PAVEL FLORENSKY

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters

TRANSLATED BY *Boris Jakim*

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY *Richard F. Gustafson*

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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SOLELY from the point of view of book production the original Russian edition of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (published by *Put'*, Moscow, 1914) is one of the most unusual books of the century. In his introduction to the present volume, Richard Gustafson tells us that "in characteristic Symbolist fashion, Florensky stressed the aesthetic character of his . . . book. He carefully chose the illustrations, created a special typeface for it, and oversaw its production." Two typeface sizes (the smaller size for "less significant" material), illustrations ("vignettes") from Ambodicus preceding each chapter, hundreds of pages of end notes (foreshadowing Nabokov's *Pale Fire*), some of which are of essay length, numerous addenda in addition to the end notes, copious Greek and some Hebrew, etymological digressions, symbolic logic and mathematical equations, various kinds of tables, and a "sophianic" sky-blue cover—are some of the distinctive features of this work.

In this English translation an attempt has been made to reproduce as many of these features as possible. There are divergences, however, between the original book and the present volume. Production constraints have made it necessary to transliterate most of the Greek and all the Hebrew. Some of Florensky's Greek seems to have had only a decorative purpose, and has been omitted. As is typical of Russian prose, there is much use of italics in the original; in this translation, I have kept only such italics as seemed absolutely essential. The different typeface sizes are indicated by indented type. The translator's notes, indicated in the text by lowercase superscript letters and given at the foot of each page, emphasize topics and figures from Eastern Orthodoxy, Russian religious thought, and Russian culture.

I AM grateful to Father Robert Slesinksi, the Reverend Mark Everitt, Laury Magnus, and Richard Gustafson for checking various parts of the manuscript. Allen Mandelbaum has provided encouragement in the course of this long project. Constantin Andronikof's excellent French translation of this work (*Le colonne et le fondement de la verité* [Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1975]) has served to confirm (or to veto) some of my guesses concerning Florensky's more obscure and abstruse verbal formulations, and has proved invaluable in deciphering the many French names in the book. I also wish to acknowledge Asheleigh E. Moorhouse, whose translation of Chapter VI (see "On the Holy Spirit,"

in *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Alexander Schmemann [Crestwood, NY, 1977], pp. 137-72) alerted me to some inaccuracies in my own version. I wish to thank Igor Vesler for his computer assistance and Olga Jakim for help with the illustrations. I am also grateful to Richard Pevear for suggesting I send the manuscript to Princeton University Press, and to Robert Brown of Princeton University Press for valiantly shepherding this unusual work through the long acceptance and production processes.

Lines from *The Odyssey of Homer*, a new verse translation by Allen Mandelbaum (originally published by the University of California Press, 1990), are reprinted by permission of Bantam Books, a division of Bantam, Doubleday, Dell Publishing Group, Inc.

George L. Kline has graciously permitted me to quote passages from his translation of V. V. Zenkovsky's *A History of Russian Philosophy* (New York and London, 1953); his articles "Leontyev, Konstantin Vasiliyevich" and "Russian Philosophy" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967); and his paper "The Potential Contribution of Classical Russian Philosophy to the Building of a Humane Society in Russia Today" (presented at the Conference on Russian Thought and Culture, University of Oregon, May 2, 1994).

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION BY RICHARD F. GUSTAFSON

• • •

Russian religious thought is a unique modern expression of the Eastern Christian worldview. It came of age early in the twentieth century, in a period now referred to as the "Russian religious renaissance" and is known to the West mainly in the works of Nikolai Berdiaev and Leon Shestov. The roots of modern Russian religious philosophy can be traced to the nationalist debates about Russia and its world-historical cultural mission in the mid-nineteenth century. The Westernizers, following the lead of Peter the Great, argued that Russia's future lay in an alliance with the West. They were challenged by the Slavophiles, who claimed that Russia's unique social and religious experience not only shaped its past but destined its future. One of the early prominent Slavophile thinkers, Ivan Kireevsky (1806–1856), called for the creation of a modern Russian philosophy which would use as a "convenient point of departure" the then fashionable German idealist philosophy of Schelling and Hegel, but corrected by the "basic principles of ancient Russian culture."[1]

Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) took up Kireevsky's directive; his philosophy of "total unity" and his theology of Godmanhood are the culmination of this nineteenth-century Russian philosophical endeavor and the intellectual foundation on which the religious renaissance rested. As with Solovyov, this return to religious roots was a decided reaction against the prevailing positivism of the times and for some a movement "from Marxism to idealism." But this idealism tended to lose sight of Kireevsky's basic principles of ancient Russian culture. Father Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) regrounded the philosophical endeavor on these basic principles, and his unique book *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914) became a seminal work for the new Russian Orthodox philosophy.

Florensky, a polymath and renaissance man, was born in Azerbaijan and lived most of his early years in Tbilisi, Georgia. He claimed that the mountainous Trans-Caucasian environment shaped his way of thinking. His mother was Armenian and his father Russian. From his mother's line he believed he inherited his artistic tendencies, while from his father, a railroad engineer descended from the clergy, both his scientific and religious interests.[2] In later years he imagined his childhood days as an

[1] James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, and Mary-Barbara Zeldin, eds., *Russian Philosophy* (Chicago, 1965), I, 213.

[2] Pavel Florensky, *Detiam moim, Vospominaniia proshlykh dnei* (Moscow, 1992), 413–415. Future references to this volume (identified as DM) will be given parenthetically in the text.

Edenic paradise now lost and asserted that "the child has absolutely precise metaphysical formulas for everything other-worldly, and the sharper his sense of Edenic life, the more defined is his knowledge of these formulas" (DM, 74). His memoirs record many moments of his "direct contemplation of Nature's countenance" (DM, 75) when he felt himself "face to face with the native, solitary, mysterious and infinite Eternity, from which everything flows and to which everything returns" (DM, 50). These childhood moments of "ecstasy" with their sense of "magic" gave him "an objective, noncentripetal perception of the world, a kind of inverse perspective" which allowed for a "penetration into the depth of things" (DM, 438–39). In school, however, Pavel turned from this childhood mysticism toward the sciences and their laws, a scholarly interest that he maintained throughout his life. "The mystery I kept within myself, the laws were proclaimed for myself and others" (DM, 190). The decisive moment came in the summer of 1899, when Florensky, reared in a home without religion, had a metaphysical dream of existential darkness and meaninglessness through which he heard or saw the name of God. When later he heard a voice call out his name, he became convinced of the "ontologicalness of the spiritual world" (DM, 215–16).

Florensky's adult life was shaped by this dichotomous lure of mystical intuition and the laws of science. In the fall of 1899 he entered Moscow University, where he studied mathematics with the noted mathematician N. V. Bugaev (1837–1903) and philosophy with S. N. Trubetskoi (1862–1905) and L. M. Lopatin (1855–1920). In 1904 he rejected a research fellowship for advanced work in mathematics to enroll in the Moscow Theological Academy, and in 1911 he was ordained to the priesthood. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* grew out of his candidate's thesis, "On Religious Truth" (1908) and his Master's dissertation, "On Spiritual Truth" (1912). Upon graduation Florensky joined the faculty, where he taught until the closing of the Academy after the revolution. In these years he also served as editor of the important *Bogoslovskii vestnik* (*Theological Herald*) and wrote numerous articles on mathematics and the philosophy of language, as well as theology, some of which remained unpublished.

After the revolution Florensky redirected his scholarly activity. He developed his interest in art history, wrote a book on the analysis of space in art and a seminal study on icons, and taught the theory of perspective at the State Higher Technical-Artistic Studios (VKHUTEMAS). He also pursued research in physics and electrical engineering, worked for the Commission for the Electrification of Soviet Russia, and served as an editor of the Soviet *Technical Encyclopedia*, to which he contributed many articles. In 1927 he invented a noncoagulating machine oil, which the Soviets called "dekanite" in commemoration of the Bolshevik Revolution. His book on dielectrics became a standard textbook. Throughout

this period he remained a priest and appeared at government offices in his cassock. Arrested briefly in 1928, Florensky managed to pursue his scholarly activities until 1933, when the Soviet government sentenced him to ten years of corrective labor in Siberia. At various camps he continued his scientific work and ministered to his fellow prisoners. On August 8, 1937, he was executed. Florensky was rehabilitated in 1956 and then was slowly rediscovered, first mainly as a philosopher of language and culture of interest to Soviet semiotics. In post-Communist Russia he has reemerged as a seminal philosopher and theologian and become a major symbolic figure in the back-to-roots movement.

Florensky must be seen first of all, however, as a man of his era. He arrived in Moscow in 1899 at age seventeen, in time to experience the growth and flowering of Russian Symbolism. He befriended Andrei Bely (1880–1934), the son of his mathematics professor N. V. Bugaev, and Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), a distinguished classics scholar, both of whom were important Symbolist poets and theoreticians. Florensky's first published review was of Bely's "Northern Symphonies," and Florensky himself published poems in the Symbolist Journal *Vesy* (*The Scales*). In his memoirs he claimed retrospectively, "I have always been a symbolist" (DM, 154).

Russian Symbolism, with its renewed concern with the significance of language and classical and medieval culture, its focus on intuitive knowledge, and its mystical apprehension of the divine root of reality couched in the language of Vladimir Solovyov, was seemingly made for Florensky, and his philosophical and theological work must be seen in the light of this important movement. With the Symbolists Florensky shares a "conception of the world and culture as a composition of symbols, turned both upward toward its original homeland and meaning and downward toward the fate of man in history."[3] Florensky's fundamental conception of truth is constructed according to the Symbolist model of reality where all phenomena are reflections, emanations, or manifestations of the noumena and we are to move, in Viacheslav Ivanov's programmatic phrase, *de realibus ad realiora*. Florensky's ornate, metaphorical, and lyrical writing style, which Berdiaev dismissed as "stylized archaism" and decadent Alexandrianism, is characteristic of much Symbolist procedure.[4] *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, which was conceived and written at the height of the movement, represents in style, structure, and worldview the most elaborated work of Russian Symbolist theology.

The Pillar and Ground of the Truth is constructed not as a philosophical treatise, but as a series of twelve letters addressed to an unidentified "brother," "friend," "elder," and "Guardian," who may be understood

[3] K. G. Isupov, "Zhitie i mirosozertsanie Pavla Florenskogo," in Pavel Florensky, *Opravdanie kosmosa* (St. Petersburg, 1994), p. 6.

[4] Nikolai Berdiaev, *Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii* (Paris, 1989), p. 544.

symbolically as Christ.[5] Poetic moments describing the narrator's present sense of separation from this "far, yet eternally near friend" are sprinkled throughout the text, thus identifying the narrator's spiritual mood, which is his constant awareness of "two worlds" and his desire to reach out from this world to experience or touch the other world. Argument often yields to emotion, and logic to lyricism. The basic assumption is that "the philosophical creation of truth is closest to artistic creation." The narrator's "I" is not an "abstract, colorless, impersonal 'consciousness in general,'" Florensky insisted at the defense of his Master's dissertation, but "concretely general, symbolically personal," a "*methodological* 'I'" in dialogue with its addressee. The method is "dialectical," understood as an "ever growing ball of threads of contemplation, a clot of penetrations, ever congealing, ever intruding into the essence of the subject studied . . . , an aggregate of the processes of thought which 'mutually reinforce and justify each other.'" Furthermore, the dialectical development of this concrete, living narrator's thought cannot be linear or "presented as a single-voiced *melody* of discoveries," but resembles more a "*fabric* or lace, whose threads are woven into varied and complex patterns."[6] Such a book, like any typical modernist text, cannot be read, but only reread.

In characteristic Symbolist fashion, Florensky stressed the aesthetic character of his own book. He carefully chose the illustrations, created a special typeface for it, and oversaw its production. "A book, as a whole, must itself be an artistic work and consequently have *its own* composition and *its own* construction," argued the professor of art history. "Its structure and external appearance must be determined first of all by its inner idea. Its dimensions, the character of its paper and cover, its typeface, its sectioning, the consistency in the use of various typefaces for the delineation of the parts, chapters, and paragraphs, the manner of opening and closing the various sections, the placing of charts, diagrams, tables, formulas, etc. all this has an expressive dimension" which when successful, "corresponds to the idea of the book itself."[7] With its many illustrations, charts, tables, diagrams, formulas and sections in varying size script, not to mention its one thousand fifty-six footnotes and thirty addenda, what, we may ask, is the idea of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* and how is it one aesthetic whole?

Florensky subtitles his book "An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy." His theodicy, however, is not a justification of the goodness of God in the face of evil, but of the divine Truth to be ascertained even in this sinful world.

[5] The "elder" refers to Father Isidore of the Gethsemane Hermitage, whose holy life and wisdom were especially important to Florensky. The "friend" was Florensky's roommate at the academy, S. S. Troitsky, who later married Florensky's sister. See P. A. Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny* in two volumes (Moscow, 1990), 2, 829–30.

[6] Ibid., pp. 823–26.

[7] P. A. Florensky, *Analiz prostranstvennosti i vremeni v khudozhestvenno-izobratitel'nykh proizvedeniiakh* (Moscow, 1993), pp. 237–38.

This Truth is attained through our experience of "ecclesiality," which is understood as the new life in the Spirit, experienced within Orthodoxy and represented ideally in the lives of the ascetics and elders in the monastic tradition. In modern Russia this tradition was renewed in the late eighteenth century through the revival of hesychast mysticism, a yoga-like form of meditative practice based on the silent recitation of the Jesus Prayer. The nineteenth century, which experienced an incredible growth in the monastic population, witnessed a creative encounter between the monasteries and the artists and intellectuals, reflected, for example, in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. This encounter fostered a renewed interest in the culture of liturgy, icons, and patristics.

Florensky, who had himself wanted to become a monk, consciously grounds his whole book in this monastic sense of ecclesiality. The complex system of layers of text and additions to the text serves to create the sense of the depth of this tradition even as it recovers it and places it on a par with secular culture. One reason for the importance of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* lies in its extensive reference to the patristic tradition and its creative reading of the liturgy, for these verbal creations best represent the basic principles of ancient Russian culture. Florensky, who preferred medieval culture to renaissance or modern, gives these verbal systems of symbols (as well as the iconographic ones) the same high regard Viacheslav Ivanov gave to classical Greek culture. While many editions of the Eastern Christian Fathers were newly translated and published in the nineteenth century, as Florensky's notes testify, it was Florensky who was responsible for legitimizing their relevance to modern philosophical and theological discourse in Russia. Likewise, Florensky was the first to see the incredible resources that lay hidden in the rich and poetic Greek and Slavonic liturgical texts which he approached with Symbolist reverence. Liturgy, for Florensky, was the "heart of human activity," for it expressed the two worlds, human and divine, of what he called *homo liturgus*.[8] With the secularization of life, "cult," Florensky believed, branched off into "culture," whose activities are "secondary and express human nature one-sidedly." With his firm belief that liturgy was humanity's "primal activity" and his focus on the symbolic meaning of liturgical texts Florensky enabled the development of modern Orthodox liturgical theology.

> The more massively and metaphysically crudely and archaically we conceive religious concepts, the more profound will the symbolism of their expression be and therefore the closer we will come to a genuine understanding of strictly religious experience. This compressed, densified character of religious concepts char-

[8] "Iz bogoslovskogo naslediia sviashchenika Pavla Florenskogo," in *Bogoslovskie trudy* 17 (1977), 107. This publication contains Florensky's main liturgical studies, pp. 85–248.

> acterizes our entire liturgy. . . . (PGT, 63) The liturgy is the flower of Church life and also its root and seed. What richness of ideas and new concepts in the domain of dogmatics, what abundance of profound psychological observations and moral guidance could be gathered here even by a not very diligent investigator! Yes, liturgical theology awaits its creator.[9]

Ecclesiality also means for Florensky the mystical life of the church. The Truth is attained in the ascetic's mystical experience of encounter with the "other world." Florensky had a special admiration for the humble purity and spiritual strength he saw in his own beloved elder, Abba Isidore, who "gave me the most solid, the most undeniable, the purest perception of a spiritual person I have had in my entire life." (PGT, 233). In 1908 he wrote a whole book about him.[10] In characteristic Eastern Christian fashion, Florensky saw the ascetic virtues, especially chastity, aesthetically, and he related life in the Holy Spirit to the experience of beauty: "Ecclesiality is the beauty of new life in Absolute Beauty, in the Holy Spirit" (PGT, 234). This Divine Beauty, understood as order and wholeness, is at one with Truth and Goodness.[11] This Divine Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are revealed and manifested in Creation.

Ecclesiality also entails the dogmatic tradition of the church. The fundamental dogmatic premise of Florensky's theodicy (as of Solovyov's theology of Godmanhood) is that the Creator and Creation are one, as God and Man are one in Christ. The whole book can be considered an exploration of the epistemological, ontological, and moral implications of the two central Christian doctrines Florensky believed both symbolized the religious experience of medieval Kiev and Moscow and prophesied the "two fundamental ideas of the Russian spirit."[12] Florensky's theodicy rests on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, understood as basic principles of ancient Russian culture.[13]

The first controlling idea of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* is epistemological and is treated mainly in letters two, three, and six. In a

[9] Pp. 63, 217–18 of this translation. Henceforth all references to the present translation of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* will be designated as PGT and given (in parentheses) in the body of the text.

[10] St. Paul Florensky, *Salt of the Earth: A Narrative on The Life of the Elder of Gethsemane Skete, Hieromonk Abba Isidore*, Palatine, California, 1987.

[11] On the aesthetic dimension of Florenskii's thought, see Victor Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in The Theology of Pavel Florenskii*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Crestwood, N.Y., 1993.

[12] See P. A. Florensky, "Troitse-Sergieva Lavra i Rossiia" in *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo* Dvizheniia, No. 117, pp. 5–22. English translation by Robert Bird: *The Trinity St Sergius Lavra and Russia* (New Haven, 1995).

[13] Father Georges Florovsky, who in general treats Florensky rather harshly, is in one sense quite correct to note that Florensky "by-passes the Incarnation" and gives us "no discussion of Christology." See his *Ways of Russian Theology*, trans. by R. L. Nichols (Belmont, 1987), II, 278. But it is also clear that Florensky considered the Incarnation a central doctrine, which he associated with Sophia (see below). In PGT the idea of the Incarnation, especially the notion of "consubstantiality," is of major importance.

fashion characteristic of the whole Slavophile tradition from Kireevsky on, Florensky grounds his theory of knowledge in an attack on "rationality." In this tradition, Reason, understood as the processes of thought and the laws of logic, is considered the foundation of Western philosophy, with its roots in both Aristotle and Aquinas, its modern champion in Descartes, and its apotheosis in Hegel. Florensky, trained in logic and mathematics, attacks the logical laws of this rationality with impressive manipulations of symbolic logic. At bottom, however, his approach is Symbolist. The law of identity, A = A, is read as a sign of reality in a state of isolating sin: "This formula affirms in advance the separateness and egotistical isolation of the ultimate elements of being, thus rupturing all rational connection between them" (PGT, 22). Truth, he argues, is antinomial, to be represented as A + (– A), and every singular truth is to be understood symbolically as a truth about the Truth, which can be experienced only "discontinuously." Christian doctrine is seen as a web of antinomial statements about this Truth. Florensky's characterization of this antinomial Truth seems to have captured something of the epistemological spirit of Orthodoxy, which is so grounded in apophatic theology. It may reflect Dostoevsky's pro and contra and was certainly useful to later Russian religious thinkers, not the least significant of whom was Mikhail Bakhtin.[14]

This attitude to Western conceptions of rationality and logic is reflected in the structure of the book. Florensky claimed that his book was but "jottings, written at different times and in different moods" (PGT, 5). In fact throughout he had to deal with his firm belief that "the single and integral object of religious perception disintegrates in the domain of rationality into a multiplicity of aspects, into separate facets, into fragments of holiness" (PGT, 234). A rational system violates the one religious Truth. But without a system, "it is practically impossible to decide what should be said and what should not be said, what should be said first and what should be said after" (PGT, 234–35). In virtual despair he comes to the conclusion that "when a religious object enters the sphere of rationality, what is most appropriate is the conjunction 'and'" (PGT, 235). This concern for appropriate form was shared by many of his fellow thinkers, who resolved it in various ways. Berdiaev's style of fiery flow from the creative depths, Frank's notion of philosophy as the rational transcendence of the limitations of rational thought, and Shestov's whole mad imagined Borgesean universe peopled with the monstrous phrases of Western rationalism represent some of the solutions to this deep-seated cultural aversion to the logical ordering of discourse.[15] Florensky's mod-

[14] On the relationship of Bakhtin and Florensky, see K. Clark and M. Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 135–37.

[15] For other roots of this attitude, see A. D. Sukhov, "Russkaia filosofiia kak istoricheskii tip: Protsess stanovleniia," in *Filosofiia i kul'tura v Rossii: Metodologicheskie problemy* (Moscow, 1992), pp. 3–12.

ernist conception of the text as a fabric made from many interwoven strands is one of the more successful attempts among Russian religious thinkers to resolve the anxiety of genre that follows from their attack on rationality.

Florensky also argued that this Western rationality was a logic of things, of entities understood as dead and closed off one from another. His epistemology is an epistemology not of separate things, but of persons, who are understood to be "consubstantial" (Gr. *homoousios*, "of the same nature"). Consubstantiality is a complex notion, especially important in Eastern Christian thought. It surfaced in the early incarnational debates about the relationship of the human and the divine in Christ. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. Christ's consubstantiality with the Father in divinity and with us in humanity was affirmed; the union of Christ's two natures was understood to be "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."[16] This conception of consubstantiality was later used to characterize the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity, who were understood to be of the same nature. The first and last of the four apophatic definitions later traveled from the doctrinal statement into the liturgy, which then popularized this conception of a union that is "not separate" and "not merged." Florensky develops his whole theory of Truth from this "antinomian seed of Christian life-understanding:"

> [Consubstantiality] expressed not only a christological dogma but also a spiritual evaluation of the rational laws of thought. Here rationality was given a death blow. Here for the first time a new principle of the reason's activity was proclaimed *urbi et orbi*. (PGT, 41)

Furthermore this doctrine of unity in separation grounds Florensky's firm belief that

> the act of knowing is not only a gnoseological but also an ontological act, not only ideal but also real. Knowing is a real *going* of the knower *out* of himself, or (what is the same thing) a real *going* of what is known *into* the knower, a real unification of the knower and what is known. That is the fundamental and characteristic proposition of Russian and, in general, of all Eastern philosophy. (PGT, 55)

This conception of knowing, which is actually borrowed from the intuitivist epistemology of Nikolai Lossky (1870–1965), is a form of loving. It is understood as a process of mutual self-emptying and results in a "living moral communion of persons, each serving for each as both object and subject." The epistemological and moral moments are ontological and

[16] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1978), pp. 338–43.

share the same structure. To know the Truth, furthermore, entails a "real entering into the interior of the Divine Tri-Unity," which is possible "only through the transubstantiation of man, through his deification, through the acquisition of love as the Divine essence. . . . In love, and only in love is real knowledge of the Truth conceivable" (PGT, 56). At root Florensky's theory of knowledge rests on the ancient Eastern Christian conception of salvation as deification, the restoration of fallen humanity to the image and likeness of God. Rational knowledge, knowledge of things, is fallen knowledge, what Berdiaev would call "objectification." Real knowledge, knowledge of persons, comes with love. Knowledge of God comes to the saintly, spiritual souls like Abba Isidore, who love God. Florensky's whole epistemological position strikingly prefigures Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and his conception of identity as "belonging together."[17]

The second controlling idea of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* is moral and is explored mainly in letters four, eleven, and twelve. It focuses on mutual relationships between human beings and between humanity and God, understood subjectively and metaphysically. The Goodness of these relationships rests on what is called love. This love is modeled after the Incarnation and is imagined as a process of kenosis, of self-emptying. "The metaphysical nature of love lies in the supralogical overcoming of the naked self-identity 'I = I' and in the going out of oneself" (PGT, 67). This metaphysical conception prefigures the "actual entities" of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) by some fifteen years.[18] Florensky understands this metaphysically realized self as an action whereby "I transcends itself, the norm of its own being, and voluntarily submits to a new image so as thereby to incorporate its own I in the I of another being which for it is not-I." This process, understood mutually, simultaneously transforms the I from a self-enclosed entity into its true state of transcendence and the other from an objective not-I into a person. Furthermore from God's point of view, Florensky believes

> [that this] whole process of the interrelation of the lovers is a single act, in which an infinite series of individual moments of love is synthesized. This single, eternal, and infinite act is the consubstantiality of the lovers in God, where I is one and the same as the other I, but also different. (PGT, 68)

This conception of true self as a self-transcending entity, ever reaching out to and receiving the other, of true love as a metaphysical moment of consubstantiality in God, and of true life as the synthesis of all human love is

[17] Robert Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky: A Metaphysics of Love* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1984), p. 115. This book is an excellent study of Florensky, with special attention to the philosophical and theological issues in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.

[18] Ibid, pp. 116–18.

characteristic of such different Russian thinkers as Solovyov and Tolstoy.[19] What is different in Florensky is his attempt, not always clear in my view, to ground this metaphysical conception of love in the doctrine of the Trinity, read in Hegelian fashion as a triadic opposition of self and other.

Florensky's most controversial theological teaching is his notion of love as friendship, the lyrical center and culminating idea of the book. The basic idea, characteristically antinomian and ambiguous, is that "to live among brothers, it is necessary to have a Friend, if only a distant one" and that "to have a Friend, it is necessary to live among brothers, at least to be with them in spirit" (PGT, 297). Christian love is an antinomian combination of *philia* (friendship) and *agapē*, and in the "*friendly*, *philic* structure of the *brotherly*, *agapic* community of Christians . . . the limit to fragmentation is not the human atom that from itself relates to the community, but a community molecule, a pair of friends, which is the principle of actions here, just as the family was this kind of molecule for the pagan community" (PGT, 301). This consubstantial dyad, gathered in Christ's name, is transformed into a new "spiritual essence, a particle of the Body of Christ, a living incarnation of the Church" (PGT, 303).

To bolster his argument for this dyad Florensky recalls the pairing of the Apostles in the gospels and of saints in hagiography and iconography. And in the "gracious office" of the "half-ecclesiastical, half popular" rite of *adelphopoiesis* (Russ. *bratotvorenie* and *pobratimstvo*), for which he gives a detailed bibliographical note, he finds the appropriate liturgical expression of philic love, just as in the general communal liturgy he sees the appropriate expression of agapic love (PGT, 328–30). Sanctified thus in the liturgy, friendship becomes an essential element of ecclesiality. It is important to note that in this notion of friendship the significance of the structure of addressed letters for the main idea of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* becomes clear; the whole work in one way or another is about this need for a friend in a world of brothers, of Christian philic life in the Christian agapic community.

In his discussion of friendship Florensky also resorts to one of his favorite devices, argumentation from language. As a Symbolist thinker, Florensky believed that words had some inherent relationship to their referent. While he was aware of the newer philology which considered words as arbitrary signifiers unrelated to the signified, he considered it but a fashionable scientific theory and later wrote several important stud-

[19] In his *Lectures on Godmanhood* Solovyov imagined all metaphysical entities as "mutually penetrating," each "mutually acting" on the other and "making room for" the other in itself. The totality of these entities is the "essence" of Christ, second person of the Trinity; with Creation this essence is embodied and with deification becomes the Body of Christ or the Church. For Tolstoi's understanding of metaphysical entities he calls "beings" and their relation to each other and the "All," see my *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger* (Princeton, 1986), 94–109; 449–455.

ies in philosophical linguistics in defense of his views.[20] In *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* he often explores an idea as expressed in various languages (he himself controlled all the European languages, classical and modern, as well as classical Hebrew and a few modern Caucasian and Central Asian languages). Several words for "truth," for example, are considered in some detail, and each is understood as revealing an aspect of the Truth (PGT, 14–20). This same procedure is used for the word "love." In his exploration of the four Greek words for love (*agapē*, *erlōs*, *philia*, and *storgē*), Florensky explores the various subjective and social experiences designated by the signs. But it is the Russian words for "friend" that are most useful to him. The word *priiatel'*, which means both "friend" and "receiver" and is related to the notions of "agreeable" and "acceptable," signifies that "between lovers the membrane of selfhood is torn," because "the loved one . . . is received by his friend and nestles, like a mother's child, beneath his heart" (PGT, 310). The most important linguistic argument in the book, however, comes from Florensky's relating the phonetically similar, but etymologically unrelated words "friend" (*drug*) and "other" (*drugoi*). Throughout the book, in theme and structure, this bit of philosophical paranomasia takes on mythic proportions. All the quasi-Hegelian discussion of I and the other turns on this relationship. "Friendship" (*druzhba*) entails both the loss of self to the other and the discovery of self in the other: "The I, being reflected in a friend (*drug*), recognizes in the friend's I its own other (*drugoe*) I" (PGT, 314). This other I is understood as the image of God, and Florensky can say that "friendship is the seeing of oneself with the eyes of another, but before a third, namely the Third." It is "self-contemplation through a Friend in God."

The notion of friendship is Florensky's response to the general modern European reevaluation of love that emerged in Russia with the "woman question" of the mid-nineteenth century and flowered in the mysticism of eros in the Symbolist period. In mid-century Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828–89) argued in his novel *What Is To Be Done?* (1863) for a rational but sexual love freed from the strictures of marriage and dependence. Tolstoy, ever troubled by his own sexual urges, argued in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890) for the rejection of sexuality even in marriage. Solovyov in *The Meaning of Love* (1892–94) tried to restore meaning to sexuality by grounding it in a higher theological conception of the person as an androgynously interrelated male and female. Vasily Rozanov (1856–

[20] See "Nauka kak simvolicheskoe opisanie," "Antinomiia iazyka," "Stroenie slova," and especially "Imeslavie kak filosofskaia predposylka" in P. A. Florensky, *U vodorazdelov mysli* (Moscow, 1990). For a picture of the complex state of late nineteenth-century philological study (more complex than Foucault presents it in *Les Mots et les choses*), see C. H. Plotkin, *The Tenth Muse: Victorian Philology and the Genesis of the Poetic Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Illinois, 1989), especially chapters two and three.

1919), a friend of Florensky's, preached a doctrine of divine sexuality to be realized in the bedrooms of bourgeois marriage. The Symbolist writers Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1865–1941) and his wife Zinaida Gippius (1869–1945) lived in a *ménage à trois*, which they believed was an embryonic church. The new visibility and sometimes tolerance, if not acceptance, of homosexuality, which was spawned by the late-nineteenth-century homosexual liberation movements in Germany, had a strong impact on Russian cultural life in the beginning of the twentieth century, and not a few of the poets and artists followed the ways of Tchaikovsky.

In this context Florensky's notion of friendship has a decided homophilic, if not homoerotic, tinge. All dyadic friendships in his discussion are same-sex unions. And this is what is significant theologically, even for our own era.[21] Florensky decenters heterosexual marriage in his presentation of ecclesiality in order to privilege pairs of friends. He moves the discussion of Christian life away from the union of the flesh to the union of the spirit. Marriage is understood as a remnant from pagan life, now blessed by the church; friendship is inherently Christian. To my knowledge, Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* is the first Christian theology to place same-sex relationship at the center of its vision.

The third controlling idea of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* is ontological; it is explored mainly in letters five, nine, and ten. For Florensky what truly and objectively is is God's original creation. And he hopes "to live and feel together with all creation, not with the creation that man has corrupted but with the creation that came out of the hands of its Creator; to see in this creation another, higher nature; [and] through the crust of sin, to feel the pure core of God's creation" (PGT, 192). This pure core of God's creation is what Florensky calls Sophia. The Old Testament concept of God's Wisdom (Hbr. *chochma*, Gr. *sophia*) was traditionally associated by Christianity with Christ. It was introduced into Russian religious philosophical discourse by Solovyov, who reread it as the "eternal feminine," of which he claimed to have had three visions. For the Symbolist poets, Bely, Ivanov, and especially Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921) this notion of Sophia as the eternal feminine proved productive for their poetry and their own mystical worldviews.

Florensky was the first Russian religious philosopher to develop Solovyov's idea. In characteristic fashion he redirected Solovyov's views, by placing them squarely in the church culture of liturgy and patristics. He also stressed the role of St. Sophia in the culture of Russia, pointing to the Kiev and Novgorod Cathedrals dedicated to her and the numerous icons depicting her. Historically, Florensky argued, the image of Sophia has

[21] For a modern study of same-sex unions in early Christian culture, including an in-depth analysis of the liturgies of adelphopoiesis, written by a medievalist and social historian, the late and much missed John Boswell, see his *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York, 1994). Boswell was aware of Florensky's work.

surfaced at three different moments, in Greek patristics as an object of contemplation, in the Slavic medieval world as an emblem of chastity and spiritual perfection, and in modern Russia as a symbol of the unity of all creation, the mystical church (PGT, 282). With Solovyov and Florensky Sophia became the privileged image of God's original vision of Creation, which, although now fallen, is to be restored as the universal church. The doctrine of salvation as deification is redirected from the individual to the cosmos. Thus conceived by Solovyov and legitimized by Florensky, Sophia entered Russian religious philosophy, spawned a whole school of sophiology, and culminated in the systematic theology of Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944), the most complete and suggestive expression of Russian sophiological theology.

For Solovyov Sophia was the passive, receptive (hence feminine) partner of the active, energizing, and ordering Logos, and their union comprised the metaphysical Christ, the second person of the Trinity. In its original conception Creation was the Body of this Christ. The actual world came into being when Sophia broke away from this union with the Logos and thus fell into chaos and matter. The cosmogonic story in its evolutionary unfolding is a process of the reordering of this fallen Sophia by the Logos. Creation is a form of Incarnation and Transfiguration. Florensky, who holds firmly to the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, redirects attention from this near-gnostic story of Creation to its idea and vision. His Sophia is still passive and feminine, and like Solovyov he associates Sophia with the Logos; their union is conceived as the idea of the Incarnation ever-existing in the Trinitarian Godhead. For Florensky, therefore, Sophia is God's idea of and love for Creation. This Sophia, understood as the original nature of Creation, is imagined as a monad which is by God's condescension (and not by nature) a fourth person of the Trinity. Thus Sophia is the "Great Root by which creation goes into the intra-Trinitarian life and through which it receives Life Eternal from the One Source of Life" (PGT, 237).

While the designation of Sophia as a fourth hypostasis (albeit not by nature) was perhaps unfortunate and to some seemed heretical, Florensky succeeded more clearly than Solovyov in bringing the concept of Sophia into relationship with the whole Trinity. From the point of view of the theological Trinity *ad intra*, Sophia is the substance and power of being, the reason and meaning of being, and the purity and beauty of being; from the point of view of the economical Trinity *ad extra*, Sophia is the Body of Christ, The Church, The Virgin Mary. For Florensky these "separate aspects of faith disintegrate atomistically only for scholastic theology, but, in living life, these aspects, each retaining its independence, become so closely interwoven that one idea imperceptively evokes another" (PGT, 243–44). And "the speech of faith . . . clothes its knowledge of dogmatic truth in a symbolic garment, in figurative language, which

covers the higher truth and depth of contemplation in consistent contradictions" (PGT, 244). Florensky's Sophia stands next to friendship as a controlling symbol of his whole vision.

> If Sophia is all of Creation, then the soul and conscience of Creation, Mankind, is Sophia *par excellence*. If Sophia is all of Mankind, then the soul and conscience of Mankind, the Church, is Sophia *par excellence*. If Sophia is the Church, then the soul and conscience of the Church, the Church of the Saints, is Sophia *par excellence*. If Sophia is the Church of the Saints, then the soul and conscience of the Church of Saints, the Intecessor for and Defender of creation before the Word of God, Who judges creation and divides it in two, the Mother of God, "Purifier of the World," is, once again, Sophia *par excellence*. But the true sign of Mary Full of Grace is Her Virginity, the beauty of Her soul. This is precisely Sophia. (PGT, 253)

The qualities most commonly associated with Sophia are virginity, chastity, purity, beauty, and wholeness, the signs of ecclesiality. They are the marks of the original creation, and hence the ideals that all creation should seek to restore. For Florensky, these qualities, which are at root aesthetic, are attained through the ascetic life, especially as he saw it in his beloved Abba Isidore. "The goal of the ascetic's strivings is to perceive *all* of Creation in its original triumphant beauty. The Holy Spirit reveals itself in the ability to see the beauty of creation" (PGT, 226). The *vitae* of the ascetic saints, Florensky observes, often "depict the life of the saint in the midst of nature, 'with beasts,'" because they "express the whole essence of a new, reconciled, restored life together with all of creation" (PGT, 222). It is this cosmic vision of nature transformed that seems most appropriate for our world today. Sophia is the great symbol of ecological vision, the sign of hope that we can, with God's grace, work to restore that original purity, beauty, and wholeness that marked our paradise. Sophia is also a feminine symbol, in the Christian tradition the most consistent image of the female aspect of the Divine. While Florensky's ethical sympathies seem to lie more with his homophilic conception of friendship, his aesthetic and mystical conception of Sophia should be suggestive for the developing feminist restructuring of Christian theology.[22]

To reduce Florensky's book to an outline of its fundamental themes, however, may well do it a great disservice. *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* is, to be sure, a strange and difficult work. It can be academically obsessive and pretentious. It is at times philosophically abstract and at

[22] See Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, 1983) and Sally McFague, *The Body of God, An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, 1993) for significant studies in this area, with extensive bibliographies.

times poetically lyrical. It attempts to appeal almost simultaneously to the intellect, the will, and the heart. It meanders and repeats, it teaches and exhorts, it preaches and prays. Yet, while this book may try Western readers' patience from time to time, it will also trace anew their steps along familiar paths and lead them down roads less traveled. The ultimate value of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* rests in the quality of its cosmic vision of love and the richness of its variegated texture. It is this vision and texture that come from the heart of the culture of Russian Orthodoxy.[23]

[23] For further assessments of Florensky, see N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York, 1951), pp. 176–191 and V. V. Zenkovsky, trans. George L. Kline, *A History of Russian Philosophy* (New York and London, 1953), II, 875–890.

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH

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An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters

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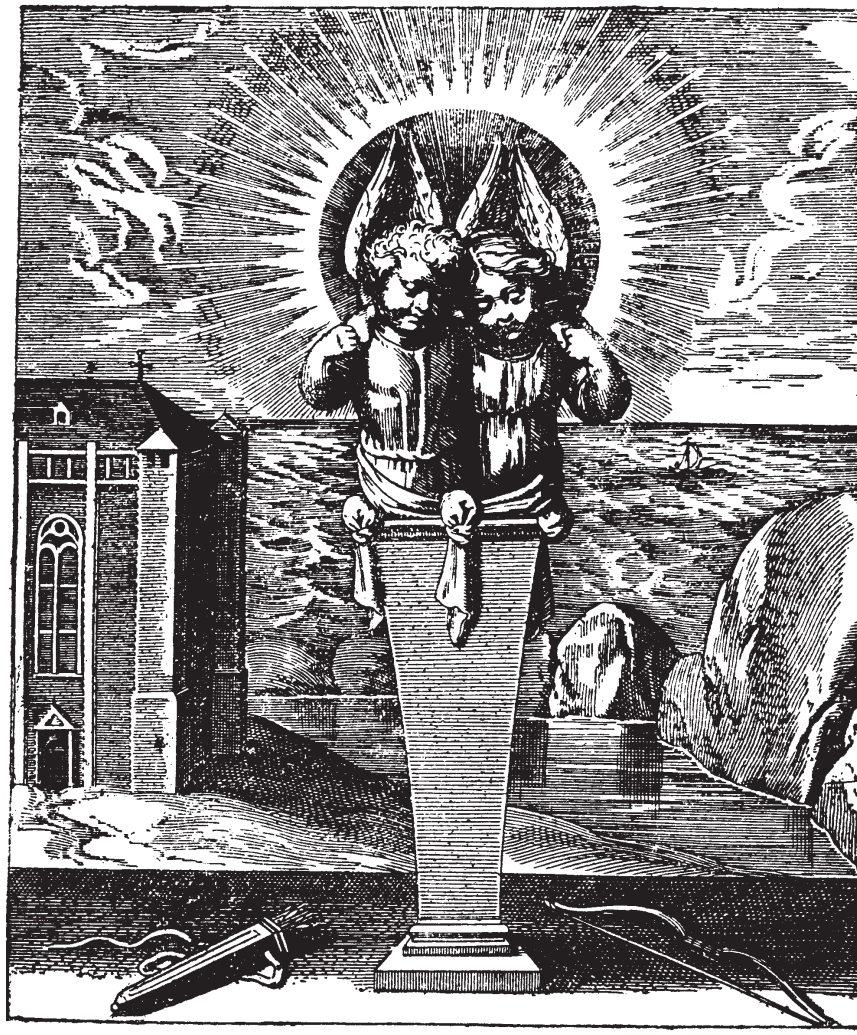
BY FATHER PAVEL FLORENSKY

ἡ δε γν σις ώγ πη γἴνεται.[a]
St. Gregory of Nyssa

[a] "Knowledge becomes love."
See p. 65 of the present work and Florensky's note 115.

To the Most Fragrant and Most Pure Name
of the Virgin and Mother

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH.



FINIS AMORIS, UT DUO UNUM FIANT.
THE LIMIT OF LOVE: TWO ARE ONE.

"Do not reproach me with the fact, my lords and brothers, that, the youngest among you, I dare write about holy miracles. I know my own poverty and both my conscience and my vice-stained mind fill me with remorse; and my many sins make this great work a difficult undertaking for me. And it is not my business, but yours, great and ancient fathers, to learn from the miracles of our saintly father Sergius, and to illuminate our crude spirits with this teaching and to proclaim it to future generations by writing. But I pray you, listen attentively: if I do not write, and you also do not wish to do it, who will then fulfill the royal injunction and who will proclaim the holy miracles, if our predecessors too have not written for so many years? Though I am a sinner, and am ignorant and without art for such a task, my character suits it and I experience the need to undertake it, but He who fulfills every good work is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Simon Azar'in, cellarer of
the Trinity-Saint-Sergius Monastery.[a]
The year 1646. (From *The Tale of the Newly Appeared Well.*)

[a] The Trinity-Saint-Sergius Lavra, founded outside Moscow by Sergius of Radonezh in the 13th century, was the first Russian monastery consecrated to the Holy Trinity. Saint Sergius was the greatest Russian saint, and the Trinity-Saint-Sergius Lavra was the greatest Russian monastery. Following the ideals of early Christian monasticism, Sergius lived for years in solitude in a "desert" (actually a forest) near Moscow. In this forest, on the site of the future monastery at Sergiev Posad, he built a small wooden church and consecrated it to the Most Holy Name of the Life-Giving Trinity. This was to become the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the future Trinity-Saint-Sergius Lavra. Before Sergius, the consecration of churches to the Trinity was neither common nor accepted. It was a novelty and even considered daring, as Father Sergius Bulgakov points out (see *Put'*, No. 5 [Oct.–Nov. 1926]: 5). Bulgakov further speculates that the young, uneducated monk Sergius had direct empirical knowledge of the Trinity, and that the consecration of this church to the Trinity expresses a special spiritual election, an answer to a call sounding in Sergius' soul. Florensky himself had a close association with the Trinity-Saint-Sergius Lavra: he served as a pastoral assistant in the Chapel of the Red Cross there.

E me alo. I feed with myself.

1. To the Reader

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Living religious experience as the sole legitimate way to gain knowledge of the dogmas—that is how I would like to express the general theme of my book or, rather, my jottings, which have been written at different times and in different moods. Only by relying on immediate experience can one survey the spiritual treasures of the Church and come to see their value. Only by passing a damp sponge over the ancient writings, can one wash them with living water and decipher the letters of the church literature. The ascetic saints of the Church are alive for the living and dead for the dead. For a soul that has become dark, the faces of the saints become dark; for a soul that has become paralyzed, the bodies of the saints are frozen in terrible fixity. Is it not well known that the hysterics and the possessed are afraid of saints? And are not those who sin against the Church forced to look away from it in fear? But unclouded eyes see as always the faces of the saints as radiant, "as the faces of angels." For a purified heart, these faces are, as always, inviting; as in the past, they cry out to those who have ears to hear. I ask myself, Why are the common folk, in their pure immediacy, involuntarily drawn to these saints? Why in their mute sorrow do the common folk find comfort in these saints as well as the joy of forgiveness and the beauty of heavenly celebration?

I do not delude myself. I firmly know that I have done no more than light a penny candle of yellow wax. But even this little flame, trembling in my unaccustomed hands, has brought forth a myriad of sparkling reflections in the treasure-house of the Holy Church. For many centuries, day

after day, the treasure has been deposited here—precious stone by precious stone, gold coin by gold coin. Like fragrant dew on fleece, like heavenly manna, the gracious power of God-illuminated souls has descended here. Like the finest pearls, the tears of pure hearts have been collected here. Here, both heaven and earth have heaped their treasures over many centuries. The most secret yearnings, the most concealed aspirations to God-likening; the azure moments of angelic purity that come after the storm; the joys of communion with God and the holy torments of ardent repentance; the fragrance of prayer and the quiet longing for heaven; eternal seeking and eternal finding; infinitely deep intuitions of eternity and the childlike peace of the soul; awe and love, love without end. . . . Ages have passed, but all this has abided and grown.

And every one of my spiritual efforts, every sigh that issues from my lips, summons the entire store of accumulated gracious energy to my aid. Invisible arms bear me over the flowering meadows of the spiritual world. Afire with myriads of myriads and *leoders* of *leoders*[1] of looks, glistening, sparkling, playing like the beams of a rainbow or like an infinite number of radiant splashes, the treasures of the Church produce in my poor soul a state of fear and trembling. Uncountable and ineffable are the riches of the Church. I can take part of them for my own use; my eyes burn with greed. I reach in, and I grab a handful at random. I have not yet seen what I have grasped. What do I have in my hands? Diamonds, carbuncles, or emeralds? Or perhaps tender pearls? I do not know if my handful is better or worse than all that remains. But having, in the words of Athanasius the Great, taken "little from much," I know that I am dissatisfied in advance by my work, because my eyes burn too greedily at the sight of these treasures. What do a few small piles of precious stones mean when they are measured by the cubic yard?

And I involuntarily remember how the general spirit of this work gradually changed in my consciousness. At first my intention was to use no references, only my own words. But it soon became necessary to enter into conflict with myself and allow room for brief extracts. But the farther along I got, the more they began to grow and expand into large fragments, until finally, it appeared that I had to discard everything of my own and publish only the works of the Church. Perhaps that is the only right way, the way that consists in directly addressing the Church itself. And who am I to write about what is holy? "I know my own poverty and both my conscience and my vice-stained mind fill me with remorse; and my many sins make this great work a difficult undertaking for me."[b] But if I nevertheless do attribute some significance to my Letters, it is an exclusively preparatory one, for catechumens.[c] These letters are intended to

[b] See the quotation from Simon Azar'in on the page preceding Chapter I of this book.

[c] A catechumen is one receiving rudimentary instruction in the doctrines of Christianity, preliminary to admission among the faithful of the church.

provide some sustenance for them until they are able to receive nourishment directly from their Mother's hand.

Ecclesiality[d]—that is the name of the refuge where the heart's anxiety finds peace, where the pretensions of the rational mind are tamed, where great tranquillity descends into our reason.[e] Let it be the case that neither I nor anyone else can define what ecclesiality is! Let those who attempt such a definition dispute one another and mutually refute one another's formulas of ecclesiality. Indeed, do not its very indefinability, its ungraspableness by logical terms, its ineffability prove that ecclesiality is life, a special, new life, which is given to man, but which, like all life, is inaccessible to the rational mind?[2] And do not divergences in the definition of ecclesiality, the variety of incomplete and always insufficient verbal formulas for what ecclesiality is, empirically confirm what the Apostle told us: namely that the Church is the body of Christ, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23)? How then can this "fulness" of Divine life be packed into a narrow coffin of logical definition? It would be ridiculous to think that this impossibility disproves in any way the existence of ecclesiality. On the contrary, its existence is rather proved by this impossibility. And to the extent that ecclesiality is prior to all its separate manifestations; to the extent that it is the Divine-human element out of which the sacraments, the dogmas, the canons, and even to some degree the temporary, everyday routine of the Church have been crystallized in the course of Church history—to that extent one can preeminently apply to the Church in this fullness the Apostle's prophecy: "there must also be divergences among you (*dei kai aireseis en humin einai*)" (1 Cor. 11:19), i.e., divergences in the interpretation of ecclesiality. Nevertheless, anyone who does not flee the Church receives into himself by his very life the unitary element of ecclesiality and knows that ecclesiality is and what it is.

Where there is no spiritual life, something external must exist as an assurance of ecclesiality. A specific function, the pope, or a system of functions, a hierarchy—that is the criterion of ecclesiality for Roman

[d] It would be presumptuous of me to define ecclesiality [*tserkovnost'* in Russian] when Florensky himself says that he cannot. Using Florensky's own language, ecclesiality is the essence of the church (existing before the institution of the church), "the Divine-human element out of which the sacraments, the dogmas, the canons, and even to some degree the temporary, everyday routine of the Church are crystallized in the course of Church history." Ecclesiality = spiritual life. Ecclesiality, as Florensky sees it, appears to be a peculiarly Orthodox concept, and he claims that only the Orthodox, among the branches of the Christian church, have preserved it in its purity.

[e] I use the word reason to render *razum* (equivalent to the German *Vernunft*) and rationality/rational mind to render *rassudok* (equivalent to *Verstand*). The corresponding adjectives *razumnyi* and *rassudochnyi* are rendered as reasonable (used in the sense of pertaining to reason) and rational. "Reason" is the mind or intelligence in man that comes from God and is able to see things integrally; the "rational" mind comes from man and tends to oppose what comes from God. The rational mind must be "killed off" by an act of ascesis, self-sacrifice, and then it is replaced by "reason," the mind that is in its proper subservient place, i.e., subservient to spirit in man.

Catholics. On the other hand, a specific confessional formula, the creed, or a system of formulas, the text of the Scripture, is the criterion of ecclesiality for Protestants. In the final analysis, in both cases what is decisive is a concept, an ecclesiastical-juridical concept for Catholics and an ecclesiastical-scientific concept for Protestants. But by becoming the supreme criterion, a concept makes all manifestation of life unnecessary.

Furthermore, since no life can be commensurate with a concept, all movement of life inevitably spills over the boundaries marked by the concept, causing harm and becoming intolerable. For Catholicism (it is understood that I take both Catholicism and Protestantism in their extreme, in their principle), all independent manifestation of life is *noncanonical*; for Protestantism, it is *unscientific*. In both cases, life is truncated by a concept; it is rejected in advance in the name of a concept. If Catholicism is usually associated with a denial of freedom while Protestantism is decisively associated with an acceptance of freedom, both of these associations are incorrect. Catholicism also recognizes freedom, but a freedom that is defined beforehand; everything that is outside the defined limits is illegitimate. On the other hand, Protestantism recognizes compulsion, but only outside the predefined bounds of rationalism. Everything outside these bounds is unscientific. If in Catholicism one can perceive the fanaticism of canonicity, then in Protestantism one can perceive the equally great fanaticism of scientism.

The indefinability of Orthodox ecclesiality, I repeat, is the best proof of its vitality. Of course, we Orthodox cannot point to any one ecclesial function about which it can be said that it sums up all of ecclesiality, for what would be the sense of all the other functions and activities of the Church? Likewise, we cannot point to any one formula or book which could be taken as the fullness of ecclesial life. And if such a formula or book did exist, what would be the sense of other formulas or books, of all other activities of the Church? There is no *concept* of ecclesiality, but ecclesiality itself is, and for every living member of the Church, the life of the Church is the most definite and tangible thing that he knows. But the life of the Church is assimilated and known only through life—not in the abstract, not in a rational way. If one must nevertheless apply concepts to the life of the Church, the most appropriate concepts would be not juridical and archaeological ones but biological and aesthetic ones. What is ecclesiality? It is a new life, life in the Spirit. What is the criterion of the rightness of this life? Beauty. Yes, there is a special beauty of the spirit, and, ungraspable by logical formulas, it is at the same time the only true path to the definition of what is orthodox and what is not orthodox.

The connoisseurs of this beauty are the spiritual elders, the *startsy*,[f] the

[f] A *starets* (derived from *staryi*, old; *startsy* is the plural) has been likened to the *directeur de conscience* of Roman Catholicism. According to Igumen [Abbot] Feodosius (Popov), *starchestvo* (the relationship between a *starets* and those he directs) "consists in a truthful

masters of the "art of arts," as the holy fathers call asceticism. The *startsy* were adept at assessing the quality of spiritual life. The Orthodox taste, the Orthodox temper, is felt but it is not subject to arithmetical calculation. Orthodoxy is shown, not proved. That is why there is only one way to understand Orthodoxy: through direct Orthodox experience. One hears that, in foreign lands, people are now learning how to swim, lying on the floor, with the aid of equipment. In the same way, one can become a Catholic or a Protestant without experiencing life at all—by reading books in one's study. But to become Orthodox, it is necessary to immerse oneself all at once in the very element of Orthodoxy, to begin living in an Orthodox way. There is no other way.

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spiritual relationship of spiritual children to their spiritual father." (See Feodosius' memoirs in *Sila Bozhiya i nemoshch' cheloveka* [God's Power and Man's Impotence], edited by Sergei Nilus, 2d reprint edition [Sergiev Posad, 1992], p. 171.) Feodosius further points out that, in the Philokalia [see Florensky's Note 135], Clement and Ignatius have named five distinguishing features of this relationship: (1) complete trust in the *starets*; (2) perfect candor before him in word and deed; (3) complete eradication of one's own will and complete obedience to the will of the *starets*; (4) abstention from argument and disputation regarding questions of faith; and (5) complete and truthful confession of one's sins and profoundest secrets. Rooted in evangelical, apostolic, and patristic teaching, *starchestvo* is an exercise whose purpose is to empty oneself of one's own will and intellect, indeed of oneself. It is through the monk's own will that Satan attacks him, and by entering into the relationship of *starchestvo* the monk closes the doors of his soul to Satan. He closes the doors to Satan and opens the doors to God's radiance, and, at the extreme limit of saintliness, he is "deified" [see note *e* on p. 94]. Essential to *starchestvo* is the relationship with another person. God is attained and Satan is defeated through another person. Many spiritual writers have pointed out the dangers of the solitary ascetic path (ibid., pp 171 ff).

Following Theophanus the Recluse [See note *a* on p. 12], Feodosius indicates that the *starets* does not absolve or punish. His role is rather to understand and define the spiritual state of the one he directs, to explain to him how he has come to sin, and to indicate how he can avoid this sin in the future, and how he can extinguish the passion from which the sin arose (ibid.).

The practice of *starchestvo* has a long tradition in the Christian East. It flourished in the ancient Egyptian and Palestinian monastic communities in the 4th to 6th centuries. It was then transplanted to Mount Athos [see note *d* on p. 185] in Greece, and finally transported to Russia. In Russia, *starchestvo* is chiefly associated with Optina Pustyn' [see note *d* on pp. 92–93].

Sic semper. Always such.

II. Letter One: Two Worlds

• • • • •

My meek, my radiant friend!

Our vaulted room greeted me with coldness, sadness, and loneliness when I opened its door for the first time after my trip.

But, alas, I entered it alone, without you.

That was not only the first impression. I washed up and put things in order. As before, rows of materialized thoughts were stretched out on the bookshelves. As before, your bed was made and your chair stood in its place (let there be at least the illusion that you are with me!). At the bottom of a clay pot, oil was burning as before, casting a beam of light upward—at the icon of the Savior. As before, in the late evening the wind was blowing noisily through the trees outside the window. As before, the night watchman's stick made an invigorating sound, and locomotives passed by with a deep-voiced roar. As before, roosters were stridently calling to one another just before the morning. As before, at about four in the morning, the bells rang their summons to the matins. Days and nights became one for me. It was as if I did not know where I was and what was happening to me. The worldless and the timeless had come to reside beneath the ceiling, between the narrow walls of our room. And beyond those walls, people would come, speak, tell the news, read newspapers, leave, then come again—and this eternally. Again distant locomotives would cry out in their deep contralto. Eternal peace here; eternal movement there. Everything as before . . . But you are not with me, and the

whole world seems deserted. I am alone, absolutely alone in the whole world. But my sorrowful loneliness aches sweetly in my heart. At times, it seems that I have become one of those leaves that are whirled about by the wind on paths.

I rose today in the early morning and seemed to sense something new. Indeed, in a single night the back of summer had been broken. Golden leaves whirled over the ground in serpentine, wind-driven eddies. Flocks of birds were set in motion. There were files of cranes, and a swirling of crows and daws. The air was filled with the cool aroma of autumn, the smell of decaying leaves, a longing for the distances.

I went out to the edge of the woods.

One after another, one after another, leaves were falling to earth. Like dying butterflies, they were describing slow circles in the air as they descended to earth. On the fallen grass the wind was playing with the "liquid shadows" of tree limbs. How good it was, how joyous and sad! O my distant, my quiet brother! In you is spring, while in me is autumn, perennial autumn. It seems that my whole soul is melting in sweet agony at the sight of these fluttering leaves as I smell

the fragrance of faded aspen groves.

It appears that the soul finds itself in seeing this death, that it has a foretaste of resurrection in this fluttering. Seeing death! I am surrounded by it. And I speak now not of my thoughts, nor of death in general, but of the death of those dear to me. So many, so many have I lost these last years. One after another, one after another, like yellowed leaves, dear people fall away. In them I had felt a soul; in them I had sometimes seen a reflection of Heaven. I had known only good from them. But my conscience is not at peace: "What did you do for them?" They no longer are, and now between me and them lies an abyss.

One after another, one after another, like the leaves of autumn, those people whom our heart has come to love forever whirl above the dark chasm. They fall, and there is no return, no possibility of embracing the feet of each of them. Gone is the opportunity to drench oneself with tears and to implore forgiveness, to implore the whole world for forgiveness.

Again and again, every sin, every "petty" baseness is present, ineradicably distinct, in my consciousness. More and more deeply, "petty" inattentions, egotism, and heartlessness are branded into the soul with letters of fire, gradually crippling it. Not that there was ever anything clearly bad, anything clearly, tangibly sinful. But always (always, O Lord!) it was in the petty things. And out of petty things, mountains grew! And looking back, one can see nothing but foulness. Nothing good . . . O Lord!

Autumn leaves keep falling without interruption. One after another they describe circles above the earth. Gently, the inextinguishable lamp burns, and one after another our dear ones die. "I know he will rise on the

day of resurrection, the last day." Nevertheless, with a kind of tranquil grief, I repeat before *our* cross, which you made from an ordinary stick and which our gentle Elder blessed, I repeat, "Lord! If Thou hath been here, my Brother would not have died."

Everything whirls. Everything slides into death's abyss. Only One abides, only in Him are constancy, life, and peace. "To Him is drawn the whole course of events, as the periphery to the center. Toward Him converge all the radii of the circle of the ages." It is not I who speak thus, from my own meager experience. No, this is the testimony of a man who had wholly immersed himself in the element of the One Center: Bishop Theophanus the Recluse.[a] On the other hand, outside of this One Center, "the only certain thing is that nothing is certain and that there is nothing more miserable or arrogant than man (*solum certum nihil esse certi et homine nihil miserius aut superbius*)." This was said by one of the noblest pagans, Pliny the Elder, who wholly gave himself to the satisfaction of his boundless curiosity. Yes, in life everything is in a state of unrest, everything is as unstable as a mirage. And out of the depths of the soul there rises an unbearable need to find support in the "Pillar and Ground of the Truth," in *stulos kai hedraiōma tēs alētheias* (1 Tim. 3:15), in *tēs alētheias*, and not merely *alētheias*—not in just one of the truths, not in one of the particular and fragmented human truths, which are unstable and blown about like dust chased by the wind over mountains, but in total and eternal Truth, the one Divine Truth, the radiant and celestial Truth, that "Truth" which, according to the ancient poet, is the "sun of the world."[3]

How can one approach this Pillar?

At the undecaying body of St. Sergius, which always gives peace to the troubled soul, we hear every day and every hour a call that also promises repose to the troubled mind. The 43rd pericope from Matthew (11:27–30), which is read at the office of St. Sergius, has primarily a cognitive meaning, and even a knowledge-theoretic or epistemological meaning. This becomes most clear when we recognize that the subject of the entire eleventh chapter of Matthew is the problem of knowledge, the problem of the insufficiency of rational knowledge and the necessity of spiritual knowledge.[4] Yes, God has "hid" all things that can be called worthy of knowledge "from the wise and prudent, and [has] revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). It would be an unjustifiable violence to Scripture to reinterpret the "wise and prudent" to mean the "pseudo-wise" and "pseudo-prudent," and the "babes" to mean virtuous wise men. The Lord, of course, said without irony precisely what he wanted to say: true

[a] Theophanus the Recluse was a 19th-century Russian-Orthodox bishop known for his spiritual and ascetic writings. He is the translator into Russian of the *Philokalia* [see Florensky's note 135], the famous compilation of mystical and ascetic writings of Eastern Christianity.

human wisdom, true human prudence is insufficient just because it is human. At the same time, the mental innocence of "babes," the absence of mental riches which prevent one from entering the Kingdom of Heaven, can turn out to be a condition for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge. But the fullness of all is in Jesus Christ, and therefore knowledge can be acquired only through Him and from Him. All human efforts at knowledge, which exhaust the poor wise men, are in vain. Like ungainly camels, they are loaded down with their knowledge. And like salt water, science only inflames the thirst for knowledge. It never gives peace to the feverish mind. For the Lord's "easy yoke" and "light burden" (Matt. 11:30) give the mind what it cannot get from the cruel yoke and hard, unbearable burden of science. That is why, at the grave of one who pours forth grace, the Divine words keep sounding like an unceasing source of living water:

"All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:27–30).

But far be from me the desire to convince anyone. I give of my meagerness. And if but one soul were to feel that I speak to it not with my lips and not into the ears, I would wish for no more. I know that you will accept me, for it is you who destroy the bounds of my egotism.

My Brother! You who share my soul. Torn away and lonely, I am nevertheless with you. Rising above time, I see your clear gaze; once again, I speak to you face to face. It is for you that I write down my discontinuous thoughts. You will not hold it against me that I do so without system, only placing a signpost here and there.

On quiet autumn nights, in holy hours of silence, when a tear of rapture sparkles on my eyelashes, I will secretly begin to write down for you schemata and pitiful fragments of those questions which we so much discussed together. You know in advance what I will write. You know that my writing will not be didactic, and that the pompous tone comes from my foolish incompetence. If a wise teacher does even the difficult as if in jest, an inexperienced pupil employs a solemn tone even in trivial things. And I, after all, am nothing more than a pupil who repeats after you the lessons of love.

His ornari aut mori. Te receive either death or a crown.

III. Letter Two: Doubt

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"The Pillar and Ground of the Truth." But how can one recognize it?

This question inevitably leads us into the domain of abstract knowledge. For theoretical thought "the Pillar of the Truth" is certitude.

Certitude assures me that the Truth, if I have attained it, is in fact what I sought. But *what* did I seek? What did I mean by the word "Truth"? In any case, I meant something so total that it contains everything and therefore something that its name expresses only by convention, partially, symbolically. The Truth, according to the philosopher,[5] is the "all-one existent." But then the word "truth" does not cover its own proper content and in order to disclose the meaning of the word truth if only approximately, in view of a preliminary understanding of our search, we must see what aspects of this concept have been taken into consideration by different languages, what aspects of this concept have been underscored and fixed through its etymological shells among different peoples.

> Our Russian word for truth, "*istina*," is linguistically close to the verb "*est*"' [to be]. Hence, "*istina*," according to the Russian understanding of it, embodies the concept of absolute reality: istina is "what is," the genuinely existent, *to ontōs on* or *ho ontōs on*, in contradistinction to what is imaginary, unreal, unactual. In the word "*istina*," the Russian language marks the ontological aspect of this idea. Therefore, "*istina*" signifies absolute self-identity and, hence, self-equality, exactness, genuineness. *Istyi, istinnyi, istovyi* [true, authentic, real] are words that issue from the same etymological nest.

Scholastic philosophy too did not shy away from an ontological understanding of the truth. For example, one can point to the semi-Thomist Dominican John Gratideus from Ascoli († 1341), who decisively insisted that "Truth" must be understood not as equality or agreement, which is introduced into a thing by a cognitive act of the reason, but as the equality that the thing itself injects into its existence from outside: "Formally, truth is the equality or conformity that the thing itself, insofar as it is thought, injects into itself in the nature of things outside."[6]

Let us now turn to the etymology. *Is-ti-na* and its derivatives (cf. the Lettish *ist-s*, *ist-en-s*) are related to *es-t'*, *est-e-stvo* (to be, essence). They can be compared with the Polish *istot-a* [entity], *istot-nie* (really), *istniec* (to exist really).[7] Others have the same view of the etymology of the word "*istina*." According to the definition of V. Dal', for example, "*istina* is all that is genuine, authentic, exact, just, that which *is*. All that *is* [*est'*] is *istina*. Are not *est'* and *estina*, *istina* one and the same?" Dal' asks.[8] Mikloshich,[9] Mikutsky,[10] and our specialist in old words, F. Shimkevich,[11] are of the same opinion. It is clear from this that, among the various meanings of the word "*istyi*," we find "closely resembling." According to the old explanation of a certain merchant, A. Fomin, "*istyi*" means similar, exact. Thus, he explains the ancient locution "*istyi vo otsa*" to mean "exactly like the father."[12]

This ontologism in the Russian understanding of the truth is strengthened and deepened for us if we consider the etymology of the verb *est'*. *Est'* comes from the root *es*, which in Sanskrit gives *as* (e.g., *ásmi* = *esmi*; *asti* = *esti*). *Esm'*, *est'* can without difficulty be related to the Old Slavic *esmi*; the Greek *eimi* (*esmi*); the Latin (*e*)*sum*, *est*; the German *ist*; the Sanskrit *asmi*, *asti*, etc.[13] But in accordance with certain hints in the Sanskrit, this root *es* signified—in its most ancient, concrete phase of development—*to breathe*, *hauchen*, *athmen*. In confirmation of this view of the root *as*, Curtius points to the Sanskrit words *as-u-s* (the breath of life), *asu-ras* (vital, *lebendig*); and, equivalent to the Latin *os*, mouth, the words *âs*, *âs-ja-m*, which also signify mouth; the German *athmen* is also related to this. Thus, "*est'*" originally meant to breathe. Respiration, or breath, was always considered to be the main attribute and even the very essence of *life*. And even today, the usual answer to the question, "Is he alive?" is "He's breathing." Whence the second, more abstract meaning of "*est'*": he's alive, he has strength. Finally, "*est'*" acquires its most abstract meaning, that of the verb that expresses existence. To breathe, to live, to be—these are the three layers in the root *es* in the order of their decreasing concreteness, an order that, in the opinion of linguists, corresponds to their chronological order.

The root *as* signifies an existence as regular as breathing (*ein gleichmässig fortgesetze Existenz*) in contrast to the root *bhu*, which one finds in *byt'*, *fui*, *bin*, *phuō*, etc., signifying becoming (*ein Werden*).[14]

Pointing to the link between the notions of breathing and existence, Renan gives a parallel from the Semitic languages, namely the Hebrew verbal substantive *haja* (to happen, to appear, to be) or *hawa* (to breathe, to live, to be).[15] In these words he sees an onomatopoeia of the process of breathing.

Thanks to this opposition between the roots *es* and *bhu*, they complement each other: The former is used exclusively in forms of *duration*, derived from

the present. The latter is primarily used in those forms of time which, like the aorist and the perfect, signify an accomplished becoming.[16]

Returning now to its Russian understanding, we can say that the truth [*istina*] is existence that abides, that which lives, living being, that which breathes, i.e., that which possesses the essential condition of life and existence. Truth as the living being *par excellence*—that is the conception the Russian people have of it. To be sure, it is not difficult to see that it is precisely this conception of the truth that forms the distinctive and original feature of Russian philosophy.[17]

The ancient Greek underscores a wholly other aspect of truth. Truth, he says, is *alētheia*. But what is this *alētheia*? The word *alēthe(s)ia* or, in the Ionian form, *alētheie*, like the derivatives *alēthes* (truthful), *alētheno* (I conform to truth), and so forth, consists of the negative particle *a* (*a privativum*) and *lēthos, *lathos* in Doric. This latter word, from the root *ladho*, has the same root as the verb *latho*, the Ionic *lēthō*, and *lanthanō* (I pass by, I slip away, I remain unnoticed, I remain unknown). In the medium voice this verb acquires the sense of *memoria labor*, I let slip in memory, I lose for memory (i.e., for consciousness in general), I forget. Connected with this later nuance of the root *lath* are: *lēthē*, the Doric *latha*, *lathosuna*, *lēsmosuna*, *lēstis*, i.e., forgetting and forgetfulness; *lēthedanos*, i.e., compelling one to forget; *lēthargos* i.e., forgetting and, therefrom, *lēthargos*, a summons to sleep, *Schlafsucht*, as the desire to immerse oneself in a stage of forgetting and unconsciousness, and, further, the name of a pathological sleep, lethargy.[18] The ancient idea of death as a transition to an illusory existence, almost to self-forgetting and unconsciousness, and, in any case, to the forgetting of everything earthly, finds its symbol in the image of the shades' drinking of water from the underground river of Forgetfulness, "Lethe." The plastic image of the "water of Lethe," *to Lēthēs hudōr* and a whole series of expressions, such as *meta lēthēs*, i.e., in forgetfulness; *lēthēn echein*, i.e., to have forgetting, that is, to be forgetful; *en lēthēs tinos eina*, i.e., to forget something; *lēthēn tinos poiesthai*, i.e., to produce forgetting of something; *lēsmosunan thestai*, to bring to a state of forgetting; *lēstin iskein ti*, i.e., to forget something, and so forth—all this taken together testifies that forgetting for the Greek understanding was not merely a state of the absence of memory, but a special act of the annihilation of a part of the consciousness, an extinguishing in the consciousness of a part of the reality of that which is forgotten, in other words, not a lack of memory but the power of forgetting. This power of forgetting is the power of all-devouring time.

All is in flux. Time is the form of existence of all that is, and to say "exists" is to say "in time," for time is the form of the flux of phenomena. "All is in flux and moving, and nothing abides," complained Heraclitus. Everything slips away from the consciousness, flows through the consciousness, is forgotten. Time, chronos, produces phenomena, but, like its mythological image, Chronos, it devours its children. The very essence of consciousness, of life, of any reality is in their flux, i.e., in a certain metaphysical forgetting. The most original philosophy of our day, Henri Bergson's philosophy of time,[19] is wholly built on this unquestionable truth, on the idea of the reality of time

and its power. But despite all the unquestionableness of the latter, we cannot extinguish the demand for that which is *not* forgotten, for that which is *not* forgettable, for that which "abides" in the flux of time. It is this unforgettableness which is *a-lētheia*. Truth, in the understanding of the Greeks, is *a-lētheia*, something capable of abiding in the flux of forgetfulness, in the Lethean currents of the sensuous world. It is something that overcomes time, something that does not flow but is fixed, something eternally remembered. Truth is the eternal memory of some Consciousness. Truth is value worthy of and capable of eternal remembrance.

Memory desires to stop movement; memory desires to freeze the motion of fleeting phenomena; memory desires to place a dam in front of the flux of becoming. Thus, the *unforgettable existence* that is sought by consciousness, this *alētheia*, is a fixed flux, an abiding flow, an immobile vortex of being. The very striving to remember, this "will to unforgettableness," surpasses the rational mind. But the latter desires this self-contradiction. If, in its essence, the concept of memory transcends the rational mind, then Memory taken in its highest measure, i.e., the Truth, *a fortiori* transcends the rational mind. Memory-Mnemosyne is the mother of the muses, the spiritual activities of mankind, the companions of Apollo, of Spiritual Creativity. Nevertheless, the ancient Greeks demand of Truth the same quality that is indicated by Scripture, for there it is said that "the truth of the Lord endureth for ever" (Ps. 117:2) and that "Thy truth is unto all generations" (Ps. 119:90).

As is well known, the Latin word for truth, *veritas*, derives from the root *var*. In view of this, the word *veritas* is considered to have the same root as the Russian words *vera* (faith) and *verit'* (to believe), and the German words *wahren*, to preserve or protect, and *wehren*, to prevent, as well as to be strong. *Wahr, Wahrheit*, truthful, truth, are also related words, like the French *verité*, which directly derives from the Latin *veritas*. That the root *var* originally refers to the cultic domain is seen, as Curtius[20] tell us, from the Sanskrit *vra-ta-m*, sacred rite, vow; from the Zend *varena*, faith; and from the Greek *bretas*, something revered, a wooden or stone idol; the word *heortē* (instead of *e-For-tē*), cultic worship, religious feast, also appears to be related. The cultic connection of the root *var* and especially the word *veritas* is clearly seen in a survey of Latin words of the same root. Thus, there is no doubt that the verb *ver-e-or* or *re-vereor*, which is used in classical Latin in the more general sense of I am apprehensive of, I take care, I am afraid, I am terrified, I revere, I respect, I tremble with fear, originally referred to mystical dread and to the caution that was provoked by this dread when one came too close to holy beings, places, and objects. Taboo, the sacred, the holy, is what forces a man *vereri*. This led to the Catholic title of spiritual persons: *reverendus*. *Reverendus* or *reverendissimus pater* is a person toward whom one must behave respectfully, cautiously, fearfully. Otherwise, something bad could happen. *Verenda,-orumor* or *partes verendae* are *pudenda*, and it is well known that antiquity had a reverent attitude toward them, treated them with fearful religious respect. Then, the noun *verecundia*, religious fear, modesty, the verb *verecundor*, I have fear, and the adjective *verecundus*, fearful, shameful, decent, modest, once again point to the cultic domain of the application of the

root *var*. It is clear from this that, strictly speaking, *verus* means protected or grounded in the sense of that which is the object of a taboo or consecration. *Verdictum*, the verdict of a judge has, of course, the sense of the religiously obligatory judgment of persons who head a cult, for the law of antiquity is only an aspect of cult. The meanings of other words, such as *veridicus, veriloquium*, etc., are clear without explanation.

A. Suvorov, the author of the Latin etymological dictionary, indicates that the Russian verbs *govoriu*, *reku* [I speak, I say] express the original sense of the root *var*. But, on the basis of what has been said above, it is unquestionable that, if the root *var* really means "to speak," it is precisely in the sense attributed to this word by all of antiquity, that is, in the sense of a powerful, vatic word (be it ritual consecration or prayer) which is capable of making its object not only juridically and nominally but also mystically and really a source of fear and trembling.[21] Thus, strictly speaking, *vereor* means "the power of ritual consecration exerted over me."

After these preliminary considerations it is not difficult to guess the meaning of the word *veritas*. Let us first remark that this word, which is of late origin, had wholly belonged to the domain of law and acquired only with Cicero a philosophical and generally theoretical sense, a sense that refers to the domain of knowledge. Even in the generally moral sense of sincerity, *parrēsia*, this word is encountered before Cicero just once, in Terence,[22] in the phrase: "*obsequium amicos, veritas odium parit*" (obsequiousness produces friends while sincerity produces hatred). Furthermore, although in Cicero the word *veritas* at once acquires a wide application, this is primarily in the legal and, in part, the moral domain. Here, *veritas* means either the real situation of a juridical case as opposed to its false clarification by one of the parties involved, or justice, or finally the just cause of the plaintiff. It is only rarely equated with "truth" as we tend to understand it.[23]

The juridical nuance of *veritas*, a word religiously juridical in its root and morally juridical in its origin, was subsequently preserved and even grew more pronounced. In later Latin the word even came to have a purely juridical meaning. According to du Cange, *veritas* means *depositio testis*, the deposition of a witness, *veridictum*. *Veritas* then came to mean *inquisitio judicaria*, judicial inquest. It also came to mean right, privilege, particularly with respect to property, and so forth.[24]

The ancient Hebrews, and the Semites in general, captured in their language a special aspect of the idea of Truth: the historical aspect, or more precisely, the theocratic aspect. Truth for them was always the Word of God. For the Hebrew, the irrevocability, certainty, and reliability of this Divine promise is what characterized it as Truth. Truth is Reliability. "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17). The Truth as it is represented in the Bible is precisely this absolutely irrevocable and unalterable "law."

The Hebrew word[25] *'emet* or, in colloquial pronunciation, *emes*, truth, has as its basis the root *'mn*. The verb *'aman* derived therefrom means, strictly speaking, I supported, I propped up. This main meaning of the verb *'aman* is strongly indicated by nouns of the same root from the domain of architecture:

'omenah, column, and *'amon*, builder, master, and, in part, by *'omen*, pedagogue, i.e., builder of children's souls. The intransitive middle sense of the verb *'aman*, was supported, was propped up, then serves as the point of departure for a whole brood of words that are fairly removed from the main meaning of the verb *'aman*, i.e., *was strong, firm* (as supported, as propped up), and therefore *was unshakable*. From this we get the meanings: *suitable for use as a support to lean upon without damage to it*, and finally, *was faithful*. From this we get Amen, meaning: my word is firm, verily, of course, thus it must be, *fiat*. It serves as a formula to seal a union or a vow. It is also used to conclude a doxology or a prayer (here it is said twice). The meaning of the word "amen" is well clarified from Rev 3:14: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness." Cf. Is. 65:16: "*'elohe-'amen*, the God that one should trust." From here one can understand the whole combination of meanings of *'emet* (instead of *amenet*). Its most immediate meanings are firmness, stability, durability, and therefore safety. Further, we get faith-faithfulness, *fides*, by virtue of which he who is constant in himself preserves and fulfills the promise, the concepts of *Treue* and *Glaube*. One can then also understand the connection of this latter concept with the honesty and wholeness of the soul. As the distinguishing characteristic of a judge or a judicial sentence, *'emet* therefore signifies justice, truthfulness. As the distinguishing characteristic of inner life, it is opposed to pretense and has the meaning of sincerity, primarily sincerity in the worship of God. Finally, *'emet* corresponds to the Russian word *istina* (truth) in opposition to falsehood. This is precisely how this word is used in Gen. 42:16, Deut. 22:20, 2 Sam. 7:28. Also see 1 Kings 10:6, 22:16, Ps. 15:2, 51:6, etc.

Derived from this latter nuance of the word *'emet* is the term *meames*, which is used by Hebrew philosophers, e.g., Maimonides, "to describe people who, not being satisfied with authority and custom, strive for intellectual knowledge of truth."[26]

Thus, for the Hebrews, Truth really is the "reliable word," "reliability," "the reliable promise." And since to "put . . . your trust in princes, . . . in the son of man" (Ps. 146:3) is vain, the sole reliable word is the Word of God; Truth is God's unalterable promise, which is insured by the Lord's reliability and immutability. Thus, for the Hebrews, Truth is not an ontological concept, as it is for the Slavs. It is not an epistemological concept, as it is for the Greeks. And it is not a juridical concept, as it is for the Romans. Instead, it is a historical, or rather, a sacred-historical concept, a theocratic concept.

The four nuances of the concept of truth observed by us can be combined in pair fashion, in the following manner: The Russian *Istina* and the Hebrew *'emet* refer primarily to the Divine content of the Truth, while the Greek *Alētheia* and the Latin *Veritas* refer to its human form. On the other hand, the Russian and Greek terms have a philosophical character, while the Latin and Hebrew terms have a sociological character. By this I mean that, in the Russian and Greek understanding, Truth has an immediate relation to every person, while, for the Romans and the Hebrews, it is mediated by society. All that we have said about the division of the concept of the truth can be conveniently summarized in the following table:

	According to Content	According to Form
Immediate personal relation	Russian *Istina*	Greek *Alētheia*
Social mediation	Hebrew *'emet*	Latin *Veritas*

"What is truth?" Pilate asked of the Truth (see John 18:38). He did not receive an answer. He did not receive an answer because the question was vain. The Living Answer stood before him, but Pilate did not see the Truth's truthfulness. Let us suppose that the Lord answered the Roman Procurator not only with this screaming silence but also with the quiet words, "I am the Truth." But even then the questioner would have remained without an answer, for he would not have known how to recognize the Truth as truth, could not have been convinced of its genuineness. The knowledge that Pilate lacked, the knowledge that all of mankind lacks above all, is knowledge of the conditions of certitude.

What is certitude? It is the discovery of the proper character of truth, the recognition in truth of a certain feature that distinguishes it from untruth. Psychologically, this recognition is expressed as untroubled bliss, the satisfied thirst for truth.

"Ye shall know the Truth (*tēn alētheian*), and the Truth (*hē alētheia*) shall make you free" (John 8:32). Free from what? Free in general from sin (see John 8:34), from every sin, free (in the domain of knowledge) from everything that is untruthful, from everything that does not conform with the truth. "Certitude", says Archimandrite Serapion Mashkin,[27] "is the feeling of truth. Certitude appears when we pronounce a necessary judgment and consists in the exclusion of the suspicion that the judgment pronounced will change some time or somewhere. Certitude is therefore the intellectual feeling of accepting the judgment pronounced as a true one." "By a criterion of truth," the same philosopher says in another work, "we mean the state of the truth-possessing spirit, a state of complete satisfaction, of joy, in which there is no doubt whatever that the stated proposition conforms to genuine reality. This state is reached when a judgment about something satisfies a proposition called a measure of truth or its criterion."

The problem of the certitude of truth is reducible to the problem of finding a criterion. The entire demonstrative force of a system is focused, as it were, in the answer to this problem of finding a criterion.

Truth becomes my possession through an act of my judgment. By my judgment, I receive truth into myself.[28] Truth as truth is revealed to me by my affirmation of it.

Consequently, the following question arises: If I affirm something, by what do I guarantee for myself its truthfulness? I receive something into myself as a truth. But should I do this? Is not the very act of my judgment what removes me from the truth I seek? In other words, what sign should I see in my judgment so as to be inwardly at peace?

Every judgment is *either through itself or through something else, i.e., it is given either directly or indirectly*, as a consequent of something else. It has in this something else its sufficient ground. If it is not given through itself or mediated by something else, it lacks all real content and rational form, i.e., it is not a judgment at all but only sounds, *flatus vocis*, vibrations of the air, nothing more. Thus, every judgment necessarily belongs to at least one of two classes. Let us now examine each of these classes separately.

A judgment given directly is the self-evidence of intuition, *evidentia*, *enargeia*. It subsequently becomes fragmented:

This self-evidence can be the self-evidence of *sensuous* experience, and then the criterion of truth is the criterion of the empiricists of *external* experience (the empirio-criticists, etc.). "All things that can be reduced to direct perceptions by the sense organs are certain. The perception of an *object* is certain."

This self-evidence can be the self-evidence of intellectual experience, and the criterion of truth in this case is the criterion of the empiricists of *internal* experience (the transcendentalists, etc.). "All things that can be reduced to axioms of reason are certain. The self-perception of a *subject* is certain."

Finally, the self-evidence of intuition can be the self-evidence of *mystical* intuition. A criterion of truth as it is understood by the majority of mystics (especially Indian mystics) is obtained: "All things that remain when everything that is irreducible to the perception of the subject-object is filtered out are certain. Only the perception of the subject-object in which there is no split into subject and object is certain."[29]

These are the three kinds of self-evident intuition. But all three of these aspects of what is given (sensuous-empirical, transcendental-rationalistic, and subconscious-mystical) have one insufficiency in common: their naked, unjustified givenness. This givenness is perceived by consciousness as something external to itself, as something compulsory, mechanical, self-imposing, blind, and dull, as, in the final analysis, something irrational and therefore *conditional*. The mind does not see the internal necessity of its perception. It sees only an external necessity, i.e., a necessity forced upon it, an inevitability. To the question, "Where is the ground of our judgment of perception?" all these criteria answer: "This ground lies in the fact that sensuous perception, intellectual apprehension, or mystical awareness is precisely this very same perception, apprehension, or

awareness." But why is "this" precisely "this," and not something else? What does the reason of this self-identity of the immediately given consist in? "It consists in the fact," it is said, "that, in general, every given is itself: every A is A."

A = A. That is the final answer. But this tautological formula, this lifeless, thought-less, and therefore meaningless equality A = A, is, in fact, only a generalization of the self-identity that is inherent in every given. But by no means is this formula an answer to our question "Why?" In other words, this equality transfers our particular question from a single given to *givenness in general*. It displays our painful state of the moment on a gigantic scale, as if projecting it by a magic lantern upon the whole of being. If previously we had bumped against a stone, it is now announced to us that this is not an isolated stone but a solid wall, a wall that encompasses the entire domain of our enquiring mind.

A = A. That says everything. It says: "Knowledge is limited by conditional judgments." Or simply: "Be silent, I tell you!" Mechanically stopping up our mouth, this formula dooms us to abide in the finite and therefore in the accidental. This formula affirms in advance the separateness and egotistical isolation of the ultimate elements of being, thus rupturing all rational connection between them. To the question "Why?" or "On what ground?" it repeats "*sic et non aliter*, thus and not otherwise," interrupting the questioner but not being able to satisfy him or to teach self-limitation. Every philosophical construction of this type follows the paradigm of the following conversation I once had with an old female servant:

I: "What is the sun?"
She: "It is our little sun."
I: "No, I mean what is it?"
She: "It's the sun."
I: "But why does it shine?"
She: "The sun is the sun, that's why it shines. It shines and shines. Look, see what the sun is like."
I: "But why?"
She: "Good God, Pavel Aleksandrovich, as if I know! You're the educated and learned one. We're ignoramuses."

It is self-evident that the criterion of givenness that is applied by the overwhelming majority of philosophical schools in one way or another cannot give certitude. From "is," no matter how deep it lies in nature or in my being, or in the common root of the one and the other, it is impossible to extract "necessary."

Furthermore, even if we did not notice this blind character of the naked tautology A = A, even if we did not suffocate in this "it is because it is," reality would force us to direct our mental gaze upon it.

That which is accepted as the criterion of truth in virtue of its givenness turns out to be violated by reality from all sides.

By a strange irony, precisely that criterion which seeks to base itself exclusively on its own factual lordship over everything, on the right of power over every actual intuition, is in fact violated by every factual intuition. The law of identity, which pretends to absolute universality, turns out to have a place nowhere at all. This law sees its right in its actual givenness, but every given actually rejects this law *toto genere*, violating it in both the order of space and the order of time—everywhere and always. In excluding all other elements, every A is excluded by all of them, for if each of these elements is for A only not-A, then A over against not-A is only not-not-A. From the viewpoint of the law of identity, all being, in desiring to affirm itself, actually only destroys itself, becoming a combination of elements each of which is a center of negations, and *only* negations. Thus, all being is a total negation, one great "Not." The law of identity is the spirit of death, emptiness, and nothingness.

Once present givenness becomes the criterion, it is such absolutely everywhere and always. Therefore, all mutually exclusive A's as givens are true; everything is true. But this annuls the power of the law of identity, for this law then turns out to contain an internal contradiction.

But there is really no need to point out that one person perceives in one way while another person perceives in another way. One does not inevitably have to refer to the *self-disharmony* of consciousness in space. Such multiplicity is also manifested by every individual subject. Change occurring in the external world, in the inner world, and finally in the world of mystical perceptions proclaims harmoniously: "The previous A is not equal to the present A, and the future A will differ from the present A." The present opposes itself to its past and its future in time just as, in space, a thing is opposed to all things that lie outside it. In time as well, consciousness is self-disharmonious. Contradiction is everywhere and always, but identity is nowhere and never.

The law A = A becomes a completely empty schema of self-affirmation, a schema that does not synthesize any real elements, anything that is worth connecting with the "=" sign. "I = I" turns out to be nothing more than a cry of naked egotism: "I!" For where there is no difference, there can be no connection. There is therefore only the blind force of stagnation and self-imprisonment, only egotism. Outside of itself, I hates every I, since for it this I is not-I; and hating, I strives to exclude this I from the sphere of being. And since the past I (I in its past) is also considered objectively, i.e., since it also appears as not-I, then it too is irreconcilably subject to exclusion. I cannot bear itself in time and negates itself in all ways in the past and future. Thus, since the naked "now" is a pure zero of content, I hates the whole of its concrete content, i.e., the whole of its life. I turns out to be a dead desert of "here" and "now." But what then is

governed by the formula "A is A"? Only a fiction (an atom, a monad, etc.), only a hypostatized abstraction of a moment and a point, which, in themselves, do not exist. Yes, the law of identity is an unlimited monarch. But its subjects do not object to its autocracy only because they are bloodless phantoms, without reality, because they are not persons but only rational shades of persons, i.e., things that do not exist. This is sheol. This is the kingdom of death.

Let us recapitulate what we have said. Only that is rational, i.e., only that conforms to the measure of rationality and satisfies the demands of rationality, which is isolated from everything else, which is not mixed with anything else, which is self-contained, in short, which is self-identical. Only A that is equal to itself and unequal to what is not A is considered by rationality as genuinely existent, as *to on*, *to ontōs on*, as "truth." On the other hand, to everything that is unequal to itself or equal not to itself, rationality refuses to attribute genuine being, ignores it as "non-existent" or as not truly existent, as *to mē on*. Rationality only tolerates this *mē on*, only admits it as not-truth, by capturing it, to use Plato's expression, through some sort of illegitimate argument, *hapton logismōi tini nothōi* (*nothos*, strictly speaking, means "of illegitimate birth").[30]

Only the first, i.e., the "existent", is recognized by rationality, which rejects the second, i.e., the "non-existent." Rationality pins on this "non-existent" the label *to mē on*, does not notice it, making believe that it does not exist at all. For rationality only an affirmation about the "existent" is truth. By contrast, a declaration about the "non-existent" is, strictly speaking, not even a declaration. It is only a *doxa*, an "opinion," only the appearance of a declaration, devoid of the power of a declaration. It is only a "manner of speaking."

But for this reason it turns out that the *rational* is at the same time *unexplainable*. To explain A is to reduce it to "something else," to not-A, to that which is not A and which therefore is not-A. It is to derive A from not-A, to generate A. And if A really satisfies the demand of rationality, if it is really rational, i.e., absolutely self-identical, it is then unexplainable, irreducible "to something else" (to not-A), underivable "from something else." Therefore, rational A is absolutely non-reasonable,[a] blind A, untransparent for reason. That which is rational is non-reasonable, nonconformable to the measure of reason. Reason is opposed to rationality, just as rationality is opposed to reason, for they have opposite demands. Life, flowing and non-self-identical, might be reasonable; it might be transparent for reason (we have not yet found out if this is the case). But, precisely for this reason, life would be nonconformable with rationality, opposed to rationality. It would rip apart the limitedness of rationality.

[a] See note *e* on p. 7.

And rationality, hostile to life, would in turn rather seek to kill life than agree to receive life into itself.[31]

Thus, if the criterion of self-evidence is insufficient *theoretically*, as something that stops the seeking of the spirit, it is also of no use *practically*, since it cannot achieve its claims even within the limits it has set for itself. The immediate givenness of all three kinds of intuition (objective, subjective, and subjective-objective) does not give certitude. This is a radical condemnation of all philosophical dogmatic systems. And we do not exclude Kant's system, for which sensuousness and reason with all its functions are simple givens.

I now turn not to immediate but to *mediated* judgment, to what is commonly called discursion, for here reason *discurrit*, runs to some other judgment.

By its very name, the certitude of this judgment consists in its reducibility to *another* judgment. The question about the ground of a judgment is answered not by this judgment itself but by another judgment. In the other judgment, the given appears as justified; it appears in its truth. Such is the relative proof of one judgment on the basis of another. To prove relatively means to demonstrate how one judgment forms the consequent of another, how it is generated by another.[32] Reason shifts its focus here to a grounding judgment. But this judgment cannot be simply given, for then the whole matter would be reduced to the criterion of self-evidence. This judgment too must be justified in another judgment. And the next judgment leads to another judgment. And it goes on and on. But this is very similar to how our forebears spoke. They constructed entire chains of explanatory links. For example, we read in a Serbo-Bulgarian manuscript of the 15th century:

"Tell me: What supports the earth? The high water. But what supports the water? A great flat rock. But what supports the rock? Four golden whales. But what supports the golden whales? A fiery river. But what supports the fire? Another fire that is twice as hot. But what supports the other fire? An iron oak that is rooted in the power of God."[33]

But where is the end? Our forebears ended their "explanations," or "justifications," of present reality by referring to the attributes of God. But since they did not show why these attributes should be accepted as justified, our forebears' reference to God's will or power (if it was not a direct rejection of explanation) must have had a formal significance, the significance of an abbreviated representation of the continuation of the explanatory process. Modern language uses the abbreviation "etc." for this purpose. But the meaning of both answers is the same: They are used to attempt to show that there is no end to this justification of the given reality. In fact, when someone, abandoning his childish faith, has entered upon the path of explanations and justifications, he inevitably encounters Kant's rule that "the wildest hypotheses are more tolerable than recourse

to the supernatural."[34] Therefore, to the question, "Where is the end?" we answer, "There is no end." Instead, there is an infinite regression, *regressus in indefinitum*, a descent into the gray fog of "bad" infinity, a never-ending fall into infinitude and bottomlessness.[35]

This should not surprise us. It could not be otherwise. For if the series of descending justifications were broken somewhere, the broken link would be a dead end, and this dead end would destroy the very idea of certitude of the type being considered now, i.e., of abstract-logical, discursive certitude, in contradistinction to the type considered previously, i.e., concretely intuitive certitude. The possibility of justifying every step of the descending ladder of judgments, i.e., the incontrovertible, constant possibility of being able to descend at least one step below any given step, i.e., the constant admissibility of transition from n to (n + 1), whatever n is, this possibility contains the whole essence, the whole reasonableness, the whole meaning of our criterion in the same way that an egg contains the embryo.

But this essence of the criterion is also its Achilles' heel. *Regressus in indefinitum* is given *in potentia*, as a possibility but not in *actu*, not as a finished reality, a reality that is realized at a given time and in a given place. A reasonable proof only gives rise in time to the dream of eternity but never makes it possible to touch eternity itself. Therefore, the reasonableness of a criterion, the certitude of truth, is never given as such in reality, actually, in its justifiedness. It is always given only in possibility, potentially, in its justifiability.

In its immediately given concreteness, intuition is something actual, although it is blind and therefore conditional. Intuition could not satisfy us. But discursion, in its always only mediately justified abstractness, is invariably only something possible, unreal, although (and this makes up for it!) it is reasonable and unconditional. Of course, it, too, we consider unsatisfactory.

Let me say it simply: Blind intuition is a bird in the hand while reasonable discursion is a bird in the bush. If the former provides nonphilosophical satisfaction by its presence and its reliability, the latter is, in fact, not attained reasonableness but only a regulating principle, a law for the activity of reason, a road on which we must walk eternally in order . . . in order never to reach any goal. A reasonable criterion is a direction, not a goal.

If blind and absurd intuition can still give comfort to the nonphilosophical mind in its practical life, reasonable discursion is, of course, suitable only for the literary exercises of a school or for the self-satisfaction of the scholar's study, for those whose "profession" is philosophy but who have never partaken of it.

An impenetrable wall and an uncrossable sea; the deadliness of stagnation and the vanity of unceasing motion; the obtuseness of the golden calf

and the eternal incompletion of the Tower of Babel, i.e., a stone idol and "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5); present reality and never-finished possibility; formless content and contentless form; finite intuition and boundless discursion—those are the Scylla and the Charybdis on the way to certitude. A very sad dilemma! The first way out is to embrace obstinately the self-evidence of intuition, which in the last analysis is reduced to the givenness of a certain organization of reason, whence comes Spencer's notorious criterion of certitude. The second way out is to plunge hopelessly into reasonable discursion, which is empty possibility, to descend lower and lower into the depths of motivation.

But neither way out provides satisfaction in the search for Incorruptible Truth. Neither way out leads to certitude. Neither way out provides a sight of the "Pillar of the Truth."

Can one not ascend above both obstacles?

We return to the intuition of the *law of identity*.

But, having exhausted the resources of *realism* and *rationalism*, we involuntarily turn to skepticism, i.e., to an examination, a critique, of the self-evident judgment.

As establishing the *de facto* inseparability of the subject and its predicate in consciousness, this judgment is assertoric. A link between the subject and the predicate exists, but it does not have to exist. There is as yet nothing in the character of this link that makes it apodictically necessary and irrevocable. The only thing that can establish such a link is *proof*. To prove is to show why we consider the predicate of a judgment apodictically linked with the subject. Not to accept anything without proof is not to admit any judgments except apodictic ones. The basic requirement of skepticism is to consider every unproved proposition uncertain, to reject absolutely any unproved presuppositions, however self-evident they may be. We already find this requirement clearly expressed in Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, even "right opinion" that cannot be confirmed by proof is not "knowledge," "for how could something unproved be knowledge?" But neither can it be called "lack of knowledge."[36] For Aristotle, "knowledge" is nothing else but "proved possession, *hesis apodeiktikē*,"[37] whence comes the very term "apodictic."

It will be objected, however, that this latter proposition, i.e., the acceptance of only proved propositions and the sweeping away of everything unproved, is itself unproved. By introducing this proposition, does not the skeptic use the same sort of unproved presupposition as the one he condemned when the dogmatist used it? No. It is only an analytical expression of the essential striving of the philosopher, of his love of the Truth. Love of the Truth demands precisely truth, nothing else. The uncertain does not have to be the sought-for truth. It may be untruth, and therefore the lover of the Truth must necessarily take care that he does not accept untruth under the guise of self-evidence. But precisely this kind

of doubtful character distinguishes self-evidence. Self-evidence is the obtuse primary thing, which is not grounded further. And since self-evidence is unprovable, the philosopher falls into an aporia,[38] into a difficult position. The only thing that he could accept is self-evidence, but it too he cannot accept. And not being able to state a certain judgment, he is fated *epechein*, to delay with the judgment, to refrain from judgment. Epoche or the state of refraining from all statement is the last word of skepticism.[39]

But what is epoche as a state of the soul? Is it "ataraxy, or imperturbability,"[40] that profound tranquillity of the spirit which has refused all statements, that meekness and quietude about which the ancient skeptics dreamt? Or is it something else? Let us see.

And further, does one who has decided on ataraxy really become peaceful and tranquil like Pyrrho, the same Pyrrho in whom skeptics of all ages have seen their patron and almost a saint?[41] Or is it that the enchanting image of this great skeptic has its roots not in the theoretical search for truth but in something else, in something that skepticism has not succeeded in touching? Let us see.

Expressed in words, epoche comes down to the following two-part thesis:

I do not affirm anything;
I also do not affirm the fact that I do not affirm anything.

This two-part thesis is proved by a proposition established earlier: "Every unproved proposition is uncertain." And the latter is the opposite side of love of the Truth.

If this is the case, I do not have any proved proposition; I do not affirm anything. But having just stated what I have stated, I must also remove this proposition, for it too is unproved. If we open up the first half of the thesis, it will have the form of the two-part judgment:

I affirm that I do not affirm anything (A′);
I do not affirm that I do not affirm anything (A″).

Now, as it turns out, we are obviously violating the law of identity by stating contradictory predicates about one and the same subject, about its affirmation, A, in one and the same connection. But that is not all.

Both parts of the thesis are an affirmation. The first is the affirmation of an affirmation, while the second is the affirmation of a nonaffirmation. The same process is inevitably applied to each. Thus, we obtain:

I affirm (A_1');
I do not affirm (A_2').
I affirm (A_1'');
I do not affirm (A_2'').

In the same way, the process will go further and further. Each new link will double the number of mutually contradictory propositions. The series goes toward infinity, and sooner or later, we are compelled to interrupt the process of doubling, in order to fix in immobility, like a frozen grimace, this obvious violation of the law of identity. We then get a powerful contradiction, i.e., at the same time we get:

A is A;
A is not A.

Not being in a position to harmonize *actively* these two parts of one proposition, we are compelled passively to surrender to contradictions that rip apart the consciousness. In affirming one thing, we are compelled at the same moment to affirm the opposite. In affirming the latter, we at once turn to the former. In the same way that an object is accompanied by a shadow, every affirmation is accompanied by the excruciating desire for the opposite affirmation. After having inwardly said "yes" to ourselves, we say "no" at the same moment. But the earlier "no" longs for "yes." "Yes" and "no" are inseparable. Doubt, in the sense of uncertainty, is far away. Absolute doubt has now begun. This is doubt as the total impossibility of affirming anything at all, even its own nonaffirmation. Progressing stage by stage, manifesting the idea that inheres in it *in nuce*, skepticism reaches its own negation but cannot leap across this negation. And so, it becomes an infinitely excruciating torment, an agony of the spirit. To clarify this state, let us imagine a drowning man who is attempting to grab hold of a polished sheer cliff face. He claws at the cliff with his fingernails, loses hold, claws at it again, and, crazed, catches at it again and again. Or let us imagine a bear that attempts to push aside a log suspended in front of a beehive. The farther he pushes the log, the more painful the return blow. The greater the inner fury, the sweeter the honey seems.

Such also is the state of the consistent skeptic. What we see is not even affirmation and negation, but insane convulsions, a furious marching in place, a tossing from side to side, a kind of inarticulate philosophical howl. The result is an abstention from judgment, absolute epoche, not as a tranquil and dispassionate refusal of judgment but as a concealed inner pain, a pain that clenches its teeth and strains every nerve and muscle in an effort not to scream and not to let out a completely insane howl.

To be sure, this is not ataraxy. No, this is the most furious of tortures, pulling at the hidden fibers of one's entire being. It is a pyrrhonic, truly fiery (Gk. *pur* = fire) torment. Molten lava flows in the veins, and a dark flame penetrates the marrow of the bones. At the same time, the deadening cold of absolute solitude and perdition turns the consciousness into a block of ice. There are no words. There are not even any moans to moan

out—if only into the air—a million torments. The tongue refuses to obey. As Scripture says: "my tongue cleaveth to my jaws" (Ps: 22:15; cf. Ps. 137:6, Lam. 4:4, Eze. 3:26). There is no help, no means to stop the torture, for the consuming fire of Prometheus comes from within, for the true focus of this fiery agony is the very center of the philosopher, his "I," which struggles to obtain non-conditional knowledge.

I do not have truth but the idea of truth burns me. I do not have the evidence to affirm that there is Truth in general and that I will attain this Truth. By making such an affirmation I would renounce the thirst for the absolute, because I would accept something unproved. Nevertheless, the idea of Truth lives in me like a "devouring fire," and the secret yearning to meet Truth face to face makes my tongue cleave to my jaws. It is this yearning that seethes and bubbles in my veins like a flaming stream. If there were no hope, the torture too would cease. Consciousness would then return to philosophical philistinism, to the domain of the conditional. For this fiery hope in Truth melts with its black flame every conditional truth, every uncertain proposition. It is also uncertain whether I yearn for Truth. Perhaps that too only seems. But perhaps this very seeming is not seeming?

In asking myself this last question, I enter into the last circle of the skeptical hell, into the place where the very meaning of words is lost. Words cease to be fixed; they fly out of their nests. Everything turns into everything else. Every word-combination is completely equivalent to every other, and any word can change places with any other. Here, the mind loses itself, is lost in a formless, chaotic abyss. Here, delirium and senselessness lurk.

But this maximally skeptical doubt is possible only as an unstable equilibrium, as the limit of absolute dementia, for what is dementia but de*ment*-ia, or mindlessness, the experience of the non-substantiality, the nonsupportednes, of the mind.[42] When this doubt is experienced, it is carefully hidden from others. And after being experienced, it is remembered with great reluctance. From the outside it is almost impossible to understand what this is. Delirious chaos pours forth through this ultimate limit of reason, and the mind is deadened with an all-penetrating cold. Here, behind a thin barrier, spiritual death begins. Therefore, the state of ultimate skepticism is possible only for the blink of an eye, followed by the return to the fiery torment of Pyrrho, to epoche, or by the plunge into the pitch-black night of despair, whence there is no escape and where the very thirst for the Truth disappears. From the sublime to the ridiculous is a single step, and this is precisely a step that takes one away from the ground of reason.

Thus, the way of skepticism also leads to nothing.

We demand certitude, and this demand is expressed in the decision not to accept anything without proof. But at the same time the very proposi-

tion "not to accept anything without proof" must be proved. Let us see, however, if we have made any dogmatic assertion in the foregoing discussion. Let us turn back.

We have sought a proposition that would be absolutely proven. But on the path of our seeking, a certain feature of this sought-for proposition which remains unproved has crept in. Namely, this sought-for absolutely proved proposition has for some reason been recognized in advance as *first* in its provenness, as that from which all positive work begins. There is no doubt that this very affirmation of the primacy of an absolutely proved judgment is, since it is unproved, a *dogmatic presupposition*. For it is possible that the sought-for proposition will be in our hands, though not as the first but as a result of other propositions, uncertain ones.

"From the uncertain the certain cannot be derived." This indisputably *dogmatic* presupposition lies at the base of the affirmation of the primacy of the certain Truth. Yes, it is dogmatic, for nowhere is it proved.

Thus, again rejecting the path we have taken, we reject the dogmatic presupposition we have found and say: We do not know whether or not a certain proposition exists; but if it does exist, we do not know whether or not it is first. Moreover, that "we do not know" we also do not know, and so on, as before. Further, our epoche will begin, and it will be of a kind similar to that encountered before. But our present state will be somewhat new. We do not know whether or not the Truth exists. But if it exists, we do not know if reason can lead to it. And if reason can lead to it, we do not know how reason could lead to it and where reason could meet it. But, in spite of all this, we say to ourselves: If the Truth exists, it could be sought. Perhaps we could find it by taking some road at random, and then it would perhaps announce itself as such, as the Truth.

But why do I speak in this way? Where is the ground for my affirmation? There is no ground. Therefore, given the demand that my presupposition be *proved*, I now remove this presupposition from the agenda and return to epoche with the affirmation: "Perhaps this is true or perhaps the opposite is true." Once I am asked for an answer to the question, "Is this so?" I say, "It is not so." But if I am asked decisively, "Is this not so?" I say, "It is so." I ask; I do not affirm; and what I put into my words is something not at all logical. What is this something? It is the tone of hope but not the logical expression of hope. And from this tone there follows only the fact that I will nevertheless try to make the proposed *unjustified*, but not condemned, attempt to find the Truth. If I am asked about grounds, I will curl up in myself like a snail. I see that I am threatened either by the insanity of abstaining from the search or by the—perhaps—vain labor of attempts: work in the full consciousness that it is ungrounded, and that its justification is conceivable only as an accident, or rather as a *gift*, as *gratia quae gratis datur*. Does not St. Seraphim of Sarov speak of the same thing when he says, "If a man, out of love for God, does

not overmuch concern himself with himself, that is a wise hope"? In conformity with St. Seraphim's words, I do not want to "concern myself overmuch with myself," with my rational mind. That is, I want to hope.[43]

Thus I grope along, all the while remembering that my steps do not have any significance. At my own risk, on the off chance, I am *attempting* to grow something, being guided not by philosophical skepticism but by my own *feeling*. And for a time I will refrain from turning this feeling into ash with pyrrhonian lava. I cherish a secret hope—*hope for a miracle*. Perhaps the flow of lava will move aside before my shoot, and the plant will turn out to be a burning bush. But this, I keep to myself. And in keeping it to myself, I accept the word of the kathisma[b] which I have heard a thousand times in church but which has only now for some reason surfaced in my consciousness: "Those who seek God shall not be deprived of any good." Yes, those who seek, those who thirst. The verse does not say "those who have," and it would be superfluous to say this, for it goes without saying that those who have God, the Original Source of all good, will not be deprived of any particular good. And perhaps it would be incorrect to say this, for can anyone say that he has God wholly and that he is therefore not one of those who seek? But it is precisely those who seek God who will not be deprived of any good. Seeking is affirmed by the Church as non-deprivation. It turns out that those who have not are identical to those who have. But although this equality is as yet unproved, it has become dear to my soul. And since I do not have anything, why should I not submit myself to this power of God's word?

Thus, I enter into a new domain, that of *probabilism*—under the necessary condition, however, that my entry into this domain be only a trial, only an experiment. The true homeland is still epoche. But if I resisted my presentiment and did not desire to leave epoche, it would still be necessary to justify my stubbornness, which I could not do, just as now I cannot justify my leaving epoche. Neither for the one nor for the other do I have any justification. But, practically, of course, it is *more natural* to search for a path, even if only hoping for a miracle, than to sit in place in despair. But in order to search it is necessary to be outside of one's rational mind. Here again, a question arises: By what right do we go beyond our rational mind? By the right that is given to us by the rational mind itself: It compels us to it.[44] Indeed, what remains to be done when the rational mind refuses to serve?

I want to form a problematic construction, keeping in mind that perhaps it will accidentally turn out to be certain. "Turn out to be!" With these words, I have carried my search from the ground of speculation to the domain of experience, of actual perception, but of experience and perception which must be united with inner reasonableness as well.

[b] A kathisma is one of the twenty sections into which the Psalter is divided for liturgical use in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

What are the formal, speculative conditions that would be satisfied if such experience actually arose? In other words, what judgments would we necessarily form concerning this experience (let me emphasize once again that we do not have this experience)?

These judgments are as follows:

(1) The absolute Truth exists, i.e., it is unconditional reality.
(2) The absolute Truth is knowable, i.e., it is unconditional reasonableness.
(3) The absolute Truth is given as a fact, i.e., it is a finite intuition, but it is absolutely proven, i.e., it has the structure of infinite discursion.

Moreover, the third proposition, after analysis, implies the two others. In fact, "Truth is intuition." This means that it exists. Further, "Truth is discursion." This means that it is knowable. For intuitiveness is the *de facto* givenness of existence, whereas discursiveness is the ideal possibility of knowing.

This means that all our attention is concentrated on a proposition that is dual in content but one in idea: "Truth is intuition; Truth is discursion." Or more simply:

"Truth Is Intuition-Discursion."

Truth is intuition that is provable, i.e., discursive. In order to be discursive, intuition must be intuition which is not blind, not obtusely limited. It must be intuition that tends to infinity. It must be speaking, reasonable intuition, as it were. In order to be intuitive, discursion must not lose itself in boundlessness. It must be not only possible but also real, actual.

Discursive intuition must contain a synthesized infinite series of its own grounds, whereas intuitive discursion must synthesize its whole infinite series of grounds into a finitude, a unity, a unit. Discursive intuition is intuition that is differentiated to infinity, whereas intuitive discursion is discursion that is integrated to unity.

Thus, if the Truth exists, it is real reasonableness and reasonable reality. It is finite infinity and infinite finitude or—to use a mathematical expression—*actual infinity*,[45] the Infinite conceived as integral Unity, as one Subject complete in itself. But complete in itself, the Truth carries in itself the whole fullness of the infinite series of its grounds, the depth of its perspective. The Truth is a sun that illuminates both itself and the whole universe. Its abyss is the abyss of power, not of nothingness. The Truth is immobile motion and moving immobility. It is the unity of opposites, *coincidentia oppositorum*.

If that is the case, skepticism in fact cannot destroy truth and truth is in fact "stronger than everything."[46] The Truth always gives to skepticism a justification of itself. The Truth is always "answerable." To every "why" there is an answer, and all these answers are not given separately,

are not linked to one another externally, but are woven into an integral, inwardly fused unity. A single moment of perception of the Truth gives the Truth with *all* its grounds (even if they have never been conceived separately by anyone anywhere!). The blink of an eye gives all the fullness of knowledge.

Such is absolute Truth, if it exists. In it, the law of identity must find its justification and ground. Abiding above all ground that is external to it, above the law of identity, the Truth grounds and proves this law. The Truth contains the explanation of why being is not subject to this law.

A probabilistically presuppositious construction leads to the affirmation of the Truth as a self-proving Subject, a Subject *qui per se ipsum concipitur et demonstratur* (that is conceived and proved through itself), a Subject that is absolute Lord of itself, that is master over the infinite series of all of its grounds, which are synthesized into a unity and even into a unit. We cannot concretely conceive such a Subject, for we cannot synthesize an infinite series in its entirety; on the path of successive syntheses we will always see only the finite and conditional. Adding a finite number to a finite number an arbitrary number of times, we get nothing but a finite number. Ascending higher and higher into the mountains (to use Kant's image[47]), we would hope in vain to touch the sky with our hand. And it is insane to count on the Tower of Babel. In the same way, all of our efforts will always yield only what is in the process of being synthesized, but never what is already synthesized. An infinite Unit is transcendental for human attainments.

If, in consciousness, we had a real perception of such a self-proving Subject, this perception would be precisely an answer to the question of skepticism and would therefore destroy epoche. If epoche is resolvable at all, it is so only by this kind of destruction, by sovereign satisfaction, as it were. But epoche definitely cannot be merely avoided or eliminated. The attempt to disdain epoche is inevitably a logical trick, nothing more. And in the vain attempt to perform this trick, all dogmatic systems, not excluding Kant's, come to ruin.

In fact, if the condition of intuitive concreteness is not satisfied, the Truth will be only an empty possibility. If the condition of reasonable discursiveness is not satisfied, the Truth will be no more than blind givenness. Only a finite synthesis of infinity, a synthesis realized independently of us, can give us reasonable givenness or, in other words, the self-proving Subject.

Having in itself all the grounds of itself and all the manifestations of itself to us, having in itself all the grounds of its reasonableness and its givenness, this Subject is self-grounded not only in the order of reasonableness but also in the order of givenness. It is *causa sui* both in essence and in existence, i.e., it not only *per se concipitur et demonstratur* but also *per se est*. It "is through itself and is known through itself." This was understood well by the scholastics.

Thus, according to the definition of Anselm of Canterbury,[48] God is "*per se ipsum ens*," "*ens per se*." Thomas Aquinas[49] remarks that God's nature "*per se necesse esse*," for it is "*prima causa essendi, non habens ab alio esse*." Here is a more precise definition of the meaning of this "*per se*": "*Per se ens est, quod separatim absque adminicolo alterius existit, seu quod non est in subjecto inhaesionis: quod non est hoc modo per se accidens*."[50]

This conception of God as having His being and reason in Himself runs through scholastic philosophy like a scarlet thread and finds its extreme but one-sided application in Spinoza. According to the third definition in Spinoza's *Ethics*,[51] which leaves its particular imprint on his entire system, a substance is precisely that which has its being and reason in itself: "*Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est et per se concipitur*."

The self-proving Subject! Formally, we can affirm that this "Infinite Unit" explains everything, for to give an explanation of something is, first of all, to show how it does not contradict the law of identity and, secondly, to show how the givenness of the law of identity does not contradict the possibility of the grounding of this law.

A new question arises, however. Let us suppose that the infinity of the series of grounds that is synthesized into a finite intuition has appeared in our perception as a kind of revelation. Let that be the case. But how precisely can this intuition form a basis for the law of identity with all its violations?

First of all, how are the multiplicity of coexistence (disharmony, otherness) and the multiplicity of succession (change, motion) possible? In other words, how is it that spatiotemporal multiplicity does not violate identity?

It does not violate identity only if a multitude of elements is absolutely synthesized in the Truth, so that "the other"—both in the order of coexistence and in the order of succession—is at the same time "not other" *sub specie aeternitatis*; if the *heterotēs*, the differentness, the alienness of the "other" is only an expression and disclosure of the *tautotēs*, of the identity of "this one."

If "another" moment of time does not destroy and devour "this" moment, but is both "another" moment and "this" moment at the same time, if the "new," revealed as the new, is the "old" in its eternity; if the *inner structure* of the eternal, of "this" and "the other," of the "new" and the "old" in their real unity is such that "this" must appear outside the "other" and the "old" must appear before the "new"; if the "other" and the "new" is such not through itself but through "this" and the "old" and "this" and the "old" is what it is not through itself but through the "other" and the "new"; if, finally, each element of being is only a term of a substantial relationship, a relationship-substance, then the law of identity, eternally violated, is eternally restored by its very violation.

This last proposition at once gives an answer to the old question: How is it possible that every A is A? In this case, from the very law of identity

there flows a spring that destroys identity, but this destruction of identity is also the power and force of the eternal restoration and renewal of identity. Identity, dead as fact, can be and necessarily is alive as act. The law of identity will then be not a universal law of superficial being, as it were, but the surface of deep being, not a geometrical figure but the external aspect of a depth of life inaccessible to the rational mind. And in this life this law can have its root and justification. The law of identity, blind in its givenness, can be reasonable in its createdness, in its eternal being-created. Fleshly, dead, and deadening in its statics, this law can be spiritual, living, and life-giving in its dynamics. To the question, Why is A A? we answer, A is A because, eternally being not-A, in this not-A it finds its affirmation as A. More precisely, A is A because it is not-A. Not being equal to A, i.e., to itself, it is always being established in the eternal order of being by virtue of not-A as A. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

Thus, the law of identity will receive its grounding not in its lower, rational form but in its higher, reasonable form. This "higher form of the law of identity" is the fundamental discovery of Archimandrite Serapion Mashkin. Let us note that the value of the discovery is revealed only in the concrete development of a system of philosophy.[52]

Instead of an empty, dead, formal self-identity A = A, in virtue of which A should selfishly, self-assertively, egotistically exclude every not-A, we get a real self-identity of A, full of content and life, a self-identity that eternally rejects itself and that eternally receives itself in its self-rejection. If, in the first case, A is A (A = A) because of the exclusion from it of everything (and of itself in its concreteness!), now A is A through the affirmation of itself as not-A, through the assimilation of everything and the likening of everything to itself.

From this it is clear what the nature of the self-proving Subject is and what constitutes its self-provenness, if this Subject exists at all.

This Subject is such that it is A and not-A. For the sake of clarity, let us designate not-A through B. What is B? B is B, but it would itself be a blind B if it were not also not-B. What is not-B? If it is merely A, then A and B would be identical. A, being A and B, would be only a simple, naked A, just like B. (As we shall see, in heresiology this corresponds to modalism, Sabellianism, etc.). In order for there not to be the simple tautology "A = A," in order for there to be a real equality of "A is A, for A is not-A," it is necessary that B itself be a reality, i.e., that B at once be B and not-B. The latter, i.e., not-B, we shall for the sake of clarity designate as C. Through C the circle can be closed, for in its "other," in not-C, A finds itself as A. In B ceasing to be A, A receives itself mediately from another, but not from the one with which it is equated, i.e., from C. And here it receives itself as already "proved," already established. The same thing goes for each of the subjects A,B,C of the triple relationship.

The self-provenness and self-groundedness of the Subject of the Truth, I, is the relation to He through Thou. Through Thou the subjective I becomes the objective He, and, in the latter, I has its affirmation, its objectivity as I. He is I revealed. The Truth contemplates Itself through Itself in Itself. But each moment of this absolute act is itself absolute, is itself Truth. Truth is the contemplation of Oneself through Another in a Third: Father, Son, and Spirit. Such is the metaphysical definition of the "essence" (*ousia*) of the self-proving Subject, which is, as is evident, a substantial relationship. The Subject of the Truth is a relationship of the Three, but this is a relationship that is a substance, a relationship-substance. The Subject of the Truth is a Relationship of Three.[53] And since a concrete relationship is, in general, a system of life-acts, in this case an infinite system of acts synthesized into a unit or an infinite unitary act, we can affirm that the *ousia* of the Truth is the Infinite act of Three in Unity. Later we will explain this infinite act of Life more concretely.

But what is each of the "Three" in relation to the infinite act-substance?

What is real is not the same thing as the whole Subject, and what is real is precisely the same thing as the whole Subject. In view of the necessity of further discussion, we will call it "hypostasis" where it is "not the same thing." Earlier we applied the term "essence" (*ousia*) to designate it as "precisely the same thing."

The Truth is therefore *one essence with three hypostases*. Not three essences, but one; not one hypostasis, but three. But, despite all this, hypostasis and essence are one and the same. Expressing myself somewhat imprecisely, I will say: "A hypostasis is an absolute person." But the question arises: "What constitutes a person if not essence?" And also: "Is essence given except in a person?" Nevertheless, all of the foregoing establishes that there is not one hypostasis but three, although essence is concretely one. Therefore, numerically, there is one Subject of the Truth, not three.

> "Our holy and blessed fathers," writes Abba Thalassius, "recognize as trihypostatic the one substance of Divinity just as they confess the Holy Trinity as consubstantial. The Unity, extending, according to them, to the Trinity, remains a Unity; and the Trinity, collecting Itself into Unity, remains a Trinity. And this is miraculous. They thus preserve as immutable and unalterable the property of the hypostases, while preserving the commonality of the substance, i.e., Divinity, as indivisible. We confess Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, divided indivisibly and joined divisibly."[54]

But I will be asked: Why are there precisely three hypostases? I speak of the number "three" as immanent to the Truth, as inwardly inseparable from the Truth. There cannot be fewer than three, for only three hypostases eternally make one another what they eternally are. Only in the unity