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Orthodoxy and European Modernity: Georgian Orthodox Church,
Market Economy, and Social Message"**

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A Response to Leons Gabriels Taivans’ “Between Oriental Orthodoxy and European Modernity: Georgian Orthodox Church, Market Economy, and Social Message”¹

By Paul Crego, Ph.D.

This response is to an article which attempted to say something about the Orthodox Church in Georgia by means of relating the religious attitude of this Orthodox Church with the Protestant ethic, mainly as described by Max Weber and Peter Berger. Weber’s major thesis was that the Protestant ethic, associated with the predestination of Calvinism, understood economic success as a sign of God’s grace and salvation. Prof. Taivans, in his article, has compared oranges with apples. When he finds a Protestant ethic in the Republic of Georgia, he has imposed this idea on a society that is largely innocent of this system of thought. In my opinion there is also an overgeneralization in terms of privileging Calvinism and its theology and ethics as somehow prototypical of Protestantism.

In the section titled “Labor as Punishment,” the text is an overgeneralization of the history of Orthodoxy, especially in describing the isolation of various churches. It is not correct that the Church in Georgia was cut off from Orthodoxy in general. The monastic centers of Orthodoxy continued to be important areas of connection and theological exchange: Jerusalem’s Holy Cross Monastery, Mt. Sinai’s St. Katherine’s Monastery, Petritsi Monastery in Bulgaria, various monasteries in Constantinople, and perhaps the greatest connection at Mt. Athos in Greece.

It is also not fully accurate that Constantinople was cut off because of Islam. Yes, it made things more difficult, but there were ongoing discussions of many sorts with Rome and other places in the West that continued even after the Ottomans assumed power in Constantinople.

The history of the Orthodox Church in Georgia is also misconstrued when the following is said, “Russia here is mentioned because, for two hundred years, the Georgian Church has been an integral part of Russian Orthodoxy.” Taivans has neglected to mention the struggle for the restoration of Georgian autocephaly that was achieved in 1917 and how that worked out during Soviet times and after. While it is true that the Russian Church before and after the fall of the Soviet Union has sought to influence the Georgian Church, it is not so dominated as the author

¹ The article was published in *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*, (July 2022) XLII, 6. 76-94.

would have us believe. There is a lot of discussion at the current time about the nature of Russian Orthodox influence. While there are some in the Republic of Georgia, for example, who might follow the Patriarch of Moscow's statements on Ukraine, I believe, for the most part, that the current thinking in Georgia has certainly moved away from its relationship with Moscow.

Judging by the limited resources that Taivans called upon to form an idea of the Georgian Church, I can understand how he came to believe this. It sounds very much like what one would expect from the educated classes of Georgia. He repeats what is often heard by researchers who gather information from a small number of people and who do not have a broad view of who the large majority of the Orthodox people really are.

Further, Taivans makes the following statement, "... it was mentioned that the Church has no social and economic vision, and therefore is concentrated on certain ritualistic and communalistic traditions." The social and economic views of the Orthodox Church in Georgia are certainly conservative, but that does not mean that they are non-existent or somehow only to be derived from Russian thinking. Patriarch Ilia II has written and spoke frequently on these issues. There are collections that specifically address social and economic issues. For example (original title in Georgian; translation is mine): *Georgia's Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II on current questions of social-economic development* and *Georgia's Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II on science, education, culture and art*. I expect that Professor Taivans' informants may not be well acquainted with these texts.

Overall, Prof. Taivans' article is an incomplete view of the Orthodox Church in Georgia. He and other interested persons could benefit from wider reading and a greater and more diverse contacts with Orthodox Christians in Georgia. I am also not sure whether Max Weber's or Peter Berger's writings are a good framework for the discussion of Georgian Orthodoxy's relation to economic and social issues. This is certainly true when the number and types of informants are relatively limited. A dialogue with Prof. Taivans and other interested readers would be of benefit to the Georgian Orthodox Church.