In the Beginning Was the Word… and in the End the Number? Orthodoxy and Anti-Digital Protests in Russia: From 1990s to COVID-19

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Abstract. This article focuses on the development of anti-digital protests among Orthodox fundamentalists and conservatives in Russia. Its aim is to reveal the main trends of these protests and the ideas that inspire them. It covers the period from the late 1990s to 2020, beginning from the early protests against the introduction of electronic means of personal data control, the use of barcodes and taxpayer identification numbers (VATIN – value added tax identification number) and ending with the reaction of Orthodox movements to the digitization initiatives of the state authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We show that although the anti-digital protest is mainly associated with fundamentalism and the most conservative movements in Russian Orthodoxy, which are largely based on archaic or "traditional" values, the representatives of such groups in recent years have increasingly turned to the values of freedom and even to the human rights discourse that is widespread in the West. We also discover two clusters in modern Russian Orthodoxy: one (the main base of anti-digital protests) is focused on the physical mediation of interaction with the transcendent, and the other on the intellectual and ethical understanding of religion. Representatives of the former cluster are much less worried about the introduction of digital technologies; indeed, they even welcome the use of online technologies in religious practice.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, digitization, Russian Orthodox Church, conservatism, fundamentalism, personal data protection, COVID-19.

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A Brief History of Anti-Digital Protests: Late 1990s-Early 2000s

The first protests against digitization in the Russian Orthodox Church started in the late 1990s over the introduction of barcodes and taxpayer identification numbers (INN). In some Orthodox communities, for example, in the Greek and Georgian fundamentalist milieu, these were interpreted in a mystical-apocalyptic way: three pairs of dividing lines in the barcodes were interpreted as the number "666" ("the number of the beast," Rev. 13:16-18) [16, pp. 73-77]. This argument was backed by Russian Orthodox believers, many of whom turned out to be new converts to Orthodoxy, which made their rejection of barcodes and INN still more radical. Their objections boiled down to a mystical-apocalyptic interpretation of barcodes and INNs. They discovered the apocalyptic "number of the beast" (666) in the EAN-13 barcode system, arguing that "it is inconceivable that these symbols could have appeared in the European system by accident" [19]. At the same time, fears were expressed concerning inadmissible invasion of privacy, with the presence of "the number of the beast" (666) in barcodes and INNs claimed to be a proven fact [33]. The most vehement opposition came from the pro-monarchy church fundamentalists who declared their commitment to fighting against the use of barcodes and INNs by believers. The anti-digital protests were joined by Orthodox conservatives who, unlike the fundamentalists, did not have articulated political demands.[1]

In 2000, Valery Filimonov, an Orthodox writer and cyber engineer, founded a movement For the Right to Live without INN, Personal Codes and Microchips in St. Petersburg. Jointly with the fundamentalist organizations of St. Petersburg and Moscow the movement organized prayer vigils, demonstrations against the adoption of INNs and barcodes and held conferences titled "Russia Facing the Challenge of Globalism" and "Orthodoxy and Russia in the Light of Apocalypse" [14, p. 499]. Similar events took place in 2003-2004 in Samara, Rostov-on-Don, Nizhny Novgorod, Ivanovo and Lipetsk [35].

Among the standard-bearers of the protests against INNs were authoritative monks and famous monasteries: Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, Valaam Monastery, Optina Pustyn, and others. Even some hierarchs: Archbishop Veniamin of Vladivostok and Pirmorye (Pushkar), Bishop Diomid of Chukotka and Anadyr (Dzyban), Bishop Nikon of Ufa and Sterlitamak (Vasyukov), Archbishop Chrisanf of Viatka and Sloboda (Chepil) and Metropolitan Juvenal (Tarasov) [16, pp. 78-83].

Because the INN opposed by the protesters were allegedly supposed to replace a person's Christian name in documents, it was deemed to be "the stamp of Antichrist." The more radical advocates of this view even started withholding sacraments from members of their flocks who had received INNs [16, p. 84]. The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church pronounced against the practice of withholding communion sacraments, but supported the concern of the Orthodox conservative movements over the forcible awarding of INNs while taking a moderate position on the theological interpretation of this phenomenon. The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) position on INNs was that believers should be offered a choice of registration methods [48], and a clearly described procedure of col-

lecting and using data [28]. Subsequently (in 2008 and 2011) clarifications on this topic were given by Assemblies of Hierarchs, which condemned methods of citizen registration that invaded privacy and declared that electronic identification of citizens should be voluntary [43; 44]. Finally, the 2013 Assembly of Hierarchs adopted a document titled "The Position of the Church on the Development of Personal Data Collection and Processing Technologies." The document drew the attention of the authorities and the public to the fact that many Orthodox believers had a reason to prefer traditional registration methods and argued that the policy of forcible digitization was discriminating against such citizens and violating their constitutional rights. The document claimed that forcible introduction of new identification systems was "forming a stratum of people debarred from all the spheres of social and state life" [40]. While supporting the fears of the believers, the ROC condemned those Orthodox preachers who identified these technologies with "the stamp of Antichrist" [48].

It has to be noted that after the first statement from the ROC hierarchs, the anti-INN rhetoric of Orthodox activists changed. First, the number came to be seen not as "the stamp of Antichrist" but as a step toward the adoption of such a stamp. Second, the argument that INN would replace the Christian name came to be used more widely because it was not condemned in the ROC official documents. Third, and most notably, INNs and later other electronic registration means came to be seen mainly as the key elements of globalization, accordingly, protests against INN became part of anti-globalism protests [16, pp. 80-82]. Since then the anti-digitization component has been to a large extent part of the protests against globalism.

Below we examine the main arguments and trends in the development of anti-digital protests in Russian Orthodoxy. We draw on the materials of the conference [29] and the website of the Committee for the Protection of Personal Data [36], which are primary sources of information about the position of digital sceptics. Articles by digital sceptics have been published in the resources Russian Citizens' Line and RIA Katyusha, conservative fundamentalist outlets that position themselves as advocates of Orthodox traditional values and give the floor to priests and church officials. We have also used the materials of the Orthodox TV channel Spas (Savior) in its Program *Do samoy suti* ("Down to the Nitty-Gritty") [22; 23], publications of the Orthodox conservative radio station Radonezh, the conservative pro-monarchy channel Tsargrad TV and the fundamentalist newspaper *Rus derzhavnaya* ("Sovereign Russia"). All this constitutes the primary information base of anti-digital protests. To compare this argument with the official Church line we have studied the documents of the ROC. It also has to be noted that the term "digital sceptic" used to refer to Orthodox believers who protest against digitization fails to adequately convey the radicalism of their position. Still, we use it as a synonym of the word "anti-digital" because the protesters sometimes identify themselves with digital sceptics.

The Religious Perspective: Word Culture versus Number Culture

The church's mystical-apocalyptic perception of digital technologies stems from deeply held cultural-ethical and worldview attitudes. Orthodox activists fear that the award and use of various digital identifiers may displace the human name. According to the Christian teaching, the name, if it is in the Book of Saints, links a person to the patron saint, is a vehicle of prayer for the person and a symbol that maintains the link with God. Anti-digital activists argue that identification through the name is important not only during prayer, but in day-to-day life and that any other identification in everyday life threatens a person's self-awareness as a Christian. Thus, V. Filimonov objects to the use of SNILS (insurance number of individual personal account) which he sees as a replacement of an ordinary human name with "a digital name, which would serve as a universal identifier not only during a person's lifetime, but also after death" [25].

In the opinion of such activists, digital identification systems also threaten to replace God's image with a digital portrait. Thus, Filimonov considers biometrics to be an inadmissible "invasion of the Temple of the Holy Spirit," "a desecration of God's image in man" because biometry's claims as a method of obtaining confidential data about a person amount to a claim to omniscience, which is accessible only to God [27]. In reality, Orthodox opponents of digitization see biometry and indeed the digital registration systems and the bid to calculate human nature and predict human wishes, preferences and behavior as an attempt to usurp the power that can only be God's. The fundamentalists bolster this argument by invoking the biblical example (1st Chronicles 21: 9-19), in which David decides to hold a population count and incurs severe punishment. The argument is that the state's bid to obtain exhaustive data on its citizens is a sign of the approach of Antichrist who seeks to establish a single planetary state that totally controls all citizens (witness Boris Knorre's interview with Reverend Igor Tarasov (Kolomna, October 20, 2017). Protesting against the universal electronic card (UEC) the opponents of digital technologies complain that the UEC functionally approaches a person's digital portrait, seeing it is a threat of replacing God's image with a virtual one.

The real reason behind the rejection of digital identifications is the characteristic Orthodox reluctance to accept the notion that it is possible to analytically "calculate" the human soul. Here we can see an obvious protest against the progressivist idea of digital assessment of human emotions and wishes by scientific means to get a "digital portrait" of a person. To explain this worldview attitude let us turn to the argument the philosopher and theologian Nikolay Gavryushin used to demonstrate that Nikolay Fedorov's idea of regulating nature is incompatible with the Orthodox theology and perception of the world. He inveighed against Fedorov's claim that it is possible, in seeking ways to resurrect a person, to analytically describe man and the human soul, thereby demonstrating "a failure to understand the inherent value of the image, which is rationally inexhaustible" and, on the contrary, interpreting it as "a sign and a pointer to some logicalizable knowledge, a cerebral schema" [4, p. 251].

Gavryushin maintained that according to the Orthodox perception of the world and Orthodox anthropology the human soul and the human personality cannot be separated by analytical means. Referring to the flaw in Fedorov's thinking, he wrote: "This analytical blindness, believing that not only the personality, but any other entity consists of parts, does not see around it anything living, all living things defy understanding and should be subordinated to a rational mechanism." Considering that the personality can be divided into parts, he argues, deprives it of mysterious depths, of its dramatic qualitative difference from all other matter because in this case "the only true reality" of the personality is "atoms and molecules from which the personality is allegedly made up" [4, p. 245]. Orthodox anti-digital activists, of course, do not formulate their rejection of digital identification of man at the sophisticated theological level, but many of their pronouncements suggest that for them digitization is unacceptable largely because they are not prepared to admit that man is calculable and therefore consists of individual parts and elements. In the event, the culture of visualization clashes with the culture of digitization: in fact, the anti-digital Orthodox protest manifests the struggle between "the word" and "the number," corporeality and visualization characterizing Orthodoxy and the sign-and-digit rational culture. The Christian name, as an integral aesthetically colored symbol appears, in this context, to be a value that is juxtaposed to identification numbers and numbers of documents.

Reverend Maria (Skobtsova) described five types of piety. In Orthodoxy, the most common type is esthetic and not rational, i.e., aestheticism is dominant in the religiosity of Orthodox believers. It is linked with the special significance of thingness, corporeality and visualization, as well as with the cult of antiquity [34], because all icons and ancient ornate chants are particularly revered. According to Mark Wynn, for the believers what they touch is important because the history of that touch makes objects and places sacred [17]. So it is no accident that totally ruined temples and monasteries are being restored in the same places where they used to stand and that the relics and personal objects of saints are revered. The threat of religious practices involving some kind of physicality being sidelined adds to the effect of the "nullification" of religion [15]. Nor is it surprising that the idea of awarding numbers to citizens along with the family, first name and patronymic in introducing various digital registration systems is at odds with the type of piety prevalent among Orthodox believers which invests the name with special meaning.

At the end of the day, digital sceptics see the process of digitization as a global negative trend because the shift of personal identification toward digital codes, renunciation of the verbal culture in favor of the numerical culture is seen as a departure from the fundamental principle laid down by God, expressed in the first sentence of the Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), where the Word (Logos) is Christ, the source of life and all being. That is why for many conservatives the answer to the question about the legitimacy of gradual replacement of words and names with numbers is unequivocal: it is a step away from Christ. This fear is vividly expressed in the book by the economist Valentin Katasonov, one of the most

mystical and conspiracy-conscious anti-digital ideologists, *In the Beginning Was the Word… and in the End the Number*? [6], the title that harks back to the above bible quote.

Political Explications of Rejection of the Digit: Conspiracy Theories and Conservatism (Hidebound Traditionalism)

The religious-mystical perception of digitization leads Orthodox fundamentalists and conservatives to see it not as an objective consequence of scientific and technological progress, but attribute it to the impact of external forces. For many faithful digitization is the result of a plot of a small group of people, members of the ruling elite and the oligarchs in Western countries who sell digital equipment to Russia, on the one hand, and bankers who seek to gain control over the payments of citizens, and lobbyists of digitization projects, on the other [27]. They believe that the main aim of the digitization lobby is to establish a world government to pave the way for the enthronement of the Antichrist. These activists see digitization in eschatological terms and they believe in the plans of the masonic "world backstage," i.e., embrace conspiracy theories [1].

In the current situation Russia is a bulwark of Orthodoxy surrounded by enemies who are out to destroy it (partly with the help of new technologies). No wonder the argument against digitization often goes hand-in-hand with conservative rhetoric, which sees the danger of electronic data handling as a threat to Russia's sovereignty because it is considered to be an instrument of globalization. Integrated systems of personal data storage (the Integrated State Social Security Information System, the Integrated State Services Portal, the Moscow Region Portal of State and Municipal Services, Mosreg), the activists believe, carry great risks because leaks from these systems can be used by Western countries [23].

The security narrative is one of the more noticeable projections of the anti-digital bias of Orthodox fundamentalists on the political tonality. In this milieu, digitization issues are discussed in the political language, highlighting the militarized defensive mentality, as witnessed by the names of their events: "Issues of Spiritual Security in the Information Society," [2] "Total Digitization of Society: A Threat to Statehood and National Identity," "RF Digital Economy Project Threatens the Country's Security and Must not Become an Ideology of a New, Dismembered Russia" [42] and so on.

Digital sceptics are worried by the "prospect of decentralization of governance, meltdown of state mechanisms, collapse of state governance… the loss of the state's ability to perform its functions and defend its sovereignty" [42]. These fears, in a more moderate form, are shared by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia: "We should not allow ourselves to be tempted by any toys, including digital ones, if we are not to discover some day that we are slaves of this technological civilization controlling our sovereign country from outside" [41].

The fixation on national security issues can readily be understood in the context of the phenomenon noticed by Jardar Østbø of Norway, namely, "securitizing

'spiritual-moral values' " [10]. His study argues that spiritual and moral values have come to be defined as national security issues at the highest levels of government. The narrow concept of "spiritual security," which sprang up in the mid-1990s, was initially directed at new religious movements of Western provenance but was later extended by declaring spiritual and moral values to be a matter of national security. Because the ROC had actively campaigned for this move its representatives embraced the security rhetoric and Orthodox fundamentalists, with their characteristic isolationism and Manichean world view, did not only pick up but intensified it, proposing various explanations of world processes on is basis.

Total Control over the Individual, Threats to Rights and Freedoms

In spite of the pronounced conservative tendencies, the anti-digitization movement has another strand which stresses concern about infringements on individual freedom (including on the part of the state).

Constitutional-legal arguments in defense of the personal rights and freedoms of digital sceptics were there from the start of the protests, but increased noticeably by the late 2010s. The digital sceptics' main worry is that new technologies would make possible total control over the individual and this would endanger the rights and freedoms of citizens: "Surveillance of the daily life of a 'barcoded' citizen … will make it possible to draw a detailed psychological and even psycho-physical profile of an UEC holder. Physiological and psychological data have long been used to develop methods of bringing pressure to bear on an individual in special situations" [49].

Universal electronic cards (UECs) have been criticized not only as individual identifiers, but also as legal tender involving the withdrawal of money from circulation. Archpriest Maksim Kolesnik (dean of the Church of Newly Canonized Martyrs and Domodedovo Confessors in the city of Domodedovo, Moscow Region) claims that the Digital Economy project is aimed at total control over citizens: "We hear weasel words about the digital economy. In reality it is a sly term. The economy is above all man's life activity and man needs real and not digital goods and services. The term 'digital economy' in reality means electronic surveillance of man's activity" [36].

To bolster their position activists – Nikolay Mishustin, founder of the Parents' Pushback movement, Olga Letkova, family protection commissioner in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region, Anna Schwabauer, lawyer and expert under the family protection commissioner in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region and others – scrutinize legal acts, draft laws and ordinances and publish complaints forms in the social media. For example, after analyzing the law on biometric identification, anti-digitization activists found several threats in it: absence of a list of information gathered about citizens, transfer of biometric data to the law enforcement bodies without the owner's consent, extension of the list of grounds for denying bank services to the client, which lays the ground for discrimination of those who disagree with the processing of their biometric data [38]. In other

words, Orthodox activists highlight the danger of limiting rights and freedoms and discrimination of those who would disagree with the use of certain methods of digital identification.

Elements of discrimination, the activists claim, are contained in the Federal Law On State Assistance which says that assistance will be withheld without prior consent to the processing of personal data. Conservatives report cases when government bodies deny the use of alternative means (paper carriers) by clients in violation of the Federal Law On the Organization of Delivery of State and Municipal Services [29]. "If the entire population is forcibly switched to 'the digit' 'free of charge' leaving no alternatives (or still worse, artificially making them undesirable) this is reason to wonder how the state will use the new 'digital' reality" [21].

Fears are voiced that technologies as an instrument will be in the hands of a limited group of people whose moral fiber is unknown and who may use it to further their selfish ends [22]. Operators of personal data – the state or private companies – may sell citizens' data. "You see what they want to turn us into? Into a market. They want man to be a commodity" [36].

Orthodox digital sceptics typically are equally worried about the danger of control over the individual by the state and by big corporations which may make a quantum leap owing to the introduction of digital technologies. This seems plausible because, as Neil Richards notes, "these are related parts of the same problem, rather than wholly discrete" [12, p. 1935]. The state, as has been said above, is passing digitization laws without leaving citizens an alternative option (traditional means of registration). The corporations for their part gain access to citizens' data because the state delegates its functions to them. Witness V. Filimonov: "The powers of the state bodies are transferred to the Multi-Functional Centers and from the MFCs to the banks" or else through corporations rendering services, for example, to major IT companies which seek to seize the world [26].

During the Pandemic

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic gave a boost to the passage of digitization laws because many spheres switched to online format. ROC dioceses received orders from governors to prevent mass gatherings of people in churches and switch them to online mode through video. This caused much resentment because it happened during a period of intensive liturgy for the Orthodox church – the end of Lent and the approach of Easter traditionally celebrated in crowded churches with huge numbers taking communion from the same cup.

Contrary to the customary compliance with the ordinances of civilian authorities, not only lay believers, but also some church leaders defied the restrictive measures: for example, Metropolitan of Saratov Longin said he was ready to allow mass prayer on Easter for all comers [32]. Public protests were voiced by Orthodox activists in Yekaterinburg, Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities. They saw the demand to conduct services online as a veiled form of persecution of the faithful, stressing that the spread of restrictions to church-going while su-

permarkets were open was at best an inconsistent move on the part of the authorities.[3] The threat of restrictions of rights and freedoms was flagged by those who previously complained only about growing centralization of the state and coercive governance practices, for example, schema-hegumen Sergius (Romanov).[4] He expressed his conviction that digitization was a ploy aimed at preventing people from moving freely, going to church and choosing how to live [45].

One of the leaders of anti-digital protests in the fundamentalist circles, Archpriest Maksim Kolesnik, compared the digital pass regime with "fascist occupation" noting that the authorities were making citizens partisans in their own cities. He cited Benjamin Franklin's famous quote – "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety" – arguing that under the circumstances putting safety first was folly. "To the tales about your safety the cities will be divided into sectors with varying degrees of access, you will have to show your passport to enter the Internet, live by permission, move around only with a pass, everyone will have their number and badge like in a prison camp" [31].

Orthodox fundamentalists railed against the State Duma churning out digitization legislation at short notice – such that the public had no chance to assess it properly. They pointed out that preventing the spread of COVID-19 was not the real aim of these bills which were designed to cover up the state's wish to limit the citizens' freedom. [36]. Thus the focus of the anti-digital protests shifted from the threats to national security to the danger of total control of the population and restriction of freedom of movement through the introduction of QR-codes.[5]

In a turnaround, Orthodox fundamentalist conservative circles became much more vocal and adopted a human rights vocabulary that was previously alien to them, opposing digital restrictive measures, whereas the believers oriented toward the Western world and liberal values showed a more relaxed attitude to these restrictions and took for granted the need to master digital skills to be able to take part in online church services.[6]

Finally, on August 25, 2020 the ROC Synod issued a belated assessment of the COVID-19 situation. In a more moderate form, it backed the fears of Orthodox activists concerning control over the population: "We see as largely justified the concern of many Christians, as well as people of other persuasions, about the possibility of continued use of methods that during the epidemic ensured the necessary decrease of intensity of personal contacts among people. The use of digital identifiers, automated decision-making that may infringe upon the rights of individuals and entire communities, widespread gathering of personal data, including information on health, as well as the processing of these data – all this calls for monitoring on the part of society, including the Church as a social institution" [24].

Another interesting phenomenon is that anti-digitization activists, in protesting against SNILS and UEC, appeal to legislation in other countries, noting that England, France and Germany do not have "a single population register with digital citizen identification because these mechanisms are seen as a gross violation of the constitutional rights of citizens" [50]. Objecting to the introduction of QR

codes they invoked the Council of Europe's warning against restrictions of rights and freedoms under the pretext of COVID-19 and cited the norms of the European Human Rights Convention.

It has to be noted that the Russian anti-digitization activists have borrowed some ideas from American Protestant fundamentalists although they are loath to admit it [11, pp. 125-127]. Beginning from the 1970s Americans have been expressing fears about the formation of the European Union and globalization which, they felt, would pave the way for the coming of Antichrist [2, p. 277], arguing that the new technical means of controlling the behavior of citizens were being used as instrument toward this end [8].

In the Public Religion Format: Attempts at Demarginalization

Researchers have noted that modern religious movements are increasingly penetrating the public space [3; 5], Russian Orthodoxy not being an exception: its transition from "private" to "public religion" arguably contributed to the development of Orthodox anti-digitization movements and their rhetoric. Let us take a close look at the actions of anti-digitization activists through the prism of this concept, which has several components [18].

(1) Let us start with the presence of a religious group in the mass media. Andrey Kormukhin, the head of the paramilitary Orthodox movement Sorok sorokov (Forty-by-Forty), complains that big media are trying to marginalize digital sceptics by refusing to give them the floor: "We have been presented as an obscurantist, sectarian fringe" [29]. Anti-digitization activists have to be content mainly with their own information channels creating their own sites, pages in social networks, YouTube channels, etc. Digitization problems can only be discussed on church media outlets, for example, on the Spas channel [22; 23], Tsargrad channel and Radio Radonezh [35; 30]. In spite of their dislike of technology, digital sceptics are amazingly active in the net, which is characteristic of the fundamentalists who are singularly active in using modern communications to promote their archaic ideas [9, pp. 27-30]. In May 2020, when the pandemic had left no other options, the activists even held an on-line rally "A Human is Not a Number" [36].

(2) The religious group is trying to influence the state. Orthodox digital sceptics do not simply oppose certain aspects of technological development, but reflect on political processes and analyze draft laws. In their statements, the activists address their critical remarks to the President, the government, the State Duma, individual deputies and bureaucrats, sometimes not without success. Thus, their criticism of the Digital Economy project led to it being discussed at a meeting of the RF Security Council in June 2017 [42]. In May 2020, appeals of digital sceptics to the State Duma forced the deputies to postpone the discussion of bills on the population register and biometric identification [39].

Anti-digital movements try to influence the situation not only at the federal level, but also in the regions. In their groups in the social media they publish samples of complaints filed with executive power bodies.[7] At this level, anti-digital

activists have more chance to uphold their interests and their right to use tradi-tional registration methods in obtaining public services, in placing their children in kindergartens and schools.

(3) In raising the topic of personal data processing, religious groups touch upon issues that are of concern to the whole society. There is an eschatological element in their rhetoric: they discuss digitization as a threat to the whole hu-manity. Viewing this phenomenon through the prism of anti-globalism, Orthodox movements see it as a threat to national security and interests.

(4) Communication between anti-digitization activists as a religious group and society could play an important role, but there is no direct exchange of argu-ments. More often than not Orthodox activists' criticism of digital projects goes unanswered.

(5) The religious group is a moral agent. Anti-digitization activists, in seeking to help those who try to uphold their moral rights to use traditional registration means, concentrate on giving information and legal assistance to all comers.

In this way, Orthodox fundamentalists and conservatives seek to demarginal-ize themselves in the eyes of society and the state. That is why they invite famous actors to their events and seek the backing of academics. Thus, speakers at the above-mentioned online rally against digitization included actress Maria Shukshi-na, TV presenter Anna Shafran, while MGIMO professors Olga Chetverikova and Valentin Katasonov are leading figures in anti-digital protests.

Conclusion

The discussions around the introduction of digital technologies, which in-tensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have revealed two clusters within the Russian Orthodox Church community. One is oriented toward "material religion" which stresses the importance of visual physical contact, the need for tangible physical mediation of interaction with the transcendental, and the other toward ra-tional theological and ethical concept of religion. In some sense the second cluster corresponds to the concept of "virtual religion" or rather, it facilitates adaptation to it and acceptance of its specificity. The first cluster is more a province of fun-damentalists and conservatives (though the correlation is not absolute) and the second of deacon Orthodox believers as well as those who take a relatively posi-tive view of the prospects of society's development ("progressivists") and finally, those who can loosely be identified with the liberal trends in Orthodoxy.

Admittedly, the Russian Orthodox Church has a largely negative or conserva-tive attitude to digital technologies. The protests against digitization are prompted by two opposite trends: on the one hand, digital sceptics object to digital technol-ogies as threats to stability and cultural sovereignty; and on the other hand, they seek to protect privacy and are afraid to lose the habitual forms of communication in the face of unpredictable controlling effects of digital technologies. As a result, the latter trend makes Orthodox actors adopt human rights discourse and use the conceptual framework of the Western legal consciousness in spite of their ten-

dency to juxtapose archaic and primordial features to the liberal-globalist type of culture. In developing their own human rights narrative they try to broaden their appeal, involve major media outlets and media personalities to popularize their ideas, make their arguments more understandable to the broad public, in other words, seek to demarginalize anti-digitization protests which acquire the attributes of a public religion.

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Notes

[1] The difference between the protests of Orthodox fundamentalists and conservatives was that while the former sought to influence society, the latter were ready to tolerate digital control remaining loyal to the regime. What they dreaded was a change of religious traditions because of technological innovation. However, fundamentalists and conservatives alike were fiercely opposed to digitization, albeit in different forms. In this article we adopt

the methodology and approaches to the definition of fundamentalism set forth in [13; 7], and proceed from their definitions of these groups.

2   The permanent round table organized by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate with the blessing of Metropolitan Onuphrius of Kiev and All Ukraine.

3   The authors often heard this argument from the Orthodox activists who campaigned for the opening of churches in April of 2020. See, for example, this comment on the post of the prominent Orthodox activist Oksana Ivanova: "I realized why they come after the Church and not after the TC" (an entry in Ivanova's personal blog of April 10, 2020, see https://www.facebook.com/ioksana).

4   In May 2020, schema-hegumen Sergius was banned from preaching and later defrocked for his eccentric sermons in which he publicly denied the existence of COVID-19, cursed religious and secular authorities for shutting down churches during the lockdown period. His opinion is important for us because during the preceding 15 years or so he commanded great authority among church fundamentalists and had a following in the Russian military and security establishments.

5   Anti-digitization Orthodox publications gave fitting titles to their materials: "From COVID-19 to a Single Digital Concentration Camp," "Who is Preparing Slavery in Russia," "New Law Abolishes Privacy," "COVID-19 Will Go Away Sooner or Later, but Total Surveillance Will Stay" [47; 46; 20; 25].

6   For example, the Preobrazhensk Fraternity set up a YouTube Channel with live streaming of church services (https://www.youtube.com/c/RusOrthodoxPrayer).

7   For example, Parents' Pushback (https://vk.com/club88227371) and Family Protection Commissioner of St. Petersburg (see https://vk.com/detipeterburg).

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