The Orthodox Church and Religious Minorities in Shida Kartli Region in Georgia in the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century

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February 25, 1921 marked the beginning of the hardest epoch in the history of Georgia. The epoch—a word not quite appropriate for this period—started with the annexation of the independent Democratic Republic of Georgia that encroached upon the Georgian state system, which was also the beginning of the darkest times, lasting about ten years and greatly influencing Georgian perception.\(^1\) Georgia missed a natural manner of development then. The sharp outlines of aspiration for a Georgian state in Europe appeared during the existence of the Georgian Democratic Republic. After the death of the independent Georgian Republic, our country did not join in the European way of civilization and its space for a long time. “The new life” began in the country. The Bolshevik governments started governing the country very actively. The establishment of an occupational regime in Georgia was considered in the Soviet historiography as the Mensheviks’ changes that had been caused by the workers’ rebellion. In fact, it was an obvious annexation of the independent country. Georgian

\(^1\) Giorgi Soshiashvili, *Orthodox Church and Religious Minorities in Shida Kartli during the First Quarter of the XX Century* (Tbilisi, Georgia, 2014), 6.
society then experienced their hardest situation since the establishment of the Bolshevik regime.

The red terror had started, spreading throughout the entire country. Noble families and educated segments of society were subjected to repression. Differences in views were persecuted and properties became nationalized. That part of the population that did not share the Bolsheviks’ ideas was physically annihilated or exiled. The Bolsheviks launched terrible battles against the counter-revolutionary groups. False accusations were often fabricated against a person or a group of people, which was followed by ruthless repressions. Executive committees were organized and they ordered the persecution of people with different points of view in villages.

The Bolsheviks started to confiscate rich peasants’ properties with the local activists’ encouragement, who they considered to be kulaks. Peasants whose properties were confiscated appealed to the local government as well as the governors of the republic, asking them to protect their human rights. Nevertheless, this was in vain. The government distributed the properties belonging to kulaks to the activists of the Bolshevik Party in order to please the crowds devoted to Kremlin. The government even confiscated homes. Their terror impacted every sphere of social life. Bolshevism encompassed politics, education, and culture. The new government took revenge on the Orthodox Church with a special cruelty.

More than a thousand churches were closed in Georgia in the 1920s. At that time, there were about 1350 active churches in Georgia with 1700 priests, 1527 monks and 280 nuns in operation.² These numbers were drastically reduced. The Revolutionary Committee established Decree no. 22 on April 15, 1921. In paragraphs 14 and 15, the

² Metropolitan Anania Japaridze, History of the Georgian Apostolic Church (Tbilisi., 2009), 115.
following was declared: “No religious society has the right to own any kind of property. They are not regarded juridical persons; all their properties belong to the people.”

This became the basis for the Bolsheviks to rob Orthodox churches and cathedrals. The process included all of Georgia. Catholikos-Patriarch Ambrosi made a speech during his enthronement at Svetitskhoveli on September 14, 1921. There, he clearly expressed the government’s attitude of that time towards the church: “The heaviness of being Catholikos-Patriarch? But each of us is aware of the heaviness and difficulty of doing one’s duty. Especially at this unbearable time, when the government hates religion, when unfaithfulness is widely spread and it is a shame to reveal one’s religion.” The problem the Patriarch had spoken about was not a casual one. The Bolsheviks began persecuting clergy altogether by closing churches. Catholikos-Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia addressed the Genoa conference about this problem in 1922. In that forum, 29 countries and five English dominions were participants. The Patriarch described the terrible situation caused by the Bolsheviks in his address. His letter dealt with the most difficult and unbearable situation of Georgian society and the Orthodox Church.

The Catholikos-Patriarch did not cease exposing Bolshevik activities after the Genoa conference. It is worth noting that the government imprisoned the Patriarch very shortly after this conference. Other representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church were subjects to repression as well. Kouts, the general secretary of the Committee of the Working Class, “Hands Away from the Soviet Union,” in England, met with the Catholikos-Patriarch on July 29, 1923. The foreign guest, who carried out propaganda

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3 S. Vardosanidze, Catholikos-Patriarch of Georgia, His Holiness Ambrosi, (1921-1927), (Tbilisi, 2009), 71.
4 Ibid., 75.
5 History of Georgian Diplomacy (Chrestomathy), (Tbilisi., 2004), 547-550.
for the Soviet Russia in the West, arrived as a traveler in the Soviet Russia. He carried
out propaganda for the Soviet Russia in the West. The Catholikos-Patriarch told Kouts
then quite frankly: “I do not care for myself. I am actually worrying about our faithful
nation, church, and ecclesiastics. Innocent members of the Catholikos Council have
been tortured for seven months in prison because of me and the central managing
apparatus has been destroyed. This troubles me and makes me feel fidgety . . .”

The campaign against churches soon became hysterical. The Bolsheviks, with
the help of the newly formed “Union of Atheists,” declared a merciless struggle against
the Orthodox religion and ecclesiastics, causing great indignation in society. The
repression of clergy became so severe that they refused to serve on their own. They
took off their cassocks themselves and soon, the shaving of priests came into fashion,
which they did with their own hands in order to avoid terror from the government. The
Bolsheviks refused to give land to the priests living in villages, which meant starvation.
That is why priests gave up serving on their own and addressed the local executive
committees about it. The documents stored at the Gori Archive confirm that the Gori
Executive Committee carried out a furious struggle to close churches and discredit
ecclesiastics.

The local executive committee used to send letters to the regional executive
committee, concerned about the fact there were no churches left open in 1923. The
parishes of the abolished churches expressed their indignation towards the Bolshevik
government. The government “compromised” in order to avoid the believers’
ingnation. The Council of People’s Commissar of Georgia addressed a special

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6 N. Shiolashvili, “Catholics-Patriarch of Georgia, His holiness Ambrosi’s unknown written communication with
the representative of England’s Labour Organization, Kouts,” Collection “Scientist with a Poetic Soul”, (Giorgi
declaration to the executive committees of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Adjara Autonomies in August of 1923. The Bolshevik government warned everybody to cease the persecution of religion, which brought counter results and ordered them to operate in other ways. The declaration stated: “The Council of People’s Commissars explained that a successful struggle against low class superstitious people is possible and will only be carried out by a long and diligent ideological education and the leaders of this struggle must be a successful working class with the help of their political, professional, cultural and other abilities.” The persecution of the Orthodox Church and clergy threatened many centuries-old Georgian architectural monuments and valuable properties that were kept in the cathedrals; they fell into the Bolshevik regime’s activists’ hands. The Bolshevik government decided to establish a special committee of ancient art monuments. This committee included the following representatives: People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs, Al. Gegechkori, People’s Commissar of Education, L. Kandelaki, and People’s Commissar of Justice, V. Vardzieli. The committee sent a special message to the chiefs of the regional executive committees and the chiefs of the autonomy units. According to this message, it appears that the Bolshevik government paid great attention to the old properties in Georgia in order to not sacrifice monuments of history and art in their struggle against churches. The committee divided cathedrals into several categories:

“All architectural monuments existing on the territory of Georgia are divided into three categories:

a) Monuments which are destroyed but still keep significant scientific values with their scripts and architectural forms;
b) Monuments with valuable treasures which still firmly stand and where services are held or have been held recently;
c) Monuments which are not valuable in regard to their architecture but still contain valuable treasure.
Monuments belonging to the first two categories must be listed, kept, and protected properly for their history and culture; therefore they must not be repaired or used for other purposes until the questions to establishing local historical museums are finally resolved.”

Thus, the repair, reconstruction or use of these monuments for any other purpose is impossible or strictly prohibited until the rules of local historical museums become clear. Church valuables kept in churches were divided into several categories by the government initiative. As for the treasure kept at the cathedrals, three kinds were distinguished:

a) Collections of handcrafted art: icons, crosses and etc.;
b) Knitted art;
c) Old manuscripts of various contents;

The treasure belonging to the first two categories is divided into two parts according to its value;

a) Valuable hand-made things of historical work of art, ornamented with precious stones and inscriptions;
b) The treasure containing only material values. It is very important and necessary to keep an inventory of all kinds of properties kept at the closed churches and monasteries regardless of their value;

Inventory of these properties must be carried out by members of the responsible local executive committee with the help of professionals.”

The government initiative planned to establish local historical museums, which they intended to open at the cathedrals of the second category (as already mentioned) or at places of special designation. The treasure belonging to the third category of churches had to be transferred to the second category, where they would be protected from fire and other kinds of danger. Two arrangements were planned in order to conduct inventory and keep old things. The first of these arrangements was to make inventories of church valuables by the representatives of the executive committees and professionals, and the second arrangement was to transfer these things to the newly established museums. The second category, church-monasteries, would be given to

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7 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 37.
museums after proper study. The document of the enlisted items had to be sent to the People’s Education Committee, who would then forward it to the committee for protecting ancient art monuments. The representatives of the local executive committee sent Simon Janashia to Shida Kartli to study the properties of churches and monasteries that existed in Shida Kartli. At first, this committee selected a scientist-expert, Akaki Shanidze, to be in charge of this business and Simon Janashia was appointed as his consultant, but later Simon Janashia was sent to Shida Kartli only as an attorney of the Special Committee of Protecting Monuments of Art.\(^8\)

After studying antiquities in Shida Kartli, Simon Janashia presented his reports to the local government. He recommended them to protect and care for the cathedrals carrying historical importance.

The Gori Executive Committee passed on different kinds of church items of historical value from Simon Janashia for later transport to the State Museum. The resolution accepted by the People's Commissariat of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, on November 23, 1923, confirmed the following:

1. All the properties of the abolished churches are to be transported at the disposal of the local executive committee;
2. The treasure carrying historical importance will be protected at the Museum of People's Education;
3. All other kinds of properties can be used by the local executive committee for peasants’ needs.\(^9\)

The parish of abolished church-monasteries could not get used to the attitude of the Bolshevik government towards religion. Believers appealed to the government with their statement and applied for the reopening of closed churches. As a result, a decree

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\(^8\) G. Sosiashvili, “Ac. Simon Janashia’s unknown facts about his work in Shida Kartli,” Gori State Teaching University, Collection of works of the Center for History and archaeology, # 3, 2012: 235.

of the government was published in *The Communist (No. 222)* in 1923, which gave believers an opportunity for the founding of religious societies. They started collecting signatures through the circular of the government and many religious societies were established. We can read this in the government resolution, “An instruction on the permission of registration of religious societies and conducting worship in them:”

1. To the civilians of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, according to the decree of the Executive Committee of the Soviet Central Republic of Georgia, which was accepted on July 7, 1923, the "rules for establishing and registering non-profit societies ("The Communist," no. 165) is that these unions have a right to organize religious and ecclesiastic societies and they will be given necessary buildings and properties in order to conduct religious services.”

Note: Representatives of religious societies or the members of already existing parishes will receive a church/house for services and properties free of charge according to the twenty-first paragraph of the decree accepted on April 15, 1921 by the Revolutionary Government of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, and by the contract of the local executive committee. The copy of the contract will be enclosed in this document;

2. The above-mentioned religious and ecclesiastic societies must be registered according to the rules pointed in this instruction;

3. Due to the decree established by the Soviet Central Executive Committee of Georgia on July 7, 1923, no religious society has the right to function without being registered by the department of the executive committee of the region or town;

4. Citizens whose aim is to establish a religious society are to present the document for registration together with their statement (three copies) to the managing department: a) a report of the meetings for establishing a society; b) the regulations of the society; c) a list of its members, which must include the following: 1) Their surnames, names and patronyms; 2) residential address; 3) marital status; 4) their social and employment status since 1914; 5) the kind of social class he/she belonged to before the revolution 6) Property holdings; 7) the date he/she joined this religious society; and 8) a stamp verifying the filing fee.

5. A religious society has to present a document describing their activities to the People's Committee of Internal Affairs (three copies): a) regulations of the society; b) a list of the members of the society and its executive department, which must be formed according to point "G," paragraph 3 of this instruction; C) and a list of clergy and other authorities according to point "G," paragraph 3. Note: The parish or society must have their regulations which must be written according to this instruction;

6. A responsible government managerial department must refuse to register a newly established society if: 1) the number of its members or founders is
less than 300 compared with the local inhabitants; 2) the regulations of the religious society requesting to be registered have aims and activities that are against the constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia and its legislation;

Note: For areas where the population is small, a smaller number of society members is permissible, but it must not be less than fifty.

7. If there is no obstacle with registration, the department of management will give the society a copy of regulations with a seal from the location where the registration took place.

8. A religious society that has not been registered within three months of the declaration of this resolution will be considered abolished;

9. Societies belonging to the same confession are allowed to conduct local or all Georgia congresses according to the decree of the Soviet Central Executive Committee of Georgia. 10

10. Local and all Georgia congresses of religious society may select executive departments; information about them must be presented to the People’s Commissariat of the Internal Affairs according to paragraph “G.”

11. Congresses of religious societies and their selected executive department have no rights to 1) establish any coerced rents; 2) possess religious properties or receive such properties by contract; 3) form any kinds of contracts or arrangements;

12. The People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs and local departments must control activities and congresses of religious societies and their organizations;

13. Each type of religious society is subject to the regulations for private societies and unions. However, it is different from them in that it is not a juridical person and has no right to possess any properties;

14. All religious societies are equal according to their rights and obligations and none are allowed to profit by any means, including any aid either from the government or its local and autonomous institutions;

15. Members of religious societies or their representatives may collect donations in order to pay fees for heating, protecting and keeping their properties, and for repairing religious buildings;

16. Though a religious society has no rights as a juridical person for possessions, they are still allowed to form such contracts concerning the use of religious properties, for example, to form contracts on renting choristers, collecting books, buying wood, etc.

Note: They are not allowed to form contracts on trading or for industrial purposes, such as rental of a factory for producing candles, printing houses for publishing religious literature, etc.;

17. Citizens may appoint people who intend to work for these societies, as well as representatives for external affairs, in order to implement resolutions for their meetings;

Note: A list of people working for religious societies or other authorities and other information about them must be enclosed and presented to the managerial department according to the third paragraph "G" of this instruction.

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10 July 7, 1923, in *The Communist*, No.165 and according to the instruction of the People’s Commissar of the Internal Affairs, July 17,1923 in *The Communis” No. 2170.*
18. Rules about closing religious societies are defined according to the decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Georgia, July 7, 1923. People's Commissar of Justice, I. Vardzieli People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, Talakhadze September 1923, Tiflis.\textsuperscript{11}

The government confirmed a sample of regulations for religious societies with this resolution. Believers had to complete these regulations for the purpose of establishing a religious society, which was to be confirmed by their local executive committee.

After issuing this resolution, an Orthodox religious society was established in Gori on September of 1923. On December 20, 1923, believers who gathered in Gori held a religious society meeting which drew up the regulations of the society and a list of council members that had been elected. Alexandre Alexandrovich Garsevanishvili was elected as chief of the meeting, and Niko Makharashvili and Anton Makalatia were elected as members of the council of the parish. Archpriest Anton Kasradze, Priest Loane Salaridze, Priest Alexandre Tlashadze, Proto-deacon Michael Gongladze, and Jacob Egnatashvili joined this council as members of a "selective committee." Artashes Mesropovich Marutov, a representative of the Gori executive committee attended the meeting. About 355 believers were members of religious societies of Gori Cathedral Church and the Church of Dormition of St. Mariam. Anton Kasradze was elected chief of the council of parish and he was in charge of registration of the regulations drawn up at the meeting to present to the local government.\textsuperscript{12} After the registration of the religious society, the local executive committee gave back any confiscated church items to the parish. Such societies were

\textsuperscript{11} Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #54, document # 36.
\textsuperscript{12} Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #4, description #1, document # 37, pp.1-17.
also established in Doesi, Atotsi, Shindisi, Khandaki, Khvedureti, Kaspi, Borjomi, and Dirbi.

At the beginning of this paper, we mentioned the repression of the clergy. The government had two ways to discredit the clergy: 1) the first was to pressure the clergy psychologically to make them abandon their position on their own. The government put them in unbearable situations. They were not given a piece of land to grow their food and the clergy remained without any income. 2) The second way was to use force against ecclesiastics. Activists who were encouraged by the Bolsheviks forcibly shaved priests and made them abandon their positions. Terror was not used only on those belonging to the lower clergy. The Bolsheviks imprisoned even the Catholikos-Patriarch. Violence against ecclesiastic leaders continued over the following years. The Catholikos-Patriarch had to agree with the local government about appointing bishops of different eparchies. One of the documents preserved at the Gori Archive describes this fact which Catholikos-Patriarch Kristepore (Tsitskishvili) signed: "To Gori Executive Committee, Bishop of the Urbnis-Matskveri Eparchy Simeon is no longer in charge as the bishop of this eparchy and he has been appointed to the position of Bishop of the Kutaisi-Genati Eparchy, whereas Bishop Ephrem is in charge as the Bishop of Urbnis-Matskveri. We are informing the Gori Executive Committee about these changes. The Catholikos-Patriarch of All Georgia Kristephore (Tsitskishvili) 1930."\(^{13}\)

The Bolsheviks violently attacked the Armenian and Catholic churches as well. Jewish synagogues were abolished due to the government resolution. The Gori Catholic Church has a rather long past. According to certain sources, Catholic missionaries

\(^{13}\) Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #4, description #1, document # 10, p.105.
settled in Gori in the fifteenth century. A former colonel of the Russian army, Rotie, mentions in his report that he sent to the Vatican in 1819 that he had seen the documents for purchasing houses by Catholic missionaries in Gori in the fifteenth century.14

The appearance of Catholic missionaries in Gori, exclusively Augustinians, actively began at the end of the 1620s when a Catholic monk, Ambrosio Dush Santoshi, transferred the holy relics of the Queen Ketevani to Teimuraz I during his visit to Gori.15 Teimuraz gifted Augustinians a piece of land where Catholics built a monastery and a house.16 Tiatinians’ activities in Gori began in the 1620s as well. According to the order of Pope Urban VIII, the Congregation of the Propagation of Faith sent some abbots to Georgia in 1627. Among them were: Pietro Avitable, Franchesko Daprile, and Jakomo De Stephano. Tiatinians were given a house and a church by the order of Teimuraz I. They were very popular among the population with their preaching and medical aids.17 Tiatinians built St. Peter’s Cathedral in Gori, which pleased the Pope. Capuchin missionaries became active in the second quarter of the seventeenth century in Gori. Abbot Justino Livornoeli was especially active. Armenian priests who lived in Gori captured the properties of the Catholics at that time. Capuchins demanded the return of their properties.18 Their activities were rather productive as they managed to win over many society members (among them were aristocratic families as well). The Capuchins’ successful activities did not continue for long however. According to Zhan Sharden, their parish and income decreased.19

15 Ibid., p. 306.
17 E. Mamistvalishvili, op. cit., p. 308.
18 M. Tamarashvili, op. cit., p. 120.
19 Jean Chardin Travels in Persia and Eastern Countries (information about Georgia), transl. from French, research and comments added by M. Mgaloblishvili, (Tbilisi, 1975), p. 274.
Conditions of the Catholic Church became abruptly worse in the 1750s. Catholic monasteries were confiscated and their house and church were transferred to the archbishop by the order of Teimuraz II. Catholics in Gori used to gather in the Zubalashvilis' house and conduct services there at that time.\(^\text{20}\) Chief Padre of Akhaltsikhe Aliozhi sent Padre Giorgi Turaneli to Gori in 1767 by the order of Erekle II. Catholics were given a piece of land for building a church in Gori. Giorgi Turaneli was soon moved to Tbilisi by the order of Erekle. Padre Andrea was sent there instead of him. The church was completed by Padre Marius, who died in 1823, and was buried in front of the altar of the church.\(^\text{21}\) The Bolshevik government closed the Catholic Church in Gori in 1923.\(^\text{22}\)

At Proceedings No. 27 of the session of presidium of the Gori region executive committee on October 22, 1924, comrades Siamashvili, Badriashvili and S. Sakvarelidze were in attendance. Chairman V. Kurdadze, Secretary (name not readable) discussed the Catholic Church there.

The Gori region executive committee possessed documents confirming problems and a small number of parishes. With Padre Saparashvili being known for his antirevolutionary activities, there were demands that the People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs closed the abovementioned chapel and Padre Saparashvili be banished from Georgia as an enemy of the Soviet system.\(^\text{23}\)

As noted above, these proceedings bear the date of 1924 and referred to the

\(^{20}\) E. Mamistvalishvili, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 331.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 332.

\(^{23}\) Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 23.
closing of the Catholic Church, though according to the other documents that had been examined, it is believed that the Bolsheviks closed the Catholic Church in 1923. This was confirmed by a letter sent by the Vatican delegate, dated September 16, 1923, addressed to Alexandre (Sasha) Gegechkori, People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs.

To the Commissar of the Internal Affairs Sasha Gegechkori in Tbilisi
Mr. Commissar!
We have already addressed you twice about the Catholic churches in Gori which were closed against the wishes of the parish and they themselves complained about it in their common statement. I had to travel for two months to Russia since then. I hoped that the churches would have been given back before my arrival; but this did not happen and I am asking you again to solve this problem and complete it in favor of the Catholic believers in Gori.
Sincerely yours, Vatican delegate Adrianus Smetsy. September 16, 1923.24

The letter by the Vatican delegate was sent to the People's Commissar of Justice of Georgia, General Procurator Vardzieli. The document was signed by Talakhadze, the Deputy of the People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs. The letter pointed out:

Personally to the People's Commissar of Justice and General Procurator of the Republic Comrade Vardzieli.
We are sending you the letter of the Procurator of East Georgia, dated September 15, 1923 and the letter of the delegate of the Catholic Church, dated September 16 of this year, about opening Catholic churches in the village of Dzlevijvari and the town of Gori. Enclosure: the correspondence consists of five pages.
Deputy of the People’s Commissar of the Internal Affairs Talakhadze.
Chief of Common Department (the surname is not readable) September, 1923.25

Konstantine Saparashvili, archpriest of the Gori Catholic Church, had addressed the People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs before the letter by the Vatican delegate came. In his letter, Saparashvili had asked for the reopening of the closed

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24 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 33, p. 18.
25 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 33.
Catholic churches and the return of their household and ecclesiastic properties. Deputy of the People's Commissar of the Internal Affairs Talakhadze sent Saparashvili's letter to the People's Commissar of Justice of Georgia and General Procurator of the Republic Vardzieli for discussion.26

The Bolshevik government of Georgia came to a compromise on September 22, 1923, as they often received requests from believers all over Georgia about the rehabilitation of the closed churches. Representatives of different confessions were permitted to create and register religious societies. Catholic believers living in Gori had also addressed the chief Gori region executive committee on reopening the Catholic churches and returning confiscated items. About 68 believers signed the appeal.27

On December 11, 1923, attorneys for Caring of the Parish of the Catholic Church addressed the internal management of the executive committee of the Gori region by the following appeal:

To the Internal Management of the Gori Region Executive Committee, by the attorneys of Caring of the Parish of the Catholic Church, according to the circular distributed by the government of All Georgia, dated September 22, 1923, Caring establishes the registration of religious societies together with their members.

Members of Caring
Attorneys K. Gab. Saparashvili
N. Julabishvili, Gabo Chitashvili, Alexandre Zubalashvili,
M.A. Korkovidov, December 11, 1923, Gori.28

In order to register a religious society, the group had to consist of at least 50 believers, according to the resolution of the government declared on September 22, 1923. It seems that the number of Catholics older than 18 in Gori was 150. They also

26 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 33.
27 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 66.
28 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 68.
lived in Khashuri and Borjomi at that time. The official notification also confirms that Konstantine Gabrielovich Saparashvili was named abbot of the Catholic Church. He was from Tbilisi and held classes around that same time. The Gori Catholic Society held a session on December 29, 1923. The proceedings of this session declare:

Proceedings of the session of the Gori Catholic Society, held December 29, 1923.
The Gori Catholic society session was held on December 29, 1923 in Gori, in the Saakadzes' estate. By permission of the Gori Executive Committee, on December 27, 1923, comrade Devdariani, a representative of the government, attended the session. He was introduced to the instructions of Internal Affairs, which were issued on August 10, September 22 and December 20 of 1923. These instructions were about freedom of religion, registration of religious societies and the reopening of churches. The resolution addressed the following:

1. Thank you to the Soviet government for permitting the return of the closed churches and supporting the wish of the Gori Catholic Society;
2. The society supports the idea of reopening the Catholic Church as it was not a supporter for its closing;
3. The society considers the idea that it must take urgent measures for establishing and rehabilitating the Catholic society that is outlined in the decree of the government. In order to carry these measures out, the society have selected two attorneys, but not their already existing brothers—Nikoloz Nikolozovich Julabishvili and Gabriela Alekseevich Chitashvili, and the priest, Konstantine Gabrielovich Saparashvili. These two attorneys are Alexandre Antonovich Zubalashvili and Mikhaka Alexeevich Korkovidovi. The society asks them to return their Catholic church, its properties and anything dealing with the Catholic religion to keep under their responsibility.
4. The society discussed the religious credo of the Gori Catholic parish, which they adopted unanimously and asked their attorneys to sign in the name of the society to present to the local government. In case of any necessary changes in its text, it would have been done according to the credo of the Catholic Church;
5. The society expresses its gratitude to the believers' registration and carries it out according to the note of the sixth paragraph of the circular of the government, dated September 22, 1923. It confirms already established and partly-signed registration for this reason;

Finally, the Gori Catholic Society hopes that the local executive committee will return the Catholic church to fulfill the wish of the society. Due to the government circular, the local Executive Committee will return the Catholic church to its

29 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 69.
30 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 117.
believers and the wishes of Catholic parish will be fulfilled. The following signatures are below:

Instead of the chairman: Konstantine Gabrielovich Saparashvili  
Secretary: Alexandre Zubalashvili  
Chairman of the Brotherhood: Gabo Chitashvili.31

In the creed of the Catholic believers, those rights were described which the government gave to the believers of the Catholic society.32 The government was given the list of society authorities together with the creed for registration. Those authorities were: Julabishvili Nikoloz Nikolozovich, Chitashvili Gabriela Alexeevich Zubalashvili Alexandre Antonovich, and Korkovidovi Mikhaka Alexandrovich.33 The Gori Executive Committee provided a stone building for conducting services and some confiscated ecclesiastic items to the Catholic religious society in Gori on February 10, 1924. In addition, a special memorandum was composed by the Catholic society and the representative of the Gori executive committee, S. Tskhovrebashvili.34

The memorandum enclosed a list of ecclesiastic things as well described as:
"The list of the ecclesiastic things given to the Gori Catholic religious society from Tskhovrebashvili - chief of local economy of the Gori Region Executive Committee."

The Bolsheviks closed the Armenian Gregorian chapel in addition to Catholic and Orthodox churches in Gori. The existence of the Armenian church in Gori is confirmed by the documents of the sixteenth century. The Armenian clergy living in Gori were free from paying taxes by the Deed of Mercy of Simon I.35 According to Professor E. Mamistvalishvili, there were four Armenian churches in Gori in 1802: 1)

31 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 120.  
32 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54.  
33 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 137.  
34 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 54, p. 134.  
35 E. Mamistvalishvili, op. cit., p. 298.
Cathedral of Our Virgin; 2) Cathedral of the Assumption of Virgin Mary; 3) St. Stephan's Cathedral; and 4) Cathedral of Christ’s Resurrection. Armenian churches belonged to the Akhpaty Eparchy. St. Stephan's Cathedral was ruined in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, according to Professor E. Mamistvalishvili, as the Armenian church is not present on a map issued in 1824. However, on documents from the first quarter of the twentieth century, in addition to references to Armenian believers, St. Stephan's church is also mentioned. This church was on Tsereteli Street and was seemingly reconstructed.

On August 29, 1923, Armenians living in Gori addressed the Executive Internal Department and demanded the reopening of their closed church and the return of their belongings as well. After having received permission for the registration of religious societies, Gori Armenian believers presented the credo of the Armenian Gregorian religious society to the Gori Region Executive Committee for its confirmation in 1923. This creed was signed by the archpriest of the church, Ter-Saak Khakhaniantsi and the members of the religious council, Mesrop Marutov, David Khudadovi and one more member whose name and surname are not readable in the document. After the confirmation of the creed, some representatives of the Gregorian church received a stone building in Gori and ecclesiastic items for services from the Gori Region Executive Committee on January 25 in 1924. They were received without any payment and the period of their usage was unlimited. All propaganda against the Soviet system was prohibited at the Armenian church.

The Bolsheviks confiscated the synagogues of Jews living in Kareli, Surami, and

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36 Ibid., p. 299.
37 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 53.
38 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 53.
Gori. It is known that Jews had been living in different parts of Georgia and in Shida Kartli as well, since ancient times. About 400 Jews lived in Kareli during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with their own rabbi and synagogue.\(^39\) They had lived in Surami, Gori, and Urbnisi since ancient times.\(^40\)

S. Tskhovrebashvili, chief of the internal management department of the Gori region executive committee, wrote to the head of the Executive Committee of the Kareli community in October of 1923. He asked to let him know whether it was possible to return the confiscated synagogue to the Jews in Kareli and if that was impossible, whether he could have an explanation for it.\(^41\)

On November 3, 1923, according to the resolution of the Commission of Religious Affairs which coexisted together with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, the Gori Executive Committee was instructed to return a synagogue to the Jews living in Kareli or give them the opportunity to have a chapel.\(^42\)

On November 20, 1923, the Jews of Gori asked the head of Internal Management for permission to gather at their chapel and establish a religious society. A Gori Jewish meeting was held on November 25, 1923. The aim of this meeting was to establish a Jewish religious society and to obtain a synagogue. The meeting selected a presidium whose members were Ela Atanelovi, Mordekh Davarashvili, Meme Koenishvili, Abraam Magalovi, and Iokhai Krikheli. The Gori Region Executive Committee and the Jewish religious society formed a contract. According to this contract, S.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., pp. 106, 122, 124.

\(^{41}\) Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 27.

\(^{42}\) Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 37.
Tskhovrebashvili, an attorney for the Gori Region Executive Committee, was to transfer them to a building for religious services and include some necessary items free of charge for an unlimited period, starting on January 17, 1924. All types of propaganda against the Soviet system was prohibited at the Jewish chapel. Mordekh Davarashvili and Iokhai Krkheli received those ecclesiastic items from Tskhovrebashvili, the chief of the Internal Management of the Gori Region Executive Committee. Bene Krkheli, who lived in Gori, was in charge of conducting religious services for the members of the society. The return of the synagogues for Jews in Gori is confirmed by another document, which is an excerpt from the minutes of the Commission of Religious Affairs of the Central Communist Party Committee of Georgia on December 11, 1924. It appears those were questions for returning places of worship to the Orthodox, Catholic, Gregorian, and Jewish parishes in Gori, Kareli and Surami. The Commission of the Religious Affairs instructed the Gori Region Executive Committee to satisfy the believers’ demands and return one church or one building for conducting services. 43

We think that it is of utmost importance to disclose the facts about the uncommon treatment that took place during Soviet rule in the 1920s towards the Georgian Orthodox Church and all the other religious confessions. The red terror that occurred in the past should not be repeated again.

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43 Georgian Central Territorial Archives, Gori Regional Archive, Funds, #3, description #1, document # 52, p. 11.
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