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Visual thought in modern orthodoxy: Art history as theology

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Abstract. In this paper I will discuss the visual category of "reverse perspective", i.e., the principle of constructing pictorial space in the icon. I will show that in Russia one of the most basic terms in Western art history, i.e., perspective, was thoroughly reworked, even turned on its head as suggested by the terminology, in order to serve a project of modern Orthodoxy. The main proponent of the theory of "reverse perspective" was Florensky, who in his essay of that title, written in 1919, uses several different definitions of the term. In the first section of the paper, I will mention briefly six such definitions, all of which are still current in contemporary scholarship. In the second and third sections, I will suggest a possible theologically-grounded elaboration of one of Florensky's ideas of what constitutes "reverse perspective". According to the interpretation proposed here, "reverse perspective" becomes the visual analogue of two basic Christian dogmas – that of a timelessly eternal God and that of "*theosis*" or "deification". In the last section, I will give a short background to the relationship between art history and theology, which lies at the heart of my approach.

Keywords: visual thought, Pavel Florensky, reverse perspective, dogma of divine timeless eternity, monumental theology, structural intuitions, hierotopy.

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Визуальное мышление в современном православии: история искусства как теология

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается визуальная категория обратной перспективы как принцип построения живописного пространства в иконе. Автор показывает, что одно из фундаментальных понятий в истории западного искусства – перспектива – в русле развития современного православия в России было основательно переосмыслено и даже, как следует из его употребления, перевёрнуто с ног на голову. Главным сторонником теории обратной перспективы был Павел Флоренский, который в своём одноимённом эссе, написанном в 1919 году, использует несколько различных определений этого термина. В первом разделе статьи автор кратко излагает шесть таких определений, по-прежнему актуальных в современной науке. Во втором и третьем разделах предлагается теологически обоснованное возможное развитие одной из идей Флоренского о том, что представляет собой обратная перспектива. Согласно предложенной здесь интерпретации, обратная перспектива становится визуальным аналогом двух основных христианских догматов – о вневременном, вечном Боге и о теозисе, или обожении. В последнем разделе статьи раскрываются взаимоотношения между искусствознанием и теологией, которые лежат в основе авторского подхода.

Ключевые слова: визуальное мышление, Павел Флоренский, обратная перспектива, догмат о вечности Бога, монументальная теология, структурные интуиции, иеротопия.

In the 1930s, while in prison, the Russian thinker Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) wrote a poem, entitled "Oro". We are given to understand that what made Oro, a boy from a Siberian tribe, special was his ability to think through images. In other words, Oro was like the ancient Egyptian sages that Plotinus talks about, who thought in images, the original mode of human thought (*Enneads* V 8,6). Florensky's poem is the direct inspiration for my notion of "visual thought", which I outlined in my book *Visual Thought in Russian Religious Philosophy: Pavel Florensky's Theory of the Icon* [Antonova 2020 a]. The book draws attention to a long intellectual tradition, going back at least to Platonism and Neoplatonism, whence it entered Byzantine theology and was later further developed by a strand of Russian religious philosophy, which conceptualizes theological and religious-philosophical ideas through visual categories. In his consistent engagement with questions of visuality, the thinker and polymath Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) becomes the most outstanding representative of the concern with the icon, which runs through much of Russian philosophy, starting with the Slavophiles in the middle of the nineteenth century and culminating with Vladimir Soloviev later in the century.

In the paper that follows I will discuss the visual category of "reverse perspective", i.e., the principle of constructing pictorial space in the icon. I will show that in Russia one of the most basic terms in Western art history, i.e., perspective, was thoroughly reworked, even turned on its head as suggested by the terminology, in order to serve a project of modern Orthodoxy. The main proponent of the theory of "reverse perspective" was Florensky, who in his essay of that title, written in 1919[1], uses several different definitions of the term. In the first section of the paper, I will mention briefly six such definitions, which I have identified (they may be more)[2], all of which are still current in contemporary scholarship. In the second and third sections, I will suggest a possible theologically-grounded elaboration of one of Florensky's ideas of what constitutes 'reverse perspective'. According to the interpretation proposed here, "reverse perspective" becomes the visual analogue of two basic Christian dogmas – that of a timelessly eternal God and that of '*theosis*' or 'deification'. In the last section, I will give a short background to the relationship between art history and theology, which lies at the heart of my approach.

What is 'Reverse Perspective'? The confusion of six definitions

The phenomenon of constructing pictorial space following the principles of 'reverse perspective' has a long history, which pre-dates by hundreds of years the invention of standard, linear perspective in the Renaissance and appears in various artistic traditions. In fact, it is linear perspective, which is the exception in world art. It is, therefore, curious that 'reverse perspective' is such a severely understudied topic. This is so much so that art historians frequently switch from one understanding to another with no awareness of doing so. I will outline briefly six definitions, which have been circulating[3]. The first four are common to both Western and Russian scholarship, while the last two are a Russian contribution, little-known among Western scholars until recently. The main value of some of the Russian works on this topic is the suggestion that 'reverse perspective' does not turn around the laws of linear space, but is fundamentally different from linear space.

The term was first used by the well-known Russian Byzantologist Dmitrii Ainalov in his 1901 study, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art.* The Russian 'obratnaya perspektiva' was then translated into German as 'umgekehrte Perspektive' by Oskar Wulff, a German art historian born in Russia, in his article of 1907 [Wulff 1907]. The most common understanding of 'reverse perspective' is what I have called 'the inner view thesis'[4], proposed by Wulff, which suggests that the viewer of an icon is as if drawn, by the very arrangement of the depicted objects and figures, inside the pictorial space of the image. Thus, the viewer adopts the viewpoint of the central figure of the representation. From this inner point of view, space functions according to the laws of natural vision in the

[1] Florensky's "Reverse Perspective", written in 1919 and presented as a lecture in 1920, was never published at the time. It first came out in 1967 in the journal of the legendary Moscow-Tartu School of Semiotics, Trudy po znakovym sistemam (Studies in Sign Systems). There is an excellent English translation by Wendy Salmond in: Florensky 2002, 197–273.

[2] See: Antonova 2010 a.

[3] For a more detailed analysis, see: Ibid.

[4] For reasons of brevity I will use my own terms for all six definitions of 'reverse perspective'. This is the terminology I used in: Antonova 2010 a.

sense that objects which are further away look smaller and those that are closer appear larger. A more extreme version of the 'inner view thesis' holds that 'reverse perspective' turns around the construction of linear, Renaissance space. So, instead of having parallel lines, which when extended, meet into a vanishing point, located within the picture space – the most famous example is probably Leonardo's *Last Supper* (Fig. 1) – in icons the vanishing point, if calculated, would be outside the painting and in the viewer's space. This is the result of parallel lines in icons diverging, rather than converging, in the distance. This interpretation, advanced for instance by Lev Zhegin, is reflected in the terminology itself [Zhegin 1970]. After all, 'reverse perspective' is allegedly reverse with respect to linear perspective. In a joint paper with Martin Kemp, we discuss some of the problems with this definition, including its obviously historical inaccuracy (in simple words, one cannot turn around something which did not exist at the time)[5]. Tellingly, no illustration for a vanishing-point construction in icons can be provided, since it relies on a calculation, which no iconographer is known to have made.

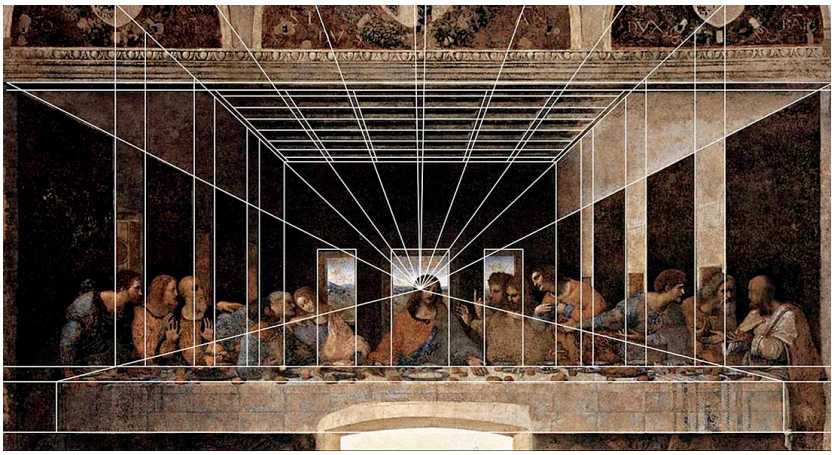


Fig. 1. Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper. Fresco.
460 × 880 cm. C. 1495–1498. Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.
With added orthogonals converging into a single point,
i.e., the so-called 'vanishing point'.

The second definition is the 'scenography thesis', also put forward by Wulff, who observed that the proportions of figures in images located above eye-level and / or on curved surfaces are adjusted in such a way as to look 'right' to the viewer on the ground. This artistic practice, backed scientifically by Euclid's *Optics,* goes back to classical Antiquity. The third view, the 'hierarchical size thesis', runs counter to the concern with adhering to the laws of natural vision, evident in the first two definitions. It was advanced in 1910 by Karl Doehlemann in direct challenge to Wulff's ideas [Doehlemann 1968]. Doehlemann understood 'reverse perspective' as the correspondence of the size of figures to their hierarchical importance (i.e., more important figures are represented as larger in scale than less important ones, regardless of their respective distance from

[5] See our joint paper: Antonova, Kemp 2005.

the viewer). The 'optical size thesis', i.e., the fourth definition that scholars occasionally subscribe to, is based on the belief that space in the icon is true to the way natural vision works under certain circumstances (for instance, in viewing at oblique angles). In this case, 'reverse perspective' has tended to be understood along the lines of the 'inner view thesis' and authors have, as a result, addressed the issue of diverging lines.

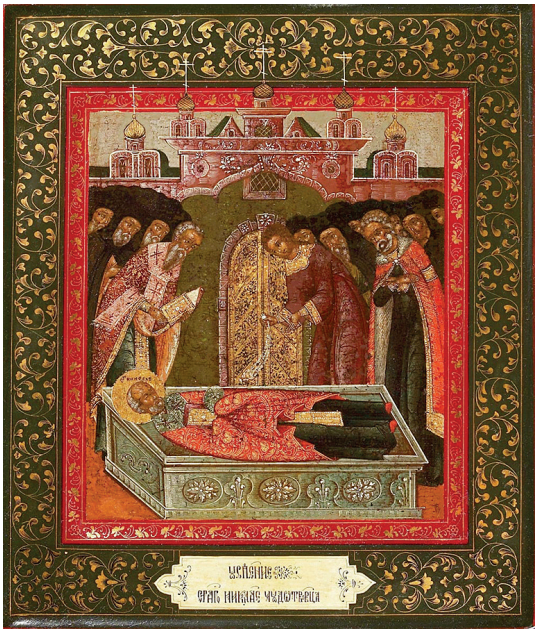


Fig. 2. The Death of St. Nicholas. Russia, Mstera School, late 19th c.
31.5 × 27.0 cm. Temple Gallery, London.

The fifth definition of 'reverse perspective', first proposed by Florensky, is probably the least familiar one among Western scholars. According to this view, space in the icon is a visual analogue of non-Euclidean geometry. This understanding relies on an analogy between the curved space of non-Euclidean geometry and the frequent depiction of objectively straight lines as curved in the art of the icon[6]. Lastly, there is another idea, again promoted in Russian scholarship, according to which space in the icon is constructed following the principle of 'supplementary planes', i.e., icons frequently depict aspects of an object that cannot be seen from a fixed position at one single moment of time. For instance, on Fig. 2, we are shown a frontal view of one side of the coffin. The other side, which is also depicted, cannot be seen from the standpoint from which we perceive the first side. The saint's body and the top part of the coffin are shown from an entirely different perspective from above. It is this definition of 'reverse perspective' in terms of 'supplementary planes' that I find the most promising in that it can be developed along several avenues. In the next section of this paper, I will propose a theological reading of this artistic phenomenon.

[6] I have discussed this at some length in: Antonova 2020 b, as well as in: Antonova 2018.

Seeing out of time: The visual implications of the doctrine of divine timeless eternity

One of the fundamental features of the organization of iconic space, according to Florensky, consists in the representation of "parts and surfaces <of the same object> which cannot be seen simultaneously" [Florensky 2002, 201] from a fixed position. As many will undoubtedly notice, Florensky's principle of supplementary planes, whereby frontal and profile aspects of the same object are depicted alongside each other (as this happens on Fig. 2), carries close associations with a similar development in Cubism, especially early Analytical Cubism. It is therefore not surprising to discover the immediate background of the Russian author's idea in his earlier discussion of Picasso's paintings of musical instruments, which could be seen in the Shchukin Collection at the time. In Cubist paintings, "the reality of the artistic image is realized", Florensky wrote in 1914, "in <...> unifying in one apperception that which is given in different moments and, consequently, under different angles of vision" [Florensky 2000, 98][7]. It is immediately noticeable, that what triggered Florensky's interest in Picasso's works was exactly the construction of pictorial space, which Florensky saw as an example of 'synthetic' or 'four-dimensional vision'. The notion of the fourth dimension, which was extremely popular at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of the revival of occultism, suggested an experience beyond the confines of time and space[8]. In this context, Florensky's later notion of 'supplementary planes' can be understood as an attempt to provide an actual visual model, that is, the icon, for the functioning of 'synthetic vision'[9].

In his essay "Reverse Perspective", Florensky makes no mention of his earlier interest in Cubism. Neither does he offer a theological framework for the explanation of the principle of constructing space in the icon. At the same time, I believe that the theological reading I will propose here is faithful to Florensky's overall project. I would also suggest that it can be logically inferred when both texts by Florensky – "The Meaning of Idealism" and "Reverse Perspective" – are considered alongside each other. Indeed, the author's overriding concern with the Platonic roots of Christianity in the 1914 text is very relevant to his critique of the icon in 1919.

The construction of space in the icon is, in fact, curiously reminiscent of the Platonic 'Idea'. According to Plato, a painted representation of an object is at a third remove from the Idea of the object, as it is a shadow of a shadow. A naturalistic depiction of a bed – three legs, supporting an angular shape, jutting out in the direction of the viewer – is a 'lie' to reality, i.e., this is how we see a bed from a fixed point of view at a certain moment of time, but this is not what a bed *is* in absolute terms. Following the principle of 'supplementary planes', a bed could be represented both with its top, its underside on all four legs – i.e., this may not be how we see a bed at a fixed moment and from a fixed position, but this is what a bed *is.* In this way, icon art, which is resistant to the accidents of time and space, offers an approximation to the Platonic Idea.

The moment we start thinking of the icon along these Platonic lines, we find ourselves in a world divided between the higher reality, which is beyond time and our own, human universe, which is subject to the flow of time and change. This

[7] My translation.

[8] See Linda Henderson's important study on this: Henderson 1983.

[9] On this, see: Antonova 2012.

distinction between time and eternity and the associated concept of timelessness are Platonic and Neoplatonic in origin and lie at the heart of one of the central Christian doctrines – the doctrine of divine timeless eternity. As Richard Swinburne has pointed out, "the doctrine of God's timelessness seems to have entered Christian theology from Neoplatonism and there, from Augustine to Aquinas, it reigned" [Swinburne 1977, 217]. While Augustine had a huge influence on the subsequent Christian tradition, some scholars have noticed that there is "little in <Augustine's doctrine of eternity> which cannot find parallel in Plotinus" [Padgett 1993, 43]. In the Greek Christian tradition, there were no serious divergences from the Latin Fathers, which is not surprising in view of their common, Neoplatonic sources. At the time of Augustine, Basil the Great analyzes the problem of divine eternity in similar terms. In a passage reminiscent of Augustine, the nature of time is defined as that "whose past has vanished, whose future is not yet at hand and whose present escapes perception before it is known" [Basil the Great 1963, 9]. In contrast, not only God, but the angels too, do not presuppose time and so are immutable. Gregory Nazianzen too insists that the Son, similarly to the Father, "exists outside time and absolutely" [Gregory Nazianzen 1991, 268–269].

Now, how does a timelessly eternal being "see" *out of the time*? This was, in fact, a question that some theologians such as St. John of Damascus confronted directly. The response of John of Damascus builds immediately on the doctrine of divine timeless eternity [John of Damascus 1958, 203]:

> And there is His distinctly seeing with His divine, all-seeing, and immaterial eye all things at once, both present and past and future before they come to pass.

In other words, to a God who transcends the temporal dimension, events in human history exist simultaneously, all at once. By implication, such a timeless being will not perceive objects successively in time but simultaneously. In this sense, divine vision is simultaneous and thus 'view-point-less', i.e., things are not seen from a certain point of view but, potentially, from all possible points of view, all at once. Of course, in icons objects are almost never represented from *all* sides altogether, because if they were these objects would be unrecognizable. At the same time, what matters is the depiction of aspects of the object that should not be there according to the laws of natural vision at a given moment of time (the sides of the coffin in Fig. 2). As Florensky noticed, in some cases these aspects, i.e., the 'supplementary planes', are even emphasized by means of colour.

In short, according to the interpretation here[10], the construction of space in the icon has a profound, theological meaning which comes down to conveying a sense of how God would "see" the world. If this view is accepted, all attempts at proving that 'reverse perspective' is somehow true to the way that natural vision works (definitions 1, 2, 4, and 5 above make such a claim) are misplaced. For instance, a great part of Florensky's text on 'reverse perspective' is devoted to this rather fruitless endeavour – the author attempts to prove that icons are much more faithful to the laws of natural vision than images, constructed in linear perspective. As a matter of fact, I believe that there are elements of the pictorial space of the icon about which such a case can be convincingly made, but this is not the essential purpose of the icon. Once we understand the icon as a symbol of the higher world and as the advent of the divine into our immanent world,

[10] For an earlier and more extended version of this hypothesis, see my book: Antonova 2010 b.

naturalism and optical illusionism become of secondary interest. What is of central significance is that the icon, through the construction of space, gives man, in the words of Umberto Eco, the opportunity to "see the world with the eyes of God" [Eco 1986, 118]. According to my hypothesis in the following section of this paper, the imitation of divine vision is also a step on the road to *theosis* or deification.

Imitatio Dei: The visual implications of the doctrine of *theosis*

Theosis or deification, a term coined by Gregory Nazianzen, was famously defined by Dionysius the Areopagite as: "Deification is the attaining of the likeness to God and union with him so far as it is possible" (EH 1.3 = PG 3.376 A)[11]. The very possibility for *theosis* is predicated on Christ's Incarnation. In the words of Gregory Nazianzen, "it was necessary that man should be sanctified by the humanity of God" [cit. in: Lossky 1974, 102]. The frequently repeated formula, first used by St. Irenaeus, was that "God made Himself man so that man might become God" [cit. in: Lossky 1974, 97]. *Theosis* is a doctrine which is fundamental to Eastern Orthodox Christianity and is accepted by some, though by no means by all, Christians outside the Orthodox tradition. The philosophical origins of the doctrine go most immediately back again to Platonism and Neoplatonism, as Plato's famous "likeness to God as far as it is possible" (Theaet. 176 b) bears witness. The New Testament abounds with references such as "I said, you are gods and all of you the sons of the Most High" (Psalm 82:6) and St. Peter's description of man as "a partaker of divine nature" (II Peter I:14).

The notion of imitation goes to the very heart of *theosis* and it is notable that in the literature on *theosis* man's imitation of God is frequently conceptualized in visual terms. This is quite consistent with the theological importance that vision and sight play in the whole Orthodox tradition. Thus, Basil the Great revived the ancient doctrine of the priority of sight and said that "from our sense organs, it is vision (*horasis*) that gives the clearest idea of sensation" (PG. 30, 121 D). With Gregory of Nyssa, this notion is applied not only to human vision, but to God himself. Gregory, in fact, attempts to derive the term Godhead (*theotēs*) from "es tes theas", which literally means "from the view / contemplation" (PG. 30, 132 A). He etymologizes on the basis of 'thea' with an emphasis on 'e' as 'view / contemplation' and 'thea' with an emphasis on 'a' as 'goddess'. Ultimately, he suggests that God first bestowed on himself the sense of vision and contemplation.

Thus, so long as *theosis* is the end goal of humanity, the icon, by inviting us to imitate God's vision, acquires a profound religious meaning and this is so precisely through the principle of constructing pictorial space. The experience that the icon provides is nothing less that a stage on the road to *theosis*. Imitation, according to the interpretation proposed in this paper, should be understood exactly as *imitation Dei,* since the model is God's 'eye' and the 'vision' of the transcendent God, who 'sees' out of time. In a completely different context, relating to man's ethical conduct as modelled on God, Martin Buber mentions that in the Old Testament, "imitation of God – not of the human image of God, but of the real God, not of a mediator in human form, but of God himself – is the central paradox of Judaism" [Buber 1933, 75][12]. It is beyond the interests of this paper to discuss the ethical side of the question such as the desirability of following all the moral examples of the

[11] See, on theosis: Russell 2004.

[12] English trans. from Barton 2007, 35.

Hebrew God and related issues. What I find useful is the concept of an imitation of the transcendent God, which some scholars see as already present in Judaism, a religion that posits the greatest possible distance between the divine and the human[13]. Indeed, the God of the Old Testament explicitly states in the Book of Isaiah 55: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways, my ways". At the same time, there are passages that suggest the possibility of a likeness between God and man, such as the following: "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). According to John Barton, the possibility for an imitation of God in the Old Testament is "one of the implications or meanings of being made in 'the image of God'" [Barton 2007, 38].

The visual language – 'eye', 'vision', 'sight', 'light', etc. – running throughout the corpus of writings on deification can be confusing. After all, the precondition for man's *theosis* is the overcoming of the senses, including the sense of sight. It is only after such a purification that man can start his journey of imitating God and becoming himself as God "as much as possible". And imitating God's 'vision' means that man, a being grounded in temporality, should imitate God's 'seeing' out of time. So, what happens in *theosis* is not only fundamentally different from human vision but is its negation. Man leaves natural vision behind in order to develop a higher mode of 'seeing'. The evolution of a "new habit of seeing" (Plato, RP 517 E) is a problem that Florensky believed was posed already by Plato, who is, in many ways, the main intellectual hero in *The Meaning of Idealism*. In order to 'see' Platonic Ideas "directly, face to face" [Florensky 2000, 13], man has to develop his spiritual "capacity for mystical contemplation". The images revealed to man in this process of "mystical contemplation" possess "a higher degree of reality" [Ibid., 108]. This thinking, according to the Russian author, lies at the basis of a "generic method of looking at the world", which is interested in the phenomenon "as a whole" and not only in "one moment of its history" [Ibid., 110]. Modern man has lost exactly this ability to experience "the world as a unified being" [Ibid., 108] and, in this way, if art has a mission it consists in restoring human beings' ability to "see the world behind the trees" [Ibid., 115]. This is the meaning of "synthetic vision" (Florensky's notion in *The Meaning of Idealism*) and the principle of "supplementary planes" of the icon (in the essay on "reverse perspective") gives a visual expression to it.

On art history as theology: Some of the background

Admittedly, the present hypothesis, which draws the visual implications of two theological doctrines, can be highly problematic. This is so because it posits a connection between two disparate domains of human consciousness – the conceptual, logical, within which theology operates and the non-conceptual, intuitive of the field of visuality. We have basically claimed that it is possible to acquire implicit knowledge about theological notions through the visual arts. As recurrent iconoclasms in history show societies and groups within societies have held deeply felt convictions on questions issuing from this claim: can images convey theological ideas at all and if so, is there a danger that they impart theological notions contrary to official teaching, etc.? The victory of the Iconophile party in the Iconoclastic Controversy in Byzantium (8th and 9th centuries) meant that Orthodox Christianity accepted once and for all the power of icons, i.e., material, visual images, to intuit, if not directly teach, theological ideas. As the contemporary scholar,

[13] See, for instance, Davies 1999; Barton 2007.

Charles Barber, put it, "the Iconoclastic Controversy <in Byzantium> had a very precise point of origin, namely the 82nd canon of the Quinisext Council, 691–692" [Barber 2002, 40][14], which expressed the belief that "how one chooses to show the Christian God [as Lamb or as man] has theological implications" [Ibid., 54]. Thus, Barber speaks of a "theology through images," i.e., the notion that ideas were "carried not only by the text, but also by the image in the icon itself" [Ibid., 53].

In the nineteenth century, with the institutionalization of art history as a separate discipline at German universities, the connection between art and theology, natural to medieval societies, was largely severed or at least rendered problematic. Ferdinand Piper's (1811–1889) work on 'monumental theology' stands out against this background. Piper drew a link between Gothic architecture and theology and claimed, more broadly, that artistic monuments were just as important sources for the study of theology as the texts, which are usually considered. While Piper is largely forgotten, his basic argument was further elaborated and popularized by Erwin Panofsky in his famous *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (1951).

More recently, Piper's idea that theology can, in some way, be accessible via art, has been resounded by authors, including myself, who have contributed to the so-called "theology through the arts", a field based on the belief in the possibility that the arts are able to disclose or inculcate theological ideas without, however, providing ultimate theological paradigms. In my own work, I have found useful Martin Kemp's concept of analogous 'structural intuitions'[15]. Kemp is very likely the major authority in the world on Renaissance perspective and he works at the crossroads of the history of art and the history of science. His term refers to structures that "are both those of the intuitive processes themselves and those of external features whose structures are being intuited" [Kemp 2000, 1]. In this way, it is possible to see 'reverse perspective' as creating a structure in concrete terms which acts visually in a way which is analogous to the logical structure of the two doctrines under our attention here (timeless eternity and *theosis*).

In many ways, the excitement felt by Western scholars at the revival of 'theology through the arts' is largely missing in Russia. The reason is the central place that the icon, as a native artistic tradition, holds in Russian art historiography, as well as the endurance of 'visual thought' among philosophers. Tellingly, some of the most original writings on the theory of the icon come from Florensky, an Orthodox priest and one of the most prominent philosophers of his generation. Similarly, what makes the notion of 'hierotopy', i.e., the sacred space created by the icon, by the contemporary Russian art historian Alexei Lidov so exciting is its interdisciplinary potential and its applicability to research in theology, the psychology of vision, museology, etc. [see: Lidov 2017]. In other words, in Russia, the wall separating art and religion, art history and theology, was never as thick and impenetrable. Indeed, one of the legacies of the philosophical movement of *vseedinstvo* (full unity), that Florensky belonged to, was the idea that knowledge is one or

[14] The text of the canon reads: "Therefore, so that what is perfect may be depicted, even in paintings, in the eyes of all, we decree that the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, Christ our God, should from now on be portrayed as a man, instead of the ancient Lamb, even in icons: for one may be led to the memory of his life in the flesh, his passion and his saving death, and of the redemption which thereby came to the world".

[15] I relied on this notion in my book: Antonova 2010 b, which was meant as a contribution to the 'theology through the arts'. Martin Kemp wrote the preface to the book.

what was called *tsel'noe znanie* (integral knowledge). The notion of 'integral knowledge' can be understood, in a Western context, as 'interdisciplinarity', but surely it is much more than that. The pursuit of the Truth was a deeply-felt religious obligation.

Conclusion

This paper offered what could be described as an exercise in 'visual thought'. More concretely, in Part I, it was demonstrated that the usual understanding of 'reverse perspective' as a strictly art historical term, describing the construction of space in the icon, is unsatisfactory. There are at least six definitions of the term in art historiography, which scholars continue to use, frequently without realizing that the view they happen to follow is one among several, some of which exclude others. Instead, this paper suggested, in Parts II and III, that 'reverse perspective' was a category, which offered a visualization of the two theological doctrines of divine timeless eternity and of *theosis*. In other words, an art historical topic *par excellence* – the construction of pictorial space – was placed firmly within a theological framework. This interpretation was inspired by the Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky, who was the first to introduce the topic of 'reverse perspective' into Orthodox discourse. Part IV of the present paper mentioned briefly some wider tendencies in scholarly literature, from the nineteenth century on, on the relationship between art history and theology.

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