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Head of Orthodox Church Blasts Social Media 'Disease'

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Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP

Millions of young people who crave approval on social media are suffering from a "real disease," Russia's spiritual leader has said.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of Russia's Orthodox Church, said that young people were willing to risk their lives in a bid to win approval from their online followers. He claimed that the problem was rooted in vanity, the Interfax news agency reported.

"Some young people see no purpose in life except to get likes," Kirill told worshippers at Moscow's Epiphany Cathedral on Tuesday. "If they have no other aim, then we should see that as a tragedy."

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Online images also provoked the patriarch's outrage for "arousing sinful thoughts."

"Civilization is going in the wrong direction," he told the congregation.

Patriarch Kirill is currently touring Moscow's churches to mark the beginning of Lent. The Christian holiday, which began on Monday, sees Russian Orthodox believers shun alcohol, smoking, sexual intercourse, swearing and impure thoughts for 47 days.

Many Russians also adopt a vegan diet for the duration of Lent, giving up meat, eggs, seafood and dairy products.

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