

THE  
WAY OF  
THE FREE  
STEFAN OSUSKY

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## *The WAY of the FREE*

Sophia Palaiologina, niece of the last Byzantine Emperor Constantine XIII, as Ivan III of Russia. The family link thus formed between the Byzantine Emperor and the Grand Prince of Moscow was pregnant with consequences; the marriage was interpreted as having bestowed on Moscow a legitimate right to the heritage of the Byzantine Empire. This legal fiction was firmly implanted in order to secure the faith of the Orthodox believers and to rehabilitate the tradition and prestige both of the Eastern Empire and of the Byzantine Church.

Thus, the legendary material concerning Russia's succession to the Byzantine Empire, coupled with the emerging successes of the Muscovite Princes and the decline of Islam, were conclusive evidence to the willing Russian believers that Russia was the God-chosen nation entrusted with the divine mission of bringing salvation to mankind. The historical events mentioned above took on a mystical quality, as part of the divine plan for Russia, and found expression in the 16th century, in the doctrine that the Czar was not only the ruler of Russia, but the sovereign of the World Empire and the Protector of all true Christians. In the first half of the 18th century, the Russian monk Philaretos, abbot of the Monastery of Pskov, wrote to Paul III, Grand Prince of Moscow:

The first Rome fell in power under the weight of its heresies, the second Rome was demolished by the infidel Turks, but a new and third Rome has arisen in the North, dominating the whole universe like a sun. Know thou, great Prince, that all the doctrines which endorse the Orthodox Christian faith are now assembled in thy kingdom. Thou art the universal sovereign of the Christian Commonwealth. Exercise thy authority in the fear of God. The first and second Rome have fallen, but the third stands still to the end of history, for it is the last Rome. Moreover, but no successor, a fourth Rome is inevitable.