

**Akaki and the Issue of Autocephaly of Georgian Church**  
(according to the banned materials)

**Abstract:** Modern studies of Akaki Tsereteli's creativity have revealed many hitherto unknown materials preserved in different archives where the poet appears before the reader in a completely different plane. The works previously banned by the tsarist censorship and Soviet conjuncture have proved once more that Akaki Tsereteli devoted all his life to the fight for national and church's independence. It is true this idea runs through all his works, but most clearly it appeared in 1901 after the celebration of 100th anniversary of Georgia's accession to Russia in the article "The Truth" (MSS # 280, # 283) which due to its most acute national-patriotic and political character became a victim of censorship of all epochs. This should not be surprising, because the bitter truth of the century-long policy of Russification was uncovered by the poet directly without embellishment to everybody – laymen and clerics, and enemy.

**Keywords:** Akaki, autograph, censorship, banned materials, autocephaly.

The letter begins with the staggering facts about the heroism of Georgians throughout the centuries which helped Georgia escaped destruction and retained her identity until the 19th century. As Akaki mentions, "Through centuries of invasions by numerous enemies, the country has retained the Kingdom and her uniqueness, but the policy of Russians has put an end to long-suffering Georgia". Akaki analyzes the methods of violence, with which Russia has achieved the voluntary accession of Georgia. The power of the one-faithful people must have been a way out for the country immersed in the darkness of Muslim world but everything happened on the contrary. Because of the Tsarist policy of Russification, it was difficult for Georgians to preserve national identity. They lost both the statehood (1801) and independence of the Church (1811), which led to the fact that the fervent faith of the nation was weakened, the churches were abandoned, Georgian traditions disappeared, the national education system was destructed, the legislation became corrupted. The break of the way of national life resulted in the spiritual and moral degeneration of the people and, regrettably, today the Georgian is as similar to his ancestor as a ghost to alive thing expressing it, "- concludes the poet.

In "The Truth", Akaki makes analysis of those three fundamental values for preservation of national identity by the destruction of which the enemy reached the goal.

The poet believes that the faith is the first value that is of the utmost importance to the nation's strength and which most of all prevents the enemy to subjugate a nation. Back in the old days, numerous invaders came with a sword to fight against Christian faith of the Georgians and forced them to give up their faith, but such persecutions by Muslims further strengthened the

faith of Georgians and nationality. This turned out to be a difficult task for the enemy with evil intentions, because, as Akaki puts it, "Georgians link faith with nationality as one integral part; in old times, Georgian and Christian meant one and same thing."

Because of such close connection, for the sake of forgetting the nationality, at first people had to be forced to forget their faith. It was from here that the Tsarism began the attack on national values. In "The Truth" Akaki considers in detail the issues related to the faith and the essence of changes occurring in it.

The first thing that the king's government did was the impoverishment of the Church. The property with which it helped the poor and easily maintained the independence was expropriated by the new authorities on the grounds that it itself would care about clerical ranks. In addition to this, the Catholicos appointed by the World Assembly was also dismissed and instead of him they appointed a Russian Exarch, gave him a new program and endowed him with power. The essence of the program was to force people forget all the old ways, the Georgian liturgy was suppressed and replaced with Slavonic, which the Russians themselves did not understand well.

They began to scold the Georgian "Gospel" and preach to the people that the Georgian gospel is not sacred, because it is written in the language for dogs... Who gave the Georgian saints what kind of church their church", writes Akaki in "The Truth".

The Russians soon realized that such direct persecution on the church and faith could not bring any result. So they began to destroy their faith in a different way. The poet notes with regret that the Tsar's authority touched the most modest and sensitive string in the Georgian – it was the fear and respect for the church. It was necessary to work out a method that would have deteriorated this respect. This must have been done through insulting the church and impairing it, which was aimed at alienation of people from the church.

The enemy started the action from here. He knew that the Georgians had such fear and respect for the church that they could not even touch anything in its surroundings. The Russians began to rob churches and monasteries. The stolen items were sold out. And this was promoted by the Holy Synod. As Akaki writes, "At first, this greatly surprised the people who saw what was a rarity when the Tatars invaded and waited for a miracle: the church would repulse its robbers, but time passed and no one raised voice and gradually got used to it. They thought that probably the church has no strength, otherwise would it have given itself to the destruction? Everything turned out to be a fraud, and the people themselves also followed this".

Akaki tried to make public this issue, but in 1875 the censorship prohibited his letter in which he allegorically denounced the robbers of Georgian churches. In the same year, Akaki also sends a letter full of charges to the bishop Gabriel Kikodze in spite of great respect for him ("Mnatobi" 968, # 1, p. 177).

The process of the struggle for autocephaly, which began in the nineties, was suppressed by making a split in the clergy. To the struggle for the destruction of the faith, the Tsarism added a "mute method" of education, i.e. the ousting of the teaching of the Georgian language and also jurisprudence in Russian language that people did not understand. This led to the impoverishment of people and they stopped to believe in justice and became the slaves of injustice.

Akaki believed that the first step to resolve the existing problems in the country is spiritual recovery and the return of the statehood, was to be the restoration of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. This was the reason that the poet actively participated in the movement for autocephaly, which was spread in Georgia in the nineties.

In 1898-99, Akaki wrote an extraordinary verse "The Voice", which was so sharp and intense national-political character that it was secretly disseminated in a certain secular or ecclesiastical circles as a manuscript without author during the poet's lifetime. The full version of this important work was found out by the researcher Levan Chrelashvili at the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia - Kyrion Foundation (# 1459) at the National Center of Manuscripts. According to the scholar, "The Voice is a significant landmark in studying Akaki's heritage; it is a fact of illegal work. This circumstance was even more important in 1901 when the struggle for the autocephaly of the Church was an immediate part of the national liberation struggle ... (Chrelashvili 1992: 157).

The main reason of Georgia's spiritual degradation in Akaki's view both in "The Voice" and "The Truth" is the loss of the autocephaly of the Georgian church: the abolishment of patriarch's chair, the rule of exarches, the exclusion of the Georgian language from liturgy and introduction of the "Slavonic" , etc. Everything is upside down in the country (" and because of this the church is totally suppressed ").

Like the article, the poem lists all those misfortunes that Georgia's incorporation into Russia had brought. In Akaki Tsereteli's opinion, Russians furiously struggle with faith using different methods, no matter how successful the Georgian is, he cannot claim the ranks of the clergy if he does not renounce his ethnicity, the liturgy in the church was not understandable to the parish and thereby the priesthood is completely destroyed; in the seminars the language of instruction is Russian and mother tongue is forbidden, etc. - all this is necessary for Tsarist policy in order to assimilate Georgia as soon as possible with Russia. Then Akaki concludes that the nation which has held their faith through centuries of invasion by Muslims is now like to lose their church.

Similar thoughts are expressed in Akaki's poem "The Century-Old Story" (Tsereteli 2014: 403), which has been unpublished for its extremely acute national-political nature. In the poem the restoration of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church is considered a vital necessity for the poet.

In addition to creative activities, it is revealed that Akaki has also taken pragmatic steps in solving the church's problems. As it is known, from time to time the autocephalist meetings were held at Ilia's house, in which Akaki, Iakob Gogebashvili, Niko Nikoladze and others took part.

Along with the verse "The Voice", the researcher Levan Chrelashvili discovered a lot of interesting materials about the relationship of the poet with autocephalists in the archive. With these materials we already have reliable documents confirming that Akaki selflessly fought for the restoration of autocephaly. Through these documents it becomes clear that the poet had close relations with two leading bishops of Georgia - Kirion and Leonid. He strongly opposed the persecutions against Catholicoses, and their pursuits. Because of exile of Catholicos Kirion to Russia, in one private letter to his secretary Soso Chijavadze the poet wrote: " I will do my best, I will go to Petersburg and unless I achieve anything, I will not return alive and will not bring the enemy joy. I know how to settle the matter ... ~ (Chrelashvili 1992: 157).

The poet believed that the return of autocephaly would morally recover the people, would return Georgians their identity ("would again become Georgian"), which meant a lot and after this one could think about county's independence...

In the nineties, the poet, concerned about weakening of the movement for autocephaly, initiated gain the independence of the church by formalizing an alliance with the Pope, but only a small part of the clergy supported his idea. A key role in solving the problem was taken by Akaki on himself.

The supporters of the union strongly hoped for the authority of Akaki, - writes Z.Okropiridze in his research, - it turns out that he had to go to Rome to the famous Georgian Catholic priest Mikheil Tamarashvili, who in turn was to ensure his meeting with the Pope" (Okropiridze 2016:91).

On July 14, 1909, Akaki set off from Batumi through Istanbul to Paris, where he arrived in late July. As promised, he had to go from Paris to Rome.

The poet had a favorable motivation to travel to France and hide the real goal. Akaki's son Alex, who was always accompanied by his mother, had an opera troupe on tour in Paris, and thus the poet was going to see his wife and son. Prior to traveling, Akaki wrote two reports of this content (January 29 and June 30) addressed to the Board of the Society for Dissemination of Literacy among the Georgians, in which he asked for financial assistance: "Because of my illness I need to go abroad for treatment ..." setting off for treatment on the resort I ask you to give me a pension for 3 or 4 month in advance... ~ (Historical ... 1953: 410-412).

At the end of July Akaki arrives in Paris. At the beginning of August, Constantinopolitan Georgian father Merabishvili sends special letter to Mikheil Tamarashvili in Rome informing about Akaki's travel to Europe and send the poet's Parisian address. In his letter Mikheil Tamarashvili asks Akaki to come to Rome (Gurgenidze ... 1989: 457).

The poet replies the letter with the following way: 'As soon as I received your letter, I wrote a letter immediately and did not receive any response. I do not know whether you got it or not. As soon as I get your letter, I will come soon". However, at the end of October Akaki writes Tamarashvili: "Circumstances have developed so that in a day or two I'm leaving for the Caucasus, and I cannot arrive three months earlier and then they will come to Rome for a long time ..." (Tsereteli 1961: 274). Despite this recognition, Akaki has not returned to Georgia. He remains in Paris until mid-January 1910, which is confirmed by many documents. For example, in a letter to his sister sent from Paris to Sachkere, Akaki informs her that he is in Paris with his family. "We all are well and I'm going to come to Sachkhere this winter "(Tsereteli 1961: 38).

Also, at the beginning of December the meeting with Georgians in Paris was held and the banquet in the Cafe Voltaire, the journalist of the Paris newspaper (News), Mrs. Tukah Massilon took an interview with the poet, etc.

Akaki did not go to Rome. The fact that the poet wanted to arrive there with a specific mission, and not for the excursion is clearly seen from the postcards sent to Tamarashvili and Gogebashvili. The observed eye will immediately notice the secret nuance. For example, in August, the poet writes to Mikheil Tamarashvili: "Your letter has been greatly appreciated! I

really want to come and see you, because your advice will be very important for me. So far, I'm not going to leave this month and I'll make you know when I decide to leave. Please, send me your writings about Catholics with pricing. Badly need. Besides this, I'd like to ask you to find Alexander Zubalov's address" (Tsereteli 1961: 273).

A postcard sent to Jakob Gogebashvili contains the same subtext: 'Yesterday I got Tamarashvili's letter from Rome ... He writes with great hopes and asks to come to Rome ... Now I'd like to ask him a piece of advice: I plan to visit Venice and meet Alexander Zubalashvili, the uncle of rich Zubalashvilis , very rich, not married man. I think it won't be bad to negotiate with him. However, I'm not attracted to them, but if you advice, I will also meet those Zubalovs"(Tsereteli 1961: 123).

While analyzing the letters, a question may arise as to which of Mikhail Tamarashvili's advice could be very necessary for Akaki, "the history of Catholics," or "Zubalov's address". Let's assume that these councils dealt with data for some historical work but the phrase of the letter to Iakob Gogebashvili: Tamarashvili "writes with great hopes" ... "Now I'd like to ask you for a piece of advice ..." If you advise ... "it will not be bad to negotiate with him" - give rise to more questions for what was all this fuss for a trip to Rome, questions and advice. This is the evidence of the great mission of Akaki's trip to Rome and the author's hesitation in connection with the Union.

Akaki's failure to go to Rome is explained in scientific literature in different ways, but we think the most closely related to reality is Okropiridze's opinion: " The reason for not meeting with the pope could also be shadowing as well as lack of money, but we think the most important was the doubt that arose in the poet: how real and what is important how legitimate it would be for the Orthodox Church to gain autocephaly in this way, moreover that this idea was categorically rejected by the Georgian High priests. It is more likely that the position of the latter has influenced the poet's views"(Okropiridze 2016: 99).

Akaki did not stop fighting for the autocephaly of the Georgian church until the end of his life. Another confirmation of this is the letter of Bishop Leonid to Akaki, from which it becomes clear that the High Priest "asked the poet to write a poem about autocephaly and Akaki promised to do this. On February 13, 1914 Bishop Leonid wrote that the restoration of the autocephaly of the Church for the Georgian people is of vital importance that requires prophetically emerging personality. Bishop Leonid appealed to the venerable poet:" Today you are the only one among us who carries this prophetic divine fire, Mr.Akaki, only your word as a flame envelops old and young, your word is driven by the unity of the nation, only your subtle verse can penetrate the soul of the Georgian nation ... your verse will clarify the issue of autocephaly to the entire nation, everyone will love it and will move old and young alike to return the treasure that has been torn off from their hands, i.e. your little wise verse will do the thing that (like this) which can never be achieved neither by bishops loyal preaches and instructions or scholarly research of professors, nor the sharp letters of the publicists. The necessity of acceptance and realization the desired ideas in the minds of the masses has always been possible with the help of a verse and also through the verse one must find the revitalizing autocephaly of our church that revives the spirit and heart of our nation.

You, the greatest poet, are expected to create such a verse, such a hymn by your mother church and know that the forces that bind our church to slavery will no longer be able to withstand Georgia singing of such a hymn "(Chrelashvili 1992: 158).

This letter points out to the great appreciation of Akaki's creativity and trust to his personality. This trust among the bishops was obtained by the poet with a self-sacrificing struggle for autocephaly.

No one knows whether or not the poet fulfilled the wish of the bishop expressed in a letter written the year before the death of Akaki, maybe he failed to create anything, and maybe he managed to do so and, like many other works, it is kept in some archive waiting for the researcher.

In 1915 Akaki Tsereteli died. He did not witness the autocephaly of the Georgian Church in 1917 and the restoration of independence in 1918. And how close the poet was to the realization of the cherished dream of his life...

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