Orthodox Christianity and Multiple Modernities: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War

PETR KRATOCHVÍL — Institute of International Relations Prague
Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic

E-MAIL — kratochvil@iir.cz

ORCID — https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3326-3814

TOMÁŠ DOLEŽAL — Anglo-American University in Prague
Metropolitan University Prague, Czech Republic

E-MAIL — tomas.dolezal@aauni.edu

ABSTRACT — This study explores the ways in which two Orthodox churches (the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine) construct their own versions of modernity while reacting to the Russian-Ukrainian war. One tries to develop its own idiosyncratic and strongly anti-Western, but still essentially modern project, while the other aligns itself with Western modernity, albeit also on a selective basis. Theoretically, the article draws from the literature about multiple modernities, arguing that this framework can shed new light not only on these religious actors' attitudes to Western modernity, but also on the internal competition within the Orthodox world. Methodologically, the study builds on a qualitative discourse analysis of online communication of the two churches in the period of January 2022-December 2023.

INTRODUCTION

The XXV World Russian People's Council, the largest public forum in the Russian Federation, recently approved a decree of fundamental importance. The decree, titled The Present and the Future of the Russian World, addresses Russia's authorities while also offering the clearest and most explicit formulation of the concept of the Russian World and its significance for the Russian war on Ukraine. The person standing behind the document is Kirill II, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. The Patriarch brought the Council into existence in 1993, and he continues to serve not only as the Council's President but also as its "spiritual leader" (WORLD RUSSIAN PEOPLE'S COUNCIL 2024). This, together with the fact that the Council operates under the umbrella of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), gives ample justification to reading the document as an expression of the dominant view within the ROC's leadership. The document's most discussed statement is the declaration that *"from the spiritual-moral point of view, the special military operation is a Holy War"*[1] (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2024). The document claims that the only acceptable solution to the conflict is the full subjugation of Ukraine, its inclusion in the exclusive zone of influence of the Russian Federation and the removal of even the possibility of a hostile government in Kiev (IBID.). To justify this radical declaration, the decree claims that the three Russian "sub-ethnicities" (the so-called Great Russians, Little Russians and White Russians) have to be reunited, not only spiritually, but also politically.

What is fascinating is that the decree heavily relies on a sharp critique of the West, and selected modern Western political principles, but also an advocacy of (a specific type of) Russian modernization.[2] On one hand, it describes Russia in highly idiosyncratic, pre-modern terms, seeing it as the biblical "katechon", the mysterious power that "withholds" the end of the world and restrains the arrival of the Antichrist. On the other, it translates this vision into concrete recommendations for the current foreign policy of the Russian Federation. It claims that the West has fallen under the spell of Satanism, but the fight against this blasphemy has to be carried out through modern political means, a 'conservative modernization' (cf. the argument proposed by (TRENIN 2010)). The curious mixture of modern and anti-modern elements is, however, also visible in the description of the key term used in the document – the Russian World. The Russian World is, for example, not seen as the sphere comprising those belonging

to the Russian Orthodox Church or professing the values of Orthodox Christianity. Instead, the Russian World *"includes everybody for whom the Russian tradition, the shrines of the Russian civilization and the great Russian culture constitute the highest value and meaning of life"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2024A). Here, the Russian World is in fact interpreted so much in line with the Western version of secularized modernity that Christianity (Orthodox or otherwise) is not even mentioned.

The sharp critique of the West and the rejection of the Western type of modernization that the ROC's pronouncements often contain, frequently lead to the conclusion that the ROC's political stance is, in its entirety, anti-modern (for an excellent overview of the debate, (SEE STOECKL 2020). Especially if this interpretation is superimposed on the current Russian-Ukrainian war, a temptation arises to reduce the intra-Orthodox conflict to a dichotomous struggle between the acceptance and rejection of modernity. In this understanding, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) (and, by extension, Ukraine itself, as well as the Ecumenical Patriarchate) represent the position which is fully in line with Western modernity. The ROC, in its turn, is also essentialized, becoming the embodiment of the purely anti-modern stance. The modern vs. anti-modern dichotomy is then reinforced by the tendency to Orientalize Orthodox Christianity, which is often – especially in its Russian guise – *"cast in the role of the 'Subaltern Other'"* (ROUDOMETOF 2014: 1).

This article puts forward a different argument; in fact, three inter-related arguments. First, it claims that each of the two sides in the conflict (the ROC and the OCU) advocates a particular type of modernity: one trying to develop its own strongly anti-Western and yet *modern* project, the other aligning itself with Western modernity, albeit also on a selective basis. Second, it argues that the notion of multiple modernities is a useful lens for the endeavour also because it makes it possible to shed more light on the interactions between different modernizing actors and also on the mutual influences among various modernization projects (SEE GÖKSEL 2016: 246–267; ROSATI – STOECKL 2012). Versions of non-Western modernity are not, after all, mere derivatives of or reactions to the Western modernity project, but they also consider local conditions, including the different attitudes to religion (CASANOVA 2011: 252–267). This means that to explain the difference between the versions of modernity advocated by the OCU and the ROC,

we need to take into account not only their attitudes to the West, but also their mutual othering, which has accelerated in recent years. Finally, on the most general level, this study aims to contribute to the growing literature that shows that, unlike in the simplified Orientalist reading of Orthodox Christianity, this tradition is capable of modernization (BUSS 2018).

The article consists of seven parts. It starts with (1) a short overview of the scholarly discussion about modernity, focussing mainly on the concept of multiple modernities as proposed by S. N. Eisenstadt. In the two sections that follow, the article links this debate to Orthodox Christianity: One describes (2) the overall attitude of Orthodox Christianity to modernity and the other shows that there is (3) internal differentiation within the Orthodox world in regard to modernity, as recently exemplified by the conflict between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church. While these two sections do not bring novel empirical findings, they are important for understanding the context in which the contestation between the ROC and the OCU plays out. Then comes (4) the research design, which also shows how the discourse analysis is reflected in the structure of the empirical part of the article. This section is followed by the empirical part, which is divided into (5) the analysis of the ROC's relationship to modernity and (6) an analogical section on the OCU. While the ROC's attitude is relatively well researched (this study brings new empirical evidence confirming that the same position is expressed in its online communication as well), the article sheds new light on the complex positioning of the OCU. The study's main findings are then summarized in (7) the conclusion.

MODERNITY AND MODERNITIES

Modernity describes the situation in which a society defines itself in terms of a radical reflexivity that posits a fundamental difference from its past, *"an historical condition of difference"* (GIDDENS – PIERSON 2018: 15). A modern society has not lost its customs and traditions, but these customs and traditions become plural and progressively less authoritative, losing their sway over the society as they are continuously critically re-examined, adapted or rejected (BECK – LASH – GIDDENS 1994: 6–8). The role of human agency thus becomes more significant than in previous eras: The awareness of the possible different outcomes of the future development of the society increases and the nature of the envisioned social order is increasingly contested. This

means that the future cannot be taken for granted; it has to be actively fought for and shaped. Social actors, even those who oppose some dimensions of modernity, perhaps wishing for the return of a single dominant tradition, are aware that they have to actively influence their societies to achieve their preferred end state. Social differentiation is then not so much the primary defining feature of modernity, but rather the outcome of the process of growing reflexivity, individualization and the increased power of human agency, for an overview of this and related debates see Raymond Lee (2006: 355–368).

The Western European version of modernity remains its oldest and most influential guise. Four of its features continue to remain central: It begins with (1) heightened reflexivity, which leads to an increased confidence in human agency and its power to transform the social order; it has produced (2) specific political institutions and practices (including the modern state and liberal democracy), created (3) new and largely autonomous economic institutions (leading to the emergence of modern market practices and the increasingly globalized market economy), and introduced (4) the existence of a largely independent secular sphere (see (STOECKL 2016) for secularization, post-secularity and modernity, but see also the argument about multiple secularities in (BURCHARDT – WOHLRAB-SAHR – MIDDELL 2015: 1–15)).

As famously argued by S. N. Eisenstadt, some aspects of modernization appeared everywhere, including the accelerating process of individualization, the introduction of modern education, the dissolution of extended family structures, and urbanization. Nonetheless, the process was not uniform and instead significant variations have taken place, producing *"multiple institutional and ideological patterns"* (EISENSTADT 2000: 2). In other words, instead of a single modernity based on the Western template, various configurations have emerged which combine elements of Western modernity with local ingredients. While the West remains *"the crucial reference point"* (IBID.) for all these projects, the references are as often negative as they are positive. This othering of the West has played a key role in the birth of anti-modern movements: contemporary versions of religious fundamentalism are often unintelligible without understanding the negative role the West and Western modernity play in their discourses and practices. But crucially, anti-Westernism (as well as the related Occidentalist attitudes – see (BURUMA – MARGALIT 2004)) has, in most cases, never translated into

a wholesale rejection of modernity, as non-Western modernization projects often build on idiosyncratic combinations of Western-type modernization measures and a strongly articulated anti-Westernism.

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AND MODERNITY

Orthodoxy is the one large branch of Christianity in which modernization was often seen as externally-induced. Typically, it was explicitly linked to Western Europe, as exemplified by the reforms carried out by Tsar Peter the Great. Even today, a sense of resistance to the project of modernity as something external is felt – to a lesser or greater degree – everywhere in the Orthodox world. Anti-modern attitudes remain *"deeply encoded in the Orthodox cultural tradition"* (ROUDOMETOF 2014: 2), and the relationship between Orthodoxy (and historically Orthodox societies) and modernity continues to be a politically sensitive issue. This sensitivity is heightened by (1) the resurgence of religion in the public sphere of many Orthodox countries and (2) the growing doubts about whether Western modernity is a model worth emulating (IKENBERRY 2018: 7–23). At the same time, the continued pressure of globalization generates new incentives to modernize as the diffusion of modern political and cultural but also economic practices does not abate, and Orthodox societies have to adapt to them.[3] It is therefore no surprise that the relationship of Orthodoxy to pre-modernity, modernity, and post-modernity has now become a popular academic topic (SEE MAKRIDES 2013; LEUSTEAN 2014).

What this wave of scholarship on Orthodoxy and modernization reveals is not only that Orthodox churches and societies have a large potential for adaptation to modernity, but also that historically, Orthodoxy underwent significant modernization processes (see many of the contributions to the special issue of *Religion, State and Society* published in 2012). In fact, the very establishment of national Orthodox churches can be understood as a product of modernization (ROUDOMETOF 2019). This does not apply only to the emergence of national churches in the Balkans, but also to the more recent developments in Eastern Europe. The key problem related to this process lies in the requirement of the separation of the church and the state as an essential part of Western modernity. It is true that the absolute state-church separation is more of an ideal type and even in the most secular Western states, some differences in the treatment of various religious actors persist

(ROY 2007). But in Orthodox countries the cooperation has been significantly more intense, so much so that the stronger church-state relations have become one of the most distinctive hallmarks of the Orthodox projects of modernity (see (KÖLLNER 2019), particularly the introduction).

Although pressures from the outside have had homogenizing effects on the Orthodox churches/societies (ROUDOMETOF 2014: 76), the Orthodox world has nonetheless never subscribed to a single project of "Orthodox modernization", not least simply because Orthodoxy was never united in a single political space. Historically, two empires and their modes of governance shaped Orthodox modernization (or the resistances to it) – the Russian and the Ottoman Empire, leading to *"multiple modernizations pursued in the Orthodox religious landscape"* (IBID.: 11; CF. BUSS 2018). Importantly, these intra-Orthodox differences and struggles have substantially accelerated recently, and as a result of the public resurgence of religion, they have become more visible, making the exploration of Orthodox modernities not only an interesting academic subject, but also a politically relevant one.

THE INTRA-ORTHODOX STRUGGLE
AND THE VISIONS OF MODERNITY

The various Orthodox attitudes to modernity influence virtually every aspect of Orthodox politics. The most important example of this trend is the long-term divergence between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate as the two most significant religious institutions in the Orthodox world. We argue that the conflict between Moscow and Constantinople is not merely a dispute over ecclesial jurisdictions or a simple contestation over territories and resources (even though both of these dimensions are also contained within it), but a fundamental disagreement over how far the Orthodox modernity project should emulate the Western one or diverge from it. This struggle is thus the culmination of the contestation over Orthodoxy's preferred modernization project; it is a struggle over what type of modernity Orthodox Christians should pursue.

The Orthodox world and the positioning of individual autocephalous churches within it are, of course, more complex and there are various ideological groupings within each of the churches as well (about this, see footnote 6). But the recent developments, such as the establishment of

the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in December 2018 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022, have had two major effects. First, they contributed to a further polarization of the Orthodox world, as the pressure to choose sides in the conflict increased and the retaliatory measures against those choosing the other side also became more common (MORINA – WILSON 2022). The second effect is related to the attention dedicated to the conflict by other political actors and its public visibility. The dispute between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Ecumenical Patriarchate had been simmering for decades before the current events. Few outside the ecclesial circles remember that the communion between the two churches was already broken in the 1990s, when a short-term schism between them appeared and lasted from February to May 1996 as a consequence of their disagreement over the status of the Orthodox Church in Estonia. After the establishment of the OCU and especially after the Russian full-scale invasion, however, secular media, political leaders as well as other actors suddenly started to pay focussed attention to the previously overlooked intra-Orthodox struggle (SHERR 2019; MANDAVILLE 2024).

An additional point should be made about the sharply different views held by the unified Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). At its formation in 2018, the OCU unified the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (the Kiev Patriarchate) and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. But the UOC rejected the move and remained part of the Moscow Patriarchate. The UOC has been criticized by the OCU for its tacit support of the invasion and maintaining the dependence on Moscow, as documented by, among other things, its breaking of communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its lack of condemnation of Patriarch Kirill for his support of the war, and its not demanding Kirill's ouster (Orthodox Church of Ukraine 2022a). The controversy over the ties to Moscow culminated in August 2024, when the Ukrainian parliament approved the Law on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine (No. 8371) with the aim *"to ban the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church and religious organisations affiliated with it in Ukraine"* (VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE – UKRAINIAN PARLIAMENT 2024).[4]

As far as the ROC's role in the conflict is concerned, it is heavily influenced by its changing position in Russia and the post-Soviet space. In the post-Cold War era, the ROC re-emerged as a strong and confident

political actor which often took a course of action independently of Russian state authorities and at times even acted in a critical manner towards the state (RICHTERS 2012A). But the proximity between the state and the church has been continuously, even if unevenly, increasing (SHAKHANOVA – KRATOCHVÍL 2020; SEE ALSO KÖLLNER 2020). The more intense cooperation between the state and the ROC already started during the period of Patriarch Aleksey II, significantly strengthening the church domestically (KRINDATCH 2006), and also equipping it with new informal tools of influence in its activities abroad (PAYNE 2010). The mutual collaboration accelerated substantially around 2008–2009 with a change at both the ecclesial and political level: The term of President D. A. Medvedev commenced in 2008 and Patriarch Kirill was installed in February 2009 following the death of Patriarch Aleksey II in December 2008. During President Medvedev's years in office, a three-tiered arrangement between the state and religious institutions solidified, with the ROC on top, other "traditional" religions in the following positions and the "non-traditional" ones at the bottom (BLITT 2010).

The increased proximity between the church and the state also led to a gradual transformation of the attitude of the ROC toward the government's plans for Russia's modernization (RICHTERS 2012B). During the third and especially the fourth presidential term of V. V. Putin (2012–2018 AND 2018–2024), the church's role in the state-sponsored conservative modernization became increasingly central. The ROC started to serve as the main vehicle for the domestic patriotic campaign as well as the militarization of education (SHAKHANOVA – KRATOCHVÍL 2020). In the process, it was also transformed into one of the key sources of the legitimacy of the President and his idiosyncratic and increasingly autocratic mode of governance. The state, in its turn, supported the ROC's "moral entrepreneurship" regarding LGBTQ+ people and family policies in general (STOECKL 2016) and translated the church's conservative moral values into state policies and legislation (SOROKA 2022). The overall result is unambiguous: The once relatively well-defined dividing line between the church's spiritual claims and the state's expansionism started to blur. If in 2015 a scholarly study could still claim that the two spheres (the political and the spiritual) were relatively distinct (PETRO 2015), the difference has almost entirely disappeared by now.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study explores the topic of multiple Orthodox modernities with a focus on the Russian-Ukrainian war and the way two Orthodox churches (the OCU and the ROC) publicly react to it. We explore whether and to what extent modernity is – explicitly or implicitly – accepted by the two churches, and how their own versions of modernity are defined, but also how themes related to modernity are present in their rhetorical strategies of identity construction and othering. Specifically, the study explores selected online communications of the two churches in the period of January 2022-December 2023. As they use multiple platforms for online communication, the sources of data differ in the two cases. As far as the OCU is concerned, we analyzed materials from its Facebook page (PRAVOSLAVNA TSERKVA 2024); all the primary sources can be found in the Appendix published online). All the posts that alluded to or otherwise dealt with the Russian invasion and the ensuing crisis, were collected. Altogether, the analysis yielded 109 published posts, some of which additionally contained a video or links to other documents. These sources were subsequently manually analyzed (for more about the analysis, see below).

In the case of the ROC, collecting data from Facebook was not an option as the church is officially not present on the platform, so instead, we collected data from its VKontakte page (RUSSKAYA PRAVOSLAVNAYA TSERKOV 2024). As any references to the "war" are illegal in Russia, we searched for documents related to the term "Ukraine/Ukrainian," etc. However, only 38 ROC posts from the two-year period qualified for use in the study. To increase the number of available texts, additional texts from the church's official website were used as well (patriarchia.ru). The search on the website yielded an additional 124 textual units. These sources (as well as those which were hyperlinked to these sources) were also manually analyzed. All the collected texts and videos were read and viewed in their original languages – Ukrainian in the case of the OCU textual/visual corpus and Russian in the case of the ROC.

Methodologically, the article draws on critical discourse analysis (in particular, following Ruth Wodak's approach (CF. WODAK 2014, 2020)). The orientation of critical discourse analysis is generally qualitative, and as a result, unlike some corpus-oriented discourse analytical methodologies

or content analysis (KRIPPENDORFF 2018), it is not primarily interested in quantifying numbers of occurrences of key *topoi* or rhetorical strategies (for an example see chapter 3 (WODAK – PELINKA 2002)). Instead, it explores general themes and their roles in the discourse: thus, rather than focussing on *"isolated words and sentences"*, it is focused on the hermeneutics of large textual units: *"texts, discourses, conversations, speech acts, or communicative events"* (WODAK – MEYER 2009: 2). We analyzed the selected texts qualitatively, searching for references to modernity in them. But our preliminary analysis showed that direct allusions to modernity were rare, and so we were also searching for indirect references from which the churches' attitudes to modernity could be gleaned. Based on this analysis, we created four categories that also structure this text. The first of these was the strategies of othering, i.e. the utterances which described how different the other church and the other country are from "our" church and "our" country. Particular attention was dedicated to affectively tinged adjectives (predicate analysis), often in a dichotomous form (such as civilized vs. barbaric). The second, related category contained strategies of self-identification and the modern/anti-modern aspects therein: Who we are, what principles we defend, which values are sacred to us, what we consider holy, etc. The third category included the churches' views of modernity based on their references to related political concepts, such as democracy or the (modern) state, and also included their views of human agency in history and the malleability of the social order (even though again, these were rare). The fourth category contained the passages where the relationship to Europe or the West was discussed (e.g. the EU as an ally of Ukraine, the West as Russia's enemy, the corrupting influence of the West, etc.). The following empirical sections on the ROC and the OCU are organized along the same lines. Each starts with an analysis of the strategies of othering and modernity, and it is followed by an exploration of the self-identification of the church, the church's own project of modernity and, finally, its attitude toward the West. The section on the ROC thus contains four parts, but the section on the OCU includes only three as we merged the last two (the preferred project of modernity is largely based on the convergence with Europe in this case).

THE ROC, THE WAR AND MODERNITY

The ROC'S strategy of othering

Overall, the ROC's discourses about the war (without, of course, explicitly employing the word) are built around a strategy of intense rhetorical othering, i.e. the construction of a strict us vs. them distinction. Here, the identity of Russia is built upon the triad of being in favour of unity and peace, defending normalcy and common sense, and being civilized. Ukrainians are depicted as a spiritually related fraternal people who are currently threatened by a dangerous propaganda that sows division and incites a fratricidal conflict, is extremist and fanatically nationalist, and is cruel and brutal to the point of madness. A similar stress on division is applied to the church: The OCU is typically labelled as *"a schismatic structure"* (PRAVOSLAVIYE.RU 2022A) or *"a schismatic Orthodox church"* (PRAVOSLAVIYE.RU 2023A) and the situation around it is labelled as *"the Ukrainian schism"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022F). The spiritual division advocated by the OCU is often seen as just another facet of the extreme nationalism of the Ukrainian government, and the linkage between the Ukrainian schism and Ukraine's nationalism is repeatedly stressed. As a result, the rationale of the "special military operation" is to defend historically Russian lands from "the bloody errors of nationalism" which the Ukrainians are perpetrating (*Russian Orthodox Church 2022h*). The double – spiritual and political – division threatens the foundations of what Russia is built upon: For instance, the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra as the cradle of *"our civilization"* (SYNODAL DEPARTMENT 2023C) is now under a brutal attack by the Ukrainians.

Ukraine's nationalism is contrasted with Russia's patriotism – described as the love for Russian culture and traditions, etc. As a consequence, the evils connected to Ukrainian nationalism can be judged through the lens of Russia as a bastion of human rights: Russia is a modern state where the rule of law prevails, and which needs to defend itself exactly because of Ukraine's *"nationalist provocations"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022I); it is forced to intervene in Ukraine exactly because of human rights violations. A typical example of this communication strategy is the address of Patriarch Kirill in relation to the situation in the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra from 16 March 2023. Kirill states that *"it is regrettable that while the government of Ukraine declares its adherence to democratic norms, the European path of development,*

and respect for human rights and freedoms, these rights and freedoms are violated [by it] in the most blatant way" (SYNODAL DEPARTMENT 2023C).

GRAPH 1: THE OTHER AS IDENTIFIED BY THE ROC
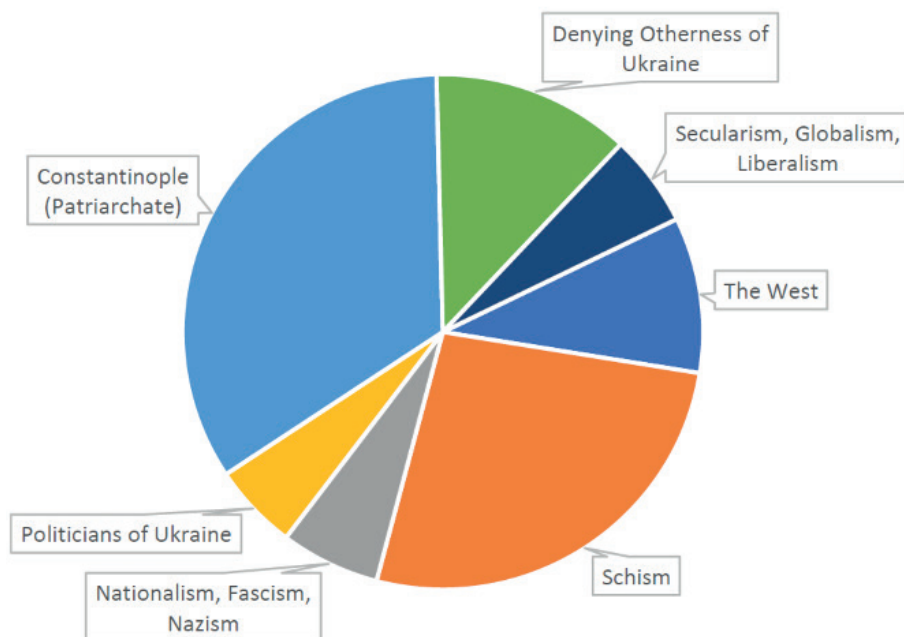
Source: Authors' work.

The ROC self-identity: The unifier and protector of the Holy Rus'

If the OCU is an agent of division sowing quarrel and hatred and inciting religious persecution, the ROC is a civilized and peaceful actor with a deep respect for human rights. The ROC sees itself as an essential institution that strives for harmony and unity in the nation and between Russia and Ukraine. There are two complications, however. First, the arguments in the ROC's posts oscillate between claims about the purely spiritual unity between the two nations and the more explosive political claim which establishes a linkage leading from spiritual unity to cultural unity and finally to political unity. Since the two nations are spiritually united through the Kievan baptismal font, they have become one nation (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022A). What starts as a purely spiritual claim (framed as the insistence on

the *"spiritual unity of all the people of Holy Rus'"* (KIRILL, PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA 2022A) quickly transforms into a full-fledged support for the war as the Russian government is seen as fighting against an artificial separation of Russians and Ukrainians: *"This is the reason why we all must support our President and the task that he is fulfilling. To our great regret, this task cannot be fulfilled without shedding blood. People in Ukraine also understand this and we accept some of them as refugees"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022B).

The second complication pertains to the various combinations of the designations the ROC uses. While "Holy Rus'" is often used when referring to spiritual matters (KIRILL, PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA 2022A), "Rus'" frequently becomes a transitory element that bridges the spiritual meaning, history and the current conflict. As a result, Ukraine becomes part of "the space of *'historical Rus'"* (PRESS SERVICE 2022A), while also being the force that attacks "Holy Rus'": *"These difficult times when those eager to fight have turned against Holy Russia, wishing to divide and destroy its united people"* (SYNODAL DEPARTMENT 2023A). In a similar vein, Patriarch Kirill could argue in his sermon shortly after the start of the invasion (27 February 2022) that when he talked about the Russian land, he meant the land to which *"Ukraine, Belarus and other ethnicities and nations belong"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022C).

As a result of the merger of the spiritual and the political meaning, a clear political message appears about what kind of nation-building the church has in mind. The ROC bishops' conference meeting of July 2023 produced a document which stated that the church *"prays to God to reconcile Rus', to stop internecine warfare so that Holy Rus' can be reunited"* (PRESS SERVICE 2022A), clearly indicating the preferred outcome of the conflict. The nation that the church wants to sustain is *"one nation of one 'Holy Rus'"*, with the ROC playing the role of *"the great protector"* of its united spiritual culture and the Orthodox faith (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022D); cf. also Patriarch Kirill's sermon about the unity of the Russian land: (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022E). Ultimately, the two notions of Rus' and Russia (Русь and Россия) merge. To strive for the unity of one necessarily means wishing to unify oneself with the other – *"'Rus'-Russia has been dramatically weakened"* and *"its one state has been divided"* – and to prevent a repetition of these tragic events or even the very destruction of Holy Rus', unity must be ensured again (KIRILL, PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA 2022A).

THE ROC'S VIEW OF COMPETING MODERNITY PROJECTS

In its online communication, the ROC offers its own version of the project of modernity (even though the notion itself is almost never mentioned), which, according to a detailed paper published on the ROC's website shortly after the invasion (in March 2022), has as its basic principles *"justice, real democracy, the non-acceptance of the right of the 'stronger', the moral criterion of legal institutions, respect for the state, [and] faithfulness to traditional values"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022J).[5] The church thus offers a project of conservative modernity that is conceived as *"an alternative to secular fundamentalism,"* as *"the 'universal' values of secular modernity and postmodernity have failed the test of time"* (IBID.). The project of civilized, conservative modernization, as defended by Patriarch Kirill, is, according to the document, based on the rejection of *"all forms of fundamentalism, both religious and secularist, and of extremist views, relativism, cynicism, transhumanism, and Russophobia"* (IBID.).

Ukraine, on the other hand, is described as a country that has adopted the wrong version of modernity, having fully emulated the flawed Western model. As a result, following the rejection of Christian humanism, secular humanism is rejected as well and replaced by a radicalized "liberal globalism," of which one expression is supposedly the Black Lives Matter movement and the other Nazism, with Ukraine being *"the clearest example"* of this trend (IBID.). The consequence of this rejection of fundamental humanist values, according to the ROC, is that the Ukrainian government attacks and terrorizes its own population (PRAVOSLAVIYE.RU 2023B), including its most vulnerable segment – the believers and the clergy of *"the most important and only canonical church, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine"* (PRAVOSLAVIYE.RU 2022B). *"The regime of Zelensky transformed into an authoritarian dictatorship"* which persecutes those with a different opinion, opposition leaders, and also church representatives (PRAVOSLAVIYE.RU 2023C).

Two criteria are typically used in assessing Ukraine's failure to live up to the standards of a civilized nation. One is reasonableness, as Ukraine's ruling class and political decision-makers, according to the ROC, have lost *"even the last traces of common sense"* (PRAVOSLAVIYE.RU 2022B). But the second criterion is again that of modern human rights, both individual and collective ones, such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and

freedom of assembly. Here, the ROC implicitly assumes the role of a modern, civilized actor which upholds and supports these human rights while Ukraine violates them openly. So, for instance, the Ukrainian legislation that would target the Ukrainian Orthodox Church *"is in contradiction of legal norms, such as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights"* (IBID.). The pressure against the UOC is unacceptable as instances of it are examples of *"discrimination and violations of the rights of the faithful"* (PRESS SERVICE 2022C); the removal of the UOC monks from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra is considered *"a blatant violation of all rights and laws, which will lead to tragic consequences in the society"* (SYNODAL DEPARTMENT 2023E).[6] While the references to human rights violations may be seen as a mere instrumentalization, or an adaptation of the church's argument to make it more appealing, it nevertheless shows that the church is willing to at least appear as an actor which defends these legal norms – in other words, it ostensibly stands up for a version of the modern discourse on individual and collective rights.

What is, however, particularly fascinating about the ways in which the ROC employs the rhetoric about internationally acknowledged legal norms to support its case, is the specific context in which these pronouncements are uttered. They are used almost exclusively in relation to the conflict between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine or in regard to the conflict between the UOC and the Ukrainian government. They are never discussed in connection with the "special military operation". If one were to judge the severity and importance of international norm violations in Ukraine based on the frequency with which the references to them appear in the ROC's online communication, the conclusion would be clear: The alleged persecution of the UOC is by far more serious than any legal problems related to the Russian invasion, the killing of Ukraine's citizens, the destruction of the country's infrastructure, etc.

The corruption of Ukraine by western modernity

The final link in the ROC's narrative about Ukraine and modernity connects the country's problems to the broader picture in two ways. Firstly, it argues that Ukraine is not an actor with its own free will, but rather a puppet of the West. Secondly, it claims that the Western influence does not extend only to the military or economic domination of the country, but also to the West's cultural and spiritual hegemony. The narrative

about the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war closely resembles that produced by Russian state media. As Patriarch Kirill argued in a key message to the World Council of Churches, the root cause of the conflict *"should be sought in the relations between Western countries and Russia"* (ʀᴜssɪᴀɴ ᴏʀᴛʜᴏᴅᴏx ᴄʜᴜʀᴄʜ 2022ᴋ), and a similar view is expressed in (ʀᴜssɪᴀɴ ᴏʀᴛʜᴏᴅᴏx ᴄʜᴜʀᴄʜ 202ʟ). Promises to respect Russia's security and dignity were allegedly broken and NATO continuously expanded in Russia's vicinity. Importantly, the West also *"tried to make enemies of the fraternal peoples – Russians and Ukrainians… But the worst thing is not the weapons, but an attempt at 're-education', a mental transformation of Ukrainians and Russians living there into enemies of Russia"* (ʀᴜssɪᴀɴ ᴏʀᴛʜᴏᴅᴏx ᴄʜᴜʀᴄʜ 2022ᴋ).

However, according to the ROC, Ukraine's corruption by the West is not, as we mentioned above, simply a matter of military or economic dominance, but the most insidious aspect of the Western influence is a spiritual disease with Satanic influences. So according to a high-ranking representative of the church, *"the enemy of the human race does not sleep, sowing division in Ukraine"* (ʀᴜssɪᴀɴ ᴏʀᴛʜᴏᴅᴏx ᴄʜᴜʀᴄʜ 2022ᴍ), and this enemy comes from the West, as it was *"some forces of the Western world"* which, *"under the influence of Satan… have succeeded in sowing hostility between the fraternal nations – Russians and Ukrainians"* (ʀᴜssɪᴀɴ ᴏʀᴛʜᴏᴅᴏx ᴄʜᴜʀᴄʜ 2022ɴ). As a result, it is not only Ukraine, but also the ROC that is under the threat of division as *"some of our brethren,… moved by the force of the dark side, work towards the division of the one body of the Russian Orthodox Church"* (ᴋɪʀɪʟʟ, ᴘᴀᴛʀɪᴀʀᴄʜ ᴏғ ᴍᴏsᴄᴏᴡ ᴀɴᴅ ᴀʟʟ ʀᴜssɪᴀ 2022ᴀ). This same corruption then reaches spiritual actors who have accepted Western modernity as well. Two of these stand out – one is the Roman Pontiff and the Catholic Church at large and the other is the Ecumenical Patriarch. The Church warns that the Orthodox "schismatics" in Ukraine are in contact with the *"Pope's Uniates, preparing a union. Soon they will replace the Byzantine calendar with a papal one"* (ᴘʀᴀᴠᴏsʟᴀᴠɪʏᴇ.ʀᴜ 2023ᴇ). The ROC also warns that *"according to the Russian secret service, Kievan authorities and UNESCO have reached an agreement to export Christian valuables […] planning to give them over to museums in Italy, France, Germany, and the Vatican"* (ᴘʀᴀᴠᴏsʟᴀᴠɪʏᴇ.ʀᴜ 2023ғ).

If the critique of the Catholic Church is intermittent, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is targeted with a substantially higher frequency. The EP has become *"one of the tools of political forces that are hostile to Orthodoxy"*

because it was *"blinded by its need to satisfy its own private interests and ambitions"* (SYNODAL DEPARTMENT 2023A). Particularly harsh words are often used in this regard, such as "the treachery of Constantinople" (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022O) and *"the invasion of Ukraine by the Constantinople Patriarchate"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022P). The explanation of the actions by the EP is again linked to its acceptance of Western modernity with the consequence of its de-Christianization and overall corruption (cf. for instance, (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022Q)). This critique is connected with the ROC's presentation of the difference between the Western version of modernity and its own. Importantly, the ROC does not deny that the West is also, in a certain sense, modern. Poland, for instance, is described (even if with some underlying irony) as *"a Western, enlightened nation"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022D). But the problem of Western modernity, as seen by the ROC, is excessive secularization, the divorce of moral values and the society's life: *"They teach children in early school years that homosexuality is a good thing; […] that if you want to belong to the other gender, doctors will help you and carry out the surgery"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022F). Subsequently, the "militant secularism" turns, with the support of Protestants, against the Catholic and Orthodox Christians (PAYNE 2010). The ultimate expression of the submission of people to this aggressive secularism is the demand *"to hold a gay pride [parade] […] as a test of loyalty to that very powerful world"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022R). In the end, "the minority dictates its will to the majority…, which is the great tragedy of Western society" (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH 2022F).

The ROC, on the other hand, holds that to be a modern, cultured nation presupposes the acceptance of a special place of religion in the society and, with it, the natural morality that religion teaches. This also means that the majority should not accommodate the views of minorities which deviate from these moral principles. Only then will people lead a happy life: *"The faith teaches us what mass culture of today does not. It teaches us the main thing – how to be a happy person… and have faith in the future"* (PRESS SERVICE 2022E). This is in line with the previous statements that argue for the compatibility between the religious neutrality of the government and the *"Christian idea about the role of the church in society"* (RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH – DEPARTMENT FOR EXTERNAL CHURCH RELATIONS 2024A). A similar argument pertains to (Western) democracy as one of the ultimate expressions of the allegedly excessively secular version of modernity. The Western model is flawed, but it cannot be transformed into a more religious arrangement without *"a spiritualization*

of the society itself," as the former without the latter would *"necessarily lead to a lie and hypocrisy"*. It is only *"a spiritual renaissance of the society"*, an elevation to a more religious consciousness, that can be the foundation of a more mature form of society (IBID.).[7]

TABLE 1: SELECTED KEY NOTIONS DISCUSSED IN THE ROC
DISCOURSE IN RELATION TO MODERNITY

Most frequent notions	Occurrence frequency
ROC's strategies of othering:	
Criticism of the division and conflict between the people of Holy Russia and the Church is central for the narrative; the attitudes causing the unnatural "otherness" of fraternal Ukraine (nationalism, Nazism, fascism) are to blame; so are Ukrainian and Western politicians (only Viktor Orbán and Aleksandar Vučić are the exceptions), Constantinople (*"the canonical crimes of Patriarch Bartholomew, who promoted schism"*), the OCU, and unnamed "forces", "external curators", and enemies who wish to weaken Russia and deepen the split with Ukraine. The West is virtually always portrayed negatively.	
Nationalism, fascism, Nazism	31
Schism	133
ROC's self-identification:	
The ROC as a unifying, legitimate link of the natural spiritual and historical whole – the people of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. A strong emphasis on the image of a fraternal and merciful ROC and on its humanitarian aid: Ukrainians are often portrayed as refugees and victims of militant nationalism and the "situation" in Ukraine, to whom the ROC, the various dioceses and the believers offer their help.	
Unity/unification	158
Refugees	987
Competing modernities, political concepts:	
Secularism is denounced; *"the so-called 'universal' values of secular modernity and postmodernity have failed the historical test"*; the secularist myth *"claims that […] the Church should preach not love and salvation but abstract political freedoms and technocratic fatalism instead of moral and real social progress."* Rights are mentioned most often in regard to the restrictions of the rights of believers and the Church itself; humanism is indirectly linked to the care of Ukrainian refugees seeking protection in Russia.	
Rights	20
Secularism and secularization	19

Most frequent notions	Occurrence frequency
ROC's attitude toward the West:	
A wider range of issues are linked to the West: economic sanctions, US troops in Europe, *"sowing enmity between brotherly nations"*, the claim that *"we live in two completely different information spaces"*. Moral condemnations: e.g., Europeans' attitude towards refugees *"borders on disgust"* (in contrast to the Christian *"brotherly love"* shown to them in Russia); criticism of *"the Western demands to organize a gay pride parade"*. All this contributes to *"the historical mission and responsibility of Christian Orthodoxy in the conditions of the dechristianisation of the West."*	
The West	49
LGBTQ+	7

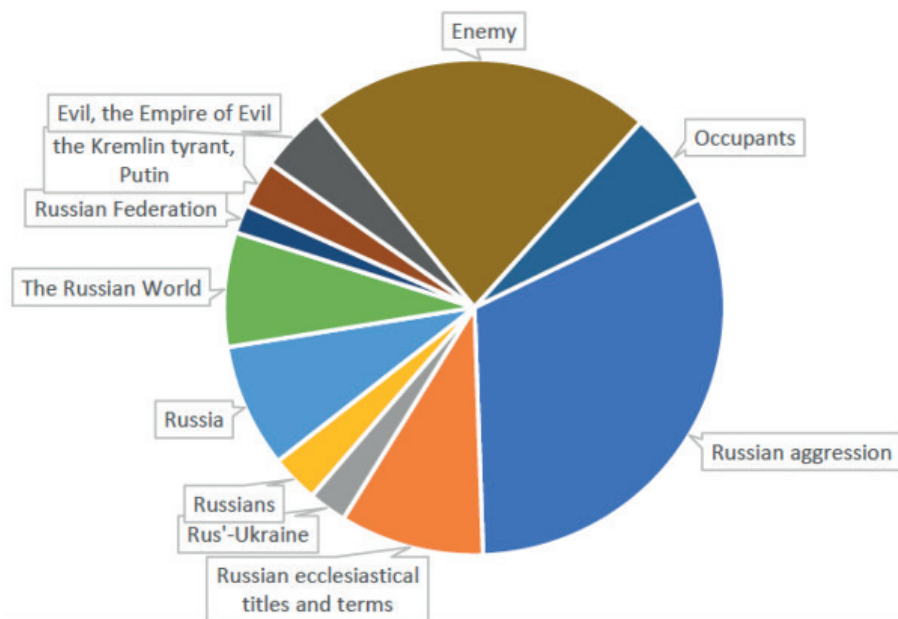Source: Authors' work.

THE OCU, THE WAR, AND MODERNITY

The OCU'S strategy of othering

The single most visible distinction between the OCU's online communication and that of the ROC consists in the OCU's focus on the war and the related difference between the OUC and the ROC. The process of othering in the OCU's online communication consists of three interlinked elements. First, the self-other constructions are more varied in terms of defining who is the enemy against whom the church's (and Ukraine's) identity is constructed. The second channel through which the OCU builds the self-other distinction is stressing the fundamental difference between aggression and defence. These two are very different phenomena; the former is seen as anachronistic, and the latter as an expression of modernity as it contributes to establishing free nationhood. The war is thus not a necessary, unprovoked reaction to the Western encroachment on Russia's vital security interests. Instead, it is Russia's imperialist aggression against its peaceful neighbour, an independent country that wants to follow its own path. Third, the war is also seen as a spiritual struggle in this case, but while the ROC's interpretation is related to the sacredness of the Russian World, the OCU sees the struggle more straightforwardly as a defence of the values of freedom and self-determination against the tyranny of Moscow.

The OCU attempts to differentiate between the Russian society and the country's leadership, focussing in particular on the Russian President and the Russian state. Hence, the harshest expressions of the OCU are related to the person of President Putin, who is compared to the greatest villains

of human history in them (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023A). More specifically, President Putin is seen as the driving force behind the war and also as a leader who exploits the Russian church for his war aims (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023B). The ROC is typically called the "Moscow Patriarchate" or "the Moscow church" in the OCU's discourse, and it is associated with "Moscow's influence" or directly with "hybrid warfare" (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023B; CF. ALSO ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023D; ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022B). This reinforces the position of foreignness of the ROC and the need to "liberate" Ukraine not only militarily, but also in terms of ecclesial independence: *"The Church is the soul of the Ukrainian nation. And the body cannot be Ukrainian and the soul Russian"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022S).

GRAPH 1: THE OTHER AS IDENTIFIED BY THE OCU

Source: Authors' work.

THE OCU'S SELF-IDENTIFICATION: A HOLY MISSION OF DEFENDING A FREE UKRAINE

In the OCU's online communication, the war defence efforts and nation-building are two closely interrelated tasks – Ukrainians as a nation are brought together by having to defend their freedom and their values against the invader. The OCU is careful in stressing that it supports the war, but its backing is again conditional upon the war's defensive nature (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023G). The OCU explains that it can bless Ukrainian soldiers, again using the opportunity to establish the distinction between Ukraine and Russia – *"unlike the occupiers, our soldiers are defenders. They do not… commit acts of aggression"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023H). On the other hand, against the ROC's claim about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict being a holy war, the OCU does not posit a pacifistic rejection of war. Instead, the OCU argues that *"historically, the Orthodox Church has never insisted on a strictly pacifistic response to war, violence or oppression, nor did it forbid believers to serve in the army or police"* (IBID.). The church often repeats that while it is in favour of what it calls true peace, creating peace by giving in to Russian demands might be in fact *"a deception, an illusion, something temporary and uncertain"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023I).

And yet, the ultimate goal for both the OCU and the nation, after repelling the aggressor, is to continue *"to build our united, independent, strong, and democratic Ukraine"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022D). In other words, the OCU's narrative revolves around the construction of Ukraine as a modern nation. The modernity that is stressed here is the "European" one (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022E), which is often contrasted with Russia's approach to the conflict. The OCU is then a key tool for the nation-building project – it sees supporting the independent statehood, building a strong army and establishing an independent church as three interrelated matters which are all essential (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022F; CF. ALSO ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022G; EPIPHANIUS I OF UKRAINE 2022).

History plays a special role in both the OCU's self-description and its treatment of nation-building. The church and, in particular, its Primate, often underline the need to study history, and *"learn from the past in order for the Ukrainian nation to be strengthened"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022E). The history of Ukraine is often venerated, and a strong connection

between Kyivan Rus' and Ukraine is ascertained. Hence, the OCU talks about Ukraine's *"more than thousand-year-old history, which the aggressor is now trying to falsify, depriving us of the right to statehood"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022E). The historical importance of Ukraine is then linked to the right of the country to sovereignty and the right of the OCU to independence. In an attempt to counter the Russian argument that Kyivan Rus' is the antecedent of the Russian Empire and today's Russia, the OCU sometimes also uses the label of "Rus'-Ukraine". So, for example, it speaks about the commemoration of Volodimir of Kyiv and the 1034th anniversary of the baptism of Rus'-Ukraine (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022H). Similarly, when describing the links between Rus' and the Byzantine Empire, it speaks about *"the powerful and rich state of Rus'-Ukraine",* adding, *"let's be proud of our roots, a glorious thousand-year history. And we will not let anyone appropriate it! Glory to Ukraine!"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022I).

Overall, the othering between Ukraine and Russia in the online statements is often carried out by stressing the civilizational difference between the two countries, with Ukraine being seen as ancient, spiritual, and modern and Russia being described as aggressive, destructive or expansionist. If the ROC's narrative sees the war as a spiritual struggle, the OCU does not contradict the claim, but it interprets the struggle differently. The OCU conducts *"its own spiritual battle"*: Since President Putin exploits his country's religious institutions, particularly "the Moscow church," and tries to impose his Russian World ideology on Ukraine, the OCU is defending the foundations of Ukraine's statehood, to which an independent church belongs: *"The spiritual fundament may be invisible, but without it, it is impossible to build a strong 'body' of the Ukrainian state"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023B). The conflict is thus not seen as a war over territory, but as a sort of cosmic war: God is with Ukraine in this battle since Ukrainians *"are fighting for truth and the good against demonic hatred and tyranny"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022K).

The ideology of the Russian World is also interpreted spiritually: It is seen not only as "criminal" (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 202L), but as a force *"with a demonic essence"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022M) and a heretic doctrine (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022U). The same spiritualization pertains to President Putin and Patriarch Kirill as well. Symptomatically, Putin's name is rarely mentioned explicitly. His personal role is likened to the biblical

tyrant and murderer Herod or to Cain, *"whose deeds are condemned by God, whose memory will be damned forever, and whose fate is with the devil, whose servant he is."* Similarly, the Patriarch Kirill as *"the preacher of the 'Russian World'"* blesses the *"war of aggression and aggression against his neighbours, serving not God but the Antichrist"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022T).

The overall framing of the OCU's positioning within Ukraine is unambiguous – a symbiotic relationship between the church, the state, and the society: The independence of the church is essential for the independent statehood, and the independent statehood is essential for the independent church. That is why the church's spiritual struggle cannot be separated from the overall victory of Ukraine over the invading forces. And vice versa, the defeat of Russia also implies the rejection of "the Moscow church" (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022K, 2023N; CF. ALSO ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022O).[8]

THE OCU'S VIEW OF WESTERN MODERNITY

If the ROC rejects Western modernity and instead advocates for the implementation of Russia's own modernity project, the OCU not only argues for a clear alignment of Ukraine with the West, but in fact claims that Ukraine has always been, at its core, part of civilized Europe, a part that was captured by Moscow but which has to return to its rightful place. In recent statements of the ROC, it said that the borderline between true Christian civilization and the area that bows to Satanism and does not even follow the ethos of its own modernity lies on the Western border of Russia (or more precisely, on the border of the Russian World's influence). The OCU reverses this geopolitical imagination. Connecting the current war with liberation from *"the yoke of the 'Russian World' and its darkness of spiritual slavery"* imposed by the *"empire of evil"* (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023F), it argues that Ukraine became the easternmost "outpost of Christian civilization" more than a millennium ago (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022H). Ukraine is seen as simultaneously becoming modern by *"returning to Europe"*, turning into *"an inseparable part of the family of European nations"* (IBID.) and reasserting its Christian heritage.

The overall acceptance of European modernity is affirmed in general terms, however, and the most sensitive issues are not discussed. For instance, while the ROC's online communication is heavily focused on LGBTQ+

topics, these issues are virtually never mentioned by the OCU, arguably in order not to anger the more conservative part of the Ukrainian society. Gender equality is also not given any significant space, but non-traditional roles of women, such as the presence of women in the army, are tacitly accepted (CF. ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022P). The belonging to the West is reflected in the more practically oriented statements about the church's ties with both ecclesial and political leaders from the West. The churches that support the OCU's independence are mentioned, in particular the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Patriarch's support for Ukraine's fight for freedom and a just peace is stressed (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022A, 2023M). The identification with the West is also confirmed by references to various interactions between the OCU's representatives and the West, in particular the United States, such as the meetings of the Metropolitan Epiphaniy with US President Joe Biden (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023N) and State Secretary Mike Pompeo (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2023O) but also the President of the European Parliament (ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE 2022V).

TABLE 2: SELECTED KEY NOTIONS DISCUSSED IN THE OCU'S
DISCOURSE IN RELATION TO MODERNITY

Most frequent notions	Occurrence frequency
OCU's strategies of othering:	
Russia's attack is a combination of barbaric violence (*"torturers and murderers"*, *"barbaric invasion"*, *"trying to cause as much destruction as possible"*) and dehumanized modernity (*"terrorizing with the most modern"* weapons). The active historical roles and intentions of some individuals (Putin as a tyrant, Herod and Cain in the service of the Antichrist) and the absence of reflexivity and moral values (*"it is useless to appeal to the conscience and mercy of the Russian occupiers"*).	
Russian aggression	51
Enemy	36
OCU's self-identification: A holy mission of defending a free Ukraine:	
The very existence of the OCU depends on the defence of Ukraine's sovereignty. The active role of the defenders is valued – their activity is at the same time in accordance with the divine order (the sacrifice of the defenders as an expression of love). Calls for an active civilian involvement (fundraising campaigns). A spiritual presence in all spheres of life (*"We are a nation that has a special relationship with God. He is always present in our hearts, churches, traditions and culture."*). An affective identification of the OCU with the goals of the state and the nation (*"the gift of freedom and independence, both state and church"*).	
Defence, defenders	58
The Russian World	12

OCU's attitude toward the West; political concepts:	
Modernity and the future of Ukraine are associated with Europe rather than the West in general (*"We will continue to have our own independent state and move towards European development"*). A transhistorical belonging to Europe on Christian spiritual foundations. The West is not explicitly mentioned. A modern(izing) reflexivity demonstrated by reformulating tradition and linking it to national interests: supporting the state and opening up to European modernity.	
Europe	20
Freedom	28

Source: Authors' work.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the complex attitudes of the ROC and the OCU toward modernity. It challenged the received view that while the Ukrainian church fully accepts modernity (including the modern insistence on the role of the individual, the central role of human agency as well as the church-state separation), the ROC fully rejects these notions as Western corruptions and defends a return to a pre-modern worldview instead. The OCU does indeed align itself with the West and implicitly accepts the basic tenets of the Western modernity project, but it carefully avoids a deeper involvement in those issues where divergences might appear, such as LGBTQ+ rights or minority rights in Ukraine. The ROC has chosen an entirely different strategy, that of a conservative modernization. This means that it tries to reject some aspects of Western modernity, while also relying on modern socio-political notions. Its approach contains both elements borrowed from the West (especially the stress on human rights, particularly freedom of expression and belief) and a critique of other such elements. Among its frequent targets are especially the church-state separation, the "aggressive secularization", and the allegedly excessive power of (sexual) minorities.

The Ukrainian church has chosen to support the state in its embrace of European modernity, while skilfully avoiding controversial issues. The version of modernity it supports is thus relatively easy to comprehend as it does not deviate much from the one spelt out and represented by the European Union. The ROC's situation is more complex. Both the Russian state and the ROC have now clearly expressed their belief that Russia is capable of producing its own version of modernity which overcomes the alleged flaws of the Western project. Hence, the ideal vision for the Russian

society that the ROC is trying to offer is not based on a version of Orthodox premodernity, but on a conservative modernity of its own, with Russia being depicted as an enlightened, civilized alternative to Western decadence and aggression. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has only reinforced the Russian church's attack on the West and its criticism of the OCU. At the same time, however, the war has made it increasingly difficult for the ROC to reconcile its claims with the continued aggression and the new atrocities coming to light on a regular basis.

That the ROC continues to embrace a type of modernity is evident in, among other things, its treatment of human agency, particularly in the political sphere. Borders of collective identities are not seen as given but as contested. In its view, even the most desirable communities, including the sacralized ones (such as that constituting the Holy Rus'), cannot be taken for granted; they too need to be actively shaped. The Russian World is thus an essential component of what the Holy Rus' is about, but simultaneously also a notion contested by Ukraine and the West, at least in the eyes of the ROC's leadership. Hence, it is not this sacred community itself that is central to the ROC's support of the war, but the need to fight for the re-establishment of its validity. The same modern consciousness is typical for the ROC's view of its role on the domestic level, namely in the Russian society. The society needs to be returned to the right track and this return has to be actively supported by the state and the church, lest Russia experience moral ruin. Hence, the social order is not unchanging and given, and the church must fight for the right social order to assert itself against its challengers – a notion that is again quintessentially modern.

At first glance, the two churches share some similarities in their attitude to modernity and their approaches to the war may seem superficially symmetrical. For instance, both sides see the war as a spiritual struggle between good and evil: For the ROC, the struggle is about the reassertion of the Russian World and the aim is to purge the immorality emanating from the West; for the OCU, the goal is independence and alignment with Europe and its values, and the enemy the tyranny of Moscow, both political and ecclesial. But below the surface, there are fundamental differences. The OCU stresses that it can endorse the war only because it is defensive in nature, thus being in line with a traditional Orthodox position on the issue, while the ROC openly commends a war of aggression or makes

a rather complicated argument about the need to attack Ukraine as part of a broader defensive war against the West and its alleged aggression.[9]

All in all, both the OCU and the ROC have thus embraced versions of modernity. Both churches strongly believe in the malleability of history, accepting the key role of human agency in it, and both see themselves as playing a significant role here. Both the OCU and the ROC thus see themselves as substantially contributing to the process of nation-building/nation-renewal, which, as we have seen above, is another typically modern attitude. However, the ROC's version is highly idiosyncratic and more ambiguous, and its belief in the necessity of the country's modernization less forceful. But the fact that the ROC's hesitant acceptance of (Russia's specific) modernity is complemented by its competition with the other main project of Orthodox modernity, the one propounded by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and now also supported by the OCU, makes the position of the Russian church even more delicate. While no result of the conflict between the two competing visions would lead to the adoption of a single version of modernity across the Orthodox world and various modernities will continue to be expounded, the actual result will undoubtedly tilt the scale in one direction or the other.

ENDNOTES

1   "The special military operation" is the official designation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

2   Modernization, in this article, is understood as a process of accepting and spreading the fundamental principles of modernity (cf. Eisenstadt 2000). For the definition of modernity see below (and cf. Eisenstadt – Ridel – Sachsenmaier 2022).

3   Indeed, globalization incentivizes modernization to such an extent that some authors focus on the triangular relationship between globalization, modernization, and religion instead of just religion and modernity (cf. Roudometof 2014).

4   In our analysis we focus on the OCU and the ROC, the churches that consider themselves 'national' or 'representative' in the two countries. Moreover, the unified OCU is a relatively new institution, which makes it an even more interesting object of research from the point of view of scholarship – this is one of the reasons why we are focusing on its discourse in particular detail. This notwithstanding, it would be interesting to see how the position of the UOC has evolved, especially as its position in Ukraine has recently changed quite dramatically.

5   The document draws heavily on "The Fundamentals of Social Conception of the Russian Orthodox Church" (Russian Orthodox Church – Department for External Church Relations 2024a).

6   A similar argument is then directed not only at Ukraine, but also at the United States: "Does the State Department know about this? Typically, the corresponding section of the US State Department reacts swiftly to cases of religious oppression" (Synodal Department 2023f).

7   A caveat is necessary here. The analysis above reflects the dominant position in the ROC as it is presented in the official communication channels of the church. Dissenters, nevertheless, exist. While the precise numbers of those who oppose the official church position are unknown, their numbers seem to be significant. The project Christians Against the War lists the names of more than a hundred Christians who have been persecuted because of their opposition to the war; out of these, several dozen belong to the ROC, including a number of priests (Christiyane 2024; cf. also Chapnin 2023 and Luchenko 2024). (We would like to thank one of the reviewers for drawing our attention to this.)

8   Interestingly, the issue of language (i.e. Ukrainian vs. Russian) is not commonly discussed in the OCU's online communication. However, we found a few references that connect the Ukrainian language to Ukraine's identity (e.g. Orthodox Church of Ukraine 2023b).

9   We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to this point.

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NOTE

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Petr Kratochvíl is a full professor and a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague, and a lecturer at the Metropolitan University Prague. His main research interests include the religion-politics nexus, critical geopolitics, and theories of international relations. He has published extensively on religion and politics, including in top journals such as *Geopolitics, Cooperation and Conflict, Politics and Religion*, and many others. His latest book is *Geopolitics of Global Catholicism: Politics of Religion in Space and Time*; his recent study titled "The Patriotic Turn in Russia: Political Convergence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the State?" (co-written with Gaziza Shakhanova) received the 2023 Ted Jelen Award for the best article on religion and politics, awarded by the American Political Science Association.

Tomáš Doležal lectures at the School of International Relations and Diplomacy, Anglo-American University in Prague and the Department of International Relations and European Studies, Metropolitan University Prague. His current courses include Politics of Religion and Ethnicity, International Politics and Religion, and 'Culture Wars' in the West: Politics in the Digital Era. His research interests focus on religious, cultural, ideational, and theoretical dimensions of international relations and identity issues in politics. He co-authored monograph *The European Union and the Catholic Church. Political Theology of European Integration* (co-written with Petr Kratochvíl), which received the Distinguished Book Award of the REL Section of the American International Studies Association.