The One and the Divine Light of Truth in Plotinus and Florensky

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This article discusses some important influences of Plotinus on the work of the Russian thinker Pavel Florensky. Florensky's philosophy was strongly influenced by Plotinus, but the secondary literature on Florensky has very little reference (if any) to Plotinus and other Platonists, despite the fact that Florensky himself mentions them in the original footnotes to his works. In fact, most of those writing about Florensky seem concerned to situate the thinker solely within the Russian philosophical tradition.[1] The influence of Plotinus on Florensky's thought is persuasive, but it sits alongside Florensky's other main influences, the Patristic Fathers and the Russian Platonist tradition in the nineteenth century.

Before investigating the links between these two philosophers, it is important to describe Florensky's Russian context, which was largely Platonic and grew out of Russia's Orthodoxy and close links with Greek culture in the formative period of Russian Orthodox Christianity. By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is very strong evidence of a Platonic tradition in Russian philosophy. Many Russian philosophers of the time characterized the difference between Russian philosophy and Western philosophy as that between a Platonic demeanour and a "rationalizing" demeanour in the West.[2] They also characterized Western philosophy as Aristotelian.[3]

1. Robert Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky A Metaphysics of Love* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); Frederick Copleston, *Russian Philosophy* (London & New York: Continuum, 1986); Victor Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Cresswood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993); Frances Nethercott, *Russia's Plato: Plato and the Platonic tradition in Russian education, science and ideology (1840–1930)* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000); G.M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius* (New York & London: Continuum, 2010).

2. Copleston, *Russian Philosophy*, 63–65; Aleksei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevsky, *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 261.

3. Leo Shestov, *All Things are Possible*, trans. S.S. Koteliansky (New York: Robert M. Mc Bride

Through the theology of the Russian Orthodox Church, there has been a Platonic tradition embedded within Russian thought since the conversion of Russia to Christianity in the tenth century AD.[4] However, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, two further factors seemed to give greater focus to this Platonic tradition, and then emphasize it as the nineteenth century progressed. The first was the influence of the theological academies, especially the Moscow Theological Academy, which, unlike the universities, gave extensive instruction in philosophy and a particular emphasis on the study of classical languages. Students of these academies could study original Greek texts in the vernacular.[5] The second factor was the translation of texts from Greek into Russian. In 1841–42, Vasily Karpov (1798–1877) translated the complete works of Plato into Russian.[6] From 1824, the Moscow Theological Academy "began to publish Works of the Holy Fathers in Russian Translation, work that eventually comprised 48 volumes."[7] These were the works of the Platonist Patristic Fathers, people like Gregory of Nyssa and other Cappadocians. Thus, important Platonic texts became available in Russian and helped to emphasize a Platonist tradition that many intellectuals felt was their Russian patrimony.

In 1836, Pyotr Chaadaev (1794–1856) published a philosophical letter that seriously questioned Russian philosophical thought. The letter caused such controversy that Chaadaev was both given a lifetime ban from publishing and was officially declared insane.[8] However, as a direct result of Chaadaev's ruminations, a movement known as Slavophilism developed, whose main protagonists were Ivan Kireevski (1806–1856) and Aleksey Khomiakov (1804–1860). This movement declared that the Russian philosophical tradition was founded on Platonism and was untainted by the rationalizing tendencies of Western philosophy, tendencies that the Slavophiles associated with the baneful influence of Aristotle.[9] Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), the most important Russian philosopher of the nineteenth century, took a much less aggressive attitude towards the West. However, he still argued strongly for a Platonist philosophy, one with a Russian, indeed Russian Orthodox,

& Co., 1920), 64–65; Pavel Florensky, *Salt of the Earth*, trans. Richard Betts (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1999), 26; Khomiakov and Kireevsky, *On Spiritual Unity*, 244–45.

4. Philip Longworth, *Russia's Empires Their Rise and Fall: From Prehistory to Putin* (London: John Murray, 2005), 34-40.

5. Nethercott, *Russia's Plato*, 76.

6. Ibid., 39–40.

7. Hamburg and Poole, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 9.

8. Peter Yakovlevich Chaadayev, *Philosophical Letters & Apology of a Madman*, trans. Mary-Barbara Zeldin (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 32.

9. Khomiakov and Kireevsky, *On Spiritual Unity*, 261.

flavour. His most important works were *Lectures on Godmanhood* (1878)[10] and *The Meaning of Love* (1894).[11]

Many Russian philosophers were influenced by Solovyov and, especially in the early twentieth century, there was a wide sweep of Platonist philosophy and philosophers. With the 1917 Russian Revolution, it seemed—on first glance—as if this tradition was quenched, especially as the Bolsheviks either executed or exiled most of the major philosophers. However, the migration of thinkers to the West at this time meant that an almost hidden permeation of Platonist ideas occurred across Europe from the 1920s up to modern times.[12] Likewise, within Soviet Russia many brave intellectuals continued the Platonist line, either in secret or in codified form. Though persecuted, and often executed, many of these thinkers, and their works, have reappeared since the collapse of the USSR. In the exiled tradition, one can name Leon Shestov (1866–1836), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), Simeon Frank (1877–1950) and Pavel Muratov (1881–1950). Within Russia, there was Vasily Rozanov (1856–1919), Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), Aleksei Losev (1893–1988) and Grigory Pomerants (1918–2013). These are only a few of the many thinkers in the Russian Platonist tradition. A comprehensive review of their work is beyond the scope of this article.

Pavel Florensky was born in Azerbaijan and lived most of his early years in Tbilisi. Though reared in a home without religion, from a young age he became fascinated by both science (and mathematics in particular) and also by mystical intuition. Florensky studied mathematics at Moscow University, publishing seminal papers at a very young age. He then enrolled at the Moscow Theological Academy and became a priest in 1911. He published major works in philosophy and theology at this time, but after the Russian Revolution he taught science, technology and art theory in Moscow.[13] When many other philosophers were exiled by the Bolsheviks in 1922, Florensky was encouraged to stay, despite the fact that he lectured in a cassock and wore a rather large cross around his neck. It was because of his scientific work that the Bolsheviks encouraged him. Florensky continued to publish groundbreaking work in mathematics and also made discoveries in biology and chemistry. Eventually, however, in 1933, he was arrested and sent to the gulags, where he continued doing research into permafrost and iodine.

10. Vladimir Solovyov, *Lectures on Godmanhood* (San Rafael, CA: Semantron, 2007).

11. Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*, ed. and trans. Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. (New York: Lindisfarne, 1985).

12. Nina Berberova, *The Italics are Mine*, trans. Philippe Radley (London and Harlow: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1969).

13. Pyman, *Pavel Florensky.*

He published under his students' names. However, in 1937, Stalin had him taken to the Lubyanka and executed, a fact only discovered after the collapse of the USSR.

Florensky's major philosophical works are *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914)[14] and *Iconostasis* (1922),[15] though he wrote many other essays,[16] most of which are still unpublished. In general, his writings are eclectic and extend beyond philosophy into science, art, mathematics and engineering. His reading in philosophy is extensive, though often indicated merely as footnotes. While studying at the Moscow Theological Institute, he would have studied Classical languages. In the context of this article, it is important to note that Florensky claims that Richard Émil Volkmann's Latin translation of the *Enneads* (1883–84) is the best edition.[17] He also mentions that G. V. Malevansky translated selected treatises of Plotinus into Russian in 1898–1900. After Florensky wrote his major philosophical works, the first complete Russian translation of Plotinus seems to have been published by Aleksei Losev in 1930.[18] Florensky most often refers his philosophy to the works of the Patristic Fathers, Platonists in the Christian tradition. But he also relates his views to Plato, Philo of Alexandria and Plotinus.

The main Platonic themes in Florensky's philosophy are: the One;[19] Divine Light;[20] Sophia;[21] Truth;[22] Beauty;[23] and arguments against the rationalism of Aristotle.[24] For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on a single strand of Plotinus' thought, a strand which demonstrates the extent to which Plotinus' philosophy is important in Florensky's thought. This strand will bring me along a path from the One to Divine Light of the Truth.

14. Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1997).

15. Pavel Florensky, *Iconostasis*, trans. Donald Sheehan and Olga Andrejev (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996).

16. Florensky, *Salt of the Earth;* Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. Nicoletta Misler, trans. Wendy Salmond (London: Reaktion Books, 2002).

17. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 478.

18. V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy, Vol. 2*, trans. George L. Kline (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 833.

19. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 12; 115; Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky*, 123–24; 136.

20. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 73; Florensky, *Iconostasis*, 144; Bychkov, *Aesthetic Face of Being*, 34.

21. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 237; 251–52; Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky*, 180.

22. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 12-17; 34; 56; Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky*, 44–45; 129; 141–42; 144–48; Pyman, *Pavel Florensky*, 75.

23. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 70–72; 165; Bychkov, *Aesthetic Face of Being*, 31–33; Hamburg and Poole, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 242.

24. Florensky, *Salt of the Earth*, 26–27; Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 24–45; 32; 46.

For Plotinus, man is not the centre of the universe. Rather it is "the universe, and particularly the transcendent One, that is at the centre of man."[25] In fact, the One is described as being at the core of reality.[26] How do we know this One? We know it in the inner part of our being and we know it as an unchangeable light. This, it has been argued, is a Christian interpretation of Plotinus developed by Augustine, a view that influenced the Christian mystics over centuries.[27] But it is also a view that is expressed in Florensky's philosophy.

Those texts of Plotinus that are most important to Florensky are *Enneads* I.6 and VI.7.[28] In *Ennead* I.6, Plotinus says that the Stoic view that Beauty is the symmetry of parts towards each other, and towards the whole, cannot include colour and light, and indeed gold (I.6.1). In fact, he says, beauty comes to the world by participation in Form, which is participation in Divine Thought (θείου λόγου) (I.6.2). Divine Thought, as Form, rallies confusion into cooperation and makes the sum one harmonious coherence. "This, then, is how the material thing becomes beautiful—by communicating in thought (Reason, Logos) that flows from the Divine." Speaking of colour, Plotinus says that its beauty is derived from shape and from the conquest of darkness inherent in Matter. This occurs by the pouring-in of light (I.6.3). Armstrong says that, for Plotinus, "light is the incorporeal ἐνέργεια of the luminous body."[29] Plotinus then moves from beauty in things to more essential beauty. The Soul, he says, sees beauties that are beyond sense (I.6.4) and this sighting is for those who see beauty as moving in the realm of Truth (I.6.5). Seeing these beauties brings with it "loftiness of spirit, righteousness of life; disciplined purity" and effects a "shining down upon all, the light of godlike intellection" (I.6.5). In contrast, the Soul is unclean when—in the manner of gold—it is mixed with "earthy particles." Thus, a pure Soul is pure of Matter just as gold is pure when it is isolated from all that is foreign to it. Then, "all is purification" (I.6.6). When a Soul becomes "a good and beautiful thing" it becomes "like to God." For, from the Divine, comes all Beauty and all the Good in Beings. Then, becoming like to God is to "ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every Soul" (I.6.7). There lies the Beauty supreme. But the Soul must be trained to this (I.6.9), one must look into

25. Paul Henry, "The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought," in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991), lxviii–lxix.

26. John Dillon, "Plotinus: An Introduction," in Plotinus, 1991, lxci.

27. Henry, "Place of Plotinus," lxxv.

28. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991); Plotinus, *The Enneads*, in Seven Volumes, trans. A.H. Armstrong (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press/William Heinemann Ltd., 1966–88).

29. Plotinus, 1966, Vol. 1, 241.

oneself and create one's inner beauty. Then, "when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature, wholly that only veritable Light" (I.6.9) then the Soul—by becoming itself beautiful, by being godlike—can have a vision of the First Beauty.

But to fully interpret this, one must turn from the perspective of man, and indeed of nature and things, to a perspective that begins instead with the One, then moves through the Intellect and the Soul and, only then, looks to the world in its material form. In *Ennead* VI.7, Plotinus opens up this perspective. He focuses first (VI.7.1–15) on the Forms, and specifically on the Intellect, because at this level the language he uses is still, to some extent, comfortable. Then, later (VI.7.16–42) he discusses the One, or the Good, which stands outside the differentiation of Intellect and, though real, Plotinus finds that he must often use strange words to describe it.[30] To begin with, Plotinus looks at time, and cause, and describes these in terms of the three hypostases. Here, he sees the future as having been fore-conceived for later coming to be (VI.7.1) and the Idea itself, unfolded, reveals the cause inherent in it (VI.7.2). It is not that everything is simply fore-ordained, although it can be interpreted in this way. It is rather that time and cause are already there in such a way as to happen. Then, because of this, Plotinus can say that man exists from eternity and is complete already and the man who is born is derivative (VI.7.2). Here, man is a λόγος, or Reason-Principle, rather than a Soul, and the lower form of man, a form that is always dimmer than his higher form, is brightened by the λόγος (VI.7.5). But the lower is like a copy to an original, an original which is the realm of complete Being (VI.7.12). Beings in the lower world could not exist except by the activity of the Intellect (the νοῦς). This activity wanders down and produces thing after thing, but it is a stationary "wandering always within 'The Meadow of Truth' from which it does not stray" (VI.7.13). This primal Life, this Life above all other life, that "is darkness, petty and dim and poor," is a Life which we long "to be of." To describe this higher life, Plotinus uses the image of a sphere. He says, "It might be likened to a living sphere teeming with variety, to a globe of faces radiant with faces all living, to a unity of souls, all pure souls, not the faulty but the perfect, with Intellect enthroned over all so that the entire place glows with Intellectual splendour" (VI.7.15). However, even this description is one that sees it from without whereas the true way is to actually become the Intellect, to "be, our very selves, what we are to see." But everything that is described here is within the realm of the Intellect.

To grasp the fullness of Plotinus' perspective one must focus on the One, on the Good. For at first, he says, "it was not Intellect looking upon the

30. J.M. Rist, "The One of Plotinus and the God of Aristotle," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27 (1973): 75–87.

Good, it was a looking void of Intellection." It simply is all things and knows this through its self-knowing which becomes the Intellect, an Intellect that is filled by its objects of vision, but seeing all by the light of the One "and bearing that light with it" (VI.7.16). And the Intellect itself becomes a light to the Soul as it "itself found its light in the One" (VI.7.17). An intense love develops in the lower hypostases, and in life, due to what they have received from above, "something quite apart from their own nature." Plotinus uses light as an image to describe this. He says that, "Material forms containing light incorporated in them need still a light apart from them that their own light may manifest, just so the beings of that sphere, all lightsome, need another and a lordlier light or even they would not be visible to themselves and beyond" (VI.7.21). Evil, in contrast to the Good, is away from this light. It is later and is found where there is no trace of the Good (VI.7.23). The light shines from the Good into the Intellect and, so by participation, into the Soul (VI.7.24).

Where does that leave the lower forms of being? Plotinus says that, "A thing is potentially that to which its nature looks," which is "obviously" what it lacks, and what it lacks is its good (VI.7.27). Then, as evil occurs where the darkness lies, "the greatest good must be there where all that is of Matter has disappeared" (VI.7.28). Now, all things were made beautiful by that which was before them and held its light, there "all it saw was beautiful and veritable" and "it grew in strength by being thus filled with the life of the True" and it enters into "conscious possession of what it has long been seeking" (VI.7.31). The One, as the source of beauty, "makes beautiful whatsoever springs from it" (VI.7.32) and, in reverse, purification has the goal of the Good. Thus, man seeks to be lifted and see and "the vision floods the eyes with light" so that he himself becomes "identical with that radiance whose Act is to engender" Intellect (VI.7.36). But, in all of this, the One "has no self-awareness, there is no need" (VI.7.41).

Pavel Florensky uses a mystical philosophical language strongly derived from Plotinus, but his language is often filtered through Christian Patristic writings, and also through the tradition of Russian Platonism that developed particularly in the nineteenth century. The close links between the two philosophers can be found most strongly expressed in Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, particularly the chapter called "The Light of the Truth."[31]

Florensky says that Reason is not the same thing as the rational mind. Reason is the mind, or intelligence, in man that comes from God and is able to see things integrally.[32] Florensky also says that "God thinks by *things*."[33] Like many Russian philosophers, Florensky is arguing here against rationality.

31. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 53–80.
32. Ibid., 5.
33. Ibid., 237.

Instead, he turns to faith. Quoting Tertullian ("That the Son of God died is credible because it is absurd; that, having been buried, he rose is certain because it is impossible"[34]), he says, "I believe despite the moans of the rational mind."[35] He also quotes St. Macarius the Great, that "The Truth itself stimulates man to seek the Truth" and then asserts that, "Truth rather than I is at the centre of philosophical seeking."[36] This Truth is something that is eternally remembered, or it is a value that is worthy of and capable of eternal remembrance.[37] "Believe in the Truth, put your hope in the Truth, love the Truth." He says that this is the voice of the Truth itself, constantly resounding in the philosopher's soul.[38] Where does this Truth come from? Truth, for Florensky, is possible only through man's deification, through the acquisition of love as the Divine Essence. Truth is knowledge, it is beauty and it is love. "Truth, Good and Beauty" are, for Florensky, a metaphysical triad that is not three principles, but one principle, for "manifested truth is love; realized truth is beauty."[39] For Florensky, then, purification is key. He says that those who are not yet pure, who are thinglike, fleshly, these are capable of falling into "desire," whereas the pure who have detached themselves from "thingness" are capable of achieving the "identification of love."[40] Man's spiritual life, his process of "likening to God," is beauty.[41] Then, "Light is the Truth, and this Truth unfailingly manifests itself," and the mode of transmission of this Truth to another person is love. Florensky quotes Gregory of Nyssa and says that "love follows from the knowledge of God with the same necessity as light radiates from a lamp or nocturnal fragrance emanates from the open calyx of a flower: 'knowledge becomes love.'"[42] Thus, the saint sees in his heart the "spiritual light," which Florensky describes in Christian terms as the "light of Tabor." Of course, Tabor is the mountain where Christ was transfigured. Florensky describes this light as follows: "It is perfect beauty as the synthesis of absolute concrete givenness and absolute reasonable justifiedness. Spiritual light is the light of the Trihypostatic Divinity itself, the Divine essence, which is not only given, but also self-given…. Spiritual light is the light whose seeing constitutes the contemplation of God and therefore our salvation, the salvation of us who cannot be without God."[43] So, for Florensky, God, the

34. Ibid., 452.
35. Ibid., 46.
36. Ibid., 51.
37. Ibid., 17.
38. Ibid., 54.
39. Ibid., 56.
40. Ibid., 59.
41. Ibid., 62.
42. Ibid., 65.
43. Ibid., 70.

Divine Essence, or the One, is closely associated with light and, "Only One abides, only in him are constancy, life and peace."[44]

Florensky quotes Plotinus (I.6.1) to justify his view that light is the beautiful in itself, that it is beautiful apart from all divisions. He says that St. Basil the Great uses this idea from Plotinus to link beauty and light. Florensky says that, "beauty is light and light is beauty. Absolute light is the absolutely beautiful. It is Love itself in its perfection, and this Love makes every person spiritually beautiful." He says that, contemplative knowledge is *philokalia*, love of beauty and asceticism produces not a 'good' or 'kind' man but a beautiful one. He says that, saintly ascetics possess spiritual beauty[45] and the light of Divine knowledge is the possession of a purified person and a great ineffable light shines for one who comes into contact with the ascetic.[46] Florensky feels able to say that, "The light shining from St. Seraphim (1759–1832) is perhaps the most powerful light that has ever shined in Russia."[47]

Returning again to Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, Florensky questions whether they had "the same vision of the light" as the Christian mystics?[48] His answer is that, "it is indisputable that they too saw some sort of light, that they too knew the bliss of their vision. Yes, they saw, and knew bliss. It is even possible that they saw the light of Divinity," though because they saw it outside of Christ, and the Christian Trinity, what they saw was not the "absolute vision."[49] But, Florensky adds that, "Paganism cannot be viewed as a phenomenon that is completely unrelated to true faith. It is not an indifferent phenomenon: it is not areligious and aspiritual; rather it is pseudoreligious and pseudospiritual."[50]

Later, Florensky again attacks rationality. He says that Divine thinking is antinomic, in the manner of Heraclitus,[51] and that this leaves an opening for faith, "which does not fit into the plane of rationality."[52] To illustrate this, Florensky quotes from Homer's *Odyssey* (XI, 601–27),[53] where Hercules' soul has a dual existence, in hell and on Mount Olympus. Interestingly, Plotinus too discusses this passage (in I.1.12) and says that Hercules "is in Hades and that he dwells among the gods." Florensky quotes also from Plotinus (IV.4.16), and says that, when the soul "has freed itself from its body by means

44. Ibid., 12.
45. Ibid., 72.
46. Ibid., 73.
47. Ibid., 74.
48. Ibid., 77–78.
49. Ibid., 78.
50. Ibid., 478–79.
51. Ibid., 115.
52. Ibid., 186.
53. Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. A.T. Murray (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1919), 444–47.

of philosophy, then only the shade goes to the worse place, whereas it itself remains in the suprasensuous world." Then, "shade is attached to the soul" during its earthly life, whereas it itself has "light shining in it" and "turns wholly to the suprasensuous world."[54] Here, Florensky aligns himself with Plotinus' view that alongside the lower man there is a higher one.

Florensky's terminology is very often the terminology of Plotinus, particularly those in the texts quoted above (I.6 and VI.7). The terms Beauty; Truth; the Light; the Good and the One are used by both philosophers and Florensky's interpretation of those terms is often close to Plotinus, though he writes always with a deeply Christian, indeed Russian Orthodox Christian, influence. It is worthwhile looking at each of these terms in turn and comparing their uses in each philosopher's thought.

Beauty: For Plotinus, Beauty is the conquest of darkness through the pouring in of Light (I.6.3) and, then, essential Beauty moves within the realm of Truth (I.6.5). Beauty comes to the world by participation in Divine Thought (I.6.2). In Florensky, Reason is the intellect in man that comes from God.[55] Through purification,[56] and the deification of man,[57] Beauty and Light are then the Truth of Divine Thought. The saint, particularly the ascetic saint, is one who achieves this goal of deification and becomes one who has perfect beauty.[58] In Florensky's conception, Beauty, Truth and the Good are a single principle.[59] These latter views are certainly consistent with those of Plotinus.

Truth: For Plotinus, essential Beauty moves within the realm of Truth (I.6.5). The pure man is he who is alike to God (I.6.7) and who is therefore in Truth. Plotinus likens this man to a sphere of faces radiant and all living, a sphere that glows with intellectual splendour (VI.7.24). This image is particularly important for the discussion of Florensky's views on Russian icons (see below). Truth, for Florensky, also happens through man's deification[60] and, as in Plotinus, the key to Truth is purification.[61] In purification, Beauty (and Light) is the Truth.[62]

Light: For Plotinus, Beauty is the conquest of darkness through the pouring in of Light (I.6.3). This Light shines from the Good, but the Light shines from the Intellect through the Soul (VI.7.24). Evil, for Plotinus, is where there is no Light (VI.7.23), an idea that is very important for Florensky's views on

54. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 521.
55. Ibid., 5.
56. Ibid., 59.
57. Ibid., 56.
58. Ibid., 70.
59. Ibid., 56.
60. Ibid., 56.
61. Ibid., 59.
62. Ibid., 65.

Russian icons. Florensky says that, in purification, Light is the Truth[63] and the saint sees the spiritual Light that is perfect Beauty.[64] Florensky derives this directly from Plotinus, whom he quotes as saying that Light is beautiful in itself.[65] Florensky asserts that Plotinus, and the other Neoplatonists, saw the Light and knew the bliss of their vision. He argues, therefore, that paganism is not completely unrelated to faith.[66]

The Good and the One: The Good and the One are synonymous in Plotinus as the names of the supreme hypostasis. The Light shines from the Good (VI.7.5) and, in the reverse direction, purity is likeness to God and has the goal of the Good (I.6.7). The One, or the Good, makes beautiful whatsoever springs from it (VI.7.32). Plotinus refers to the One in terms of Light in quite a number of quotations (IV.5.7.41-42; V.5.7.16-21 & 31-35; VI.4.9.25-27; VI.7.22.34-6; VI.7.31.1-4; VI.7.41.1-7)[67] Florensky asserts that, "only One abides, only in him are constancy, life and peace."[68] Then, Florensky argues that Beauty, Truth and the Good are a single principle.[69] The One, or God, is also closely associated with Light.[70] Again, Florensky's conception is consistent with that of Plotinus.

But, despite these links, Florensky says that paganism "is a distorted reflection of faith" and it was reason that "distorted spiritual reality like a crooked mirror."[71] "Nevertheless, knowing of the spiritual world from Scripture and the Patristic writings, an investigator can become convinced that each of the aspects of true faith is also present in paganism, although distorted almost beyond recognition."[72] Here, Florensky is involved in a process of reconciling "pagan" views, like those of Plotinus, with his strongly held Christian beliefs, and the result is Florensky's own Platonist philosophy. Thus, although deeply imbued with Plotinus' views, Florensky turns to the Patristic Fathers[73] and to holy icons[74] in order to find the fullness of Truth.

To follow Florensky's use of Plotinus in his philosophy would involve a thorough investigation of Plotinus' influence on the extensive works of the

63. Ibid., 65.
64. Ibid., 70.
65. Ibid., 72.
66. Ibid., 77–78.
67. L.P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 340–43.
68. Florensky, *Pillar and Ground*, 12.
69. Ibid., 56.
70. Ibid., 70.
71. Ibid., 479.
72. Ibid., 479.
73. Ibid., 43–44; 46; 83–86; 101–02; 208.
74. Florensky, *Iconostasis*.

Patristic Fathers, a task beyond the scope of this article. But, on holy icons, Florensky says that, "the icon is executed on light" and "every iconic image appears always in a sea of golden grace, ceaselessly awash in the waves of divine light, in the heart of this light 'we live, and move, and have our being': it is the space of true reality."[75] Florensky says that "The icon-painter never enters into an affair with darkness and so he never creates a shadow in an icon."[76] He adds that, "high spiritual attainment transforms the fact into a lightbearing countenance by driving away all darkness."[77] To explain this, Florensky quotes St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, that Christians should "be not conformed to this world"[78] but rather to "be transfigured" "whence shines forth one's true countenance, one's holy face."[79] The icons are the holy saints bearing "witness to the invisible"[80] and "the iconostasis is a boundary between the visible and invisible worlds."[81] The iconostasis therefore acts somewhat as Plotinus' "globe of faces radiant with faces all living" that "glows with Intellectual splendour" (VI.7.15). Florensky says that, "the iconostasis opens windows" to the Divine: to "destroy icons" means "to block up the windows."[82] Thus, Florensky says, in his most famous quotation, that "the most persuasive philosophic proof of God's existence is one the textbooks never mention, the conclusion to which can best express the whole meaning. There exists the icon of the Holy Trinity by St. Andrei Rublev: therefore God exists."[83] These views can be seen as an application, in Christian terms, of those derived from Plotinus and explicated in the earlier part of this article.

This article shows that many themes from Plotinus occur in Florensky's thought and that Florensky actually quotes from the *Enneads* in a number of important places and justifies some of his most important positions on the basis of Plotinus' philosophy. However, as a committed Russian Orthodox Christian, Florensky always steps back from what he termed pagan philosophy. At key moments, he therefore turns to the Patristic Fathers and to Hesychasm to give the fullest Christian justification for his philosophy.

75. Ibid., 136–37.
76. Ibid., 144.
77. Ibid., 56.
78. Ibid., 58.
79. Ibid., 59.
80. Ibid., 60.
81. Ibid., 62.
82. Ibid., 63.
83. Ibid., 68.

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