

Soviet Religious Policy and the Georgian Orthodox Apostolic Church: From Khrushchev to Gorbachev*

S. F. JONES

Gorbachev's emphasis on 'the human factor', 'universal human values' and the 'law-governed state' has led to a breakdown of the Marxist-Leninist certainties which have dominated public life in the Soviet Union since the 1930s. This 'de-ideologisation' of Soviet life, although far from complete, has had major repercussions for the churches. It has led to an open reassessment of the ethical and spiritual values offered by, in particular, the Christian religion. Secondly, many of the bureaucratic and legal obstacles to the activity of the churches are, with some notable exceptions,¹ being eased. This is reflected by the growth in the registration of congregations (1,610 in 1988), the annulment of unpublished and discriminatory legislation introduced by the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) or its predecessors,² the involvement of churches in charitable activity, the establishment of Sunday schools (still technically illegal), and the return to the church of churches and monasteries. Thirdly, almost all former religious dissidents have been released from prison or labour camp and have re-entered church life. Fourthly, the present improvements in religious freedom are being supplemented by legal reform. A new draft USSR Law on Freedom of Conscience, which should significantly improve the rights of believers, is presently under discussion.³

*Some sections of this article are based on materials used by the author in previous writings on the Georgian Church.

¹For example, the Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches, banned under Lenin and Stalin respectively, are still officially proscribed, despite dialogue between the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church since June 1988 and numerous petitions, hunger strikes and open protests by members of these Ukrainian churches. See *Keston News Service (KNS)*, 20 October 1988 No. 311, p. 7; 8 June 1989 No. 328, p. 9; 'The USSR This Week', *Radio Liberty Research (RL)*, 1988 No. 247, p. 1 and No. 258, pp. 1-2.

²Formerly, the function of the CRA was performed by two organisations: the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults and the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. They amalgamated into the CRA in 1965. On the annulment of secret legislation passed by these various bodies between 1961-83, see *KNS*, 13 April 1989 No. 323, p. 2.

³See *KNS*, 19 January 1989 No. 317, p. 17; 24 March 1989 No. 320, p. 2; 27 April 1989 No. 324, p. 17.

In exchange Gorbachev hopes to gain the support of church leaders for *perestroika* and his religious reform package, and to undermine those demanding more radical change such as the rehabilitation of church leaders who perished under Lenin or the setting up of church schools. The experience of the last two years, however, suggests that Gorbachev's policy has achieved the opposite result. Religious activists are not only expanding the influence of the churches in the community, but calling for democratisation of their own organisations and the removal of compromised church leaders.⁴ In republics such as Lithuania, Armenia and Georgia, where there is a close ethno-religious identity, members of national churches are openly reclaiming their role of spiritual leadership of the nation, although in other republics and regions where *perestroika* is finding it harder to penetrate, religious life continues to suffer severe restrictions.⁵

Religion has always been part of the Soviet Union's 'national problem'. In the past, the Soviet government has treated religion not only as an erroneous ideology but as a political institution with an independent social base. In Georgia, the church was seen as a support for ethnic separateness and hence a barrier to the integration of the Georgian population into the Soviet Union. The policies adopted by the state to counteract religious influence in Georgia have varied but have been largely determined by Moscow. This paper will investigate church-state relations and the church's internal situation in Georgia from the Khrushchev period onwards. It will also deal with issues raised in the introduction concerning the changing role of the Georgian Orthodox Church under Gorbachev.⁶

A Brief History

The Georgian Church has played a key role in the country's history and become a vital component of Georgian national consciousness and identity. Conversion to Christianity took place in the fourth century A. D., with full autocephaly achieved in the 11th century. After the Russian annexation of Georgia between 1801-11, Georgian

⁴This is the case in the Latvian Lutheran Church. In April 1989 at a meeting of the General Synod of the Church the Archbishop and the Consistory were replaced by members of the 'Rebirth and Renewal' movement which advocates a much less submissive attitude toward the state. On the revival in the Latvian Lutheran Church, see Marite Sapiets, "'Rebirth and Renewal' in the Latvian Lutheran Church', *RCL*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 237-49.

⁵See for example 'Press and Church Come under Fire', *The Times* 26 June 1989, p. 10 where continuing cases of harassment of believers are recorded.

⁶For a more detailed history of church-state relations in Georgia through the entire Soviet period, see my chapter 'The Georgian Orthodox Church' (written under the pseudonym of C. J. Peters) in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Pedro Ramet, (Durham and London, 1988), pp. 286-308.

autocephaly was abolished in 1811 and the church reorganised into an Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Sporadic resistance to russification of the church intensified in the first decades of this century. In 1908 the Russian Exarch Nikon was assassinated, and some Georgian clerics were exiled. Georgian autocephaly was restored in March 1917 although it was not recognised by the Russian Orthodox Church. Between 1918-21 Georgia was independent under a menshevik government, which granted the church political freedom. In February 1921 Soviet power was established in Georgia and henceforth all religious legislation and policy came from Moscow.⁷

In the 1920s and '30s Soviet legislative and administrative measures reduced the Georgian Church to an organisational shell. A combination of atheist propaganda, terror and rapid urbanisation led to the virtual elimination of practising believers. Soviet laws crippled the church economically and judicially. During the Second World War there was some relaxation of the government's anti-religious measures. The Georgian Church, in common with other Soviet religious organisations, adopted a patriotic attitude and was rewarded with state recognition of its canonical status. In 1943 its autocephaly was recognised by the Russian Orthodox Church, probably on Stalin's personal instructions.⁸

After the war the Georgian Church recovered slowly but, unlike its Russian counterpart, experienced no significant revival. In 1956 there were only seven students training as priests, and one Georgian author recalls that during this period 'there were so few Georgian clerics that services in the native language were rarely taken.'⁹

The Khrushchev Years

While Khrushchev pursued ideologically innovative policies at home and abroad, in the religious field he remained an orthodox Marxist-Leninist. Religion had no place in Khrushchev's primitive vision of the future communist society. His 'communist' idealism,

⁷For the best histories of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the pre-Soviet period see M. Tamarati *L'Église géorgienne des origines jusqu'à nos jours*, (Rome, 1910); A. A. Tsagareli, *Stati i zametki po gruzinskomu tserkovnomu voprosu k stoletiyu (1811-1911gg.) vdovstva gruzinskoi tserkvi*, (St. Petersburg, 1912). See also D. M. Lang, 'Religion and Nationalism. A Case Study. The Caucasus', *Religion and the Soviet State. A Dilemma of Power*, edited by M. Hayward and W. C. Fletcher (London, 1969), pp. 169-76, and E. Melia, 'The Georgian Orthodox Church', *Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union*, edited by Richard H. Marshall Jr (Chicago and London, 1971), pp. 223-27, which both touch on the pre-Soviet period.

⁸Stalin received Russian Metropolitans Sergi, Aleksii and Nikolai in September 1943. Recognition of Georgian autocephaly by the Russian Church came seven weeks later.

⁹*Sakharthvelos Ecclesiis Calendari (The Georgian Church Calendar. Henceforth S.E.C.)* 1980, p. 394.

combined with a political need to prove to domestic critics his ideological purity and to stem the alarming growth in church life since the war, led to an anti-religious campaign reminiscent of the atheistic proselytising of the 1920s and '30s. The Georgian Party led by First Secretary V. P. Mzhavanadze, a Khrushchev appointee, took an enthusiastic part in the all-union campaign. Six weeks after the 21st Congress of the CPSU (January-February 1959) a Georgian republican conference on ideological work called for a more intense struggle against 'survivals of the past'.¹⁰ This was followed in April by a conference of local atheist propagandists and in May by a conference of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Georgian Central Committee.

These conferences were accompanied by an increasing number of anti-religious articles in the press. *Zarya vostoka*, the Russian language Georgian party daily, published three such articles in April alone.¹¹ In January 1960, at the 20th Congress of the Georgian Communist Party, Mzhavanadze warned that 'of all the survivals of the past, religion is the most tenacious'. He went on, 'Party organisations must direct their most serious attention to the improvement of atheist propaganda. Anti-religious propaganda must be more offensive, combatant, more direct. . .'¹²

Throughout the early 1960s the atheist campaign continued, with particular concern shown for the ideological waywardness of Georgian youth. At the 14th Congress of the Georgian *Komsomol'* in 1962 its first secretary, O. K. Chercezia, complained that children 'coming home from school find themselves in a past life which cripples them. . .'¹³

In 1964, *Agitator*, the journal of the CPSU Central Committee, reported that as a result of the directives of the CPSU 22nd Party Congress seven 'atheist universities' and 15 lectureships in scientific atheism had been established in Tbilisi, and over 100 atheist propagandists had been trained.¹⁴ That same year Mzhavanadze declared that 'serious improvements' had to be made to counter 'church-going and sectarianism which have recently increased. . .'¹⁵

¹⁰ *Zarya vostoka*, 24 March 1959.

¹¹ See *Zarya vostoka*, 2 April, 11 April, 28 April and 31 May 1959. The articles contained attacks on the work of *Tsodna* (the Georgian Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge), on the lack of ideological activity in schools, and on the Easter festival. On 31 May the paper reported a trial of believers in Adzhariya and accused the local Batumi party organisation of allowing 'religion to flourish' in their region.

¹² *Zarya vostoka*, 26 January 1960.

¹³ Cited by D. Konstantinov in 'Further Blows at Religion', *Bulletin. Institute for the Study of the USSR*, Vol. 9 No. 11 (November, 1962), p. 51.

¹⁴ *Agitator*, 21 November 1964, pp. 45-47.

¹⁵ *Zarya vostoka*, 30 January 1964.

His statement suggested that the buoyant reports of statistical progress covered up the real situation.

Under Khrushchev there was increasing state interference in church affairs. The two councils attached to the All-Union Council of Ministers, designed to liaise between church and state, were strengthened into organs of control over all aspects of religious life.¹⁶ Their administrative and legal powers were extended so that effectively they had the authority to refuse a religious society registration (and therefore the right to practise its faith legally) or to force its closure. The councils (amalgamated into the single Council for Religious Affairs in 1965) were centralised organisations with representatives appointed to the regions. In Georgia there are still three appointees, one for the Georgian SSR as a whole, one for the Adzharian ASSR (Adchara) and one for the Abkhazian ASSR. The extent of flexibility permitted in the application of policies decided in Moscow is not clear. In the hierarchical structure of the USSR one suspects it is limited although may well be changing. The Council representative on the Georgian Council of Ministers, however, has always been Georgian, which suggests there was some concession to the specificity of Georgian church problems.

Despite the anti-religious campaign there was some determination under Khrushchev's leadership to return to the rule of law and 'socialist legality' (as opposed to the 'revolutionary legality' of the Stalinist period). Definite improvements were made in the new Republican Criminal Codes, enacted on the basis of the Fundamental Principles of Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure passed by the All-Union Supreme Soviet in 1958. The new Georgian Criminal Code, published in December 1960, dropped the principles of guilt by association and crime by analogy. The 'counter-revolutionary' crime was removed and two new chapters on personal rights were introduced. The code failed, however, to eliminate a number of Stalinist legal concepts, quite apart from its inability to tackle the tendency of Soviet leaders to flout their own laws and treat them as political measures. The right to practise one's belief was not greatly improved by the Georgian code. Article 233 (which expanded Art. 58 of the previous code) made it a crime to direct a group

whose activity, although carried on with the appearance of preaching religious beliefs and performing religious ceremonies

¹⁶The creation of the two separate councils (see footnote 2), one to deal with the Russian Church and the other to deal with all other religious denominations, seemed to be an admission that in denominational matters the Russian Church was *primus inter pares*.

. . . causes harm to the health of citizens or infringes in any other way the person or rights of the citizen . . .¹⁷

Such vagueness in formulation allowed the authorities a wide degree of latitude in interpretation. Article 71, which dealt with anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, covered possession of literature defaming the Soviet political or social system and differed little from previous provisions on counter-revolutionary agitation in the earlier Soviet codes.

There is little evidence that Khrushchev's anti-religious measures had any significant impact on the rather feeble Georgian Church.¹⁸ Pressure at the beginning of the campaign led to a much shorter and poorly produced Church Calendar in 1960 compared to that of 1959,¹⁹ but on the other hand Patriarch Epremi II (elected in February 1960) opened a two-year religious training school (officially acknowledged as a seminary in 1970) and published a New Testament and Prayer Book. Under his leadership the isolation of the Georgian Church from the Orthodox world was ended when it joined the World Council of Churches in 1962. This was an important concession to the Georgian Church by the Soviet authorities although their purpose was to obtain as many seats as possible on the World Council's Central Committee, thereby gaining a powerful influence on its activities.

Epremi travelled to Paris in August 1962 to put his church's case for admission to the World Council. In his application, he claimed the Georgian Church had seven bishops, 105 priests, 80 parishes, two monasteries, two convents and a publishing house.²⁰ After the Georgian Church's admission, he asserted that of the four million Christian inhabitants of Georgia, three-quarters were believers.²¹ This was a rather optimistic estimate and although there were signs of a growing interest in the church during the 1960s, there was little organisational growth. When Epremi died in April 1972, there were

¹⁷ *Ugolovnoye zakonodatel'stvo RSFSR i soyuznykh respublik. V dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1963), Vol. 1, p. 542.

¹⁸ This is in contrast to the Russian Church, which between 1954-64 lost half of its working churches. Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, 'Religion and Atheism in Soviet Society', in Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁹ For a systematic comparison of the 1959 and 1960 Church Calendars, see Von R. S., 'Der Kalender der Georgischen Kirche — 1977 — und was er uns über die Georgische Kirche von heute sagt', *Glaube in der 2 Welt. Themaheft Georgien* (October 1977), pp. 121-23.

²⁰ M. Bourdeaux et al., *Religious Liberty in the Soviet Union. The World Council of Churches and the USSR: A Post-Nairobi Documentation* (Kent, 1976). Compare these figures with those at the beginning of this century when there were 2,055 parishes and 1,700 clergy (*ibid.* p. 4). When noting the decline of the Georgian Church, we must remember that some churches in the West have also experienced diminishing parishes and clergy.

²¹ Nino Salia, 'Le Catholico-Patriarche de Géorgie au Congrès du Conseil Ocuménique des Églises à Paris', *Bedi Kharthlisa* Vol. XIII-XIV (1962), p. 10.

only two metropolitans and three bishops, with two-thirds of the dioceses unfilled and only 44 churches working.

Towards the second half of his reign, Epremi had become an increasingly pliant tool of the Soviet authorities. Khrushchev forced many church leaders into submission and transformed church administration into an obedient organ of Soviet religious policy. At the same time he politicised many of the more active parishioners and clergy who resented state interference in church affairs. In 1965, at a ceremony in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (in the old Georgian capital of Mtskhetha), Epremi allegedly told the congregation:

You present have read and no doubt know the 1961 [party] programme. This programme is wonderful. After two decades people will live as well as Jesus Christ predicted . . . but it needs more work from us. Idlers and loafers will not find paradise in this world . . .²²

According to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a Georgian human rights activist and church member, Epremi was intimidated by the authorities. He allegedly told Gamsakhurdia that 'when Moscow plays the piano, we must dance to its tune . . .'²³ He refused to open a library for lay members and allowed abuses by the Georgian clergy to continue. Gamsakhurdia accused Epremi of simony, and argued that disillusionment with his leadership led to a significant drop in church attendance and to the closure of churches 'one after the other'.²⁴

Religious Policy in Georgia under Brezhnev

After the fall of Khrushchev in 1964, the new Soviet leaders concluded that crude anti-religious propaganda and coercion were counter-productive. It damaged the Soviet Union's image abroad, and succeeded only in driving religion underground. The new leadership resumed the pattern adopted after the war: preferential treatment for the established churches (as opposed to the sects) within a network of tight legal and administrative controls. These controls were extended in March 1966 when the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet (the Georgian Presidium followed suit in October 1966) passed two resolutions and a decree which considerably broadened the scope of possible prosecution for religious activity. In 1975 (March 1977 in Georgia), a new law on religious associations gave the Council for

²²D. Gegeshidze, 'Pravoslaviye v Gruzii, *Nauka i religiya*, 1972 No. 6, p. 44.

²³Cited by M. Bourdeaux in 'The Georgian Orthodox Church', *Radio Liberty Script* 246, 22 December 1976.

²⁴Radio Liberty, *Arkhiv samizdata*, Document No. 1,821. p. 3.

Religious Affairs increased powers and for the first time juridical status. The Council was assisted in its control of religious cults by the introduction of public assistance commissions which were attached to local soviets. From 1969 the Council was made responsible for collecting detailed information annually on all religious societies under its supervision.

The legacy of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign presented his successors with new problems. In the '60s and '70s believers began to establish links with nationalist and civil rights movements. Many religious activists became prominent in the growing dissident movement, but the politics of *détente* hindered any major crackdown until the late 1970s, when the invasion of Afghanistan and partial boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980 removed political constraints, and leading dissenters, religious or otherwise, were arrested. In Georgia, the link between civil rights and the rights of Orthodox believers was a strong one. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Valentina Pailodze and other believers provided the core of the Georgian dissident movement in the 1970s. 'Official' churches, if they remained within the narrow framework of religious activity laid down by the Soviet authorities, were not affected by the clampdown on dissent.

A new anti-religious campaign began in Georgia with the appointment of Eduard Shevardnadze as the Georgian party First Secretary in September 1972. He was under Moscow's orders to clear up the massive corruption which had thrived under Mzhavanadze,²⁵ and to bring an end to ideological 'backsliding' in the republic. Within two years of his appointment, 25,000 people had been arrested, 9,500 of them party members, although many were released without trial. Shevardnadze's anti-religious campaign concentrated on 'harmful traditions' such as church marriages, baptisms and religious festivals. He established two new organisations to direct anti-religious propaganda: a Republican Commission on Propaganda and the Introduction of New Traditions and Rituals, and a Centre for the Scientific Coordination of Problems of Social and Cultural Traditions. Between 1972-77 the number of 'people's universities', which concentrate on atheistic work, increased from 350 to 520. In 1978 a new Centre of Festivities was created to provide new festivals, and at a conference of 'ideological workers' that same year in Tbilisi V. Siradze, a secretary of the Georgian Central Committee, announced that the struggle against 'negative phenomena' was entering a 'new sharper stage'. She attacked the formalism of scientific educational propaganda and urged the formation of a

²⁵ V. P. Mzhavanadze was First Secretary in Georgia from September 1953 to September 1972. He was dismissed in disgrace for tolerating the growth of corruption, nepotism and ethnic favouritism in the republic.

Department of Scientific Communism attached to the Institute of Philosophy.²⁶

Despite the new campaign party newspapers continued to highlight the ineffectiveness of all agencies concerned with anti-religious work. In 1976, for example, T. Phanjicidze wrote in *Zarya vostoka* that 'very little' had been achieved and blamed it on the inertia of the responsible organs such as the Ministry of Culture, Trade Unions and the Writers' Union.²⁷ At the conferences of 'ideological workers' in 1976 and 1978, party committees, soviets, 'people's universities' and *Tsodna* (the Georgian Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge) were condemned for their inactivity in the religious sphere. In 1979 *Zarya vostoka* was forced to admit that religious festivals continued 'to attract many of our youth'.²⁸ Shevardnadze stressed that propaganda should be characterised by 'logical arguments, comradely relations and respect for others' opinions', but, according to Georgian *samizdat*, there were many instances when religious festivals were forcibly prevented or when those attending services were detained on leaving the church. There were other cases of people losing jobs or party membership because of their religious convictions.²⁹

One of the major concerns of the Georgian party was the growing influence of religion among the young. At the 25th Georgian Party Congress in 1976, Shevardnadze referred to 'a certain reorientation in the conviction of a part of our population, particularly young people . . .'³⁰ In 1982, at the 32nd Congress of the Georgian *Komsomol*', its First Secretary, I. Orjonikidze, condemned the increasing numbers of young people applying to the seminary and the 'not insignificant' proportion of newly-weds who had chosen a church wedding.³¹ More alarming was the fact, as *Zarya vostoka* admitted, that young people in church, 'are for the most part well-dressed with intelligent faces. You cannot say of any of them that they have come to church out of ignorance or lack of education.'³²

A statistical survey taken in 1982 of 1,500 young Georgians, aged between 18 and 33, showed that only 46 per cent considered religion a 'negative phenomenon'. There was no breakdown of the remainder who disagreed and presumably felt it was not a negative

²⁶ For these figures and V. Siradze's speech see *Zarya vostoka*, 22 January 1978.

²⁷ *Zarya vostoka* 22 January 1978.

²⁸ *Zarya vostoka* 14 February 1980.

²⁹ 'Iz Gruzii soobshchayut', *Russkaya mysl*, 15 July 1982; Radio Liberty, *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 2,801; *A Chronicle of Current Events*, 1973, No. 27, pp. 327-328; *Zarya vostoka*, 21 February 1978.

³⁰ *Zarya vostoka*, 23 January 1976.

³¹ Cited in *RL*, 1982 No. 188, p. 3.

³² *RL*, 1983 No. 453, p. 4.

phenomenon.³³ Young people's support for the church (though not necessarily for reasons of faith) is also illustrated by their enthusiastic participation in the restoration of church buildings. In a sermon in 1982 Exarch Ilya confirmed that 'in this holy and national task, the young have the decisive voice'.³⁴

Internal Problems of the Georgian Church

The serious internal problems of the Georgian Church worsened during the 1970s. In April 1972 Epremi II died, and the Georgian Church Council met the following July to elect his successor. According to David Koridze, an assistant procurator in Tbilisi who investigated accusations of church corruption in 1973, the election 'took place in illegal circumstances'.³⁵ The Holy Synod, which had decided on the candidacy of Metropolitan David (Davit) of Urbnisi, did not invite two key church leaders who were known to oppose his election. This left only two electors with voting rights. Epremi's will was falsified in favour of David. Moreover, David V, as he became, did not fulfil the Georgian Canon Law requirement that all patriarchs have ordinary higher education or a 'necessary training in theology'.³⁶ Koridze claimed further that after the accession of David V 'the Georgian Church began to slide towards moral disintegration and degeneration'. He accused the new patriarch of restoring people to church employment 'who had previously been expelled from the clergy for corruption, immorality, drunkenness and other criminal activities. . .'³⁷ Koridze singled out Bishop Gaioz (Bidzina Kerathishvili) as a particularly corrupt influence. Sentenced for hooliganism in 1969 and expelled from Tbilisi University and the seminary, Bidzina Kerathishvili became a bishop one year after taking holy orders in 1971. As Epremi's secretary he became one of the most powerful figures in the church and was appointed rector of the seminary and Metropolitan of Urbnisi at the age of 30.³⁸ According to Koridze and other lay members of the church, Metropolitan Gaioz embezzled church property (for which he was eventually brought to trial in 1979) and provided money for the local representative of the Council for Religious Affairs, D. Shalutashvili. Koridze also claimed that Victoria

³³ A review of this survey is contained in *RCL*, Vol. 11 No. 1, p. 74.

³⁴ *S.E.C.*, 1982, p. 6.

³⁵ For David Koridze's report, see Radio Liberty, *Arkhir samizdata*, No. 1,821a.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8. The official report of David V's election paints quite a different picture of probity. See *Samshoblo*, 14 July 1972.

³⁷ Radio Liberty, *op. cit.*, No. 1,821a, p. 6.

³⁸ For further biographical details of Metropolitan Gaioz and a report of his trial, see *Zarya vostoka*, 14 June 1979.

Mzhavanadze, wife of the former party first secretary, received stolen valuables from the church, and that David enjoyed the political protection of the former chairman of the Georgian Council of Ministers, G. Javakhashvili (removed in 1975), and secretary of the Georgian Central Committee, N. Tzkhacaia (removed in 1972). Koridze's report, which made six recommendations (including a thorough investigation of the clergy, seminary and state organs that dealt with the church) was circulated in the Georgian Party Central Committee in 1973, but no action was taken. In October 1974 Koridze was summoned to the KGB after a translation of his report had reached the West. A. N. Inauri, head of the Georgian KGB at the time, accused Koridze, of being anti-Soviet, despite his 30 years' party membership and professions of atheism. He threatened him with expulsion from the party and loss of pension rights unless he broke off relations with Gamsakhurdia (who was suspected of translating Koridze's report).³⁹ The following year Koridze was compulsorily retired.

Koridze's accusations against the Georgian Church were supported by a number of other documents produced by 'dissident' parishioners. Valentina Pailodze (a conductor of church choirs), Temuraz Jvarsheishvili (a historian) and Gamsakhurdia (then a part-time employee of the Department for the Preservation of Monuments attached to the Ministry of Culture) all petitioned the government to act. Gamsakhurdia took the case to Shevardnadze who took no action (which gives some credence to Gamsakhurdia's assertion that powerful state officials outside Georgia were implicated in the Georgian church affair), and it was not until 1978 that Metropolitan Gaioz was arrested for selling precious church stones. His trial in the summer of 1979 corroborated Koridze's accusations, and he was sentenced to 15 years' detention after more than 288,000 roubles' worth of church and other valuables had been found at his flat.⁴⁰

Before Metropolitan Gaioz's arrest, Jvarsheishvili, Pailodze and Gamsakhurdia, among others, tried to set up their own 'Christian court' to investigate the church hierarchy, but KGB intimidation prevented it taking place.⁴¹ Not long afterwards the main organisers of the court were arrested; Jvarsheishvili was detained in August 1975 and sentenced to four years' corrective labour for alleged rape,

³⁹Radio Liberty, *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 2,581, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁰D. Shalutashvili, the representative of the CRA in Georgia, had been dismissed in October 1973. At Gaioz's trial the CRA was criticised for 'turning a blind eye' to the situation in the church. Of 288,000 roubles' worth of valuables, only 100,045 roubles' worth was returned to the church. The rest was considered of 'national and historical significance' and retained by the state. *Zarya vostoka*, 14 June 1979.

⁴¹One of the 'witnesses' for the 'court', Victor Shalamberidze, was killed in a car crash in February 1974. It is hard to say whether this was the work of the KGB.

although available documents strongly suggest a frame-up,⁴² whilst Valentina Pailodze was charged with writing anonymous letters which 'insulted the founder of the Soviet Communist Party and state. . .' She was sentenced under Art. 233 of the Georgian Criminal Code to one and a half years' imprisonment.⁴³ In April 1977 Gamsakhurdia was finally arrested⁴⁴ along with two other Georgian dissidents, Merab Kostava and Victor Rtzkhiladze, who had helped him form an Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights in Georgia (1974) and a Georgian Group to Assist the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements (1977).

Gamsakhurdia's arrest was a serious setback in the battle against church corruption. He dominated the young Georgian dissident movement and edited two *samizdat* journals in the mid-seventies, *The Georgian Messenger* and *The Golden Fleece*, in which civil rights and the rights of the Georgian Orthodox Church were closely linked.⁴⁵ He was sentenced under Art. 71 of the Georgian Criminal Code (anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda) to three years' imprisonment and two years' internal exile.⁴⁶

The government campaign against Gamsakhurdia enlisted the support of church leaders David V and Metropolitan Gaioz. Their attacks, both in government organs and the church's own

⁴² See *A Chronicle of Current Events*, 1978, No. 38, p. 130.

⁴³ For details of Pailodze's trial, see 'Delo Pailodze', *Khronika tekushchikh sobyti*, (New York, 1974) No. 32, pp. 40-42. For the Soviet version, see *Zarya vostoka*, 2 June 1983. Pailodze was subsequently released in September 1975, rearrested in 1978 on the same charges and released again in 1980. In 1983, she was sentenced to eight years' corrective labour and three years' exile on bribery charges. *Ibid.* She was released from labour camp under amnesty on 8 December 1987, more than four years before the end of her sentence.

⁴⁴ Despite Gamsakhurdia's dissident activities the authorities initially hesitated to arrest him, in large part because of the great popularity of his father, Konstantin, regarded as one of the best Georgian novelists of the century. (He died in July 1975.)

⁴⁵ The first issue of *The Georgian Messenger* contained articles entitled 'The Government Bans Religious Festivals on the Pretext of a Campaign Against Harmful Traditions' by T. D. Janelidze, 'The Church and the Communists' by V. Pailodze, 'On the Condition of Cultural Monuments in Georgia' by Z. Gamsakhurdia and 'A Crime Against the People: The Tragedy of the Meskhetians' by V. Rtzkhiladze. *A Chronicle of Current Events* No. 44, pp. 319-20.

⁴⁶ After his trial Gamsakhurdia publicly recanted on the Soviet central TV channel. Gamsakhurdia and his wife Manana deny the authenticity of the recantation, although Gamsakhurdia subsequently had his sentence reduced to two years' exile, which suggests some sort of 'deal' with the authorities. Rtzkhiladze also repented. Kostava did not, and received his full sentence. In December 1981, when still in exile, Kostava was re-arrested on a fabricated charge of 'malicious hooliganism' and sentenced to a further five years in labour camp. In June 1985 he was re-arrested in camp and sentenced to a further two years' detention under Art. 188-3 of the Russian Criminal Code (violation of camp regulations). On 30 April 1987 he was freed, 20 months before the end of his sentence. On 13 October this year Merab Kostava died in a car crash on a deserted wet road in Georgia. Again, it is hard to say whether this was the work of the KGB. For an account of Gamsakhurdia and Kostava's trial, see *A Chronicle of Current Events*, 1979 No. 50, pp. 20-27.

publications, contained no detailed rebuttal of Gamsakhurdia's accusations. In the 1976 Georgian Church Calendar, edited by Metropolitan Gaioz, there was a thinly veiled attack on Gamsakhurdia in the guise of a speech made by Archbishop Gabriel in 1882. Gabriel, defending himself against accusations of 'debauchery, dissolution and thieving', condemned 'a person's betrayal to the government by word. . . or. . . by secret anonymous. . . letters' as a 'shameful and terrible action' and warned that by such activity, people 'harm themselves. They do not disgrace me, but their own country. . .'⁴⁷

In another attack published in the organ of the Georgian Writers' Union, *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo*, six days before Gamsakhurdia's arrest David V, Metropolitan Gaioz and two other bishops continued the theme. Gamsakhurdia, they wrote, 'has thrown his country's name and honour, along with that of his compatriots, to be crushed under the bloody and dirty feet of the enemy. . .'⁴⁸

The campaign against Gamsakhurdia revealed close cooperation between government and church authorities. This was also evident from Koridze's report, which had shown KGB involvement in the election of David V. The extent of government interference was made clear to Gamsakhurdia when he was summoned by R. Metreveli, a member of the Georgian Central Committee, and was informed:

'I have been told to choose the candidate for the patriarchate, and I am asking the opinion of representatives of the intelligentsia. . .'⁴⁹

In addition, the local Georgian head of the Council for Religious Affairs sits on every church council which, among other things, elects the patriarch. In an open letter to L. I. Brezhnev in March 1982 Gamsakhurdia complained that the then incumbent, Givi Maisuradze, 'interferes not only in the placing of priests and especially bishops, but in various minor matters of church life'.⁵⁰

The Georgian Church under David V was an easy prey for government manipulation. David V did not exploit the growing interest among Georgian youth in religion and failed to fill the ten vacant eparchies. The quality of services, the priesthood and the seminary students declined and little attempt was made at restoration work. Real control of the church lay with Metropolitan Gaioz, who exploited his position for personal gain.

⁴⁷ S.E.C. 1976, pp. 37-39.

⁴⁸ *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo*, 1 April 1977.

⁴⁹ Radio Liberty, *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 2581, p. 9.

⁵⁰ 'Iz Gruzii soobshchayut', *Russkaya mysl'*, 15 July 1982 No. 3,421, p. 7.

Renewal in the Georgian Church

On 9 November 1977 David V died. His successor, Ilya Shiolashvili, (Ilya II) Metropolitan of Sukhumi and Abkhazia, has improved the position of the Georgian Church dramatically. Ilya, in contrast to his predecessor, was young (44 years of age) and well-educated (he attended both the Theological Seminary and Academy in Moscow). In his acceptance speech, he stressed the need for 'internal unity' in the church and the removal of all 'evil and wickedness' among its servants.⁵¹ Although it is not clear whether he has achieved either of these objectives, organisationally the church has made great progress. Within his first year a record number of seven diocesan bishops were appointed, and by 1980 all 15 eparchies were re-established and filled. Many churches were reopened, including one in Armenia (Kirovo), and a new stone church was begun in Batumi. Two new departments were established in the patriarchate, a foreign relations department (Ilya was an active ecumenist before his election) and an architectural and building department. The establishment of the latter has helped coordinate an extensive restoration programme. Ilya made enormous improvements to the seminary, including the provision of better grants and better teachers. From 1978 a new biannual church journal *Jvari Vazisa* (*Cross of the Vine*) has been published, and more recently an internal series called *Theological Studies* has appeared. Ilya has also commissioned modern Georgian translations of the Old and New Testaments, extracts of which have appeared in the church calendars. Two years after his election Ilya claimed in an interview that there were 200 working churches in Georgia, 50 more than under Epremi II.⁵² In 1979 Ilya was made one of the six presidents of the World Council of Churches, which enormously enhanced the image of the Georgian Church at home as well as abroad.⁵³

Despite these achievements, the Georgian Church still faced internal problems. A little over a year after Ilya's election he received a document from Hierodeacon David complaining of corruption among priests in Didube (a district of Tbilisi). The document contained allegations of homosexuality, trading in church candles, embezzle-

⁵¹ For extracts of his speech, see *Jvari Vazisa*, 1978 No. 1, pp. 13-14.

⁵² Brian Cooper, 'Little Candles for the World', *The Church of England Newspaper*, 15 February 1980, p. B5.

⁵³ Despite this, in 1982 Ilya still found it necessary to request talks with the Russian Church on Georgian autocephaly, and to establish once and for all the 'proper historical place' of the Georgian Church. An article on the church's autocephaly was read at the meeting, and it was agreed it should be sent to all Orthodox churches. There is still some resistance, notably from the Greek Church, to acceptance of the Georgian Church's autocephalous status. For an account of the meeting, see *Jvari Vazisa*, 1982 No. 1, pp. 19-20.

ment of money earmarked for church repairs and drunkenness.⁵⁴ This was followed by a much more serious dispute between the Georgian higher clergy. Two metropolitans, an archbishop and two bishops called for the expulsion of a number of their colleagues for homosexuality. They claimed their activity could only 'bring down an already crumbling faith. . .' and that any attempt to ignore their behaviour was 'wicked'. They demanded that Ilya convoke the Holy Synod immediately. The accused responded with a petition to the Georgian Procuracy demanding that such 'slander' be stopped. Metropolitan Nikoloz of Khuthaisi called a church meeting to rebut the accusations against him. When Ilya failed to act, the accusers appealed directly to the members of the Holy Synod. 'The Georgian Church is in danger', they wrote, 'and every day this peril becomes deeper and more complex. . .'⁵⁵ Ilya eventually removed the accused Metropolitan of Khuthaisi, the Archbishop of Ochqon-didi and Archimandrite Codchlamazashvili from their positions in the church.

There was also resentment among the clergy at the appointment of Ilya's brother, Victor, to a secretarial position in the patriarchate. Known as the 'Second Patriarch' he has considerable control over placings and appointments in the church. Ilya was also accused of self-aggrandisement when he commissioned a fresco of himself for Didube Cathedral.

Like every church leader in the USSR, in return for concessions from the state, such as the opening of new churches, aid for a restoration programme or an increase in seminary students, Ilya has publicly professed loyalty to the regime and its policies. This is particularly true in foreign affairs. He has condemned the right-wing militia in Lebanon, the Chinese invasion of Vietnam and the neutron bomb, and praised the peace programme of the USSR. In the domestic field he has followed the same policy of appeasement, supporting the official celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Georgievsk Treaty by which Georgia became a Russian protectorate despite the fact that unity with Russia led to the loss of the Georgian Church's autocephaly. In his sermons, Ilya has also echoed Shevardnadze's concern at the declining birth rate and increasing number of divorces among Georgians, although this has always been a traditional moral concern of the church. He has not, however, proved totally subservient to the state and in 1980 signed a statement by the

⁵⁴The document entitled 'To His Holiness and Beatitude Ilya II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All-Georgia. Declaration of Hierodeacon Davit (Jvarqeishvili)' is available at Keston College.

⁵⁵This is from a document (in Georgian, no date) entitled 'To His Holiness and Beatitude Ilya II, the Catholicos-Patriarch of All-Georgia. To All Members of the Holy Synod'. It is available at Keston College.

World Council of Churches condemning the invasion of Afghanistan.⁵⁶

The Georgian Church Today

The Georgian Church has benefitted considerably from *glasnost*. There has been further growth in its organisational strength and activity, and the danger most feared by party ideologists — the fusion of religious and national sentiment — has occurred openly.

In 1988 72 new Georgian Orthodox parishes were established⁵⁷ and an unprecedented number of churches and monasteries were returned to the patriarchate. In an interview with *Komunisti*, the Georgian-language party daily, Ilya II listed a number of churches that had recently been reopened in the towns and villages of Gori, Dmanisi, Qazbegi, Sachkheri, Akhaltzikhe, Norio, Zugdidi and Ude.⁵⁸ In Tbilisi, after a number of campaigning articles in the Georgian press and a petition,⁵⁹ the churches of Metekhi (formerly a youth theatre) and Anchiskhati (formerly an artist's studio) were also returned. In Batumi, in May 1989, the former Catholic Church was handed over to the Georgian Orthodox Church and to celebrate its consecration Ilya II undertook a mass baptism of 5,000 people.⁶⁰ That same month, in celebration of 1500 years of autocephaly,⁶¹ a competition was announced to design a new cathedral in Tbilisi. In September 1988 a new Theological Academy was established under Bishop Zosima of Tsilcani and in the same year the present representative of the CRA in Georgia, Andzor Tsiclauri, announced that the Bible would be published in a modern Georgian translation.⁶² The number of copies

⁵⁶ Representatives from other churches under communist rule also signed: Archbishop Kirill, then head of the seminary in Leningrad, Bishop Johannes Hempel of the East German Evangelical Church and Bishop Antoni of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Although the invasion was condemned, the statement noted that 'no single event should be seen in isolation'. See *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1980.

⁵⁷ *KNS* No. 323, 13 April 1989, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Komunisti*, No. 66, 19 March 1988, p. 2.

⁵⁹ See for example Nana Khatiscatzi's article 'Reken zarebi', *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo* No. 13, 25 March 1988 and *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo* No. 14, 1 April 1988, in which the CRA representative in Georgia, Andzor Tsiclauri, mentioned the petition.

⁶⁰ 'Press and Church Come Under Fire', *The Times*, 26 June 1989, p. 10; 'Vis ukhmobs bathumis samreclos zari', *Samshoblo* No. 15, June 1989, p. 8 (this is a full account of the consecration service). See also *Moambe*, the journal of the Ilya Chavchavadze Society (Fourth Group), No. 6, July 1988, pp. 10-11 which contains a petition calling for the opening of the church.

⁶¹ There is some debate as to when full autocephaly was established. The Georgian Church dates it from when the first Catholicos, Peter, was sent to Georgia from Constantinople in the fifth century A.D.

⁶² 'Vzaimootnosheniya gosudarstva s tserkovyu', *Tass*, 25 July 1988. See also *KNS* No. 307, 25 August 1988, p. 4.

of the Georgian Church Calendar will also be doubled to 10,000. In an interview with *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo*, one of the most radical of the Georgian newspapers, Ilya II declared in July 1988 that the number of all church publications had increased 'significantly' and that from 1988 *Jvari Vazisa* would be quarterly rather than biannual.⁶³

Despite these visible improvements there is still dissatisfaction with government controls. Ilya II in this interview with *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo* referred to the government's continuing refusal to allow the reopening of a number of churches such as Gremi, Iqalto, Qintsvisi and others for the 'odd reason' that lighted candles might damage the walls. There are whole regions of the country (Svaneti, Tusheti) where there is still no working church. He also called for the establishment of an independent ecclesiastical publishing house and a workshop where candles, icons and other religious objects could be made. At present the Georgian Church receives these from the Russian Church, depriving it of an important source of income. A church commission has also been set up to look at the question of theological literature for children and in January 1988 a course in church history was introduced in the higher classes of a selected number of schools.

There has been continuing criticism of Ilya's moderate course. In an address to the unofficial Moscow human rights seminar in December 1987 Zviad Gamsakhurdia suggested that there was 'only a slight improvement in the church's position' and cited cases of continuing obstruction to the setting up of religious associations and the opening of churches.⁶⁴ He and Merab Kostava repeated these accusations in a letter to Gorbachev in July 1988. Like Ilya, they demanded the return of churches and monasteries but also called for the re-establishment of an ecclesiastical court and Patriarchal Council, no doubt in an attempt to democratise church administration. They also demanded that the Georgian CRA be given republican status, as in Armenia and Ukraine.⁶⁵ That same month, in an open letter to Ilya II, Gamsakhurdia and eight others called for the removal of Metropolitan David Dzhcadua, head of the church's foreign department who they alleged was a KGB agent.⁶⁶

⁶³ 'Gzagadarchenisa', *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo*, 22 July 1988, p. 7.

⁶⁴ This document seems only to cover events until the end of 1985. Given the considerable changes since then, the document is no longer accurate. For example, there are a number of monasteries open today rather than the single one that Gamsakhurdia cites. See Radio Liberty, *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 6, 158, pp. 96-103. There is an English summary of the document in *Soviet Nationality Survey*, Vol. 5 Nos. 5-6, (May-June 1988), pp. 7-8.

⁶⁵ 'Moskva, Kreml'; General'nomu sekretaryu TsK KPSS M. S. Gorbachevu', 14 July 1988. There is a copy in the Keston College library.

⁶⁶ Entitled 'Svyateishemu i blazhenneshemu patriarkhu vsei Gruzi Il'e II' it is hand written on four A4 pages and signed by Z. Gamsakhurdia, M. Kostava, I. Tseretheli and others. It is in the Keston College library.

The Georgian Church under Ilya has taken a patriotic stand on most issues. In his sermons Ilya II has always stressed the church's role as the defender of the Georgian nation and its culture. As far back as his 1980 Christmas message, he declared that 'where the language declines, so the nation falls' and in 1986, the church published a booklet entitled *Glory to the Georgian Language* to celebrate Georgian Language Day (26 April). In 1987, during the 150th anniversary celebrations of the great Georgian national poet, Ilya Chavchavadze, the church canonised him and devoted a whole issue of *Jvari Vazisa* to his patriotic writings.⁶⁷

During the events of 1988-89 in the republic, characterised by mass demonstrations on issues of republican autonomy and the defence of Georgian communities and national rights, Ilya maintained a pragmatic approach toward the Georgian government. He praised the Georgian leaders fulsomely for their aid in attempting to retrieve the monastery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem (it was sold to the Greeks by the Georgians in the 19th century) and took a relatively moderate line at the founding conference of the official cultural organisation, the Rustaveli Society, in March 1988, where his major demand was for the provision of better facilities for foreign scholars of Georgian. During the events which led up to the tragedy of 9 April when 21 protestors were killed by Russian troops,⁶⁸ Ilya urged moderation and appealed on television and directly to demonstrators gathered on hunger strike outside the Government Palace to disperse. Although he emphasised the church's support for *perestroika*, he warned, in a manner reminiscent of government leaders, that 'freedom does not mean license...'⁶⁹

Ilya's caution does not seem to be alienating the church leadership from their increasingly radical flock. Young people especially and some individual church office holders have taken a more assertive line. In November hunger strikers protesting against Gorbachev's new

⁶⁷ *Jvari Vazisa*, 1987 No. 1.

⁶⁸ The events leading up to the massacre of 9 April are complex. From November 1988 onwards a whole series of demands concerning national and human rights were put forward as well as calls for an investigation into why independent Georgia was invaded by the Red Army in 1921. The more immediate cause of the demonstration in April was the call by the minority Abkhazians who have their own autonomous Soviet socialist republic in Western Georgia, to secede from the Georgian SSR. This led to mass protest in Tbilisi and a hunger strike in front of the Government Palace on the main street of Rustaveli Prospekt. Information on these events is abundant and any proper discussion would require a separate paper. For a summary of the events prior to 9 April, see *Vesti iz SSSR; prava cheloveka*, 1989 Nos. 6-7 and 7-8. See also *Samshoblo* No. 8-9, April 1989, and S. F. Jones 'Moscow's Restless Tribes', *The Times*, 12 April 1989, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Ilya II led prayers with the hunger strikers minutes before the massacre and urged them to disperse. This is documented on a film of the demonstration by the Georgian film director, Eldar Shengelia, shown at the Congress of People's Deputies in May of this year.

constitutional changes and the arrest of activists were joined by Bishop Khristephore Amalaidze and a priest, Lorthkhipanidze. Immediately after the massacre of 9 April Archimandrite Ioakim Asathiani addressed a fierce letter to Gorbachev in which he described the events as 'one more glorious page in the history of Soviet terrorism'. He also accused the Soviet government of pursuing a divide and rule policy in Georgia creating animosities between Georgians and their minorities.⁷⁰ Georgian nationalists, whose influence has escalated profoundly since the demonstrations of November 1988 and particularly since the tragic events of 9 April, see the church as playing a vital part in the struggle for national self-expression. Official surveys in the 1980s have shown that there are many believers among the young and a close association in their minds between the national church and ethnic identity.⁷¹ Informal nationalist groups such as the Union of National Salvation, the Ilya Chavchavadze Society, the National Democratic Party and the Christian Union, all formed in 1987-88 have appealed to these ethno-religious sentiments. The programme of the National Democratic Party, perhaps the most influential of all the 'informal groups', calls for a 'theodemocracy' in which the church will play a 'leading role... in moral questions and in control over politics'.⁷² Six of the 21 points in the programme of the Ilya Chavchavadze Society, which has since split into two separate groups, deal with church-state relations. The programme calls for complete separation of church and state, for the establishment of church schools and an ecclesiastical court, and for the right to organise charity work and open new churches and monasteries.⁷³ The 'informal groups' frequently use religious symbols in their campaigns. At a mass meeting in Tbilisi on 25 February this year, to commemorate the fall to the Red Army of the independent Georgian Democratic Republic (1918-21), two of the four informal groups organising the demonstration gathered at Anchiskhathi and Kashveti churches respectively before converging on the city centre. Along with the Rustaveli Society and the church, they have campaigned for the removal of an artillery range from the vicinity of the David Gareji monastery in south-east Georgia and forced a Georgian Central Committee meeting to take up the issue in May 1989 at which all organisations concerned with the upkeep of the monastery were roundly condemned.

⁷⁰ 'Archimandrite Ioakim Asathiani', *Iveria*, Paris, No. 33, April 1988, pp. 4-6.

⁷¹ See discussion of some of these surveys in my 'Religion and Nationalism in Soviet Georgia and Armenia', *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, edited by Pedro Ramet (Durham and London, 1989), pp. 171-95.

⁷² The programme is in *Gushagi* No. 18, (Paris) February 1989, pp. 34-37.

⁷³ *Iveria* No. 7, (Tbilisi) June 1988, pp. 3-11.

The same meeting responded to demands for the defence of Georgians in Saingilo (the Kakhi district) in the Azerbaidzhan SSR, where both church and nationalist activists have long campaigned for Georgian schools and a church for the ethnic Georgians in the region.⁷⁴ In an article in the May issue of *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo* three Tbilisi University students condemned cultural discrimination against Georgians in the region and described crumbling churches covered in graffiti or converted into storehouses.⁷⁵ A Georgian priest, Moisei (Mose) Otarashvili, addressed the Moscow Seminary on the same issue, citing persecution by the Azerbaidzhani authorities because of his religious activities there.⁷⁶ The official church journal *Jvari Vazisa* indicated its support for Georgian activists' claims by printing an article on georgianising activities in Saingilo in the 19th century.⁷⁷ There have been nationalist demands for Georgian Church proselytisation in the formally Muslim but ethnically Georgian autonomous republic of Adzharia, in the Muslim dominated area of Meskheta, and in the Marneuli district to the south of Tbilisi where there were clashes between Azeris and Georgians in July 1989. The church has lent official support to this nationalistic campaign. R. Shaghradze, writing in *Jvari Vazisa* referred to the necessity of renewing the 'ethnic torch of faith' in Meskheta and the same journal published a patriotic article on previous attempts by Ilya Chavchavadze to georgianise Muslims in Adzharia.⁷⁸

After the tragedy of 9 April the church became the focal point of mourning and a symbol of national unity. In his Easter epistle Ilya remarked that Georgian history had always been characterised by the 'sin of division' but with the one positive result that 'this great pain. . . awakes our national soul, binds us together and unites us.'⁷⁹ The outcome of 9 April is a Georgian Church stronger and more popular than it has ever been in the Soviet period. The great surge in popular nationalism, which has focused to a great degree on the church, has re-established the latter's centrality in Georgian life. Although the church remains an unequal partner in dialogue with the state, its growing popular base and the population's complete loss of faith in the authorities have enormously increased its influence.

⁷⁴See 'Sakharthvelos compartiis tzentralur comitetshi', *Komunisti* No. 107, 7 May 1989, p. 1.

⁷⁵'Dchirisuphlebis uphlebit', *Literaturuli Sakharthvelo*, No. 22, 27 May 1988, p. 9.

⁷⁶'Obrashcheniye k Moskovskomu seminaru po gumanitarnym problemam', *Arkhiv samizdata*, No. 6, 158, pp. 104-106.

⁷⁷Martha Tartarashvili, 'Ilya da me-19 saukunis Saingilo', *Jvari Vazisa*, 1987 No. 1, pp. 60-61.

⁷⁸See R. Shaghradze, 'Ardavitsqeba mshobliur mkhari', *Jvari Vazisa*, 1988 No. 2, pp. 68-69; Haidar Abashidze, 'Tserilebi' (extracts from his book first published in 1963), *Jvari Vazisa*, 1987 No. 1, pp. 58-60.

⁷⁹'Saaghdgomo epistole', *Samshoblo*, 1989 No. 10-11, pp. 1-2.

Should the devolution of power to the republics continue, including perhaps the removal of the Moscow directed CRA in Georgia, one might see a much more genuine church-state partnership as the Georgian government seeks legitimacy through the use of national symbols and greater consultation with influential organisations in society such as the church. After the tragedy of 9 April the party has almost no support in Georgian society and the local leadership will probably be prepared to make major concessions to the church and other independent organisations to regain some degree of cooperation and trust.