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Homosexuality and hypermasculinity in the public discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church: an affect theoretical approach

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Since the late 1990s, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and several mainline Western Protestant churches have been at odds over homosexuality to such an extent that it has turned into a church-dividing issue. This article aims to find new openings for the ecumenical dialogue by examining how the ROC's negative attitude toward same-sex relations has been influenced by cultural and historic factors. The analysis focuses on the affective dimension of the ROC's discourse on homosexuality in important social documents and public speeches. The methodology applied is taken from affect studies. The rhetoric of the ecclesial texts recalls 'shadows from the gulag' and frightening memories of the chaos of the 1990s, and functions to create an imagined national, moral and religious community – the 'Russian Christian civilization' – which is characterized by masculine heterosexuality. Religious concepts tend to become subordinate to the affective politics of the discourse. In conclusion, the author proposes that ecumenical partners continue with a profound theological discussion on human sexuality in all its diversity and complexity, and clarify to each other how understandings of basic theological notions such as human dignity and freedom have also been shaped by formative historic experiences. Furthermore, ecclesiological debates should address, at a fundamental level, the relationship between Christian community and the freedom 'to be different.'

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church; ecumenical dialogue; homosexuality; same-sex relations; human dignity; masculinity; affect theory

Introduction

In my opinion, homosexuality is directly a sin, because at all times and in all nations that feeling was condemned [...] Despite the Declaration of Human Rights, I do not understand this right; I do not understand this 'love,' 'friendship.' For me it's disgusting and unnatural. My friends also do not accept homosexuality. It evokes in them laughter or irritation.¹

My father commented to me (when he saw a gay pride parade in TV-news): 'Oh, those poor and unhappy people.' In my mind, the concept of 'homosexuality' [гомосексуализм] is very exotic for our Slavic society. It is difficult for us to explain it, due to differences of our traditions and customs. That is why 'homosexuality' is situated outside of our traditional world view.²

These quotations from essays written by my Ukrainian university students are illustrative of how homosexuality is perceived throughout Eastern Europe. The described emotions are incomprehension, disgust, aversion, discomfort, irritation, and compassion. These affective attitudes that can be regarded as manifestations of social homophobia³ are

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quite different from those expressed on the topic by public opinion in Western Europe. With one accord Western media expressed loud indignation and anger when Gay Pride Parades in Eastern European capitals were intimidated and attacked by nationalist and religious mobs (Kiev, May 21, 2011; Tblisi, May 17, 2013). They likewise spoke of ‘a violation of human rights’ when on June 11, 2013 the Russian Duma, the lower house of parliament, adopted a bill that criminalizes the ‘propaganda of homosexuality,’ as part of the series of anti-constitutional bills restricting individual freedoms in the Russian Federation.⁴

These examples, in their briefness, may illustrate the rather contrasting affective attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT) expressed in public opinion in Eastern and Western Europe. Recent surveys of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)⁵ and the SCP in the Netherlands⁶ confirm that across Europe public attitudes towards homosexual individuals range from broad tolerance to widespread rejection, with high levels of tolerance in Western Europe and the Scandinavian countries, increasing tolerance in South Europe, and widespread and persistent intolerance in Eastern European countries like Poland, Romania, Hungary, the Baltic States, Russia and Ukraine. The reports make clear that religion is one of the factors in maintaining or reinforcing negative public attitudes toward homosexual persons.⁷ In countries like Russia and Ukraine we observe a trend that widespread social intolerance and institutionalized religious homophobia join forces to advance new legislation that impairs the rights and safety of LGBT people.

These attitudes toward homosexuality have also affected ecumenical church relations. In particular in the last decade, the issue of homosexuality has evolved from a moral issue causing emotional debates and controversies in ecumenical relations into a real *church-dividing* issue. The issue of homosexuality has become, not only in Europe, a chosen battleground for defending and affirming either traditional or liberal religious identities. The battles occur within churches as well as between churches. As for the battle within churches, the moral disagreement about homosexuality is now seriously threatening the worldwide Anglican Communion. Between churches, the issue severely deteriorated ecumenical relations between Eastern Orthodox churches and mainline Western Protestant churches. The most determined and resolute in drawing political–ecclesial consequences from its moral stance is the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia publicly criticized Western churches that ‘under the influence of newfangled liberal ideas refuse to qualify abortion, homosexuality, and divorce as a sin.’⁸ In 2003 the ROC broke off all relations with the Episcopal Church of the USA because of the latter’s consecration of an openly gay priest, Gene Robinson, to bishop of New Hampshire.⁹ The official statement of the ROC read:

The consecration of a gay priest has made any communications with those who consecrated him impossible. We shall not be able to cooperate with these people not only in the theological dialogue, but also in the humanitarian and religious and public spheres. We have no right to allow even a particle of agreement with their position, which we consider to be profoundly antichristian and blasphemous.¹⁰

In 2005, the ROC cut ties with the Lutheran Church of Sweden for blessing same-sex marriages.¹¹ In December 2012, the ROC disallowed baptisms carried out by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark because of the latter’s decision to bless same-sex marriages. Archpriest Dimitriy Sizonenko, Moscow Patriarchate’s secretary for inter-Christian relations stated:

We do not officially recognize Danish or Swedish baptism. The practice whereby someone is accepted without being re-baptized will be impossible for us, as homosexual relationships are a sin in Orthodox theology.¹²

The last statement shows how the consequences are getting more radical. By calling into question the mutual recognition of baptism, which in the ecumenical consensus represents nothing less than the sign and symbol of Christian unity,¹³ the ROC has elevated the moral controversy on homosexuality to the level of a church-dividing issue and has made it a criterion upon which to decide about ecclesial legitimacy and truth.

Research question

In this article, I will limit my research to the ROC. I want to more closely analyze its public moral and theological discourse on homosexuality. My aim is to deepen the understanding of its theological articulations by examining the *affective dimension* of the public discourse. The main question and focus of this article is: How can a better understanding of the affective structures of the ROC's homophobic discourse help to find possible openings for further ecumenical dialogue? The methodology applied will be taken from the relatively new area of affect studies (see below).

The main question is divided into a set of sub-questions: (1) How is the homophobic discourse of the ROC shaped by its particular cultural and historical backgrounds?; (2) How does the discourse on homosexuality relate to the actual social and political situation in Eastern Europe that is marked by a 'crisis of masculinity'?; and (3) What is the role of religious concepts, such as human dignity, sin, redemption and deification, in allowing or rejecting certain performances of masculinity and sexual identity?

My motivation to answer these questions comes from an ecumenical commitment that is substantially informed by my experience over the last eight years of lecturing, as a Protestant theologian from the Netherlands, to students in an ecumenical program in Ukraine. I feel a desire and urgency to try to move the ecumenical dialogue with the ROC (and with other Eastern Churches as well) in a more constructive direction across our cultural differences.

In this article, it is *not* my intention to give an account of the divergent theological and ethical positions on homosexuality, or of the underlying different hermeneutics of Scripture and (T)tradition. These topics have already been well covered by others.¹⁴ Their analyses prove to be helpful for clarifying the different approaches and positions. Yet, these efforts have, so far, not led to actual rapprochement between the churches with conflicting positions. Apparently, something more needs to be done.

This was also the conviction of the World Council of Churches when in 2007 they asked the Faith and Order Commission to reflect on moral discernment as a necessary *prerequisite* for ecumenical dialogue about specific moral issues. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of the *nature* of theological difference and disagreement on moral issues that significantly threaten the church unity. The final document, called *Moral Discernment in the Churches: A Study Document (2013)*, has been offered to the churches for further discussion.¹⁵ It presents four case studies, one of which addresses the issue of (homo)sexuality. The document explicitly calls for increased attention to *cultural, ecclesial, and historical* factors that shape and affect the moral attitudes and the communication about them. It underscores that increased awareness of these factors, and how they shape and affect communication, can lead to more effective ways of discussing and negotiating moral differences. The document acknowledges that moral questions are

often encountered within the context of personal experience and are therefore deeply emotionally charged. Besides, one should be aware that attitudes about emotions are often culturally marked. In other words, if we want to move forward in the ecumenical debate on moral issues, we must involve the study of the area of human affects and emotions, and investigate how these are shaped by historical, ecclesial, and cultural factors in a specific context.

An affect theoretical approach

To investigate the affective dimension of the public discourse of ROC I will make use of theories and concepts developed in the area of *affect studies*. Since the mid-1990s this field of studies refers to the theoretical engagement with emotions and affectivity. It draws on innovative theoretical and epistemological scholarship, such as psychoanalytically informed theories of subjectivity and subjection, theories of the body and embodiment, and poststructuralist feminist theory, as developed by Judith Butler, Bruno Latour, and others. There is the influence of Martha Nussbaum's epistemology, building on the cognitive value of emotions.¹⁶ The field of affect theory studies has become so influential and productive that scholars speak about the *affective turn* in social sciences and humanities (including religious studies).¹⁷ Affect theory assumes that any serious consideration of culture and politics needs to involve serious attention to affect, to those visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing that not only drive our actions and shape our social relations but are also being shaped and produced by the power of discourse, technology, and by the 'cultural politics of emotions' as the landmark study by Sara Ahmed (2004) is titled.¹⁸ In particular, the creative intertwining of methods of affect theory with gender studies and queer studies turns out to be fruitful.

The ecumenical discussion on homosexuality can be enriched by an affect theoretical approach. To analyze the public discourse of the ROC, it involves asking questions such as: Which historic and affective memories are encoded and transmitted in the ROC's discourse? What kind of 'imagined collectivity' (cultural, national, religious) is produced by the discourse? How can we bring into question prefigured cultural constructions of meaning? I hope that my article contributes to the tasks envisioned in the WCC Faith and Order Commission's study document. Simultaneously, on a methodological level, this article explores the possible usefulness of an affect theoretical approach for ecumenical theology.

Structure

First, I will analyze the historical and cultural background of the current homophobic speech in Russia and the larger post-Soviet region. Second, I will address the 'crisis of masculinity' in post-Soviet society and the political function of the 'masculinity cult' surrounding Vladimir Putin, in relation to the public attitude towards homosexuality. Third, I will present an analysis of the affective textual strategies applied to homosexuality in two important documents from the ROC: *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* (2000) and *Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom, and Rights* (2008), as well as in the public speeches of the prominent Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Relations of the ROC and as such the 'voice' in ecumenical affairs. I will indicate how the imagery of homosexuality in these texts reflects the theological concepts of human dignity, freedom,

redemption and deification. Finally, I will suggest how the ecumenical dialogue could be moved forward.

As a preliminary remark, I wish to emphasize that the ROC's view is not representative of all Orthodox churches as they do not speak *unisono* on moral matters.¹⁹ Further, it should be made clear that my analysis will focus exclusively on the *official* statements, documents, and speeches of the ROC-leadership, and does not say anything about the perhaps divergent personal views and opinions of individual church leaders, priests, or Orthodox laymen and women.

Cultural history of homosexuality in Russia

It is important to discern between the periods of pre-modern Slavic Orthodox culture, the times of modernization since Peter the Great, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet times.

Pre-modern Orthodox Slavic culture

Pre-modern Slavic culture, which lasted from 900 till about 1700 CE, was a very complex and mixed phenomenon. Although officially the Orthodox Church ruled the moral life, folk religiosity, especially in the rural areas, continued to be strongly influenced by pagan rituals and views that expressed a quite uncomplicated approach to sexual matters. We should keep this inconsistency in mind while acknowledging the fact that under the influence of the Church medieval Slavic culture developed a generally *negative* view on sexuality, even more than in Western Christianity.²⁰ Slavic Orthodoxy considered the desire for sex not as innate but as an evil inclination originating with the devil, dangerous to the individual and to society. Therefore, it should be kept within strict bounds, if not eliminated altogether.²¹ Social historian Eve Levin writes, 'The Slavs developed a negative view of sexuality in theory and a broad system of constraints on its manifestations in practice.'²² Confession and penitence, as well as numerous regulations about sexual abstinence in marriage,²³ were important instruments in maintaining social stability in the family-based society.

Canon law dictated which expressions of sexuality were forbidden. It is noteworthy that the terms 'sodomy' and 'sin against nature' were not exclusively reserved for homosexual relations. They were used to describe a wide variety of illicit sexual behaviors, among which were certain techniques of intercourse between husband and wife.²⁴ The male's dominant position over the female should be emphasized, and the woman should not mimic the position of the passive male in homosexual intercourse.²⁵ It is 'unnatural' for men submit to each other sexually; an adult male does not belong in the passive sexual role, nor should he seek to put another man in such a role.²⁶ The idea that men and women should retain their designated gender roles decisively shaped the Slavic Orthodox view on homosexual relations.

Homosexual intercourse involving anal penetration (*mužebłudie* or *muželožstvo*) was deemed to be just as sinful as heterosexual adultery. The penalties were one, two or five years of penance (but never the death penalty!). Leniency was practiced towards young people under thirty. Those who had once engaged in merely intercrural (non-penetrative) homosexual relations were not forbidden entry into the priesthood.²⁷ It is possible that most regulations specifically addressed the context of monasteries.²⁸ Sexual intercourse between women was not deemed to be a serious violation, although it was not appropriate for a woman to take on a male role in sexual relations.²⁹

Levin concludes:

In any case, Slavic hierarchs – and particularly the Russians – exhibited less hostility to homosexual activity than their Western European counterparts, regarding it as the equivalent of heterosexual adultery, at worst.³⁰

Modern times

During the reign of Peter the Great the first laws against homosexual acts were created. However, it was not until 1832 that the criminal code of the tsarist regime made *mužheložhstvo* a criminal act punishable by exile to Siberia for up to five years. At the turn of the twentieth century there was a relaxation of the laws and an increasing tolerance and visibility of homosexuality, in particular in higher classes and artistic circles. The October Revolution of 1917 cancelled the tsarist Criminal Code, and the new Soviet Criminal Codes of the 1920s eliminated the offence of *mužheložhstvo* from the law.

In the context of Stalinist pro-family politics, in 1933/1934 homosexuality was re-criminalized by the new Article 154a of the Criminal Code.³¹ It punished *mužheložhstvo* by five to eight years of imprisonment. Only male homosexuality was punishable. The standard rhetoric of associating bourgeois privilege with perversion made a comeback at this time.³² The revised entry in the second edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, published from 1950–1958, denounced homosexuality as a feature of capitalist society:

By the healthy standards of Soviet morality, homosexuality as a sexual perversion is considered shameful and criminal. Soviet criminal law penalizes homosexuality, with the exception of those cases in which it is a symptom of psychological disturbance.³³

Article 121 (as it was renumbered in 1960) was used frequently as a political tool to control and arrest dissidents, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Needless to say, gay men kept a very low profile in Soviet society. Only in 1993 was the ‘anti-sodomy law’ of Article 121 repealed from the Criminal Code, as this was one of the conditions for the Russian Federation to enter the Council of Europe.³⁴

Shadows of the gulag

Undeniably, the experience of the gulag has had a great impact on the affective formation with regard to homosexuality in Soviet and post-Soviet society. Millions of men and women – political dissidents, religious practitioners, former prisoners of war, and simply family members of the ‘enemies of the people’ – spent some part of their lives in gulag prisons and camps. It is estimated that under Stalin alone about 25 million people (equivalent to 15% of the entire Soviet population) were imprisoned. Their experiences became part of the Soviet collective memory. ‘Gulagspeak’ intruded everyday language. The prisons’ homosexual subculture and its violence shaped the prevailing imagery of same-sex relations in Soviet and post-Soviet culture.³⁵ It was common practice for those at the top of the criminal hierarchy to force other inmates, those who entered the camps labeled as ‘sodomites’ or simply the young, defenseless men, into a passive homosexual role. They were raped and systematically abused as sex-slaves. Their sleeping place was ‘by the latrine,’ a place of social subordination. These men were known as *opuschennye*, or ‘those who were put down,’ sexually and hierarchically.

Adi Kuntsman has undertaken an ethnographic research³⁶ of today's Russian homophobic hate speech, using feminist affect theories.³⁷ She brilliantly analyzes how the injurious names used for the abused men in the camps are still used today and revive 'an encoded memory of trauma, one that lives in language and is carried in language' (Judith Butler).³⁸ Abusive terms that originate from Soviet criminal jargon pervade Russian homophobic hate speech.³⁹ Based on her analysis of today's homophobic speech acts Kuntsman holds that the ghosts of the Soviet gulags still haunt us today; their affective presence forms 'the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience.'⁴⁰

The collective memory of the gulags is particularly shaped by the memoirs written by the *intelligentsia*. They positioned themselves as the moral authority of a persecuted generation, and gained profound influence in the years of Thaw (through *samizdat*) and Perestroika. What unite the memoirs of the 1930s–1950s are the active disgust and scorn toward same-sex relations in the camps.⁴¹ There is a notable difference with later memoirs from the 1970s–1980s that show a shift to more pity and compassion in the perception of same-sex relations.⁴² Central to the memoirs is the distinction between political and criminal prisoners. It is a class distinction, for the representation of sexuality in gulag memoirs works along the lines of class. Here is one powerful example from a story by Varlam Shalamov, which is quoted and analyzed by Kuntsman:⁴³

The criminals [*blatari*] in the camp are all pederasts. Each of them in the camp is surrounded by young people with swollen and muddy eyes – 'Zoikas,' 'Man'kas,' 'Verkas,' whom the criminal is feeding and with whom he sleeps. In one of the camps where there was no hunger, *blatari* had tamed and corrupted a female dog. They fed and petted her, and then slept with her, like a woman, openly, in front of everyone in the barrack. One does not want to believe these cases because of their monstrousness. But this is everyday life.⁴⁴

The criminals [*blatari*] have nothing human. They are all pederasts, and they embody the monstrous. They have sex with young men (who are called girly names) and dogs. The *blatari*'s victims of sexual abuse are depicted without any compassion. The men in the passive sexual role are described as a nameless crowd of disgusting deviants, interchangeable with dogs.

In exploring the role of disgust in the gulag memoirs, Kuntsman draws partly on Mary Douglas' cultural-anthropological insight that shame and disgrace, as well as the sense of filth and disgust, appears at moments when the social order and associated boundaries of what is normal are threatened. Shame and disgust work to both define and guard the 'normal' and the 'civilized.'⁴⁵ While Douglas focuses first and foremost on the object of disgust, cultural theorists like William Ian Miller⁴⁶ and Sara Ahmed turn to the subject of who experiences disgust. They read disgust as a navigator of social hierarchies. In Ahmed's view, disgust *creates* the effect of boundaries and social hierarchies. Disgust is not simply about a subjective feeling or about imagining others as 'hateful and sickening'; it is about the *boundaries* between 'us' and 'them' that are announced and reproduced in the affective politics of the narrative. Experiencing disgust is what makes one human. Inspired by this approach, Kuntsman asks: 'What are the boundaries of the human that the authors of the gulag memoirs want to preserve, and what threatens such preservation?'⁴⁷ If we look at the fragment from Shalamov's story, we can see which boundaries are created. Through textual strategies, which Ahmed refers to as metonymic 'sticking' and 'sliding,'⁴⁸ the closeness of same-sex relations to cruelty and bestiality becomes constant.⁴⁹ The narrative creates a social hierarchy and juxtaposes the heterosexual 'political' who

sustain their humanness in a world that is bestial and infernal, and the homosexual, subhuman ‘criminals.’⁵⁰

As Ahmed notes, the emotion of disgust is ambivalent: on the one hand, it serves as a boundary between objects or subjects; on the other hand, it signals that the disgusting has already come too close and that these boundaries are *already* under threat.⁵¹ For gulag survivors, the threat of same-sex relations is less about sexuality per se and more about their deep anxiety about sustaining the boundaries of humanness. The intellectuals present themselves as victims, not so much of sexual abuse, but as ‘captive witnesses’ to the savage presence of the homosexuals. Kuntsman posits that in today’s Russian homophobic hate-speech the fear of this presence is generated again, through memories, meaning, and words. She writes:

...the gulags are formative of Russian views of same-sex relations as disgusting and dangerous, and as particularly fearful for those who see themselves as belonging to the intelligentsia [...] While there are significantly historical differences between the gays and lesbians of today and criminalized Soviet homosexuals, or between male and female sexualities in and outside the gulags, the evocation of same-sex relations described here always leads back to the monstrous images of criminal *pidory*, *kobly*, and *kovyrialki*, collapsing everything into the shadowy figure by the latrine.⁵²

The problem is that the memoirs have gained the almost sacred status of both historical truth and unquestioned moral authority on all topics they discuss. The memoirs’ textual and discursive violence toward criminals and homosexuals has become *naturalized*.⁵³ Thus Kuntsman concludes:

Although the memoirs are not the only source of the criminalization of same-sex relations in the public imagination, they are one of the main grounds for the persistent connection between same-sex relations, low-classness, criminality, and monstrosity.⁵⁴

Crisis of masculinity in post-Soviet society

Another factor that influences the public attitude towards homosexuality in post-Soviet society is the change in gender formations. The economic transition to a market economy had a more catastrophic effect on men than on women, to such an extent that social scientists speak about a ‘crisis of masculinity’ in Russia today.⁵⁵ Many men have gone through a loss of status and struggle with their male identity. They are dying earlier, drinking more, and the crime and suicide rates for men are much higher than they are for women.⁵⁶

In the Soviet gender order, work was central to the identity of all Soviet citizens. Women were defined as worker-mothers and they had a duty to produce future generations of workers, as well as to oversee the running of the household. Men, meanwhile, had a more limited but higher status role to play. They were to be leaders, managers, soldiers, and laborers. Their importance, however, was limited because the state assumed responsibility for the fulfillment of traditional masculine roles. The paternalistic Soviet state emasculated men as public actors by discouraging individual initiative and as heads of households by eroding their role as the primary provider in their family.⁵⁷

Since the collapse of communism, unemployment has become a reality for many men and women. Further, the state has withdrawn from the private realm of the family. Today, there is a relatively new and great pressure on men to be ‘breadwinner’ of their family. Many men have difficulties performing this new role and suffer from a sense of failure or

inadequacy. And even when a man succeeds at being a breadwinner, his position as the head of the family is often a precarious one, for many Russian men are completely disengaged from the everyday practice of running the household.⁵⁸ Post-Soviet men struggle to find a new sense of identity beyond the one that was defined by the socialist labor collective; this is what scholars refer to as the ‘crisis of masculinity.’ Women were better off psychologically during the transitions. They always retained a measure of influence, power, and legitimacy in their homes. They have a broader gender role base from which to derive their sense of identity. In the present situation, they prove to be more flexible in choosing a gender strategy and negotiating between different socially acceptable roles.⁵⁹

Men are looking for a strong ideal of masculinity and popular media is responding to this. Since the 1990s, in particular the *boevik* (action story in book or film) has fostered an ideology of compensatory masculinity.⁶⁰ The genre focuses on aggressive, self-confident heteronormative masculinity and glorifies the Russian action hero. It uses themes from the ‘zone,’ a term that refers to the prison camp system inherited from the Soviet Union. Homosexual sex is implicit in the scenes set in the ‘zone,’ yet even the active penetration of a sex slave (*opuschenie*) does not diminish the heterosexuality of the hero. The sheer aggression and violence make him even more masculine and ready to conquer the world (and women).

A similar desire for a hypermasculine image influences the personality cult surrounding president Putin. The public image of Putin shows him as the man on top who is in control. He takes part in dangerous activities, including flying military jets, tranquilizing tigers and polar bears, scuba diving, and leading endangered cranes in a motorized hang glider. He is shown, mostly bare-chested, in wild, natural settings engaging in sports activities, such as riding horses, rafting, fishing and swimming in a cold Siberian river. He is known as a tough fighter on the *tatami*. In short, he is presented as an ultra-masculine hero. Clearly, this serves a political goal. The ultra-masculine hero symbolizes the top of the ‘power vertical,’ the power system which Putin himself introduced into Russian politics. He personifies the Russian state as vigorous, indomitable, and invincible. Interestingly, as Elizabeth Wood shows,⁶¹ the image of Putin combines two distinct masculinities: a heroic masculinity and a street masculinity. He presents himself as the ultimate ruler (the ‘good tsar’) and as the regular guy on the street. His vulgar vocabulary underscores the ruthless and aggressive street masculinity idolized in the *boevik*.

Putin’s virile image makes him the ‘perfect husband’ for Russia.⁶² The popular song ‘I Want a Man like Putin’ (‘Takogo kak Putin,’ 2002), written by Aleksander Elin and performed by many female artists on YouTube, depicts Putin as a ‘man full of strength’ who easily outshines the good-for-nothing ‘drunkard-boyfriend.’ He sets the standard for ‘hegemonic masculinity’⁶³ in today’s Russia. It is not surprising that in such a cultural-political climate, aggressive rejection of male homosexuality as a type of ‘effeminate masculinity’ is publicly encouraged and applauded.⁶⁴ Another factor that reinforces the public’s aversion to homosexuality is that the legal re-emergence of homosexual visibility in the 1990s coincided with great economic, political and social chaos. Many people came to see queer visibility (and other liberal manifestations) as a symptom, if not the cause, of economic and social disaster.⁶⁵ In the affective politics of today, Putin’s ‘manhood’ and his readiness to take tough action are inextricably and smartly connected to the promise of economic and social stability for the country.

The Russian Orthodox Church on homosexuality

To understand the official position of the ROC on same-sex relations, I analyze the two major documents adopted by the Holy Bishops’ Council of the ROC: *The Basis of the*

Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000) and the *Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights* (2008). After that, I turn to the public speeches of Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev). Metropolitan Hilarion (*1966) is the top diplomat of the External Relations of the ROC and most extensively articulates the church's view on same-sex relations, of course always in accordance with Patriarch Kirill's statements. The prominent place of the topic in the foreign relations of the ROC suggests that its stance on same-sex relations has become no less than an identity marker of the ROC, perhaps in relation to modernity at large.

My analysis of the public documents and speeches aims to reconstruct the theological views on homosexuality and will focus on the *rhetoric* of the discourse: Which figures of speech are prominent in the discourse? How do signs 'slide' together, and how do they 'stick' to particular bodies? What kind of affects does the rhetoric evoke? How does the imagery of homosexuality relate to theological concepts of human dignity, freedom, redemption, and deification, and to the current 'crisis of masculinity'?

The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000)

The highly important document *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*⁶⁶ presents the basics of the teaching on church-state relations and on a number of significant social issues. First, it is remarkable that the topic of homosexuality is not treated in the chapter where one would expect it (Chapter X on 'Personal, Family and Public Morality'), but instead in Chapter XII 'Problems of Bioethics.' Section XII.9 is entirely dedicated to the topic of homosexuality, and follows the sections on abortion, fertilization technologies, cloning, and euthanasia.

The opening sentence of XII.9 clearly states, 'Holy Scripture and the Teaching of the Church unequivocally deplore homosexual relations, seeing in them a vicious distortion of the God-created human nature.' As for Holy Scripture, the document cites well-known texts such as Lev. 20:13; Gen. 19:1–19; Rom. 1:26–27; and 1 Cor. 6:9–10 to demonstrate that the Bible condemns homosexual relations as sinful and a defilement of the body. Support for the condemnation is found with the Church Fathers who 'all express the unchangeable teaching of the Church that homosexual relations are sinful and should be condemned.' People who are involved in homosexuality have no right to be members of the clergy. The only explicit quotation from the writings of Church Fathers originates from St Maxim the Greek (c. 1475–1556) and emphasizes the dirt and filth associated with the 'sin of sodomy.'

See at yourselves, damned ones, what a *foul* pleasure you indulge in! Try to give up as soon as possible this *most nasty* and *stinking* pleasure of yours, to hate it and to fulminate eternally those who argue that it is innocent as enemies of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and corrupters of His teaching. Cleanse yourselves of this *blight* by repentance, ardent tears, alms-giving as much as you can and pure prayer... Hate this unrighteousness with all your heart, so that you may not be sons of damnation and eternal death.⁶⁷

Most probably, St Maxim the Greek is addressing in this text the monks in monasteries where homosexual practices were widespread.⁶⁸ The context suggests that his warning has some relevance for today, for the quotation immediately follows the apodictic verdict that 'people involved in them [homosexual relations] have no right to be members of the clergy.'

Disgust and damnation are the pillars of St Maxim's rhetoric. These are also the themes in the theological anthropology presented in section XII.9. The Orthodox Church considers the homosexual drive as a sinful distortion of human nature. Human nature, created in God's image and after His likeness (cf. Gen. 1:26), is potentially good; however, because of the fall, human nature is darkened by sin. It is darkened by vicious passions torturing fallen man, and homosexual desire is identified as one of those passions that stain and corrupt human nature. The ROC's teaching does not adopt the medieval Slavic view that all sexuality is vicious and corrupts human nature; yet, for homosexual desires this idea does apply. In order to arrive at salvation, the human being has to struggle to overcome this distortion of his nature, by bringing his lustful passions under spiritual control. The document states, referring to debates in contemporary society, that for the Orthodox Church homosexuality is not a 'sexual orientation' among others but a sexual perversion.

[...] the Church is resolutely against the attempts to present this sinful tendency as a «norm» and even something to be proud of and emulate. This is why the Church denounces any propaganda of homosexuality.⁶⁹

The homosexual desire, seen as a tempting passion, is believed to be 'healed' by the Sacraments, prayer, fasting, repentance, reading of Holy Scripture and patristic writings, as well as pastoral Christian fellowship. Struggling against the passion can thus strengthen a person on the way towards *theosis*, the reintegration of the creature in the life of the triune God.⁷⁰

The fact that the topic of homosexuality is discussed in the chapter on 'Problems of Bioethics' indicates that the ROC expels same-sex relations from the domain of love relations (marriage, family) and understands it merely as a lustful (= sinful) urge. It appears that the modern discourse on same-sex relations is disregarded by the ROC as one of the 'attempts of human beings to put themselves in the place of God by changing and "improving" His creation at their will' (XII.1). This alleged human hubris to change God's creation, which they believe is evident in abortion, fertilization technology, and euthanasia, is for the ROC also visible in the current movement to affirm multiple sexualities (heterosexuality, homosexuality, transsexuality), and in other attempts of 'gender ideology' to change the God-given female and male nature.⁷¹

Basic teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights (2008)

The document on 'Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights'⁷² has been adopted by the Bishops' Council of the ROC as a follow up to the 'Basic Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,' and it addresses the following question: What constitutes a human being and what is the church's teaching on human rights? The document takes a polemic stance. The 'Preamble' states that for Christians today 'a serious tension and incongruence is felt between the theory and implementation of human rights in today's world and God's commandments.' It is critically noted that 'human rights protection is often used as a plea to realize ideas which in essence radically disagree with Christian teaching.' We will see that this criticism applies to the rights of sexual minorities.

The document does not dwell separately on homosexual relations but classifies them in the broader category of 'sexual lechery and perversions.' This category includes quite varied things, including pornography, prostitution, pederasty, and homosexuality. Chapter III on 'Human rights in Christian worldview and in the life of society' states:

It is inadmissible to introduce in the area of human rights the norms that obliterate or altogether cancel both the Gospel and natural morality. The Church sees a great danger in the legislative and public support given to various vices, such as *sexual lechery* (разврат) and *perversions* (извращения) [and] the worship of profit and violence. (III.3)

The term *извращения* used to be the common Soviet designation for homosexuality.⁷³

A key concept in the document is that of *human dignity*.⁷⁴ Orthodox theology assumes that human nature has an inherent dignity (Chapter I). Created in God's image and after His likeness, human nature is potentially good. After the fall, the image of God still offers the opportunity to restore the original perfect human life. Orthodox theology makes a distinction between the 'image of God' as the *potential* for human dignity, and the notion of the 'likeness after God' as the *actualized* human dignity. Full human dignity can only result from the efforts to overcome sin and it is found in a life of moral purity and virtue. The notion of the 'inherent dignity' of the human being, which was assumed in the beginning of Chapter I, appears to be rather conditional.

Therefore in the Eastern Christian tradition the notion of 'dignity' has first of all a moral meaning, while the ideas of what is dignified and what is not are bound up with the moral and amoral actions of a person and with the inner state of the soul. (I.2)

...a human being preserves his God-given dignity and grows in it only if he lives in accordance with moral norms because these norms express the primordial and therefore authentic nature not darkened by sin. (I.5)

What is different from the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (1948), is that human dignity here is not conceived of as unconditional, universal and inalienable, but as a moral category. Human dignity is related to growth in virtue. Everything in this view depends on *what* is defined as moral and *who* sets the norms. The document refers to God's commandments as the external revelation and the moral principle laid down by God in human conscience as the internal revelation. 'A morally undignified life does not ruin the God-given dignity ontologically but darkens it so much as to make it hardly visible.' (I.4) The sinful person should restore his appropriate dignity and therefore he must repent before God and the Church (I.5). Obviously, in such a theological construction God's law, natural law and the Church's law are closely intertwined if not entirely identical. Ultimately, the authority of the Church discerns, affirms and sanctions the law of God.⁷⁵ Not much space for moral decision remains for the individual conscience, which had been defined in the Basic Social Concept as

...a certain autonomous sphere that should be reserved for man, in which his conscience might remain the 'autocratic' master, for it is the free will that determines ultimately the salvation or death, the way to Christ or the way away from Christ. (IV.6)

The individual conscience is, to a certain extent, respected in relation to the state,⁷⁶ but its validity in relation to the authority of the Church is less clear. Alfons Brüning points to the critical potential of the *imago dei* concept in the ROC teaching: If the human being is created by God, he/she certainly is not created by another human, and therefore no human shall claim the right to dispose over another human.⁷⁷ This is a deeply spiritual principle. The document, however, does not make it clear how this principle applies to people of a different sexual orientation. The basic concept of *imago dei* and the ROC's theological construction of the law of God are at odds with each other. Following the logic of the document, a person entrapped in 'sexual lechery and perversions' has a barely discernible

‘natural dignity’; he is almost subhuman, animalistic; his body reigns lustful over the spirit. His only way to redemption is to repent before God and the Church, and henceforth obey the moral norms set by the Church. As Pope Shenouda III (1923–2012) of the Coptic Orthodox Church once stated, ‘What rights are there for homosexuals? The only right is to be led to repentance.’⁷⁸

I will now turn to the ROC’s definition of *freedom*. The document holds that freedom of choice is a blessing for the person; however, it is not an absolute value. Christian tradition makes a distinction between freedom of choice, *autexousion*, and the freedom to live in goodness, *eleutheria*.

While recognizing the value of freedom of choice, the Church affirms that this freedom will inevitably disappear if the choice is made in favor of evil. (II.2)

The Church is called to harmonize in the social system the set of human rights with the norms of morality disclosed by Divine Revelation, and thus guide human beings to a dignified life. (III.3)⁷⁹

In history, the choice made by people and societies in favor of evil led:

...to the loss of freedom and to *the enormous loss of lives*. And today humanity may follow the same path if such *absolutely vicious things* as abortion, suicide, *lechery*, *perversion*, destruction of the family, the worship of cruelty and violence are no longer given a proper moral assessment and justified by a distorted understanding of human freedom. (II.2)⁸⁰

Analyzing these sentences, we can see how the rhetoric works. Homosexuality, categorized as ‘lechery and perversion,’ finds its place among the ‘absolutely vicious things.’ It is equated with ‘abortion, suicide’ – suggesting acts of killing – and the ‘destruction of the family, the worship of violence and cruelty’ – suggesting the destruction of social cohesion and safety. The rhetoric of ‘the enormous loss of lives’ recalls encoded traumas of the communist and fascist regimes. Thus, by using false analogies and suggestive figures of speech, the homosexual who chooses ‘in favor of evil’ is defined as someone who is (potentially) destructive and murderous. Instead of being acknowledged as a victim of the communist and fascist regimes, the figure of the ‘pervert homosexual’ becomes associated with such totalitarian violence. The homosexual ‘body’ itself gets stigmatized as a place of active violence and destruction.

Public speeches of Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk

In his public lectures and addresses, Metropolitan Hilarion speaks repeatedly about same-sex relations. The topic is presented as a (major) symbol of the dangers of Western liberal society that threaten Russian society. I will now analyze the vocabulary and images he employs, and the affective strategies that are operative in his discourse.

a. Warfare, battle to defend the Christian civilization

The first metaphorical cluster in Metropolitan Hilarion’s speeches is that of *warfare*, *battle*. Russian Christian civilization is under threat and must be defended. The attacks come from the secularism and liberalism that rule Western society. The following are some examples of the metaphorical language of warfare: The secularism that wants to impose its moral norms on European civilization is ‘aggressive.’⁸¹ The leadership of the

traditional churches should not ‘surrender’ to the pressure coming from the liberals.⁸² The Metropolitan warned, ‘Everyone knows that the liberalization of Christian ethical norms is of *extreme danger* for the traditional faith.’⁸³ In an interview in 2011, he stated that ‘we are in solidarity with the Evangelicals [in the USA] in their *battle* against the liberalization of Christianity, in their advocacy of traditional moral norms. They have consistently come out against the so-called same-sex marriages and ordination of homosexuals.’⁸⁴ In a speech to the Russian Academy of Sciences, Hilarion spoke about the ‘value cleansing’ pursued by the so-called ‘religious neutrality of society’ in the European Union.⁸⁵ He used a slang word in Russian [зачистка] which literally means ‘mopping up of the enemies’ and refers to military operations in populated areas involving searching houses and arresting suspicious persons.⁸⁶ He suggests that the West is now ‘mopping up’ the traditional, Christian values in its own societies and will threaten Russian civilization as well if it does not vehemently defend itself.

b. *Disease and physical elimination of the nation*

A second repetitive metaphorical cluster associated with homosexuality is the attack on the health of the nation. Metropolitan Hilarion fears liberal ideologies will cause a ‘demographic catastrophe.’ They will destroy the institution of the traditional family and will lead eventually to the elimination of the nation. This seems to be his key argument to justify the fight against tolerance of same-sex relations. The following are some examples of how he employs the imagery of disease and epidemic in relation to homosexuality: He refers to the ‘demographic realities of our days,’ in particular to low birth rates in Western European countries, to consolidate his argument that ‘the propaganda of the so-called free love, the legalization of prostitution and same-sex cohabitations have turned the traditional family into a *degenerating* institution in many European countries.’⁸⁷ For the Russian audience at home he uses more powerful vocabulary, ‘this process [of secular liberalization] is *suicidal* for the whole Western society,’ it may lead to the ‘*physical elimination* of European nations.’⁸⁸ He continues,

Why am I talking about physical elimination? Because, for instance, this godless liberal ideology [...] delivers a blow not only to religions but first of all to such foundations of human existence as family and family values. Indeed, what does homosexuality lead to? It leads to creating an increasing number of same-sex unions that claim to be marriages, while it goes without saying that such union does not produce posterity. The destruction of traditional family ideals leads to a considerable decrease in the number of large families. Today, a large family in Western countries, just as in Russia, is a rarity. Large are the families of Muslims, not of Christians, even less of atheists.⁸⁹

Homosexuality is imagined as an epidemic. Hilarion fears that the Western empire will die from a ‘moral decay’ and this fate will take Russia as well, if the trend of liberalization is not stopped at the borders of the nation. He strongly emphasizes, ‘...we can and must preserve and develop our cultural, national and spiritual identity.’⁹⁰ In a lecture in the USA (2012), he also links the destruction of traditional family life to the disease of a nation,

This is a very simple and real indication of the spiritual health or spiritual disease of a particular nation. If the population of a country is increasing this means that there are in the nation *healthy* forces which allow this to happen; if the population decreases, this is a sign of

disease. And the disease in this instance is that in society there is an absence of the traditional notion of the family.⁹¹

In short, the demographic crisis is Metropolitan Hilarion's favorite framework in which to explicate the dangers of homosexuality. The homophobic argument is framed in a biologicistic view: It degenerates the institution of the family, leads to a decrease in birth rates, and thus weakens the nation. On the affective level, this creates feelings of fear, insecurity, and anxiety. The strong Russian nation is being threatened by a disease from 'outside the borders.' The discourse of the church leader helps to draw the boundaries: the strong, healthy, masculine Russian state (ready for the battle!) is contrasted with the degenerated, ill, effeminate states of Western Europe.

Hilarion's imagery of 'demographic crisis' reminds Russian citizens of the chaos and crisis of the years of *perestroika* and the Yeltsin era during which they struggled merely to survive. The birth rate in Russia during those years was dramatically low.⁹² This association with chaos and poverty is part of the encoded memory of 'demographic crisis' speech. Suggesting that a more tolerant approach to same-sex unions will lead to a dramatic decline in birth rate and affect the country's economic stability evokes people's horror of homosexuality.

Hilarion's 'demographic crisis' speech is permeated by the ideology of the Russian World National Council (RWNC).⁹³ This is an important forum that formulates ideas to strengthen Russia as a distinct civilization (which is referred to as Russian, Orthodox or East Slavic civilization). In December 2007, in a meeting headed by Metropolitan Kirill (of Smolensk) – the current Patriarch – the RWNC adopted an 800-page document titled 'Russian Doctrine.'⁹⁴ In this 'Russian Doctrine' the issue of demographic epidemic is prominent (Chapter V). The Doctrine proposes social and political measures to stimulate a demographic revival. The RWNC believes that 'the policy of a strong family will save Russia.' (Chapter V.6) Here we find the ideological background for the laws that were approved by the Duma in January 2013. The Church's teaching is in line with the ideology of the Russian World National Council.⁹⁵

c. *Soviet terror and trauma*

A third metaphorical cluster in Metropolitan Hilarion's speeches appeals to *traumatic experiences* that occurred during the Soviet era. For example, in 2012 Hilarion warned against the policy of European institutions to influence Russian (and Polish) legislation on 'banning the propaganda of homosexuality among minors' and 'to protect the youth against obscene things.'⁹⁶ He calls this policy dangerous, and states, 'We should not allow external force to manipulate our international contradictions.'⁹⁷ He calls for a holy alliance of traditional Christians. Hilarion's rhetoric clearly constructs the image of a traditional Christian community/civilization that is about to become the victim of the militant secularism of European institutions. The 'foreign enemies' label, reminiscent of Stalinist times, has shifted from (former) capitalists to liberal secularists. Gay rights activists, inspired by liberal values, are portrayed as antipatriotic forces undermining their own societies.

The appeal to the encoded memories of the Soviet era, however, is paradoxical. In the same speech, the Metropolitan recalls the trauma of the religious persecution under the Soviet regime.

Let us remember that Orthodox and Catholic priests and lay people suffered in the hands of people who were filled with hatred towards religion as such and who persistently did everything possible to destroy it.⁹⁸

He compares the political and juridical interference of European institutions in the field of human rights with the communist terror against religion and faithful people. With the words 'Let us remember' he evokes the collective trauma of persecution, repression, and suffering. He makes a similar suggestive comparison between Western liberalism and the anti-religious Soviet terror in an interview from 2012. With regard to the debate in Great Britain on wearing religious symbols in public and the registration of same-sex unions as marriages, Hilarion contends:

If Great Britain becomes like the Soviet Union in its ideological dictate characteristic of militant secularism, then it will not be the most beneficial comparison for a country which claims to be a democracy.⁹⁹

d. Ideal of masculinity

In the same interview Metropolitan Hilarion explicates the Church's ideal of masculinity:

If you are an Orthodox Christian, you create a strong family, love your wife and children and have as many children as the Lord gives you. You are protector and breadwinner of your family. In professional work, you are also guided by Christian moral norms. For instance, if you are a businessman, you do not steal, refuse to be corrupted, avoid immoral actions for the sake of personal profit; you wear a cross under your clothes, even if it is contrary to the official dress code.¹⁰⁰

The church leader of course does not simply repeat the popular ideology of ultramasculinity, with its characteristic aggressiveness, violence, criminal behavior, and boundless sexual activity. Hilarion proposes a 'softer' alternative to this hegemonic masculinity, in which responsibility for the family in the role of progenitor, protector, and breadwinner is compatible with moral responsibility in the professional domain. He upholds patriarchal concepts and redefines them in terms of responsibility, protection, and love.¹⁰¹ Concerns about the demographic situation mark this ideal of masculinity, but it also entails profound criticism of the dominant and criminal type of 'street masculinity' that is popular in post-Soviet society. Further, and not surprisingly, the Church's norm of masculinity is explicitly heterosexual.

Conclusion

This survey of the cultural-historical background of the ROC's negative stance toward homosexuality revealed how it is shaped more by patterns originating from communist times than by the relatively lenient Slavic medieval approach to homosexual behavior. In today's homophobic discourse this much earlier, and much milder, approach has completely vanished. Post-Soviet moral formation is strongly influenced by a mixture of still effective Stalinist anti-homosexual propaganda and encoded traumatic memories of the gulag. These elements have decisively shaped the ecclesial discourse on homosexuality.

From my reading of church texts, which was guided by the methods and tools of affect studies, I conclude that the topic of homosexuality functions to construct an *imagined* religious, moral, and national collectivity which must defend itself, as a matter of life and

death, against ‘others’ who threaten this collective body. By way of refined textual strategies and frightening imagery of a ‘demographic catastrophe,’ homosexuality functions as a *topos* to create and fortify the following boundaries: between ‘healthy’ and ‘degenerated’ people; between moral and immoral people; between traditional Christian civilization (= Russia, and traditional Christian communities in holy alliance with it) and the liberal, secularized Western society (which no longer deserves to be referred to as culture)¹⁰²; between the strong, healthy, masculine Russian state and the degenerated, ill, effeminate states of the West. Masculine heterosexuality becomes an identity marker for Russian Christian civilization, which must protect itself against threats both from the outside and the inside. The shared perception that the outside world is hostile and ill-intentioned proves to be a solid foundation for church–state collaboration in Russia. This perception fits well with the lingering sense across the Orthodox world that national security depends in a profound – even mystical – way on the nation remaining Orthodox.¹⁰³ Homosexuals claiming their rights are ‘intruders’ who endanger the social cohesion and political stability. Their ‘deviant’ sexuality is a symbol of the degenerated West. However, it is more likely that alternative sexualities and relationships do threaten autocratic regimes that aim to control civil society and cannot allow individual freedom to express itself in the public domain.

The ROC’s homophobic discourse reproduces in its own way the opposition described in the memoirs’ between the moral intelligentsia and the immoral criminals. The Church wants to identify with the history of the martyrs; many of the Orthodox clergy, monks and religious sisters belonged to the persecuted intelligentsia in Soviet times. Today, the Church appeals to the rhetorical violence toward homosexuals ‘naturalized’ in the gulag memoirs. It provokes the emotion of disgust by talking about dirt, filth, perversity, disease, and the continuous association of ‘perverted’ homosexual activity with criminality and destruction/murder. This strong, implicit reference to the sufferings of the gulag (and to the economic and social chaos of the 1990s) makes the ROC’s discourse on sexual morals very persuasive in post-Soviet society.

What is the role of religious concepts, such as human dignity, sin, freedom and deification in allowing or rejecting certain types of masculinity and sexual identity? I noticed a tension between the idea of human dignity as defined by the Church and the concept of *imago dei* which is based on the principle that no person has the right to dispose over another, for each person is created by God. The Church does not leave much room for the freedom of personal conscience in moral matters. Further, it claims exclusive authority in defining the legitimate forms of gender and sexuality. Human dignity is denied to persons with a different sexual orientation. A dualism of love and lust is constructed, with heterosexuality on the side of (spiritual) love and homosexuality on the side of (fleshly) lust. This lust, stigmatized as ‘lechery’ and ‘perversion,’ is metonymically linked to cruelty and violence. To achieve the Christian goal of life – deification as reintegration into the love relationship of the triune God – the homosexual person has to cure (deny or suppress) his/her sexuality. This conceiving of human dignity and sin, in short, helps to create and sustain an opposition between a moral group that protects the boundaries of humanity, and an immoral, monstrous bunch of creatures that threatens these boundaries. The religious concepts tend to become part of a ‘hate speech’ discourse.¹⁰⁴

Where can we find possible openings for further ecumenical dialogue? I would suggest the following tracks: It is not productive to discuss the topic of homosexuality without taking into account the affective structures that shape the moral and religious attitudes of churches. To give these dimensions space, ecumenical conversations should

not focus on 'homosexuality' as such but rather profoundly discuss issues of human sexuality and gender in all its diversity and complexity. These discussions should include the varied ways of cultural and historical formation and expression, as well as the multiple emotional layers. A narrative approach may be recommended. Affect theory, as I have demonstrated, can offer helpful tools and concepts to analyze the dynamics of sexual discourse and its intertwining with political, social, and economic discourses. Likewise theological notions of human dignity and human freedom need to be brought 'down to earth.' Dialogue partners should discuss and make clear to each other how these normative concepts are not only precious gifts of the Creator and beautiful fruits of the Holy Spirit but, in terms of their specific content, have also been shaped by particular experiences, fault lines, and conflicts in history. It is important to clarify how our ideas of human dignity and freedom are to a significant extent constructed, interpreted, and modified by sometimes traumatic historical experiences, and how our current interpretations entail responses to (real or imagined) perceived threats and challenges in the present. It goes without saying that this applies to Western Christian liberal interpretations as well.¹⁰⁵ Answering the question 'what are you afraid of?' can function as an eye opener in interpersonal, intercultural, and interdenominational communication.

Ecumenical studies of human sexuality would benefit from paying special attention to the interrelationship of generous love and joyful lust.¹⁰⁶ Some of the Eastern Church fathers offer inspiring views on the integrity and fullness of human sexuality. Reducing same-sex relationships to the 'carnal' side does not do justice to the love, spiritual union and emotional intimacy that can and do exist in same-sex relationships as well.¹⁰⁷

Finally, struggling to come to terms with a plurality of sexualities is part of the greater struggle with plurality in emerging democratic societies. The ROC's defensive attitude can very well be understood as a 'sign of the times': Will it, coming from a very strong monoculture, allow plurality within society or not? Alternative sexualities appear to be the litmus test for whether or not a society will allow people the freedom 'to be different.' For the present, the ROC's answer is negative. Further ecumenical conversation could focus on the following question: To what extent is the Christian church community itself marked by difference and oddity, by the strange love of the Son of God who died as an outcast on the cross? And what does this imply for addressing differences, both within and outside of the church? I expect that the controversy on homosexuality will lead us, in the end, into an ecclesiological debate on the foundations of church community.

Notes

1. Fragment of an essay (originally in Ukrainian) of a female student of the Master Program Ecumenical Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine, written for the exam of my course 'Human Rights and Christian Faith,' June 2011.
2. Fragment of an essay (originally in English) of another female student, written for the same exam.
3. Homophobia can be defined as an irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. It manifests itself in attitudes and feelings of antipathy, contempt, prejudice, hatred, in forms such as hate speech and incitement to discrimination, psychological and physical violence, persecution and murder. Social theories usually distinguish between social, institutionalized and internalized forms of homophobia. See Merriam-Webster Dictionary and the "European Parliament resolution on homophobia in Europe," adopted January 18, 2006.
4. Local legislatures in several Russian regions, including St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk, had already passed similar laws in previous years. Bills to prohibit 'propaganda of homosexuality' are also in the process of preparation in Ukraine.

5. Source: European Agency for Fundamental Rights, “EU LGBT Survey 2012,” data and results available through the link: <http://fra.europa.eu/DVS/DVT/lgbt.php>
6. See the publication of the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP) (2013) Kuyper et al., *Towards Tolerance. Exploring Changes and Explaining Differences in Attitudes towards Homosexuality in Europe*. This report shows that Europe is moving towards more tolerance. However, different countries are moving at a very different pace and from very different starting positions. In addition, the biggest changes seem to have taken place between 1990 and 1999 and did not persist into the new millennium.
7. Differences in levels of tolerance are related to other values, levels of income and income inequality, educational attainment, religious factors, degree of urbanization, EU membership and political systems, and to links with civil society and LGB movements, see Kuyper et al. (2013) *Towards Tolerance*.
8. From a speech of patriarch Kirill in Petrozavodsk, June 3, 2010.
9. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, later commented that the ‘situation was aggravated when a woman bishop was installed as head of the Episcopal Church in the USA in 2006 and a lesbian was placed on the bishop’s chair of Los Angeles in 2010.’ See his address to the Annual Nicean Dinner, Lambeth Palace, UK, September 9, 2010.
10. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/novemberweb-only/11-17-23.0.html> (accessed on May 30, 2013).
11. <http://english.pravda.ru/society/family/30-12-2005/9460-gay-0/> (accessed on July 1, 2013).
12. <http://politiken.dk/newsinenglish/ECE1758334/orthodoxy-disallows-dk-baptisms/> (accessed on July 1, 2013).
13. See WCC Faith and Order Commission (2006) “One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition.”
14. *Inter alia*, Wolfgang Lienemann (1998), Brigitta Larsson (1998), Thomas Hopko (2006), Dagmar Heller (2010) and Justin R. Cannon (2011).
15. The Orthodox members of the Faith and Order Standing Commission, however, made an Addendum to the text. They affirmed that the study document contains tools to understand different causative factors that divide churches over moral issues, but they expressed their concerns regarding the whole study process. ‘The Orthodox read the text in ways that do not reflect their tradition; in particular, they identify the following areas: working methodology of the study leading to the relativistic approach; the same methodology applied to church unity; overemphasis on the non-theological academic approach; lack of broader ecumenical approaches; lack of spiritual and theological aspects [...]; assumptions running throughout the paper that should not be made. The same relativistic approach is applied also to the sources; but for the Orthodox there are three initial capital sources for moral discernment: the Holy Trinity, the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition. These sources cannot be placed at the same level with the other sources.’ “Moral Discernment,” (2013), 8–9.
16. Nussbaum (1990) *Love’s Knowledge*; (2001) *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.
17. Patricia Ticineto Clough coined the term in 2007 and described it as ‘a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory’ brought on by transformations in the economic, political, and cultural realms. See Clough and Halley (2007) *The Affective Turn*, 1–2.
18. Ahmed (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Other significant authors in affect studies are Patricia Ticineto Clough (2000, 2007), Jean Halley (2007), Elspeth Probyn (2000, 2005), Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010), and Adi Kuntsman (2008a, 2008b, 2009).
19. For instance, a different attitude towards same-sex relations can be found in the Finnish Orthodox Church. See Cannon (2011) *Homosexuality in the Orthodox Church*, 42, 50-51, 67 (note iv).
20. Levin (1989) *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700*.
21. *Ibid.*, 13, 36–78.
22. *Ibid.*, 35.
23. Church canons regulated when and how the married couple could have conjugal relation. If a couple strictly observed the rules, they refrained from marital intercourse three hundred days of the year. See Levin, *Sex and Society*, 163, 178.
24. *Ibid.*, 197–204.

25. Ibid., 172–173.
26. Ibid., 199.
27. Ibid., 202. For comparison, in Renaissance Venice non-penetrative and penetrative sex between men was deemed equally reprehensible, and the initiating partner was subjected to the death penalty. Levin refers to Ruggiero (1985) *The Boundaries of Eros*.
28. However, the tolerance was not confined to the clergy. Foreign visitors to Muscovite Russia in the 16th and 17th centuries repeatedly expressed their amazement at the open displays of homosexual affection among men of every class. See “Russian Gay History” in Dyes (1990) *The Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*.
29. Levin, *Sex and Society*, 204.
30. Ibid., 203.
31. Article 154a was renumbered in 1960 to Article 121. Historians differ about the reasons why homosexuality was criminalized again. Was it because the family was presented as the ‘primary cell’ of rapidly industrializing Soviet society; was it an attempt to increase the birthrate; was it the context of an altered juridical climate eliminating the protections of privacy; was it a simple political tool to be used against political dissidents, irrespective of their sexual orientation? See for this discussion James Riordan (1996), Dan Healy (2001), Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina (2004), Camilla Roubleva (2007), and Laura Engelstein (2010).
32. In 1934, Maxim Gorky identified homosexuality as a form of bourgeois ‘filth’ linked to the emergence of fascism in Germany. See Engelstein (2010) “Soviet Policy toward Male Homosexuality,” 170–171.
33. Ibid., 172.
34. Baer (2008) “Texts, Contexts, Subtexts,” 3–8.
35. Kuntsman (2008a) “Between Gulags and Pride Parades”, (2008b) “Shadows of the Past”, (2009) “With a Shade of Disgust”.
36. Thus she calls her research project in “Shadows of the Past,” 8.
37. Kuntsman, “Between Gulags and Pride Parades,” 270–271.
38. Ibid., 265. She quotes Judith Butler (1997) *Excitable Speech*, 36.
39. Other injurious names are *pidory* (the men who were put down in the passive role), and for lesbian relations *kobly* (women in the ‘masculine’ role), and *kovyrialki* (women in the ‘feminine’ role). See Kuntsman, “Between Gulags and Pride Parades,” 269.
40. Ibid., 267. She quotes Avery Gordon (1997) *Ghostly Matters*, 8.
41. Ibid., 273.
42. Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust,” 325–326. She mentions the works of Igor Guberman and Inna Ratushinskaia. Marina Shishova (St. Petersburg) drew my attention to a similar delicate treatment of lesbian relationships in the memoirs of Tatiana Shchipkova, *Zhenskiy portret v tyuremnom interyere. Zapiski pravoslavnoy* (Female Portrait in a Prison Interior. The Notes of an Orthodox Woman). Written in 1985–87, published in Moscow in 2011, with an appreciative comment of Patriarch Kirill on the cover of the book.
43. Kuntsman zooms in on two authors, Varlam Shalamov and Evgeniia Ginzburg, but her reading is informed by broader textual observations of the memoirs.
44. Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust,” 315. Quoted from Varlam Shalamov. “Zhulnichenskaja krov” (“Swindler’s Blood”) in *Preodolenie zla: Izbrannoe*. Moscow, 2003, 564.
45. Douglas (1966/2002) *Purity and Danger*.
46. Miller (1997) *The Anatomy of Disgust*.
47. Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust,” 316.
48. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12–14; 44 refers with metonymic ‘sticking’ to the way signs get stuck together and have created histories of association; moreover, in the work of (naming) disgust signs ‘stick’ to particular bodies. Through ‘sliding’ of signs a relation of resemblance is constructed between figures in the text, for instance in Shalamov’s fragment between the ‘Zoikas’, their ‘swollen and muddy eyes,’ (like a toad) and the ‘female dog’.
49. Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust,” 320. See also Ahmed (2004a) “Affective Economies,” 126–128.
50. Kuntsman, “With a Shade of Disgust,” 309–310. We could enrich the analysis of Kuntsman by taking into account the power relations described in Varlamov’s fragment. The point for the political to distance themselves from the criminals is not only a question of ‘what’ but also ‘how.’ They rejected the approach to human relationships manifested by the *blatari* in

their sexual behavior (not necessarily homosexual) that is ruled by a lust to dominate, a lust for power.

51. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 86: 'To be disgusted is after all to be affected by what one has rejected.'
52. Kuntsman, "Between Gulags and Pride Parades," 280.
53. Kuntsman, "Shadows of the Past," 9.
54. Kuntsman, "With a Shade of Disgust," 326.
55. See the works of Sergei Kukhterin (2000), Marina Kiblitckaya (2000), Elena Meshcherkina (2000), Olga Issouпова (2000), Sarah Ashwin (2000, 2002), Sarah Ashwin and Tanya Lytkina (2004), Tania Rands Lyon (2007), and Janet E. Johnson and Jean C. Robinson (2007).
56. See Ashwin and Lytkina (2004) "Men in Crisis in Russia," 189–190; Rands Lyon, "Housewife Fantasies," 28.
57. Rands Lyon, "Housewife Fantasies," 28.
58. Ashwin and Lytkina, "Men in Crisis in Russia," 195.
59. Johnson and Robinson (2007), Introduction to *Living Gender after Communism*, 12.
60. Borenstein (2008a) "Band of Brothers," 17–21; Borenstein (2008b) *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture*.
61. Wood (2011) "Vladimir Putin: Masculinity and Hypermasculinity" (public lecture).
62. See for this metaphorically 'sexing Russia', Ellen Ruten (2012) "Putin on Panties: Sexing Russia in Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture." She draws, inter alia, on her monograph (2010) *Unattainable Bride Russia* and on the studies of Joanna Hubbs (1993), Oleg Rjabov (2001), and Tatjana Rjabova (2002).
63. The concept 'hegemonic masculinity' originates from R.W. Connell (2005) *Masculinities*, 76–81. Masculinity is regarded as a social construction of male gender identity and of men's position in gender relations. Various masculinities may co-exist in a given context. The popular, most influential and prevailing version of masculinity is referred to as 'hegemonic masculinity.'
64. Compare Culbertson (2009) "Designing Men: Reading the Male Body as Text," 120: 'Those with the greatest investment in reading meaning into the male body are governments and politico-military authorities, which need men to conceive themselves in certain ways in order to retain their present positions of power.'
65. Baer "Texts, Contexts, Subtexts," 4.
66. Holy Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, "Основы социальной концепции Русской Православной Церкви." English translation: <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>
67. "Basis of the Social Concept" XII.9. My italics.
68. Maximus the Greek (also called Maximus the Hagiorite) came in 1518 from Greece to Moscow and became a famous translator of ecclesiastic books in Church Slavonic. He criticized the lifestyle of the Russian clergy and the wrongdoings of political authorities. Therefore he fell in disgrace and was sent into exile to Tver. As a saint, he has been held in the greatest repute by the Old Believers. See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Vol. 7. (Chicago, 2002), 967–968.
69. "Basis of the Social Teaching," XII.9.
70. Compare the view of Fr George Morelli, of the 'Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America,' on homosexual persons and *theosis*: 'But we are called to live according to God's commandments, and the struggle the homosexual might have in conforming himself to God's commands can become a pathway to holiness.' Although Morelli is more open to consider homosexuality as a sexual orientation, he affirms the view that homosexual desire is a passion that must be overcome: 'Persons with a homosexual orientation are invited to use their struggle as a means of sanctification.' In "Understanding Homosexuality: An Orthodox Christian Perspective" (<http://www.antiochian.org/node/17905>).
71. Compare the statement of Bishop Iaroslav Pryriz of Sambir and Drohobych, head of the Theology Department of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (November 27, 2012): 'The aim of gender ideology is to create a new type of man who is endowed with the freedom to choose and implement his sexual identity, regardless of biological sex.' (<http://ucu.edu.ua/eng/news/1241/>). (Accessed on July 1, 2013).

72. Holy Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, Основы учения Русской Православной Церкви о достоинстве, свободе и правах человека. English translation <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights/>
73. My italics. See for the denouncing of homosexuality as a 'perversion' the second edition of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1950–1958). In the late Soviet books on 'sexual pathology,' homosexuality was described as a pernicious 'sexual perversion,' an illness to be treated. For example, Vasilchenko (1983) *Chastnaya seksopatologiya*.
74. See for discussions on this concept Stefan Tobler (2010), Alfons Brüning (2010, 2013), Alfons Brüning and Evert van der Zweerde (2012), and the response of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) to the ROC's document: "Human Dignity is Unassailable, Inalienable and Indivisible," May 2009.
75. See Graf (2006) *Moses Vermächtnis*, and Graf (2009) *Missbrauchte Götter*.
76. "The Christian socio-public ethics demanded that a certain autonomous sphere should be reserved for man, in which his conscience might remain the "autocratic master" [...] The right to believe, to live, to have family is what protects the inherent foundations of human freedom from the arbitrary rule of outer forces." (IV.6)
77. Brüning (2013) *Andere menschenrechten?*, 13.
78. Bishop Serapion of the Coptic Orthodox diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii (1998) "Homosexuality and the Church. A Coptic Orthodox Perspective," 82.
79. Ethical theory calls this the position of 'moral objectivism,' see Amesbury and Newlands (2008), *Faith and Human Rights*, 62.
80. My italics.
81. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), Address to the meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders (Church of Christ the Saviour, Moscow, June 21, 2011a).
82. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), Address to the Annual Nicean Club Dinner (September 9, 2010b).
83. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), Address at the opening of the WCC Permanent Conference for Consensus and Cooperation, Moscow (June 30, 2010a). My italics.
84. "Diplomacy is Driven by Mission"– Metropolitan Hilarion's interview to "NG-Religii" supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (August 3, 2011b).
85. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), "European Civilization – From the Edict of Milan to Christianophobia." Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow (October 2, 2012d).
86. <http://ru.wikipedia.org/> Зачистка 'Mopping up' – the informal expression used to refer to operational and military operations in populated areas to verify the identity documents of citizens, examination rooms, buildings, etc., to identify and arrest suspects who may have been involved in crimes and other illegal actions of illegal armed groups.
87. Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), "The Peace We Need" (2012b). My italics.
88. Metropolitan Hilarion, "Political Correctness Mania Destroys Europe" (2012a).
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Metropolitan Hilarion, Lecture at Villanova University, Pennsylvania (November 1, 2012c). My italics. <https://mospat.ru/en/2012/11/01/news74213/>
92. The birth rate in the Soviet Union was declining since 1987. The overall demographic decline began after 1991, falling at a rate of about 0.5% per year due to declining birth rates, rising death rates (main factor: the alcohol abuse and suicides among the male population) and emigration. However, the decline began to slow considerably after 2006, and in 2009 Russia recorded a yearly population spike for the first time in 15 years, with a growth rate of 23,300. 2006 was the year in which Vladimir Putin made government measures to halt the demographic crisis a key subject. "The mood of Russia: time to shove off." *The Economist*, September 10, 2011.
93. Всемирный Русский Народный Собор, founded in 1993. It is a public forum that connects Church hierarchy, state leadership, and nationalistic Orthodox intelligentsia. According to the Statute, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia is the head. All meetings are held under his blessing and guidance. See Stricker (2008) "Unsere Russische Doktrin" and Cimek (2012) "World Russian National Council as a religious and political institution."
94. Website www.rusdoctrina.ru. Main authors of the Russian Doctrine are Andrei Kobayakov, Vitaly Averyanov, and Vladimir Kucherenko (Maxim Kalashnikov).

95. President Putin is rather low profile on the issue of same-sex relations. It is not a moral issue to him but seems to concern him only in so far it might affect social or political stability. On one of the few occasions he commented on gay rights he referred loosely to Russia's declining population: 'One of the main problems of the country is demographic.' "Putin Speaks Publicly on Moscow Gay Pride," website UK Gay News, February 1, 2007 <http://www.ukgaynews.org.uk/Archive/07/Feb/0102.htm> (accessed on July 1, 2013).
96. Metropolitan Hilarion, "The Peace We Need" (2012b).
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Metropolitan Hilarion, "Political Correctness Mania Destroys Europe" (2012a).
100. Ibid.
101. This is an often practiced way in which Christian discourses seek to change men and to transform masculinities within a context of patriarchy. See Van Klinken, *Transforming Masculinities in African Christianity*, 171.
102. From a speech of patriarch Kirill: "Abortion, homosexuality and divorce do not cease to be a sin" (2010). The Patriarch stated that the Orthodox Church doesn't acknowledge a distinction of 'religious' and 'non-religious' culture. 'There is only "culture" and "anti-culture" - which transforms man into an animal,' the Patriarch explained.
103. Coalson (2013) "Orthodox Churches Fight Back."
104. Compare Ahmed (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 42–61.
105. For example, the 'emphatic individualism,' as advocated by Friedrich Wilhelm Graf in his conceiving of human dignity, makes a good sense when understood from the traumatic historic experience of Nazi Germany. Graf (2009) *Missbrauchte Götter*, 201.
106. I consider the discussion paper of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands (2006, main author: Anton Houtepen) as a valuable contribution in this area: "Love, Lust and Life: A Contribution to the Reflection Process on Human Sexuality within the World Council of Churches and its Constituency."
107. See Cannon, *Homosexuality in the Orthodox Church*, 47.

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