Universal Culture, Ecumenicism, and the Classics: Two Communications from The Republic of Georgia

Transcending the Limits of One's Native Culture

To the editors of *Fidelio,*
Dear ladies and gentlemen,

To the very interesting observations of Mrs. Zepp LaRouche about the relationship of the Classics and Romanticism in Eighteenth-Nineteenth century German literature, and to the parallel she draws with the current spiritual-intellectual situation in the world, I want to add two points.

First of all, I want to refer to the eternal and lawful circumstance, that *both* the forms of artistic expression, *and* the range of feelings and moods which they nourish, have a tendency to lose their sharpness and, consequently, to give rise to a striving towards something still more stimulating for the imagination, more unexpected, and even irrational. In this regard, the counterposition of German Romanticism to the German Classics is of the same order, as the decadent art of the late-Nineteenth/early-Twentieth century, and many other "rebel" departures from the Canon in the past and in the future. Secondly, it seems to me that this *psychological* factor in the departure from the Classics was not unique.

There is another factor at work in this phenomenon, in a more or less conscious form, and that has to do with *one's system of values.* Self-assertion and the assertion of one's principles and positions in the setting of one's native culture, within its limited framework, is not as high a value for the creative personality, as is self-assertion on an intercultural scale, as is the location of higher artistic and moral values in the setting of everything achieved, or not achieved, by humanity as a whole. With the passage of time, the artistic forms and the range of moods, which attain classical status within a given culture, as well as a culture's moral and social principles, are necessarily fitted into the framework of an establishment, or sometimes even just of one social layer or class. The creative personality, as well as its more or less creative audience, strives in its searching, to transcend the limits of this milieu, for the fruits of its search to be of genuinely universal significance (*allgemeingültig*), and to be adequate to the entire real wealth of human nature.

The farther the process of democratization proceeds in the world, with the globalization of a long list of relationships and problems, the closer become the contacts among cultures, and among social layers within the same culture; the less the individual's hereditary social characteristics shape his biography and, in particular, his world view, his moral choices and capacities, and, on the contrary, the more they are shaped by his personal qualities; —so much the stronger will be his striving to transcend the limits of his native culture, in the search for truth and for universally significant self-assertion in all areas of life, including in literature and art, on a global scale, i.e., under conditions of the absolutely free, unbiased competition of all possible approaches, tastes, and norms, from the norms of the higher intellectual elite, down to the norms of the so-called "bottom."

The impossibility of "returning" to the Classics in their initial form, should not mean an inevitable victory by the present "dark ages," i.e., the reign of incompetent "public opinion." It merely indicates that for humanity there is an inevitable process of seeking the above-mentioned harmonic, rational, and stable solutions, i.e., the search for a new or constantly renewed Classics, in the form of a stable equilibrium among the eternal, mutually contradictory principles in human nature, will take place on a broader intercultural basis.

—*Nodar Natadze, Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, October 2000*

The Three-Church Basilica Type in Georgia

The contemporary spirit is filled with multicultural and universal concepts, which regard all cultures as being equal. In other words, we need to enrich our own culture, and respect its minorities. Historical background may be useful in supporting this global idea. Georgia appears to be a good example, as a permanent recipient of different ethnic groups and confessions, treating them moderately. This article presents one of the specific expressions of this idea.

Three-church basilicas present, indeed, a very special architectural appearance, and they are by and large concentrated in Georgia. These churches were built mostly in the Sixth-Seventh centuries. Who needed three separate chambers in a basilica, which thus restricted the space for the faithful? Christianity is a teaching, and a teaching needs an auditorium, and an auditorium demands a large interior. Why, then, is the Georgian case so unusual? This paper deals with the problem of providing a functional explanation for the three-church basilica type.
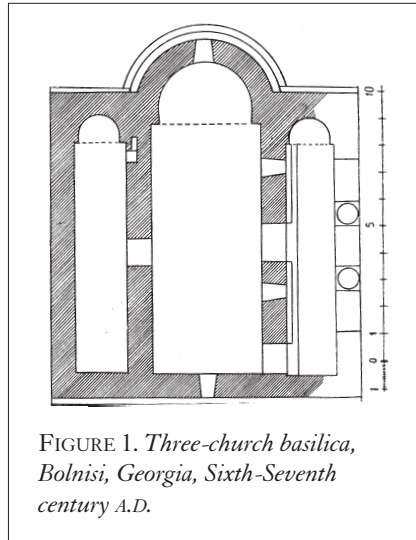

FIGURE 1. *Three-church basilica, Bolnisi, Georgia, Sixth-Seventh century A.D.*

Lines of columns are present in a normal basilica, whereas a three-church basilica is formed when the columns are replaced by interior walls [SEE Figure 1]. The purpose of these interior walls is still obscure.

We are greatly indebted to some brilliant contributions to this field. Ernst Badstübner[1] considers a Benedictine presbytery [SEE Figure 2] to be derived from an Eastern Christian, possibly even Georgian, prototype, with a Swiss example [SEE Figure 3] being a transitional stage. In the Middle Ages, the small chambers of a presbytery served either for storage of the holy relics, or as an assembling area for the monks before prayer. Badstübner wants to regard the Georgian division of a church in the same way. This comparison remains hypothetical, requiring many arguments to prove that the Benedictine rules were the same as those of Georgia. And, if the Georgian type had been adopted by the West *via* Byzantium and the Mediterranean, as Badstübner thinks, why don't we find any remnants in those places? Theoretically, a division of a church is more a necessity, than an influence.

We remain inclined to think that Georgia's Zaza Aleksidze was quite accurate in his conclusion, that those separated spaces in Georgia served for the different Christian confessions—Monophysite and Diophysite.[2] Indeed, there had been substantial confessional dualism in East Georgia (Iberia) in the Sixth-Seventh centuries, and those three-church basilicas could have served as an architectural compromise for the sake of unity. And Iberia was a special case of this solution. An additional three-church basilica comes from Egypt (Sixth-Seventh centuries), and is thought to be of Georgian origin.[3]

In the Sixth-Seventh centuries, Iberia, being a traditional ally of Byzantium, was badly threatened by the [Iranian] Sassanids, who made their attempt to
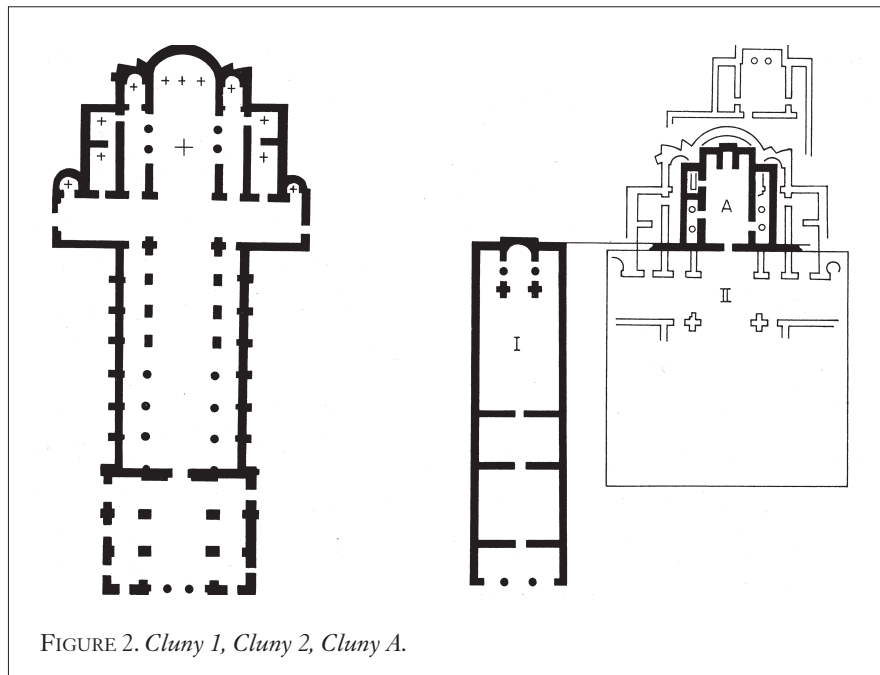

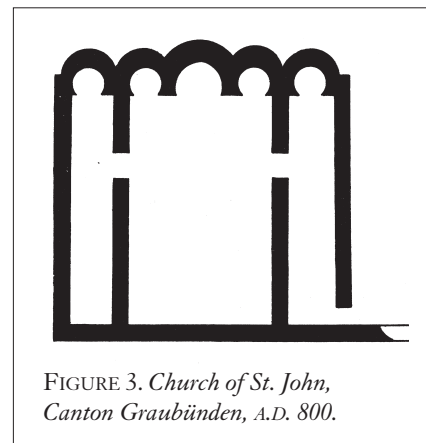FIGURE 2. *Cluny 1, Cluny 2, Cluny A.*

FIGURE 3. *Church of St. John, Canton Graubünden, A.D. 800.*

build an Asiatic empire, and who demanded that the Caucasian range be considered the outer boundary of their political influence. The Iranians supported the Monophysites, whereas the Georgians wished to be Diophysites, thus demonstrating their fidelity to Byzantium and Europe. However, most of the lower classes, inspired by Iranian aid and irritated by the local magnates, stressed their loyalty to the pro-Iranian branch of Christianity, as did some ambitious nobles. Moreover, the Armenian *receptio* (community) was present in Georgia, and they were faithful Monophysites. The situation seems to have been even more complicated by Iranian Zoroastrian proselytizing, conducted either by the Persian *receptio* dwelling in the Iberian cities, or by new native converts to the Iranian confession.

Thus, Diophysites, Monophysites, and even Zoroastrians, were present, and, in trying to maintain the national unity and social security of the country, one had to deal with them. What was to be done? Collect them in one place, ignore their confessional divisions, and not allow the appearance of truly separate—dominated by the Iranians—religious and political structures. The three-church basilicas were intended to serve this basic purpose, especially in the villages, where the serfs were rudely suppressed by their lords. Thus, although the village churches are very small, they are still divided into three sections. One could argue, that there was no place for the Zoroastrians in a Christian church, but we have to take into consideration the fact of Iranian (Sassanid) Zoroastrianism being largely influenced by European Mithraism, according to which even the date of birth of Mithras was fixed to the 25th of December.[4] The Armenians, inspired and strengthened by the support of Khosrau I, the Persian pro-Monophysite Shah, accused the Georgians of disloyalty to the Monophysite faith, and of loyalty instead to all of the Christian confessions, admitting even Nestorians to the churches. Of course, the Georgians would have preferred their country to have been neatly orthodox, but failing to achieve this comfortable situation, they tried to achieve a
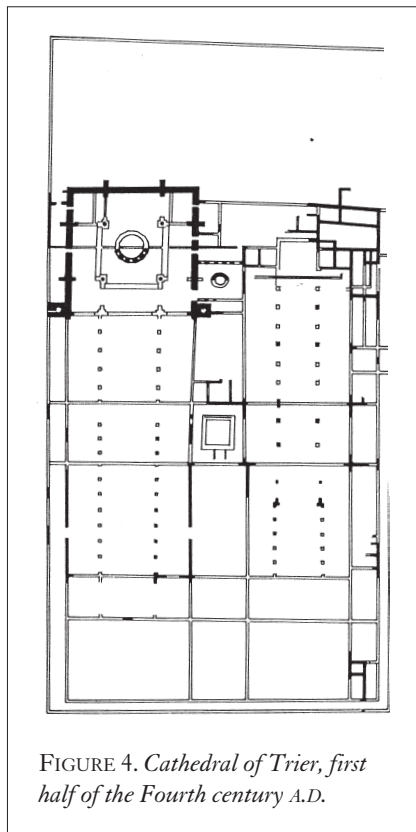

FIGURE 4. *Cathedral of Trier, first half of the Fourth century A.D.*

national—and not religious—unity, putting all the confessions into one church.[5]

Europe had faced the same problem earlier, in the Fourth-Fifth centuries, with the orthodox Christian folk, the Arians, and the Mithra-worshippers living together. So, we are inclined to expect something similar there. Indeed, the joint basilicas [SEE Figures 4 and 5], or a Mithraeum inserted into a Christian church (Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Santa Prisca at Aventine Hill), could have served the same purpose.

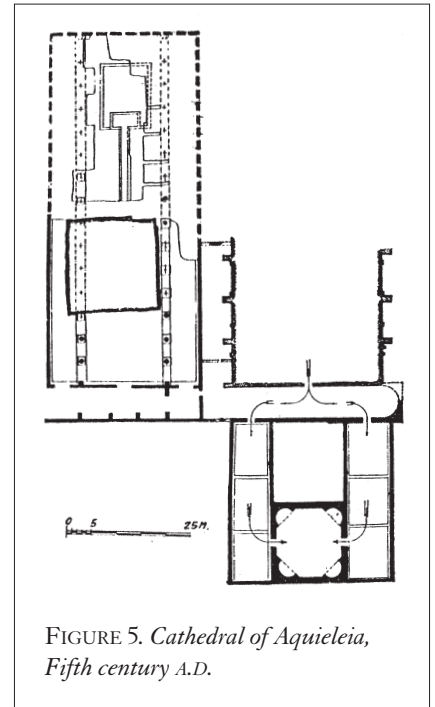And, perhaps, the Egyptian case included three separate chambers, with

FIGURE 5. *Cathedral of Aquieleia, Fifth century A.D.*

the Greek, Coptic, and Armenian languages being involved in the church service. It is thought that a certain Cyrus from Iberia extended his activity by founding the three-church basilica in Thebes in the Seventh century.[6]

This pattern of confessional pluralism has continued to be precisely maintained. Being largely an Orthodox country, Georgia still embraced different communities, such as Jewish (from the Second century B.C.), Muslim (from the Eighth century A.D.), Armenian, Roman Catholic, etc.

So, co-existence was easily achieved—which means that it can be achieved any time, anywhere.

—Dr. Nino Silagadze,
—Prof. Dr. Tedo Dundua,
Tbilisi State University

1. E. Badstübner, "Zum Ursprung des dreischiffigen Presbyteriums an Klosterkirchen des benediktinischen Reformmönchtums (ein Vergleich mit den Drei-Kirchen-Basiliken in Georgien)," *Georgica,* Jena-Tbilisi, Heft 7, 1984, pp. 77-81.
2. Z. Aleksidze, *Liber Epistolarum: Textum Armenicum cum Versione Georgica Edidit et Disputatione Commentariisque Instruxit* (Tbilisi: 1968), pp. 262-266.
3. U. Morrenet de Villard, "Una chiesa di tipo georgiano nella necropoli Tebana," in *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum* (Boston: 1950), pp. 495-500.
4. T. Dundua, *Christianity and Mithraism, The Georgian Story* (Tbilisi: 1999).
5. Z. Aleksidze, *op. cit.,* p. 191. Pope Gregory I is said to have been delighted by the religious toleration in Georgia.
6. Z. Aleksidze, *op. cit.,* pp. 167-272; also G. Chubinashvili, *Architecture of Kachetia* (in Russ.) (Tbilisi: 1959), p. 142.