

The Reception of Florensky's Works in Russian and Soviet Scholarship

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One of the most interesting developments in recent Russian thought is the re-discovery of the works of Pavel Florensky (1885-1937) from the beginning of the twentieth century, which were almost completely forgotten in the Communist period. There was one important exception – carefully censored versions of Florensky's writings were published in the late 1960s. The full publication of Florensky's works, however, started only after the late 1980s and the fall of Communism.

The present paper attempts to trace the development in the perception of Florensky in Russian and Soviet scholarship. It is suggested that this development illustrates important aspects of Russian intellectual history. While in 1920s and 30s Florensky was remembered by Russian emigres mainly as a religious philosopher (Section I of this paper), this aspect of his work was suppressed in 1960s. To Soviet scholars Florensky was presented as a thinker with interesting, frequently unorthodox ideas in more politically neutral fields as art history and the history of science (Section II). After 1989 there has been a return of interest in the religious dimensions of Florensky's thought and it is mainly in this context that Florensky has been popularized in the West (Section III).

It seems that so far Florensky has been considered in a highly politicized context and his works have been studied selectively and in view of reigning ideologies. Thus, a study of the perception of Florensky's writings is useful in a project that seeks to illustrate how ideologies use, and even distort, intellectual products for their own aims. In Section IV I try to illustrate a recent line of thought which attempts to see Florensky outside political and ideological frameworks by suggesting a romantic background to his understanding of the symbol.

Father Pavel: Florensky and the Russian Emigres

In 1922, following a decree signed by Lenin and Trotsky, several hundred Russian intellectuals, who were considered as representatives of bourgeois culture, were exiled from the newly formed Soviet Union. Among them, were close friends and colleagues of Florensky. All connections between those who left and those who stayed were severed. The case of the Bakhtin brothers is telling of the isolation but also of the strange channels of information. While Mikhail Bakhtin, the great scholar, remained in the Soviet Union, his brother left for Britain where eventually he got a lectureship at the University of Cambridge. One day in a second-hand bookshop in Paris he came across a book by Mikhail which was the only sign he got from Mikhail and his academic career.

It seems that, on the whole, little information filtered through to the Russian exiles of their native land in those years. To many of the intellectuals, Florensky's name was familiar, to some he became a symbol of Russia and Russian spirituality. The memory of Florensky the scholar was, however, incomplete for the simple reason that only his early works, i.e. prior to 1922, were known. At that time Florensky's reputation rested mainly on his *The Pillar and Ground of Truth* (1914). Even though the huge intellectual scope of the work was perceived by all the book was regarded mainly as a theological treatise. And this is what it was – a theological treatise in its overall intent which, however, overstepped the expected framework of the genre and thus included subjects as concepts of infinity from physics, a mathematical theorem by Louis Carroll, etc. This is the work that Florensky was remembered for by Russian intellectuals living in Paris, Prague, Berlin, etc. In these circles, the view of Florensky as primarily a theologian and religious philosopher was firmly established. This is important since Florensky was very much in the background of future developments such as the “Paris theology”, associated with St. Sergius Institute in Paris and later with the still active St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York.

Sergei Bulgakov suggested this idea as early as 1943 in his moving account of Florensky, written in response to the news of Florensky's execution in Solovki.¹ “Из всех моих современников ... он есть величайший”², Bulgakov, a personal friend and associate says. Tellingly, in this much cited essay, Bulgakov constantly refers to Florensky as “Father Pavel” to emphasize Florensky's

¹ Florensky had actually been executed in 1937 but his family was told much later.

² Булгаков, С., “Священник О. Павел Флоренский” in Флоренский П., *У водоразделов мысли*, (Paris, 1985), p.7

role as a priest. From 1918 began Florensky's "священническая неприютность"³, though Bolshevik Moscow remembered him giving his lectures in his cassock and cross.⁴ After the closure of the Theological Academy in Moscow Bulgakov and Florensky discussed the possibility of founding a religious-philosophical academy. In all probability, "the transformed and broader programme"⁵ of this unrealized project represents a shift from a more strictly theological faculty to a faculty of religious philosophy – in other words, a shift towards Florensky's own work and mental attitude. It is in this project that Berdyaev finds the intellectual source of the work done by him and his associates in Paris. Thus, "Paris theology" was literally inspired by Florensky and one of its main representatives Berdyaev felt that it was conducted under Florensky's "духовное с нами как бы соучастие".⁶

Others of the Russian exiles who achieved notoriety in West, too, paid their tribute to Florensky. Once again, as with Berdyaev, Florensky was seen in the context of Russian religious philosophy. Nikolay Lossky, who left the Soviet Union in 1922 and was a professor of philosophy at the St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York since 1942, illustrates the impact that the *Pillar and Ground of Truth* had at time of its publication. The copy that the author sent to Lossky "furthered my [Lossky's] gradual return to the Church".⁷ Nicolas Zernov, a Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Culture at Oxford University, calls the *Pillar and the Ground of Truth* "an epoch-making book"⁸, which "revolutionized religious thinking".⁹

"The Russian Leonardo": Florensky's Soviet Period

³ p.12

⁴ *op.cit.*

⁵ p.15, my translation

⁶ *op.cit.*

⁷ Lossky, N., *History of Russian Philosophy*, (London, 1952), p.177

⁸ Zernov, N., *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1963), p.101

⁹ *op.cit.*, p.102

Florensky's associates from his early period were well aware of his "truly encyclopaedic mind"¹⁰ and the extraordinary range of his interests. An article by V. Filinsky entitled "A Russian Leonardo da Vinci in a Concentration Camp" cited an impressive list of Florensky's achievements as a philosopher, a symbolist poet, a mathematician and physicist, a polyglot, etc. Filinsky expresses the reaction of his contemporaries when he says: "A new Leonardo da Vinci was standing before us and we all were aware of it".¹¹

However, most of Florensky's works in fields outside religious philosophy became known only after 1922. In this sense, what Berdyaev says is characteristic of the state of knowledge on Florensky among Russian emigres. Berdyaev, too, compares Florensky to Leonardo and admires his "всепожирающей пытливостью ума".¹² At the same time, he admits to not knowing what happened to Florensky's manuscripts in various fields of scholarship¹³. It also becomes clear that Berdyaev knew of the existence of these manuscripts but had not read them, as most of them were work in progress.

In the years after 1922, Florensky held various teaching and research positions, which allowed him to share his ideas with his colleagues and students. Some of his works from this period were published, while most were not and remained unfinished. After his second arrest in 1934 Florensky largely fell into obscurity. It was only in the 1960s that his work was rediscovered, mainly through a few publications in the remarkable journal *Trudy po znakovim sistemam*. It is noticeable that that in all these publications the interest was consciously shifted away from the more obviously religious subjects and onto more politically neutral fields as the history of art, semiotics, etc. This is how a completely different aspect of Florensky's work began to attract a more systematic attention.

¹⁰ *op.cit.*, p.101

¹¹ cited in Lossky, N., *History of Russian Philosophy*, (London, 1952), p.176

¹² Булгаков, С., "Священник О. Павел Флоренский" in Флоренский, П., *У водоразделов мысли*, (Paris, 1985), p.10

¹³ Florensky's texts were preserved by his family.

Among the greatest contributions to scholarship was the publication in 1967 of Florensky's essay "Reverse Perspective" (written in 1919)¹⁴, dealing with the construction of space in the medieval icon. To the present, this remains the classic text on the subject, which is in the background of almost all studies on the subject. These studies are mainly by Soviet scholars, all of whom were directly indebted to Florensky's text.¹⁵ In 1970 came out Lev Zhegin's book *Язык живописного произведения* which was partly concerned with providing visual analyses to Florensky's theoretical positions¹⁶. The book is the result of forty years of work, which started under the inspiration of Florensky, whom Zhegin personally knew.

Reading Zhegin's memoir of Florensky¹⁷ makes one realize the active involvement of the latter in one of the most vibrant moments of European modernism. The figure of Florensky in his usual white cassock leaning over and inspecting a modernist painting that Zhegin had brought to him remains memorable. We hear of Florensky attending artists' meetings and participating in their heated discussions. He was a regular visitor at the meetings that took place at L. S. Popov's (a Russian Cubist painter) home where he would have met artists like Tatlin. Florensky was also actively involved with the modern artists of the Makovetz group, who had asked him to contribute an article to the first issue of their journal.

It seems that it was people like Zhegin who knew Florensky in the years before his arrest and who had access to his published works in the 1960s who were best placed to perceive the full scope of Florensky's achievement.

Florensky in the First Years after the Fall of Communism

¹⁴ Флоренский, П., "Обратная перспектива", *Труды по знаковым системам*, Тарту, 1967, 3: 381-416. For an English translation see Florensky, P., *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art*, ed. N. Mislner, (London, 2002).

¹⁵ For a critical overview of Florensky's text and later studies in Russian on "reverse perspective" see my joint paper with Martin Kemp, "'Reverse Perspective': Historical Fallacies and an Alternative View" in Emmer, M., ed., *The Visual Mind*, vol.2, (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), pp. 399-433

¹⁶ There is still no English translation of Zhegin's work. I thank Prof. Boris Uspensky for bringing to my attention the existence of a German translation, which makes the book more accessible to the Western public. For an overview of Zhegin position see my joint paper with Martin Kemp, "'Reverse Perspective': Historical Fallacies and an Alternative View" in Emmer, M., ed., *The Visual Mind*, vol.2, (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), pp. 405-416

¹⁷ Жегин, Л., "Возпоминания о П. А. Флоренском" in Исупов, К., *П. А. Флоренский: Pro et Contra*, (Санкт-Петербург, 1996), pp.162-173

It was only after the opening of the KGB files in 1989 that the truth about Florensky's death became known.¹⁸ While little known in the West, Florensky became a household name in the Russian-speaking world in the post-Communist era. He has been seen largely as a martyr, one of the many victims of Stalin's *chistki* but more specifically a martyr who had suffered in the name of Orthodoxy. As a result, Florensky and his works were increasingly interpreted in the context of the revived religiosity of post-Communist Russia. Therefore, the renewed interest in Florensky focused increasingly on his theology-related material. In this sense, a full circle could be traced to themes that were prominent with the Russian emigres (see the first section of this paper). The difference is that more recent scholars were aware of Florensky's later period and this is why their views are usually more comprehensive. There is a tendency to place Florensky's studies in various fields of knowledge within the overall framework of Florensky's Christian Orthodox worldview. This tendency, I believe, keeps close to the spirit of Florensky's work. At the same time, when taken too far it can obscure the very interesting and rich dimensions of Florensky's texts growing out of his inbeddedness in the development of ideas specific to late nineteenth and early twentieth century thought.

Viktor Bychkov is among those who have done the most to further Florensky studies. His book on Florensky is representative of the tendency in the first years after 1989 mentioned above. The title is revealing – *The Aesthetic Face of Being. Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*.¹⁹ The book is concerned mainly with those texts by Florensky which are devoted to subjects that belong to the realm of art history and aesthetics. At the same time, the only way to understand Florensky's views is to place them within the broader context of religious belief. We cannot know Florensky's aesthetics without knowing Florensky's theology – this is one of Bychkov's main claims, which brings us to the problem of the definition of “aesthetics” in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Bychkov tackles this problem in two earlier works – *Byzantine Aesthetics* and *Russian Medieval Aesthetics* (both available only in Russian). His book on Florensky could be read as the last of this trilogy, since Florensky is seen as the last important representative in a long line of Eastern Orthodox thought on art, which has its roots in Late Antiquity with authors like Philo of Alexandria.

¹⁸ It is only in publications after this year that the correct date of Florensky's death is given.

¹⁹ Bychkov, V., *The Aesthetic Face of Being. Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*, Crestwood, (New York, 1993, first in Russian in 1990)

One idea that comes forcibly across in Bychkov's studies is that Eastern Orthodox aesthetics is fundamentally different from Western aesthetics in that it is non-systematic, i.e. the systematic categories of Western, Kantian aesthetics are inadequate to describe it. Eastern Orthodox aesthetics is intimately and inextricably bound to the culture and most of all to the religion at the period. As Bychkov says: "Aesthetics in Orthodoxy does not have the status of an independent discipline. Its subject is virtually indistinguishable from the subject of theology".²⁰ If this is so, one wonders to what an extent the term "aesthetics" is appropriate since it presupposes an independent field of inquiry that obeys its own rules. For the time being we seem to be stuck with this term for lack of a better one but the inverted commas should signal the problem of definition.

What becomes clear is that Eastern Orthodox "aesthetics" understood in this fashion claims a much wider scope than the familiar field of aesthetics. The interest of Bychkov in Florensky is exactly because Florensky's works express this tendency so strongly. When Florensky comes back to the subject of the ancient Russian icon in various of his works – in "Reverse Perspective", in the *Iconostasis*, etc. – he does so from a much wider perspective than an interest in a particular art form. The icon becomes an emblem of Eastern Orthodoxy, a connection between the immanent and the transcendent and as such a symbol in a specific sense of the word. According to Bychkov, Florensky's ideas on this are "not traditional for the new European artistic consciousness" and reveal a typically "Orthodox world sense".²¹ Is this so?

Recent Tendencies in Florensky Studies: Florensky on the Symbol

It is possible to claim that a number of recent studies on Florensky in Russian show for the first time an appreciation of the great Russian author's work which is comparatively devoid of political or ideological motivation. I believe that these studies unveil a major reason for the attraction that Florensky has exercised over most of those, familiar with his work. Florensky is very probably the only Russian thinker of the period, who was deeply steeped both in the rich Orthodox tradition and in modernist developments of the Russian and European avant-garde at

²⁰ *op.cit.*, p.26

²¹ *op.cit.*, p.57

the beginning of the twentieth century.²² The result was frequently startlingly original and illuminating insights on problems of modernity.

In this section, I will suggest that Florensky's understanding of the symbol was indebted to two sources – Orthodox thinking on the subject and particularly the Byzantine theology of the image and romantic theories of the symbol. The first source is the more obvious one, so far as Florensky's belonging to the Orthodox tradition has been stressed by many authors (see the first and the third section of this paper). The latter source has not been remarked so far and it will be the subject of the foregoing text. I believe it is important in the context of the revival of interest in romantic theories during the *fin-de-siecle*, which is especially important in the case of Russian developments at the time and particularly Symbolism with which Florensky was intimately involved.²³

The problem of the symbol was of long-standing interest for Florensky. In the 1920s he embarked on the 'Symbolarium' project, which was meant to develop into a dictionary of symbols. Unfortunately, no more than a first issue was accomplished²⁴. However, we come across Florensky's understanding of the symbol over and over again, scattered throughout his works. Florensky's writings on the image as symbol are probably among the most difficult in his works. This is partly due to the fact that they rely on the reader's knowledge of the theoretical background, while quite typically, Florensky spends little time in referring to his sources. It has been pointed that in the *Iconostasis* Florensky constantly 'hesitates' and 'contradicts himself'²⁵. It should be born in mind that this particular work by Florensky remained unfinished and if there are contradictions, they are partly the natural result of the fragmentary character of the text. I

²² On Florensky and developments in psycho-analysis see Михайлов, А., "О. Павел Флоренский как философ границы", *Вопросы искусствознания*, т.4, 1994; on Florensky and phenomenology see Филоленко, А., "Конкретная метафизика Павла Флоренского: Возвращение к подлинному" в Флоренский, П., *Христианство и культура*, (Москва, 2001)

²³ On Florensky's relations with the symbolists see Иванова, Е., *Языки славянской культуры*, (Москва 2004)

²⁴ See Nekrasova, E., "Neosushtestvennii zamisel 1920-h godov sozdania 'Symbolariu (Slovaria simbolov) i ego pervii vipusk "Tochka"" в *Pamiatniki kulturi. Novie otkritia*, (St. Petersburg, 1994), pp.99-115. The text of the first issue is pp.100-115.

²⁵ Михайлов, А., "О. Павел Флоренский как философ границы", *Вопросы искусствознания*, т.4, 1994, p.48, the translation is mine.

believe, however, that some of the most difficult points would be explained away if we follow Florensky's argumentation on the background of its intellectual sources.

The symbol being one of the most allusive cultural categories, the Russian author takes care to specify which of its uses he was adhering to. A main concern of Florensky, in the *Iconostasis* and other writings, has been to distance himself from certain interpretations of the symbol, which tend to sever the connection between prototype and image or, to use Saussurian terminology, between the signifier and the signified. Florensky distinguishes between 'two thresholds of receptivity' of the symbol – an 'upper' one, at which the symbol preserves some identity with the prototype, as in its ancient usage and the 'lower', at which the ontological connection between the two entities has been broken, as in modern times. Florensky's own understanding of the symbol apparently belongs to the former, 'upper threshold'.

I suggest that Florensky's distinction between upper and lower threshold of receptivity of the symbol bears a close affinity, and is very probably modelled on, the romantic opposition between symbol and allegory. Without mentioning the romantic source of the distinction, Florensky contrasts the 'allegorized symbol' to 'true symbols' (*nastoiashchie simvoli*)²⁶. Russian art from the end of the sixteenth century is said to exhibit 'the spirit of allegory', while earlier art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is symbolic. To grasp fully Florensky's meaning we have to go back to the romantic opposition between symbol and allegory.

The first writer to draw the opposition between symbol and allegory is the art historian Heinrich Meyer (1760-1832) in his essay *Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst* (On the Objects of the Plastic Arts) (1797). In his notes for the edition of Winckelmann's *Werke* Meyer gives the following definition of the symbol-allegory pair: "Symbolic representation is the general concept itself, rendered perceptible; allegorical representation signifies only a general concept different from itself".²⁷ In other words, the organic link between allegory and what it represents is severed, as in Florensky's "lower threshold of receptivity", while it is preserved with the symbol, at the

²⁶ Флоренский, П., "Иконостас" в Флоренский, П., *Христианство и культура*, ред. А. Filolenko, (Москва, 2001), pp.560-1; the English translation in P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996), p.85

²⁷ Cited in Todorov, T., *Theories of the Symbol*, (Oxford, 1982, first in French in 1977), p.214

“upper threshold”. In another text, Meyer elaborates on the function of symbolic visual representation of “divinities”, in which “figurative art ... forces ideas and concepts themselves to make their appearance in a perceptible way, it requires them to enter into space, to take shape and present themselves to the eye”.²⁸

In his lectures on the *Philosophy of Art* of 1802-1803, Schelling goes back to this definition of the symbol. He makes clearer that one of the fundamental characteristics of the symbol is the fusion of the general, i.e. ideas and concepts and the particular, i.e. the appearance of ideas and concepts ‘in a perceptible way’, as Meyer had put it. Thus, “a picture is symbolic”, according to Schelling, “whose object not only signifies or means the idea but is *itself the idea*”.²⁹ Throughout his passages, dealing with the symbol Schelling tirelessly insists on the unity of general and particular, understood in the sense here, i.e. the symbol in its particular representation of a general notion is, at the same time, that notion.

Florensky’s examples, I think, belong exactly to this romantic strand of thought. Let us consider the following passages: ‘Now I look at an icon and I say to myself: “Behold, this is She – not her picture but She Herself, contemplated by means of, with the aid of, iconographic art. As through a window, I see the Mother of God”’³⁰ and the paragraph, concerning Egyptian funerary art, which Florensky believes to be an antecedent to the icon. Referring to the so-called Fayum portraits of the dead from Roman Egypt, Florensky says that they were the objects of elaborate devotional practices, based on the belief that the deceased was present in his portrait. The relative or friend of the dead would say “This *is* my father, brother, friend” (the italics are mine), and not “This is the paint on my father’s face” or “That’s the mask of my friend”.³¹

²⁸ *op.cit.*, p.213

²⁹ Schelling, F., *Philosophy of Art*, (Minneapolis, 1989, first in German in 1859), p.151

³⁰ Флоренский, П., “Иконостас“ в Флоренский, П., *Христианство и культура*, ред. А. Filolenko, (Москва, 2001), с..548. The English translation here is from Bychkov, V., *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*, (Crestwood, New York, 1993), p. 80, which I find better than the translation in Florensky, P., *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996), p.69

³¹ *op.cit.*, p.625; the translation is mine; the English translation in Florensky, P., *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996) is on p.164

The identity that Florensky claims between prototype and image clearly takes us back to the Late Antique understanding of the image, as worked out by pagan and Christian Neoplatonists.³² The ancient roots of this definition of the symbol are well realized by the romantics themselves and are repeatedly acknowledged especially in their writings on mythology. For Schelling, the right approach to mythology starts from the realization that it is “universal symbolism or universal representation of ideas as real”.³³ In this sense, “in allegory the particular merely *means* or *signifies* the universal; in mythology it itself *is* simultaneously also the universal”.³⁴ This is why we must not say, for example, that “Jupiter or Minerva *means* or *signifies* this or is supposed to signify it ... They do not *signify* it, they *are* it themselves”.³⁵ In the same fashion, an icon of the Mother of God, as in Florensky’s example, does not merely signify its prototype but is, in the sense here, the Mother of God.

The symbol, therefore, by displaying an ontological identity between prototype and image opposes a tendency, evident with the allegory, which disconnects the link between the two entities. It is this view that underlies Florensky’s view of symbolism. As the Russian writer says: “I acquired the basic thought of my worldview: that what is named in name, what is symbolised in the symbol, the reality of what is pictured in the picture, is indeed present, and therefore the symbol *is* symbolised”.³⁶

To discover the function that the symbol plays in Florensky’s worldview entails going to the theme of the boundary. Florensky discusses specifically dreams and mental (and by implication, artistic) images as belonging to the boundary zone between the two worlds. The Russian word that Florensky uses for mental image is “lik”, which can be translated as “countenance” and is used in contrast to “litso”, which means literally “face”. The distinction is quite important in the course of the discussion, even though it is difficult to express in English. The “lik”, on the other

³² On the Late Antique origins of image theory see Barasch, M., *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*, (New York and London, 1992)

³³ Schelling, F., *Philosophy of Art*, (Minneapolis, 1989, first in German in 1859), p.17.

³⁴ *op.cit.*, p.47

³⁵ *op.cit.*, p.42

³⁶ Флоренский, П., “Иконостас“ в Флоренский, П., *Христианство и культура*, ред. А. Filolenko, (Москва, 2001), с.625; Florensky, P., *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York: St.Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000, first in 1996), p.164.

hand, is “an ontological *gift* of God”³⁷, it is an expression of “the possibility that God’s image ... be embodied in life, in the personality and thus to present it through the ‘litzo’”³⁸. The authentic icon is symbolic in the sense that it is a “litzo”, which reveals the “lik”. The most important for our purposes is that both dreams and mental (and, by implication, as long as they are authentic, artistic) images, understood in the just mentioned fashion, are symbols. What is said about dreams is valid about images in general – in them “*both* shores of existence are given to the consciousness’ ‘simultaneously but with differing orders of clarity’”³⁹. The iconic images become “*the visible witnesses of the invisible world*”⁴⁰, they “dwell simultaneously in two worlds, combining within themselves the life here and the life there”⁴¹.

The boundary is the area of being between the two worlds – it touches both of them and, at the same time, coincides with neither. That is, the boundary is something else, different from the other two, but having something in common with both of them. The symbol belongs to the boundary and, in this sense, it is the link between the two worlds and it possesses characteristics of both the transcendent and the immanent worlds. Exactly this idea comes across in the following definition by Florensky:

A being that is greater than itself – this is the basic definition of the symbol. A symbol is something that manifests in itself that which is not itself, that which is greater than itself and is nevertheless manifested through itself ... a symbol is an essence energy of which is joined, or, more precisely, commingled, with the energy of another essence, more worthy in a given respect, and which thereby carries this other essence in itself.⁴²

The iconic image possesses the characteristics of the symbol, understood in the sense here. Its essence is to make present and accessible to the senses (a characteristic of this world) of what is, on principle, invisible and only spirit (a characteristic of the otherworldly). The authentic icon, which fulfils its purpose, incorporates both these moments, as in Florensky’s example of the

³⁷ *op.cit.*, p.535; the translation is mine; there is nothing to suggest in the Russian text the strange phrase ‘ontologically actual’ in the English translation in P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996), p.51.

³⁸ *op.cit.*; the translation is mine.

³⁹ *op.cit.*, pp.529-530; P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996), p.43

⁴⁰ *op.cit.*, 542; P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996), p.60

⁴¹ *op.cit.*, p.542; P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996), p.62.

image of the Mother of God, which is ‘not Her picture, but She Herself’. At the same time, the icon “on its own” – i.e. apart from the spiritual vision – ‘is neither an image nor an icon, but a wooden board’.⁴³ That is, the iconic and the symbolic of the image are in its connection to the prototype. Florensky illustrates this notion in a clear and straight-forward way. The window on its own is no more than “wood and glass”, but once we are able to see the light through it then it becomes “that very light itself” and is not just “like’ the light”.⁴⁴ In the same way, we have to understand the other example about the friend or relative, looking at the portrait of the deceased and saying: “This is my father, brother, friend”. Thus, Florensky’s understanding of the symbol organically belongs to the Late Antique and later Eastern Orthodox tradition, which stresses the fact of the simultaneous existence of both, from the point of view of reason, contradictory aspects of the icon. At the same time, this view of the symbol is very pronounced with some romantic philosophers, who in turn were extremely influential in the formation of Symbolist theories in Russia and Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The present paper has been concerned with tracing a development in Florensky scholarship done in Russian from the 1920s, by Florensky’s own contemporaries to the present. Until recently, it has been suggested, that an ideological and political framework has been imposed on studies devoted to the great Russian thinker and as a result, one or another aspect of his work has been illuminated frequently at the expense of other equally important ones. It is only recently that attempts have been made for an impartial scholarly approach to the work of Florensky. In bringing attention to the romantic background of Florensky’s views on the symbol I have attempted to keep close in spirit to this approach.

⁴² P. Florensky, “Имелавие как философская предпосылка“ в Флоренский, П., *Христианство и культура*, ред. А. Filolenko, (Москва, 2001), с.270. The English translation is from Bychkov, V., *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1993), p.70

⁴³ Флоренский, П., *Христианство и культура*, ред. А. Filolenko, (Москва, 2001), с.545; the translation is mine; the English translation in P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996) is on p.65.

⁴⁴ *op.cit.*; the translation is mine; the English translation in Florensky, P., *Iconostasis*, (Crestwood, New York, 2000, first in 1996) is on p.65.