

The Utopia of 'Holy Russia' in Today's Geopolitical Imagination of the Russian Orthodox Church: a Case Study of Patriarch Kirill

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the myth of 'Holy Russia,' as restored and promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev), and explores the new imagining identities and spatial configurations generated by this myth. While before 'Holy Russia' was a metaphor, associated with relics, deposited in Russian monasteries and churches, Kirill 'geo-politicized' it, informing it with practical political meaning, and as such it is viewed as including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and on many occasions Moldova, and less often – Kazakhstan. The paper discusses the metaphor of 'Holy Russia' as a geopolitical utopia, as a postcolonial invention, and as a method of mental mapping. It uncovers Kirill's modernist philosophy of history, based on Messianic meta-narrations of enslavement and subsequent liberation. As such, 'Holy Russia' does not stop colonial practices, but perpetuates them in many aspects. It continues the 'internal re-colonization' of the Russian population by 're-churchizing' it, and by claiming to be the cultural center of the Western civilization.

In contemporary Russia geographical imagination provides a more powerful source of self-identification than history¹. The reasons of this are manifold, including the spatial anxiety caused by the loss of empire. Given that in words of G. Hosking, unlike Western powers, Russia did not have an empire, it *was* and empire². The collapse of the Soviet Union delivered an unprecedented blow on the identity of the Russians, leaving a number of imperial 'sacred places' such as Sebastopol, Poltava, Baikonur Cosmodrome, the Brest Fortress beyond the

¹ E.g. R. J. Johnston, *One World, Millions of Places: the End of History and the Ascendancy of Geography*. In: *Political Geography* 13, no. 2 (1994), p. 111-121; D. Hooson, *Ex-Soviet Identities and the Return of Geography*. In: D. Hooson (ed.) *Geography and National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 134-141. See penetrating discussion of this phenomenon in: E. Clowes, *Russia on the Edge: Imagined Geographies and Post-Soviet Identity*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, xi. Cf.: in the past 20 years, there were published more than 100 different manuals on geopolitics in Russia (checked in the catalogue of the Russian State Library: <http://www.rsl.ru>).

² G. Hosking, *The Freudian Frontier*. In: *Times Literary Supplement*, March 10, 1995, p. 27. Quoted from R. Szporluk, *The Fall of the Tsarist Empire and the USSR: The Russian Question and the Imperial Overextension*. In: K. Dawisha and B. Parrott (eds.), *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective*, Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe, 1997, p. 70.



state border³. Of no less importance is the failure of history to power the sense of belonging among Russians. The end of history and history-based ideological meta-narrations, proclaimed by scholars and public intellectuals in the 1990s, and the ascendance of 'presentism' as the dominant historical sensibility⁴ have been superimposed on the particularly Russian situation of troubled and dividing historical memory. Struggling to forge common historical memory, Russian society faces almost insurmountable difficulties to tackle with Stalin and Gulag. Although officially condemned, Stalin remains the key and indispensable symbol of the shared identity of millions of Russians, who associate themselves first and foremost with the Soviet past⁵.

So, imagination of geography could 'switch off the microphones', when intellectuals start to debate history⁶, thereby providing a language to speak out the trauma of the loss of the empire, and to create a shared platform on which the new Russia identity could be grounded. However, in order to narrate the unspeakable, this language should be metaphoric and compensatory: it should restore the sense of stability, self-esteem and self-confidence. Thus, the importance of the metaphor of 'Holy Russia', deeply engraved in Russian mythology and intellectual history, is on the increase in both lay and church discourses⁷.

³ E.g.: S. Plokyh, *The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology*. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 3, 2000, p. 369-383. Discourses on Russia being hurled back to the frontiers of 16th or 17th century are countless in the right-wing and patriotic journalism and even in academic manuals and theses on geopolitics. See, for example: N. A. Nartov, V. N. Nartov, *Geopolitika: Uchebnik dlia studentov vuzov*, Moscow, 2007, p. 160; N. V. Luk'ianovich, *Geopolitika Rossii: Teoretiko-metodologicheskie osnovy, genezis, osobennosti formirovaniia i razvitiia v usloviakh globalizatsii*, Review of the Doctor of Science in Political Studies, Moscow, 2004. On the necessity of 'feelings of national pride and trauma, that arise from external relations' for the elaboration of national identity see, e.g.: G. Dijkink, *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain*, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 11.

⁴ See, e.g.: F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press, 1992; P. Nora, *Realms of Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998, p. 2-12.

⁵ N. Koposov, *Pamiat' strogogo rezhima: Istoriia i politika v Rossii*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozreniie, 2011, p. 128.

⁶ 'If I had any say in the peace negotiations... I would instruct the sound technicians to switch off the microphones as soon as any of the negotiating parties began to talk about the past.' (Amos Oz, quoted in J. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 21.

⁷ For example, there is the publishing house in Moscow 'New Holy Russia', the series of politically engaged encyclopedias 'Holy Russia', edited by the Institute of Russian civilization in Moscow, a number of local newspapers of this title, some political pamphlets, associated with this term, such as: G. Ziuganov, *Sviataia Rus' i Koshchevo tsarstvo*, Moscow: Rezerv, 2003, and even textbooks for religious secondary schools, e.g. L. Shevchenko, *Pravoslavnaia kul'tura. 6-i*

The central question of this paper pertains to the exploration of the myth of 'Holy Russia', restored and promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and personally by Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev), who was enthroned on 1 February 2009. To be sure, this paper is focused neither on the coincidences of the geopolitical ideas of the ROC and official statements of the Russian government, nor on the interrelations of the ROC's policies with those of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs⁸; the main goal is, by contrast, to uncover, interpret and understand what kind of 'newness' in imagining identities and spatial configurations is being generated by this myth. The very fact that this 'newness' exists is warranted by the ROC's position as an essentially hybrid institution in transition from periphery and 'cultural ghetto' to the center of public life. Putting aside the question whether the ROC has emerged as a promoter or a hindrance of the civil society⁹, this paper concentrates on the instable status of the ROC as a point of conceptual growth, a place from where 'the newness enters the world'¹⁰, be it for good or for evil.

Trying to examine the intellectual channels through which 'newness comes' as well as impediments and conceptual 'clogging' on its way, this paper will discuss the metaphor of 'Holy Russia' as a geopolitical utopia, as a postcolonial invention, and as a method of mental mapping. This analytical framework would structure this examination of 'Holy Russia' as utopian 'novum'¹¹ of ambivalent status; it both liberates from cultural hegemony of the West, and claims to restore cultural hegemony of the 'Orthodox civilization'. Thus, the 'Holy

god obucheniia. Sviataia Rus', Moscow: Tsentr podderzhki kul'turno-istoricheskikh traditsii Otechestva, 2007.

⁸ On this see, for example: R.C. Blitt, *Russia's 'Orthodox' Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia's Policies Abroad*. In: *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33, no. 2, 2011, p. 363-460; D. Sidorov, *Post-Imperial Third Romes: Post-Imperial Third Romes: Resurrections of a Russian Orthodox Geopolitical Metaphor*. In: *Geopolitics* 11, no. 2, 2006, p. 317-347.

⁹ On this discussion see, e.g.: N. Gvosdev, *Unity in Diversity: Civil Society, Democracy, and Orthodoxy in Contemporary Russia*, In: Ch. Marsh (ed.), *Burden or Blessing? Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy*, Boston: Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, 2004; Z. Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism*, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005; W. L. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006; J. and C. Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

¹⁰ H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 227. On the significance of spatial imagination for shaping the geopolitical future see, for example: A. P. Tsygankov, *Mastering Space*. In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, 2003, p. 102.

¹¹ D. Suvin, *Novum Is as Novum Does*. In: K. Sayer and J. Moore (eds.), *Science Fiction: Critical Frontiers*, Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000, p. 3-23.



Russian' mythology is not consistent in its decolonizing intention; it stops at the point where intellectual practices of decolonization should transform into post-colonial deconstruction of all hegemonic meta-narrations whatsoever.

Imagining 'Holy Russia'

Speaking about 'Holy Russia' as utopia does not mean to denigrate the ideas of Patriarch Kirill and his collaborators¹²; by contrast, the interpretation of Kirill's thoughts as utopia means to highlight their ability to 'estrangle' reality and to break through the petrifying dominant mythology.¹³ Kirill is himself reflexive about utopianism and its necessity¹⁴, arguing that it is important to have a dream, to be faithful to it and devote one's life to its implementation¹⁵. Kirill's recent moderate criticism of the government further aligns his ideas with utopianism much rather than with the docile pro-Putin crackdown on opposition¹⁶. This reasoning does not preclude the possibility that 'Kirill's project' has been concocted in Kremlin, but it definitely evokes intellectual forces and possibilities, potentially capable of destabilizing the regime.

The phrase 'Holy Russia' (*Sviataia Rus'*) appeared in Kirill's programmatic enthronization speech and rapidly gained wide currency in his discourses throughout his three years in service of the Patriarch of the ROC, which fact highlights the importance of this metaphor in today's Russian Orthodoxy¹⁷. The very choice of the 'Holy Russian' imagery is significant because of its historically entrenched anti-state overtones. First time the notion of 'Holy Russia' is reported

¹² Cf.: A. Verkhovskii speaks of Kirill's doctrine as a utopian (read: counter-productive) striving to restore pre-modern social configuration (A. Verkhovskii, "*Doctrina Kirilla*" *kak instrument izmeneniia identichnosti rossiiskogo obshchestva i Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi*. In: *Eurasian Review* 4, November 2011, p. 19.

¹³ See on this interpretation of utopianism: F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fiction*, New York, 2005; T. Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, New York, 1987; D. Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and Theory of a Literary Genre*, New Haven, 1979.

¹⁴ See, for example: Kirill, *Sviataia Rus' – vmeste ili vroz'?* *Patriarkh Kirill na Ukraine*, Moscow: Danilov muzhskoi monastyr', 2009, p. 217; P. Kuzenkov, "*Politika*" i "*politiiia*" v vizantiiskoi traditsii. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 7, 2011, p. 39.

¹⁵ Patriarkh Kirill, *Patriarkh i molodezh: Razgovor bez diplomatii*, Moscow: Danilov muzhskoi monastyr', 2009, p. 150; Kirill, *Kak sokhranit' svoiu mechtu?*. In: [29 May 2009] *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, no. 7, 2009, p. 60-61.

¹⁶ Kirill, *Rozhdestvenskoe interv'iu*. In: [9 January 2012], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1932241.html>

¹⁷ Kirill, *Byt' vernym Bogu: Kniga besed so Sviateishim Patriarkhom Kirillom*, Minsk: Izd-vo Belorusskogo ekzarkhata, 2010, p. 10, 171, 325, 568-69; Metropolitan Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill: Zhizn' i mirosozertsanie*, Moscow: Eksmo, 2010, p. 116.

to appear in Prince Kurbsky's correspondence with tsar Ivan the Terrible in 1570s, when it acquired distinctive dissident connotations as an 'opposite to the myth of the ruler', and was further elaborated by the Slavophiles¹⁸. For the latter Holy Russia meant mostly the transcendental ideal to follow, and a metaphor, associated with relics, deposited in Russian monasteries and churches¹⁹. Kirill's predecessor Patriarch Aleksii II seems to embrace this interpretation²⁰. Kirill, by contrast, understands 'holiness' as an eternal quality of Russia, as its singular and immutable 'spiritual and moral core'²¹, which manifested itself in the past, mostly in the Muscovite Tsardom, and which is to be 're-membered', 're-collected' and thereby restored in the future²². Thus, Kirill 'geo-politicizes' and 'de-historicizes' this metaphor, informing it with practical political meaning. He says that 'Holy Russia is not a speculative concept, and not [merely] a part of our history. This is our present'²³. 'Holy Russia' has its distinctive territory and borders; namely it includes Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and on many occasions it is said to embrace Moldova and less often – Kazakhstan²⁴.

¹⁸ M. Cherniavsky, "Holy Russia": A Study in the History of an Idea. In: American Historical Review 63, no. 3, 1958, p. 621; M. Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961, p. 159- 228; P.J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and After*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 14-15.

¹⁹ See, for example: 'If the Russian land was sometimes called 'Holy Russia', this is because of sacred relics, monasteries and churches, which were located there, and not because of the intertwining of state and church institutions' (I. Kireevskii, *O kharaktere prosveshcheniia Evropy i ego otnoshenie k prosveshcheniiu v Rossii*. In: Kireevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow: tip. P. Bakhmeteva, 1861, p. 263). Cf. celebrated verses by Aleksei Khomiakov: 'Oh unworthy to be chosen, // Yet you were chosen. Cleanse yourself swiftly // In the waters of repentance, // Lest a twofold punishment // Should fall like a thunderbolt upon your head.' (A. Khomiakov, *Rossii*. In: Khomiakov, *Stikhotvoreniia i dramy*, Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969, p. 137. Translation from: A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975, p. 187. Our sources show that neo-Slavophiles of the late imperial period almost never used the term 'Holy Russia'.

²⁰ Aleksii II, *Privetstvie uchastnikam II assamblei Russkogo mira*. In: Tserkovnyi vestnik 394, no. 21, 2008; Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii, no. 2, 2008, p. 53; Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii, no. 9, 2008, p. 36.

²¹ Kirill, *Propovedi, 2009-2010*, Sviato-Troitskaia Sergieva Lavra, 2010, p. 4, 6, 52. Cf.: Metropolitan Kliment, *Interv'iu "Rossiiskoi gazete"*. In: [12 January 2012], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1945937.html>.

²² Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 71, 78.

²³ Kirill, *Doklad na Arkhiereiskom soveshchaniu 2 fevralia 2010 g.* In: Tserkov' i vremia, no. 50, 2010, (<http://www.mospat.ru/church-and-time/196>); Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 389. Cf. Kirill's remark that his visits to Ukraine were 'the strongest spiritual experience and visible evidence of the unity of Holy Russia' (Kirill, *Propovedi* [7 January 2010], 284).

²⁴ E.g. Kirill, *Propovedi* [1 February 2010], 308.



So 'Holy Russia' is located on the 'canonical territory' of the ROC. This other spatial term frames geopolitical imagination in more or less tangible and rationalized juridical form. In the article published in 2005 archbishop Hilarion Alfeev (now Metropolitan) substantiated 'canonical territory' as territory of exclusive jurisdiction of ROC. It does not mean that other confessions should be ousted from these lands, but Hilarion insists that missionary activity of other churches on 'canonical territory' should be considered hostile proselytism if not overt imperialistic hegemony²⁵. This territory includes Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania²⁶. So this concept is basically reactive and defensive: canonical territory, which generally coincides with the territory of the Soviet Union, symbolically stabilizes post-Soviet space²⁷. The metaphor of 'Holy Russia' shapes spatial imagination differently, in a way of practical political programming and active reforming.

'Holy Russia' emerges on the area, where territorially bounded notion of 'canonical territory' and culturally bounded notion of the 'Russian world' overlap. Due to its inescapably instrumentalized character as a political means to reinforce legitimacy of the Putin's regime in the eyes of the foreigners, as well as to its ethnically and religiously ambiguous status, the concept of the 'Russian world' is much less popular in Kirill's discourses than 'Holy Russia'²⁸. It appears sporadically mostly on special occasions, such as collaboration of the ROC with the foundation 'Russian world'²⁹, established in 2007 by the initiative of the Russian President in order to promote Russian language and culture abroad.

²⁵ See on this, e.g.: J. Anderson, *Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church: Asymmetric Symphonia?*. In: *Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 1 (2007), 193; Metropolitan Kirill, *Gospel and Culture*. In: J. Witte Jr. and M. Bourdeaux (eds.) *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999, p. 72-76.

²⁶ Hilarion, *Printsip "kanonicheskoi territorii" v pravoslavnoi traditsii*, [2005] <http://www.hilarion.ru/2010/02/25/1048>. See also papers by then Metropolitan Kirill and then archbishop Hilarion, presented on 1 December 2007 in Moscow at the international conference *Local Church and Canonical Territory: Canonical, Juridical and Inter-Confessional Aspects*: Metropolitan Kirill, 'Privetstvie mitropolita Kirilla,' [1 December 2007] <http://www.mospat.ru/archive/38874.htm>. For analysis of the concept of 'canonical territory' see, e.g.: D. P. Payne, *Nationalism and the Local Church: The Sources of Ecclesiastical Conflict in the Orthodox Commonwealth*. In: *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 5, 2007, p. 831-852.

²⁷ K. Rousselet, *L'Église orthodoxe russe et le territoire*. In: *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* 35, no. 4, 2004, p. 153.

²⁸ E.g.: Kirill, *Propovedi* [24 May 2010], p. 447.

²⁹ Kirill, *Vystupleniie na otkrytii 3 assamblei Russkogo Mira*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, no. 12, 2009.

'Holy Russia' in his understanding is held together by the common system or 'matrix' of values and cultural foundations, implanted in 'Kievan font' by St. Vladimir. These principles include ideas that spiritual dominates over material, that there is the good and the evil, and everybody has to choose between the two with no intermediate solution available³⁰. So, Kirill argues, in the center of these values lied an ideal of 'holiness', which permeated all aspects of life of the Russians in medieval and imperial periods, and also, although considerably perverted, in Soviet time³¹. It does not mean, he says, that all Russians were righteous people, but they measure their lives by the ideal of the righteousness³². In Kirill's thought, the 'holy-Russian' community has also a transcendental dimension, that is the special relation of Russia as a geopolitical entity with the highest deity. God's divine grace, given due to the prayers of the Russian saints and just people, is what makes Russia 'holy'³³. Another messianic metaphor employs the imagery of 'Holy Russia' as the 'earthly principality', which belongs to and resides under the protecting veil of the Mother of God³⁴.

The fact that 'Holy Russia' is politically split into several sovereign countries allows Patriarch Kirill to theorize a 'new type of integration', which comes to replace the tradition of political centralization³⁵. He argues that the 'Russian world' could be organized on principally new foundations, which would blaze a new path of political reforming, to be walked by the rest of the peoples on the earth³⁶. He is not very explicit, but we can assume that he means the principle of equal rights of all members of 'Holy Russia'³⁷. Peacefulness of the process of integration is guaranteed by the fact that this integration is neither supposed to revise political borders of already sovereign countries, nor encroaches on the existing national sovereignties³⁸. The key element of such integration, however,

³⁰ E.g.: Kirill, *Interv'iu dlia programmy 'Natsional'nyi interes'* [25 November 2009], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/949960.html>.

³¹ Kirill, *Propovedi*, p. 12, 52. Cf.: *Ideals of Holy Russia, though not connected with God, were actually present in culture of the Soviet people*. In: Kirill, *Propovedi* [11 September 2009], p. 174).

³² Kirill, *Propovedi*, p. 520.

³³ Kirill, *Sila Bozhestvennogo zakona*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, no. 10, 2010, p. 27.

³⁴ Kirill, *Propovedi* [14 October 2009], p. 221.

³⁵ Kirill, *Sem'ia narodov*, p. 34; Kirill, *Propovedi*, 4;

³⁶ Kirill, *Sem'ia narodov*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 12, 2010, p. 35; Kirill, *Vystuplenie na otkrytii*, p. 29-33.

³⁷ *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, no. 12, 2009, p. 29-33. Cf.: "There should be no more "seniors" and "minors", leaders and followers [in our] brotherhood" (Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, 221).

³⁸ Kirill, *Interv'iu Sviateishego Patriarkha Kirilla dlia ezhegodnika Predstoiatel*. [10 February 2010], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1065213.html>; Kirill, *Interv'iu Sviateishego Patriarkha Kirilla programme 'Voskresnoe vremia*. [31 January 2010], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1058792.html>.



does not belong to the domain of politics; this is the specific spiritual atmosphere of Christian morality, respectful attitude to foreigners and self-sacrificial service to 'thy neighbor'³⁹.

This argumentation helps him to explain the collapse of the Russian and Soviet empires as the result of moral degradation of society and waning of religious enthusiasm and self-denial among Russians⁴⁰. Kirill's attempt to bridge the gap between moral improvement and geopolitical perspectives of Russia deserves closer attention. He says that people like to live side by side with you when you are a good person. A good person is one who never oppresses you, or takes away your property, but, instead who gives you something. The same thing is with an empire: when the imperial center gives more than takes, this structure is stable. Thus, we have to learn how to give, to learn self-sacrificial service to our neighbors; so this is the first precondition of integration⁴¹.

However, the most powerful instrument to maintain the unity of 'Holy Russia' is an attempt, though not thoroughly consistent, to de-ethnicize this metaphor. Kirill insists that 'Holy Russia' is not based on ethnicity, because of inclusion of non-Slavic Moldovans and possibly Kazakhs. He further argues that whereas 'Russians' are one nation, which includes *rossiiane* living in the Russian Federation (including the Great Russians and many other nationalities), Ukrainians and Belarusians, 'Holy Russia' is geographically broader than 'Russians' (pan-Russian nation), because, for example, Moldovans belong to 'Holy Russia' but not to the 'Russians'. According to the shrewd remark of David Harvey, the internal contradiction of spatial utopias consists in the fact that they 'are typically meant to stabilize and control the processes that must be mobilized to build them'⁴². This observation precisely reflects the paradox of 'Holy Russia': conceived as an intellectual instrument to arrest processes of nation-state making on the post-Soviet space, this project can be realized only if forces of nationalism are unleashed, as follows already from its name referring to Russia; to paraphrase the famous dictum of E. Gellner, 'Holy Russia' could be only created by 'holy Russian nationalism'. Kirill, however, opposes nationalism as a non-Christian, pagan concept, detrimental to the dogma of unity⁴³. From time to time Kirill voiced the necessity of patriotism as a geopolitical projection of Christian love

³⁹ Kirill, *Propovedi* [4 November 2009], p. 231. Cf. Kirill's television programme *Slovo pastyria*, aired on 5 November 2011 on ORT (Public Russian Television) Channel.

⁴⁰ Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 281.

⁴¹ Kirill, *Zadacha cheloveka: nesti mir Khristov v soznanie kazhdogo*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 9, 2010, p. 33-34. See also: Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 391-92.

⁴² D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000, p. 173.

⁴³ *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, no. 9, 2010, p. 34.

to 'thy neighbor', but he insists that patriotism must be 'sanctified'. His concept of 'sanctified patriotism' (in Russian here is the play on words: 'prosviashchennyi patriotism', instead of 'prosveshchennyi' – enlightened) implied that the moral ideals of Scripture must always hover above any mundane, political attachments, thereby preventing patriotism from degeneration into nationalism⁴⁴.

So, the closer look at Kirill's ideas cannot corroborate the vision of ROC as moving towards a more ethnically-bound religious identity⁴⁵. Kirill re-launches the late imperial project of creating of a pan-Russian nation; the meaningful difference is that tsarist government desired to consolidate it within the broader political entity, while Kirill is speaking about one nation, divided among several political entities. Although he consistently highlights the importance of observing current sovereignties, it cannot be denied that if his project of pan-nation-making succeeds, the existence of separate non-nation states, not supported by the nation coincided with the political boundaries will become problematic.

All in all, 'Holy Russian' imagery helps the ROC to dissociate its Messianic teaching from the state nationalism and imperialism and to distance from the 'Moscow as the Third Rome' mythology as too much susceptible to the imperialist interpretation, to put it in N. Berdiaev's words⁴⁶. Kirill elaborated his position on 'Moscow as the Third Rome' concept in 1995, when he argued that that this mythology had been misinterpreted by the commentators; in fact it means not the claims for geopolitical hegemony but rather claims to be a Christian spiritual center, the place where religious values and morals reign⁴⁷. The model of 'Holy Russia' provides for a 'third way' perspective between Westernism and Eurasianism, dominant in contemporary Russian public sphere⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, 75; *Osnovy sotsial'noi kontseptsii Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi*, 2000, II.1, II.2, III.3; Kirill, *Interv'iu*. [23 July 2009], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/702155.html>; Kirill, *Aktual'nye voprosy tserkovnoi zhizni*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 2, 2011, p. 29; *Zaiavlenie Sviateishego Sinoda*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 7, 2011, p. 19. Cf. Kirill's television programme *Slovo pastyria*, aired on 6 March 2011 on ORT (Public Russian Television) Channel. See also: A. Verkhovskii, *Politicheskoe pravoslavie: Russkie natsionalisty i fundamentalisty, 1995-2001*, Moscow, 2003, p. 118-119.

⁴⁵ A. Agadjanian, *Revising Pandora's Gifts: Religious and National Identity in the Post-Soviet Societal Fabric*. In: *Europe – Asia Studies* 53, no. 3, 2001, p. 481-82.

⁴⁶ N. Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, Paris: YMCA-Press, 1971, p. 12.

⁴⁷ Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 65.

⁴⁸ Kirill capitalized on Eurasian terminology in 2001 (A. Verkhovskii, *Politicheskoe pravoslavie*, 42). Since then has rarely used it to designate territorial spread of Orthodoxy 'on the immense vast of Eurasia' (Kirill, *Propovedi* [22 July 2010], 517; A. Dobrosotskikh (ed.) *"Neizvestnyi" Patriarkh Kirill*, Moscow: Danilov muzhskoi monastyr', 2009, p. 103.



Decolonizing 'Holy Russia'

The utopia of 'Holy Russia' is fecund with liberating and anti-colonial potential due to the possibility of interpreting it as a 'covenant Messianism', to use A. Smith's seminal analysis⁴⁹. If missionary peoples seek to transform the outer world according to what they perceive to be their divine revelation, covenant peoples look inwards and reflex on their ability to maintain the covenant and fulfill God's commandments as a precondition for being chosen. So covenant Messianism could provide the language of self-sufficiency, restoration of self-esteem and authenticity of one's own culture vis-à-vis the penetrating Western cultural hegemony. Already Slavophiles, who elaborated one of the first versions of anti-colonial criticism⁵⁰, tended towards covenant interpretation of Russian Messianism framed by the imagery of 'Russian God'⁵¹. Patriarch Kirill comprehensively elaborated this imagery when he devoted the whole sermon of 9 July 2009 to the concept of the covenant with God. He paralleled Russian history with the history of the Jews, implying that the Russians were the chosen people, dwelling in prosperous 'Holy Russia', but in 1917 they betrayed Christ and apostatized from the true faith. This apostasy, he continued, was the catastrophe of universal importance which ended up by the genocidal Soviet regime, which took lives of tens of millions of Russians⁵². The idea of God's punishment for apostasy is a corollary of the covenant Messianism. So, Kirill picks on the discourses of sufferings during the Great Patriotic War in order to demonstrate that God chastised the whole of the people for its 'deadly sin of apostasy, sacrilege, humiliation of the Church, sacred objects and faith'⁵³.

However, the revolution of 1917 is not the only one and perhaps even not the most dreadful act of apostasy, because it had been prepared by previous two centuries of gradual secularization and Westernization, launched by the reforms of Peter I⁵⁴. So, looking in the past, when the initial fundamental condition of the covenant took their shape, Kirill discovers Russia's 'golden age' not in pre-revolutionary period but in much more distant pre-Petrine past, when

...Our pious forefathers... believed the material well-being to be not the end but the means for ... spiritual life... There was no blind admiration for

⁴⁹ A. D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 49.

⁵⁰ A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization. Russia's Imperial Experience*, Cambridge: Polity, 2011, p. 17, 140.

⁵¹ Cherniavsky, *The Tsar and People*, p. 177.

⁵² Kirill, *Propovedi* [July 2009], p. 75-77. On Messianism in today's Orthodoxy in general (including laymen and religiously anxious intellectuals) see, e.g.: A. Mitrofanova, *The Politicization of Russian Orthodoxy: Actors and Ideas*, Stuttgart, 2005, p. 42-44.

⁵³ Kirill, *Propovedi* [3 June 2009, 6 May 2010], p. 57, 431.

⁵⁴ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 218; Patriarch Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 66.

foreign experience [in Muscovite Russia]... But there was no stagnation, isolation as well... [Russia] always took care of its spiritual authenticity, spiritual individuality, and thereby critically assessed views from abroad⁵⁵.

Kirill's philosophy of history based on covenant Messianism, means also that contemporary Russia is living through the second most important period in its history, which is associated with liberation from the Western hegemony in the forms of both secular imperialism and atheistic socialism⁵⁶. *The Journal of Moscow Patriarchy* argues that the Church has to reconsider its missionary work; if in the previous centuries, the measure of success was the expansion of the so called canonical territory, now this indicator is dated⁵⁷. What was suggested instead is to 'churchize' those people who already identify themselves with Orthodoxy, but do not attend services and actively participate in the life of a parish yet⁵⁸.

'Holy Russian' Messianism helps to overcome not only 'internal colonialism'⁵⁹, but also the Western cultural and political hegemony in time and in space, which is typical for religious Messianisms of the developing countries⁶⁰. The 'Holy Russian' imagery strengthens feelings of self-esteem and dignity, injured by the collapse of the Soviet Union and cultural hegemony of the secular West.

The utopia of 'Holy Russia' underpins 'civilizational approach' in historiography, which helps the ROC's intellectuals to reject the universality of

⁵⁵ Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 64-65. Thus we have to qualify the analysis of S. Ramet, according to which the 'Orthodox geography of happiness' is located either before 1917 or before 1991. With Kirill's enthronization, situation has changed. See: S. Ramet, *The Way We Were – and Should Be Again? European Orthodox Churches and the "idyllic past"*. In: T.A Byrnes, and Peter J. Katzenstein (eds.), *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 151. Cf.: 'By no means should we restore the pre-revolutionary situation [of the church-state relations]' (Hilarion, *Besedy*, 141).

⁵⁶ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 38.

⁵⁷ E. Murzin, *Svoboda i otvetstvennost*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 12, 2010, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Kirill, *Missiia dolzhna byt' delom vsei tserkvi*. In: *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*, no. 12, 2010, p. 23-24; Kirill, *The Orthodox Church in the Face of World Integration: The Relation Between Tradition and Liberal Values*. In: *The Ecumenical Review* 53, 2001, p. 4; Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 167; Kirill, *Interv'iu Patriarkha Kirilla telekanalu "Rossiia"*. In: [21 September 2010] <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1280323.html>; Kirill, Patriarch, 'Interv'iu Sviateishego Patriarkha Kirilla telekanalu "Rossiia 23" [5 April 2010]; <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1131490.html>.

⁵⁹ The concept of internal colonization as regards Russian history has been fruitfully elaborated by A. Etkind. See, e.g.: A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization*; Etkind, 'Foucault i tezis vnutrennei kolonizatsii: Postkolonial'nyi vzgliad na sovetское proshloe', *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 49, 2001; Etkind, M. Mogil'ner, *Razgovor o neklassicheskom kolonializme*. In: *Ab Imperio*, no. 1, 2011, p. 117-130; Etkind, *Bremia britogo cheloveka, ili vnutrenniaia kolonizatsiia Rossii*. In: *Ab Imperio*, no. 1, 2002.

⁶⁰ V. Murvar, *Messianism in Russia: Religious and Revolutionary*. In: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 10, no. 4, 1971, p. 286-293; V. Lanternari, *The Religion of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*, London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1963.



the Western notions of secular humanism, human rights and liberal democracy⁶¹ and to establish the principles of autonomy, importance and self-sustainability of 'civilizations', the 'Russian civilization' included, vis-à-vis their Western peer⁶². Postulating different yardsticks for different 'civilizations', Kirill argues that countries which want to live up to their religious precepts must not be infringed or oppressed by those countries which maintain the human rights secular ideology. As the 'Foundations of Social Programme of ROC', elaborated by the same Kirill, say, the West is simply a so different civilization from 'ours' that applying the same norms would cause injustice⁶³.

However, postulating the difference of civilization is not enough, because it could not soothe the fear that 'Russian civilization' is located on the periphery of the great civilizations of Europe and Asia, so it was necessary to find 'contact points' of Russo-European interaction. The general assumption says that the Western civilization stemmed from Christianity, and the Orthodox religion, which was the faith of the European continent in the first thousand years AD, constitutes an important if not the bearing pillar of the today's West. More than that, this twist of thought suggests that Orthodoxy is the most authentic European cultural tradition, which means that 'Holy Russia' stands for its geopolitical center, its 'Third Rome'. Trying to substantiate Russia's cultural centrality in Europe, Kirill has to prejudice both the concept of covenant Messianism, and the concept of the autonomy of civilizations. First, to spite Huntington's (in)famous geopolitical analysis, Patriarch Kirill and the other ROC's leaders argue that the Orthodox countries are inseparable from the West⁶⁴, and even responsible for what is going

⁶¹ M. Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 165; A. Verkhovskii, *Tserkovnyi proekt rossiiskoi identichnosti*. In: M. Laruelle (ed.) *Sovremennye interpretatsii russkogo natsionalizma*, Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2007, p. 171-188.

⁶² Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 65, 95, 115; A. Agadjanian, *Breakthrough to Modernity, Apologia for Traditionalism: The Russian Orthodox View of Society and Culture in Comparative Perspective*. In: *Religion, State and Society* 31, no. 4, 2003, p. 336-338; Rousselet, *L'Eglise orthodoxe russe*, p. 157. On anti-Westernism in Orthodox discourses see: V. Makrides, *Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today: A Hindrance to European Integration?*. In: *International Journal for Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3, 2009, p. 209-224.

⁶³ See on this: A. Verkhovskii, *Bespokoinoe sosiedstvo: Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' i putinskoe gosudarstvo*. In: E. Verkhovskii, V. Mikhailovskaia, V. Pribylovskii, *Rossia Putina: Pristrastnyi vzgliad*, Moscow: Panorama, 2003, p. 81-84; V. Makrides, *Orthodox Anti-Westernism Today*, p. 211.

⁶⁴ Cf.: 'Orthodoxy must be inscribed onto the spiritual and cultural space of the Western civilization' (Hilarion, *Besedy s mitropolitom Ilarionom*, Moscow: Eksmo, 2010, p. 97. And elsewhere: 'We are not foreigners in the European Union...' (Hilarion, *Besedy*, 294); Hilarion, *Tserkov' otkryta dlia kazhdogo: Vystupleniia i interv'iu mitropolita Ilariona (Alfeeva)*, Minsk: Belorusskaia

on in the West⁶⁵. Thus, for example, the ROC's task is to arrest degradation of the Western civilization in spiritual, demographical and geopolitical aspects⁶⁶, and to teach it the lesson of what can happen with the apostate people⁶⁷. Second, parting with the principles of covenant Messianism, Kirill cedes to the spells of expansionist cultural imperialism and proclaims that Russia's history has transcendental meaning and universal importance: 'Russia is the place, which is going to give a new life to the Universe', and to redeem the humanity⁶⁸.

The concept of 'basic culture' explains in which sense the Russian-Western concordat is thinkable. In tune with the Western neo-conservatives, it implies the importance of fundamental traditions, connected with Christian morality⁶⁹. Kirill professes that 'basic culture' of different countries and even civilizations (which is, to be sure a contradiction in terms) is practically the same, so the more traditionally oriented a 'civilization' is, the more grounds for intercultural dialogue and opportunities for peaceful co-existing it provides: 'if these 'other' ways of life are based on their [peoples, nations] own traditions, then more often than not they are not perceived as dangerous for the Orthodox way of life'⁷⁰. By the same token, breaking away with 'basic culture' makes people susceptible to hostility towards the alien cultures⁷¹.

Thus, traditional Russian anti-Catholic sentiments notwithstanding, the latter-day ROC has found many occasions to express its solidarity with Rome. Metropolitan Hilarion, the head of the External Relations Office, is especially explicit; he insists on the necessity of the 'Orthodox-Catholic strategic alliance'

Pravoslavnaia Tserkov', 2011, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Igumen Filaret (Bulekov), *Russkaia Tserkov' v stolitse "bol'shoi Evropy"*. In: Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii, no. 10, 2010, p. 59-60; Metropolitan Hilarion, *Tserkov' otkryta*, p. 20, 26, 36; Hilarion (ed.), *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 129, 481; Hilarion, *Besedy*, p. 300-303.

⁶⁶ Kirill, *Vystuplenie na vstreche so studentami Kaliningradskikh vuzov* [23 March 2009], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/595733.html>. See also: *Opredelenie Arkhiereiskogo Sobora*. In: Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii, no. 3, 2011, p. 72; Hilarion, *Besedy*, 111. Cf. Hilarion's reasoning that Western 'anomic' Christianity cannot withstand the pressure of Islam, implying that only 'firm and traditional' Christianity of the Russian ilk could do this (Hilarion, *Besedy*, p. 115).

⁶⁷ Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 482; Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii, no. 10, 2010, p. 59-60.

⁶⁸ Kirill, *Byt' vernym*, p. 41; Dobrosotskikh (ed.) *"Neizvestnyi" Patriarkh*, p. 121-26; Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 390.

⁶⁹ Kirill, *Patriarkh i molodezh'*, p. 98.

⁷⁰ Kirill, *The Orthodox Church in the Face of World Integration: The Relation Between Tradition and Liberal Values*. In: *The Ecumenical Review* 53, no. 4, 2001, p. 481. See also: Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 217. See also: Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii, no. 2, 2009, p. 56.

⁷¹ Hilarion, *Vystuplenie Mitropolita Volokolamskogo Illariona na vstreche OBSE* [12 September 2011], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1621587.html>



against secularism⁷². Another intellectual development is connected with the re-framing of the image of the United States. Long viewed as a 'Big Satan'⁷³, the United States as the fortress of traditional religiosity is often implicitly or explicitly juxtaposed to Northern Europe as the den of atheists⁷⁴. Probably we will witness the emergence of the US in the religious minds as the Holy Russia's strategic partner in the would-be 'Inter-Traditional'.

Mapping 'Holy Russia'

The concept of 'Holy Russia' has been tested and honed by Kirill's semantically loaded visits to Ukraine in 2009-2011⁷⁵. Nikolas Gvosdev quoted from the 19th-century historical A. N. Mouravieff, that the vast and often disunited territory of ancient Russia was kept together as one hole 'chiefly by their [metropolitans] travels and visitations'⁷⁶; the same is true in regard to Kirill's thinking: his pastoral visits and pilgrimages weave the fabric of 'Holy Russia.' They produce 'Holy Russia' by means of 're-membering' of its sacrosanct geographical contours. Iu. Lotman uncovered the logic of a semiotic journey as a triple transfer from 'here' to 'there' in geographical terms, superimposed on the moving between binary oppositions: 'home' – 'foreign land' and 'profane land' – 'sacred place'⁷⁷.

According to this logic the very journey to Ukraine is represented as a feat of asceticism and self-denial; thus, Patriarch Aleksii II in Kirill's discourses was said to be traveling to Ukraine deadly ill; he had to terminate his visit because of this illness in the summer 2008 several months before his death. Kirill's own journey was obstructed by hostile forces, embodied by the President Iushchenko, nationalists and adepts of the dissident Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate⁷⁸.

⁷² Hilarion, *Tserkov' otkryta*, p. 55, 82; Hilarion, *Patriarkh Kirill*, p. 422.

⁷³ E.g.: A. Verkhovskii, *Politicheskoe pravoslavie*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 10, 2010, p. 62.

⁷⁵ On symbolism of metropolitans' traveling in medieval Russia see: B. Uspenskii, *Tsar' i patriarkh: Kharizma vlasti v Rossii (Vizantiiskaia model' i ee russkoe pereosmyslenie)*, Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1998, p. 373-375. Pilgrimages are analyzed, for example, In: J. Eade and M. Sallnow (eds.), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

⁷⁶ N. Gvosdev, *Keeping the Faith: The Orthodox Church and Reintegration in Contemporary Eurasia*. In: *Ab Imperio*, no. 2, 2000, p. 220.

⁷⁷ Iu. Lotman, *Semiosfera*, St Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2000; conceptualization of 'sacred places' is dominated by Eliade's analysis of sacred centers as intersections of divine and mundane forces (M. Eliade, *Sacred Places: Temple, Palace, "Center of the World"*. In: *Paterns in Comparative Religion*, New York: World Publishing Co., 1963.

⁷⁸ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 7-8.

Kirill's first pastoral visit to Ukraine took place on 27 July – 5 August 2009, when he made his key geopolitical statements, timed to the anniversary of the baptism of St. Vladimir. He started his visit in Kiev, which he called the Southern capital of Holy Russia, 'our Jerusalem and Constantinople', the place where Russia was baptized⁷⁹. Kiev represented three types of sacred places: this is the locus of supra-natural presence on earth through the first Russian monastery (Kiev Pechersk Lavra), this is a place of historical event of great importance (baptism of Russian people on the banks of Dnieper river), and this is the cradle of 'Holy Russia', 'from whence the Russian land came to be' in words of Nestor the Chronicler.

On 30 July Kirill traveled to Sviatohirsk Lavra in Donetsk region on the East of Ukraine. In his sermon Kirill compared the history of this monastery with the history of Russia in general; closed in 1787 by the decision of Catherine II and then again in 1918 Sviatohirst monastery was restored in 1992 as a 'spiritual fortress' of 'Holy Russia', thereby fitting to Kirill's historiosophic outline of Russian 'illness' progressing through 18th and 19th century with its paroxysm in the Soviet Russia and subsequent convalescence.⁸⁰ On the next day in Gorlovka in the central Donbas area, the backbone of the Ukrainian heavy industry, Kirill referred to this region as 'the holy land of Donbas'.⁸¹ On 1 August, already in Simferopol, the patriarch spoke of Crimea as 'the ancient land of Tavria', from whence St Cyril started to teach the Orthodox faith in Russian lands and where St Vladimir was baptized.⁸² If the 'holy Donbas area' is mostly the place where glorious and tumultuous events of Russian history took place, Crimea stands for another 'hearth' of 'Holy Russia', the place where religious enlightenment came on the Russian land.⁸³

Kirill flew the next day to the Koretsky monastery in Volyn region in Western Ukraine, and then travelling to nearby Rovno. If Volyn region is the 'foothold of Orthodoxy' in Western Ukraine, the Koretsky monastery is the 'stronghold of Orthodoxy in Volyn'⁸⁴. Here among anti-Russian-oriented Western Ukrainians, his rhetoric acquired palpable military traits. Kirill completed his journey in Pochaev Lavra, further to the north from Rovno, which he assessed as a 'holy Pochaev mountain', 'one of the greatest spiritual centers of Russian Orthodoxy'

⁷⁹ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 67; Kirill, *Propovedi* [28 July 2009, 4 October 2009, 25 February 2010], p. 109, 207, 343.

⁸⁰ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 137; Kirill, *Propovedi*, p. 112.

⁸¹ Kirill, *Propovedi* [31 July 2009], 117; Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, 43.

⁸² Kirill, *Propovedi* [1 August 2009], p. 121, 124; Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 44-45; Kirill, *Interv'iu* [31 July 2009], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/709499.html>.

⁸³ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 45, 140-141.

⁸⁴ Kirill, *Propovedi* [3 August 2009], p. 134 - 138.



and 'the great shrine of Holy Russia' mystically sanctified by prayers of many generations of monks.⁸⁵

So, Ukrainian lands are sacred in three interconnected ways; they are the spring, the beginning of 'Holy Russia', Russian Orthodoxy, statehood and religious enlightenment; they represent the spiritual center of 'Holy Russia' – although located on its geographical periphery; and last but not least, Ukraine is the place, where asceticism and selfless devotion could be practiced. This last aspect establishes the parallels with the martyrdom of the first Christians. Like them, true believers in Ukraine, faithful to the Moscow Patriarchate, had to go to and perform services in catacombs; some of them are threatened with knives and pursued.⁸⁶

The symbolic status of Ukraine displays the internal dynamism of spatial imagination; the focus of attention transfers from the fundamental binary opposition between "Us" and "Them" to the medieval geographical duality according to which territories are ranged on the scale 'sacred' - 'sinful'. Thus, Ukraine is represented as essentially part (even 'heart') of 'Holy Russia', reigned by 'sinful aliens'. Further disclosing the metaphor of 'Holy Russia' in regard to Ukraine, it is necessary to stress that postcolonial situation heightened the 'center-periphery' sensibility, so that the spatial status of Ukraine is again destabilized: situated on the Russian border (the very name Ukraine is reminiscent of Russian phrase 'u kraia', i.e. 'on the edge'), it is nevertheless the center of 'Holy Russia', its point of growth and the lieu of contestation (us / them, holy/sinful), where the future of 'Holy Russia' is being shaped⁸⁷.

Kirill has traveled very much in Russia too, but his highest esteem is reserved for Ukrainian sacred places. Only the 'Moscow land' and the land of Valaam monastery were honored by the epithet 'holy'.⁸⁸ Many other territories in Central Russia, Urals and Siberia were designated by weaker epithets like 'ancient' (Kolomna and Tver regions⁸⁹), and 'blessed' (Kursk region⁹⁰). Only Kolyma evoked a stronger metaphor of 'Russian Golgotha'⁹¹, Novgorod stands for one of the 'cultural centers of [medieval] Europe'⁹², and Karelia is said to bear 'signs of God's presence'⁹³.

This mapped out the contours of 'Holy Russia' as a space, where centers are located on the periphery: Kiev, Crimea, Sviatohirsk and Pochaev Lavras,

⁸⁵ Kirill, *Propovedi* [5 August 2009], p. 147; Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 167.

⁸⁶ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 116, 197-198.

⁸⁷ Kirill, *Sviataia Rus'*, p. 214.

⁸⁸ Kirill, *Propovedi* [1 September 2009, 9 July 2010], p. 165, 495.

⁸⁹ Kirill, *Propovedi* [13 September 2009, 1 July 2010], p. 179, 482.

⁹⁰ Kirill, *Propovedi* [24 September 2009], p. 197.

⁹¹ Kirill, *My ne dolzhny zabyt' strashnyi urok proshlogo* [1 September 2011], <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1610887.html>.

⁹² Kirill, *Propovedi* [20 September 2009], p. 188.

⁹³ Kirill, *Propovedi* [3 June 2010], p. 454.

Novgorod, Karelia, Kolyma and other 'holy places' on the edge rim on the South, West, North-West and East the immense Russian hinterland with only 'holy' Moscow and Valaam in the middle. The salient example of Kirill's thinking is his speech to the people of Kamchatka, in which he glibly avers that they live not on the periphery but 'in the beginning of Russia'⁹⁴. This kind of spatial structuring marks a shift from the Soviet-type hierarchical imperial space to a 'post-modern' space, organized as a decentralized network of sacred places, united by the same 'matrix of values', transcending newly erected political differences.

Conclusions

The eccentric and network-like model of 'Holy Russia' provides a more open structure with important outlets, 'contact points'⁹⁵ and points of conceptual growth on the periphery. 'Holy Russia' as an imaginary place where nation-states fail, opens up horizons for new communities. This model, however, is self-contradictory in many aspects, and these contradictions put significant limitations on imagining the 'novum'. First, it helps to deconstruct Russian history as a history of Western colonialism, but it fails to deconstruct Russian geography likewise. Trying to preserve and restore 'Holy Russia' as a geopolitical entity, Kirill and other ROC's intellectuals neglect the fact that its territory was shaped by the colonial practices of the Russian empire, already 'corrupt', 'Westernized', and devoid of national authenticity. Second, the geographical anchoring of 'Holy Russia' instrumentalizes it as a method of controlling certain portions of space⁹⁶, so this utopia is inseparable from the narrations of power and hegemony. Third, historical and geographical aspects of this utopia could hardly be assembled together, because essentially postmodern, decentralized space of 'Holy Russia' contradicts to Kirill's modernist philosophy of history, based on Messianic meta-narrations of enslavement and subsequent liberation. Thus, in spite of Kirill's hopes, 'Holy Russia' does not stop colonial practices, but perpetuates them in many aspects, such as the 'internal re-colonization' of the Russian population by 're-churchizing' it, and claims to be the cultural center of the Western civilization. 'Holy Russia' is the utopia which fails to exit the vicious circle of de- and re-colonization towards the post-colonial imagination and spatial sensibility.

⁹⁴ 'Na Vostochnykh rubezhakh Rossii,' *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii*, no. 11, 2010, p. 25.

⁹⁵ Cf. Kirill's sermon, saying that Pochaev mountain is a good place for 'Holy Russia' to speak out its opinion to Europe (Kirill, *Propovedi* [5 August 2009], p. 147.

⁹⁶ On the religious way of controlling meanings and usages of space see, for example: R. W. Stump, *Boundaries of Faith: Geographical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000, p. 3; O'Loughlin, J., Gearóid Ó Tuathail (Gerard Toal), Vladimir Kolossov, *Russian Geopolitical Culture and Public Opinion: The Masks of Proteus Revisited*. In: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 30, no. 3, 2005, p. 322-325.