

Illustrations: [Bella Lane](#) for OVD-Info

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СТАТЬИ

“Monk calls for disobedience”: The Life Story of Father Ioann Kurmoyarov

A former priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, Ioann (Dmitry) Kurmoyarov, arrested in June for spreading ‘fakes’ about the Russian army, remains in the Kresty pre-trial detention facility. On July 20 the court refused to commute the preventive measure, although the defence insisted that Father Ioann had no intention to hide from the investigation. OVD-Info tells his story — from the words of his brother, Alexander Kurmoyarov.

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

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Текст на русском

«RUSSIAN, BUT NOT SOVIET»

Dmitry Kurmoyarov was born in 1968 in the Perm region into a family of a Soviet staff officer, who would often be transferred from one USSR region to another. Later the family moved to Belarus, and after that — to Ukraine. In Vinnitsa, where Ioann's father served at the time, they got an apartment. However, soon he was transferred again — this time to Transbaikalia, where they would live for three years. Only after this temporary duty trip the family finally returned to Vinnitsa and settled there.

«In general we are Russian, our homeland is Russia, but in the Soviet Union in those years it was considered to be better to live in Ukraine», says Alexander Kurmoyarov «Ukraine is such a beautiful country, whoever is sent to serve there is lucky».

However, Alexander Kurmoyarov did not stay long in Vinnitsa. He graduated from school there but decided to study at a university in Russia — at the Volgograd Architectural Institute, which he finished in the early 90s. During his studies, he served in the army and then returned to an already independent Ukraine. Kurmoyarov perceived the events of those years — the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of Ukraine into a sovereign state — rather positively.

«He considered it normal», his brother says, «Later he spoke out against the Soviet Union in [his] articles, he thinks that everything had gone its way, the way it should be. He was a Komsomol member, but he could not stand the whole system. He definitely had no nostalgia or fond reminiscences of the Soviet Union or of how nice it had been there».

Much later, in 2014, Kurmoyarov, answering the question «To what world do I belong?», wrote on his Facebook page that he belongs «to the World of the Universal Orthodox Christianity», «to the world of Tatar culture (a Tatar myself), to the Ukrainian world (as I live here), to the Russian world (love Russian literature), to the French world (love impressionism and post-impressionism), to the world of the Byzantine icon and many, many other worlds. But I dislike brainwashing — with the Soviet ideology, russophobia, Ukrainian nationalism».

And five more years later Father Ioann spoke about the USSR even more radically: «Just now in one of the posts where I had criticized the Soviet system I was accused of not loving my Homeland. I reply to those people (copying here my messages to a certain person): I am Russian, but not Soviet. My Homeland is Russia and not the USSR. The USSR is a communist project directed against Russia. Perhaps our difference is that you are a Soviet person, and I am Russian. Personally, it hurts me to observe such experiments on my Homeland, during which (bearing in mind famines, the civil war, collectivization, repressions and so on) millions of people have perished».

«THEIR GOD — UKRAINE»

Not much is known of Dmitriy Kurmoyarov's life during the end of the '90s and the beginning of the 2000s. Probably that is because he was living a rather common life in those years. After having come back from Russia, Dmitriy did not take a job in his speciality, but did «business, here at the

bazaar» with his father: they were trading fish on the local market.

At the same time in the 90s, Dmitriy married a woman with a son from her first marriage. Kurmoyarov, according to Alexander, some time later adopted the child so that the boy officially became his son. Later they split their ways, but Father Ioann still keeps in touch with his son.

Alexander tells that he and his brother always had creative personalities and had an interest in arts, especially music. Father Ioann is still locally known as an electronic musician, and Alexander until recently has performed with local bands as a guitarist. As for Dmitry Kurmoyarov, in his youth, he preferred painting, created artworks and later — icons, the interest in which made him closer to the Church.

«He was an artist, made artworks and later icons, began to attend the church, he made acquaintance with someone, I believe, from Saint-Petersburg, a well-known theologian, I don't remember his last name exactly, he had passed away already. Back then they were communicating, and in the end, he decided to join the church», says Alexander.

By that time Dmitry had already divorced his spouse and had been gradually abandoning worldly life. He purchased a modest house in Nemirov district of the Vinnitsa region and later founded a hermitage there, in which he would live for a long while. «He was ordained by monks, I think, and from there, his cleric path began», says the priest's brother, «The hermitage was in Tulchin eparchy».



Dmitry Kurmoyarov, photo made for the eparchy's office, 2019 / Photo from Kurmoyarov's Facebook page.

In 2011 Dmitry Kurmoyarov was tonsured with the name Ioann. In the same year, Chernivtsi Orthodox Theological Institute awarded Father Ioann the title of Candidate of Theological Sciences. Later he would receive the doctoral title. Kurmoyarov already at that time, judging by some sources, was actively blogging, however, the earliest posts on his current Facebook page date back to 2014, after the

Euromaidan and the change of the government in the country.

«In 2014 he was already generally in the church, he attempted to give specifically church's assessment of what was going on, I can't say he was politically involved much in them or expressed his opinion, but after 2014 Poroshenko has come to power and the movements to split the Church started, he began to speak out in support of UOC (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow patriarchate — *OVD-Info*), to raise awareness».

Father Ioann indeed wrote a lot about the problems of the Church, but political topics also remained the focus of his attention. He **called** 'civil' the war in Donbas and **criticized** Euromaidan, predicting that after it «there will be a real (pardon my rudeness) ASS» in the country, **criticized** Ukrainian politicians, **responded** negatively to cutting off Russian TV stations in Ukraine and **wondered** what 'nationalists' from ATO would do in the afterworld.

«Generally speaking, a Christian must repent for the life lived before he dies, as we people are all sinners», wrote Father Ioann, «But some people, in Ukraine, have a different faith today. More precisely, their god is Ukraine. And the highest meaning of life is belonging to the Ukrainian nation. I do not understand, however, what will they do in the afterworld? Where there are no countries, no borders, no nationalities? Where there is no sex, male or female. They will probably suffer because they loved not Christ, but something temporary and transient, which has no relation to eternity!».

«**SOME THREATS**»

Revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-2014 exacerbated the situation in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as well. At that time most church parishes in the country's territory fell under the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow

Patriarchate, which was essentially governed by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate was also active in Ukraine, as well as other non-canonical orthodox churches.

Father Ioann served in the church of the Moscow Patriarchate and strongly opposed the so-called 'split', was an active **participant** in the 'One church' movement that **exists** to this day. He **called** the Kyiv patriarchate 'self-proclaimed' and **urged** its founder, patriarch Philaret, to repent, to dissolve his 'pseudo-clerical structure' and take off the patriarchal koukoulion.

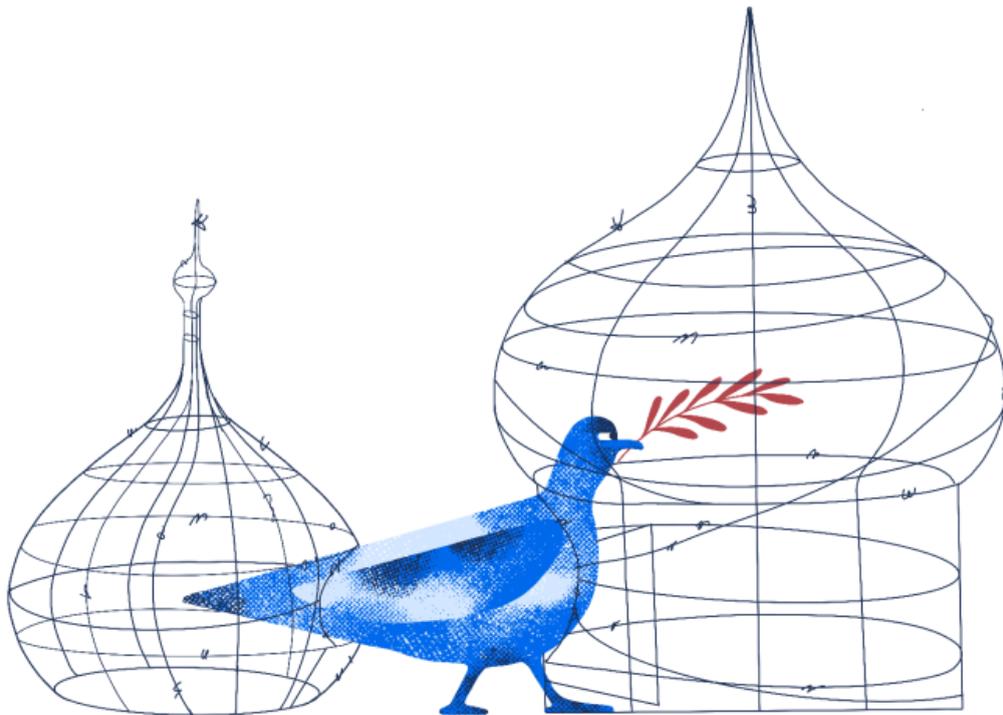
«Then the Ukrainian Orthodox Church began to seize UOC churches, and he tried to talk to the church leadership about the need for some kind of action, somehow react to this, ” Alexander Kurmoyarov says, «But the leadership adopted a position of silence, waiting, his actions met no reaction and he found himself in an informational vacuum, he simply had no field for action here».

Father Ioann's irreconcilable position was not understood by the church hierarchs. In addition, Filaret's supporters eventually won: in December 2018 UOC of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOCKP) announced it had disbanded and joined the then-created Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was joined by other non-canonical Orthodox churches as well. Orthodox Church of Ukraine became the dominant power, and in 2019 it received autocephaly from Constantinople Patriarchate, that is, independence from other local churches, including the Russian Orthodox Church.

When this process was still ongoing, Father Ioann strongly criticized not only UOCKP, but also Constantinople: «PERSONALLY TO ME FROM NOW ON CONSTANTINOPLE PATRIARCHATE IS A SCHISMATIC, HERETIC STRUCTURE», he **wrote** in October of 2018, «I hope ROC, UOC and other canonical Orthodox Churches will break off eucharistic communion with it».

At that time Father Ioann had already been persecuted in Ukraine because of another scandalous post of his, dedicated to Victory Day. The postcard he posted on May 9 of 2017 featured a St. George ribbon, the manufacture and propaganda of which was banned a few days later — Verkhovna Rada **adopted** relevant amendments to the administrative code only on May 16, 2017. Nevertheless, a few months later the Security Service of Ukraine became interested in Kurmoyarov's actions, an administrative case was initiated against him, he was accused of pro-Russia propaganda and then **removed** from the list of priests of the Tulchyn eparchy.

«There was no persecution as such, no serious pressure, the law enforcement agencies somehow summoned him, had some kind of conversation», says Alexander Kurmoyarov, «The pressure was more social, the media wrote some negative articles about him. There were some threats from nationalist organizations in this regard, but not very serious ones. So he just decided to move to Russia».



Father Ioann himself later explained that his departure was primarily due not to public pressure, but to the behaviour of the Tulchyn eparchy. According to him, the situation around St. George ribbon ended «quite normally», he won both trials on the case, so he had nothing to fear in Ukraine, even despite the threats of «crazy people».

«But the fact that my eparchial administration, to put it bluntly, has done a vile thing, did hurt me a little, of course», says Father Ioann, «And after all, when you do not feel support for the very activities to which what they themselves blessed you, and for which yet so harshly punish you, I realized there is no point in staying, Nothing will come out of it anyway. If you own people throw spanner in the works and do not wish to preach against the split, against the schismatics <...>, then there is no point, and with that, I simply packed up and left for my homeland».

«NO ONE WILL TAKE YOU»

In Russia, Father Ioann was offered a position as an associate professor at Novosibirsk Theological Seminary, where he taught theology for two years. At the same time, Ioann continued to blog on Facebook and developed an 'Orthodox Virtual parish' YouTube channel, registered back in 2017. In his social media, Father Ioann was now criticizing Russian realities, including the activities of the ROC.

Alexander Kurmoyarov says his brother would always stand out through his implacable love of the truth, which often caused him to have bad relationships with the authorities and people who could not handle criticism.

«He is such a truth-seeker, if he sees any injustice, he speaks of it openly», Alexander explains, «And a lot of people dislike it. And he was disappointed in the Russian Orthodox Church, in the ROC of [Patriarch] Kirill, because he realized that it had turned into a sort of an army-like totalitarian

structure to suppress the man. That is, you cannot criticise anyone, higher authorities are the law, and so on. This has absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. He encountered that, began to express his opinion, and they decided to shut him up».

Until this spring, the most resonant story associated with Father Ioann was his systematic criticism of the Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces, which he **called** the «pagan temple» and **condemned** for its frescoes **depicting** NKVD officers, Yuri Gagarin, other secular characters and Soviet symbols. As a result, in the summer of 2020, Kurmoyarov **was banned** from conducting church services, wearing a cassock and a cross, teaching, and preaching in church. The ban was imposed «due to incompatibility with the title of a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church».

Father Ioann tried to find another place of service, since the ban, in theory, would only last for two months, but he could not get hired due to the negative reference that had been drawn up in the Novosibirsk eparchy. «He was told: we can't accept you, it's written in such a way so that no one will take you. That is, they wrote such a description of him that he could no longer serve anywhere», says Alexander Kurmoyarov.

Father Ioann attempted to **sue** the eparchy and get reinstated to the service, but the attempts so far have been unsuccessful. Later, he moved to St. Petersburg, joined the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR — *OVD-Info*), found a secular job at a security company, studied music and continued to write in his blog. Kurmoyarov also did not abandon his fight against the Cathedral of the Armed Forces, and last December, he even **sued** Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, asking to prosecute him for insulting the feelings of believers. The claim was related to the Cathedral. Kurmoyarov was then interviewed by Snob,

Dozhd' and other independent [Russian] media, and has become a fairly well-known person.

The rhetoric of Father Ioann toward the Russian Orthodox Church at that time changed significantly compared to the Ukrainian period of his life. On December 28, 2021, he wrote on his blog: «DEAR FRIENDS, I ALREADY HAVE 5000 FOLLOWERS. THOSE WHO CONSIDER THE ROC TO BE THE ONLY TRUE CHURCH AND BELIEVE IN THE SINLESSNESS OF THE ROC EPISCOPATE, PLEASE UNFOLLOW BECAUSE I CAN'T ADD NEW PEOPLE TO FRIENDS».

«THE AUTHORITIES SHOULD FEEL IT»

Father Ioann condemned the military «special operation» in Ukraine two days after it began in a video titled «Why won't Putin win this war?».

«Just don't think that I'm calling for some kind of revolution, no, I'm for peaceful protest, Gandhi-like», Kurmoyarov says in the video, «You will probably be surprised, a monk calling for disobedience, right? Even those who are ROC members, take the social concept of the Russian Orthodox Church, open, I believe, the „Church and Politics“ section, and you will see there these wise words are written that if the government opposes the Gospel, the Christian commandments, the Church has the right to call upon Christians and society to disobey the authorities. <...> The authorities should feel it and simply leave, that's all. And finally, democratic procedures should work in Russia».

Later, Father Ioann released many more videos criticizing the military activities, but the video «Who will go to hell and who — to heaven?», posted on his channel on March 12, 2022, attracted the most attention from law enforcement officers. In it, Kurmoyarov comments on Putin's statement that «we as martyrs will go to heaven, and they will die.»

Father Ioann says that peacekeepers will go to heaven, «and he who started the aggression, well, he will not be in heaven, no matter how hard he tries».



Dmitriy Kurmoyarov in Saint-Petersburg, 2018 / Photo posted on Kurmoyarov's Facebook page

There was no reaction from the authorities immediately after the video was published, but Father Ioann, according to Alexander Kurmoyarov, realised that such a threat existed. «We discussed the situation with these videos and so on, in principle, we were prepared for the arrest, we expected it, we assumed that there would be some sort of pressure from the authorities. We thought that they would summon us, and talk to us. He thought that if there were severe persecution, he would somehow be forced out of the country or he would leave on his own, but we had no specific plans. After all, he was still going to stay in Russia, to live there», says the priest's brother.

In April, Father Ioann was deprived of his priesthood by a decree of Patriarch Kirill, noting that «former hieromonk Ioann (Kurmoyarov) is actively engaged in media activities in support of the nationalist regime of Ukraine, is forming

false information about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and was assigned by the ROC schismatic organization of Agafangel Pashkovsky to Moscow region to form a local community». Already in early June, Kurmoyarov was arrested on the case of «fakes» about the Russian army. During the search, a computer, a tablet, two hard drives, two icons, a wooden cross and a cassock were seized, although he recorded the video that led to the criminal case in a plain shirt.

As a measure of restraint for the period of the investigation, Father Ioann is to be held in custody, although there were no grounds for this, according to Kurmoyarov's lawyer Leonid Krikun.

«This measure is chosen absolutely unreasonably, » the lawyer believes, «He has both a living space and a job in St. Petersburg, and despite the fact that the crime with which he is charged is a serious one, there were no grounds for this measure to be imposed on him. Apparently, this measure, in particular, is related to the fact that he refused to confess to the crime, but this is not a reason in the law».

Under the new law on «spreading knowingly false information about the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation», Kurmoyarov may face up to ten years in prison. Leonid Krikun says that Father Ioann has no complaints about the conditions of detention. At meetings with a lawyer, he looks fine and feels okay, too.

According to the defence counsel, the investigator did not get in touch with him for a long time after the measure of restraint was imposed, and later, in late July and early August, he postponed the presentation of a new version of the charges several times. Alexander Kurmoyarov believes that the case against his brother was initiated not without the participation of Father Ioann's opponents in the Church:

«I can't say for sure, but it seems to me that this is a sort of revenge. He was arrested for some video, but he has a few thousand followers on the channel, that is nothing. There is also a small number [of followers] on Facebook, he is not that famous. But at that time of the trial with the ROC, the Spas TV channel made a libellous video about him, that is, work was underway to discredit him. And, it seems to me that someone, to put it bluntly, just ratted on him, pointed him out to the authorities».

OVD-Info Editorial Staff

ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

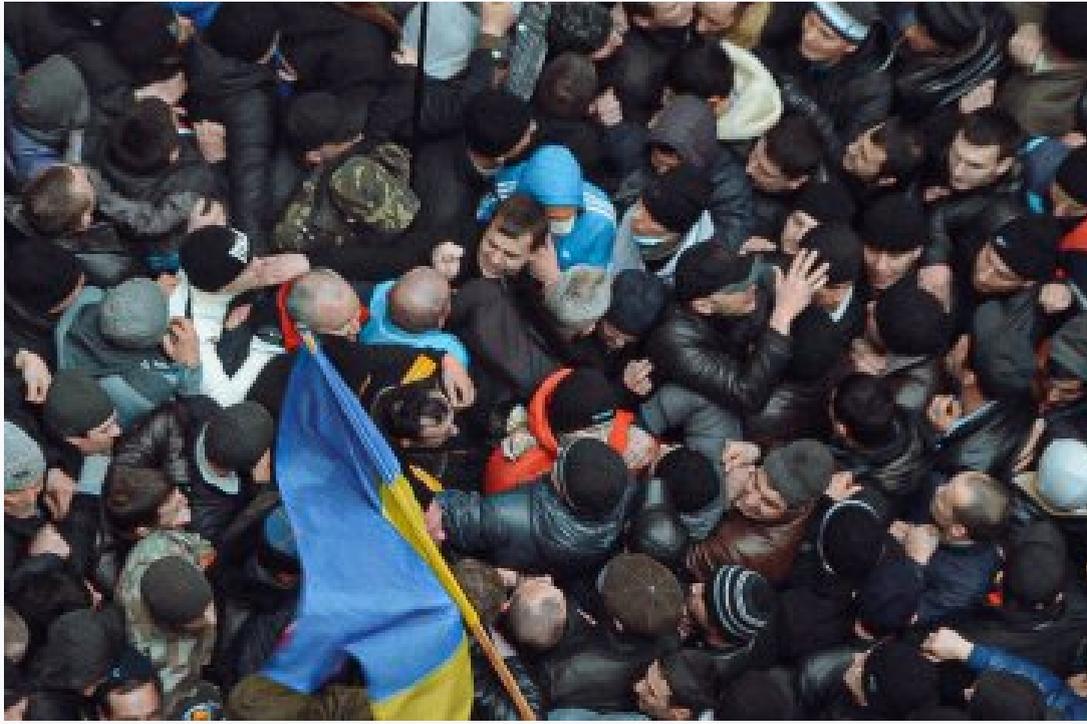
Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

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