

The Holy Archimandrite Grigol Peradze, Martyr of Auschwitz.



*‘Discovering historical truth and preaching God’s truth about humankind are closely connected themes in the work of the Georgian martyr of Auschwitz’.*¹

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

¹ *‘The Vision of integrated man in the homilies of St. Grigol Peradze’.* Father Artur Aleksiejuk, Ph.D., Warsaw Theological Academy.

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little-known saint of whom it is stated in the documentary film about him² 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 darkest periods of modern history.

The son of an Orthodox priest, Archimandrite Grigol (Gregory) Peradze was born on 31st of August (Old Style Calendar) 1899 in the village of Bakurtsikhe in the Kakheti province of Georgia.

Having graduated with distinction from the Theological Seminary of Tbilisi in 1918, and revolution having happened in Georgia, he went on to study at the Faculty of Theology at the Tbilisi State University, and after some time, the Catholicosate Council of Georgia, chaired by Catholicos Patriarch Ambrosi I³, was sent to study theology in Berlin. The Church wanted him to return to Georgia eventually, to contribute to the life of the Church. He studied under very distinguished scholars in Berlin, concentrating on theology and oriental languages. He eventually knew 15 languages⁴, learning Polish very quickly at a later stage in his life.

In due course, his friend and patron Dr. Johannes Lepsius, the great German orientalist, had advised him to transfer to the University of Bonn, and he arrived there on the 29th of April 1925. He studied at the Faculty of Philosophy, focusing on the history of religion and improving his knowledge of oriental languages.

By 1926 he had received a doctorate for his work on St. George of the Holy Mountain – a work through which he contributed to a greater understanding

² *'In Search of the White Angel'* (*Kinikon Film Studio*). Polish film with English subtitles. youtube)

³ Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, 1921-1927. Church historian, researcher of primary Georgian sources. Opponent of Bolshevik rule in Georgia. Canonised by the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1995 as St. Ambrosi, the Confessor.

⁴ Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Greek, Latin, German, English, French, Danish and Polish as well as his native Georgian together with Russian and Old Church Slavonic.

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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 profound spiritual experience, after which he took monastic vows in the Greek cathedral in Paris, and was ordained a priest. He spoke of this profound spiritual experience in a poem entitled 'Cherubic Hymn' - a poem in which the themes of service and sacrifice are evident.

“And today I understood, today I experienced
An amazing joy and astonishing praise!
A sinful heart fluttered - full of blood offering itself in sacrifice!
Frozen consciousness, a tongue fallen silent, ...
Coldness overwhelmed the body, and then eternal warmth warmed it.
And I touched the sky like an arrow, and the earth which was under me.
The whole earth was then understandable, the vanity of humanity,
The root and meaning of human sin. ...
Then at that moment I heard a voice from heaven:
'Where are you going, O poor servant?
Stay with your people, become a bridge to heaven,
Don't measure the world with handfuls!
Love and care for it,
Find within it the plan of God!'”⁵

It is in Paris in 1931 that he founded the Georgian Parish of St. Nino, of which he became the priest. In the same year, he also began the publication of an academic annual "Jvari Vazisa" ("Cross of Vine"⁶), of which he was the editor and main contributor. By 1932 he resigned from teaching at Bonn because of

⁵ Grigol Peradze, *Hymn Cherubinów* [Cherubic Hymn] In *Dzieła zebrane* [Selected Works], v. 3, pg. 140-141

⁶ A reference to the Cross made of grape-vine which accompanied St. Nino (335 A.D.) as she evangelised Georgia.

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the demands of parish life, but by 1933 his aspiration of becoming a lecturer in theology was realised when Metropolitan Dionizy (Waledyński) - 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.⁷ 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.

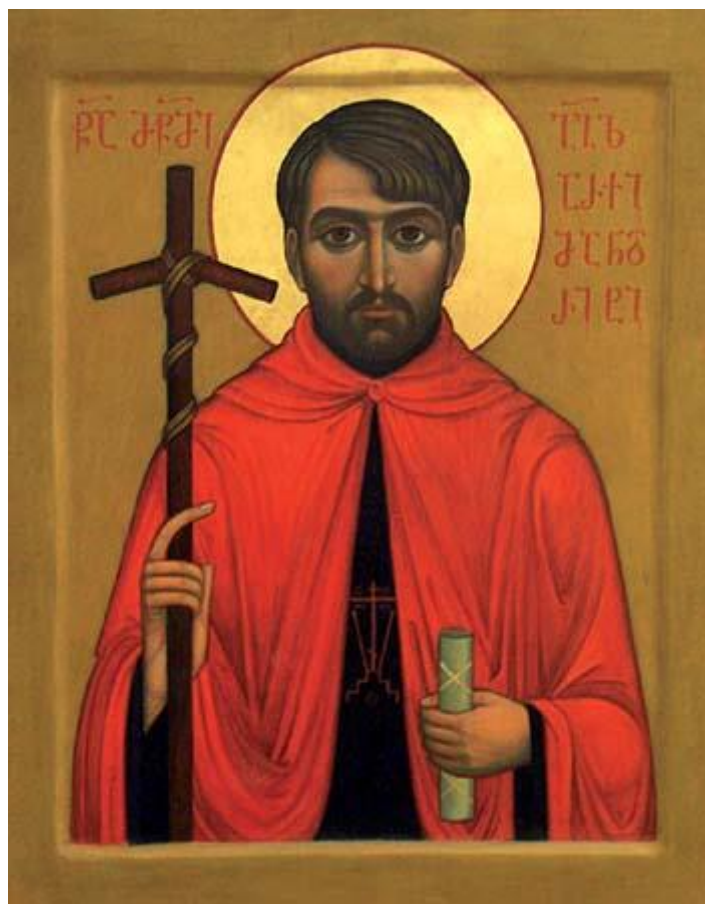
The late Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (1914-2003) who ordained the present writer wrote: "No one has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friend" - these words characterized the ideal of the Gospel and was shown as the only precise Gospel way of life. Too often are the words of the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

⁷ -Assistant Professor and Deputy Head of the Patristics Seminar in the School of Orthodox Theology at the University of Warsaw

- Member of the Oriental Studies Commission at Warsaw Scientific Society
- Member of the Commission on "Faith and Order" (Geneva)
- 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

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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."



Icon of St. Grigol by Mrs. Ludmila Lubach

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’”.⁸

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

⁸ J. Tischner, *Ksiądz na manowcach* [‘Priest Led Astray’], “Znak” Publishers, Cracow 1999, pp. 93-94.

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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 6th, 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.⁹

Just as a brutal war brought that most gentle and gifted soul, Saint Grigol Peradze to martyrdom in the country that had welcomed him and had become his home, now another brutal war brings millions of refugees from Ukraine to Poland where it is no surprise that they are welcomed with compassion and open hearts.

In 2006, a church bearing Saint Grigol's name was founded in Warsaw. Not surprisingly, it is a church that is popular with students. St. Grigol is a contemporary saint. Like them, he was in academia; he walked on the same streets as they do, caught the same trams. The Rector of the church is Archpriest Father Henryk Paprocki who was a consultant in the making of the documentary 'In Search of the White Angel'.

In Białystok here is another Church dedicated to St. Grigol. Białystok is one of the places at which the Ukrainian refugees arrive in Poland.

In these dark times, with war raging on the continent of Europe, the life and death of St. Grigol Peradze shine in darkness – the same light that the existence of two churches in Poland bearing his name proclaims; the same light that radiates in the compassion and openness of heart that were so much a part of him and that the people of Poland daily proclaim by their not counting the cost as they welcome one wave after another of refugees from Ukraine.

"There are no set boundaries and contradictions for the eternal human soul. It exists in search of God and His eternal truth and in the pursuit of that truth in daily life ..." - Saint Grigol Peradze

Tad Deiniol Blaenau Ffestiniog 24 : 03 : 2022

⁹ See pages 10-12 Appendix: 'The circumstances of the Martyrdom of St. Grigol Peradze.'

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Orthodox Church of St Grigol Peradze, Warsaw

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

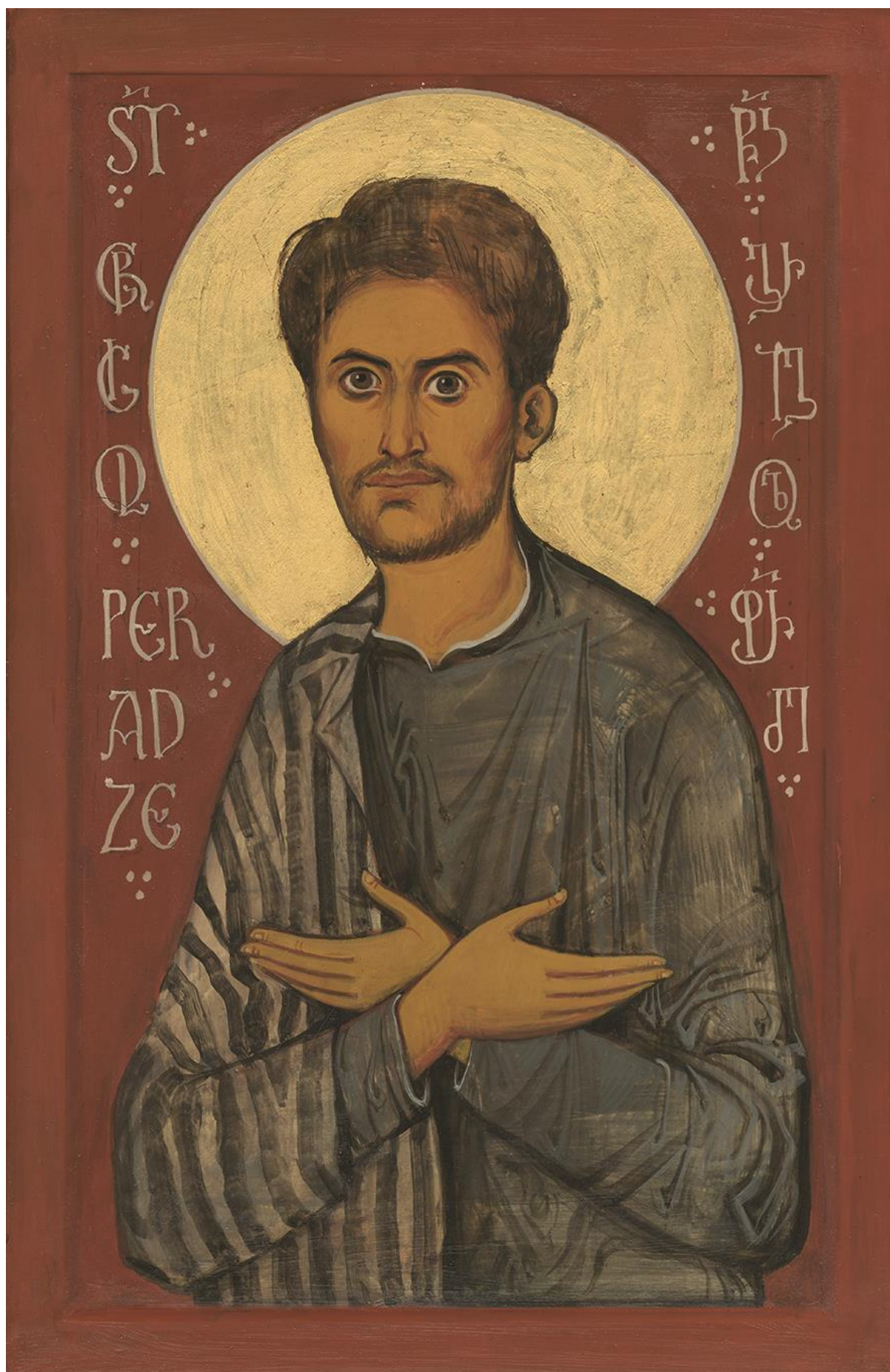
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Appendix: 'The circumstances of the Martyrdom of St. Grigol Peradze'

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Appendix

The circumstances of the Martyrdom of St. Grigol Peradze.

Archimandrite Gregor Peradze was arrested for sheltering and aiding Jews and other victims of the fascist persecutions. He was incarcerated at Pawiak Prison in Warsaw, and deported to Auschwitz at the beginning of November.

In the camp, the guards drove everyone out from 3 barracks absolutely naked, forcing them to stay in the below-freezing temperatures until someone confessed to having stolen bread. This was a completely false accusation. Saint Gregory decided to take the blame, thus saving innocent prisoners from freezing to death. The guards let loose the dogs on the martyr, but the dogs did not touch him. Then the guards poured gasoline over him, and put him on fire. Then they said, "Poles, go warm yourselves around him, your intercessor."

According to the official German documentation, Gregory Peradze died on December 6, 1942 [November 23, old style], at 4:45 in the afternoon.

Germans had a so-called 'Death Book' where they kept in writing all deaths - how and why people were killed.

This 'Death Book' was taken to Moscow after Auschwitz was liberated and was kept at the KGB archives. When in 1991 this book was returned to Poland, the pages of year 1942 from 6th December until the end of December were torn out...

The Polish Metropolitan Dionisius¹⁰ received the notice from Auschwitz about the death of Archimandrite Gregor Peradze. The letter was indicating only the date and exact time of his death.

Other information about his death was sent secretly by underground telegram wire from Auschwitz to London.

In the documentary film, directors recorded His Beatitude Basil I (Doroszkiewicz) the Metropolitan of Warsaw and All Poland of the Church of

¹⁰ Metropolitan Dionizy (Waledyński) - Primate, at the time, of the Polish Orthodox Church, and well-known to the Holy Martyr who did not hesitate to visit the Metropolitan imprisoned by the regime.

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Poland from 1970 to 1998. His Beatitude Basil I had been St. Grigor Peradze's student.

He tells the story which he learned from the door-keeper of an orphanage, which was under the patronage of the Polish Orthodox Church in the district of Wola, Warsaw. (In his will, St. Grigol Peradze left the money from all his possessions to this orphanage).

Two former prisoners, who, after being liberated from Auschwitz, visited the Metropolitan church in the Wola district and told the priest, deacon and the door-keeper (who were at that moment in the church), that they had come to deliver the message to the Polish Orthodox Church to know how Archimandrite Grigol Peradze was killed. They told the story written above.

The door-keeper became the only person who learned this story by himself, since on the second day the Germans killed the priest, the deacon, all children and care-takers of the orphanage. The door-keeper was sent somewhere at the time of killing and only he survived. This door-keeper told this story to Bishop Basil I after Bishop returned from prison himself.

In this documentary, called 'In Search of the White Angel' Bishop Basil I himself tells this story.

Ms Tamar Dularidze together with the Jerzy Lubach is the Director of '[In Search of the White Angel](#)' - the documentary film about the Holy Martyr, Archimandrite Grigol Peradze.

While working on the Documentary, Ms. Tamar Dularidze was researching all the materials, letters, archive papers, including the secret archive papers in connection with St. Grigol Peradze. According to her statement, she herself was attending the Church Council in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta, Georgia in 1995 when Archimandrite Grigol Peradze was canonized. Her accounts regarding St. Grigol's Life and Martyrdom were used at this Holy Council.

Complementing and explaining information available in the public domain, Ms Dularidze herself provided additional information on the evening of 23rd March 2022 to a learned Georgian contact of Tad Deiniol in response to an enquiry he had addressed to the mutual friend. The notes above concerning the

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martyrdom incorporate most valuable information that Ms Dularidze has provided.

Ms Dularidze added that the allusion to going in to the gas chamber in place of a Jewish man with a large family was a mix-up with the story of another martyr - the Catholic priest Maximilian Maria Kolbe.

The date of the commemoration of the Saint is 6th December (23rd November, Old Style).