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«Ukraine stands on the right side of history»

FRIDAY, 5 APRIL, 2024

In partnership with «Œuvre d'Orient», we met the former Ukrainian Soviet dissident Myroslav Marynovych in Lviv. Buoyed by his faith in God, justice, truth and freedom, he dares to hope that the Russian empire will collapse.

Myroslav Marynovych, advisor to the rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, is today the embodiment of spiritual resistance.

Sentenced in 1977 to be deported to the Gulag Myroslav Marynovych is one of the last living Soviet dissilast living Soviet dissidents. At the age of 75, the former vice-rector of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) and human rights activist talks about his values of freedom and faith in the face of war in the Mitteleuropa city of Lviv (Ukraine). We met him in February 2024 when we reported from Ukraine.



Myroslav Marynovych. Even if I feel guilty about living in safety in Lviv, while my compatriots are in mourning and suffering mourning and suffering in battle, I feel a deep sense of peace. Why do I feel this way?

Because Ukraine is on the right side of history. My country didn't send the first missiles into Russia, it was attacked. That's crucial. I experienced the same thing in the gulag. I suffered being detained. But I knew that defending the truth was the right decision, even at the cost of freedom. I was a student when I was arrested by the KGB for criticising the regime.

the regime. I had laid flowers in front of the statue of the poet Taras Shevchenko. At that time, fed up with propaganda, I was afraid for my future and my career. The KGB agent said to me: «Anyone who is not with us is against us». So «I'm against you», I replied. As I said these words, I thought to myself, «I'm against you».

When I said those words, I felt liberated. At my trial, the prosecutor asked me what my aim was. I replied, astonishing myself: «Not to feel hatred towards my persecutors.

Do you let go of your past?

M.M. No, I'm more interested in the future. The Stalinist period was terrible. Under Brezhnev, the violence was more elaborate: I was mainly subjected to psychological torture. Vladimir Putin, who uses blackmail, manipulation and hatred, has turned Stalin into a hero.

His regime is of the same nature. Captured Ukrainians are atrociously tortured. It was wrong not to try the crimes of the Soviet communist regime. Justice was necessary. Impunity is harmful. I do not need to know that my persecutors are in prison. But their actions must be declared criminal.

With Vladimir Putin at the head of a nuclear power, we want dialogue... But he has violated every point of the Budapest Memoranda, which guaranteed our territorial integrity in exchange for our renunciation of nuclear weapons. With him, we are putting our security before our values. This is wrong.

I sacrificed 10 years of my life for human rights. In 1991, I set up Amnesty International in Ukraine. Its best idea? To defend those who are in the shadows. Today, freedom and justice are taken for granted in the West. Who really cares anymore?

You praise Ukraine's resistance...

M.M. I'm proud of my nation, which is fighting for its independence. People are giving up their comforts to defend their land. If Russia occupied my country, there would be total violence. Putin has left us no choice but to fight. But Ukraine is a smaller country and needs other countries on its side. However, we are more motivated than the Russians.

They will not win the war. If the world allowed them to, it would be the end of civilisation. In prison, I had the feeling that neither Brezhnev nor any politician was the master of history. For me, only God was. Today, it seems to me that neither Biden nor Putin nor Zelensky are in charge, but divine power. This war may last. But sudden events can precipitate change. In Russian history, regimes have collapsed suddenly on several occasions.

Does your faith guide you?

M.M. I had two revelations when I was in prison. I don't think God came to me because I was desperate. But I felt an explosion of light that left me stunned for three days. I thought it was a hallucination and I told myself I must have been tired after an interrogation. And then I had a second revelation, a few weeks later, when in my forced labour camp they gave me back my cross, which had been confiscated from me. Before that, my Christian faith had been purely intellectual. I then realised that I had received two enormous gifts. My wife Luba was another gift. I had already been relegated to Kazakhstan for two years, after five years in the gulag in the Urals. I came back to Ukraine one summer, where I met her. She agreed to come with me to Kazakhstan, where I was to stay for another two years. We weren't married. But the village took care of her of her, as if she was already my woman. A few months later, Mikhail Gorbachev released 200 political prisoners, including me. I worked here at the UCU for a long time as vice-rector.

I recently turned 75 and became simply an advisor to the rector. Since 2022, this university, like the rest of the country the whole country, into a theatre of volunteers. After several months, classes resumed. Now, only the occasional siren interrupts them.

Will Ukraine have to transform itself after the war?

M.M. We are a country in transition. After independence in 1991, Ukraine developed a system of oligarchy, marred by corruption. The Maïdan revolution in 2014 and the war called this system into question. I hope that once the war is over, it will become a normal democratic system. The current Constitution is flawed. I'm not a lawyer, but it will undoubtedly have to be changed.

We need to reach a new social consensus to found a real democracy. Here in Lviv, a patriotic city that was once Austrian, Polish, etc., with a mix of Orthodox and Latin mentalities, we are

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