

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GEORGIA AND CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC

GÜRCÜ ORTODOKS KİLİSESİ VE KORONAVİRÜS SALGINI

ПРАВОСЛАВНАЯ ЦЕРКОВЬ ГРУЗИИ И ПАНДЕМИЯ КОРОНАВИРУСА

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ABSTRACT

2020 was unusual for entire world. Corona Virus was announced as a pandemic by the World Health Organization and it became the key challenge for the world.

Unexpectedly pandemic changed a political, economic, social life, it also put the issue of changing religious rituals up on the agenda. It made a dramatic change, changing not only lifestyle thoroughly but also it influenced public values and fundamental principles.

Georgia, as the part of the global space was not able to avoid the problem. In order to prevent dissemination of the virus, Georgian government closed the borders of Georgia for the foreign citizens, it announced the emergency condition, closed trading facilities, stopped functioning of the enterprises, enforced curfew, prohibited gathering of more than three people and set charges for violation of the rule.

For prevention of the virus, different confessions were forced to introduce changes in their services. Georgian Orthodox Church was an exception together with several churches of the world (Poland, Greece, Serbia). The patriarch of Georgia decided not to change the service rule despite high risk. It became the reason for excitement and criticism of clergymen, theologians, politicians and citizens in general. There were different positions and opinions inside the church itself, among the clergymen. The society had different opinions regarding the fact. This step made by the church was evaluated by some people as anti-social and anti-human decision. In the country, where the belief and traditions are closely connected, change of eucharist rule and close churches for the prayers are very sensitive issue. This is why due to respect to the Georgian church and Synod, as well as for high interest of the society, we decided to learn problem deeper. Actually, the following questions were asked, like what was the cause for the decision? Why the opinion of the churchmen, as well as parish and society were divided? What is the role of the state in solution of such problem?

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The article is focused on two key problems, one is receiving eucharist by the same spoon and the issue of social distance in the churches. In order to learn the issue deeper we got known with the opinion of the clergymen and theologian.

The Goal of the Study: Objective assessment of the latest developments, understanding relationship between the state and the church, analyzing the issue of freedom of belief.

The Methodology of the Study: The study is mainly based on the historical study method: description, comparative-historical method, empirical analysis, causal-historical analysis. Observation of the publications, analysis of the statements and opinions of the Patriarch of Georgia and high-ranking officials of the Patriarchate, as well as state officials, the representatives of the opposition parties, checking of the disseminated information and sources detecting method. Analysis of the governmental and opposition TV data and official versions.

Key Words: Orthodox Church of Georgia, State, Pandemic, Corona Virus, Patriarchy

ÖZ

2020'de bütün dünya için farklı bir durum meydana geldi. Koronavirüs, Dünya Sağlık Örgütü tarafından salgın ilan edildi ve dünya büyük bir zorlukla karşı karşıya kaldı.

Mevcut durum sadece yaşam biçimini değil, aynı zamanda kamusal değerler ve temel ilkeler üzerindeki etkisini de gösterdi. Salgın, birdenbire toplumun siyasi, ekonomik, sosyal hayatını değiştirdi. Bununla birlikte, dini ritüellerin değiştirilmesi konusu da gündeme geldi.

Gürcistan, küresel dünyanın bir parçası olarak bu sorundan kaçamadı. Gürcistan hükümeti virüsün yayılmasını önlemek için sınırlarını yabancı uyruklulara kapattı. Ayrıca olağanüstü hal ilan etti, alış-veriş merkezleri ile bazı işletmeleri kapattı, sokağa çıkma yasağı çıkardı, üçten fazla kişinin toplanmasını yasakladı ve yasaklara uymayanlara para cezası koydu.

Salgını önlemek için çeşitli dini mezhepler ibadetlerinde geçici değişiklikler yapmak zorunda kaldılar. Ancak, Polonya, Yunanistan, Sırbistan gibi Ortodoks kiliseleriyle birlikte Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi de oldu istisna oldu. Gürcistan Patrikliği, virüsün yayılma riskinin yüksek olmasına rağmen ibadet kurallarını değiştirmeme kararı aldı. Bu karar din adamları, ilahiyatçılar, politikacılar ve genel olarak vatandaşlar arasında tartışma ve eleştiriye neden oldu. Kilisenin kendi içinde, din adamları arasında bile farklı pozisyonlar ve farklı görüşler gözlemlendi. Bu gerçeğe ilgili kamuoyu tarafından pek çok görüş dile getirildi. Kilise'nin bu hareketi, toplumdaki bazı kişiler tarafından anti sosyal ve insanlık dışı bir karar olarak görüldü. İnanç ve geleneğin iç içe geçtiği bir ülkede, zıhareba (evkaristiya) kuralını değiştirmek ve ibadethaneleri kapatmak kilise cemaati için oldukça hassas bir konu haline geldi. Bu nedenle, Gürcistan Kilise ve Sinodu'na duyulan saygı ve konu üzerine olan kamu ilgisi çok fazla olmasından dolayı sorunu açıklığa kavuşturmayı uygun gördük. Aslında ortaya konulan sorular şunlardı: Alınan kararın nedeni ne oldu? Din adamlarının, kilise cemaatinin ve toplumun görüşü neden bölündü? Meselenin çözülmesinde devletin rolü ne olabilirdi?

Makalede kiliselerde evkaristiya ve sosyal mesafe konusu gibi iki güncel konu üzerine durulmuştur: konunun daha iyi anlaşılması için din adamları ile ilahiyatçıların görüşlerinden istifade edildi.

Araştırmada güncel olayların objektif değerlendirmesi, devlet ile kilise arasındaki ilişkinin netleştirilmesi, din özgürlüğü konusunun analizi amaçlanmıştır.

Araştırma temel olarak açıklama, karşılaştırmalı-tarihsel yöntem, deneysel, nedensel ve karşılaştırmalı analiz, yayınların gözlemlenmesi gibi tarihsel araştırma yöntemine dayanmaktadır. Ayrıca, Gürcistan Patriği ve Patrikhanesi'nin, üst düzey devlet yetkililerin, muhalefet partilerin temsilcilerin beyan ve görüşlerin analizi, yayınlanmış bilgilerin ve

kaynakların, hükümet ve muhalefet TV verilerinin ve resmi versiyonların analizi de yapılmıştır.

Анаhtar Kelimeler: Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi, Devlet, Salgın, Koronavirüs, Patrikhane.

АННОТАЦИЯ

2020 год для мира выдался необычным. Всемирной организацией здравоохранения коронавирус был объявлен пандемией и стал серьезной проблемой на Земле.

Пандемия внезапно изменила политическую, экономическую, социальную жизнь общества, а также поставила на повестку дня вопрос об изменении религиозных ритуалов. Это было радикальное изменение, которое коренным образом изменило не только образ жизни, но также повлияло на общественные ценности и фундаментальные принципы.

Грузия, как часть глобального пространства, не смогла избежать этой проблемы. Для превенции вируса, правительство Грузии закрыло границы для иностранных граждан, объявило чрезвычайное положение. Были закрыты магазины, была приостановлена работа ряда предприятий, был введен комендантский час, запрещены собрания более трех человек и наложены штрафы за его нарушение. Также, с целью превенции, различные религиозные конфессии вынуждены были сделать временные изменения в богослужении.

Исключением стала Грузинская православная церковь с несколькими церквями по всему миру (Польша, Греция, Сербия). Патриархат Грузии решил не менять правила богослужения, несмотря на высокий риск распространения вируса. Это было причиной волнения и критики со стороны духовенства, а также теологов, политиков и граждан в целом. В самой церкви, даже среди духовенства, наблюдались различные позиции и различные точки зрения. По этому поводу в обществе было высказано множество мнений. Этот шаг Церкви в определенных кругах общества был расценен как антисоциальное и антигуманное решение. Именно поэтому, в свете уважения к Церкви и Синода Грузии и из-за большого общественного интереса к этому вопросу, мы сочли необходимым уточнить эту проблему.

Фактически возникли следующие вопросы: что стало причиной указанного решения? Почему разделились мнения духовенства, прихода и общины? Какова роль государства в решении проблемы? Почему разделились мнения духовенства, прихода и общины? Какова роль государства в решении проблемы? В стране, где вера и традиция тесно связаны друг с другом, изменение правила причастия и закрытие храмов для прихода стало довольно болезненной темой.

В статье рассматриваются два актуальных вопроса: причастие одной ложкой и защита социальной дистанции в храмах. Для более глубокого понимания вопроса ознакомились с мнениями духовенства и теологов.

Цель исследования: объективная оценка происходящих событий, выяснение взаимоотношений государства и церкви, анализ темы свободы вероисповедания.

Методы: В основе исследования лежит метод исторического исследования: описание, сравнительно-исторический метод, эмпирический анализ, причинно-сравнительный анализ, наблюдение за публикациями. А также анализ высказываний и мнений Патриарха и Патриархата Грузии, высокопоставленных государственных деятелей, представителей оппозиционных партий, методика проверки распространяемой информации и поиска источников. Анализ данных и официальных версий правительственных и оппозиционных телеканалов.

Ключевые слова: Грузинская Православная Церковь, Государство, Пандемия, Коронавирус, Патриархат.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020 the humanity faced the global problem. The Coronavirus which first has blew up in China became the global threat very soon. The World Health Organization announced Covid-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, which appeared a challenge, kind of test for Georgia and for the world in general. The situation totally changed the everyday routine, economic, political or social environment, it influenced the values and fundamental principles. It was the reason of the death of many people, it was especially dangerous for elderly people and for those with the chronicle diseases and put the medical staff under the high risk. It required to make some changes in the religious service as well.

The relationship between the church and state became very important due to existed situation. As Orthodox church is a highly trusted institute by Georgian society (proved by the social studies conducted by the international and local organizations) (Sakartvelos martlmadidebeli ek'lesiis rolis gazrda kveqnis demok'rat'iul ganvitarebashi:2017). It is noticeable that Georgian Church used to support spiritual, cultural and intellectual development of the country for centuries. "The special role of in Georgian History" of the Georgian Orthodox Church is reflected in the Constitution, what is proved by the "Concordant", the agreement between the State and the Church („Sakartvelos sakhelmts'iposa da sakartvelos samotsikulo avt'ok'epalur martlmadidebel ek'lesias shoris“ k'onst'it'utsiuri shetankhmebis damt'k'itsebis shesakheb 2002).

In April the largest world news company, CNN publishes the article about Georgia by the title: „Georgia's defiant Orthodox church will host Easter worshipers despite lockdown“. „The tradition-bound church has so far refused to adapt communion rites to counter epidemiological concerns. Worshipers line up at the end of each service to receive the sacrament of communion from the same communal spoon“ (Haueri:2020).

In April the phone survey conducted by the TV channel "Formula" for Edison Research showed that majority of Georgian population (60%) stated that receiving sacrament of communion from the same communal spoon was dangerous, while 40% thinks on the contrary (Mosakhleobis 60% tvlis, rom erti k'ovzit ziareba p'andemiis dros sakhipatoa 2020).

Georgian Policy Institute conducted the survey in March of this year. 40 Georgian and international researcher and policy experts answered the questions on Georgia's readiness for combating COVID 19 pandemic. The study results showed that experts consider disobedience of Georgian church and the part of the citizens as the most serious challenge, though the measures taken by the Georgian government and healthcare system were assessed positively. According to the results of the respondent's answers, the actions of Georgian Orthodox Church was assessed as the most negative during each phase of the crisis. 92% of Georgian and international experts assessed the decision not to change the rule of communion "negatively" (Eksp'ert'ta gamok'itkhva №11:2020).

In June, 2020 the public attitude survey was conducted by CRRC for the National Democratic Institute. One of the goals of the study was analysis of Coronavirus-related problems, according to it 73% of the citizens think that comparatively low rate of the virus dissemination is the result of right steps made by the government and doctors, while 17% thinks that it is due to Georgian genes and religion. 53% of surveyed population thinks that belief protects the believers from infecting by Coronavirus. 38% of the population is not agree with this opinion. According to this survey, only 10% of the Orthodox believers attended the Easter service in the churches during the Pandemic (Sazogadoebis gants'qoba sakrtveloshi :2020).

During the history of humanity global pandemics were spread in Georgia many times. The interesting work on how our ancestors combat with the pandemic based on Georgian and Foreign sources by Giorgi Sosiashvili. Since early mid-centuries till quarter of the XX century the world remembers many pandemics. The pandemics similarly killed declared masses and the representatives of the royal family members, clergymen or atheists. Giorgi Sosiashvili described how the infections being important challenge for the humanity were overcome by Georgians (Sosiashvili, 2020: 4).

In the I half of XIV century, spread of the plague in Georgia is confirmed in Svaneti. The documentation describes the fact that there were places which were banned and charged for visiting “If anybody goes to Ossetia where the epidemic was in the highest level, without telling to others, they should be imposed to the penalty” (Sosiashvili, 2020: 11).

There was practice of having the quarantine zones even in the XIX century. The information about such zones are found in the diaries of the travelers, in particular, Giorgi Sosiashvili refers the texts of a Scottish traveler and Botanist, Robert Layel, who mentioned one of the main, strategically important quarantine zones in Ananuri. Giorgi Sosiashvili discusses the attitude of the Christian churches towards the spread pandemics in one of the chapters of the study. For instance, it is clear, that the Church was the only salvation for the frightened people who are frightened from the plague found Church as salvation. The Patriarchy of Georgia used to provide not only spiritual support to the population harmed by the epidemy, but is also released them from the taxes. It is proved in in the letter written to the Catholicos Anton II by the residents of Dzegvi dated as May 2, 1800 (Sosiashvili, 2020: 142).

The ethnologist, Prof. Ketevan Khutsishvili describes the behavior related to the epidemic diseases in the Georgian ethnographic practice as follows: “It is natural, that each society has its own experience with regards of diseases, accordingly the attitudes are developed based on the health and illness idea, origin of the disease and the ways of prevention. Georgian ethnographic practice proves that there were diversified ways care and prevention of diseases. During the epidemics the strict isolation rules were kept, those who violated the rules were imposed to charges or forced to leave the village, in most cases with their families. The tradition of rustication was also wide-spread. Referring to the mentioned study

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it is clear that there was quite developed medical practice and knowledge, used for cure and prevention of the diseases (Khutsishvili:2020).

DISCUSSION

Georgian government has started struggling with pandemic a month before first known case (February 26). On January 28, 2020 the interagency coordination council was established for taking important decisions related to Coronavirus. The measures for prevention of possible spread of the novel Coronavirus in Georgia and the response plan for the cases of novel Coronavirus Disease was developed (Sakartvelos mtavrobis gank'arguleba №164, 2020 ts'lis 28 ianvari :2020). The borders were closed for the foreigners to prevent spread of virus in the country, the emergency situation and the national curfew (From 21:00 till 06:00) were announced since March 21 gathering more than three people was banned.

The Ecumenical patriarchy stopped all types of religious services for a certain period. The address of the Ecumenical patriarch, Bartholomew reads, that the ban does not refer to the personal prayers in the open churches and they will be reviewed according to the spread of pandemic. He called the society to stay home for their safety and protection of other people. He also commended on the opinion, as if the dramatically strict measures harm the belief and he explained “not the belief, but the believers, not Crist, but the Christians, not the Sone of the God, but human beings are under threat“ (Ebralidze: 2020).

Georgian church started introducing certain measures for prevention spread of virus. The religious rites were left unchanged. Pursuant to the decision of the Synod as of March 20, the society was informed that the rule of receivin the sacrament of communion from the same communal spoon and the praying would be left unchanged in the churches. It was the reason for different opinions and criticism of clergymen, theologists, politicians and citizens in general, as taking sacraments from the communal spoon and gathering of more than three people in the public places supported to spread of virus. The eparchies of Khobi and Poti, (Absaridze: 2020), as well as Batumi and Lazeti took different decision from the patriarchy (Monast'rebshi ts'irva ghamit mrevlis gareshe chat'ardeba, dilit – mrevltan ertad – batumis da lazetis ep'arkia :2020), the Easter eve service was conducted without prayers. Several orthodox churches of Georgia functioning abroad (German-Austrian, the North American, Belgian-Dutch and the Western European) fully understood the directives of the state where they operate and demonstrated absolutely different positions from the Synod decision.

The leaders of other religion confessions acting in Georgia made changes in their services and called parish to stay home, they conducted the rites without parish. For instance, Catholic Church in Georgia changed the rule of communion based on the decree of March 16 (Afriamashvili... 2020), while the meetings in the churches were banned since March 22. On March 19 the Administration of Georgian Muslims made the decision for temporary termination of the services in the Mosques (Tsulukidze:2020).

The changes were introduced in the rites and communion by the Evangelical-Baptist Church in Georgia since March 8 (Sekhniashvili :2020). While Armenian Apostil Church (Sarukhanyani: 2020).

The society itself, both active part of the Orthodox Population and passive ones were confused by the situation. Part of them attended the services and received communion without threat following the ordinary rule. Another part approached with different responsibility to the threat of spreading virus and stayed home. It causes kind of disappointment of certain part of the society towards the clergymen and state.

In this part the opinion and statements of the state and church officials, physicians, theologians, the representatives of the opposition parties will be presented consistently and based on this information the evaluation and analysis will be made in the conclusive part of the paper.

„Use of communal spoon for communion includes risk of infection dissemination and it does not require any special scientific study”, the head of the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center, Prof. Tengiz Tsertsvadze (Tsertsvadze:2020).

Upon announcement of the state of emergency, the society was interested whether synod change the rule of receiving communion. According to the decision of the St. Synod, neither rule of communion was changed, nor services were terminated, as Synod considered, that the fact would be abuse of belief and change of religious dogmas “Sacred communion is the cure of the spirit and flesh for those who received the communion by belief and keeping the church rules. Therefore, doubts in the secret communion by the members of the church and its demonstration in the actions, for instance, refusal on getting it by communal spoon, as the source spreading infection, is totally unacceptable”, Synod decision reads (Ts'minda sinodis gadats'qvət'ilebit, k'oronavirusis p'andemiis gamo ziarebis ts'esi ar sheitsvleba, imediniusi:2020).

The Press speaker of the Patriarch, an Archpriest, Andria Jaghmaidze clearly mentioned in his official statement, “It is more than thousand years, since this tradition exists and there were many different pandemics for this period. Church had never discussed to change the rule of communion”. We can have the communion individually, by visiting the priest on place (Jaghmaidze, (a):2020). It seems that in this case the church paid attention not to the dogmatic theology, but the tradition.

The opinion of Father Theodore Gignadze is little bit different, who on one hand, is for change of the tradition of the church, though it should not be caused by the fear, to the belief, “One thing is undoubtful, our belief goes lustration, our belief goes through test and it is very important. I am a church historian, the traditions in the Orthodox church used to change, but not for the reason of fear, the fear which opposed to the belief” (Gignadze: 2020).

The opinion of the theologians in the presented article below is totally different from the church officials' statements, “The communal spoon, like other forms of liturgy is not the part of unchangeable dogma. The history knows well that the practice of applying spoon was introduced in the XI-XII centuries. It is quite

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possible to apply the old liturgical practice and put the bread in the wine and sharing with the worshippers”, Zurab Jashi, the theologian stated (Jashi: 2020).

The problem does not refer to change of communion, but to change of the communion rule, communal spoon, which can become the tool for spreading infection. Theologian, Gocha Barnov declares, that “Christ defined the communion, this secret is essential, not the rule of the communion. Eucharist is one of the secrets, when the believers accept Christ with emotions, how it is made, it is not essential and it used to change for centuries (Barnov ... 2020).

Theologians used to state based on the essence of the Christianity, that life of a human is important and the God does not require any victim, Christ says “here are those, who is higher than temple”, “I want mercy and not sacrifice“ (Jinjolava:2020).

A theologian, Basil Kobakhidze considers “when there is the outbreak of pandemic, many lives are sacrificed to virus, this is the best time for the Christians to demonstrate love to a man, share the responsibility which supports to survival of people, what is much more important than participation in the ritual: The idea of the Christianity is in love of a man, in caring of a man and it is “the way how to reach the God and first of all it goes through our heart, spirit and mind“ (Kobakhidze:2020).

Evangelist-Baptist Church Bishop, Malkhaz Songhulashvili is for change of the communion rule and declares, that “implementation of Eucharist can easily be the reason for spreading epidemic. Eucharist always was and remains the heart of the Christian religion. Taking use of communal spoon out of the ritual is the nuance and it does not impact to the theology of Eucharist at all“ (Songhulashvili:2020).

The head of Michael Archangel Church, Archpriest Alexandre Galdava also is for the change of the communion rule, as he thinks that “God says Saturday was created for the people and not people for Saturday, it means that the rule is for people but not the people for a rule. Therefore, temporarily should restore the rule according to which the people used to receive communion till VIII century, what totally excludes receiving communion by a communal spoon“ (Bogveradze: 2020).

A theologian, Levan Abashidze suggests different viewpoint, he tries to consider the emotions of a believer and peculiarities of the studies, the sensitive factors, what can be followed to altering of the life routine in the emergency state, in this case pandemic, he calls the society for demonstration of respect towards the followers of any religion. „Termination of the divine service even due to spread of Coronavirus, will be very harmful for the Christian, believer person. A person bears once, and it regularly gets food in order to continue living. Birth is christening, while regular getting of food is the participation in general divine service and communion“. He considers evaluation of the Synod’s decision as a delicate issue, saying “even the fact that the church is in a regular dialogue with the state agencies and primarily, with the representatives of healthcare system, considering many recommendations, including alternation of the divine rules, is important. The safety measures introduced for prevention of dangerous epidemic spreading, serves to caring and love of the people“(Asanishvili,(a): 2020).

The certain group of clergymen, who are supporters of the Synod's decision with regards of use of communal spoon during the communion, consider that "Holy communion is for curing spirit and flesh, and suspecting of the secret of the communion and refusal from getting communion from the same spoon, as from the source of spreading infection is totally unacceptable"(Kenkadze: 2020). While theologians prove by arguments, that altering of the holy communion rule by the patriarchy was possible, as it is not a dogmatic issue and it used to change for centuries and it is fully possible due to the current situation and adjust to the challenge. Others contradicted, stating that the decision opposes to the fundamental concept of the Christianity on love of neighbor and it is focused on the form and ritual instead of contents.

The problem of conducting easter rites became more important together with approaching the Easter holiday, the society was curious about upcoming agreement of the state and patriarchate officials. Finally, the state and patriarchy agreed that regardless emergency situation and curfew, the worshipers would attend the service. On April 15, the press speaker of the patriarchy, Andria Jaghmaidze (Jaghmaidze, (b):2020) and the press speaker of the Prime Minister, Irakli Charkviani (Charkviani:2020) informed the society about compromised decision, they made similar statements, that the worshipers could visit the church before start of curfew and stay till 6 a.m. 2 meters of distance would be kept in the big churches, while in the small ones the worshipers would be distributed in the yard. The government would ensure social distancing in the churches.

Though, Khobi and Poti, as well as Batumi and Lazeti eparchies, as well as Georgian Orthodox churches abroad got different decision. The state officials, epidemiologists, public servants appealed to the population to prevent themselves from attending the rites, stay home and listen to the Easter liturgy.

„Coronavirus will not be spread from the church, on the contrary, the people come to the church for curing, spiritually and physically..." as the Metropolitan of Zugdidi and Tsaishi, the father Gerasime said (Meupe gerasime:2020).

Poti and Khobi Eparchy Metropolitan Grigol, called worshippers to obey the limitations set during the emergency situation. During discussion of the physical diseases the issue of a doctor and a theologian should not be considered as a confrontation, "saying that "no doctor and curing are needed, when I have a doctor and can pray", or "I will not be infected as I have God", is not correct! A doctor and a curable means are blessed by God, to protect and cure a person from the physical diseases A Metropolitan called the population to understand existing situation correctly and listen to epidemiologist (Meupe grigoli:2020).

Quite emotional statement of the Ubisi Bishop, father Melkisedek had the same contents. He mentioned "You unlike us, clergymen, are not obliged attend the divine services. I have no right to forbid any of you visit of the church on Saturday evening, I cannot lock the church from inside, but as a bishop, who constantly cares for your health and prayer as an ordinary citizen, urge you, stay home as much as you can and limit the contacts, please stay home even on Easter! In order to help

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state and physicians in effective management of the situation (Meupe melkisedek'i:2020).

The Akhaltsikhe, Tao-Klarjeti and Lazeti Eparchy Metropolitan Theodore, states how it is important to go church and take a communion, he keeps himself to call the worshipers and entire society to follow the recommendations directly, what are important for fighting against pandemic (Mit'rop'olit'i teodore:2020).

The opinion of the archpriest Alexandre Galdava differs from other people, as he thinks that the celebration should be in the heart, and he is sorry that the worshipers are divided into two parts: “The celebration is in the heart, the joy is in the heart and if the celebration still takes place after such number of warning, does it have a sense? If the entire Georgia is angry on you and does not rely, how can we celebrate, we will disappoint our parish, those who have stayed at home and the people who struggle and urge not to fall in the situation which cannot be managed and have thousands of people dead, it cannot be celebration, will it be the victory on the death?“ (Dek'anozi galdava :2020).

Archpriest, Father Tamaz Lomidze talks about the church, as the union of believers and calls the parish to stay home, as he says, “nothing is better when being together on the service, but even in case we have to refuse from being together temporary due to the threat, there is no power, which will destroy the invisible union of the believers“ (ek'anozi Lomidze: 2020).

Noticeable that 13 clergymen and 16 theologians appealed to the Christian believers individually, where they considered as needed to ask Orthodox parish to refuse on the liturgical life temporarily what is needed for prevention of the virus and the way to the God is not only through church-going and following liturgical rules. „True relationship with the Crist is not expressed only by going to Church. We can be the true churches for Crist in a different way, like the parts of his body and true sharers. Those who refuse from gathering during the rites due pandemic do not refuse from God, on the contrary, they try to conduct a spiritual liturgy for serving humans“ (Vints tavs ik'avebs ts'irvaze misvligan, ar ghalat'obs krist'es – mghvdlebis da teologebis mimartva:2020).

Regardless gathering of more than three people was banned in the country, the churches were crowded. According to the emergency situation decree, freedom of belief and religion is not limited. Introduction of an individual normative act is needed for limitation of the gathering of people in the churches during the services what has not been done by the government. The article 71 of Georgian Constitution defines the list of the rights which can be limited by the President's decree during the emergency situation. According to the decree of the President it is not allowed to limited the belief and religion. Accordingly, limitation of the gathering does not cover those who are gathered for participation in the rites (Janashvili: 2020).

State Officials: President, Prime Minister, Ministers or Members of Parliament, as well as the representatives of the opposition parties, public servants officially called the parish to stay home during their public speeches or TV statements, they declared, that they would not attend the Easter liturgy to be the example for the society. „I, as the guarantee of the concordant, understand well that

the church should have the service, but in altered manner. How it used to happen during the history, praying was and still is very important for survival of the nation, it cannot be changed by anybody or anything”, the President of Georgia, Salome Zurbishvili declared (Zurbishvili:2020).

Prime Minister, Giorgi Gakharia declared: “I would like to ensure, that state, as well as church fully understand their responsibility for struggling with pandemic, including human health, importance of the state institutes, functioning of church and in terms of violation of law, these are the challenges and we have to find a golden balance we are currently working together almost every day. We have to do our best not to close churches. This is a historical challenge, we had to find such balance all the time and we will find it together with the church“ (Gakharia: 2020).

The opposite evaluations followed to the agreement of Georgian Orthodox Church and state, which considered conducting Easter eve service. NGOs, the office of a Public Defender, Opposition parties, the leaders of other religious groups considered this action as the rough violation of the legal state and human rights, as a discrimination.

One part of Georgian politicians demonstrated their position “let emergency regime will refer to everybody, without discrimination“ (Sakartvelos evangeluri aliansi, aghasrulet sagangebo rezhimi qvelas mimart, disk'riminatsiis gareshe:2020). „The citizens were left alone with their civic consciousness“. I understand Christianity differently, that it is care on the people, this is care on weak and entire process related to Coronavirus is the care on the most vulnerable” (Margvelashvili:2020). „Follow one of the key principles of the democracy, legal state and human rights, equality against the law. Only Georgian Orthodox Church has an actual right not to obey general rule and encourage the parish to break a law“ (P'olit'ik'uri p'art'iam tavisupalma demok'rat'ebi:2020). „Georgia is not Iran, where the country is ruled by the religious leaders,” according to Christian religion and by this institute, Georgia is not Iran ruled by the religious leaders”, by Christian religion and this institute, it is the greatest irresponsibility from the government not taking any measures“ (Bokeria:2020). „By means of such selective approach, the state refuses from the main principles of the legal state, the rule of law, equal rights and protection of citizens safety, health and life (Sakhalkho damtsvelis ap'arat'tan arsebulma t'olerant'obisa da mravalperovnebis inst'it'ut'i, TDI:2020).

On April 29, a Human right international organization, Amnesty International published its findings regarding to the measures taken against pandemic by the European and Central Asian countries. The report refers Georgia “The special measures introduced on March 21 were necessary and proportional and serves to the legitimate goals of public health. Though there is the concern that the measures against COVID-19 was discriminating. Regardless medical recommendations the religious gatherings are not limited by the law, the Orthodox Church hosted thousands of church goes on the Palm Day and Easter on April 12 and 19 in Georgia”. The organization report tells about discriminative approach, what means certain type of privilege to the Orthodox church, as other religious

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groups available in Georgia voluntarily refused and terminated services temporarily (Amnesty International:2020).

Though April had started with certain excitement, the State Officials stated that there was no Easter cluster, no increase of number of infected related the religion events. The population and church reasonably responded the Governmental recommendations (Akhaldze: 2020).

Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Archbishop of Mtskheta-Tbilisi, Metropolitan of Bichvinta and Tskhum-Abkhazia, His Holiness and Beatitude Ilia II thanks to the parish and the state leaders in the Easter Epistle for 2020 “Thanks God, service has not suspended in Georgia together with the parish, and it took place on the Easter Eve. Due to support of God, help of the doctors, actions of the government and responsibility of the citizens the great problems were not caused by the pandemics. I have to thank to our parish, who was distinguished by the following of the rules and recommendations and who suffered from cold, wind, rain but stand for hours under the sky“ (Saaghdgomo ep'ist'ole: 2020).

RESULTS

Synod of Georgian Orthodox Church and the representatives of the acting government came to the decision based on the consensus, that Georgian churches were not closed, the parish attended the service on Easter, while the state helped in meeting certain recommendations. The decision of the government and patriarchy was assessed as “balance” by the representatives of the legislative and executive government, while the opposition considered it as the action against statehood, violation of the law on religion freedom and human right.

Some people evaluated the actions of the patriarchate as the fact of power demonstration and the state was afraid of upcoming elections (Zantaraia:2020), or government tries to use the authority of the church for its political purposes election campaign (Asanishvili (b): 2020). All mentioned point of view was very important during the emergency situation announced during the pandemic period and Georgian Orthodox Church is quite influential and has the tools for ruling of the parish.

On the Palm Sunday the patriarch Ilia II conducted the service in the Trinity Church, though he was in the risk group due to his age and health condition. The leaders of the eparchy, clericals demonstrated a great courage and continued service regardless the risk in the churches. where the Metropolitan of Pechersk Larva, in the Ukraine was infected by the virus. The similar situation was on the island Crete, in Serbia, where the Metropolitan was died by Coronavirus, etc.

Finally, the state and the church were able to response in concordance. Though the church, society and state made the risk during such actions, though agreed action, distribution of the social responsibility and civic culture had the positive result.

Georgia is a multi-religious country and all the citizens have equal rights assigned by the Constitution of the Country. Though the parish of other confessions except Orthodox church obeyed the rules of the emergency situation without any enforcement, but finally, they expressed some kind protest against the state.

Actually, the state was not able to spread the pandemic preventive measures on all the confessions equally and ask for following the rules equally. Though the state did not discriminate but agreement with the patriarchy showed unequal attitude to other confessions.

Pandemic is still strong and Georgia still copes with the global challenge successfully. Timely taken intervention measures, severe emergency situation, meeting of the world Health Recommendations, good knowledge, competencies and tireless work of the public health national center, medicine workers, sharing of other countries' experience, timely results of the laboratory diagnostics.

In such situation the high state-oriented thinking and civic and social responsibility of entire society, including clerical and secular servants are very important.

According to Prof. Nino Chikovani, the stereotype existing in the society seriously prevents development of civic awareness. Quite a large part of the society still believes that neither virus, nor the limitations caused by the virus refers to it; that everybody is responsible except him/her; or everything is solved "somewhere" without us and we cannot change anything (Chikovani: 2020).

When there is the pandemic in the world, the political and economic situation is difficult in Georgia, it is unacceptable to be the confrontation between the members of the society, strain of the situation between the church and state and harm neither belief nor state idea (Kandelaki: 2020).

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