

Georgian Autocephaly and the Ethnic Fragmentation of Orthodoxy

PAUL WERTH*

On the morning of 28 May 1908, the Exarch of Georgia, Nikon (Sofiiskii), was gunned down on the stairway of the church administration building in Tbilisi. His murder apparently represented the culmination of a struggle, initiated in 1905, between proponents of Georgian ecclesiastical independence and advocates of the continued subordination of all Orthodox believers in Transcaucasia to the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg. Waged for the most part in the press and church committees, the struggle reached this violent stage when consideration of autocephaly stalled in St. Petersburg and when indications appeared that Nikon was preparing to eliminate even the small remnants of Georgia's special ecclesiastical status that still existed. Although the precise links of the autocephalists to the Exarch's murder remain unclear, the initial police investigation concluded that it had been carried out "by an autocephalist organization of the Georgian clergy" in order "to express in a sharp, bloody form its protest against the non-restoration of the Georgian church's autocephaly."¹

To the extent that the tsarist autocracy institutionalized diversity in its vast realm, it did so principally along religious lines. From the late eighteenth century into the 1830s, the regime created a series of institutions and statutes designed to regulate the religious affairs of Russia's "foreign confessions," in most cases through the establishment of a single administrative body for each religious tradition. As concerns Transcaucasia, the Armenian Catholicos was formally recognized as the spiritual head of all Armenians of the Apostolic (Gregorian) confession in the empire in 1836, and Muslims in the region, both Sunni and Shiite, received a statute and "spiritual boards" for religious admin-

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1 The investigation's report is in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (henceforward: RGIA), f. 1579 [Viktor Ivanovich Iatskevich, Director of the Chancellery of the Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod], op. 1, d. 157 (citation at l. 34). For a biography of Nikon and an anti-autocephalist account of the circumstances surrounding his death, see L.I. Sofiiskii, *Vysokopreosviashchennyi Nikon, Arkhiepiskop Kartalinskii i Kakhetinskii, Ekzarkh Gruzii, 1861-1908* (St. Petersburg, 1909), esp. pp. 111-132.

istration somewhat later, in 1872. While in some cases this system took into account geographical differences in the empire for the purposes of establishing religious jurisdictions, on the whole it took little or no stock of ethnicity or nationality.²

In a similar fashion, all Orthodox communities in the Russian empire were under the authority of the Holy Synod, regardless of their geographical location and ethnic composition. Although certain newly incorporated areas might enjoy a special status for a transitional period, by the mid-nineteenth century only symbolic markers of former institutional independence remained in place. In no case did Orthodoxy's administrative divisions reflect the ethnic character of the Orthodox population, and indeed in the majority of cases the boundaries of the Orthodox dioceses had been made to coincide with those of existing provinces. In this respect, the Orthodox church's universalist orientation combined with the state's imperial character to override concern with ethnic differences. This is not to say that the official church ignored such differences altogether. For a decade or so after its incorporation into the Russian empire, Bessarabia enjoyed the status of an exarchate with provision for the use of the Moldavian language in religious contexts.³ The church also made substantial concessions to ethnic particularity in missionary contexts, most notably in the Volga region, by offering religious instruction and liturgy in local non-Russian languages and even specially promoting non-Russian candidates to the priesthood.⁴ On the whole, however, the universalist impulse – the New Testament vision of there being “neither Jew or Greek” in Christ⁵ – substantially outweighed the particularist and also was far more compatible with the imperial character of the Russian state.

2 On these institutional arrangements and their origins, see E.A. Vishlenkova, *Religioznaia politika: Ofitsial'nyi kurs i "obshchee mnenie" Rossii aleksandrovskoi epokhi* (Kazan, 1997); V.G. Vartanian, *Armiansko-Grigorianskaia tserkov' v politike Imperatora Nikolai I* (Rostov-na-Donu, 1999); Robert D. Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *American Historical Review* 108:1 (2003), pp. 50-83; Firouzeh Mostashari, “Colonial Dilemmas: Russian Policies in the Muslim Caucasus,” in Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 229-249.

3 Avksentii Stadnitskii, *Gavriil Banulesko-Badoni, Ekzarkh Moldovo-Vlakhiiiskii (1808-1812 gg.) i Mitropolit Kishinevskii (1813-1821 gg.)* (Kishinev, 1894); A. Chelak, “Bessarabskii bogoslužebnyia knigi na rumynskom iazyke,” *Trudy Bessarabskago tserkovno-istoriko-arkheologicheskago obshchestva*, vyp. 2 (Kishinev, 1909), pp. 181-184; Iustin Fratsman, *K voprosu ob eparkiakh v Bessarabii* (Kishinev, 1901), pp. 57-58; George Frederick Jewsbury, “Russian Administrative Policies Towards Bessarabia, 1806-1828” (Ph. D. diss., University of Washington, 1970), pp. 193, 200-205.

4 See the incisive discussion of this issue in Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, 2001), pp. 47-85. On such practices among converts to Orthodoxy in the Baltic region, see A.V. Gavrilin, *Ocherki istorii Rizhskoi eparkhii* (Riga, 1999), pp. 118-119, 140-143, 159.

5 As the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28.

Just as the rise of national sentiment increasingly challenged the integrity of the Russian empire, so too did it complicate the church's universalist stance. As a result of its intimate association with the tsarist state, the church had essentially become an imperial institution, and as the state itself went through a certain "nationalization" in response to the spirit of the times, so the church increasingly became an instrument of Russification and aligned itself ever more closely with the perceived interests of ethnic Russians. To be sure, most Orthodox believers in Russia were indeed ethnically Russian and there were certainly grounds for claims that Orthodoxy represented "the Russian faith." But such formulations and the attendant policies were bound to provoke dissatisfaction among those non-Russian Orthodox groups that had begun to exhibit national consciousness. Particularly after the revolution of 1905, nationalist agitation within Orthodoxy became more pronounced. On the whole this agitation was fairly mild and involved primarily the desire for greater expression of ethnic particularity within Orthodoxy, especially with regard to language.⁶ The situation in Georgia was of a different order, as clerical activists and even bishops there demanded not only greater rights for the use of the Georgian language, but full ecclesiastical independence – autocephaly – for the ethnically and historically Georgian provinces of Transcaucasia.

This article, then, concerns the intrusion of national politics into the Orthodox church in Russia and the process of Orthodoxy's fragmentation along ethnic lines. It begins by considering the intrinsic tensions within eastern Christianity between ecumenism and particularity, and then briefly analyzes the playing out of those tensions in the Orthodox world of the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires, where the principle of autocephaly found extensive application. I draw particular attention to the creation of the Bulgarian exarchate in 1870, since the resulting arrangement – church autocephaly before political independence or even autonomy – in some respects represents the scenario closest to the one envisioned by the Georgian autocephalists. I then describe the course of the conflict over autocephaly from the introduction of the issue into public discourse in 1905 until the assassination of Nikon in 1908, at which point the issue became less prominent – publicly, at least – in light of the autocracy's successful reassertion of authority in Transcaucasia. My principal concern is to consider how nationalist assertions were articulated and contested in a specifically ecclesiastical context, where scripture and tradition framed the exercise of modern nationalized politics, even while also yielding, in some measure, to the latter's dictates. While rooting my analysis in processes specific to the Russian empire in and after 1905, I nonetheless contend that the tendency towards

6 See for example Paul W. Werth, *Inorodtsy on Obrusenie: Religious Conversion, Indigenous Clergy, and Negotiated Assimilation in Late-Imperial Russia*, in *Ab Imperio* 2 (2000), pp. 105-134; Keith Hitchins, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 247-248; and Ricarda Vulpius, "Ukrainische Nation und zwei Konfessionen: Der Klerus and die ukrainische Frage, 1861-1921," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 49:2 (2001), pp. 240-256 (esp. pp. 248-254).

ecclesiastical fragmentation was a more general problem facing the Orthodox world in the age of nationalism.

NATIONALITY AND ORTHODOX UNIVERSALISM

In a recent treatise challenging “modernist” orthodoxies concerning nations and nationalism, Adrian Hastings has argued for the fundamentally Christian foundations of both. A striking characteristic of Christianity, he writes, is the absence of a sacred language and the license to translate scripture again and again into a wide range of languages – from Latin, Armenian, and Coptic in the early centuries to countless vernaculars subsequently. In contrast to the Old Testament’s focus on a “chosen people,” the New Testament is also steadfastly ecumenical in its orientation and makes repeated reference to a world consisting of “peoples” and “nations.” Thus, Hastings concludes that Christianity had “the use of the world’s vernaculars inscribed in its origins,” and that “[w]ithin the unity of Christian faith, the full diversity of nations, customs and languages comes simply to be taken for granted.”⁷

This general acceptance of differences between peoples otherwise united in Christ did not prevent the historical development of a range of different configurations with respect to church organization. The tendency in the west was towards centralized authority under the papacy, although the Reformation eventually led to the repudiation of this tradition in northwestern and parts of central Europe. In the Christian east one observes a more complicated tension between ecclesiastical unity and administrative decentralization. On the one hand, eastern Christianity recognized the existence of autocephalous churches – independent administrative entities in whose affairs other churches were prohibited from interfering.⁸ Even within the Ottoman empire, the patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem remained *ecclesiastically* independent units, even if in a *civil* sense they were subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople. And the Muscovite/Russian church was itself an autocephalous entity, having claimed independence for itself from Constantinople in 1448.

On the other hand, Orthodox teaching advanced the notion of a single church united in dogma and sacraments, with at least formal precedence for the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This ecumenical orientation was furthermore reinforced by the tendency of Romanov and Ottoman rulers to promote the centralization of ecclesiastical administration within their vast imperial

7 Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), citations at pp. 194-195.

8 On the issue of autocephaly generally, see Theophilus C. Prousis, “Autocephalous Church,” in Paul D. Steeves, ed., *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, vol. 3 (Gulf Breeze, Florida, 1991), pp. 141-149; and “Avtokefaliia,” in Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexei II, ed., *Pravoslavnaiia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2000), pp. 199-200; Nikolas K. Gvosdev, “The Russian Empire and the Georgian Orthodox Church in the First Decades of Imperial Rule, 1801-1830,” *Central Asian Survey* 14:3 (1995), pp. 407-223.

realms. Even though the Patriarch of Constantinople formally had no ecclesiastical jurisdiction outside of his own patriarchate, he was recognized by the Porte as the official civil head of the entire Orthodox community in the empire and therefore enjoyed substantial authority even over canonically independent ecclesiastical units. It was also by the authority of the Ottoman government that the Patriarch was able to eliminate the last independent Balkan sees at Péc and Ohrid in the 1760s.⁹ The Russian church achieved a similar result by bringing all Orthodox communities in the empire under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow and later the Holy Synod. The Metropolitan of Kiev was thus transferred from Constantinople's jurisdiction to Moscow's in 1686, while the ecclesiastical independence of Orthodox institutions in the Georgian kingdoms was terminated in the early nineteenth century.¹⁰ The situation in the two states was decidedly different, of course, as Orthodoxy in the Ottoman empire could make no claims to equality with Islam, let alone to the "predominant and ruling" position enjoyed by its counterpart in Russia. Still, the political structure of a large empire in both cases tended to place greater emphasis on the ecumenical than on the particularistic.

The fragmentation of the Ottoman empire over the course of the nineteenth century opened the way for the creation of a series of new autocephalous churches. Indeed, autocephaly usually followed on the heels of political independence, so that, as Maria Todorova writes, "the succession of the emerging nations from the empire meant also an almost simultaneous secession from the Constantinople patriarchate, i.e., from the Orthodox church of the Ottoman Empire."¹¹ These new cases of autocephaly were not without some historical precedence. The principle of autocephaly and the idea of diversity within Christianity, as we have seen, were by no means novel in the nineteenth century, and in some cases independent ecclesiastical units had been eliminated comparatively recently. Yet we are certainly also justified in recognizing what Paschalis Kitromilides calls "the radical interruption of the Orthodox religious tradition involved in the 'nationalization' of the churches which followed the advent of the national states."¹² For many of the Balkan peoples the creation of

9 Maria Todorova, "The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans," in L. Carl Brown, ed., *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York, 1996), p. 49; Adrian Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church* (New York, 1907 [reprint 1969]), pp. 283-285.

10 Zenon Kohut, "The Problem of Ukrainian Orthodox Church Autonomy in the Hetmanate (1654-1780s)," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 14:3/4 (1990), pp. 364-376; I. Pokrovskii, *Russkiiia eparkhii v XVI-XIX vv.: Ikh otkrytie, sostav i predely*, vol. 1 (Kazan, 1897), pp. 451-502; Gvosdev, "The Russian Empire."

11 Todorova, "The Ottoman Legacy," p. 49; Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, pp. 276-277.

12 Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "'Imagined Communities' and the Origins of the National Question in the Balkans," *European History Quarterly* 19:2 (1989), p. 179. See also Ekkehard Kraft, "Von der Rum Milleti zur Nationalkirche: die orthodoxe Kirche in Südosteuropa im Zeitalter des Nationalismus," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51:3 (2003), pp. 392-396.

national churches was something substantially new, involving the deployment ecclesiastical institutions for the attainment of modern nationalist goals. Most striking in this regard was the declaration of autocephaly by the church of the new Greek kingdom in 1833. In light of strong connections between Greek society and the patriarchate and general Greek domination of the empire's Orthodox affairs, this act represented a striking break from the imperial and universalist orientation of Orthodoxy in the Ottoman context. It also set a pattern for the creation of autocephalous national churches among the other Balkan peoples.¹³ The determined resistance of the patriarchate offers some indication as to the novelty of these developments, even if they did not fundamentally violate the spirit of Christianity. Only with great reluctance and considerable delay did the Patriarch of Constantinople recognize the unilateral declarations of autocephaly by Greece (1833) and Romania (1865), while the establishment of Bulgarian autocephaly in 1870 produced a schism that lasted until 1945.¹⁴

Indeed, the Bulgarian case proved particularly acrimonious and has special significance for our consideration of developments in Georgia. For in contrast to other cases in the Balkans, Bulgarian ecclesiastical autonomy *preceded* political independence rather than following it. As a result, the struggle between nationalized Bulgarian clerics and the patriarchate's Greek-dominated hierarchy occurred *within* an imperial context, and its resolution – politically, if not ecclesiastically – depended ultimately on the authority of the Sultan. While moderate elements among both Greeks and Bulgarians sought a compromise solution, disagreements over the territorial jurisdiction and the degree of autonomy for a proposed exarchate proved insurmountable. Bulgarians sought to eliminate all Greek interference in their religious affairs, whereas the patriarchate regarded full ecclesiastical independence as a violation of canon. Bulgarians also wanted the new exarchate to encompass those portions of Macedonia and Thrace populated by Slavs, whereas the patriarchate and the Greek kingdom fought bitterly to ensure that the exarchate be confined safely to the north of the Balkan range. Despite concerns that an exarchate with clearly defined boundaries would lead eventually to demands for political autonomy, for a set

13 Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, pp. 312-316; Kraft, "Von der Rum Milleti," pp. 398-401; George G. Arnakis, "The Role of Religion in the Development of Balkan Nationalism," in Barbara and Charles Jelavich, eds., *The Balkans in Transition* (Berkeley, 1963), pp. 134-135; Richard Clogg, "The Greek Millet in the Ottoman Empire," in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1: *The Central Lands* (New York, 1982), pp. 185-207.

14 Kraft, "Von der Rum Milleti," pp. 406-407. Constantinople recognized Greek autocephaly in 1850 and Romanian autocephaly in 1885. Only in the case of Serbia did the transition from ecclesiastical autonomy to full autocephaly in 1879 proceed smoothly, as a result of the country's medieval traditions and its orientation towards the Hapsburg monarchy and the Metropolitanate of Karlowitz. On relations with Constantinople thereafter, see Angelopoulos Athanasios, "The Relations Between the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Church of Serbia, 1885-1912," *Balkan Studies* 13 (1972), pp. 119-127.

of reasons the Porte eventually came to favor the Bulgarian side. In February 1870 the Porte unilaterally issued a *firman* authorizing the creation of a new Bulgarian exarchate, while the Patriarchate, under heavy Greek pressure, declared the hierarchy and laity of the new church “schismatic” in 1872.¹⁵

In essence, then, whereas the Ottoman government had accepted the national principle alongside the confessional one as a basis for communal organization, the patriarchate continued to reject that principle. The Porte created a distinct and independent *millet* for Bulgarians, who confessed a faith *identical* to the one confessed by those still under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch. The patriarchate, even as it had not categorically rejected some institutionalization of national difference under its authority, absolutely rejected the idea of full autocephaly for a national group within a single political entity. Its condemnation of the exarchate is revealing. The Bulgarians were accused of “philetism” – the love of ethnicity, or the introduction of ethnic difference into the church. The patriarchate concluded that “the principle of ethnic difference” was completely at odds with “evangelical teachings and the church’s steadfast mode of action.”¹⁶

These developments were of great interest to both statesmen and churchmen in Russia. But whereas the historiographical tendency has been to ascribe to St. Petersburg – and in particular to its energetic ambassador in Constantinople, Nikolai Igant’ev – unwavering support for the Bulgarian cause and to treat the Exarchate as an essentially Panslavist creation, in fact Russia’s position was far more ambivalent. To be sure, Igant’ev was deeply sympathetic to the Bulgarians and had already begun to advocate that Russian policy be based on national considerations – links with the Slavic world – more than on purely confessional ones – i.e., concern for Orthodox Christians. He nonetheless recognized that unequivocal support for the Bulgarians would alienate Greeks, and that a schism between Greeks and the Slavic world would greatly complicate Russia’s quest for influence in the region. He was also imbued with a respect for the interests of Orthodoxy and a religious sensibility that drove him to seek compromise at all costs. His goal was thus to accommodate Bulgarian aspirations, but emphatically “without breaking with the Greeks.”¹⁷ Russia’s

15 Kraft, “Von der Rum Milleti,” pp. 401-404; V. Teplov, “Greko-Bolgarskii tserkovnyi vopros po neizdannym istochnikam,” *Russkii vestnik*, vol. 159 (May 1882), pp. 389-444; (June 1882), pp. 811-862; L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York, 1958), pp. 364-375; Thomas Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate, 1864-1872: A Study in Personal Diplomacy* (Madison, 1970); Carsten Riis, *Religion, Politics, and Historiography in Bulgaria* (Boulder, CO, 2002), pp. 124-129; and Evangelos Kofos, “Attempts at Mending the Greek-Bulgarian Ecclesiastical Schism (1875-1902),” *Balkan Studies* 25:2 (1984), pp. 347-368.

16 Cited in Teplov, “Greko-bulgarskii tserkovnyi vopros,” pp. 843-844. A portion is also provided in English in Kitromilides, “Imagined Communities,” pp. 181-182. For an interesting critique of the act condemning the Bulgarians, see Teplov, pp. 844-862.

17 Citations in A.A. Dmitrievskii, *Graf N.P. Igant’ev, kak tserkovno-politicheskii deiatel’ na Pravoslavnom vostoke* (St. Petersburg, 1909), p. 9; and “Zapiski Grafa N.P. Ignat’eva (1864-1874),”

Holy Synod likewise favored a compromise involving substantial concessions for Bulgarians, but only in the context of the maintenance of church unity. It noted, for example, that “some, if not all, of the wishes of the Bulgarians ... are of course in essence wishes that are most natural, well-founded, and legal.” But in light of Orthodox canon, the Synod refused to interfere in the affairs of its sister church and rejected the proposals of both Ignat’ev and later the Patriarch in Constantinople to convene an ecumenical council for the resolution of the affair. In the Synod’s view, the Greco-Bulgarian conflict did not concern dogma and was therefore a matter of internal concern to the church of Constantinople.¹⁸ Thus both Ignat’ev and the Holy Synod, while perhaps favoring the Bulgarians, were also firmly committed to the idea of canonical resolution of the dispute. The principal difference was that, while the Synod refrained from interference on canonical grounds, Ignat’ev became deeply involved and indeed promoted the unilateral creation of Bulgarian autocephaly – i.e., through Ottoman *firman* – once it became clear that compromise was impossible.

If the creation of the Bulgarian exarchate was a unique occurrence for the Ottoman empire, the Hapsburg monarchy authorized a series of autocephalous units in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise in national sentiment among Romanians in the nineteenth century led to determined efforts by Romanian Orthodox hierarchs to restore the metropolitanate in Transylvania, which had ceased to function when a large segment of the Orthodox hierarchy there agreed to ecclesiastical union with Rome in 1700.¹⁹ Like the Greeks of the patriarchate of Constantinople, Serbian bishops strenuously resisted these efforts, insisting that the Metropolitanate at Karlowitz was the true center of the church in Hapsburg lands and even demanding recognition of Slavonic as the official common language of church administration.²⁰ Although Romanian appeals to the state initially went unheeded, by the early 1860s emperor Franz Joseph made it clear that he supported the restoration of the Transylvanian metropolitanate, which occurred in 1864. The emperor’s decision to exclude Bukovina from the new ecclesiastical unit prevented the creation of

Izvestiia Ministerstva inostrannykh del 3:6 (1914), p. 161. See also the discussions in Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment*, pp. 25-30, 195-197; and V.M. Khevrolina, *Rossiiskii diplomat, graf Nikolai Pavlovich Ignat’ev* (Moscow, 2004), pp. 103-107, 162-181.

18 Teplov, “Greko-bulgarskii tserkovnyi vopros,” pp. 436-437, 818; Meininger, *Ignatiev and the Establishment*, pp. 112-117; Khevrolina, *Rossiiskii diplomat*, pp. 168, 172-175.

19 This union was the Romanian counterpart to the Union of Brest of 1596 in Ruthenia, which created the Uniate, or Greek Catholic, confession. On Brest, see most recently Borys Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform: The Kyivan Metropolitanate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the Genesis of the Union of Brest* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

20 That metropolitanate was created in 1737 for the monarchy’s Serb population, and after the elimination of the patriarchate at Péc in the Ottoman empire 1766, it became fully autocephalous.

a single Romanian Orthodox church within the monarchy.²¹ But the national factor had clearly become central to the organization of Orthodox ecclesiastical administration in Austria-Hungary from the 1860s, even as the persistence of historically constituted units such as Bukovina and (later) Bosnia-Herzegovina continued to impose a non-national logic as well.²²

In short, in the Orthodox world autocephalous churches were appearing with ever-greater frequency in the age of nationalism. Some were the result of the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman empire, but in other cases they had emerged *within* imperial states. In each case, nationalist aspirations proved central to the creation of the new churches, and even the abandoned “mother” churches – the patriarchate of Constantinople and the metropolitanate at Karlowitz – themselves become more ethnically homogenous as a result.²³ Until 1905 the Russian church had not faced any comparable pressures to grant autocephaly, for two reasons primarily. First of all, Russia remained a good deal stronger, both internally and internationally, than either Austria-Hungary or the Ottoman empire, and this circumstances served to hinder the development of separatist tendencies, especially among the non-Russian peoples of Orthodox faith. Second, in contrast to Orthodoxy’s second-class status in the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, Orthodoxy in Russia was both the predominant faith of the empire and, increasingly, an important instrument of Russification. As viewed from St. Petersburg, Orthodoxy represented a crucial source (though by no means the only) of unity for the empire, and its fragmentation obviously had serious implications for imperial integrity. Both Vienna and the Porte, in contrast, had considerably smaller ideological investments in Orthodoxy and could therefore more readily afford to sanction its ethnic fragmentation within their realms, if they deemed this to be politically expedient.

FROM CATHOLICOS TO EXARCH: THE GEORGIAN CHURCH AFTER ANNEXATION

The appearance of autocephalist claims in Georgia was closely related to the politics of 1905, when the tsarist regime found itself on the verge of collapse and borderland populations challenged existing authority with particular vigor.²⁴ But it was also inextricably connected to the nature of Orthodox ecclesi-

21 Vienna authorized the creation of a separate Orthodox metropolitanate for Bukovina in 1873, apparently because that territory remained part of Austria, whereas Transylvania was under Hungarian rule after the compromise of 1867.

22 My account here is based on Keith Hitchins, *Orthodoxy and Nationality: Andreiu Şaguna and the Rumanians of Transylvania, 1846-1873* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), esp. pp. 173-198. The Orthodox church in Bosnia-Herzegovina received autocephaly shortly after the Austrian annexation of the territory in 1908.

23 To a degree, at least, the patriarchate at Constantinople slowly became subordinated to the nationalist agenda of the Greek government in Athens. See Kitromilides, “‘Imagined Communities’,” pp. 181-182; Kraft, “Von der Rum Milleti,” pp. 404-406.

24 See, for example, Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russian in Disarray* (Stanford, 1988), esp. pp. 152-161; and Robert E. Blobaum, *Revolucja: Russian Poland, 1904-1907* (Ithaca, 1995).

astical organization introduced in Transcaucasia after its annexation. Whether the church in eastern Georgia enjoyed autocephaly *de jure* in the centuries leading up to the annexation of the several Georgian kingdoms in the early nineteenth century, as the autocephalists would claim, is difficult to determine with any certainty. With less reservation we may say that the elimination of the office of Catholicos in 1811 and the creation in its stead of a "Synodal Exarch over Georgia" represented the termination of *de facto* Georgian ecclesiastical independence.²⁵ That the church in Transcaucasia went through fairly extensive reorganization in the first decade or so of the exarchate – the dramatic reduction of the number of dioceses, the creation of a new Synodal office (*kontora*), the elimination of the position of the Catholicos, etc. – could only serve to reinforce the loss of independence.²⁶

Two principal points should be made about the exarchate, which remained in place until the end of the old regime in 1917. First, it represented perhaps the only case of long-term particularistic Orthodox ecclesiastical administration in the Russian empire. To be sure, it remained subordinate to the Holy Synod, but the Exarch nonetheless enjoyed certain special powers, which in turn limited the authority of bishops in Georgia, who commanded fewer prerogatives than their counterparts north of the Caucasus. Secondly, the exarchate eventually established ecclesiastical unity over a territory that had been fragmented for centuries. The catholicosate that was eliminated in 1811 had corresponded only to eastern Georgia (Kartli-Kakheti), the territory of the kingdom annexed in 1801, while a separate catholicosate had existed in western Georgia (Imeretia). With Russian imperial expansion, the exarchate gained jurisdiction over far more territory, both Georgian and non-Georgian in terms of its ethnic composition, than the catholicosate of eastern Georgia had enjoyed. The annexation of Imeretia in 1814 brought that territory under the Exarch's authority, and Abkhazia was eventually included as well.²⁷ With the settlement of Russians across the Caucasus the exarchate's jurisdiction expanded to include all of Transcaucasia, at one point even encompassing lands across the Caspian Sea. On the one hand, then, Russian imperial power created a single ecclesiastical entity to which autocephalists could later lay claim. On the other hand, the "Exarch of Georgia" had authority over more than Georgia, and ethnic Georgians, alone.

25 For a broad overview of the history of the Georgian church, see Peter Hauptmann, "Unter dem Weinrebenkreuz der heiligen Nino: Kirchengeschichte Georgiens im Überblick," *Kirchen im Osten* 17 (1974), pp. 9-41.

26 Gvosdev, "The Russian Empire"; E.K. [Episkop Kirion], *Kratkii ocherk istorii Gruzinskoi Tserkvi i Ekzarkhata za XIX stoletii* (Tiflis, 1901), pp. 36-43 (citation at p. 36); N. Pokrovskii, "Tserkovno-istoricheskaia zhizn' Gruzii pod russkim vladychestvom," *Russkaia starina* 3 (1906), pp. 391-438; and M.N. Khutsishvili, "Gruzinskii ekzarkhat na sluzhbe kolonial'noi politiki tsarizma, 1811-1917 gg." *Avtoreferat* (Tbilisi, 1972); and Zaal Abashidze, "K istorii obrazovaniia Gruzinskogo Ekzarkhata Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi" (unpublished manuscript, 2005).

27 K., *Kratkii ocherk*, pp. 54-80.

On the whole the experience of the Georgian church in the nineteenth century remains poorly studied, but we may nonetheless note a general trend toward Russification that intensified in the 1880s. All Exarchs after the first (Varlaam Eristavi) were Russians unfamiliar with local languages. Georgian was increasingly excluded from church administration, ecclesiastical education, and liturgy, while knowledge of Russian became a prerequisite for candidacy to the priesthood. An aggressive campaign of “denationalization” seems to have been initiated already under Varlaam’s successor, while more heavy-handed Russification appeared in the 1880s. In the Tbilisi seminary, for example, “a harsh Russianizing regime was installed,” as Russian replaced Georgian as the language of instruction. Russian hierarchs seem to have regarded the Caucasus as a “wild” region and were generally eager to leave for service in the Russian interior as soon as possible.²⁸

Nonetheless, open criticism of the church administration from within the ranks of the Georgian clergy was limited before 1905. There was some unrest in the Tbilisi seminary in the 1880s, including the murder in 1886 of its rector, who had allegedly described Georgian as “a language for dogs.”²⁹ But to my knowledge before 1905 there was no open talk of the restoration of Georgian autocephaly or of reinstating the Catholicos. Notably Bishop Kirion (Sadzaglishvili) – the man who became the first Georgian Catholicos when autocephaly was attained in 1917 – wrote a history of the exarchate in 1901 commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Georgian kingdom’s union with Russia. He described at great length the missionary efforts of the church and offered no hint of the deep dissatisfaction that he and others were to express just a few years later. On the contrary, he wrote that the Georgian church was prospering “under the protection of the most powerful Russia” and that various aspects of its religious life were visibly improving.³⁰ What Kirion and others actually thought before 1905 is difficult to determine, but thereafter Georgian discontent with Russian ecclesiastical administration emerged with striking clarity.

THE AUTOCEPHALIST MOVEMENT EMERGES

The emergence of the campaign for autocephaly needs to be understood in the context of two processes, both of them related to the crisis of autocratic power culminating in 1905. The first involved agrarian unrest in Transcaucasia, especially in western Georgia, beginning in 1902. As Marxist ideas made

28 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, 1994), p. 140 (quote); Hauptmann, “Unter der Weinrebenkreuz,” pp. 28-30; Sofiiskii, *Vysokopreosviashchennyi Nikon*, pp. 111-112; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow, 2001), pp. 265-267; Varianeli, “K voprosu o sud’bakh gruzinskoi tserkvi (istoricheskaiia spravka),” *Vozrozhdenie* 19 (5 November 1905), p. 2.

29 Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, p. 266; Suny, *The Making*, pp. 140-141.

30 This book was K., *Kratkii ocherk*.

their way with exiled workers from new industrial centers into the crisis-ridden countryside, peasant boycotts of their landlords soon evolved into a general revolt against the autocracy itself. Although the movement exhibited certain anti-clerical tendencies, Georgian clerics themselves became radicalized and even proved receptive to social-democratic ideas. Unrest was particularly pronounced in the seminaries in 1905, and liberationist nationalism occupied a prominent place in the rhetoric of Georgian seminarians. Meanwhile the nobility of Tbilisi and Kutaisi provinces responded to the peasant movement by asserting that autonomy for Georgia, aside from being consistent with the voluntary character of Georgia's original adherence to the Russian empire, represented "the only certain means for calming the Georgian people and for its peaceful cultural development." In short, originating in primarily economic grievances, agrarian unrest eventually generated calls for national liberation and autonomy.³¹

The second process involved the appearance of a vigorous movement for church renewal in Russia itself, including calls for a council of the Russian church and the restoration of the Patriarch. In the several years leading up to 1905 arguments among clerics, lay theologians, and philosophers questioning the validity of the Synodal apparatus created in 1721 began to appear. By December of 1904 the government had promised greater religious freedom to the empire's various non-Orthodox believers, and many Orthodox hierarchs began to fear that their church would be unable to compete if not itself liberated from state tutelage. As the state crisis deepened with the events of Bloody Sunday, proponents of reform began to push harder for a church council, and by March 1905 Nicholas II agreed to its convocation "at a suitable time."³² These two developments – the appearance of autonomist claims in response to rural unrest and the movement for Russian church reform – combined to produce calls for Georgian autocephaly.

Within days of Nicholas' announcement on the church council, a congress of the clergy in Imeretia (western Georgia) raised the issue of autocephaly, among others, in a petition to the Synod. The recent unrest in the Caucasus, the petition noted, had been directed "in a quite sharp form against the servitors of the church, against the entire clerical estate." But the petitioners refused to believe that Georgians had rejected Christ, arguing instead that they "do not

31 Suny, *The Making*, pp. 162-164; S.F. Jones, "Marxism and Peasant Revolt in the Russian Empire: The Case of the Gurian Republic," *Slavonic and East European Review* 67:3 (1989), pp. 403-434; Argyrios Pisiotis, "Orthodoxy versus Autocracy: The Orthodox Church and Clerical Political Dissent in Late Imperial Russia, 1905-1917" (Ph. D. diss., Georgetown University, 2000), pp. 48-65; A. Khakhanov, "Gruzinskaia pechat' o Gosudarstvennoi Dume i avtonomii Gruzii," *Russkaia mysl'* 6 (1906), pp. 63-72 (esp. pp. 63 and 68; citation at p. 70).

32 James W. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope: The Movement for Church Renewal in Russia, 1905-06* (Crestwood, NY, 1981), pp. 49-126.

wish to make peace with the present organization of church life." Aside from the fact that the church had been made into a bureaucratic "chancery of sorts," Georgian seminarians did not study anything Georgian. "Upon leaving that institution they are capable of reading ancient languages, but not Georgian. They learn by heart a significant portion of the Slavic Bible, while at the same time they are not compelled even to glance at the Georgian one." The petitioners bemoaned the loss of their *Catholicos*, who throughout the period of autocephaly "had remained for the people an unalterable friend, father, consoler and custodian of souls." They therefore requested, among other reforms, recognition of "the full independence" of the Georgian church with a *Catholicos* at its head. A gathering of Georgian clergy in Tbilisi produced a similar call for the restoration of autocephaly in May, although their meeting was violently dispersed by Cossacks.³³

Within a short time the issue of autocephaly also appeared in the press, which introduced the public to some of the intricacies of medieval Georgian church history. The general thrust of these articles was to argue that the Georgian church had indeed been autocephalous up to 1811 – that at first *de facto* and eventually *de jure* the medieval connection between Georgia and the Patriarch of Antioch had been severed, leaving the Georgian church independent. Neither the agreement between Georgia establishing a Russian protectorate in 1783 nor the full-fledged incorporation of eastern Georgia in 1801 had compromised the church's independence.³⁴ Opponents of autocephaly also entered the fray, noting that the title "*Catholicos*" did not by itself signify autocephaly and that formal subordination of the Georgian church to Antioch had in fact continued until 1811.³⁵ By late 1905 and early 1906 the issue began to appear even in the press of the Russian capitals. Notably, some Russians – most re-

33 RGIA, f. 821 [Department for the Religious Affairs of Foreign Confessions], op. 10, d. 18, ll. 6-8; B.E., "O dvizhenii sredi gruzinskago dukhovenstva," *Voprosy zhizni* 8 (1905), pp. 273-291; Leon der Megrian, "Tiflis during the Russian Revolution of 1905" (Ph. D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1968), pp. 119-123; V.S. Diakin, *Natsional'nyi vopros vo vnutrennei politike tsarizma, XIX - nachalo XX vv.* (St. Petersburg, 1998), pp. 662-666.

34 The first reference to the issue that I have encountered in the Russian-language press was S. Goradze, "K voprosu ob avtokefalii gruzinskoi tserkvi," *Kavkazskii kraï* (10 April and 5 May 1905), pp. 9-10, 11-13. Other articles developing arguments in favor of autocephaly include Varianeli, "K voprosu o sud'bakh," pp. 1-2; S. Goradze, "Afvtokefal'nost' gruzinskoi tserkvi," *Dukhovnyi vestnik gruzinskago ekzarkhata* [henceforward: *DVGE*] 21-22 (15 November 1905), pp. 40-51, and 23-24 (1-15 December 1905), pp. 12-17; A. Khakhanov, "K polozeniiu gruzinskoi tserkvi (istoricheskaia spravka)," *Vozrozhdenie* 29 (17 November 1905), p. 2; S. Goradze, review of the book by K. Tsintsidze, *Avtokefaliia tserkoi gruzinskoi: Istoricheskii ockerk 4-11 v.* (Tiflis, 1905), in *DVGE* 1-2 (1-15 January 1906).

35 For these arguments, see Arkhimandrit Nikandr, "Ob avtokefal'nosti gruzinskoi tserkvi i tserkovnoi zhizni v Gruzii pri Katolikosakh: Istoricheskaia spravka," *Pribavlenie k DVGE* 13-14 (1-15 July 1905), pp. 15-78; V. Samuilov, "K voprosu ob avtokefalii Gruzinskoi tserkvi," *Pribavleniia k Tserkovnym vedomostiam* 1 (7 January 1906), pp. 6-11.

markably the deeply conservative publicist N.N. Durnovo – became avid proponents of Georgian autocephaly.³⁶

Autocephalist aspirations were further encouraged by developments in the state's religious policy generally. By a decree of 17 April 1905 the government introduced extensive new religious freedoms to sectarians and non-Orthodox confessions, which prompted the Georgian clergy to re-submit its earlier petition to the Committee of Ministers, the body that had produced the decree on religious toleration.³⁷ In August 1905 the state returned to the Armenian church the property it had confiscated in 1903, thus encouraging Georgian clerics to raise the issue of their own church's property, secularized in 1852. Over the course of 1905, as the political crisis in the country worsened, the autocephalist movement grew, becoming more organized and determined. By December Georgian clerics were meeting in Tbilisi to draft a plan for the reorganization of the church in preparation for an all-Georgian church council to follow the restoration of autocephaly.³⁸

The reform process in the Russian church itself meanwhile offered new channels for the articulation of the autocephalist idea. In an effort to postpone the all-Russian council, over-procurator K.P. Pobedonostsev ordered a poll of all diocesan bishops on a series of questions concerning church reform. Among the issues under discussion was the idea of substantially decentralizing the church administration and creating new ecclesiastical districts with greater autonomy on the regional level. A number of bishops endorsed this idea, with specific reference to Georgia, and a few even proposed the restoration of autocephaly.³⁹ Those calling for the most extensive change, not surprisingly, were two Georgian bishops: Kirion (by then stationed in Orel diocese) and Leonid (Okropiridze), bishop of Imeretia. Kirion now emerged as a strong proponent of the Russian church's decentralization and division into districts based on "cultural-historical, ethnographic, and customary particularities," with church autonomy raised to the level of autocephaly in the case of Georgia. In a longer opinion, Leonid echoed Kirion's call and leveled a series of accusations against the Russian Exarchs of the last century, holding them responsible

36 His articles appeared in the conservative paper *Russkii stiag* and were published as separate pamphlets: N.N. Durnovo, *Sud'by Gruzinskoi tserkvi (po voprosu o Gruzinskoi tserkovnoi avtokefalii)* (Moscow, 1907, with supplements in 1907 and 1908); and idem, *Predpolagaemoe reshenie Gruzinskago tserkovnago voprosa* (Moscow, 1909).

37 RGIA, f. 821, op. 10, d. 18, l. 6; RGIA, f. 796 [Chancellery of the Holy Synod], op. 186, otd. 1, stol 2, d. 704, l. 1; RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 170, l. 1-1ob. The Congress also sent the petition to the Exarch, the nobility of Kutaisi and the Kutaisi municipal administration.

38 RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 170, ll. 2-3ob.; Aristin, "K 'Proektu reorganizatsii Gruzinskoi tserkvi,'" *DVGE* 23-24 (1-15 December 1905), pp. 26-31; and "Proekt reorganizatsii Gruzinskoi tserkvi," *DVGE* 4 (15 February 1906), pp. 6-16.

39 Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope*, pp. 127-135; *Otzyvy eparkhial'nykh arkhieerev po voprosu o tserkovnoi reforme*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 97-98, 419-420, 531; *ibid.*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 392-393; *ibid.*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 621-662, 140.

for the sad state of religious affairs in Georgia and for persecuting “everything Georgian.”⁴⁰ By the end of 1905, then, it was clear that the question of autocephaly would have to be addressed explicitly, as even Georgian bishops had joined in revolt.

AUTOCEPHALY DENIED

The issue of the church in the Caucasus was officially discussed in two separate fora in 1906. The first was a special conference convened by the Holy Synod in January to discuss “the abnormality of the conditions of the Orthodox church in the Caucasus.” Present at the meeting were the new exarch Nikolai (Nalimov), two former exarchs, the over-procurator and his deputy, and the two Georgian bishops Leonid and Kirion.⁴¹ This conference also proposed a modest reform program for the exarchate that included greater sensitivity to the specificities of the region, for example the use of the local liturgical language. Recognizing the necessity of establishing full powers for the local bishops, the conference proposed making each diocese an independent entity, as elsewhere in Russia, and also dividing the current Gruzia diocese into two, Tiflis and Kars.⁴² The conference did not, however, address the issue of autocephaly.

The two Georgians at the conference – Kirion and Leonid – refused to accept these “palliative measures” and affixed dissenting opinions to the conference’s protocol.⁴³ In their dissent the two bishops appealed above all to the principle of religious freedom, and threatened that a schism was in the making. Kirion expressed the hope that “Orthodox Georgia” would not be deprived of the new freedoms offered to Russia’s non-Orthodox confessions, “and will be granted the right to organize its church on canonical foundations by means of resurrecting the autocephalous catholicosate, which has been blessed by the ages.” In this way, he concluded, “the ecclesiastical breach between the brotherly peoples, which is currently preparing itself, will be averted.” Leonid’s statement was if anything stronger still: “The approach taken by the commis-

40 *Otzyvy eparkhial’nykh arkhierееv*, vol. 1, pp. 520-529 (citation at p. 522); *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 505-527 (citation at p. 508).

41 RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 1, 27; Diakin, *Natsional’nyi vopros*, pp. 673-674. The two former exarchs were Moscow Metropolitan Vladimir (Bogoiavlenskii, 1892-98) and Kiev Metropolitan Flavian (Gorodetskii, 1898-1901). Kirion had been serving outside of the exarchate since 1902 and was to remain in episcopal positions outside of the Caucasus, with the exception of just under a year in Sukhumi (1906-07), until elected Catholicos in 1917. In general, he was transferred with a frequency that is striking even for a bishop of the Russian church.

42 I use the Russian form “Gruzia” to refer to the diocese, which was only one part of the exarchate or, in the autocephalists’ mind, the Georgian church.

43 Leonid, in particular, was facing a revolt by his clergy in Imeretia and may well have regarded a strong stance on autocephaly in St. Petersburg as the best way to re-establish his credibility on the local level. RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 14, 53.

sion gives Georgians a direct and definite indication that the freedom of faith, conscience, and church administration that their neighbors – Armenians, Catholics, Muslims, and others – enjoy without hindrance, may be acquired only by break[ing] off all accounts and ties with the predominant Russian church.”⁴⁴

The government’s position at this point was not entirely clear. I have not been able to locate specific evidence on the position of viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov before early 1907, although there are indications that he supported some accommodation with the Georgian clergy, while regarding the issue of autocephaly itself as a canonical question beyond his competence. Exarch Nikolai, appointed in July 1905, also recognized “the development of national consciousness among the Georgian people” as a factor that simply could not be ignored without causing Georgians’ “alienation from the Christian faith itself.” Asserting that there was no canonical basis for refusing to grant autocephaly, Nikolai was convinced that only the actual experience of ecclesiastical independence would convince Georgians of the advantages they derived from intimate communion with the Russian church.⁴⁵ Viewed from St. Petersburg the prospect of autocephaly was more worrisome. In a letter to the viceroy, the new over-procurator A.D. Obolenskii identified the special position of the Orthodox church in Russia as a fundamental obstacle to the fulfillment of the Georgians’ request. By church canon, he wrote, “The establishment of autocephaly is the complete separation of one church from another with the condition of only dogmatic and canonical unity.” Such a separation would permit different resolutions of questions on a range of issues, potentially creating vastly different ecclesiastical regimes for subjects of the same Orthodox confession in different parts of the empire. In April 1906 Obolenskii presented these conclusions to the emperor, who entrusted resolution of the issues raised in the Georgians’ “lamentable petition” to the upcoming all-Russian council.⁴⁶ In this way the autocephaly issue now merged directly with the larger process of Russian church reform and became dependent on its fortunes.

Discussion of the issue in the press also became more contested. From early on opponents had claimed that the autocephalists, ignoring their spiritual duties, were instead engaging in “politics” and that they were essentially “separatists” seeking Georgia’s independence. The newspaper *Svet* opined, “All this hullabaloo on account of church autocephaly is generated by concerns

44 RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 27-34 (citations at ll. 30 and 34). Both dissenting opinions were published in the Tbilisi newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* 5 (24 February 1906), p. 1; and in *Zhurnaly i protokoly zasedanii Vysochaishche uchrezhdennago Predsobornago Prisutstviia*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1907), otdel 2, pp. 99-100.

45 *Svet* 11 (12 January 1906); “K voprosu ob avtokefalii,” *Golos Kavkaza* 13 (24 March 1906), pp. 1-2; RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 61-67 (citations at 61, 61ob., 63ob.); Diakin, *Natsional’nyi vopros*, pp. 669-671.

46 RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 40-44 (citations at ll. 40, 42, 43ob.-44); Vladimir Egorov, *K istorii provozglasheniia gruzinami avtokefalii svoei tserkvi v 1917 g.* (Moscow, 1917), p. 4.

and motives having decisively nothing to do with purely ecclesiastical requirements and needs in Georgia."⁴⁷ The Georgian clergy were also often accused of having mutinous connects to Social Democrats and other revolutionaries – an accusation that apparently was not without some foundation. Autocephalists responded that it was their opponents who had politicized the issue, adding that “separatism” had become a convenient but nebulous term of denunciation. Rather than promoting “separatism,” wrote one publicist, autocephaly “will contribute to the strengthening of political unity between Georgia and Russia, since nothing weakens that unity more than the Georgian people’s deprivation of the important right that neighboring peoples enjoy.” The church’s century-long experience of striving for “external unity,” involving the subordination of one nationality to another, had only produced “a strong tendency among the local clergy towards isolation.” Supporters of autocephaly also drew parallels between church reform in Russia and Georgia. One article thus concluded that it was as “unfounded” to accuse Georgians of “separatism” for wanting an elected Catholicos, as it was to accuse Russians of the same for wanting an elected Patriarch.⁴⁸

These polemics continued as the problem of the church in the Caucasus finally came up in June 1906 for official discussion in a second forum – a pre-council commission established to finalize an agenda for the all-Russian church council. Proving lengthy and contentious, the discussions offered little hope that any kind of mutually satisfactory solution might be worked out.⁴⁹ Probably only a harsh condemnation of the Exarchs could have drawn serious attention to the issue of autocephaly, but the accusations in Leonid’s episcopal opinion poisoned the atmosphere in the sub-commission formed to discuss the issue and compelled several of the Russian members to focus primarily on defending the “honor” of the Russian church. Much of the discussion accordingly consisted of attempts by Kirion and Leonid, joined later by professors of St. Petersburg University Alexander Tsagareli and Nikolai Marr, to provide “facts” to support their critique of the exarchal regime and the efforts of Rus-

47 *Svet* 15 (16 January 1906); *ibid.* 11 (12 January 1906).

48 A.A. Tsagareli, *Stat’i i zametki po gruzinskomu tserkovnomu voprosu: K stoletiiu (1811-1911 gg.) vdovstva gruzinskoi tserkvi* (St. Petersburg, 1912), pp. vii, xiii, and 93; A. Natroev, “V chem vykhod iz tragicheskago polozheniia gruzinskago dukhovenstva?” *DVGE* 1-2 (1-15 January 1906), p. 25; *idem*, “K voprosu ob avtokefalii,” *DVGE* 8 (15 April 1906), p. 24; N. Pokrovskii, “Obosoblenie i edinenie,” *DVGE* 4 (15 February 1906), pp. 16-24 (citation at pp. 23-24). “Kogda i pochemu byl priostanovlen vybor katiklosa gruzinskoi tserkvi,” *DVGE* 6 (15 March 1906), p. 16 (emphasis in the original).

49 *Zhurnaly i protokoly*, vol. 3, ot del 2, pp. 1-106. Unfortunately, I was able to obtain materials pertaining only to the early discussions (June and November 1906) in the pre-council commission. An exhaustive investigation of the question of Georgian autocephaly would require full engagement with accounts of later discussions. Here I offer a preliminary account, based on the proposition that the central issues of the dispute arose in the discussions of June and November.

sian clerics with experience in the Caucasus to refute them. There was painfully little on which the parties could agree, however. What some regarded as systematic persecution of “everything Georgian” others regarded as reasonable efforts to improve administration. Construed by Russians as an extreme response to problems best solved otherwise, autocephaly in Georgian eyes was indispensable to Orthodoxy’s reinvigoration. If Kirion could declare about autocephaly that “the people want it,” then I.I. Vostorgov could respond, “If one gives autocephaly, Russians will be offended.”⁵⁰

While much of the discussion focused on specific grievances against the Exarchs and their administration, Kirion sought also to make a more abstract case for autocephaly. Most interesting in this regard was his essay “The National Principle in the Church,” which he submitted to the sub-commission. Here he argued, appealing above all to Apostolic Canon 34, that Georgia “has the right to the independent existence of its national church on the basis of the principle of nationality (*narodnost'*) in the church, declared at the beginning of the Christian era.”⁵¹ Kirion contended that while the church drew no distinction between “Jew” and “Greek,” nonetheless it had long recognized national differences to the extent that they did not contradict higher Christian ideals. The eastern church had thereby constructed a “federated system” that had “significant advantages from the national point of view.” The ecumenical church, he concluded, recognized the independent existence of each nation and thereby “legalized the right of each nationality to have its own church with a national hierarchy at its head.”⁵²

The sub-commission chose to focus less on these arguments, however, than on the complex ethnic character of the Orthodox population of Transcaucasia and its significance for the resolution of the autocephaly issue. Russians in the sub-commission criticized the autocephalists for artificially dividing everything into “native” (Georgian) and non-native (Russian), and for ascribing Orthodox Greeks, Abkhazians, Ossetians and others unreflectively to the former category. Vostorgov, a conservative cleric with administrative experience in the Caucasus, argued that he could cite numerous examples “of the crudest efforts to Georgify the Abkhazians and Ossetians; I could point to tens of parishes and schools in which Georgian is being forcibly imposed.” Leonid nonetheless insisted that Georgian was “the principal national language

50 Ibid., pp. 19 and 28.

51 Apostolic Canon 34 refers to “bishops of every nation who must acknowledge him who is first among them.” (Translation of the canon cited in Lewis J. Patsavos, “Unity and Autocephaly: Mutually Exclusive?” p. 3 (<http://www.goarch.org/print/en/ourfaith/article8131.asp>, last accessed 12 January 2006). Kirion of course interpreted the deeply problematic term “nation” [*ethnos*] in a modern sense, which may well represent an ahistorical reading. “Nation” in its original context may best be understood as a synonym for state administrative unit, such as a province. See Kraft, “Von der Rum Milleti,” p. 393.

52 Kirion, “Natsional’nyi printsip v Tserkvi,” in *Zhurnaly i protokoly*, pp. 55-58 (citations at pp. 55-57).

of the exarchate's population," while Kirion remarked, "Georgia enlightened [that population] with Christianity and has the right to administer them." Russians were furthermore reluctant to concede that certain groups of the population formed part of a larger Georgian nationality. Thus the archbishop of Mogilev (also with service experience in the Caucasus) remarked, not without irony, "Perhaps the western Kartvelian ethnic groups – Imeretians, Mingrelians, Gurians – would like to have a distinct autocephaly for themselves?" The archbishop also asserted, apropos the complex ethnic composition of Gruzia diocese alone, "that only a Russian [bishop] can dispassionately sort out the conflict of interests of so many peoples and dispassionately allocate a sphere for their influence."⁵³ Discernable in this dispute, then, were both a competition between Georgians and Russians over the future of smaller peoples, and a Russian claim to the status of neutral arbiter over the ethnographic confusion in Transcaucasian Orthodoxy.

In this context the territorial definition of a potential autocephalous Georgian church became deeply problematic. Earlier in 1906 Russian clergy informed the Holy Synod in Petersburg that they did not wish to be included in an autocephalous Georgian church and argued that a new Russian archbishop should be appointed for the non-Georgian population, which included Russians, Greeks, Ossetians, and others.⁵⁴ Appealing to a combination of ethnography and history, the autocephalists referred both to the borders of the catholicosate as it had existed on the eve of Georgia's incorporation into Russia and to provinces with ethnic Georgian predominance.⁵⁵ Yet these standards were problematic, as they encompassed different territories, and Russians were quick to point out that the catholicosate of 1811 had had jurisdiction over only eastern Georgia. Moreover, Russian members of the sub-commission were unwilling to agree with the Georgians as to what constituted "Georgian provinces." The autocephalists remained committed to the proposition that the jurisdiction of any future autocephalous Georgian church be strictly *territorial* and not be confined only to certain parishes based on the ethnicity of the parishioners. In this regard, in fact, they were quite critical of Bulgarians, who in their view had advocated precisely such an arrangement.

The sub-commission's deliberations presumably offered a good sense of what Georgians could expect from an all-Russian council. N.N. Durnovo, al-

53 *Zhurnaly i protokoly*, pp. 13, 22-23, 32-33, 67, 70.

54 RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 45-50. A similar proposal was published as "Archiepiskopstvo zakavkazskoe," *Golos Kavkaza* 63 (3 June 1906), pp. 2-3. Vorontsov-Dashkov likewise stressed that any resolution of the autocephaly question needed to take into account the interest of Orthodox Russians, who were deeply agitated by the issue. See *Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska po upravleniiu Kavkazskim kraem general-ad'iutanta Grafa Vorontsova-Dashkova* (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 163.

55 Aristin, "K 'Proektu reorganizatsii'," p. 28; Durnovo, *Predpolagaemoe reshenie*, p. 6; *Zhurnaly i protokoly*, pp. 33; B.E., "O dvizhenii," p. 283.

most surely in contact with autocephalist circles, commented darkly that “all the lies” of the “Georgia-phobes” in the sub-commission “have made a loathsome impression in all of Georgia. God forbid that out of this is cooked up some deadly porridge.” Another observer meanwhile predicted that the majority in any all-Russian council would be hostile to autocephaly.⁵⁶ Back in Georgia, a group of priests accordingly decided that “we must apply all efforts so that the all-Russian council does not begin to decide the question [of autocephaly].” Considering it better instead to leave the issue’s resolution “until a more favorable time,” they recognized that they had work to do in convincing members of the Russian church that Georgians “are not separatists and not chauvinists, and that Georgians’ aspirations are concerned with creating the conditions in the life of the church in which, by the best means possible, the teachings of the Savior may be achieved.”⁵⁷

As it turned out, there was no danger that the all-Russian council would decide on autocephaly or anything else. Once the Emperor understood the extent to which some Orthodox hierarchs sought to disengage the church from the state’s embrace, and once prime minister Peter Stolypin recognized the passions that were likely to appear if the clergy were allowed to gather, the council died a slow death by non-convocation.⁵⁸ Meanwhile back in Georgia the lively discussion of autocephaly in the pages of *Spiritual Messenger of the Georgian Exarchate* apparently became too much for local authorities, and publication accordingly ceased in April 1906.⁵⁹ More ominously, Exarch Nikolai was replaced in June 1906 by Nikon, who was to prove both an effective administrator and an opponent of autocephaly. By no means had autocephaly been formally rejected, but by the end of 1906 prospects for its implementation must have appeared increasingly unlikely.

MURDER OF AN EXARCH

In effect, two very different reform programs for the church in Transcaucasia emerged after 1905. The first, as we have seen, was the autocephalist vari-

56 Durnovo, *Sud’by gruzinskoi tserkvi*, as cited in RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 22-22ob.; Tsagareli, *Stat’i i zametki*, p. 92.

57 *Kakoi taktiki dolzhno derzhat’sia gruzinskoe dukhovenstvo pri vozstanovlanii rodnoi tserkvi v avtokefal’nykh eia pravakh?* (Tiflis, 1906), pp. 2-4.

58 On this process see Cunningham, *Vanquished Hope*, pp. 313-329. A pale substitute for the council convened in May 1908 in the form of the Kiev Missionary Congress, which is deftly analyzed by Heather Coleman in “Defining Heresy: The Fourth Missionary Congress and the Problem of Cultural Power after 1905 in Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 52:1 (2004), pp. 70-91.

59 It is not clear whose decision it was to end publication of *Spiritual Messenger*. The last issue at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, likely the most complete collection, was no. 8 (15 April 1906). Publication was resumed under the title *Vestnik Gruzinskago Ekzarkhata* in March 1910, but for three years the publication contained only an official section.

ant: the conversion of the exarchate into an autocephalous Georgian church. The second was the Synod's reform plan that emerged from the conference of January 1906, which offered to grant bishops in Georgia full episcopal power, to improve the teaching of the Georgian liturgical language, and to publish more religious materials in local languages. Aspects of this second program were presumably attractive to autocephalists, but the exarchate's restructuring was regarded as a potential disaster. As Kirion had written in his dissent, "The new plan of dismembering the Georgian church into separate independent units, by weakening the principles that have bound them for centuries – national ties of kinship, common church traditions and patriotic legends of yore – erects a wall between them and in that way eliminates any possibility of the Georgian hierarchs' joint discussion of common diocesan questions in the future."⁶⁰ The exarchate, for all its faults, at least preserved the idea and fact of a unified and distinctly Georgian ecclesiastical space; it was, as Kirion stated in the sub-commission, "the remnant of autocephaly, the shadow of former ecclesiastical independence."⁶¹ The exarchate represented the logical foundation for the construction of an autocephalous Georgian church, and its elimination would accordingly constitute a serious setback to the autocephalist cause.⁶²

This is essentially where things appeared to be moving already by the summer of 1906. Presumably in response to the fruitless June meetings of the sub-commission in St. Petersburg, the Synod appointed Nikon exarch and in August decided to move forward with the earlier program, in spite of Kirion's and Leonid's dissent. The Georgian clergy seems to have sensed which way things were moving and sought to forestall Nikon's arrival in Tiflis. A congress of Georgian clergy sent telegrams to St. Petersburg protesting his appointment,⁶³ while others appealed directly to Nikon with a striking letter warning him not to take up his appointment as Exarch and threatening him with violence otherwise. Even before Nikon arrived in Tbilisi an anonymous letter had been sent to him warning him to leave the city within two weeks of his arrival.⁶⁴ Equipped with armor, Nikon nonetheless departed for Tiflis, determined to take up his position. Whether out of their own conviction or fear of retribution from more radical colleagues, the Georgian clergy refused to greet Nikon at the train station, thus initiating a boycott of his administration.

There are indications that while Nikon was open to considering the question of autocephaly in principle, he nonetheless saw the Georgians' aspirations

60 RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 29ob.-30; "Osoboe mnenie episkopa sukhumskago Kiriona, podannoe im v sinod," *Vozrozhdenie* 5 (24 February 1906), p. 1.

61 *Zhurnaly i protokoly*, pp. 31, 70.

62 RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 965, ll. 101-112; "Vopros ob avtokefalii gruzinskoi tserkvi," *Obnovlenie* 5 (24 August 1906); "Ofitsial'noe soobshchenie," *Golos Kavkaza* 126 (31 August 1906), p. 1; Tsagareli, *Stat'i i zametki*, p. 107.

63 "Petitsiia i pros'by gruzinskago klira ob avtokefalii tserkvi," *Golos Kavkaza* 100 (29 July 1906), pp. 3-4; RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 170, l. 6; RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 157, l. 22ob.

64 RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 157, l. 24; RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 170, ll. 7ob.-8.

as being misguided. Thus in a speech in August 1906, upon taking up his position as Exarch, he emphasized that autocephaly “is not the dogma or the commandment of God.” Its absence “does not prevent us from becoming heirs to the heavenly kingdom,” just as its establishment “will not lead us to eternal bliss.” He stressed that this did not mean that he was opposed to autocephaly, but nonetheless emphasized that he had not been given the power to decide the issue. His responsibility, instead, was “to examine it assiduously from all sides in order to facilitate its impartial and correct resolution at the Council.” He concluded by asserting that “in the matter of salvation everything consists in the observance of the God’s commandments (I Corinthians, 7, 19) and not in the ecclesiastical independence of one or another Christian people.” By seeking to attain autocephaly without reference to the means by which this was done, its proponents were sacrificing that which was essential for salvation for the sake of that which was not.⁶⁵

Such assertions, however proper from a purely ecclesiastical perspective, could hardly have appealed to Georgian clerics. Although the boycott slowly waned, Nikon continued to sense a threat to his personal safety and even considered imminent death to be a distinct possibility. He almost always wore his armor – by sheer chance he was not wearing it on the morning of his murder – and while receiving visitors he maintained an armed guard by the door.⁶⁶ *Golos Kavkaza* severely criticized the Georgian clergy for its boycott, proclaiming that “[w]ith their tactless actions, their purely politicking resolutions, and so on, it seems to us that the clergy merely reinforces the conviction that they are guided not by concern for the well-being of their flock, but by political aspirations.” More sympathetic was *Obnovlenie*, which argued that autocephaly had become “the cardinal question in the life of the Georgian clergy” and that St. Petersburg had paid “insufficient attention” to it.⁶⁷ In the meantime, Nikon was carefully studying the situation in the exarchate, providing few if any outward clues concerning the conclusions he was reaching.

There are some indications that the autocephaly question was by this time losing some of its topicality. This was certainly the assessment of Vorontsov-Dashkov in a survey, submitted to the Emperor in 1907, of his first two years as Viceroy. He contended that the movement’s particular forms depended to a substantial degree on the course of the revolutionary movement more generally, and that with the stabilization of the situation by 1907 the issue might well disappear of its own accord if certain needs of the clergy were met. On the whole, he contended that the movement had comparatively shallow roots, and that common Georgians played no role in it. Moreover, even the clergy itself no longer ascribed to the issue the “burning significance” than it had earlier

65 Quoted in Sofiiskii, *Vysokopreosviashchennyi Nikon*, p. 420.

66 RGIA, f. 1579, op. 1, d. 157, ll. 25-25ob., 28ob.; Durnovo, *Sud’by gruzinskoi tserkvi*, p. 34.

67 “31-e avgusta 1906 g.,” *Golos Kavkaza* 126 (31 August 1906), p. 1; “Vopros ob avtokefalii gruzinskoi tserkvi,” *Obnovlenie* 11 (1 September 1906), p. 1.

and was “prepared to make many compromises in contrast to its earlier declarations.”⁶⁸ While being stern but also open to some of the requests of Georgian clerics, Nikon was able, if not to attain full acceptance of his authority, then at least to convince many members of the Georgian clergy slowly to abandon their boycott of his regime. Whether autocephalists had actually abandoned their aspirations or simply recognized that their attainment was unlikely in light of the autocracy’s reassertion of authority and the indefinite postponement of the church council, the situation had in any event stabilized.

How, then, may we account for Nikon’s murder in 1908? The event that triggered it, by all indications, was Nikon’s completion of a concrete plan for the elimination of the exarchate and its replacement by an archbishopric and bishoprics on the general Russian model.⁶⁹ The timing certainly supports such a conclusion, since Nikon was indeed preparing to travel to St. Petersburg in early June, apparently with the goal of presenting the plan to the Holy Synod. More difficult is ascertaining the extent to which the murder represented the outlook of the Georgian clergy more broadly. In general, Nikon’s murder rapidly became something of a political football, as the right used it as a stick with which to beat Vorontsov-Dashkov’s “flaccid” administration.⁷⁰

In many ways the most striking thing about the murder is how little came of it. To be sure, there was a great outpouring of indignation, especially from the right, and Nikon’s reform plan, whatever its specific contours, was effectively abandoned. A new Exarch, Innokentii (Beliaev) was finally appointed only eighteenth months after the murder (the reasons for such a delay are not clear), and he made no open effort to resolve the autocephaly question definitively one way or the other. Some murder suspects were apprehended, and a preliminary investigation concluded – as we saw at the outset of this essay – that “an autocephalist organization of the Georgian clergy” bore responsibility for the act. But to my knowledge, no one was ever tried or convicted for the murder. Faced with an increasingly unstable political situation across the southern frontier in Persia and the Ottoman empire, the viceroy’s administration presumably put an especially high premium on stability within Russia’s

68 *Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska*, pp. 22-23.

69 This is how the plan was described in “Otkliki russkoi skorbi na Kavkazskoe zlodeianie,” *Kolokol* 683 (4 June 1908), p. 1. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate the plan itself or to obtain more than a general sense of its content.

70 See, for example, “K ubiistvu ekzarkha Gruzii, Vysokopreosviashchennago Nikona,” *Golos Kavkaza* 602 (31 May 1908); “Ishchite ubiitsev,” *Zakavkaz’e* 122 (1 June 1908), p. 2; “Intellektual’noe podstrekatel’stvo,” *Zakavkaz’e* 124 (5 June 1908), p. 1; “Kavkazskii dela,” *Kolokol* 685 (6 June 1908); and D.I. Ismail-Zade, “Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov,” in S.V. Tiutiukin, ed., *Istoricheskie siluety* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 48-52. Consider in particular the polemic between Durnovo and Vostorgov: N. Durnovo, *Protoieri I.I. Vostorgov i ego politicheskaia deiatel’nost’* (Moscow, 1908); Protoieri I.I. Vostorgov, *Kleveta N. Durnovo* (Moscow, 1909); and *Po povodu rechei Protoieria Ioanna Vostorgova ob ubiennom ruskom Ekzarkhe Gruzii, Preosviashchennom Nikone* (Moscow, 1908).

borders and was therefore inclined, one may surmise, to make as little of the murder as possible. Discontent among the Georgian clergy continued to fester, and Innokentii acknowledged the possibility of the reactivation of the autocephaly issue. But Vorontsov-Dashkov could nonetheless report with considerable confidence in 1913 that thanks to Innokentii's "exceptional energy and astounding tact," the autocephaly question "is becoming a purely theoretical question, subject to canonical resolution in the future."⁷¹

Still, the experience of 1905-08 had demonstrated to autocephalists that there was little or nothing to be gained from being patient. Thus when the autocracy finally collapsed in 1917, they quickly revealed that they were not going to wait for the decision of synodal conferences, sub-commissions, or an all-Russian church council. On 12 March 1917 a group of Georgian clergy and laypersons in Mtskheta declared, after a prayer for the well-being of the new Provisional Government, that their church was now autocephalous. In September a Georgian church council elected Kirion Catholicos. The Provisional Government extended conditional recognition to the new church on a non-territorial basis, insisting that its final legal status would have to be determined by the Constituent Assembly, while Russian clergy and laity affirmed that only an all-Russian church council could make a final judgment on Georgian autocephaly. When the all-Russian council did finally convene in August 1917, the Georgian clergy did not participate and refused to recognize Tikhon (Bellavin) when he was chosen Patriarch of the Russian church. The Georgian bishops rejected Tikhon's demand that they submit to his authority, instead sending an epistle in which the Catholicos - now Leonid - again asserted the canonical basis for autocephaly and claimed that God himself had created the conditions in which the Georgian church finally reclaimed its rights in 1917. Thereafter regarded as "schismatic" in the eyes of the Russian church, only in 1943 did the Georgian church finally receive recognition of its independent status from its Russian counterpart.⁷²

CONCLUSION

Within Orthodoxy, nationality had become an undeniable reality by the early twentieth century. The Orthodox world consisted increasingly of a series

71 *Vsepoddanneishii otchet po upravleniiu Kavkazom general-ad"iutanta Grafa Vorontsova-Dashkova* (St. Petersburg, 1913), p. 8; RGIA, f. 796, op. 186, d. 704 (otdel 1, stol 2), ll. 2-8; Pisiotis, "Orthodoxy versus Autocracy," pp. 60-62; Diakin, *Natsional'nyi vopros*, p. 676.

72 Vladimir Egorov, *K istorii provozglasheniia*; "Ot Vremennago Pravitel'stva: Avtokefaliia Gruzinskoi tserkvi," *Vestnik gruzinskago ekzarkhata* 7-8 (1-15 April 1917), p. 186; "Opredeleniia Zakavkazskago Tserkovnago Sobora russkago dukhovenstva i mirian, proiskhodivshago v gor. Tiflise 25-29 maia 1917 goda," *Vestnik gruzinskago ekzarkhata* 13-14 (1-15 July 1917), p. 7; I.K. Smolich, *Istoriia russkoi tserkvi, 1700-1917*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1996), p. 273; Hauptmann, "Unter den Weinrebenkreuz," pp. 33-35; *Poslanie Sviateishago Leonida, Katolikosa-Patriarkha vseia Gruzii, k Sviateishemu Tikhonu, Patriarkhu Moskovskomu i vseia Rossii* (Tiflis, 1920).

of distinct, independent national churches, a fact reinforced subsequently by the declarations of autocephaly in Ukraine (1921) and Albania (1922).⁷³ Yet the failure of Orthodoxy to contain nationalism was a matter not only of subordinate ethnic groups seeking greater ecclesiastical autonomy against supra-national church elites. Rather, those elites themselves had slowly adopted the national idea, and proved willing, if not directly to promote Hellenization and Russification, then at least to perpetuate the predominance of Greeks and Russians in the higher church administration. In this regard the assessment of Moscow Metropolitan Filaret in the mid-1860s is revealing. Even while refraining from interfering in the Greco-Bulgarian dispute on canonical grounds and recognizing the need for compromise from both sides, Filaret wrote that "the Greeks repudiate the principle of nationality, but in fact they are acting in such a way as to maintain the predominance of their own nationality and do not remember that the Holy Spirit recognized the principle of nationality when he sent down to the church the gift of languages."⁷⁴ Georgians were of course making analogous accusations about Russian predominance in the church in the early twentieth century. No doubt, many church hierarchs still sought to stand above national differences in the interests of ecclesiastical unity, just as the recognition of nationality did not by itself imply advocacy of autocephaly. But at the very least we may state that some of the policies and practices adopted by Russian and Greek hierarchs strengthened among those who experienced them the nationalist, particularistic orientation over the ecumenical. In this way, both sides contributed to the "nationalization" of Orthodoxy and to its fragmentation along ethnic lines.

The Georgian case represented the first call for Orthodox autocephaly within the Russian empire. Faced with the opposition of most church hierarchs and an autocracy unwilling to allow even the reform of the Russian church to proceed, the autocephalist cause had few prospects for success at this early stage. An autocephalist church within Russia would have created serious complications for the functioning of the empire's civil order, which rested on confessional foundations. And the accusation of "separatism" raised against the autocephalists by more conservative Russian commentators likewise made it more difficult to invest their claims and aspirations with legitimacy. Yet it is worth emphasizing that even in Turkey and Austria, where the state had far fewer ideological investments in the unity of Orthodoxy, the struggles of Bulgarian and Romanian nationalists to attain autocephaly had lasted several decades. In this light, autocephaly was attained in Georgia with comparative speed, even if, ultimately, it was the collapse of the tsarist regime that proved to be the decisive factor in this process.

73 Kitromilides, "‘Imagined Communities’," p. 180; Vulpius, "Ukrainische Nation," pp. 253-254; and Bohdan Bociurkiw, "The Rise of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, 1919-1922," in Geoffrey A. Hosking, ed., *Church, Nation and State in Russia and Ukraine* (London, 1991), pp. 228-249.

74 Cited in Khevrolina, *Rossiiskii diplomat*, p. 168.

Given the dramatic rise of national politics in Russia in 1905 and after, Georgian aspirations for autocephaly should be viewed, in part, as a manifestation of modern national consciousness, as well as a response to the revolutionary events in western Georgia beginning in 1902. Yet the autocephalists, most notably bishops Kirion and Leonid, were at pains to invest “the national principle” with clear ecclesiastical sanction and to present autocephaly as the realization of an ideal that had been present in Christianity from the very beginning. And the autocephalists were also emphatic that they sought merely the *restoration* of ecclesiastical independence that had been uncanonically terminated by the autocracy in 1811. In this regard their attitude towards the Bulgarians – whose aspirations seem outwardly to have been comparable to their own – is revealing. As Kirion related in his essay “The National Principle in the Church,” Bulgarians were entitled to autocephaly, but their aspiration to have two bishops – one Greek and one Bulgarian – in each city with an ethnically mixed population represented “philetism,” or the “introduction into the church of ethnic distinctions, dual power, and strife” – all of it rightly meriting the condemnation of the council of 1872 in Constantinople. In his missive of 1919, Leonid likewise accused the Holy Synod of having adhered to the “schismatic point of view of the Bulgarians” by rejecting the territorial basis of Georgian ecclesiastical jurisdiction in temporary rules of July 1917.⁷⁵ In this view, Bulgarians had put themselves before the church and had violated canon in order to attain their goal. The Georgians, by contrast, sought only to reclaim what was already theirs, to correct a canonical violation rather than to perpetrate a new one. To be sure, part of the reason for condemning the Bulgarians was to ensure undivided and unitary ecclesiastical authority for Georgian hierarchs over the territory that they claimed.⁷⁶ Yet it seems also true that only a strong belief in the *canonical* foundations of Georgian autocephaly could have pushed Georgian hierarchs to declare autocephaly unilaterally in 1917 – without reference to, and indeed in defiance of, the all-Russian church council and the new Patriarch – while also echoing ecumenical condemnations of Bulgarian “philetism.”

In conclusion, then, we might emphasize the importance of canon to virtually all of the historical actors that we have encountered. If for Georgians respect for canon required the restoration of the territorial autocephaly of their church, Russian insistence on the sanction of a church council was, by all indications, no less genuine. Vorontsov-Dashkov explicitly recognized the need for the question’s canonical resolution, as did the Emperor, when he transferred it to the jurisdiction of the church council. The Holy Synod refrained

75 *Zhurnaly i protokoly*, p. 158; *Poslanie Sviateishago Leonida*, p. 35.

76 From a canonical perspective, one of the more objectionable aspects of the Bulgarian Exarch was his residence in the Ottoman capital, where of course the Patriarch of Constantinople also resided. Leonid was thus referring to the Russian church’s creation of a Transcaucasian Exarchate, with its seat in Tbilisi, as a similar violation of canon.

from interference in the Greco-Bulgarian conflict on canonical grounds, even as the issue was obviously of great concern to the imperial Russian government. Even Ignat'ev made strenuous efforts to invest resolution of the conflict with canonicity. His intervention on the Bulgarian side towards the end of the crisis was a product of his exasperation with the Greek hierarchs and his recognition that, if compromise was ultimately impossible, Russian interests were better served by supporting the Bulgarians than by either backing the patriarchate or maintaining a position of strict neutrality. Thus even while the national question challenged religious conceptions of community and authority with ever greater success, ecclesiastical conceptions and provisions continued to frame national struggles within the church.