

**“CHURCH OF ABKHAZIA” IN THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE PATRIARCHATES  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND MOSCOW AND THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH  
(THE ISSUE OF AUTOCEPHALY OR AUTONOMY)**

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**Abstract.** Over the past decade, the issue of "disputed churches" has become increasingly topical and has added a tension in relation between the churches in the Orthodox world; The danger of schism has been revealed, due to the redistribution of ecclesiastical boundaries and the ambition of primacy in the ecclesiastical hierarchy<sup>1</sup>. So, the problems have been arisen in this regard, including the post-Soviet states, which showed the desire to gain the autocephaly of individual dioceses and started appropriate activities. On the example of Georgia, the above-mentioned took place in the dioceses of Sokhumi and Tskhinvali. This problem from the very beginning transcended the boundaries of ecclesiastical issues, acquired a deep political load, and became a serious problem for the Christian world.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** *Orthodox, ecclesiastical hierarchy, schism, autocephaly.*

The present work concerns the problem of the "Church of Abkhazia", where the Abkhazian society was divided into pro-Greeks and pro-Russians: one connected the issue to Constantinople, and the other to the Moscow Patriarchate. Today, the "Church of Abkhazia" is

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<sup>1</sup> პავლიაშვილი ქ., ქრისტიანობის ისტორია, თბ., 2010, გვ. 410-412 (K. Pavliashvili, History of Christianity, Tbilisi, 2010, პ. 410-412)

<sup>2</sup> პავლიაშვილი ქ. საქართველოს მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესიის ისტორია 1800-1945 წწ., თბ., 2008, გვ. 607-609. (K. Pavliashvili, History of Georgian Orthodox Church in 1800-1945, Tbilisi, 2008; pages 607-609)

canonically subordinated to the Church of Georgia, but in fact, the Diocese of Sukhumi-Bichvinta is governed by the Moscow Patriarchate and is working purposefully to obtain the status of an independent church from Moscow. The current situation has turned the issue into an inter-Orthodox conflict, and it has escalated into a confrontation between the Abkhazian-Russian and Moscow-Constantinople patriarchates.

There has been formed a different form of ecclesiastical independence demand in Abkhazian clergy: the pro-Greek group (Archimandrite Dorothy Dbar) demands ecclesiastical autocephaly from the Patriarch of Constantinople and considers another way to be apocryphal. Russian Church qualifies this position to be divisive and pushes Russian, Georgian and Constantinople Patriarchates to confront each other over the "Abkhazian issue", while the "Abkhazian Orthodox Church" (Archimandrite Besarion Aplia) demands the status of autonomy from Moscow. According to Aplia, the status of autonomy will be the basis for future autocephaly, ie initially he considers the necessity to restore the Catholicosate of Abkhazia and in fact demands the subordination of Sukhumi-Bichvinta Diocese to Russian Church.<sup>3</sup>

In the modern orthodox world there is a canon developed at an early stage of history, which in its time envisaged the separatist attitude of the states and made changes in certain ecclesiastical laws, namely, 1). Regional Ecclesiastical Competence, 2). Ecclesiastical boundaries, 3). The right of autocephalous traditional arrangement. Today, factors determining autocephaly are as follows: 1). The political independence of the country where the autocephalous church is to emerge; 2). Geographical distance of the region from Mother-Church; 3). Ethnic and linguistic differences. According to Ecclesiastical Canon, besides the Ecumenical Council, only the kyriarchal (mother church) Church has the canonical right to establish a new autocephalous church. Thus, the demand of the so-called "Holy Metropolitan" of Abkhazia to obtain an autocephaly from the World Patriarch is canonical, because it is neither a decision of the Ecumenical Council, nor does it have the consent of the Cyrillic Church. In ecclesiastical science, the term is relatively new, although the phenomenon itself dates back to the Middle Ages, when a separate church owned incomplete independence. If the autocephalous church has the advantage of apostolic independence, the autonomous church lacks it. It has the right to elect a spiritual leader only with an approval of the mother church; other internal

<sup>3</sup> ჯგერენია ა.,ვის ინტერესებშია აფხაზეთის ეკლესიაში განხეთქილება,გაზ.ვესტნიკ კავკაზა,2013,21 ივლისი; (A. Jgerenia, "In whose interests is the split in the Church of Abkhazia", newspaper "Vestnik Kavkaza", 2013, 21. VII) Анкваб А.,Абхазская православная церковь должна добиться автокефалии,газ.Вестник кавказа,2013,20 май (A. Ankvaб, Abkhazian Orthodox Church must achieve Autocephaly, "Vesknik Kavkaza", 2013, 20.V)

ecclesiastical matters are being solved independently; The typicon is endorsed by the mother church, which is also an expression of canonical affiliation; financially and legally autonomous church depends on the mother church and establishes international ecclesiastical ties only with the consent of the mother church. Thus, it is obvious that attempts of "Abkhazian Orthodox Church" lack the basis of this canon on demanding of autonomous status and subordination to Moscow Patriarchate. The abovementioned is proved by historical basis concerning adoption of the autonomy: 1. Existence of a church in another state; 2). Geographical distance from the mother church; 3). Ethnic peculiarity. Historically, the granting of autonomy to the Church used to coincide with the acquisition of state independence, which was an intermediate, transitional stage in acquiring of autocephaly. Historical sources indicate that part of such churches have achieved autocephalous status over time, while others lost their right to autonomy and were converted into a metropolitan, or episcopal districts<sup>4</sup>.

Over the years, for Russian Church, "Abkhazian issue" has become an obstacle in redistribution of ecclesiastic borders; it was loosing its impact on Abkhazia and facing exacerbation of crisis with the World Patriarchate. In order to maintain its "right" over Abkhazian Church, Moscow Patriarchate made every effort to find a church that would help to recognize self-regulation of Abkhazian Church, based on ecclesiastical sources. Thus, the Church of Antioch has been selected and not by chance. On July 26, 2011, during the official visit of Russian Patriarch to Kiev, during a meeting with representatives of the Church of Antioch, Patriarch Kirill said: "We must support each other in every way throughout the all Orthodoxy"<sup>5</sup>. The reason for this statement is considered to be Archimandrite Dorotheos Dbar's appeal to the Holy Synods of the All-Orthodox Churches, where Dbar demanded the establishment of a special commission on Abkhazian issue, chaired by the Patriarch of Constantinople. This appeal deepened the controversy in the Abkhazian clergy. To defuse the situation, on August 19, 2020, the President of the self-declared republic, Aslan Bzhania, met with a delegation from the Holy Metropolitan, where Bzhania strongly supported the idea of autocephaly of the Abkhazian Church and approved the establishment of a "Common Orthodox Commission"; He only added that speeding of this issue would not be good for the further development of the country and would strain relations with Russia.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Историко-правовые аспекты автокефалии и автономии церкви, газ. Литературная газета, 2021, 27 май. Historical-legal aspects of autocephaly and church autonomy, newspaper "Literaturnaya Gazeta", 2021, 27. V.

<sup>5</sup> იჯგ

<sup>6</sup> Забулин К., Не сбиваться с пути..., газ. Литературная газета, 2021, 20 май. Другого пути нет! , газ. Христианская Абхазия, 2011, №40. Красно А., Нельзя все время ссылаться на прошлое. Глава Митрополии Абхазии - о конфликте с Грузией и РПЦ, 2021, 10 май. К. Zabulin, Not to go astray ..., newspaper "Literaturnaya Gazeta", 2021. 20. V; There is no other way! Part 1, newspaper "Christian

It is known that on May 16, Abkhazian delegation led by Bzhania paid an official visit to Syria, which recognized the occupied regions of Georgia as independent countries in 2018. With this fact, Bzhania's visit to Syria was not unexpected; On the other hand, receiving of Bzhania in Damascus by the Patriarch of Antioch, John X, and his widely publicized position, which clearly reveals his intention to establish direct contacts between the Churches of Antioch and Abkhazia, bypassing the Church of Georgia, became a matter of serious concern; "We are ready to help you, to provide your country with any kind of assistance you need regarding Christianity and the Church," said the Patriarch of Antioch at the meeting.

According to current situation, the question is - how dangerous is the orientation and messages of the Patriarch of Antioch? Numerous materials can be found that reflect the facts of support for the policies of Syria and Russia from the Patriarch of Antioch; The political-religious tandem of Antioch-Moscow patriarchates was revealed.

The positions of the Patriarchate of Antioch coincide with the approaches of Russian Church in all key issues. This tandem became apparent during Crete Council in 2016, when a representative of the Church of Antioch did not attend the event. The fact is that Russian Church, through the Church of Antioch, gives publicity to its goals and intentions.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, two questions arise from the above: 1). Is it possible for the Patriarchate of Antioch to grant autocephaly to the Church of Abkhazia? and 2). What will be the result of making such a decision? Analysts have different answers to these questions.

Some analysts do not rule out that the Patriarchate of Antioch, which opposes the World Patriarchate and acts in the interests of Russia, should grant Abkhazian Church the status of an autonomous Catholicate Church instead of autocephaly, what is in the direct interests of Russian Church and what the pro - Russian clergy of Abkhazia strives to. Russian Church will, in fact, subjugate Abkhazian region over time on the grounds that it has not gained an autocephaly and converts it into a diocese; until then, it will try its best to introduce Russian Orthodoxy in the parish of Abkhazia.

With such an approach to the issue of Abkhazia, the Patriarchate of Antioch has in fact denied the primacy of the World Patriarchate and recognized the possibility of establishing a new order in the Orthodox world, where Russian Church is considered to be one of the

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Abkhazia", 2011. A.Krasno, "You can't always refer to the past". Head of the Metropolitanate of Abkhazia-about the conflict with Georgia and the Russian Orthodox Church, 2021.10. V

<sup>7</sup> Мархвадзе Т., Автокефалия Абхазской церкви никто не признает, газ.Ахали ТаобаЮ,2011,22 май. Т. Markhvadze, Nobody recognizes the autocephaly of Abkhazian Church, newspaper "Akhali Taoba", 2011, 22. V

candidates for the primacy. Hence, the campaign against the World Patriarchate, led by Russian Church and widely used by the Patriarchate of Antioch, is widespread in the modern Christian world. The ideology of the campaign was the accusation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in trying to create a "new ecclesiology".

The theory of "alternative ecclesiology" considers only the establishment of inter-church ties through the Patriarch of Constantinople. With such an approach, only that Church can be in Orthodoxy, which has a direct connection with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Finding a dogmatic basis for such teaching is a difficult and in fact unattainable task; However, his theorists still aspire to create a new theological platform of ecclesiology, which should strengthen the right of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to grant the status of autocephaly. The author of this conclusion is Russian Church, which believes that Constantinople is trying to transfer the concept of Christian teaching to ecclesiastical primacy in the primacy of power.<sup>8</sup>

The severance of the Eucharistic union between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople in 2018 has created an awkward situation for the Orthodox Churches of the world, and has put Georgian Church in a difficult position.

Georgian Patriarchate constantly keeps an eye on the current events in the Orthodox world, on the approach of the Orthodox Churches to Abkhazian issue, and the meeting of Abkhazian delegation with the Patriarch of Antioch. It is clear to Georgian Church that this meeting took place during a difficult period for the Orthodox world, when the recognition of the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church led to an ecclesiastical schism; The Orthodox world was conventionally divided into two-Russian and Greek camps. The Church of Antioch found itself in a so-called Russian camp, which was revealed in the criticism of the decision of the Patriarch of Constantinople by the Patriarch of Antioch and in the declaration of the Ukrainian Church as a schismatic church. With such an approach, fears appeared in Syria regarding Bartholomew's revenge, that would lie in his attempt to destroy the Church of Antioch by recognizing the independence of Lebanese metropolis.<sup>9</sup>

Part of Georgian analysts give a negative assessment to the meeting between the Presidents of Antioch and Abkhazia and believe that Georgian Church should break the Eucharistic connection with the Church of Antioch, make public statements and condemn the attempts of the Patriarchate of Antioch to invade the internal affairs of Georgian Church: special

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<sup>8</sup> Солдатов И., Горячие точки православия, газ. Вестник Кавказа, 2012, 3 июля. Перчик А., Церковная забастовка в Абхазии завершилась, М., 2021. I. Soldatov, Hot spots of Orthodoxy, Vestnik Kavkaza, 2012.3.VII. A. Perchin, Church strike in Abkhazia is over, Moscow, 2021

<sup>9</sup> ჟურ. უფლის ციხე, 2011, #12. Journal Uplis Tsikhe, 2011, #12

appeals, to the World Patriarch and other patriarchs regarding unfriendly and unworthy actions of the Patriarchate of Antioch, to be made.

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„აფხაზეთის ეკლესია“ კონსტანტინოპოლისა და მოსკოვის  
საპატრიარქოებს შორის არჩევანში და ანტიოქიის ეკლესია  
(ავტოკეფალიის თუ ავტონომიის საკითხი)

**ქეთევან პავლიაშვილი**

ისტორიის მეცნიერებათა დოქტორი, ცხუმ-  
აფხაზეთის მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის  
რელიგიათმცოდნეობის ინსტიტუტის დირექტორი  
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უნივერსიტეტის პროფესორი, ხელოვნებისა და  
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მცოდნეობის ინსტიტუტმა*

**აბსტრაქტი.**

1. უკანასკნელი ათწლეულის მანძილზე „სადავო ეკლესიების“ საკითხმა უაღრესად აქტუალური ხასიათი შეიძინა და მართლმადიდებლურ სამყაროში ეკლესიათაშორის ურთიერთობას დამაბულობა შეჰმატა; ამკარად გამოიკვეთა სქიზმის საშიშროება, რაც განპირობებულია საეკლესიო საზღვრების ხელახალი გადანაწილებით.
2. საბჭოთა იმპერიის დაშლას მოჰყვა ერთა თვითგამორკვევის პროცესში გაღვივებული სეპარატიზმი და საეკლესიო საზღვრების ხელახალი გადანაწილების ამბიცი, რაც გამოვლინდა ცალკეული ეპარქიების ავტოკეფალიის მოპოვების სურვილსა და ამ მიმართულებით მეცადინეობაში. საქართველოს მაგალითზე, აღნიშნულმა თავი იჩინა სოხუმისა და ცხინვალის ეპარქიებში.

3. აფხაზეთის სამღვდლოებაში ჩამოყალიბდა საეკლესიო დამოუკიდებლობის ურთიერთგანსხვავებული ფორმის მოთხოვნა: პრობერძნული დაჯგუფება (არქიმანდრიტი დოროთე დბარი) ითხოვს საეკლესიო ავტოკეფალიას კონსტანტინოპოლის პატრიარქისაგან და სხვა გზას არაკანონიკურად მიიჩნევს, ხოლო „აფხაზეთის მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესია“ (არქიმანდრიტი ბესარიონ აპლია) ითხოვს ავტონომიის სტატუსს მოსკოვის საპატრიარქოსგან. ავტონომიის სტატუსი, აპლიას აზრით, საფუძველი გახდება მომავალი ავტოკეფალიისათვის, ე.ი. ფაქტობრივად ითხოვს სოხუმ-ბიჭვინთის ეპარქიის ავტონომიური უფლებით რუსეთის ეკლესიაზე დაქვემდებარებას.
4. აფხაზეთის ეკლესიაზე მოპოვებული „უფლების“ შენარჩუნებისათვის მოსკოვის საპატრიარქომ მთელი ძალისხმევა წარმართა მართლმადიდებლურ სამყაროში ისეთი ეკლესიის ძიებისაკენ, რომელიც დაეხმარებოდა აფხაზეთის ეკლესიის პრობლემის მოგვარებაში, ანუ აღიარებდა მის თვითმოწესეობას საეკლესიო წყაროების გათვალისწინებით და ისტორიული გამოცდილებით. ასეთ ეკლესიად მოსკოვის საპატრიარქომ ანტიოქიის ეკლესია შეარჩია.
5. საქართველოს საპატრიარქო მუდმივად მეთვალყურეობს მართლმადიდებელ სამყაროში მიმდინარე მოვლენებს, მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესიების აფხაზეთის საკითხისადმი მიდგომას. ამ მიმართულებით განვითარებულ მოვლენასა თუ ფაქტს საქართველოს ეკლესია დიდი სიფრთხილით ეკიდება. საქართველოს ეკლესიისათვის ნათელია, რომ აღნიშნული შეხვედრა მართლმადიდებლური სამყაროსათვის რთულ პერიოდში შედგა, როდესაც უკრაინის ეკლესიის ავტოკეფალიის ცნობამ სათავე დაუდო საეკლესიო განხეთქილებას; მართლმადიდებლური სამყარო პირობითად გაიყო ორ - რუსულ და ბერძნულ ბანაკებად. ანტიოქიის ეკლესია აღმოჩნდა ე.წ. რუსულ ბანაკში, ქართველ ანალიტიკოსთა ნაწილი ანტიოქიისა და აფხაზეთის პრეზიდენტების შეხვედრას ნეგატიურ შეფასებას აძლევს და მიიჩნევს, რომ საქართველოს ეკლესიამ ანტიოქიის ეკლესიასთან ექვარისტული კავშირი უნდა გაწყვიტოს; საჯარო განცხადებებით დაგმოს ანტიოქიის საპატრიარქოს შეჭრის მცდელობები საქართველოს ეკლესიის შიდა საქმეებში: მსოფლიო პატრიარქისა და სხვა პატრიარქებისადმი საგანგებო მიმართევებში ანტიოქიის საპატრიარქოს არამეგობრულ და უღირს ქმედებებზე მიუთითოს.