

Amsterdam Lectures 2012-13 by Revd. Prof. Andrew Louth:

The Ways of Modern Orthodox Theology: Part I

Lecture III: Fr Pavel Florensky and the nature of reason

A few facts:

Pavel Florensky was born in 1882 in Azerbaidjan; educated in Tbilisi, Georgia; and then, 1900, enrolled in Moscow University; in 1904 began studies at the Moscow Spiritual Academy in Sergiev Posad; graduated in 1908, and ordained priest; 1912 submitted his Master's thesis at the Spiritual Academy, which was published in 1914 as *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. From 1912 to 1921 he served at the Church of St Mary Magdalene in Sergiev Posad, attached to the Shelter for Nurses of the Russian Red Cross. After the Revolution in 1917, Florensky served on the Commission for the Preservation of Art and Antiquities of the Trinity-St Sergii Lavra until 1919; this provoked a series of important works on early Russian art and the nature of icons. In the twenties, Florensky devoted more and more time to his scientific activities, publishing prolifically. He still appeared publicly as a priest, with his cassock and cross. Arrested in 1933 and condemned to 10 years in a prison camp, ending up in Solovki. Shot by the NKVD in the Leningrad Region on 8 December 1937.

Florensky's theological writings fall into two periods: before and after the Revolution.

- Before the Revolution dominated by his great work, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.
- After the Revolution, he planned a massive work to be called *On the Watersheds of Thought*; much was written, but none of it published until long after his death, and then piecemeal. It would have included works on worship and the nature of the icon, works such as *The Philosophy of Cult [Worship]*, a lecture on 'Reverse Perspective', and *Iconostasis*.

First part of lecture discusses Florensky's notion of antinomy, derived from Immanuel Kant, which leads into an exploration of his understanding of the nature and limitation of reason.

Second part of lecture discusses his understanding of the icon, especially in the works, 'Reverse Perspective' (1919), and *Iconostasis* (1922).

Bibliography

Works by Florensky referred to (in English translation):

Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, English translation by Boris Jakim (Princeton NJ, 1997)

'Reverse Perspective' in Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision. Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicoletta Misler, English translation by Wendy Salmond (London, 2002), 197–272.

Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis* English translation by Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood NY, 1996).

Secondary Literature:

Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky. A Quiet Genius. The Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Russia's Unknown da Vinci* (London, 2010)

Charles Lock, 'What is Reverse Perspective and who was Oskar Wulff', *Sobornost* 33:1 (2011), 60–89

Nicoletta Misler's introduction in *Beyond Vision*.