Religious Origin and Political Extension of the idea of “Moscow – Third Rome”

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October 24, 2023

Abstract

The idea of “Moscow – Third Rome” is a unique phenomenon in Russian religious culture. It is the idea that the Russian state, represented by Moscow, is the “Third Rome” that succeeded Rome and Constantinople and has a mission to save the world. Although this idea was initially a religious doctrine, the consciousness of Russian nationalism and the universalist mission of salvation extended from this idea have been deeply embedded in the Russian national character and way of thinking through the efforts of Russian intellectuals. Since the 21st century, the thought of “Moscow – Third Rome” has been closely integrated with politics and gradually became one of the primary ideological sources of contemporary Russian geopolitical theory. The purpose of this study is to investigate the concept of “Moscow - the Third Rome” in relation to the genesis of Russian civilization. Because of that, traditional methods of historical research were used along with the theory of civilizations, the development of systems, and national archetypes. The article reconstructs the main components of the theory “Moscow—the Third Rome” and its contextualization is carried out within the framework of various periods of Russian and world history. The author concludes that the special messianic role and significance of Russia in world history may be seen as the archetype of Russian national identity.

Keywords: Moscow – Third Rome, Orthodoxy, Messianism, geopolitics
The idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" is one of Russia's most important theological and political theories. It was born in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in the Grand Duchy of Moscow. At that time, the Grand Duchy of Moscow had been liberated from the rule of the Golden Horde, and the fall of the Byzantine Empire made the Duchy to face its status in the Christian world. In the spiritual atmosphere of the Orthodox world at different times arose various projects of such spiritual centers as "Roma Acterua" wishing to become the successor of Constantinople. But the only Orthodox, independent Slavic country that successfully centralized its state power was Russia, the largest state in Europe. In this regard, in Russia has started a heated discussion about the royal title of its Duke, who wanted to become the nominal head of the entire Orthodox world and the patron of all Orthodox Christians, thereby replacing the Byzantine emperor. It is known, for example, that in the Treaty of 1515 Grand Duke Vasilii III for the first time in the history of Rus was named Emperor of the Russians. Later Peter the Great will refer to this fact when justifying his imperial title.

N. Berdyaev writes in his work "Types of Religious Thought in Russia" that "Orthodox thought in pre-Petrine Rus was connected exclusively with the religious mission of the Russian state, substantiating the idea of the Russian Orthodox kingdom". Indeed, in Russia was developing a different principle of state power and spiritual culture, in contrast to Western Europe that can be called theonomic, or theocentric – based on God's law and God's will.

Byzantine Orthodoxy brought to the Slavic world the idea of movement as a historical, linear unfolding of history: a person, being the image of God, must transcend the state in which he entered the world, from the old Adam to Jesus Christ. The idea of "transfiguration," "theosis," or "deification" of a person was not found in Western Christianity. It is especially important to emphasize this because only in the context of this transfiguration can one understand what monk Philotheus had in mind when speaking about "Moscow – the Third Rome".

In this regard, the Church, and the Kingdom, although not merged but inseparable, like two natures in the God-man Jesus Christ are called to spiritually guide human life in a single service to the cause of God. Byzantine model of church-state relations dominated the entire spiritual life of the Slavic ethnos, uniting them into a single Russian people and establishing the archetype of Russian national identity.

Russian messianism, which was expounded by the monk Philotheus, was the idea of man's salvation and the salvation of the world from universal evil. References to the monk Philotheus' concept can be found in the History of Kazan, the Letter on the Establishment of the Patriarchate (1589), the inscription on the Psalters of Boris Godunov, The Tale of the Beginning of Moscow (XVII century), discussions of Slavophiles and Westerners, and books by Russian religious philosophers V. S. Solovyov and N. A. Berdyayev. This theory is still alive and well today: as the foundation of Russian empire-building, not just as a secular organization but as a mysterious organism, as an obstacle, and as a threat.

In this context, the creation of the "Moscow – Third Rome" concept provided the spiritual basis for Russia's establishment as an ecumenical empire. As written before this statement was formulated by hegumen Philotheus of Pskov, who claimed that Moscow was the successor of Rome and Byzantium, the Third Rome, the divinely chosen center of the Orthodox world and the eternally powerful empire. The original idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" was a messianic religious doctrine that defined the Grand Duchy of Moscow's perception of the world and defined the tasks that the Duchy was obligated to perform. As the only last Orthodox state, the Grand Duchy of Moscow was considered the defender of pure Orthodoxy. At the time of its creation, this concept had little influence on the culture of the Grand Duchy of Moscow and remained "within the walls of the Church" until the mid-19th century. In the 1860s, with the first publication of Philotheus's work on the Third Rome, the theory was revived and became increasingly active. The idea of
"Moscow – Third Rome" not only attracted the attention of historians of the late empire but also found a response in the works of Russian writers and philosophers. As a result of the efforts of these intellectuals, the Moscow – Third Rome doctrine began to take shape. It was gradually transformed into an informal geopolitical concept, which also laid the foundations of the imperial line of contemporary Russian policy.

Promoted by scholars, the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" has become almost legendary, with many interpretations over the centuries and renewed interest in the 21st century. Today, the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" is described in the narratives of scholars and politicians in Russia and abroad as a fundamental breakthrough in the evolution of Russian history, a "pivotal moment" that divided Russian history into two halves. According to the messianic concept of "Moscow – Third Rome", Moscow succeeded Byzantium in the role of "Christian kingdom", and historical Russia began its "Chosen Mission" of imperial conquest. The values of the Byzantine, messianic, and sacred Russian mission also seem to define the geopolitical imagination of contemporary Russia. This idea has also become an integral element of Russian thinking about the current state of Russia.44 Doroszczyk J., Moscow – Third Rome as Source of Anti-Western Russian Geopolitics, Historia i Polityka. No. 24 (31)/2018, p.51. The influence of the "Moscow – Third Rome" doctrine can be seen in the "expansionist" foreign policy of the imperial era, the "messianic" ideas of the Slavophiles and Panslavs of the late nineteenth century, the Bolshevik "drive for world domination".55 Poe M., Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a "Pivotal Moment", Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, 2001, Neue Folge, Bd. 49, H. 3 (2001), p.413. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this ideology also gradually became an essential part of Russian geopolitical thought in terms of its expansionist tendencies and anti-Western ideology. As a textual symbol and conceptual carrier for the emergence of Russian universalist messianic consciousness, the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" expresses the aspiration of Russians to become God’s chosen people and an eternally powerful empire, representing Russian chauvinist national consciousness and the feelings of ecumenical salvation. It is deeply embedded in the Russian national character, the structure of thought and the way of understanding. The value of the "Moscow – Third Rome" concept in developing Russia’s national philosophy and political strategy has further determined the need to study this doctrine.

The ecclesiastical history of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome"

The universal idea of the sacred empire was formed in the Middle Ages and quickly became the key to the concept of medieval statehood. The idea of a universal world power begins to take shape in the edge of antiquity. For the first time, the idea of a world power was brought to life thanks to the campaigns of Alexander the Great. Later the Roman Empire forms the universal concept of the state, which practically begins to be associated with the entire civilized world. During the time of Rome, a special concept "Pax Romana" - "Roman world" appeared, which puts an equal sign between the concepts of "world state", "civilization" and "cultural world".

Christianity made special adjustments to the idea of a universal empire. Byzantium, or the Eastern Roman Empire, also inherited Roman traditions, elevating them to an absolute: "The model of the world order in Byzantium was conceived as follows: one God - one Basileus - a single Universal Roman Empire. The emperor was the viceroy of God on earth. Only through him was the divine power over the world exercised. Only the emperor, by virtue of his special status, commanded both the empire and the priesthood.

The Greeks not only preserved the memories of Pax Romana, but, relying on the authority of the Bible and the Church Fathers, created the idea of a new universal empire, where the Symphony of Authorities becomes the main feature. The sympathy of authorities is the harmonious coexistence of spiritual and secular authorities within the framework of one world state. Basileus is obliged to take care and protect the church, and the priesthood is obliged to support the power of the basileus by prayer and the spiritual authority of the church. That is, both forces could not ideally exist without each other. Around this supreme power stood a permanent living Church, the bearer of the Divine moral will, and the autocrat himself was only a member, but not the master of the Church.66 Berdyayev N. A. Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma [The origins and meaning of Russian communism]. Moscow, Azbuka Publ., 2016. – P. 144.. The Byzantine Empire, which existed for more than a thousand years, planted the idea of a world kingdom in its environment in every possible way. The ideological expression of the idea of a universal empire was the position: "One God in
The idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" was inextricably linked to the Union of Florence and the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire in the 15th century. In the first half of the 15th century, the Byzantine Empire faced the threat of the Turks and needed military assistance from the Catholic world. The Catholic world’s aid to Byzantium was conditional on the union of the Greek Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, from 1438 to 1439, the Greeks held union councils in Ferrara and Florence. After much deliberation and debate, and under the pressure of the Pope, the 33 Orthodox delegates signed an agreement of pastoral union "with deep pain and sorrow in their hearts". In this agreement, the Orthodox made huge concessions. The Orthodox continued to maintain their liturgy and use their liturgical language, but nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine. The convening of the Council of Ferrara-Florence was a great shock to the Muscovites, and in the eyes of the Moscow Church, it meant the defection of the entire Greek Patriarchate, starting with the Tsar and the Patriarch. However, Moscow was not yet brave enough to break away from the Church of Constantinople; after all, it was almost impossible to exist independently from the ancient Church at that time. In the end, the Muscovites decided on a "cunning" compromise solution to the problem: they wanted to ordain their metropolitan, maintaining the appearance of formal unity with the Church of Constantinople while separating from it. In 1448 the Church of Moscow alone ordained Jonah as Metropolitan, effectively separating itself from the Patriarchate of Constantinople. On May 29, 1453, Constantinople fell. Although the Orthodox Patriarchs were subsequently reinstated, the situation of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople currently was unacceptable to the people of Rus. Thus, in the opinion of Russian church historians, the fall of Constantinople was also one of the main driving forces behind the independence of the Moscow Church from Byzantium.

The Moscow Church's ordination of Bishop Jonah without the permission of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was undoubtedly a violation of canon law. The Moscow Church has also defended this act. After the appointment of Metropolitan Jonah, the view gradually began to emerge in the official narrative of the Moscow Church that the Orthodoxy in Rus was greater and nobler than the Orthodoxy in Greece. The people of Rus should replace the Greeks in the Orthodox world and take primacy, and accordingly, the ruler of Rus should take the place of the Byzantine emperor in the Orthodox Church. This idea of challenging the Greek Orthodoxy did not exist from the beginning but gradually arose and developed on the land of Rus with the union of Florence and the fall of Constantinople. When Christianity first came to Rus from Greece, the practice of the Eastern Church was still full of various rituals. Under the Greeks’ teachings, the Rus gradually adapted to Christianity. As the Rus had become accustomed to church life and began to have their views, they began to recognize the mixture of appearance and inner content in Christ, the equation of ritual with dogma. Under the influence of this view, ritual differences became intolerable behavior and an important issue against Orthodox doctrine. The occurrence of the Florentine union, therefore, greatly shocked the Russians. In their view, it was a betrayal of Orthodoxy and caused them to lose faith in the purity of their tutor in the faith. Gradually, the Rus came to believe that this loss of purity was not a superficial phenomenon in the Greek Church but a real corruption within the Greek Orthodox Church. The fall of Constantinople was God’s punishment for the Holy City’s betrayal of the Orthodox Church. At the same time, the Russians found that not only had they retained the purity of Orthodoxy, which had been lost to the Greeks but that the Orthodoxy in Rus was generally superior to the Greek Orthodoxy and that the Rus believed in Orthodoxy more devoutly than anyone else. This ‘religious confidence’ of the Rus and the accusations of apostasy against the Greeks arose and festered with the Council of Florence and the fall of Constantinople.

Firmly confident of their primacy in Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Church, the people of Rus also found support in an ancient ideological foundation, a historical conception from Byzantium. This historical concept emphasizes that "the Roman Empire is indestructible because Jesus Christ is a Roman citizen in the physical sense, and the Christian Church must then always be under the protection of the power of the Roman state. Therefore, for the existence of the Christian Church in the world, an Orthodox kingdom headed by a monarch, with the monarch as 'bishop of the external affairs of the Church', protector and guardian of the Church,
is necessary.” According to this theory, the Church’s and the Orthodoxy’s fate was closely linked to the Roman Empire’s political fate and its emperor’s position. As a result of the decline of the Western Roman Empire, the Byzantines, to explain their position, began to emphasize the principle of the "transfer of the inheritance of the Christian kingdom”. In the Byzantines’ view, the Eastern Roman Empire replaced the Western Roman Empire and began to become the center of world Christianity and believed that the scepter of ecumenical Church and secular power would never fall from their hands: "Just as the dominion of Israel lasted until the coming of Christ, we believe that from us Greeks the kingdom will not be taken away until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.” However, the reality of the situation shattered the Greeks’ illusions, and in 1453 the Eastern Roman Empire fell. Slavic religious and national ideals came alive as the Eastern Roman Empire declined and barbarians invaded. The young Slavic neighbors began to break away from their ecclesiastical and political dependence on Byzantium and aspired to possess Byzantine privileges and glory. In the fourteenth century, the Bulgarian and Serbian chiefs dreamed of conquering Constantinople and crowning themselves with glory. They began to call themselves "kings" and adopted the courtly rituals of the imperial city (Constantinople). Accordingly, the Patriarchates were established in both countries. However, reality soon dashed their hopes. One by one, the capitals of these Balkan countries, the so-called new imperial cities, also fell to the Turkish sword. The Slavs found it hard to accept this fact and turned their hopes to Moscow, the capital of the newborn Rus world. The idea of a "new imperial city” found ground once again in Moscow and began to grow. With the fall of Constantinople, the Byzantine theory of a Christian kingdom, the idea of the "transfer of the inheritance of the Christian kingdom”, began to be put into practice in Moscow, and the idea of the dominance of the land of Rus in the Orthodox world was gradually developing. Rus began to be portrayed as replacing the Orthodox Greek kingdoms that had betrayed their mission. The Church of Rus was elevated to the supreme representative of the Orthodox world, and, accordingly, the rulers of Moscow began to be touted as the supreme defender and protector of Orthodoxy, the replacement of the ecclesiastical status of the Byzantine emperor, after the "pious sun had set” in the imperial city, the title of "God-crowned Orthodox Tsar” was given to him.88 Карташев А.В. Очерки по истории Русской Церкви. Том 1. интернет-портал «Азбука веры». с.445

Thus, after the incorporation of Florence and the fall of Constantinople, the Rus began to emphasize in their narrative that Moscow had inherited the divine rights and duties of the Byzantine Empire. In their view, if the Greeks remained pious and held fast to Orthodoxy, Constantinople would not have suffered. The betrayal of Orthodoxy by the monarch of Constantinople terminated his role as defender of Orthodoxy. The role of patron of the Church was now clearly attributed to the Grand Duke of Moscow. The Grand Duke of Moscow will take over from the Constantinian monarch and continue to guard Orthodoxy and piety. The Muscovites believe that Orthodoxy in its purest form is preserved only in Rus and that the world capital of Orthodoxy is not the destroyed Constantinople but Moscow. This idea of the "transfer of the inheritance of the Christian kingdom” and the "dominance of the land of Rus in the Orthodox world” laid a solid foundation for the subsequent creation of the idea of the "Moscow – Third Rome”.

II. The emergence of the "Moscow – Third Rome” idea

After Bishop Jonah, the Synod of Bishops of the Moscow Church went on to ordain several metropolitans, each of whom was appointed with the direct involvement of the Moscow ruler. In 1472, during Philip’s tenure as Metropolitan, Ivan III, Grand Duke of Moscow, married Zoya (renamed Sofia in the Duchy of Moscow), the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor. The Muscovite idea of transferring the powers and privileges of the Byzantine emperor to the Moscow dukes also found its basis and support in this marriage. 1453 saw the survival of the emperor’s two brothers, Dmitry, and Thomas, after the murder of the Byzantine emperor Constantine XI. Dmitry was then taken prisoner by the Ottomans, leaving no children behind. After Thomas’s death, his four children—Andreas, Manuel, Helena and Zoya—were placed in the care of the Pope. Manuel fled to Constantinople and converted to Islam; Helena married a Serbian ruler; Zoya and Andreas were instructed in Rome by the famous Cardinal Vissarion. Thus, the heirs to Byzantine imperial power were left with Prince Andreas and Princess Zoya, who was married to Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow at the end of 1472. So, Byzantium nevertheless fell. But the idea of a world holy empire did not perish. Together with the Byzantine legacy, this idea was brought by Zoya Paleolog and her entourage to their new homeland -
Moscow. There, within Russian political tradition and ideology this idea was developed under the influence of the eschatological and messianic dreams of the local people. The result of this symbiosis was the ideas of pan-Russianism and pan-Slavism, as well as the idea of the notorious Byzantine heritage and the special mission of the Russian people.

By this marriage, in the opinion of the Muscovites, the Grand Duke of Moscow also officially received the legal authority of Byzantine power. This idea was also recognized from the papal side, and in 1473 the Venetian Senate wrote to Ivan III stating that, with the cessation of the royal male line, the Eastern Empire should belong to the Grand Duke of Moscow after his marriage to Zoya. At this time, Zoya’s brother Andreas was still alive, and such a direct acknowledgement of the Moscow duke’s right of succession to Byzantine royalty, especially coming from the mouth of the Pope and his agents, was more like a form of flattery to the Grand Duke of Moscow. By this, the Pope hoped to induce Moscow Rus to undertake a crusade against the Ottomans, and the Moscow dukes, although they might not have done what the Pope wished, did not want to miss the opportunity to use the idea to enhance their power and prestige. At the same time, Ivan III adopted the double-headed eagle, the emblem of the Roman Empire, as the emblem of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which was an important symbol of the succession of power to Byzantium. Ivan III was also the first of the Moscow dukes to receive the official title of “autocrat”. Since then, Ivan III has insisted on using this title in his foreign relations to symbolize his increased power. In any case, this marriage with the Byzantine royal family gave the Grand Duke of Moscow legitimate backing for his inheritance of power in the Byzantine Empire. The Grand Duke became increasingly self-conscious and began to intervene more and more frequently and boldly in the affairs of the Church. The Metropolitan of Moscow, appointed at the will of the Grand Duke, gradually lost the power and independence that he had previously enjoyed under the Patriarchate of Constantinople.11Kartashiev A.V. Ocherki po istorii Russkoi Tserkvi. Tom 1. intiernet-portal «Азбука веры». с.313, 316

Politics and socio-historical development were always perceived by Russians as a kind of sacred mission. Walter Schubart noted: "The Russian differs from the Europeans in this as well. His national idea is the salvation of mankind by the Russians"22Schubart, V. Evropa i dusha Vostoka [Europe and the Soul of the East] / V. Schubart. - M., 2000. - S. 194.. The doctrine of Moscow, the Third Rome, became a secular expression of the eschatological aspirations of the Russian people. The ancient Jews expected the coming of the Messiah, who would save and unite the Jewish people, and in the Russian eschatological tradition, the messianic function was transferred to the entire people. After that, the entire socio-historical process turns into a mystery, the purpose of which becomes the messianic sacrifice of the Russian people. It is thanks to this that Moscow is turning into a center of unity and, most importantly, the protection of Russians, regardless of whether they are subjects of the Grand Duke of Moscow or not. It was the idea of pan-Russianism that laid the foundations for the imperial policy of the Russian state, which lasted not only until 1917 but also largely influenced the political tradition and socio-historical development of modern Russia.

Having united the Russian lands under its rule, Moscow defines new goals for itself. Now the Moscow Duchy is not just one of the Orthodox states; now Moscow claims the position of a single world Orthodox kingdom. The idea of pan-Russianism, mixed with the idea of Byzantine heritage, inevitably brings the political development of the Russian state to the idea of pan-Slavism. According to Byzantine imperial doctrine, the world state must necessarily be Orthodox. After the fall of Byzantium and the creation of the Ottoman Empire, Muscovite Russia remains the only independent Orthodox state. The Moscow grand dukes begin to use the titles of tsar and autocrat, which are a literal translation of the Byzantine emperors’ royal titles.

From this period, the belief in the Duchy of Moscow as the "successor to the Byzantine Christian kingdom" matured, and the idea of Moscow as the "Third Rome" began to appear in Moscow. In 1492 the Metropolitan of Moscow and All Rus Zosima called Moscow "the new Constantinople" and Ivan III "the new Tsar of the new Constantinople" in his "Easter Schedule" (Изложение пасхалии).33Успенский Б.А. Восприятие истории в древней Руси и доктрина Москва-третий Рим[A]//Русское подвижничество[C]. М.: Наука, 1996. с.467 The idea of a "Third Rome" is beginning to emerge. At the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries, several writers in Rus wrote exceptional works that developed and confirmed this claim. The
ecclesiastical authority of Rus was highly celebrated by Dmitry Gerasimov of Novgorod in his work "The Legend of the White Cowl". The author sees the transfer of the greatest of all sacred objects, the White Cowl, to Rus as a symbol of the transfer of the unified Orthodox kingdom: "In ancient times Constantine, the king of the earth, passed the crown from the imperial capital to the ruler of Rus, and now the White Cowl will be passed from Jesus, the king of heaven, to the bishop of Great Novgorod". In the author’s narrative, the White Cowl, inherited from Rome, is a sign of God’s chosen will, a symbol of God’s favor and is destined to belong to the sacred land of Rus. At the same time, the author has directly proposed a "Third Rome". Although the White Cowl was given not to the Metropolitan of Moscow but to the Archbishop of Novgorod, Novgorod is not the city of Novgorod in the narrow sense of the word, nor is Moscow in the "Moscow – Third Rome" sense of the word, but both refer to the entire land of Rus. According to the Soviet scholar N. N. Rozov, the codex available today from the 17th to 18th centuries is an abridged version, which has something to do with the growing Novgorodian separatism in the mid-16th century, and the original version of The Legend of the White Cowl is imbued with a high degree of "all-Rus patriotism." Not to prove Novgorod’s ecclesiastical supremacy over Moscow. Thus, The Legend of the White Cowl is still in line with the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome".44Розов Н.Н. Повесть о новгородском белом клобуке как памятник общерусской публицистики XV в.[A]//Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы АН СССР. Ин-т рус. лит[C]. т. 9. М.-Л.:Наука, 1953. с.178-219

The most substantial and most representative expression of the "Moscow – Third Rome" theory was put forward by Philotheus, the elder of a monastery in Pskov, in a letter to Grand Duke Vasili III. In this letter, Philotheus clearly states that the Orthodox Church fled from Old Rome to New Rome, Constantinople. However, there was no peace there, for they united with the Latin Church at the Council of Florence. As a result, the Church of Constantinople was destroyed and left in ruins. It then fled to a Third Rome, the new Rus. "The Church of Old Rome fell because of the impiety of the Apollinarian heresy; the Church of the Second Rome, Constantinople, was smitten under the battle-axes of the Agarenes; but this present Church of the Third, New Rome, of Thy sovereign empire: the Holy Catholic. Apostolic Church . . . shines in the whole universe more resplendent than the sun. And let it be known to Thy Lordship, O pious Czar, that all the empires of the Orthodox Christian Faith have converged into Thine one empire. Thou art the sole Emperor of all the Christians in the whole universe. . . . For two Romes have fallen, and the Third stands, and a fourth shall never be, for Thy Christian Empire shall not devolve upon others. . ."55Cyril Toumanoff, Moscow the Third Rome: Genesis and Significance of a Politico-Religious Idea, The Catholic Historical Review, Jan., 1955, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Jan., 1955), p. 438 Thus, the Kingdom of Rus is the only Orthodox Kingdom in the world; it is the proper guardian of the splendid Ecumenical Orthodox Church; it is truly God’s chosen Kingdom, destined to preserve the purity of the Christian faith until the end of the world and to present it to God as an eternal sanctuary at the coming of His eternal Kingdom.66Карташев А.В. Очерки по истории Русской Церкви. Том 1. интернет-портал ≪Азбука веры≫. с.318-319 At the same time, Philotheus, in his letter to Vasili III, called him "the Christian Tsar of the whole world", saying that "in the whole world, there is only one great Orthodox Tsar of Rus". Thus, the Chosen Mission of the Grand Duke of Rus is clear. Through these expressions, we can see that the essential function of royal power is to defend the Faith and the Orthodox Church and that, in turn, secular power acquires a divine origin.

However, the imperial idea was not something original and was not created on Russian soil. The socio-historical process of the development of Rus in the era of Ivan III simply followed the path created by the southern Slavs. As said above it was the South Slavic rulers who were the first to use the titles "tsar" and "autocrat". P.N. Milyukov, citing a Bulgarian manuscript of the 14th century, written on the orders of the "tsar and autocrat" Ivan Alexander, points to parallels well known to us from the Moscow national idea: “All this happened to old Rome; our new Constantinople stands and grows, strengthens and rejuvenates”77Milyukov, P.N. Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul’tury [Essays on the history of Russian culture] / P.N. Milyukov. - M., 1994. - T. 3. – P. 43.. After the Ottoman Turks conquered both the "old" Constantinople and the "new" Constantinople at Tarnovo, the South Slavic patriots began to look for a new source of their political and eschatological hopes. Moscow, far away and mysterious, becomes such a source.

At the same time, the expression "Third Rome" inevitably led to the derivation of the Byzantine view that
since Rus was the only Orthodox kingdom in the world, the Rus rulers naturally enjoyed complete authority over their ecclesiastical affairs. It is important to note that this view was put forward precisely by the Moscow Church. With an excessive dependence on royal authority, the interests of the Church had long been merged with those of the state. The Moscow Church also needed to advocate the sanctity of royal authority. We can see the reason for it from the words of Joseph Volotsky (1439-1515), the founder of the famous Russian Joseph Volokolamsk Monastery. Joseph quoted the following legacy of Tsar Constantine to the Orthodox monarchs: "The Tsar is, in essence, the same as all men, but in power, he is the same as the Highest God" to emphasize the supremacy of state power. According to Joseph, the supreme jurisdiction in the ecclesiastical sphere belonged to the monarch because God had given him "mercy and judgment, and church and monastery, and all Orthodox Christianity, all Russian lands, power and care handed over to him." Therefore, "the royal court is not judged by the holy court by anyone." In 1503, Father Georgy of Rostov also stated directly that the Tsar was the supreme appeal organ and could even judge the sober and the Patriarch: "if the patriarch and the sober do not judge someone according to the rules, then the king will judge them according to the rule of the Holy Father and take revenge on the guilty."88Карташев А.В. Очерки по истории Русской Церкви. Том 1. интернет-портал ≪Азбука веры≫. с.469-470 Thus we can see that the Church tried to place the authority of the Tsar above that of the Church's clergy. The monarchs of Moscow, in turn, had taken firm hold of the weapons the representatives of the Church granted to them and had begun to use them more and more boldly and uncontrollably for their ends.99Карташев А.В. Очерки по истории Русской Церкви. Том 1. интернет-портал ≪Азбука веры≫. с.320

The sacred authority required some justification. Gradually, was formed a complex of legends, substantiating the special role of the Russian Church in the history of universal Orthodoxy. In this regard, appeared legends that substantiate Moscow's church claims to autocephaly. These stories include for example "The Tale of the Journey of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called". Moscow government, referring to "The Tale of Bygone Years" tried to prove the equality of the newly formed patriarchy with the ancient ecumenical church. This idea failed, but the New Testament origins of Russian Orthodoxy from the Apostle Andrew the First-Called began to be actively used in political doctrine by the Russian government. Under the Archbishop of Novgorod, later Metropolitan Macari, the idea of a white cowl was transferred to Moscow, where it organically fit into the doctrine of "Moscow, the Third Rome". 

Under the son of Ivan III, Vasili III, the idea of Moscow as the sole custodian of Orthodox traditions is generally recognized. And it is quite natural that it was under Vasili III that the idea of Moscow—the third Rome—was formulated. The first step towards the creation of a world Orthodox empire was the adoption by Ivan IV of the royal title in 1547. The Council of 1561 proclaims Ivan the Terrible "tsar and sovereign of Orthodox Christians throughout the universe"1010Storchak, V.M. Thema rossiiskogo messinianstva v obschestvenno-politicheskoi i filosofskoi mysli Rossii [The theme of Russian messianism in the socio-political and philosophical thought of Russia] / V.M. Storchak. - M., 2004. - P. 18..

In 1589, Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah of Constantinople and other ecumenical patriarchs ordained Metropolitan Job of Moscow to the rank of patriarch. Since 1589, the Russian state has become fully consistent with the concept of the universal Orthodox empire. Moscow had its own tsar as well as its own patriarch. To substantiate their claims to universal dominance, the Grand Dukes of Moscow use not only the idea of Byzantine inheritance but also a specially created genealogical legend. There is a circle of legends confirming the succession of the universal insignia of Byzantium to the Russian state. The right to inherit the universal power of the emperor was confirmed by the genealogical "Tale of the Princes of Vladimir". This text traced the relationship of Rurik with a certain Prus, the brother of the Roman emperor Octavian Augustus. Ivan the Terrible repeatedly points to his superiority due to "Roman kinship" saying: "We are related to Augustus Caesar, and you judge us contrary to God".

As pointed before on 16 January 1547, at 17, Ivan IV was crowned Tsar at a ceremony by Metropolitan Makari. When the Metropolitan placed the Monomakh crown on Ivan IV's head, Russia's first Tsar was officially crowned. The idea of transferring "the ecclesiastical and secular privileges of fallen Constantinople to the Third Rome — Moscow" was maturing in Russian society and government consciousness. At the
same time, the Moscow state grew stronger, and the Moscow monarchs gradually established a unified and centralized system. Against this ideological and political background, the confirmation of the title of Tsar and the establishment of Tsarist Russia was a historical necessity. Metropolitan Makari was convinced that the Church of Rus had inherited the power, glory, and honor of the Church in Byzantine and that it was, therefore, time for the Rus state to become a 'kingdom'. Makari hoped that the "coronation of Ivan IV" would raise the political consciousness of the monarch and force him to take state affairs seriously so that Russia would be worthy of its status as a new and supreme Christian kingdom. The Tsar did not disappoint the Metropolitan, and at the subsequent Stoglav Synod, Ivan IV, following the example of the ancient Tsars, took an active part in the discussion of the needs of the Church, aware of his duty to attend to the "building of the Orthodox Church". Otherwise, God would punish him for his negligence. The title of Tsar was also officially recognized by the Church of Constantinople. In 1562, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Joasaph II, sent a "cathedral charter" to Rus, granting Ivan IV the right to "become and call himself Tsar lawfully and piously". The coronation of the Tsar was a remarkable moment in Russian ecclesiastical history, marking the gradual emergence of the Moscow monarch as a despot not only in secular but also in ecclesiastical matters. The title of "God-crowned Tsar" also finally secured for the Tsar the supreme guardianship over the interests of the Orthodox Church in law. At the same time, however, the Moscow monarch's power in church affairs grew, and the Church became increasingly subservient to the regime, eventually losing its independence altogether. Against this background of caesaropapism, it is not surprising that Metropolitan Dionysius was deposed and exiled by Boris Godunov in 1587 without a trial by the Church. In the 17th century, the doctrine of "Moscow – the Third Rome" became very relevant again. Prior to the accession of the Romanov dynasty, this thesis was perceived exclusively in an eschatological sense, i.e., holy Russia was the heiress of Byzantium and the guardian of the purity of universal Orthodoxy. Since the time of the first Romanovs, the formula of Philotheus begins to be interpreted exclusively in a political sense. The sacred doctrine of "Moscow – the Third Rome" has become the socio-historical dominant of Russian history. It was the idea of restoring the Byzantine Empire under the auspices of the Muscovite tsar that determined the entire reformist policy of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich in relation to the church. Patriarch Nikon became his faithful ally in this matter. Just like Alesei Mikhailovich, Nikon wanted to become the ecumenical patriarch in Constantinople, heading the entire ecumenical Orthodox hierarchy. He even nurtured the idea of transferring oriental shrines to Russia. This is what caused the construction of the Resurrection New Jerusalem Monastery. The main temple of this monastery copied the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

In ideological terms, starting from the era of Mikhail Fedorovich, New Testament legends are projected onto the image of the Russian state. The idea of a sacred world power is gradually beginning to be embodied in the policy of the Russian state. For the Russian political science tradition, the idea of a universal Orthodox state determined the path of development until 1917. Naturally, the idea of imperial sovereignty was formed in line with religious traditions, because of which the idea of "Moscow - the Third Rome" combined the geopolitical and national aspirations of the Russian state.

The historical Russians saw the principle of "imperial transfer" and the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" as a historical necessity and a requirement of the realities of the circumstances. These two interrelated ideas also supported the spread of the Monomakh crown, the adoption of the Byzantine double-headed eagle emblem, the marriage of Ivan III to the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, and the use of the title "Tsar". By asserting that "the Moscow Church was the new center of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church" and that "the Moscow monarch was the monarch of a new Christian kingdom", the Moscow Church achieved de facto spiritual independence from Byzantium. In the political context of the rising nationalism of the Moscow region, the independence of the Church went far beyond a religious issue and became heavily political. The moral and spiritual emancipation of the Moscow Church from Byzantium was accomplished with the direct
help of the state power, which was also in the direct interest of the Moscow dukes. In this way, the power of the Moscow monarchs was religiously consecrated and politically empowered. As a result, Moscow was now entrusted with messianic responsibilities, becoming the sole patron of Orthodoxy in the world. The idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" became the primary source of Russian ecumenical messianic consciousness.

III. The revival of the "Moscow – Third Rome" idea in the nineteenth century

In the first half of the 19th century, 'Third Rome' remained an insignificant doctrine outside the church community. Interest in and knowledge of the "Third Rome" did not increase significantly until the cultural thaw marked Alexander II's ascension in 1855. The most critical "Third Rome" publication of this time was Philotheus's "Letter Against the Astrologers", published by the historian Aleksei Pavlov in 1861. Several texts containing this doctrine were also published, including "The Legend of the White Cowl", Old Believer tracts, etc. Knowledge of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" began to grow. A few years later, the historian Vladimir Ikonnikov developed a new interpretation of the "Moscow – Third Rome" doctrine. According to Ikonnikov, Philotheus’s doctrine confirmed the existence of a new Moscow ideology based on imperial transfer around 1500: the Byzantine Empire had fallen, Moscow had taken its place, and Philotheus expressed the court’s new awareness of its place in the world as the third historical empire. Moreover, Ikonnikov explains that "there will be no fourth Rome" was the beginning of Moscow’s messianism. According to Ikonnikov, the doctrine of Philotheus reflects this mode of thought: the monks of Pskov and the Muscovites generally saw the end of the world coming and felt it was their duty to prevent the catastrophe by their righteous acts. This interpretation of the "Third Rome" as a universal empire and savior of the world influenced the Russian understanding of Moscow. It formed the basis of the standard academic interpretation of Philotheus in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.11

Subsequently, the idea of the "Moscow – Third Rome" spread rapidly among the educated public. Through the efforts of these intellectuals, the concept of "Moscow – Third Rome" began to take shape in the mid-19th century.

Initially, the concept was primarily based on Russia’s perception of itself as the spiritual center of the world, offering a new way of understanding Russia’s early history. In the 1870s and 1880s, as Pan-Slavism developed, Pan-Slavists became aware of the potential of the "Third Rome" doctrine to influence the modern state. For the Pan-Slavists, this doctrine seemed to prove what seemed to be the historical continuity of Russia’s "mission" to save the Slavic Orthodox Church from both the "East" (Ottomans) and the "West" (Europe). As the Pan-Slavic scholar Vladimir Lamanskii put it: "the notion of Moscow as the Third Rome" was not a "vacuous, prideful falsehood," but rather "a gigantic cultural and political task, a world-historical triumph, intentionally entrusted to the Great Russian people and its ruling leaders by millions of co-religionists and kinsmen."22

By the end of the 19th century, the "Moscow – Third Rome" doctrine was also echoed in the work of Neo-Romantic and Idealist writers and philosophers. For these people, the "Moscow – Third Rome" doctrine gave Russia a world-historical and eschatological significance. The most representative philosopher was, above all, Vladimir Solov’ev. In this doctrine, Solov’ev discovered Christian universalism. He believed Russia’s mission was to reconcile East and West, overcome all forms of particularism and usher in an era of worldwide organic unity. The "Third Rome" demonstrates the historical nature of Russia’s mission, with its universalist overtones.33

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In 1914, scholar Kirillov’s historical work was of great importance to the spread of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome". Kirillov argued that the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" was not the propaganda of Ivan III but a fundamental change in the mindset of the Russian people, marking a new era in Russian history. It reflects that the Russian nation has become self-aware and has taken on a world-historical mission as the divine guardian of the Orthodox Church. Kirillov’s account aptly summarizes the traditional understanding of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" since Ikonnikov and Solov’ev and the transformation of the doctrine of "Third Rome" from an obscure doctrine espoused by a Greek Patriarch to a "pivotal moment" in Russian history.

After the establishment of the Soviet Union, it seemed that the whole of Russian history (including the concept of the Third Rome) had been left behind. It withdrew from the Russian geopolitical tradition, replacing nearly 2000 years of moral values with the 'thought of Lenin', and at the same time pursuing an ideological line towards atheism. However, in the view of some scholars, some of the ideas of the Soviet period were also a sort of 'metamorphosis' of the concept of "Moscow – Third Rome". The emergence of communism in Russia gave a new meaning to the term "Moscow – Third Rome". The most representative of these was Berdiaev’s ideas. According to Berdiaev, "Russian Messianism" was the fundamental element of "Russian religious psychology" and the main force behind Bolshevism. "The ancient Russian messianic idea goes on living in the deep spiritual layers of the Russian people. However, in the conscious mind, its formula changes, the thing ‘in the name’ of which it acts; the messianic idea rises out of the collective unconsciousness of the people’s life and takes on another name. Instead of the monk Philotheus’s Third Rome, we get Lenin’s Third International." This view of Berdyaev was widely disseminated.

Since the mid-19th century, scholars have found the ‘roots’ of their claims in the writings of Philotheus by relating the idea of a "Moscow – Third Rome" to political reality. Lamanskii found the roots of Pan-Slavism; Solov’ev found the origins of Christian universalism; Berdiaev found the lineage of Bolshevism. The discussion of scholar Kirillov made the "Third Rome" theory a "pivotal moment" in Russian history. "The "Moscow – Third Rome" doctrine took shape in the discussions of these scholars and became one of the most important components of "Russian idea".

IV. The extension of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" in the geopolitical sphere of contemporary Russia

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of "Moscow – Third Rome" was reactivated. The main strategic challenge for Russia is to preserve its identity as a sovereign and integral Eurasian state, the natural leader of Eurasian integration. There was a strong need for a solid idea to fill the ideological gap. At this point, the mastery of historical and contemporary interpretations of the concept of "Moscow – Third Rome" and the resulting arguments for the uniqueness of Russian civilization provided critical ideas for developing a new geopolitical strategy for Russia.

Although the idea of the "Moscow – Third Rome" was not the domain of official political doctrine and can only be described as an unofficial source of geopolitical doctrine, it nevertheless became the dominant idea...
in defense of Russian imperial policy. The idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" was not only one of the basic historiographical concepts that established and defined Moscow’s national identity but were also crucial in defining the starting point for contemporary Russian activity in international relations.11 Гердт Я.В. Истоки российской геополитики. Вестник Челябинского государственного университета, 2012, с.26-30 This idea is both the theoretical, mystical and religious basis of Russia’s international efforts and the guarantee of the survival of Russian spirituality in a globalized world.22Дорощык Ю.М. Москва — Третий Рим как источник антимосковической российской геополитики, Historiai Polityka, No. 24 (31)/2018, p.55 In contemporary Russia, the geopolitical significance of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" is reflected in the dichotomy between East and West in Russian geopolitics, an idea that is the inspiration and expression of Russia’s anti-Western will. Although this ideology has undergone many transformations throughout history, always, it has been anti-Western at its core. In contemporary Russian geopolitical thought, the anti-Western element in the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" is determined by its religious dimension. The "Moscow – Third Rome" concept has long been essential to Russian national consciousness and identity. It is the belief that Russia, which inherited the Roman and Byzantine empires and is the only Orthodox kingdom in the world, is the last guardian of true faith and traditional values and is naturally responsible for saving the world. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the failure of Russia’s westernization project also accelerated antipathy towards the West and even open anti-Westernization. In Russia’s view, the West had lost its ideological vitality by rejecting Christian values and all moral principles. At the same time as the Third Rome, Moscow was the cradle of traditional values, religious spirituality, and humanism. The West is Russia’s main enemy and a threat to Russian moral standards, focused on destroying the uniqueness of Russian spirituality and thought and working to diminish Russia’s role and place in the modern world. The values of the Russian spirit and culture can only be preserved through the rejection and repudiation of secular liberalism represented by the West. Moreover, based on the contemporary interpretation of the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome", Russia, as the only Christian country in the world, has naturally taken on the responsibility of saving the West and the world, not only by defending Russia and the Russian world but also by trying to save "morally decaying Western societies". The anti-Western nature of contemporary Russian thought is evidenced by Putin’s words: "The basis of American self-consciousness is the individualistic idea. Russian basis is collectivist…" and further – "Our consciousness, the consciousness of the Russian people, suggests different tasks. Russia is something spiritual. Something associated with God. You need to understand, we have different philosophies of life, and it is not easy for us to understand each other".33Лазари А. (2014). «Русская идея» по-путински, http://liberte.pl/idearosyjska-putinowsku/.

The source of the anti-Western character of "Moscow – Third Rome" is the belief in Russian civilization’s unique providence and messianic perspective. According to the "Moscow – Third Rome" concept, Russia inherited a pure and uncorrupted Orthodox Christianity. The Russian people are divinely chosen people endowed by God with a special mission of salvation. Russia’s mission is to be the bearer and guardian of Orthodoxy. This view of the uniqueness of Russian civilization is the central core of Russia’s anti-Western geopolitical ideology. Achieving its cultural and religious mission requires Russia to confront other morally decaying Western powers constantly. The uniqueness of Russian civilization is at the heart of the contemporary Russian geopolitical imagination, which is in line with the typical anti-Westernism of the idea of a "Moscow – Third Rome".44Дорощык Ю.М. Москва – Третий Рим как источник антимосковической российской геополитики, Historiai Polityka, No. 24 (31)/2018, p.48

S. Baburin even writes: “The socio-economic, political, and legal processes of the modern world, even as they give rise to new challenges for existing folks and states, make us recall old geopolitical axioms and rethink old worldview approaches. The Russian statehood, in one of its origins, came from the Tatars and that the Muscovite state arose thanks to the Tatar yoke. The Russian tsar was the heir of the Mongol khan, and the "overthrow of the Tatar yoke" was reduced to the replacement of the Tatar khan by an Orthodox tsar and the transfer of the khan’s headquarters to Moscow”.55Бабуrin С. Сибилизационное значение России “Москва – Третий Рим” как политический, юридический и геополитический вызов современной Российской Федерации. In: Bulletin of the Moscow Regional State University. Series: History and Political Sciences, 2019, no. 3, pp. 10–16. Relations between religion and the state initially developed in Russia, as V.V. Zenkovsky emphasized, “not
in the sense of the primacy of spiritual power over secular power, as happened in the West, but in the direction of assimilation of the sacred mission by state power.”66 Zen'kovskii V. V. Khristianskaya filosofiya [Christian philosophy]. Moscow, Institut russkoi tsivilizatsii Publ., 2010. – P. 324. 1072 p.. And in this, of course, Christianity in its Byzantine format played a huge role. It was from the imposition of Eastern Christianity on a bizarre cultural and historical mixture of the traditions of the Slavic and Turkic people that the Russian spirit and Russian national character grew.

However, the idea of a "Moscow – Third Rome" was a double-edged sword: on the one hand, Russia's mission to be the true embodiment and defender of Christianity and the only worldwide Orthodox kingdom; on the other hand, a messianic consciousness permeated the imperialist temptation and led to Russian nationalism and aggressiveness. Underpinned by the idea of a "Moscow – Third Rome", the dream of rebuilding the Russian Empire was gradually revived, and Russian diplomatic strategy gradually took on expansionist overtones. The most emblematic example of this was the implementation of the "Russian World" project. In realizing the idea of a "Moscow – Third Rome", Russia seeks to create a pro-Russian state block. In 2007, President Vladimir Putin created the "Russian World" Foundation, which aims "to popularize Russia’s national wealth and the Russian language, an important element of Russian and world culture, and to support programs for learning the Russian language outside the Russian Federation."77 Priezidenta Rossiiskoi Fiederatsii ot 21.06.2007 gh. 796 — O sozdanii fonda «русский мир». 21 июня 2007 г. http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25689 Putin attempted to build a common identity among the people of the post-Soviet region through a common language, culture and religion, thus creating a spiritual community that transcended national borders. This project gained great political significance in the following decades, serving the Putin government’s geopolitical strategy of promoting the Russian language, uniting the diaspora abroad, and enhancing the country’s 'soft power'.88 Hu Weiwei, The Idea of the State and the Idea of the Church: An Analysis of the Double Dimension of the “Russian world”, Siberian Studies, No.1, 2021, p.38. The Russian Orthodox Church has played a central role in implementing the "Russian World" project, and the "Russian World" concept has been promoted primarily by the Orthodox Church. The "Russian World" is a spiritual civilization, a collection of Russian language and culture communities. The "Russian world" cannot be maintained by a single state or other political structure but only by the roots of Russian culture – the Orthodox faith and the Russian Orthodox Church. The concept of the "Russian world" is anti-Western and presupposes the re-establishment of the unity of the Russian people. These ideas coincide with the main ideas of "Moscow – Third Rome". In modern Russian political discourse, the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" is a critical element of "Russian thought" and a factor in determining the geopolitical and strategic priorities of Russia's activities in the post-Soviet region. According to the "Moscow – Third Rome" concept, Moscow and Russia naturally assume the role of the supreme leader in the "Russian world". Professor S. Baburin who clearly is a great Putin's supporter even thinks: “Now, when Universal Orthodoxy is under threat, God Himself tells Russia to return to its mission as the sole custodian of the truth of Christ in its purity, to the mission "Moscow, the Third Rome." And the main obstacle to such a return is not the apparent social passivity of the Russian Orthodox Church but the absence of the main core of this mission: the Russian Orthodox Tsar. It is time to remove from the current Constitution of the Russian Federation the norms that enshrine anti-Orthodox neo-liberal values and to fix in it the role of Orthodoxy as the spiritual and moral bond of Russian society.99 Baburin S. Civilizational mission of Russia “Moscow is the Third Rome” as a political, legal and geopolitical challenge of the modern Russian Federation. In: Bulletin of the Moscow Regional State University. Series: History and Political Sciences, 2019, no. 3, pp. 10–16.

This idea also implies a hegemonic role for Russia in the post-Soviet space represented by the "Russian world". In this way, Russia becomes the guarantor of rights and the defender of the Russian people, and it does not exclude using armed force to defend its compatriots.100 Doroszczyk J., Moscow – Third Rome as Source of Anti-Western Russian Geopolitics, Historiai Polityka. No. 24 (31)/2018, p.56 The concept of the "Russian world", which transcends national borders, and the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" reflect the "neo-imperialist" tendencies of the Russian Federation. On the one hand, the religious ideology of "Moscow – Third Rome" not only determines the anti-Western character of Russia’s expansive geopolitical tendencies based on the concept of the "Russian world" but also provides legitimacy for the Russian Federation’s
activities in the post-Soviet region. In turn, the geopolitical implications of the "Russian world" concept have determined new ways of understanding and interpreting the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" in modern Russia.

V. Conclusion.

The idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" is a central element of Russian national consciousness and an extension of Russian idea. In the Russian view, this concept was a historical necessity dictated by the Florentine union and the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire in the 15th century. Underpinned by the principle of "imperial transfer", the Moscow Church became the new center of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church, and the Moscow ruler became the king of the New Christian Kingdom. Russia naturally took on the mission of salvation for the Ecumenical Christian Kingdom. Throughout history, this idea was formulated precisely as a requirement for awakening Russian national consciousness, forming a centralized state, and fully developing the Orthodox Church. For centuries after its formation, the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" shaped the values of Russians.

At its inception, "Moscow – Third Rome" was a messianic religious doctrine that defined the duties and obligations of Russia as the last Christian kingdom. Over time, thanks to the efforts of intellectuals, this idea was gradually combined with politics and transformed into an informal geopolitical doctrine, thus defining the universal line of contemporary Russian policy. Since the beginning of the 21st century, this idea has gradually become the basis of the Russian state and national thought and the primary source of Russian geopolitical thought. As a combination of religious and political elements, the idea of a "Moscow – Third Rome" provided the ideological basis for the tendency for the expansion of geopolitical thinking in modern Russia. This idea, underpinned by the uniqueness of Russian civilization and the Russian idea of a universalist messianism, also became a determining factor in the anti-Western Russian geopolitical line and formed the basis for the defense of Russia’s assertive foreign policy.

Today, the concept of "Moscow – Third Rome" is deeply rooted in the Russian historical tradition and has become an indispensable source of thought for the Russian public and elite, as evidenced by the different periods of Russia’s existence. However, it should be noted that the concept of "Moscow – Third Rome" is essentially a religious, spiritual doctrine, and neither this concept nor the universal and messianic ideas derived from it can justifiably or legitimate Russia’s intervention in other countries. The idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" and the project of the "Russian World" are spiritual concepts intrinsic to the spiritual mission of religion for the Russian nation. They should not be overly political or territorial. Only in this way can the idea of "Moscow – Third Rome" be genuinely liberated from political influence and instrumentalization so that "to give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s".

References

1996. p.467
16. Berdiaev.N.A. The Russian Revolution [1931], p.41