

The orthodox community of Elbasan and the status of Autocephalous church issues

Nereida Omeri Shqerra

Abstract

On 12.09.1922 the Congress of Berat declared the administrative independence of the Albanian Orthodox Church with the following decision: "Congress delegates, clergy people, with enthusiasm on behalf of all the clergy and the Orthodox people of Albania, on the basis that Albania was recognized by all the states of the world as an independent and sovereign state, based on the sacred canons of the Orthodox Church: That in an independent state there is an independent church, etc., having the following Autocephalous Churches: The Church of Russia in 1771, the Orthodox Churches of Austria in 1740, Bukovina in 1873, Greece in 1883, Serbia in 1880, Romania in 1856 and finally Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 proclaim in the name of the Holy Trinity united and indivisible (en onomati tis ajias, omousiu qe adhieretu Triadhos) Autocephaly of the National Orthodox Church of Albania." (Beduli, 2006). In this sense main objective of this manuscript is the analysis of the orthodox community of Elbasan and status of Autocephalous church issues.

Keywords: orthodox community, Elbasan, Autocephalous church.

Introduction

This statement ends with the call: "Long Live the Autocephalous Church". The above statement was signed by the following participants: Korça-At Josifi, Dhori Havjari; Pogradeci-At Vasil Marko, Thanas Kërxfhalli; Bilisht-At Jorgji, Anastas Çekrezi; Kolonja-Oshenar Sofroni, Dhimitër Ndini; Leskoviku-At Vangjel Çamce, Thomo Prifti; Përmeti-Dr.Stathi Kondi, Vasil Zoto; Tepelena; Kavaja-Pal Xhumari, Andre Ikonomi; Tirana-Papa Simoni, Mark Hobdari; Elbasani-Vasil Llapushi, Simon Shuteriqi; Shpati-Taq Buda, Dhimitër Papparisto; Dibra-Leonidh Nishku, Kostë Paftali; Berati-Perikli Kona, Taq Tutulani; Vlora-Tol Arapi, Jani Skrame; Fieri-Lon Xoxa, Mit Qilica; Lushnja-Tun Gjergji, Llazar Boxhja; Durrësi-Arhimandrit Vissar Xhuvani, Jorgj Manushi; Libohova-Spiro Kati, Shkodra-Rist Gjybabiq, Gjok Nikolliqi; Gjirokastra-Doctor Kondi, Delvina-K. Thomaj; The representative of the prefecture: Llazar Puli; Special Commissioner of the Government: Harilla Dhosid.v. Berat 13-9-1922 (Xhuvani, 2008).

The Statute of the Albanian Church consisted of 14 articles. It was a provisional one except the Article 1 and Article 11, and would remain in force until the Episcopal Synod of 4 Bishops was dealt with, which would call the Ecclesiastical Assembly within three months and make the Permanent Statute of the Church on a population basis, relying on a special election regulation (Xhuvani, Haxhillazi, Xhuvani, 2007). Article 10 of the statute was of great importance because it stated that the church language was Albanian, but since some of the clergy and the Horus were not trained in the ecclesiastical language and lacked proper means, they were given the right

to continue teaching in the same language. This article was very important for the autocephaly of the Albanian Church, as preaching in Albanian gave the Church national features. The Berat Congress decided to delegate to Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the former priest of St. Louis in the USA and now Stavrofor (Crusader) in Korça, Vasil Mark. He went there and presented the decisions of the Congress of Berat. The Patriarchate did not immediately respond, but appointed Bishop of Meletus, Hierotheus, to come to Albania as a full-fledged exarch to investigate the situation, and make every effort to recognize the decisions of the Congress. This exarch was accompanied by Archimandrite Christopher Kiss. He became a priest in 1908. He was declared Archbishop on April 12, 1937. In 1949, he was forced to resign as archbishop.

He died on June 16, 1958. On November 21, 1923, this Synod appointed F. Noli as Archbishop. The ceremony took place at the Church of St. George in Korça (Qiriazi, 2000). As Noli himself wrote, after 500 years, the First Synod of the Albanian Orthodox Church was established since 1478, when all of Albanian territory (Arberia) fell under the Ottoman rule. This Holy Synod consisted of: Hireotheu, Metropolitan of Korça and Gjirokastra, Christofor Kisi, Metropolitan of Berat and Vlora, F. Noli Metropolitan of Durres and Tirana. According to Noli, this synod continued until December 24, 1924, when F. Noli was forced to leave Albania.

According to Ecclesiastical Congress of Berat, it was made clear that the Ecclesiastical Council of the Ecclesiastes did not have the right to continue in power for more than two years, unless the two necessary bishops were found. But if they were found, then the Ecclesiastical Council was not even two years allowed to continue in power, but had the primary task of forming the Episcopal Synod quickly; and this was to call the new (second) ecclesiastical congress within three months of its formation (Episcopal Synod) (Xhuvani, Haxhillazi, Xhuvani, 2008). With the government support, the head of the Albanian Orthodox Church became Father Visarion Xhuvani, who was proclaimed archbishop, thus: In 1929, he was sent by the Russian Synod and its metropolitan to Anastasios Koshovac. He was called to Tirana along with the Serbian Bishop of Shkodra, as well as with two other bishops, Evthim Ikonomi and V. Chamcen (Agathangelin). They formed the Second Synod of the Albanian Orthodox Church with Archbishop Visarion Xhuvani. He was proclaimed Archbishop of Albania and Metropolitan of Durres and Tirana (Qiriazi, 2000). Victor was declared Metropolitan of Shkodra, Agathangjeli, Metropolitan of Berat and Evthim, Metropolitan of Korça. The Ecumenical Patriarchate opposed this synod and excommunicated its bishops. Thus, the autocephaly was not granted again, and V. Xhuvani, in spite of this, remained in charge of the Church until 1936. During that year the Synod was dissolved because Viktor broke away from Giovanni and requested the government to remove him, and Evthim died. Agathangel stated that he no longer wanted to cooperate with V. Xuvani. V.Xhuvani was then released and Christopher Kissi was appointed to form the Third Synod. It should be noted, however, that V.Xhuvani was very energetic during his time in charge of the Church.

He called the Second Orthodox Congress in Korça on June 16, 1929. This Congress supplemented and approved the Statute of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania after it had been approved by the Berat Congress, in which S. Shuteriqi had

worked. He was thanked in the Congress by V. Xuvani for the work he had done. As we can see, Orthodox representatives of Elbasan area have been prominent initiators and activists for the establishment and consolidation of KOASH. Above mentioned prominent figures: Visarion Xhuvani, Simon Shuteriqi, Vasil Llapushi, Taq Buda, Kostaq Cipo, Kov Deliana etc. worked hard and sacrificed for an Albanian National Church and its Statute.

But the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania was not only the merit of the Albanian Orthodox, it also received support from the Albanian state and government. His Majesty the King of the Albanians, Zogu I, sent as his representative to the ecclesiastical congress his Colonel Gjilardi, inspector of the Albanian royal army, and the representative of the Government, Mr. Vasil Bidoshi, a member of the court in order to attend congressional meetings with legal powers.

King Zog gave his most honorable congratulations to the Congress in a letter sent to Prime Minister Koco Kota, which states, among many things, that only through the great will and love that people had for freedom, did the tribulations of the traditions endure. Centuries-old fallacy and the entanglements revealed by divine authorities. And at the end he writes, "I thank you personally, the Orthodox Clergy for his patriotic stance, as well as the whole national press, who knew how to defend his thesis" (Xhuvani, Haxhillazi, Xhuvani, 2008).

At the conclusion of the proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Congress of Korça, Mister Visarioni made the third statement to summarize the proceedings of the Congress and also to present the most important issues of the Final Statute, giving also historical conclusions upon this important Ecclesiastical Assembly:

- "The Orthodox Church of Albania is part of the Pandemic of the Holy Church, which is a general apostolic part and is composed of all the Orthodox of Albania, altogether with the sacred patriarchies and the orthodox churches of the world.
- Albanian is the official language of the church.
- The highest authority is the Holy Episcopal Synod, consisting of the Archbishop, Bishops, their deputies, and the Great Mitrofor, who must be of Albanian blood, language and Albanian nationality.
- The Statute's decisions required the establishment of order, discipline and the implementation of the orders of superiors. Good discipline, culture, morals, and good habits are pillars to maintain the spiritual edifice of the holy church.

The mobile and immobile ecclesiastical property should be used only for the sacred spiritual mission of the church, for this purpose the following organs were formed:

- The Holy Synod for Spiritual Governance;
- The Mixed Council (mixed) comprised of the Synod and the four lay members, who will take care of the control and regulation of the estates.
- Permanent Financial Economic Administrative Council.

The main purpose of this general meeting is the spiritual unification of all Christians to ensure the solidarity of all those who disrupt the lifeboat of the blessed name "Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania." "The unorthodox Congress of Korça voted for the Statute, but since it did not have the power to vote the regulation, it left it to be drafted by a competent committee within six months. ... on behalf of that regulation which is very important for the church I asked the government to

assist me with Mr. Kov Deliana, Chairman of the State Council, who has done special studies of political economy, and for the linguistic point of view to assist me with Kostaq Cipo, Professor at the Lyceum of Korça."

This basic document was wisely designed by Monsignor V. Xhuvani and very carefully drafted by his associates. The Administrative Regulation clearly set out the rights and duties of each church governing forum. It was hierarchically constructed. Forums are accountable one after the other to the top forum. The election of governing members is clearly and democratically determined. All forums are run by freely elected believers who meet the requirements of the Regulation. They have a term of only two or three years and can only be elected for up to two terms. The regulation defines the management hierarchy and tasks:

- The highest body is the Council of the Mikst, which administers all ecclesiastical property, meets once a year and is chaired by the Archbishop. He makes decisions by majority of the vote. The "Mikst" Council is made up of clergy and lay people and has a term of two or three years. He appoints the administrators of the monasteries, which are called "Igumenal".
- The "igumenal" council consists of the "igumeni" and 4 laymen who meet once a month to take care of the welfare, order and wealth of the monastery.
- Ecclesiastical elders (dhimogjerondite) are indirectly chosen, one member for 250 believers. They have the task of appointing a guardian, electing priests and deacons, administering church property. Caregivers have a duty to take care of the church's well-being, budget and income.
- The administrative organ of the Church begins with the members of the Synod, determining their salaries and royalties of the Mikst Council, of other governing bodies working in administration, in churches and monasteries.

The regulation also determines the quota (tax) paid by each married Orthodox according to their income.

The following is the list of all the delegates of the Second Ecclesiastical Congress of Korça:

Tirana : Archbishop Visarionid.v .; Dr. Athanas Shundid.v .; Dr. Zoi Xoxad.v.

Slave Delegate: Taq Buda d.v.

Shkodra : Father Velisa Popovic; Naim Plevneshid.v .; Mitro Lazarevi d d.v.

Korça: Ik. of M. Mitrofor Father Vasil Marko d.v .; Stavraq Ballauri dv; Thoma Turtullid.v .; Vasil Avramid.v .; Sotir Kota d.v.

Permet: Dhimitri Kacimbrad.v.

Gjirokastra: Thoma Papapanod.v .; Kostandin Litod.v .; Bishop Ambrose d.v .; Ikonom Papavlashi

Libohova: Dhimosthen Hadzhoglud.v.

Leskovik: Andon Kitod.v.

Lushnja: Lazar Bozo d.v.

Vlora: Kristaq Ikonomid.v; Father Isaiah d.v .; Kristo Karbunara d.v.

Delvina: Mihal Maksakuli d.v.

Saranda: Apostol Dhimad.v.

Konispol: Loli Qesko d.v.

Durres: Kristaq Zaguridhi dv; Vasil Bakallid.v .; Moses Popa d.v.

Kavaja: Kleanth Mineu d.v.

Himara: Dr. Mihal Cane

Berat: Bishop Agathangel d.v. ; Dr. Nicholas Haxhistasa d.v. ; Ikon. Father Theodor Brisku d.v.

Fier: Jovan Xoxa d.v.

Mallakastra: Ikonom Polokoi d.v.

Cologne (Erseka): Petro Prodani d.v.

Bilisht: Petro Ilia d.v.

Tepelena: Dhimitër Mole d.v.

Elbasan: Kostaq Cipo d.v. ; Kov Deliana d.v. ; Dhimitër Papajani d.v.

Pogradec: Spiro Naço d.v.

Debar: Stavrofor Ik. Joseph d.v. ; Dr. Filip Papajani d.v. ; Gavril Lasku d.v.

Composing the regulation of the Administration of the Church a lot of contribution was given by: Agathangel and Ambros, the great Mitrofor Vasil Marko, and the lawyers Ilia Kota, Vasil Avrami, Thoma Papapano, Dr. Mihal Cane, Kristaq Zaguridhi, Vasil Bakalli, and in particular Dr. Zoi Xoxa and Kov Deliana. On July 20, 1929, this Regulation was adopted.

The statute sanctioned the Autocephaly declared in Berat on September 12, 1922, being dogmatically united with the sacred patriarchies and other autocephalous Orthodox churches, but administratively remained completely under the national flag. Pursuant to the Statute of the Religious Communities adopted in the Assembly of 1924, he emphasized and demanded that the official language of the Church should be Albanian, while the archbishops, bishops, their local deputies, etc. must be of Albanian blood and language, as well as have Albanian citizenship.

Only a fine connoisseur of ecclesiastical rules, dedicated to exalting national-religious affairs, only a talented organizer could employ qualified subordinates to set the steel columns of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania: the standing statute and the Regulations of General Administration of the Church. That person was the first Archbishop of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Visarion Xhuvani (Xhuvani, Haxhillazi, 2008).

The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, with its Episcopal Holy Synod, the Definitive Statute and the General Administration Regulation, met the canonical requirements of the Autocephaly and deserved the approval of the Istanbul Patriarchate. Unfortunately that was not the case; It took almost nine years for the wrath of the Istanbul Patriarchate to abate. During this time, KOASH, built on national and canonical sounds foundations, walked steadily in the path laid down by the First Historical Church Congress of Berat and the Second Congress of Korça. The full support of the Albanian people and state support of the time were accompanied by an unprecedented joy ever, by Orthodox and Muslims, as this was a historic step for all Albanians.

Conclusions

The Holy Synod elected Bishop of Korca, Bishop Christopher. Under his leadership and with the consent of the Government, in March 1937, a commission went in

Istanbul to deal with the Patriarchate on the matter of recognizing the Church. The Commission was well-received there and successfully accomplished its mission because there was good will on both sides to settle the issue, after so many years. On April 12, the Ecumenical Patriarchate recognized the Autocephaly of our Church by giving its respective Tom and together with him recognized our Church and all other Patriarchs and other Orthodox Autocephalous Churches of the world (Gani, 2002). Along with all other Albanian Orthodox clergy, a special merit belongs to the Elbasan Orthodox for achieving this great success for every Albanian. Both in the Congress of Berat and in Korça, they provided their unsparing support by placing themselves at the forefront of this movement not only religious but also national. Among the many respected names of prominent Elbasan figures is the great Visarion Xhuvani. He was not only a man who dedicated his life to the Church, but also to his homeland. Visarion lived in peace and religious harmony also with those Albanians who did not belong to his religion, because according to him he was united by the same blood, the same language and the same land. He never thought of himself, but for the good of the nation and of his countrymen.

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