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FLORENSKY'S PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Many proofs of the existence of God have been proposed in the history of philosophy and theology, but according to a provocative statement made by Pavel Florensky, a Russian Orthodox priest and scientist, “the most persuasive philosophic proof of God’s existence is the one the textbooks never mention, the conclusion to which can perhaps best express the whole meaning: There exists the icon of the Holy Trinity by St. Andrei Rublev; therefore, God exists” (*Jc.* 68)¹. The statement was made in the midst of a discussion of the religious significance of icons presented in his book, *Iconostasis* (1922), which was composed after his major work, *The pillar and ground of the truth* (1914)². His supposition is remarkable on at least two counts. It is pronounced by an Orthodox theologian, and the proofs of God’s existence are a side-issue in Orthodox theology. Also, the proof proposes making an immense step from the existence of a painting to the existence of God. How valid is this proof?

¹ References are made to *Iconostasis*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood 1996.

² Pavel Florensky (1882-1937) received in 1904 degrees in mathematics and physics from Moscow State University, however, his religious convictions led him to the Ecclesiastical Academy at the Troitse-Sergiyeva Lavra in Sergiyev Posad from which he graduated in 1908 and in which he taught. He was ordained as an Orthodox priest in 1911. After the revolution, he worked for the state as a scientist. He was arrested twice, tried, and sentenced to death.

1. ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

Orthodox theology does not make much of the proofs of the existence of God. For Clement of Rome it is obvious that “the sun and moon with the companies of the stars roll on in harmony according to His command” (*Letter* 1.20). Similarly, Athanasius considers the arrangement of the universe seen and unseen to be done for the glory and knowledge of the Father so that almost by the very works that He brings to pass He teaches us and says, “By the greatness and beauty of the creatures proportionately the maker of them is seen” (*Wisdom* 13,5) (*Contra gentes* 44).

For Gregory of Nazianzus, the existence of God should be obvious through the grandeur of the universe: it is impossible that the world of such grandeur and quality can be reigned by chance (*Poemata arcana* 1.1.5.7-8). Caesarius, Gregory’s younger brother, should recognize the Creator “through harmony and order of celestial bodies” (*Oration* 7.7), through “beauty and order of visible things” (28.13). “Our very eyes and the law of nature teach us that God exists”; the eyes – because they see the beautiful stability and progress of things; and the law – because through these things we reason back to their Author just as we think about a maker of a lute or a musician when a melody is heard (28.6).

According to Maximus the Confessor, “God cannot be termed intelligible, while from our apprehension of intelligible beings we can do no more than believe that He exists” (*Two hundred texts on theology* 1.8). God’s existence is really a matter of faith, not of intelligible apprehension. “To the devout believer God gives something more sure than any proof: the recognition and faith that He substantively is. Faith is true knowledge, the principles of which are beyond rational demonstration; for faith makes real for us things beyond mind and reason (*logos*)” (1.9; *Various texts on theology* 1.13, 2.12). However, although affirming the primacy of faith, the Greek Fathers were not completely disinterested in proofs of God’s existence. Maximus the Confessor himself rhetorically asked, “who, seeing the beauty and greatness of God’s creatures, does not immediately understand that He has brought all this into being, as the beginning and source of beings and their maker?” Since no motion is without cause, so God must be

the first cause (*The ambigua* 10.36). Also, “the harmonious web of the whole” points to its Author (10.18). That is, through the being of created things “we, seeking the source of all things, teach through them that He is. Not endeavoring to know how He is essentially, for there is no indication of this in the things that are, but through it we return, as from a thing caused, to the cause” (10.19).

John of Damascus opens his exposition of the Orthodox faith with the statement that “the knowledge of God’s existence has been implanted by Him in all by nature” (*On the Orthodox faith* 1.1). However, the nefarious work of the devil turns people away from the truth. Apostles “took them captive in the net of miracles and drew them up out of the depths of ignorance to the light of the knowledge of God,” but John himself, unable to perform miracles, must resort to arguments. One argument states that things are created and uncreated, and, obviously, the created things must be created by a Creator. A second argument states that opposites would annihilate one another, and thus have to be kept in their paths by a higher power. A third argument, which is really the extension of the second, posits that there must be a God who “implanted in everything the law whereby the universe is carried on and directed” (1.3) This is an argument from design that infers from the perceived harmony of the universe the God who is the author of the order of cosmos³. Only then can John of Damascus say that the fact “that there is a God is clear; but what He is by essence and nature, this is altogether beyond our comprehension and knowledge” (1.4).

Generally, Western Christianity is much more interested in the problem of finding proofs of existence of God. Thomas Aquinas proposes that “the existence of God can be proven in five ways” (*ST* 1.2.3; *SCG* 1.13), but he does it only after stating that the existence of God is self-evident and is implanted in us, if only in a general and a confused way (*ST* 1.2.1). Aquinas supports his conviction with a quotation from John of Damascus who says that “the knowledge of God’s existence has been implanted by Him in all by nature” (*On the Orthodox faith* 1.1, 1.3). Similarly, Calvin declares first that “a sense of Deity is indelibly engraven on the human heart” (*Inst.* 1.3.3) and only

³ Thomas Aquinas mentions it as an argument from the government of the world and refers to John of Damascus (*SCG* 1.13.35).

later uses, e.g., the argument of the harmonious arrangement of the universe as an indication that God exists (1.5.2).

It is important to observe that the proof of the existence of God that is used by Orthodox theologians is primarily the proof from design that is the first and last word in the area of proving the existence of God by natural reason. In European thought, Socrates made the first attempt to prove the existence of the divine utilizing an argument from design, as reported by Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.4), and the argument was later used prominently by the Stoics⁴. The argument also appears to be the last word, considering the recent popularity of the intelligent design movement which insists on a scientific rather than a theological approach in the quest of proving that the design detectable in the universe cannot be explained with natural laws.

2. INTELLECT AND REASON

The two Christian traditions, Western and Eastern, differ in the power ascribed to human rational faculties and the extent to which these faculties can suffice in knowing not only that God exists but what His attributes are. Western theology ascribes more power to human natural faculties in acquiring the knowledge about God than does the East, so that attempts were even made to provide a proof of the Trinity. However, most theologians set some limits for human rationality. "His essence cannot be understood nor imagined," says Origen (*De princ.* 1.1.5). "His essence is His being," states Aquinas, meaning that God's essence can be known, but if "to be" means the act of being, then our understanding is powerless and "we cannot understand God's being nor His essence" (*ST* 1.3.4). Also, Calvin says that "His essence is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought" (*Inst.* 1.5.1). However, it was in the East where human cognitive capacities were greatly reduced in their power when left to themselves.

Greek Fathers made a distinction between *dianoia* and *nous*. The former is natural rationality that carries humans through their natural life. It is a capacity that everyone utilizes in daily life and scientists use in conducting their research. *Nous*, on the other hand, allows man

⁴ A. Drozdek, *Greek philosophers as theologians*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007, 70, 121-126.

in order to transcend his natural life to ascend toward God. *Nous* is the highest faculty in man, our helmsman (Evagrius the Solitary, *Texts on discrimination* 3). It is not an easy task and was most perfectly accomplished by the saints. It requires a disciplined ascetic life that purifies *nous* to the extent that it can bring man closer to God. Through *nous*, the Holy Spirit calms the uncontrolled impulses of the body by entering it and filling it “with whatever knowledge He wishes” (Evagrius the Solitary, *On prayer* 64). Only upon those who abandon earthly delights and suppress their appetites through self-control can *nous* “act with its full vigor so that it is capable of perceiving ineffably the goodness of God” (Diadochos of Photiki, *On spiritual knowledge* 25). According to Maximus the Confessor *nous* is an organ of faith (*Various texts on theology* 2.11, 3.33) and because faith is rationally undemonstrable, “faith is a supranatural relationship through which, in an unknowable and so undemonstrable manner, we are united with God in a union which is beyond intellection (νόησις)” (2.12)⁵. *Dianoia* is thus the faculty that can be used by science to observe, perform experiments, analyze, synthesize, make inferences, propose hypotheses and validate or reject them, create theories, subsume some theories to others, and the like. *Dianoia* is incapable in dealing with the divine sphere, with mysteries of faith, with rationalizing the phenomena on the incarnation, resurrection, obtaining the purity of the soul and deification, which are the subjects of faith and religious belief. To that end, a direct apprehension is needed and *nous* is the faculty through which such apprehension is possible. Because the union with God is accomplished through *nous*, the Fathers are primarily interested in that faculty rather than in *dianoia*. Only to the ones whose gaze is bound to the earthly things, *dianoia* is of primary importance, only to those who value human accomplishments, impressive as they may be, *dianoia* takes precedence over *nous*.

The distinction between *dianoia* and *nous* is recognized by Florensky when he distinguishes between intellect (*rassudok*) and reason (*razum*). For example, he writes that oil painting is a manifestation of sensuousness,

⁵ Western theologians make similar distinctions. For instance, Nicholas of Cusa distinguishes senses, intellect, and reason, senses being of temporary nature, intellect of extratemporary nature, and reason being an intermediary between the two and as reason rules senses so intellect should rule reason (*De docta ignorantia* 3.6.215, 217).

while an engraving is based on intellect (*rassudochnost'*) by constructing "images from elements wholly unlike the elements in the object being depicted," from combinations of intellectual (*rassudochnye*) "yes" and "no" (*Ic.* 106). It is "a schematic image constructed on the axioms of logic (identity, contradiction, the excluded middle)." There is somehow a parallelism between intellect and figurative linearity in engraving (107). Because of this parallelism, engraving became popular in Protestant countries since Protestants rely on intellect, which is "the unique faculty of Protestantism." For others, it is intellect under the disguise of reason. For Protestantism itself, intellect is imagination that struggles with superficiality much more ontological than revealed to others (112). "In Protestant culture ... the invisible world is scarcely even mentioned, and, instead, it turns what is immediately available to sensory experience into abstract schemata" (125).

It is not necessary to enter the discussion of Florensky's debatable understanding of the history of art and its association with Protestantism. It suffices to observe that, for him, intellect is associated with logical reasoning; in particular, with the law of identity which he discusses at some length in *The pillar*, Ch. 2 (letter 3), as useless in acquiring true knowledge. To elevate itself, intellect masquerades as reason which is the faculty through which true knowledge can be gained. Protestantism, as presented by Florensky, cuts itself off from the spiritual realm by relying solely on the cognitive faculty which by its nature cannot break beyond the boundaries of the natural world. Needless to say, this, in Florensky's eyes, renders Protestantism powerless and false.

Intellect is interested in the material and this-worldly side of icons. It sees them only as products of the artistic efforts of iconographers who use special materials, colors, composition, and sequence of operations to accomplish their aesthetic result. They create works of art to be admired and enjoyed. But reason goes beyond that. Reason sees in icons something that goes well beyond this world. And this is accomplished, says Florensky, only in Orthodox iconography.

3. THEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF ICONS

There are two worlds, visible and invisible, and dreams are "our first and simplest entry into the invisible world" (*Ic.* 34). An artist reaches

the invisible world in order to contemplate “the essences of the highest realm.” Art is a materialized dream (44). What is true of dreams and art is true about mystical experience. The soul soars into the invisible and then descends into the visible “and then and there, before its very eyes, are those real *appearances* of things: ideas” (45). The soul that approaches the boundary between the worlds can, however, be deceived by earthly images, “the spirits of the present age that seek to trap our consciousness in *their* realm.” It is dangerous to approach it without spiritual reason, one’s own or spiritual advisor’s. A level of maturity is needed to avoid it (46). The vision that appears to us on the boundary of the worlds can be the result of our emptiness (48) or “the presence of the superior reality of the spiritual world” (49), i.e., the result of our emptiness or our fullness (50). Approaching the boundary of the two worlds can thus be precarious and should be avoided without thorough spiritual preparation. However, for ordinary people, the boundary is brought to them by icons.

“The wall that separates two worlds is an iconostasis.” Saints on it, are the cloud of witnesses. It is a manifestation of saints and angels, the Mother of God, and Christ. “*Iconostasis is the saints themselves.*” It is a “spiritual prop” that “points to the half-blind the Mysteries of the altar” (*Ik.* 62). It points toward living witnesses “concentrating the attention of those who pray upon them – a concentration of attention that is essential to the development of spiritual sight” (63). The icon *speaks*, through color and line, the Name of God that streams from the countenances of the saints. And thus we can say to the iconographer, “we believe (...) because we ourselves can hear coming out from them [icons] (...) the self-revelation of the saints (...) in their countenances (68). Like through a window, we see the saints. For ancient ascetics, icons were not only windows through which they beheld countenances of the saints, but doorways through which they entered the empirical realm (71). “All icons are miracle-working, i.e., all can be windows into eternity”; “every icon can be seen as the factual certainty of divine reality (...) it *necessarily authenticates* perception of the world beyond the senses through an always *authentic* spiritual experience” (73). Also, the spiritual content of the experience evoked by copies of such an icon are exactly the same (74). The icon visualizes the invisible world, and,

as Florensky phrases it, the iconographer fashions from the purest light what is invisible, accessible to the mind, and present in the makeup of our experience (126). Abstract constructions, including metaphysics, are rejected by religious thought, i.e., the reason of the Church (151). Both metaphysics and iconography are based on the same rational fact or factual reason: “in anything seriously given, the senses wholly penetrate it in such a way that the thing has nothing abstract in it but is entirely incarnated sense and comprehended visuality” (152).

Not everyone can be an iconographer. Talent is an indispensable prerequisite, but far from sufficient. Ascetic demands are put on lives of iconographers by the Church precisely formulated by the Council of the Hundred Chapters of 1551 (art. 43) (*Id.* 92). The Seventh Ecumenical Council states that “only the technical part of iconpainting belongs to the artist; the determination of the icon itself (*diataxis*) plainly belongs to the Holy Fathers” (67). That is, icons have to be painted in accordance to the canons that meticulously prescribe the materials, type of symbolism, order of preparation and execution of the icon, etc. For example, *Hermeneia* or *Instructions in the art* by hieromonk Dionysius of Fournia codify the teachings of Panselinos’ school concerning the process of iconography (95). And thus, for example, there are no shadows on icons because “to depict a shadow would be to characterize an absence of something positive, by a presence” (144). Also, realism is not to be expected: proportions are different from what occurs in nature; eyes are very large and other facial features are only marked; the law of gravity is defied; reversed perspective is used. An otherworldly atmosphere permeates icons, as intended, and in this sense they exhibit “sacred realism”⁶.

Icons, and even their reproductions, have to be painted. A printed reproduction of an icon is not really an icon⁷. As Florensky remarks in not altogether clear words, it is impossible to conceive an icon in an alien technique and an alien material because the materials and

⁶ As phrased by E.N. Trubetskoi, *Icons: theology in color* [1915-1917], St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood 1973, 57.

⁷ The making and selling of printed icons was forbidden by the Council of Moscow in 1667 and by patriarch Joachim as being against the canons, P. Evdokimov, *The art of the icon: a theology of beauty*, Oakwood Publications, Redondo 1990, 215.

techniques used are “the metaphysical modalities by which the icon possesses incarnate life”; the materials and techniques are symbolic and correspond to “concretely determined metaphysical aliveness” through which they correspond to unique spiritual facts (*Jc.* 99).

All such canonical restrictions do not stifle creativity and “to the truly creative, the presence of a canonical tradition is never a hindrance”. The true artist “wants not his *own* (at any cost) truth but rather the objectively beautiful and artistically incarnate *truth of things*” (*Jc.* 79-80). “The immediate task is to understand the canon, to enter into it as into the essential rationality of mankind, spiritually straining so as to attain the highest [higher] level whereupon we may determine ourselves; and to see, too, how from this level the truth of things then reveals itself to me, the individual artist; for it is universally acknowledged that such spiritual straining, wherein our individual reason enters into the universal forms, opens the source of all creation” (80).

All of it is uncontroversial and simply recounts Orthodox traditional understanding of the icon. This meaning was conveyed much more clearly by the patristic tradition that arose as the result of struggle with iconoclasts. This meaning is summarized in the statement of Joseph of Volotsk, quoted by Florensky: thanks to the icon, the viewer can “ascend in spirit to the icon’s incomprehensible prototype” (*Jc.* 66), i.e., through the material, the mind can ascend to the prototype and thus is anathema to those who judge such ascension to the prototypes by means of the holy icons to be base and unspiritual (Theodore the Studite, *On the holy icons* 1.13, 1.20). The icon is the result of vision. It does not use human models to depict its prototype but is the result of mystical experience, of comprehension “in mind through contemplation” (1.10) and thus it “shares the glory of the prototype” (1.8). “What the book is to the literate, the image is to the illiterate” (John of Damascus, *On the divine images* 1.17), and thus the icon has the same value in bringing people to God as the written word, and maybe even a greater value since sight is considered to be superior to hearing⁸. Icons are

⁸ “Comprehension that comes through sight is far superior” (Photius, *Homily* 17.5); “sight precedes hearing both in the location of its organs and in perception of its senses” (Theodore the Studite, *On the holy icons* 3.2); sight and hearing are on equal footing for John of Damascus, *On the divine images* 1.17.

“the source of profit, help, and salvation for all, since they make things so obviously manifest, enabling us to perceive hidden things” (3.17). Icons are not objects created to beautify churches – and if they do, this is their secondary role – they are avenues guiding viewers to the realm of the divine, to the invisible and eternal world that is only worthy of human attention and striving.

It is clear that icons occupy a prominent position in Orthodox theology and liturgy. For centuries there has been no doubt about their sacred character as venerated objects constituting the windows to the invisible realm of God. This position of icons was clearly delineated by the Councils and by the Greek Fathers. Icons in isolation are thus void; they live only in the life of the Church. In that situation, can it be said that an icon is a proof of the existence of God? Icons would not be considered what they are outside Orthodox religious tradition, and so the existence of God must be the starting point before any considerations of the sacred character of icons can be made. No icon can prove that God exists; God proves that an icon is an icon, that a particular pictorial representation expresses sacred realism.

4. RUBLEV’S ICON OF THE HOLY TRINITY

One of the most famous icons is the Trinity icon painted by Andrei Rublev. The vision of the Trinity seen in three angels visiting Abraham was depicted centuries before Rublev. The depictions were full of historical details because of unclarity of the vision. When the vision became the focus of Sergius of Radonezh and was depicted by Rublev, “the vision was at last understood, a process taking humankind millennia of spiritual labor to develop the necessary organs of perception within the sacred” mind (*Jc.* 84).

According to Florensky, when looking at Rublev’s icon we become so enraptured by the icon’s “triumphant beauty overwhelming everything” that we say: this icon exists as a material item, “but it’s inconceivable it exists, my eyes cannot believe what they’re seeing.” But Florensky hastens to add that such an effect is also made by the Holy Mother of Vladimir icon and, what is more, these two icons “do not stand apart from all other icons” (*Jc.* 72). What is the reason

for which Rublev's icon is used as a proof of the existence of God? Florensky mentions the fact that "all icons possess in themselves the power of spiritual revelation, though some veil it almost impenetrably" (72). Does this mean that Rublev's icon reveals religious truth in the most penetrable fashion? Florensky does not elaborate upon this point. But it seems that it takes great spiritual perspicacity to be convinced that God exists just by contemplating Rublev's icon. Only someone already convinced that icons are windows to the invisible divine world can see visible reflection of the Triune God in Rublev's icon, that is, someone who already believes that God exists and that icons are one channel bringing the viewer closer to Him. For such an icon viewer, no proof from the existence of an icon is needed to believe in the existence of God. He believes already.

"Every icon can be seen as the factual certainty of divine reality. An icon may be skillfully or poorly executed," but it guarantees the authenticity of the spiritual experience of the world beyond the senses (*Ic.* 73). Is Rublev's icon better executed than other icons? There seems to be little doubt in that respect; but can the better execution of an icon be an attribute leading to the proof of the existence of God? Better execution perilously focuses on the iconographer rather than on the subject, and it would be difficult to see the transition from the masterly work of Rublev to the existence of God. This transition could be accomplished by someone who believes that human skills are the gift of God; that is, for someone who already believes in God and the way He influences the world. Moreover, good execution in the whole of great Western art is the testimony to incredible talent of painters and sculptors⁹. But Florensky is the first to deny any religious value in these works. They may have religious themes, but they are not religious works. "From the Renaissance on, the religious art of the West has been based upon esthetic delusion," he says. The artists claimed to be near the spiritual truth and yet they failed to follow the few guidelines about painting given by the Catholic church (67).

⁹ As a rule, art "will always be more perfect than iconography because the iconographer does not attempt to attain artistic and aesthetic perfection. In fact, an excess of aesthetic beauty would detract from the icon". P. Evdokimov, *op. cit.*, 89.

Florensky mentions the fact that Rublev's icon was recognized as a canonical icon to be used as a model by other iconographers (*Jc.* 85). By itself, this fact is insufficient to use the icon in the argument for God's existence. The icon was recognized as a model because it was believed to faithfully convey the image of the Trinity; that is, the argument really can be: because the Triune God exists, Rublev's icon can also exist. Moreover, the Council of the Hundred Chapters stated that the iconographers should paint icons of the Trinity, in particular, without a cross in the nimbus, "according to old models, such as painted by Greek iconographers and as painted by Andrei Rublev and other renowned iconographers and sign it the Holy Trinity and add nothing according to one's own conception" (art. 41). Although only Rublev is mentioned by name, he is mentioned in a large company of other iconographers and it seems that any one of them could be used in Florensky's proof.

5. VALIDITY OF FLORENSKY'S PROOF

The proof Florensky submits certainly gives credence to the statement that he relished in "shocking the reader at any price"¹⁰. The proof is certainly original in not appearing in any metaphysics textbook, and it seems that it will not be included in any of them very soon. It is also shocking in its terseness and its lack of underlying justification.

Arguably, proofs of the existence of God have been primarily directed to unbelievers or to those whose beliefs were not strong. They rely on the natural rational endowment of man and attempt to argue on the basis of what the natural eye can see and assume that natural intellect can infer that there is a God. Such a proof may use philosophical arguments (e.g., the concept of cause in Aquinas' proofs or the concept of hierarchy of perfection in Anselm's proof), but it attempts to lead the listener to the threshold of the divine sphere. Natural sensory and reasoning experience is deemed in such proofs to be sufficient to make them convincing. Such proofs have been discussed for centuries, criticized

¹⁰ R.A. Gal'tzeva, in *Florenskii segodnia: tri tochki zreniia*, *Voprosy Filosofii* 1997, no. 5, 145; also in J. Schelhas, *Gespräche*, in: *Materialien zu Pavel Florenskij*, eds. M. Hagemeister, T. Metelka, Kontext, Berlin 1999, v. 1, 199.

and then refined, and they undoubtedly have some convincing power. The Greek Fathers, as already indicated, did not see any problem in using the proof from design. But it is hard to see how Florensky's proof can have such convincing power. The proof cannot rely on intellect, on natural reasoning, since to such reasoning an icon is yet another work of art, pleasing to the eye as it may be. The fact that a reference to an icon is made in the proof means that an object is meant as understood in Orthodox dogmatics, and this fact alone means that we go beyond natural rationality and enter the sphere of reason, of mind. That is, the proof already presumes that God exists. And reason, the organ of belief, goes beyond proofs. A believer believes. His faith could be strengthened by contemplating Rublev's icon, but it should be equally strengthened by contemplating any other recognized icon.

Florensky's proof seems to be an expression of his own religious experience in contemplating the icon¹¹, but considering his argument to be "the most persuasive philosophic proof of God's existence" is unacceptable. It may be persuasive to some individual believers, but hardly so persuasive as to be mentioned in textbooks. Neither is it philosophical. It is at best a religious statement, but not a proof. It is, therefore, puzzling why the *Iconostasis* is considered a work in which "Florensky offers one of the most penetrating philosophical discussions of these objects [icons] ever written"¹², a work in which Florensky "provided a complete, metaphysically precise and irreproachable view of the icon in itself"¹³.

¹¹ He says that "in Rublev's work we are moved, struck, and almost burned (...) by the sudden tearing away of the curtain of the noumenal world before our eyes", *The Trinity-St Sergius Monastery and Russia* [1919], in V. Bychkov, *The aesthetic face of being: art in the theology of Pavel Florensky*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood 1993, 99. Can everyone meditating the icon in all sincerity really say that he is smitten and burned by the gaze into the noumenal world?

¹² S. Cassedy, *P.A. Florensky and the celebration of matter*, in: *Russian religious thought*, eds. J.D. Kornblatt, R.F. Gustafson, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1996, 101.

¹³ J.L. Opie, "*Ikonostas*" and its context, in: *P.A. Florenskii i kul'tura ego vremeni*, ed. M. Hagemester, N. Kauchtschischwili, Blaue Hörner Verlag, Marburg 1995, 436.

Florensky's proof is also considered "a way of saying that beauty itself bears witness of God"¹⁴, and Florensky himself suggests something to that effect by saying that the icon "by the music of its beauty (...) is heaven itself"¹⁵. Beauty is an extremely important concept in Orthodox theology. But an unqualified reference to beauty can be precarious. As Evdokimov reminds us in a book that deserves the distinction of presenting a metaphysically precise and irreproachable view of the icon, "though truth is always beautiful, beauty is not always true"¹⁶. What is divine about beauty depends on the context, and the context is specified by ecclesiastical and theological tradition. That is, beauty can be considered proof of the existence of God if belief in the divine is already in place. Without a theological context, beauty can detract from the divine, and Florensky would be the first to admit this, as he sees unworthiness in Western art, the art which is skillfully and frequently beautifully executed. In the end, Florensky leaves us – at least as far as his proof is concerned – empty-handed and somewhat perplexed about the seriousness of his argument.

DOWÓD FLORENSKIEGO NA ISTNIENIE BOGA

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje pogląd Pawła Florenskiego, że „najbardziej przekonującym dowodem filozoficznym na istnienie Boga” jest następujące stwierdzenie: „istnieje ikona Trójcy Świętej Andrieja Rublowa, zatem Bóg istnieje”. Choć ikony mają niezwykle ważne znaczenie w teologii i liturgii prawosławnej, nie zajmowałyby tak wysokiej pozycji poza obrębem religijnej tradycji prawosławnej, a zatem istnienie Boga jest punktem wyjścia od którego rozpoczyna się rozważania na temat sakralnego charakteru ikon.

¹⁴ J. Forest, *Praying with icons*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll 1997, 13.

¹⁵ P. Florensky, *The Trinity-St Sergius Monastery and Russia*, op. cit., 100.

¹⁶ P. Evdokimov, op. cit., 37. The Church Fathers were very keen on pointing to the deceptive aspect of beauty. V.V. Bychkov, *Estetika Ottsov Tserkvii*, Ladomir, Moskva 1995, 199-210. Cf. also Siemion Frank's remark that "beauty as such is neutral. In a sense it is indifferent to good and evil (...) We can say that beauty is a sign of the potential harmony of being", *The unknowable*, Ohio University Press, Athens 1983, 196.