

6-2021

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Vyacheslav Ageyev  
*National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine*

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### Recommended Citation

Ageyev, Vyacheslav (2021) "Use of Invented Religions in Ukrainian Protest Movements against Russian Orthodoxy 2018-2021," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 41 : Iss. 5 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol41/iss5/5>

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# USE OF INVENTED RELIGIONS IN UKRAINIAN PROTEST MOVEMENTS AGAINST RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY 2018-2021

By Vyacheslav Ageyev

**Vyacheslav Ageyev** is a postgraduate student in the Department of Religious Studies in the Institute of Philosophy of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He received his M.A. degree in Religious Studies from Kyiv National Shevchenko University. He is a Fulbright fellow. His scientific interests are in the spheres of psychology of religion and new religious movements.

## **Abstract**

Since 2018, three projects operating in the framework of “invented or parody religions” and aimed against the Russian Orthodox Church have arisen in Ukraine. The article describes their invention, practices, “belief systems,” political acts, and tries to predict whether any of these or similar projects have any future in predominantly conservative Christian Ukraine.

## **The 2018 Rise in Political, Historical, and Religious Protests of Invented Religions**

Since the Revolution of Dignity and the start of the Ukrainian-Russian War (in 2013-2014), the tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian society have risen. The Russian Orthodox Church structures have been officially registered in Ukraine under the name of the “Ukrainian Orthodox Church” (UOCh). The law that requires this Church to rename itself according to its and the Russian Orthodox Church’s official statutes (like “Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine”, or “Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate” as it is usually named unofficially) is not currently implemented. Until 2019 there had existed another “Ukrainian Orthodox Church” (UOCh), and to distinguish the Russian and Ukrainian churches with the same name, people used it following with the abbreviations of MP and KP – indicating the Moscow Patriarchate (the Russian Orthodox) and Kyiv Patriarchate (ukr. “VIII МП” and “VIII КП”). This state of affairs contributes to the confusion and disorientation among common believers. (This attention to naming and abbreviations is important, so the reader doesn’t get lost in the church names to follow).

The brutality of “Russian Orthodox Army” battalion in Donbas, the arrogance and demonstrative neglect of Ukrainian legislature, propaganda of “*Russkiy mir*” ideology, and the blessings of Russian and separatist forces in occupied Crimea and Donbas exposed cases of espionage and sabotage under the cover of this church; all these and many more factors made many people rethink the role and status of this church in Ukrainian society and to protest against its activities.

The protest and work to decrease Russian Orthodoxy’s influence in Ukraine occurs on different levels, ranging from the transition of Orthodox communities to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine canonical jurisdiction and the banning of Russian Orthodox chaplains from the Army to complex work in the parliament and on an international level.

Three notable projects (two of them appear to be grassroots, and one a project of a minor right-liberal political party) have protested against Russian Orthodoxy operating in the framework of “invented or parody religions”:

1. *Yozheslavie* (Hedgehog worship)
2. High Duck Church and
3. Burning Church of Matriarchal Patriarchate

I consider the term “invented religions” by Carol M. Cusack<sup>1</sup> as the most appropriate to describe these phenomena, although the term “pseudo-religion” as used by Paul Tillich<sup>2</sup> might also be applied to *Yozheslavie* and the Burning Church of Matriarchal Patriarchate. Still, Carol Cusack’s term is preferable since these religions clearly present themselves as products of human creativity, enjoy their mock status, and do not seek legitimation via any divine revelation but rather making fun of the idea of it. They don’t hide or even emphasize their fictional origin, but rather use it for their mockery of “real” religions such as Russian Orthodoxy or Russian neopaganism. The concept of invented and parody religions is rather new to Ukrainian post-atheist society. The only one of “invented” or “parody” religions to establish itself in Ukraine have been the *pastafarians*, who registered as an NGO, but not as a religious community in 2013. Their NGO’s name in Ukraine is Ukrainian Pastafarian Church (Macaroni Paraphia). In Ukrainian it is “Українська пастафаріанська церква (Макаронна парафія),” abbreviated to “УПЦ МП” (the same as the abbreviation for Russian Orthodox). No invented religion has made

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<sup>1</sup> As defined in Carole M, Cusack, . . *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith*, (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Tillich. *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. (1963). In Scharlemann, Robert P. (ed.). *Religiose Schriften [Religious writings]. Hauptwerke*. 5. (Walter de Gruyter, published 1988),. 293.

it to the state registration as a religious organization as of May 2021, and we do not observe any signs showing that this might have happened in 2021.

### ***Yozheslavie, the Hedgehog Worship***

The first of these invented religions to rise with their protests against Russian Orthodoxy and get media attention was the *Yozheslavie* (Ukr: *Йожеславіє*, “hedgehog worship”), which defined itself as an “ancient ecological spiritual science of our Slavic ancestors, who did worship hedgehogs since times immemorial.” This mock religion arose among artists and intellectuals, during gatherings at a Barbakan bar in 2018 at the peak of protests against the illegal and corrupt seizure of a piece of land on the territory which had belonged to the National Historical Museum of Ukraine. After having constructed a fence on the territory seized, the Russian Orthodox had quickly built a small church despite the absence of permission from the city council. Their public relations officers explained this action as the “restoration of an ancient monastery” near the historical foundation of Desytnyna Church of the 10th century, which is supposed to be under UNESCO protection. The process began in 2006 with a tent that grew into a capital building. Tensions between Kyivites and the UOCh MP grew in February 2018, when the Russian Orthodox converted the wooden building that had grown from the tent into a concrete structure. The Russian Orthodox argument, that they were restoring the Middle Ages monastery, was opposed by the group of activists, armed with an counterargument that “medieval churches were built on the places of ancient Slavic pagan sanctuaries, where our ancestors worshiped Nature and hedgehogs.” Two Kyivan architects tried to set the building on fire, but did not succeed and were arrested.

At the same time, Russian Orthodox tried to expand to a mini-park on Reitarska street nearby, setting there a cross with an assumed plan to put the tent-to-become building in the next few years. This mini-park houses the sculpture of a Hedgehog, the hero of a Soviet-era cartoon “Hedgehog in fog.” The sculpture had been removed due to the restoration of the mini-park and the activists were afraid that after the restoration there would appear a new Russian church instead of the Hedgehog.

The activists, who had already started to use the title of *Yozheslavie*, claimed the mini park to be the place where an ancient temple dedicated to worship of the hedgehog, the “Kyivan Stonehenge,” had existed since times immemorial. The action to defend the statue “Hedgehog in

the fog” took place, during which the settled cross fell to the ground and was later returned to the church authorities. One of the action’s slogans reads, “No to illegal building! Yes to free grazing of hedgehogs!”<sup>3</sup>

The belief system of *Yozheslavie* can be reconstructed from its preaching and a couple of videos available from their Face Book page. It states,

The theology of modern *Yozheslavie* pays special attention to the mystical connection between Hedgehog, Nature, and Human Environment. This connection has been given to humanity in sensations via the Park--a sacred place where the Nature of the Hedgehog in the form of Shrubs, Grasses, and Trees has been organically woven into the Human Environment, expressed via Benches, Lanterns, and Paths.<sup>4</sup>

Another post states that, “the Park is the Temple of *Yozheslavie* and the Public Garden is its Church... For the Park is the place where a Human can relax, exhaling daily hustle and thinking about the Being, and if lucky enough the Human can hear His Rustle, that reminds us about the Higher Sense.”<sup>5</sup> This element arguably looks more like a parody not of Russian Orthodoxy, but of another religion of “*ruskiy mir*”–Russian neopaganism with their “restoration of secret ancestor religion” narratives.<sup>6</sup> The original cartoon, “Hedgehog in the fog,”<sup>7</sup> seems somewhat psychedelic from the modern perspective. Several Face Book posts in the group and rumors about the group among Kyivan activists suggest that the *Yozheslavie* is not hostile to psychedelics.

The narrative of “revival of *luibojozhie*” (Ukr: “любойожіє,” hedgehog fine love art), the “Slavic Kama-sutra,” which our wise ancestors had studies from watching the sexual rituals of hedgehogs and imitating their mating practices (sounds like another parody of popular neotaoist or neotantric sexual practices and of Russian neopagans with their “revival of ancient secret practices.”

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<sup>3</sup>Активисты защитили скульптуру "Ежик в тумане" от посягательств УОЧ МП [Activists have protected the Hedgehog in the Fog sculpture from the encroachments of UOCh MP]. УНІАН, 2018, February 2. <https://www.unian.net/society/2380035-aktivisty-i-zaschitili-skulpturu-ejika-v-tumane-ot-posyagatelstv-upts-mp-fotoreportaj.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Любойожіє – слов'янська Камасутра. [luibojozhie, hedgehog love art – the Slav’s Kamasutra]. Facebook video. <https://www.facebook.com/546824099036676/videos/559721571080262>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandr Hinevitch and Nikolai Ivanov. Славяно-Арийские Веды. [Slavic-Arian Vedas]. (Omsk: Асгардъ Ирийский, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Soviet-era cartoon Ёжик в тумане [Hedgehog in the Fog]. Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGJgaXpxl0I>.

The Ukrainian verb “*наїжачитися*” (the process of a hedgehogs raising its needles in a situation of threat or danger) alludes to an ancient spiritual martial art utilized against “false religion.” An old Ukrainian proverb about scaring the hedgehog with one’s naked bottom is interpreted as a sacred initiation ritual (again, it’s an ironical parody on Russian neopagans that pathetically declare all kinds of proverbs and folklore as having sacred and secret symbolical meaning corresponding to ancient religious practices of Slavs) as a test for sexual maturity. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and modern BDSM are just an echo of ancient *yozheslav* practices. The statements above parody the discourse of neopagans, Russian adepts of “alternative history” and other conspiracy theories.

*Yozheslavie* makes people laugh; it has provided carnival spirit to the 2018 protests against the monastery near National Historical Museum (which failed) and the defense of the mini park on the Reitarska street of Kyiv with its Hedgehog against the attempt to seize the land for a new church there. *Yozheslavie* has already become a minor city legend in Kyiv. After the end of protests, this purported religion of ancestors disappeared from public attention, although its Face Book page is still (as of May 2021) maintained.<sup>8</sup>

## High Duck Church

The High Duck Church (HDCh) project, in contrast, is more sophisticated and tries to go beyond the scope of definitions of “parody religion” or “mock religion,” although it is definitely an “invented religion.” Its first and only notable political protest action took place on July 27, 2018.<sup>9</sup> The action was not spontaneous; the announcement had been registered with the Kyiv Municipal Administration. Both the police and Security Service of Ukraine had been notified.

On this day, a twenty thousand people procession of Russian Orthodox people holding a cross took place in the center of Kyiv. It was due to the celebration of 1030 years of the baptism of Kyiv Rus’ in 988. The HDCh’s counteraction was named the “Duckwalk against the

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<sup>8</sup> *Йожеславіє* [Yozheslavie, the Hedgehog Worship]. Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/yozheslavie/>

<sup>9</sup> Video coverage of performance *Качина хода проти двоголової курки-мутанта* [Duckwalk against two-headed mutant chicken]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/204916983258779/videos/538914153192392>.

two-headed mutant chicken”<sup>10</sup> (a reference to the two-headed eagle of Russian flag). After the Duckwalk with the church’s flag and symbols and preaching to passers-by, the HDCh organized a performance on the hill above Maidan Nezalezhnosti and Evropeiska Ploshcha squares where the Russian Orthodox procession took place. The performance happened to be in the form of mock-exorcism: after a short sermon about Russians stealing Ukrainian Church history (the strongest argument has been the physical absence of Moscow and of Moscow Patriarchate in the times of Kyiv Rus’ being baptized by prince Volodymyr) and falling into “heresy of chicken-worship instead of worshiping their delusions about God,” an individual in a bright yellow duck-shaped hat burned the flag with “two headed mutant-chicken” printed on a foreground of three colors of the Donbas Malorossiia occupational “state” (which happens to have been used by White Guard of Russian imperialists a century before). The person in duck hat called himself the Highest Quacko (Ukr: “Крячеслав,” and no, it doesn’t sound like Ukrainian translation of Orwell’s “duckspeak”) Stanislav the 23<sup>rd</sup> (which might be a reference to discordians<sup>11</sup> with their practice of looking for the number 23 everywhere).

Several Ukrainian media answered the action with neutral or favorable articles, like Artem Holub’s “High Duck Church accuses Moscow Patriarchate of falling into heresy.”<sup>12</sup> The reaction of Russian and pro-Russian media showed that the action, though small, hit its point. For example, scandalous “*Komsomolskaya Pravda*” in their editorial article “The duck procession didn’t manage to stop the cross procession”<sup>13</sup> exaggerated the number of highduckchurchers in the action, stating that there were fifty, and the Ukrainian section of Russian NewsOne Channel called the HDCh “a radical organization.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>У Києві Церква Великої Качки протестувала проти хресної ходи “руського міра” [The High Duck Church protested against the “russskiy mir’s” cross procession]. Релігієзнавча Лабораторія, 2018, July 27. <http://rellab.org.ua/tserkva-velykoji-kachky-protestuje/>.

<sup>11</sup>The practice of searching for the number 23 in the phenomenal reality was proposed by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea’s in their book, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* and by Robert Anton Wilson in his *Cosmic Trigger I: The Final Secret of the Illuminati*. Since there is no trace of Highest Quacko’s or Stanislavs with numbers 1-22 in High Duck Church’s history, we assume that this might be an allusion or homage to discordian numerology.

<sup>12</sup> Artem Holub. *Церква Великої Качки звинуватила Московський патріархат у ересі* [High Duck Church accuses Moscow Patriarchate of falling into heresy]. Uian Press, 2018? July 27. <https://uain.press/.../tserkva-velykoji-kachky...>

<sup>13</sup> *Утиное шествие Крестный ход не сорвало* [The duck procession didn’t manage to stop the cross procession]. *Komsomolskaya Pradva*, 2018, July 27. <https://kp.ua/.../613991-utynoe-shestvye-krestnyi-khod-ne...>

<sup>14</sup> *Крестный ход в Киеве и день Крещения Руси. Все подробности онлайн*. [Cross procession in Kyiv and the day of Rus’ baptism. All events online]. NewOne, 2018, July 27. <https://newsone.ua/.../krestnyj-khod-2018-v-kieve-i-den..>

High Duck Church had existed for at least two years prior to this performance. It had even financed and taken part in organizing an academic summer school on Buddhism in Kyiv during July 2018, with such respected organizations among Ukrainian scholars of religion as the Institute of Philosophy of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and NGO “Workshop for the Academic Study of Religions” as co-organizers.

The abbreviation HDCh (ukr: “ЦВК”) for some reason looks the same as the abbreviation of the scandalous Central Election Commission (Ukr: “Центральна Виборча Комісія”) – the body that leads all important elections in the country; this also hints at the political meaning of HDCh. Another hint may lie in a pun: the meaning “newspaper duck” as a “media hoax” or “fake news” also widely corresponds to the word “duck” in both Ukrainian and Russian languages.

In short, there is the High Duck (the name suggests some pun, because the exact translation from Ukrainian should be not “high” but “big” or “huge,” though the adherents emphasize that “high duck” is more appropriate to describe the eternal state of the Duck in English). Another pun: the meaning “newspaper duck” as a “media hoax” or “fake news” also widely corresponds to the word “duck” in both Ukrainian and Russian languages.

The church hasn’t disappeared after the scandalous performance. It still exists as a Facebook Page, created in October 2016, with 660 followers at the time of writing. The Facebook group connected to the page does not let people from outside in. The page updates weekly. The Facebook page regularly posts announcements about “duckology,” rage against two-headed chicken (they call this “false belief” *duogalinofilia*), duck art, practices of “quack yoga,” and “duck meditations.”

There are a couple of articles by scholars of religion on the High Duck Church in Ukrainian religious studies websites, notably the ones by Andrii Dmytruk<sup>15</sup> and an article by Frank Pritchard in *Релігієзнавча Лабораторія* (Laboratory of Religious Studies.)<sup>16</sup> According to Andrii Dmytruk, HDCh owns a basement in downtown Kyiv. The church probably has a hierarchic structure with several circles of initiation, although it doesn’t seem to have a single authoritarian or charismatic leader. The church representative doesn’t answer questions like

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<sup>15</sup> Andrii Dmytruk. *Церква Великої Качки (Перезапуск)* [High Duck Church (Reboot)]. Філософія та Релігієзнавство. November 21, 2018. <https://tureligious.com.ua/tserkva-velykoi-kachky-perezapusk/>.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Pritchard. *Як мене в Церкву Великої Качки вербували* [How they have tried to recruit me into High Duck Church]. <http://rellab.org.ua/yak-mene-v-tserkvu-velykoji-kachky-verbuvaly/>.



“how many followers do you have,” either declaring this information to be secret, or passing off with jokes like “try counting all the duckies and quackies on this planet.” The belief system of High Duck Church is best described in the 2021 book “Religion must die, or in whom will we believe after God.” Some materials were derived from the HDCh’s Facebook page and communication with a few adepts who had agreed for an interview.

The religion has a simple hierarchy, at the top of which there is the High Duck. The name suggests some pun, because the exact translation from Ukrainian should be not “high” but “big” or “huge,” though the adherents emphasize that “high duck” is more appropriate to describe the eternal state of the Duck in English. In short, the High Duck hallucinates the world that people perceive. Here, again the translation loses some narrative: the Ukrainian word *злючить* has two major translations into English – “hallucinates” and “glitches” (like computers or other complex systems glitch). When the High Duck followers use this word to describe the Duck’s activity they imply both meanings, hence that the perceived world is so weird and chaotic. They claim that gods and souls are just mental illusions which stand in the way to Enlightenment.

On the other hand, the High Duck has all the traditional attributes of a deity: omnipotence, omnipresence, the ruler of all forms and matters, the ability to exist and to non-exist at the same time, to control the time and to be beyond time. A. Dmytruk states that the HDCh’s belief system looks like monism with Zen Buddhist and Discordian elements.

Some of the HDCh’s narratives try to connect the duck discourse with neopagan and ancient pagan beliefs, like the legend of the human soul becoming a wild duck after death. It might also have some connection with the mourning hymn to those who died during the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, “Пливе Кача” (The wild duck swims away). The Church emphasizes that the sacred language of their texts is Ukrainian. Although no one has ever seen those texts, they are supposed to be written or painted on the feathers of the High Duck, and one with a spiritual eye opened (or high in the church enough) should be able to perceive them.

The HDCh has an esoteric doctrine on death: the souls of sinners (those who eat ducks, worship the two-headed mutant chicken, and pollute the Environment) after death go to a mountain lake in a place beyond time and space, cause and effect. There is no sound or movement, only peace and dreadful Black Drake on the surface of the lake. The Drake will stare into the eyes of the soul, and if the soul has not led a righteous life in the light of the High Duck’s truth, it will not be able to withstand the disintegrating gaze of the Black Drake. Such a

soul (this doctrine seems to contradict the doctrine that the soul is just a cognitive fiction like gods are) will be annihilated by the gaze of the Black Drake, its remains pecked with his huge Beak, and digested in His (in Ukrainian the drake is “he”, not “it” as in English) craw and sent back to the Glitch. The esoteric doctrine states, that it is not the Drake itself who pecks on the soul and its remains, but the Drake’s reflection in the lake

Another phenomenon of ritual importance: the plant duckweed is worshipped as a great and quickly renewable resource of proteins, a possible savior of humans in case of further population growth and ecological collapse. In the group’s discourse, the duckweed might allude also to some entheogens or other resources that come from nature.

The sacred goal of HDCh’s soteriology is described as “transduckism,” either a reference to or parody of Christian transhumanism). The HDCh teaches that human bodies may not be very suitable for space and other planets. They lack intelligence, wings, the ability to act in the air, in water, underwater, and on land, which is present in the advantageous manner of ducks. Transduckism not only has nothing against the improvement of bodies (preferably closer to the likeness of the duck, but not necessarily) and the mind, but also insists on their development. Transduckism predicts that we will be able to communicate directly through gadgets built into the body--a real telepathy from the point of view of the people of the twentieth century. It also states says that we can live in other bodies, ideally those that are fluffy, winged, and with membranous feet, suitable for swimming and flying on planets where there is a lot of water and little land; one’s Inner Duck, however, is more important than compliance with external form.

As opposed to the two other invented religions described, the High Duck Church has regular spiritual practices: its adherents perform quack yoga and engage in meditation. The latter resembles a mix of *vipassana* and mindfulness, with elements of cognitive behavioral therapy. These practices suggest that the church transcends the usages of the church name just for fun and protest and becomes something like a simulacrum of the simulacrum of religion – a “true” or “real” new religion trying to look like a parody of religion.

Another narrative of the HDCh’s belief system is ecological. It doesn’t demand that the devotees become vegetarians, but it advises them to avoid red meat, and consume fish over the meat of mammals and birds. Vegetarianism is considered a higher virtue. The devotees often gather to clean up the parks and banks of ponds and lakes where ducks do dwell (communal cleaning services in Ukraine do a bad job in taking the trash out of the parks and forests). They

feed the ducks, especially those, who don't fly away in winter, and condemn the Chinese for their Peking duck dish.

The church celebrates “kachurnalias” (ukr. *качурналиї*, the closest English translation would look like “drakernalia,” a mix of the “drake”—male mallard, and saturnalia for Roman religion). With their secrecy, absurdism, and presumed love of narcotics, highduckchurchers have similarities to discordians in the US. (I hope the use of “highduckchurchers” to name the adherents sounds appropriate. The shortened names like “quackers” or “duckchurchers” shouldn't be used to refer to this Ukrainian church, because there are at least two Protestant churches with similar names in the USA: a Duck United Methodist Church in North Carolina and a denomination of Quakers with centuries-old history). At least some things, that they are doing resembling the heroes of R.A. Wilson's “Illuminatus!” and “Cosmic Trigger” trilogies, the texts highly valued by discordians.

### **The Ukrainian Burning Church of Matriarchal Patriarchate**

The *Demsokyra* party was created in 2018 and officially registered as a political party of Ukraine in 2019. One of the first moves following the creation of the party was the announcement of a new church--the Ukrainian Burning Church of Matriarchal Patriarchate (BChMP). The abbreviation of the name in Ukrainian, “УІІІІ МІІ,” looks the same as an abbreviation used by Russian Orthodox branch in Ukraine. The slogan of the new church, “the burning church shines brightest,” has some prehistory of Soviet atheist usage, alluding to communist practices of burning churches in the 20th century.

*Demsokyra* leadership states its purpose as the following: The main task of the Church is to become a tool for demonstration of other churches' bonding with the state. It's not only about the discount for gas payments (Ukrainian government lets religious organizations pay only 50% of communal payments), and other privileges, intrusion of religions into secular schools, politics, and other institutions where religion shouldn't be. It's about showing the absurdity of such bonding.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Official *Demsokyra* website. <https://sokyra.party/uk/material/70>.

Their Facebook page was created in July 2018. As of May 2021, it has four thousand followers. One of few mock actions of the Burning Church was the sale of indulgences,<sup>18</sup> (poking fun at the Catholic medieval practices in the party's online shop, along with "merch" and paraphernalia like BChMP's "burning heart" symbols and pendants and refrigerator magnets. In eclectic postmodern style, the note that comes with indulgence says that "it will make your karma dry and shining again."

Although there's at least one person with theological education in *Demsokyra* leadership (journalist V. Tregubov), the Burning Church did not come up with its own unique theology, announcing themselves the followers of the true god R'hllor, the Lord of Light, from *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin and Game of Thrones series. The new church declared George Martin to be its prophet.

Still the Church has its own sacred text, called the "Book of Horde."<sup>19</sup> (One of the names of names the *Demsokyra* party considered was "Democratic horde"). It is a short text combining and parodying the religion of R'hllor, Genesis, cosmology, and cosmogony in ironic style, the origin and sacred history of Ukrainians, and their enemy of Mordor (J.R. Tolkien's name of the Empire of Evil, that Ukrainians often use for Russia) the grim land to the north and north-east of Ukraine. It involves an eclectic mix of reptiloids (and some fun on conspiracy theories as well), septons, and Synedrion and a story of Orthodox denominations of Ukraine struggle and the role of Five Riders (leadership of *Demsokyra*).

Although is *Demsokyra* is a known and recognized political party in Kyiv and some other cities, they have not managed to win a majority in a single city of town in local power elections, nor to pass into parliament in 2019. After this, no actions took place under the Burning Church name and symbolics, and the church's Facebook page has few updates.

## Conclusion

As with the cases of Kansas' Board of Education trying to bring creationism to public schools, and the reaction of secular society in the form of Flying Spaghetti Monster, or with Jediism and building mosques on university campuses of Istanbul and Izmir, parody religions are

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<sup>18</sup> *Демсокира. Магазин атрибутики. Індульгенція для хлопців* [Demsokyra. Shop. Indulgence for the guys] [https://shop.sokyra.party/index.php?route=product/product&path=67&product\\_id=84](https://shop.sokyra.party/index.php?route=product/product&path=67&product_id=84)

<sup>19</sup> *Іонагеліє, або Книга Орду* [Ioangelie, or the Book of Horde]. Facebook, July 14, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/265604568035721/>

still in use for mocking traditional religions and for creative protest against their invasions of secular spheres.

In many aspects, all the three churches analyzed here have much in common. None of them has registered officially as a church (“religious community” in terms of Ukraine’s legislature) yet. But all three have declared their intentions to claim such a status.

As it happens often among invented religions, they do not emphasize one single leader’s role, but rather present themselves as products of collaboration among small groups of intellectuals, artists, or other creative folks having fun and mocking traditional religious elements.

The High Duck Church looks quite different from two other projects: their discourse deals not only with the political struggle against Russian Orthodoxy with mocking them, but with a broad spectrum of problems from psychotherapy (meditations, claimed to have stress-reduction, calming, and anxiety-decreasing effects), to ecology. Another distinctive point: they have regular meditations, and speak about improving themselves through religious practices, thus behaving more as “real” religions do.

All three projects have shown a lack of energy and resources to develop beyond the situational political counteractions against the Russian Orthodoxy’s actions. With Russian aggression and the Russian Orthodoxy’s support of it, the Ukrainian *Demsokryra* party has pledged to fight it and every now and then takes some counteractions, though not under the Burning Church brand and symbols. All the projects might be used again for protests with elements of mocking and parody if the Russian Orthodox make new moves for capturing new territories or make some major mistakes in cultural or public spheres.

Whether the fact that the first steps of these three invented religions in the sphere of political protest happened in 2018 is a mere coincidence is uncertain. Prior to this year, Ukrainian scholars of religion haven’t noticed any significant “homemade,” invented, or parody religions’ activity, although the U.S.-born *pastafarians* have been present in Ukraine for several years already.

This might be the sign that the Ukrainian post-atheist society that daringly dove into religion in the 1990s has finally found enough secular self-awareness and humor to mock religion and to construct its own parody religions, thus starting a new trend of Ukrainian educated secular society’s opposition to conservative and fundamentalist Christianity.

This matter has become especially urgent after the new legislature which, starting from the year 2021, de facto allows Christian Ethics to be taught at public schools. The tendencies of bordering Poland and Russia, with the rise of Christian conservatism and xenophobia in recent years, is likely to influence the Ukrainian religious landscape, and bring up more secular opposition in the form of new invented and/or parodying religions or reactivation of the three described.

The High Duck Church, if it finds enough resources and motivation for growth, might develop into a completely new phenomenon – a new religious movement, which hides behind a mask of a parody religion.

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## Online Materials of Invented Religions and Their Mother-Organizations Analyzed

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[https://shop.sokyra.party/index.php?route=product/product&path=67&product\\_id=84](https://shop.sokyra.party/index.php?route=product/product&path=67&product_id=84)

*Йожеславіє* [Yozheslavie, the Hedgehog Worship]. Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/yozheslavie/>

*Іонагеліє, або Книга Орди* [Ioangelie, or the Book of Horde]. Facebook, July 14, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/265604568035721/>

*Качина хода проти двоголової курки-мутанта* [Duckwalk against two-headed mutant chicken]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/204916983258779/videos/538914153192392>

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*Палаюча Церква Матріархального Патріархату* [Burning Church of Matriarchal Patriarchate] Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/nehajpalae/>

*Церква Великої Качки* [High Duck Church] Facebook page  
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### **Media in Ukraine on Invented Religions and Their Protests and Mockery**

Holub, Artem. *Церква Великої Качки звинуватила Московський патріархат у ересі* [High Duck Church accuses Moscow Patriarchate of falling into heresy]. Uian Press, 2018? July 27.  
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*Крестный ход в Киеве и день Крещения Руси. Все подробности онлайн.* [Procession of the Cross in Kyiv and the day of Rus' baptism. All events online]. NewOne, 2018, July 27.  
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*Утиное шествие Крестный ход не сорвало* [The duck procession didn't manage to stop the cross procession]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 2018, July 27. <https://kp.ua/.../613991-utynoe-shestvye-krestnyi-khod-ne...>

### **Other Materials**

*Йожик в тумане* [Hedgehog in the Fog]. Youtube,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGJgaXpxl0I>.