, jealousy, doubt, and evil doing? It lives in the brotherly love of the Lord’s parish and on one beautiful day, these three branches will be interlocked on the tree of our Savior.<sup>116</sup>

Peradze continued a tradition that can be traced back into at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, when Bishop Gabriel Kikodze hosted the Anglican priest Solomon Caesar Malan at Kutaisi’s Orthodox church in 1872 and gave him permission to pray, read the Gospel and preach.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>115</sup> Grigol Peradze died in the Nazi concentration camp in Auschwitz in 1942 when he deliberately took the place of another inmate. Since the 1920s he had repeatedly spoken out in favour of the unity of Christians taking the commands of the Saviour seriously, and despite ‘scholastic’ differences. He was later canonized as martyr. Cf. Grigol Peradze, ‘Die Unionstagung in Wien’, *Der Orient*, No. 7-8, (1926), pp. 116-118; Irakli Jinjolava, ‘The Ecumenical Vocation of the Orthodox Church According to the Georgian Theologian and Saint Priest-Martyr Grigol Peradze’, *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 65, No. 2 (2016), pp. 239-270, on p. 262.

<sup>116</sup> The words are translated from the German into Georgian by Tamara Chumburidze. See: *Limits of the Church: The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Tamara Grdzeldze (Tbilisi, 2000), p. 177. [ეკლესიის საზღვრები: მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია და ეკუმენური მოძრაობა. რედ.: თამარ გრძელიძე. (თბილისი, კვირიონი 2000), გვ. 177]. These grand words (from the journal *Der Orient*, No. 7-8 (1926)) of St. Grigol are not a part of the speech given at the Lausanne conference, but instead are from an article that Grigol wrote as a form of an overview of this conference.

<sup>117</sup> Nugzar Papuashvili, ‘Bishop Gabriel Regarding the Faith and Citizenship or: Would He Say No to Ecumenism or Not?’, *Solidarity*, No. 3, (2010), pp. 29-49, on p. 41. [ნუგზარ პაპუაშვილი. ‘ეპისკოპოსი ვაბრიელი სარწმუნოებისა და მოქალაქეობის შესახებ



## Abstract

The article analyzes the stance of the Orthodox Church of Georgia (OCG) towards the Ecumenical Movement before and after the OCG's departure from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in 1997, and documents the controversies accompanying this development. Up until the 1990s, the hierarchy of the OCG was outstanding in its energetic ecumenical activities within the country as well as in the international arena. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the gaining of independence, religious nationalism and a hostile attitude towards religious and ethnic minorities grew stronger in Georgia. Having been tainted by a Soviet past, a mass mentality found such phenomena as pluralism, equality, religious freedom, etc., characteristic of the free world, to be foreign. A contingent of Orthodox fundamentalists is gradually growing stronger in the OCG and considers the defense of Orthodoxy against 'sects' and the 'ruinous' innovations of the West its holy obligation. Since the middle of the 1990s, this group intensified its agitation against 'ecumenism', and its pressure on the church hierarchy to keep its distance, threatening with schism in the worst case. This anti-ecumenical propaganda organized by monks is supported by a part of the married clergy, their parishes, the media, and some politicians. The OCG was eventually forced to leave the WCC and the CEC, although it inflicted church penances upon the monks leading the rebellion. Some of the anti-ecumenist monks go even further and are demanding the OCG to cease Eucharistic communion with all the Orthodox churches who are still members of ecumenical organizations. As the OCG would not satisfy this demand, the result was an actual schism of the radical anti-ecumenists and the foundation of their own 'Truly Orthodox' Church in Georgia.

**Keywords:** Orthodox Church of Georgia, Ecumenical Movement, Georgian Orthodox fundamentalism, ecumenism in Georgia, anti-ecumenism in Georgia, WCC