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BETWEEN ORIENTAL ORTHODOXY AND EUROPEAN MODERNITY: GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, MARKET ECONOMY AND SOCIAL MESSAGE*

By Leons Gabriels Taivans

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Georgia has long sought a close relationship with Europe. It is currently in an association agreement with the EU and seeks to join NATO. Though Georgia has doubtlessly made significant progress in the past fifteen years and stands out among other countries in the region, some old habits have been harder to kick than others. Only 2% of Georgians fully trust the courts, a perception that is borne out by its 80th place in the World Economic Forum judicial independence ranking.¹ Amnesty International, likewise, highlights that “concerns remained over politically motivated prosecutions.”² Under the leadership of the “Georgian Dream” party, the country was recovering a pro-Russian orientation, which was damaged seriously during the 2008 Russian war

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¹ World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey. https://reports.weforum.org/pdf/gci-2017-2018-scorecard/WEF_GCI_2017_2018_Scorecard_EOSQ144.pdf (accessed 4/27/2022)

² Mary Honeyball, “Georgia is still a long way off showing it adheres to EU values,” *Euronews*, 22/07/2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/07/22/> (accessed 4/27/2022).

against Georgia. Putin's war against Ukraine in 2022 forced the leadership of Georgia to make a U-turn and apply for EU membership responding to the pressure of overwhelming public protests.

Behind the political turns, the background of the matter is much more complicated. June 17, 2022 will likely be remembered as a turning point in Georgia's modern history. On that day, the European Commission finally gave qualified recommendations for European Union candidature to Moldova and Ukraine. However, despite the country charting a Euro-Atlantic course for more than 20 years, it opted not to recommend Georgia for the same.

At the same time, the World Bank praises Georgia for its sound macroeconomic framework and attractive business environment, reflected in EPRS (European Parliamentary Research Service), with its high ranking in the *Ease of Doing Business Index*—seventh out of 190 countries; in Europe, only Denmark does better. Despite this mostly favorable economic situation, unemployment was high both before and after the pandemic—19.4 percent in the first quarter of 2022. The percentage of living below the national poverty line has fallen over the past decade, but according to the most recent available figures, was also relatively high, at 19.5 % in 2019.³ Georgia is a country with a very low GNP, caused to a great extent by the legacy of Soviet occupation of the country for more than 70 years. Parts of the country (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) are under indirect rule of Russia even now.

The subject of this article is the religious motivation of the Georgian society to transit from a pre-market, Soviet-model economy to a modern westernized economy. The reason for this approach is obvious: Georgian society is highly religious. According to Pew data, 85 percent of the population declares themselves Orthodox Christians. (The greatest religious minority is Muslim at 10.7 percent.)

Concerning methodology, we are following a Weberian line. Max Weber was the first of the European thinkers to research the link between religious motivation and economic success and development. The history of the 20th and 21st century revealed more examples of the symbiosis of religious motivation and intense economic development in different religious surroundings. Japanese religious fervor applied to everyday labor at the big Japanese companies was one of the secrets of the fast recovery of Japanese industry after WWII.⁴ A new stage of economic

³ BRIEFING EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service Author: Martin Russell Members' Research Service PE 690.626 – May 2021 EN *Georgia's bumpy road to democracy. On track for a European future?*

⁴ Joseph Pittau, S.J. (1999) "Ethical Values and the Japanese Economy. Towards Reducing Unemployment." *Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, Acta 5, Vatican City.

development in Turkey in the 21st century was evoked to a great extent by the religious preaching of Fethullah Gülen and the new Islamic bourgeoisie of Central Anatolia emerged as a result.⁵ The Christian milieu is not an exception. Peter Berger discovered on the verge of the 21st century a Pentecostal awakening in Latin America and Africa, which turned out to be a powerful agent of economic and social modernization.⁶

This article aims to ask what the history of the Protestant ethic might contribute to our understanding of the contemporary relationship between Georgian Orthodoxy, economics, and capitalism. In doing so, we engage with a handful of retrospections that offer engagements with Weber regarding this interface. We begin with the key arguments advanced in *The Protestant Ethic*. Then we incorporate contemporary Pentecostalism into Weber's genealogical account of the rise of capitalist modernity. Thus, we hope to find parallels between twenty-first-century Pentecostalism and the seventeenth-century ascetic Protestantism as a sort of modernization paradigm.

The second part of the article is an exploration of Georgian Orthodox Christian views on religious motivation concerning economic and social transitions. There is a popular point of view in Georgia that joining the EU will automatically and miraculously increase the level of income for everybody. Therefore, the motivation at the level of good intentions is great. Unfortunately, this popular sentiment to a great extent is based on the social perception, once spread in the Soviet Union, that “the government is providing citizens with work, good or not so good salary, housing, etc.” At the grassroots level, the childish stereotype of a great family, where the leading Communist elite (government, Communist Party leaders) were identified as *pater familias*, taking care of their children—i.e., citizens, is one of the elements of the crippled social psychology of communist reality. It has not disappeared completely yet. Modernization needs responsible participation, and how much this quality is developed in Georgia is one of the targets of this research.

http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/georgia/religious_demography#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010 (accessed 27.04.2022).

⁵ Doğu Ergil, *The ethical considerations of Fethullah Gülen and his movement are made up of what components?* <http://fgulen.com/en/fethullah-gulens-life-en/fethullah-gulen-and-the-gulen-movement-in-100-questions/the-ethical-considerations-of-fethullah-gulen-and-his-movement-are-made-up-of-what-components> accessed 6/23/2022.

⁶ Peter Berger. “Max Weber is Alive and Well and Living in Guatemala: The Protestant Ethic Today.” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 2010: 8/4.

The research on the contemporary state of religious motivation of the believers is based on ethnographic material collected through participant observation. Thirty normal, semi-structured interviews among Georgian educated lay-people were performed and analyzed by experts on religion throughout Spring-Summer 2023. This work was conducted in universities and scholarly institutions in Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

Given the local, rather circumspect nature of this study and the fact that additional qualitative and quantitative research is needed to further elucidate these themes, this study, we believe, represents mainly the lay Orthodox Christian perspectives on these matters. We have no reason to suspect that the informant's words fail to have resonance with the Orthodox population of Georgia.

Labor and Predestination: From the Church's Discipline to Self-Control

German sociologist Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–05), held that the Protestant ethic was an important factor in the economic success of Protestant groups in the early stages of European capitalism. The religious idea here was that worldly success could be interpreted as a sign of eternal salvation. In the specific social atmosphere of the Calvinist Reformation, these “signs” were sort of markers of social success and acknowledgment. To understand why the theory by Max Weber is still relevant today, it should be mentioned that the overwhelming focus of *The Protestant Ethic* is on the spirit of capitalism rather than its form. It's important to stress that ascetic Protestantism or 'the spirit of Christian asceticism' is not synonymous with the spirit of capitalism, as is often taken to be the case, but is rather its 'religious root.'⁷ In other words, the Christian Reformation in Europe created the specific social paradigm, viz. 'a new form of control,' a sort of *modus vivendi* which transcended the religious changes, such as secularization, or spiritual awakening among Pentecostals of the 21st century.

This 'new form of control' developed from the monastic discipline and inner Regula, and it turned out to be highly effective: it had substituted “the Church's control over everyday life” with an internal form of self-discipline which entailed the “regulation of the whole of conduct”

⁷ B. Kirby, (2001) “Pentecostalism, economics, capitalism: putting the Protestant Ethic to work.” *Religion*, 2019, 49 (4). p. 574; Max Weber. [1904-5]. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. (London: Routledge), p. 120.

and which penetrated “to all departments of private and public life.” The “specific type of conduct” to which Weber alludes is, in short, ascetic rationalism.⁸

Calvinism’s emphasis on the religious duty to make fruitful use of the God-given resources at everyone’s disposal and its orderliness and systemization of ways of life were also regarded by Weber as economically significant aspects of the ethic. The “Protestant ethic” is theologically rooted in Calvin’s theory of predestination. Predestination is a Christian doctrine according to which the eternal destiny of a person, whether it be salvation or damnation, is determined by God alone before, and apart from, any worth or merit on the part of that person. The doctrine of predestination became important in the late medieval period and passed into the theology of the early Protestant authors, especially John Calvin. Calvin also insisted that grace is a gift and that a person with his own will and works cannot achieve eternal life. Until recently, the doctrine of predestination of John Calvin has remained a characteristic teaching of churches in the Calvinist tradition.

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* explains that the tenet of salvation is possible to detect from certain “outward signs” of one’s eventual fate. Someone with skills, or who might have a successful business, could be a sign that a person is among God’s elect. Calvinists tried to figure out who the elect were. If they became successful in business, perhaps that was a sign of God’s preferences. Weber argued that it was this that motivated intense and successful work which resulted in capitalism. This is a very short and traditional summary of the impact of the Protestant version of Christianity on the development of capitalism.⁹

Labor as Punishment: Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy, which dominates in Georgia, historically inherited a different theological path. After the conquests by Arabs, which began around 632, Orthodoxy lost its contact and exchange of theological thought with the rest of Europe. The Middle East became Islamic, the Byzantine empire became isolated, surrounded by Muslim states. Ideological and administrative pressure from Islamic religious and political surroundings influenced Christian theology. Islamic thought and dogmas in a way shaped Christian Orthodoxy, pressed it towards greater monotheism, and

⁸ Kirby, (2001), p. 576.

⁹ See: Richard A. Layton, *Martin Luther and John Calvin on Predestination* // <file:///C:/Users/Lietotajs/Downloads/437-924-1-SM.pdf> [Accessed 5/24/22].

pushed back in the direction of a concentration on a common heritage, particularly the Old Testament, its prophets and narrative. The last Universal gathering (Ecumenical Council) of Church leaders convened in 787 in Nicaea. It was the last convention of Bishops authorized to update Church teachings due to the current age and cultural surroundings. Thus, theology was petrified, for centuries relying mainly on the practice of the early Church. Monastic virtues, which included solitude (“desert”), became the basis of the social and economic teaching of Orthodoxy. Christian philosophy capable of reflecting the world from a secular viewpoint was tacitly denied as incompatible with the faith.¹⁰

Whereas Calvinist doctrine of predestination was a theological and social answer to rising capitalism in 16th century Europe, Orthodoxy was surrounded by stagnant social and economic surroundings of the Ottoman Empire, and the ascetic ideal of the 3rd and 4th centuries was recalled and conserved instead of theological modernization. Militant Islamization pressed the society of Christian *millets* to protect the native indigenous culture. Thus, monastic virtues and lifestyle became a universal pattern for all believers—secular and clerical. While the ecclesiastical discipline in the West required five times of prayer a day from the clergy, the seculars could pray two, or three times a day, and fasting was reduced to lesser severity. The everyday discipline of monks and seculars among the Orthodox had fewer differences. At least theoretically, there were no difference between ecclesiastics and seculars.¹¹

One of the cornerstones of the Orthodox monastics is the renunciation of all that is unnecessary for human life in order to acquire the intimate and enduring knowledge of God. Initially, the call was to break ties with certain traditional ways of life and to retreat into the silence of the “desert.” Here the realization of this process was based on the practice of poverty and separation from material things, all self-centered thoughts, and desires. This simple lifestyle strongly influenced a person's work motivation and behavior. In some cases, the writers of the desert literature pointed out that to get rid of temporal distractions and continual fellowship with God, it was necessary to reduce work or avoid it altogether. Self-service and service to others were a deviation from pure ascetic life, not essential components. Here it should be stressed that, manual

¹⁰ G. Florovskij. (1987) *The Ways of Russian Theology*. Georges Florovskij, vols. 5-6, in Richard S.; Nordland Publishing Company, See especially chapters eight “On the Eve” and nine “Breaks and Links.”

¹¹ А. А. Ткаченко. *Монашество*. [Monasticism] Православная энциклопедия.
<https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2564108.html> Accessed 6/23/2022.

labor was not seen as a spiritual activity at all, but as a specific tool that helped, among other things, focus the mind and heart on God.

Monks could overcome temptations and destructive passions through hard work. On the one hand, they were especially vulnerable to idleness, and the attendant vices of gossip and covetousness. Manual labor was the simplest and most direct way to rid themselves of these maladies of character. Moreover, because they worked only for their basic needs, they could focus on the pursuit of God rather than the accumulation of material goods. In turn, this attitude protected them from pride and the exaggerated sense of self-sufficiency that often came with wealth and temporal security. Manual labor was often used in the battles against impurity and gluttony. Service to God and the needy was an essential part of the monastic regimen. It was as important a motivation for work as self-support since it provided monks the opportunities to ameliorate human needs and defer to the interests of others. Finally, ordinary labor was seen as an ascetical activity when it cultivated the virtues of obedience, charity, and humility. In this context, monks were more concerned with how their work formed them as a person than how it provided for their temporal needs.¹²

These differences didn't go unnoticed in Weber's comparative civilizational studies. He stressed the mystical and collective character of Orthodox religiosity, in contrast to the more rational character of Protestant religiosity, which brought strict discipline to life, and asserted the responsibility of everyone in the worldly quest for success. For Weber, Orthodox Christianity was too otherworldly-oriented to produce any significant and rationally articulated economic ethic.¹³

Back to Protestant Ethic

The Protestant ethic followed as an element of the evolution of the Western Christian approach to labor which is presented by Benedictine legacy. Western medieval monastery tradition was developed by St. Benedict and here we may trace different religious motivations of labor, represented by early European monastic tradition. It should be mentioned that St. Benedict's Rule was initially written for laymen, not for monks. The saint's purpose was not to institute an order of

¹² Charles A. Metteer, "Mary needs Martha": The Purposes of Manual Labor in Early Egyptian Monasticism//*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No 2, (1999): 205-206.

¹³ Vasilios N. Makrides, "Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development: A Critical Overview." *Archives de sciences sociates des religions*, 185 | janvier-mars (2019), Christianisme orthodoxe et économie dans le sud-est européen contemporain, p. 3., See Weber, 1988, 466-467.

monks with clerical duties and offices, but an organization and a set of rules for the domestic life of laymen who wished to live as fully as possible according to the Gospel. Besides, the greatest part of Western monasticism in the 12th century switched to pastoral work in populated cities and the countryside.¹⁴

The characteristic feature of St. Benedict's Rule is its view of work. With Benedict, the work of his followers was only a means to the goodness of life. According to the point of this saint, the great disciplinary force for human nature is labor; idleness is its ruin. The purpose of his Rule was to bring men back to God by the labor of obedience, from whom they had departed by the idleness of disobedience. Work was the first condition of all growth in goodness. It was so that one's life might be wearied with labor. One of the institutional heirs of St. Benedict, Abbot Alered Carlyle, summarized the Rule in 1907:

The human body is a machine made for work, and for hard work: a repose free from strenuous endeavors must cause flabbiness of mind and of muscle. As our numbers increase and powers of usefulness develop, we shall hope to extend our labors according to our gifts, working for our daily bread with interest and thankfulness doing our best to deserve that great gift of God, a healthy mind in a healthy body.¹⁵

The Cistercians, who historically followed the Benedictines, added to the principle of "*Ora et labora*" entrepreneurship. They mastered rational cost accounting, plowed all profits back into new ventures, and moved capital around from one venue to another, cutting losses where necessary, and pursuing new opportunities when feasible. They dominated iron production in central France and wool production (for export) in England long before the industrial revolution. Being few in number, the Cistercians needed labor-saving devices. Their monasteries were economically effective, marked by technological development.¹⁶

The "Protestant Ethic" defined by Max Weber was a certain stage of the evolution of the Christian approach to the work from the early Middle Ages. Eastern Orthodoxy followed another model based on ancient Egyptian monastic principles defining the labor as a depressive obstacle for a Christian path towards his deification, or *theosis*.

Weberian sociology and the observation of the role of religion in the contemporary stage of development of human society were perpetuated by a plethora of scholars. Among them is Peter

¹⁴ See: Alison I. Beach. (*The Trauma of Monastic Reform. Community and Conflict in Twelfth Century Germany*. (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Alered Carlyle, OSB. *Our Purpose and Method*, (Pluscarden Abbey, Elgin, Moray, 1987).

¹⁶ Michael Novak, "How Christianity Created Capitalism." *Religion and Liberty*: 2010. Vol. 10, No.3.

Berger with his widely cited essay, “Max Weber is Alive and Well and Living in Guatemala” (2010).¹⁷ In the essay, P. Berger describes the ”attitudes and behavior” of Pentecostals in Latin America as bearing “a striking resemblance to their Anglo-Saxon predecessors.”¹⁸ In other words, he identifies a remarkable consonance between Latin American Pentecostals and Weber's Puritans because they shared a “this-worldly ascetic” orientation.

Latin America, with its historical dominance of local Catholicism, is similar in a way to the Orthodox society with its ancient popular theology and ritualistic conduct, which is not necessarily Catholic, but in a certain part a layer of an ancient pre-Christian religious replica. The comparatively new phenomenon of Pentecostalism promotes personal discipline and honesty, proscribes alcohol and extra-marital sex, and dismantles the ancient compadre system. The set of ancient religiously “blessed” traditions prescribe a paternalistic and communalistic way of life, extravagant expenditures, connected with Catholic festivals, and discourages saving. Contrary to these traditions Pentecostals teach ordinary people to create and run their own grassroots institutions; moreover, it fosters a culture that is radically opposed to classical machismo; instead of male domination, women take on leadership roles within the family, 'domesticating' their husbands and paying attention to the education of their children.¹⁹

The Pentecostal parallels are developing in a milieu that is much more complicated compared to Weber's times. The global political-economic landscape has undergone dramatic changes in the century that has passed since the publication of *The Protestant Ethic*. Modern, industrial capitalism was characterized by the systematic pursuit of efficiency and the accumulation of capital through the rationalization and refinement of production, communication, finance, feminine participation, and management. Today we are living in an age of global neoliberal capitalism which is a process distinguished by such novel phenomena as transnational production, expanding global monetary transactions, tension between the capital and nation-state, and erosion of the institutions of liberal democracy.²⁰

New social and economic surroundings triggered a corresponding discourse explaining the process of the secularization of Protestant ethics into the capitalist worldliness. Max Weber himself

¹⁷ Berger, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Kirby, *op. cit.*, p.13.

acknowledged that already in the eighteenth-century Protestant “religious roots died out.”²¹ “The intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God “had given way to a full-fledged rationalism” of sober economic virtue and “utilitarian worldliness.”²² The confidence of Puritans in their capacity to withstand the “temptations of wealth” helped material goods to gain “an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men.”²³

Crucially, this did not entail the straightforward disappearance of the “specific type of conduct” that had been developed in seventeenth-century ascetic Protestantism as a means of securing proof of election, but rather its endurance as the principal element in a spirit of capitalism. There was an elective affinity between this profoundly “non-ethical” ethic and the impersonal form of capitalism that was ascendant. From this point onwards, prescriptions for rational conduct would be directed away from “the world beyond” and towards another impersonal authority, namely the “fateful force” of capitalism.²⁴

In other words, they were now “ends in themselves” in an autonomous and secular world characterized by “pure utilitarianism.”²⁵ It is in this regard that Weber²⁶ made his famous observation that those of his era now inhabit the wholly impersonal “steel casing” of modern capitalism, with the spirit of religious asceticism necessary for its emergence having “escaped,” and the individual enjoined to “rational conduct based on the idea of calling” without any grounding in “the highest spiritual and cultural values.”²⁷

Clash of Values: Religious Traditionalism or Modernization of Georgia?

In an atmosphere of the religious renaissance in Georgia in the past two decades, different trends from the history of Orthodox thought are being revived, including pre-revolutionary Church theology, patristics, Russian religious philosophy, and debates from Russian émigré-theology. As to contemporary borrowings and inspiration, Greece became an important source of theological thought, but mainly for the younger generation of independent religious thinkers. Russia here is mentioned because, for two hundred years, the Georgian Church has been an integral part of

²¹ Weber, (2001), p.119

²² Ibid.

²³ ibid. pp.117-118, 124.

²⁴ Weber (2001), p. xxxi.

²⁵ Ibid., 125.

²⁶ Ibid., 122-124.

²⁷ Anne Motley Hallum. “Taking Stock and Building Bridges: Feminism, Women's Movements, and Pentecostalism in Latin America” *Latin American Research Review*, 2003, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 7.

Russian Orthodoxy. The autocephalous status of the Georgian Church was abolished by the Russian authorities in 1811, despite strong opposition in Georgia, and the Georgian Church was subjected to the synodical rule of the Russian Orthodox Church. From 1817, the metropolitan bishop, or *exarch*, in charge of the church was an ethnic Russian, with no knowledge of the Georgian language and culture.²⁸ The Georgian liturgy was suppressed and replaced with Church Slavonic, and publication of religious literature in Georgian cut short and was heavily censored. As a result, the development of religious education and scholarly theology moved to Russia. When Georgia declared secession from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Georgian Orthodox Church got its nominal sovereignty, but the real independence in theology, as well as Church politics, is still to be achieved.

Most of the Orthodox churches, living in liberal democratic societies, are free to worship God and live the fullness of the Orthodox tradition in its diverse ethnic and cultural expressions. However, the freedom that liberal democratic societies ascribe to their citizens generates an unprecedented pluralism of voluntary communities and lifestyles, which has challenged the central role that the Orthodox Church played in the moral formation in traditional societies. The attitudes and sensibilities that the Orthodox churches are called to develop within the contextual realities of liberal democracies are highly contested issues among Orthodox theologians everywhere, and Georgia is not an exception.

The alarmist attitude, fearing the capitulation of the Orthodox Church to liberal sensibilities, is probably one of the main concerns of the church. The Georgian church to a certain extent following the Russian trend has adopted an adversarial, activist posture against the modernizing liberal societies, proposing defensive demarcations of radical separation between Orthodoxy and other Christian churches, other religions, and liberal democracy in general. It seeks to construct the identity of the Orthodox Church in opposition to all who are not Orthodox, espousing a stringent, hierarchical, authoritarian, and exclusivist vision of what the Orthodox Church should be, to maintain the purity of Orthodoxy.

Probably the two hundred years long suppression of the national spirit of Georgia reduced the Church to a cultural agency that legitimates for its members the prevailing social realities. Informants to this author unanimously insisted on the exclusive role of the Orthodox Church in

²⁸ Stephen H. Jr. Rapp. *Georgian Christianity*. The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity. (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), pp. 137–155.

preserving the Georgian nation and its culture. In Georgia, where religion still appears strong, it does so largely because it constitutes a form of cultural defense. It is used by ethnic or national groups to protect their identity from external threats. This has proved to be the case in Northern Ireland, in Poland where it aided resistance to Communism, and in Yugoslavia where it has enhanced the cultural distinctiveness of conflicting ethnic factions. Religion remains resilient since it provides a means of coping with the cultural transition. It is a way of dealing with social and political change.

Among intellectuals interested in the theological and political stance of the Church the belief dominates that the political dependence of the Orthodox Church of Georgia on the Russian Patriarchate in Moscow is a Russian soft power project stemming from Georgian patriarch Ilia's II life-long collaboration with the Soviet secret service, the KGB. In the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, the Patriarchate of the GOC is carefully avoiding any comments, thus balancing between expressed sympathies towards Ukraine of its flock and loyalty to the Russian Church establishment by supporting Moscow's aggression, said the social activist, the former ambassador of Georgia in Denmark, Gigi Gigiadze.²⁹ In this respect, it is safe to say that the Orthodox Church of Georgia itself is in the process of a slow and painful transition.

The critics are aware that the Georgian Orthodox Church is a composition of several groups and individuals, rather than an entirely homogenous entity. Three groups with distinct positions operate inside the Georgian Church. They are (1) Conservative pro-Russian majority, (2) Relative liberals, and (3) Byzantine conservatives, following a social pattern of contemporary Greece.³⁰ Interview partners note that the pro-Russian faction dominates both theological discourse and the Church's political stance. The rest of the Church ecclesiastics—the “Relative liberals” and “Byzantine conservatives” --represent a weak minority.

To determine Georgia's believers' attitude towards economic and social modernization, we used Berger's checklist of characteristics that constitutes Weber's ethic of inner-worldly asceticism. They are:

1. A disciplined attitude toward work (not just hard work, which one finds in many very un-Protestant places, but what Weber understood as the “rationalization” of work).

²⁹ Gigiadze, 04/2/2022, personal communication.

³⁰ Ibid.

2. An equally disciplined attitude to other spheres of social life, notably the family (Weber's notion of "life-discipline").
3. A deferral of instant consumption, resulting in saving and, eventually, capital accumulation and social mobility (what psychologists call "delayed gratification").
4. And all of this in the context of a worldview at least relatively free of magic (Weber's "disenchantment of the world").
5. A strong interest in the education of children (originally based on the Protestant insistence that the Bible should be read by everyone).

Concerning the first point of the checklist, the question to our informants was as follows: "Does the Church insist on a disciplined and rational attitude toward work and law?" Practically all the interview partners answered positively, making a certain impression that the Church is promoting Weberian values. Confronting these results with the point of the critics of the Orthodox Church, it turned out, that the sermons did not contain a Weberian theological background.³¹ Here dominates the perception that the relations between Orthodoxy and economy constitute what Vasilios Makrides formulated in the following way: "Across Orthodox history, examples of economic success among certain individuals, groups or local communities are not unusual, showing that Orthodox beliefs are not necessarily detrimental to entrepreneurial spirit."³² In opposition to Makrides's point it is obvious from already mentioned European monastic history, that occasional, or local economic success doesn't shape systematically the society as a whole and do not create religious and social preconditions to change the mind or conduct of its members.

Other related issues were also hooked to Berger's checklist's first point. One such question was about the comparative efficiency of entrepreneurs belonging to different Christian Churches, namely Orthodox, Protestant, or unbelievers. Only two of thirty informants stated that "religion is an obstacle to business," but all others agreed that the most efficient are those belonging to Georgian Orthodox, but not to Russian Orthodox, Protestant, or Catholic churches. The only rational explanation here is religious nationalism, conviction that the Georgian Orthodoxy is the best one. When the question was repeated differently, namely "is there any difference in the efficiency of an Orthodox compared to Protestant business leader," eighty percent of informants answered that there is no difference, thus contradicting the previous statement. Notably, the

³¹ Priest Giorgi ...06/13/2013, personal communication.

³² Makrides, "Orthodox Christianity and Economic Development: A Critical Overview," p. 3.

interview partners were led by two different reasons or even paradigms of approach to the questions. The first is religious and emotional, dictated by the conviction of the superiority of one's Church, and the second is rational, based on common sense and everyday experience.

The same outcome was noted for the second point of Berger's checklist, dealing with "an equally disciplined attitude to other spheres of social life, notably the family." Life discipline issues revealed the same attitude: only two of the participants of the focus group expressed different points whereas the rest approved of the interest of the Church in family issues. Berger's approach was dictated by Latin American machismo, which has some common features compared with Georgian masculinity. The main issue here is dominance in the family, including tolerance of extra-marital sex of men compared to the subordinate position of women in the family. There is no coincidence that the Pentecostal Awakening sometimes is defined as a successive feminist movement and husbands' domestication.

The third point of the questionnaire, "a deferral of instant consumption, resulting in saving and, eventually, capital accumulation and social mobility," revealed even less clarity. The answers of focus group representatives gave the same answers in the same proportion. Yet, priests' sermons, in cases where they are referring to general Christian ethics, are dealing with modesty, humility, solidarity, and help to those in need. But this is not the systematic teaching about Christian ascetics, as it was understood by Puritans in England or Pentecostals in Puerto Rico. Therefore, additional statements, namely "Only reasonable laws must be kept, but stupid regulations are not worthy of keeping," were supported by 70 percent of respondents, while 30 percent chose the statement: "To keep the law is a matter of one's dignity." No one selected the statement: "All the state-approved regulations should be kept because the law must be kept despite probable losses." In other words, the dignity of the Church was once more supported by the informers, but, when the practical dimension was at stake, legal nihilism appeared.

When the same subject was discussed with the experts on religion, it was mentioned that the Church has no social and economic vision and therefore is concentrated on certain ritualistic and communalistic traditions. Consequently, there is no social teaching of the Church although the Russian "Mother" Church published "The Fundamentals of the Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church" in 2008. Local theologians do not remember that this sort of subject was ever presented in the curriculum of theological seminaries or the Theological Academy.³³

³³ Mindiashvili, 6/10/2022, Tserodze, 6/06/2022, personal communication.

In the same way, Georgian Orthodoxy exposed itself without concrete proposals for the structuring of the economy. In economic matters, the contemporary Orthodox ideal has been to seek a balance between wealth and poverty, between the concrete needs of the individual and the wellbeing of the entire community. In the perception of Orthodox believers of Georgia, their version of Christianity does not uphold an economic system which rewards laziness and encourages the poor to depend upon handouts from the state. Productive labor looks like a necessary, divinely ordained part of the human experience. Approximately ninety percent of the Georgian Orthodox respondents surprisingly enough supported a “Weberian “Protestant” attitude toward honest labor, strict morality in the questions dealing with labor ethics, and honesty towards the property of the company they are working for.

Irinej Dobrijević generalizes the modern shift in Orthodoxy, saying that “the contemporary Orthodox emphasis is upon self-sufficiency, ideally promoting a solid “middle class,” neither seeking existence at the level of mere subsistence, nor enjoying excess; deriding an unfettered, unregulated capitalist system (*laissez-faire*), while advocating a socially responsible free-market system,” as it was formulated by Makrides.³⁴ This approach can be called the economic concordance of the believers and non-believers of the Georgian society, but it is in no way the merit of the Church as the organized religion.

The fourth point of Berger’s questionnaire is dealing with Weber’s “disenchantment of the world,” or a worldview, that is at least relatively free of magic. As to the definition of the Church itself, according to the logic of Weber, it can clarify the perception of believers about the Church: is it a social institution and therefore the actor of social change, or it is a mystical entity, designed by God for moral perfection of humans for the sake of eternity, and therefore passive onlooker of the society in transition.

Here the respondents are strictly divided between lay believers and those theologians and experts on religion who are trying to influence the Church’s theological and social milieu. Approximately half of the interview partners representing the lay majority were unanimous that the Church is “a mystical union of believers with God, living and deceased Church members.” About one quarter believe that the Church is “something, which is impossible to define.” The rest

³⁴ Irinej Dobrijević, “‘The Orthodox Spirit and the Ethic of Capitalism’: A Case Study on Serbia and Montenegro and the Serbian Orthodox Church.” *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies*, 2006: Volume 20, Number 1, p. 5.

exposed either the point that “the Church is organized religion” or had “no idea.” The informal discussions with churchgoers revealed their inclination mainly towards magic and to a lesser degree mysticism.

The interviews clarified the dominant perception of the Church as a mystical entity. As to intellectual opposition, they clearly stated that the church is an organized conservative religion with strong political interests. The church is trying to minimize the ongoing social modernization but has no clear vision for future development.³⁵

Concerning the fifth point, the informal questioning revealed that Bible reading is not the common virtue of Georgian Orthodox believers. The already mentioned magical approach (mainly healing) is replacing Weber’s inner asceticism, and the hagiographic literature is more popular than the Scripture. The critics stressed the need for reform in public education and the declining religiosity of society. According to “Caucasus Barometer,” the weekly attendance of religious services decreased from 18 percent in 2015 to 13 percent in 2021.³⁶

In contrast to the relative low Church attendance, religious education is promoted mainly informally by teachers and school administration because formally the Church and school in Georgia are separated.³⁷ At the same time, religious education is not of the sort which is suggested by Berger. The National Curriculum states: “Electives more specifically connected to Christianity include: The New Testament, The History of the Apostolic Church, the teachings of the Apostles, The Divine Law, The Holy Book of the Old Testament.”³⁸ The religious instruction in private schools “teaches the Divine Law, the history of religion, the Georgian polyphonic chant. Under the guidance of the teacher, the pupil is involved in the liturgical process, which implies: the help of the priest during the service, the baking of the bread for the sacrament, the preparation of the church candles, and the passing of the sacrament.”³⁹ To sum up, the education promoted by Church does not lead to the inner transformation of a student towards social and economic change, but introduces him/her to the Church’s textual and doxological tradition.

³⁵ Guruli, Gigiadze, Mindiashvili, Zviadadze, Grdzeldze, e. a. 04/2/2022-6/24/2022, personal communications.

³⁶ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2021ge/RELSERV/> Accessed 6/23/22.

³⁷ Guruli, Gigiadze, Mindiashvili 04/2/2022-6/24/2022, personal communications.

³⁸ Ketevan Gurchiani. Religious Education at Schools in Georgia // Religious Education at Schools in Europe...2020,p.111.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340457056_Religious_Education_at_Schools_in_Georgia/stats
Accessed 6/23/2022.

³⁹ Ibid., 109.

Georgia in Transition: Multiple Religious Belonging?

To explain the contradictions of the religious mind among Georgian believers, and the economic and social behavior of any Orthodox society, a proper definition of religion is necessary. A common approach, so-called “substantive” definition of religion, explains it in terms of a belief in a higher power such as a God or other supernatural forces. For example: “Religion refers to the existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life.”⁴⁰

If we change the “substantive” definition with “functional” (which tends to have broad, more inclusive definitions of religion) we can get better answers to our questions. The functional definition explains religion in terms of the functions it performs for individuals and society, for example, “religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people copes with the ultimate problems of human existence.”⁴¹ We may explain the matter in other words, saying that not every set of beliefs and practices is called religion, but such a set works as a parallel religion. Contrary to the sixteenth century, when religion was the only worldview shared by most of the society, contemporary human society has an alternative system of thought called “secularism,” which shapes human conduct in the same way as a religion. Secularism is a communal belief system that rejects or neglects the metaphysical aspects of the supernatural, commonly associated with traditional religion, instead of placing typical religious qualities in earthly entities.

Technological advances reduce religious perceptions of the world. This has given individuals a greater sense of control over the natural environment and less need to resort to supernatural explanations or remedies. The increasing worldliness of the churches, the decline of the political significance of religion, and the complexities of pluralism all point to the diminishing of the social significance of the traditional religion. It is a way of dealing with social change. However, in the overall long-term, while the global trend is clearly toward a scientific worldview, science itself becomes a form of religion. Comte in the 18th century fervently argued that science would emerge as the new religion, while a belief in the supernatural declined. Religious conviction has been replaced by faith in science and technology. The latter has become a form of religion, which provides a new order of meaning.⁴²

⁴⁰ Robert Robertson. *The Sociological Interpretation of Religion*, (New York, Schocken Books, 1970), p. 47.

⁴¹ Revise Sociology//<https://revisesociology.com/2018/08/12/what-is-religion/> [accessed 6/20/2022]

⁴² Stephen Hunt. *Religion in Western Society*. (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2002), pp. 27-28.

From the point of practical dimension, it means that the Orthodox population of Georgia is practicing a sort of multiple religious belonging: (1) the Orthodox teaching, and its traditions and (2) the secular worldview taught in school and spread by literature and mass media. Additionally, the social conduct of the contemporary Georgian society in many ways is still following the “[m]oral code of the builder of communism,” composed in 1961 as one of the basic Communist Party documents. It was widely taught in schools and propagated as the basis of Soviet morals.⁴³ Its twelve rules are copied from the Ten Commandments. Unlike the Ten Commandments, the rules of the Code were not directly regulating the individual conduct; they were stated as the rules of attitude. For example, the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" loosely corresponds to the Code's call for "[m]utual respect in a family, concern about the upbringing of children." "Moral code of the builder of communism" interpreted the Ten Commandments in the spirit of Protestant ethics which looked more secular. Another notable distinction is that the Moral Code speaks in terms of the relation of a person to society, rather than in terms of personal virtues. For example, the "Do not steal" may be loosely matched to "[c]oncern of everyone about the preservation and multiplication of the common wealth." Here we can detect the roots of "Protestant ethics" when we search for values-driven economic and social conduct in Georgian society. Social inertia is strong in Georgia in different respects, but the propagation of moral principles nowadays is ascribed not to the Communist past, but the Church's merit. The double loyalty to two opposite value systems is a powerful sign that the Georgian Orthodoxy is on track for a European future.

⁴³ *Moral Code of the Builder of Communism*, adopted at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961, as part of the new Third Program.