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## “THE TIME OF BUILDING”

In the beginning of the 19th century Russia abolished statehood of Georgia in its east and west. In 1811 Czar's Russia put an end to the autocephaly of the Georgian Church and brought the institution of exarches in its place. In 1917 the Georgian Church regained the autocephaly and elected Catholicos-patriarch, and the Georgian Church continued to serve for the motherland. Georgian Mensheviks guided with atheistic thoughts during the years of independence, and the Church appeared left without governmental care. All these were aggravated by “Overwhelming calamity” inflicted by the Bolshevik Russia. Bolsheviks began to plunder the Georgian Church and taking the treasures away to Russia.

Ambrosi Khelasia, Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia tried to oppose the Soviet Russia's looting policy and addressed for help to the Conference of Genoa (1922). Infuriated for suing Bolsheviks arrested the Georgian Catholicos-Patriarch and arranged the trial.

For the next decades Russia continued tearing down Georgian churches and persecuting Georgian clergy. Problems amassed in the Georgian Church and their solution was difficult under the Soviet power.

In December 23, 1977 the Georgian Church elected Ilia II, (Ghudushauri-Shiolashvili) the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia and the “Time of building” has arrived. The deeds and exploits of Ilia II inspired the new beginning to the Georgian Church. The relationship with other Churches abroad became active. At the time Ilia II was elected the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia.

Only 48 Churches were permitted to conduct divine service. Now the number is more than a hundred. New religious schools were established, among them the Religious Academy of Georgia. The number of clergy increased from 40 to more than a thousand. The number of eparchies increased to 35. Tao-Klarjeti eparchy was restored and new metropolis of Western Europe began to function.

One of the most important events for the Georgian Church is the Constitutional Agreement between the Georgian government and the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Church of 2002.

His Beatitude Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch blesses the people of Georgia that is the great encouragement for the country's spiritual efflorescence.