

*The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.*



The Georgian martyr of Auschwitz of whom these words are spoken is the Holy Martyr, Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, canonised in 1995 by the Georgian Orthodox Apostolic Church – one of the most ancient Churches of the Eastern Orthodox family of Churches.

These two themes – discovering historical truth and preaching God’s truth – are eloquently exemplified in the remarkable life and the heroic death of this

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*The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.*

little-known saint of whom it is stated in the documentary film about him<sup>2</sup> that he is forgotten in his homeland of Georgia and unknown in his adopted land of Poland.

Certainly in his lifetime's work as a brilliant academic he researched, discovered, taught and published historical truth and likewise – for example, in his devoted and exemplary labours as founder and pastor of the Georgian parish in Paris - he preached God's truth. But he did more than that – he brought the two together in his own life and finally as a martyr in one of the

*The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.*

of Georgian monasticism. Having been awarded a doctorate, he studied in Brussels and at the Catholic University of Louvain in 1927. He even came to the U.K. for two months, working at the libraries of the British Museum and at the Bodleian at Oxford. He then taught Armenian and Georgian at the University of Bonn and became increasingly known through his contribution to academic journals. He became one of the leading experts on Christianity in the Middle East , and Georgian Studies gained a new momentum as a result of his work for his Ph.D. thesis.

But it was not only academic matters that Father Grigol was learning. He became seriously ill in Bonn in 1930, and this illness was accompanied by a

*The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.*

the demands of parish life, but by 1933 his aspiration of becoming a lecturer in theology was realised when Metropolitan Dionizy (Waledy ski) - Primate of the Polish Orthodox Church, offered him the position of assistant professor and deputy director of the patristics seminary at the School of Orthodox Theology at the University of Warsaw. An important part of his theological vision was that Orthodox theology has important eastern Christian roots as well as Greek and Latin sources. He served the Polish Orthodox Church with devotion, lived in a modest apartment in Warsaw and gave time to help less advantaged students, and in particular, those with little means. By the outbreak of World War 2, Father Grigol belonged to numerous national and international academic organisations.<sup>7</sup> In 1934, he was elevated to the dignity of Archimandrite at the Greek Cathedral of St. Sophia in London.

His theology reflects his ability to listen effectively to historical events and especially to human hearts. Reflecting the words of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, " the glory of God is a human being fully alive" , he articulated the belief that one becomes an integrated human being only when one fulfils God's calling in life. Furthermore, only such a being can become a peacemaker. He speaks of " recognising the mystery of God in the face of others" . To Father Grigol, integrated man is authentic, and actualises the peace of God within himself. Accordingly, such a person can indeed become a peacemaker.

The late Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (1914-2003) who ordained the present writer wrote: " " No one has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friend " - these words characterized the ideal of the Gospel and was shown as the only precise Gospel way of life. Too often are the words of the Saviour retold as to how a Christian should die. But in this case, it refers to life

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- Member of the Polish team at the World Association of Friendly Co-operation of the Churches
- Member of the Polish branch of Practical Christianity ("The Stockholm Movement")
- Member of " Anglican and Eastern Church Association" (London)
- Rector of the Georgian Orthodox parish of St. Nino in Paris
- Editor of the academic annual "Dshvari vathisa" (Cross of grape-vine), Paris
- Chaplain to the Georgian immigration in Poland
- Member of the committee on translation of liturgical books into Polish
- Honorary member of the Orthodox Brotherhood of Theologians in Poland
- Chairman of the Circle of Students of Orthodox Theology, Warsaw University and head of the scientific section
- Member of the Polish Society of Oriental Studies

*The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.*

itself: 'to lay down one's life', to donate, devote to the neighbour. Above all, it means to live for Him, to live a decent day-to-day life, to live with persistence, to shoulder the burden of life - the whole life – and not just your own but strangers' too (if that word can ever be used because, after all, we can never be 'strangers' in relation to the others, as we, without exception, are all 'kindred'). And when one's love ends in death by sacrificing one's life, then that is a triumph and victory of life."



Such a life Archimandrite Grigol did indeed live, and as he approached his destiny of becoming a martyr we see even more clearly the themes of service and sacrifice being articulated in his life.

Father Józef Tischner, writing about sacrifice, observes " the essence of sacrifice is a gift. The point is to offer oneself and to retrieve oneself in that gift: 'he who loses himself saves himself' ".<sup>8</sup>

After September 1939 Father Grigol continued to live in Warsaw, and in 1942 was arrested in his apartment by the Gestapo. It appears that he had been

<sup>8</sup> J. Tischner [ ], "Znak" Publishers, Cracow 1999, pp. 93-94.

*The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.*

denounced. He was imprisoned first at the Pawiak prison in Warsaw. Some details of his imprisonment were discovered as recently as 1986 in the archives of the Orthodox Metropolitan of Warsaw. Interrogated and beaten, The Very Reverend Archimandrite Grigol was then sent to Auschwitz, in mid-November. After eighteen days - on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1942 - he was killed.

We know that in 1945 two people came to the Warsaw Metropolia who were also in this concentration camp, Poles. These two people said that everyone should know - and that they are ready to confirm - that Grigol Peradze in this concentration camp took the guilt of the team, that he stole bread, which he did not actually take. And for this the guards killed him.<sup>9</sup>

Just as a brutal war brought that most gentle and gifted soul, Saint Grigol



*Orthodox Church of St Grigol Peradze, Warsaw*

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Page 7:

Icon of The Holy Martyr Grigol Peradze at the Church of the Holy Protection, Blaenau Ffestiniog. Iconographer – David Kidasheli of Tbilisi.

Pages 10-12

Appendix: 'The circumstances of the Martyrdom of St. Grigol Peradze'

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Appendix



