Metropolitan Hilarion: Four Gospels prove the historicity of Christ

Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk answered questions put to him by Ekaterina Gracheva – the host of The Church and the World TV programme which was broadcast on March 6 2021 on Rossia-24.

Gracheva: Hello. This is The Church and the World TV programme on Rossia-24 where we will be putting questions to the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Hello, Your Eminence.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Hello, Ekaterina. Hello, dear brothers and sisters.

Gracheva: I would like to begin with a fresh statement made by US state secretary Anthony Blinken this week. I quote: "The authorities promise not to inculcate democracy in the world. We are not going to promote democracy by resorting to costly military operations". During the speech he also claimed that now the US key priority is confrontation with China rather than with Russia. It is China which is the biggest geopolitical problem of this century. Does that mean that Russia without being a geopolitical problem for America now is not an equal and strong rival for America?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First of all, I would like to stress that very important statements have been made which are probably aimed at presenting the new foreign policy vector of the United States of America to the public. If it's true, I would highlight both topics as very important.

Let's look at the events of recent decades: America inculcated a so-called democracy in those countries where there was no democracy fr om the perspective of the US. We have seen the fruit of such actions. I see the situation in this case fr om the perspective of the position of Christians in these countries, because this is firsthand information and I can state what had happened in Iraq, for example, wh ere Americans tried to build democracy through military intervention. There is still no democracy until now, but under Saddam Hussein a million and a half Christians lived there, whereas now only one tenth of that number remains at best. Americans tried to inculcate democracy in Libya, they overthrew Muammar el-Qaddafi. Under Qaddafi there were Christians in Libya, but now they are all almost all gone, there are hardly any of them left. This is a very simple and bright example of how wrong and, I would even say, criminal was the US foreign policy in the Middle East. If America rejects such a policy, if it rejects inculcating the so-called democracy in such ways, then I suppose it is going to be positively accepted all over the world, not only in the Middle East.

If we look at who is supposed to be the US geopolitical rival, I think Americans know it best. But it seems to me that confrontation with Russia was a mistake of previous administration and I hope that such a mistake can be corrected by new administration, if it already claims such a determination.

Gracheva: Your Eminence, this week Michael Garbachev celebrated his 90th birthday. By the way, America congratulated him on behalf of the President Joe Biden. He said that through Michael Gorbachev's actions the world became safer. They rate him highly as a politician. Meanwhile, during the latest polling among 51 percent of Russians called Gorbachev a man that thought about the welfare of the country, but his activities did more harm than good. However, in 5 years percentage of those who negatively assess Gorbachev has decreased by 10 percent. How do you assess Michael Gorbachev as a person and as a politician?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I belong to the generation that witnessed radical changes in the country, which began after Michael Gorbachev had taken office. I remember my school days very well. We had been looking at just one man on the screen for a long time, very senior, with a poor diction, who muttered, and he was parodied by the entire country. That man was Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev. Afterwards he died and Yuriy Andropov came for a short term and nobody got a clear picture of him. Later an old man appeared who spoke in a way that nothing could be understood, and soon he died. I was in the army then and we had a slogan in our troop, wh ere we lived, as follows: "Meeting one or another Congress of the CPSU"; and suddenly a slogan declaring the following emerged: "Let's fight back the untimely death of comrade Chernenko with a crash work". When I read it I thought that it was a bad dream or someone's cruel joke. Firstly, the death of comrade Chernenko wasn't untimely. Secondly, how could we fight back the death of a state leader with a crash work?

Afterwards a young, dynamic man emerged, who, first of all, spoke distinctly, and secondly, he initiated the “policy of glasnost” which changed dramatically the situation in the country. Things that were keept secret through decades suddenly became discussed. They started to talk about repressions, about injustice that went on in Soviet period; some alternative looks at history emerged. A new atmosphere was created in the country. I think that this is an unquestionable credit of Michael Sergeevich Gorbachev. Also as a clergyman I should say that under him the revival of Church began and it continues by now.

Gracheva: Do you know him personally?

Metropolitan Hilarion: No, I don’t know Michael Sergeevich personally. At one meeting in the Kremlin (before the pandemic) I saw him and wanted to come and thank him for everything he had done for the Church then. But he was already old man and he was led forward by the hand, so I didn’t dare to come to him; but I think that very many clergymen remember that time and are grateful to him for the situation with religion had changed in such a way under him.

With regard to the fact that many assess Gorbachev’s activities negatively, I would like to say the following. He is often blamed for the collapse of the Soviet Union as though if there was no Gorbachev, the Soviet Union would not have collapsed. The Soviet Union was on its clay feet. People were left without the heart of their life. I know people who lived a long life and still say: I can’t forgive Soviet authorities that they took God away from me. That is why the Soviet Union would still collapse a little earlier or a little later, and since it was built on godless ideology and since that economic model inspired the Soviet economy was becoming less and less viable and competitive. Gorbachev knew that. He tried to upgrade it but the “policy of glasnost” and Perestroika led to the collapse of the Soviet Union in the end.

Gracheva: Thirty years later after we seemingly finally said goodbye to this ideology, a wave of hot discussion emerged again after the Moscow authorities had initiated a polling – who is more worthy of a monument on Lubyanka – Alexander Nevsky or Felix Dzerzhinsky. I don’t ask which side you are on, after everything was said for me the answer is evident, but what do you think: what was that? Communists attempted to revenge? Was it an attempt to return to that ideology? An attempt of a revision?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think that it was an attempt of revenge because all the propaganda campaign which preceded the polling was aimed at exclusively a revival of the monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky. Nobody said and didn’t urge to build a monument to Alexander Nevsky. All the internet was full of headlines: vote for Felix Dzerzhinsky. Yandex-Zen called to vote for Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Telegram channels called to vote for Felix Dzerzhinsky. It really was an attempt of revenge. And what about the

fact that they suggested to build a monument to Alexander Nevsky near the monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky? That was a pure provocation, because in such a way they could put pressure on people of a wide range of political orientations.

I think that the last thing we need is people butting heads and taking it to the streets. It is very true that voting was suspended, but I think that before it's beginning it was very obvious, that it could only create division. By the way, I would like to stress that you must not cheer numbers which are given – 55 percent for Alexander Nevsky and 45 percent for Felix Dzerzhinsky – because they explained people that voting woukd last till the 5th of March. Many people just had not had time to vote. For example, I didn't physically have time to go to the site and vote for Alexander Nevsky. I think that the real power balance was different, if that voting continued, it would have been as I think about 65 to 35 percent. The same idea was presented by independent sociological studies before the polling.

We are not speaking just about the monument. They claimed that it had some cultural meaning, that it was an outstanding piece of sculptural arts. However, you know that the ideology with which we cast away under Gorbachev and after him, that ideology was a pagan one at its core. It was not only godless, godlessness almost never exists in pure form. When they take from the people God, Mother of God, saints, then they needed to put something instead, so they put those idols across the country, moreover it was precisely done for worship. All kinds of events, ceremonies, dedications to pioneers, to Komsomol and so on took place near those monuments. Now there is no more such paganism, but idols keep standing. They managed to remove one and they want to put it back again. I very much hope that the ideology will not be back and I would like to wish those who want to take a revenge to search for some other ideals.

Gracheva: Your Eminence, I would like to finish with the topic that came from Ukraine. A congress of representatives of the churches captured by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, who suffered from raiders, took place at the Kiev Laura of the Caves. More than 250 criminal proceedings for capture of churches were commenced in Ukraine by now. Moreover, they're complaining that there is no progress in these criminal proceedings. In that connection they petitioned to the President Zelenskiy. What do you think: can this congress and this petition change anything?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I very much hope that the community both inside and outside of Ukraine will finally notice the lawlessness that was going on under the President Poroshenko and which, unfortunately, has not been completely finished, because from time to time we continue hearing about captures of churches, but the propaganda which leads to these captures continues.

The essence of the propaganda boils down to the fact that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is alleged to be the Kremlin's fifth column, that it's the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine while it's a Ukraine's

national Church uniting a majority of Orthodox believers. The members of this Church were mainly born and raised in Ukraine and they have Ukrainian passports. I think that the captures of churches will regrettably continue as long as this lawless propaganda exists. I hope so much that the propaganda will be stopped and that the Orthodox faithful in Ukraine will be allowed to live in peace.

Gracheva: Thank you very much, Your Eminence, for answering our questions.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Ekaterina.

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