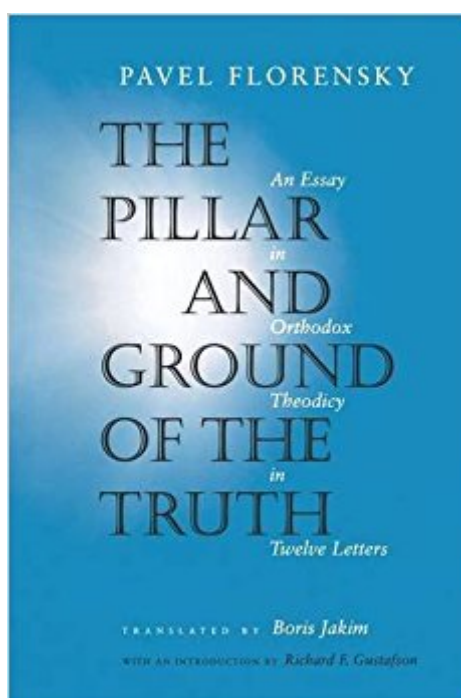


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# The Pillar And Ground Of The Truth: An Essay In Orthodox Theodicy In Twelve Letters



## Synopsis

Pavel Florensky--certainly the greatest Russian theologian of the last century--is now recognized as one of Russia's greatest polymaths. Known as the Russian Leonardo da Vinci, he became a Russian Orthodox priest in 1911, while remaining deeply involved with the cultural, artistic, and scientific developments of his time. Arrested briefly by the Soviets in 1928, he returned to his scholarly activities until 1933, when he was sentenced to ten years of corrective labor in Siberia. There he continued his scientific work and ministered to his fellow prisoners until his death four years later. This volume is the first English translation of his rich and fascinating defense of Russian Orthodox theology. Originally published in 1914, the book is a series of twelve letters to a "brother" or "friend," who may be understood symbolically as Christ. Central to Florensky's work is an exploration of the various meanings of Christian love, which is viewed as a combination of *philia* (friendship) and *agape* (universal love). Florensky is perhaps the first modern writer to explore the so-called "same-sex unions," which, for him, are not sexual in nature. He describes the ancient Christian rites of the *adelphopoiesis* (brother-making), joining male friends in chaste bonds of love. In addition, Florensky is one of the first thinkers in the twentieth century to develop the idea of the Divine Sophia, who has become one of the central concerns of feminist theologians.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Recommended with enthusiasm. . . . The reader's investment will be repaid many times over."--Patrick Henry Reardon, *Books & Culture* "Jakim has provided a thoughtful and accurate translation. . . . Bringing a project like this to completion is a monumental achievement."--Steven

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Russian --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Paul Florensky (in some Orthodox circles he is Saint Pavel Florensky) was one of the most creative Orthodox thinkers of the post-Byzantine era, and this is his magnum opus, brilliantly translated by Boris Jakim, a well-known and very capable translator of other Russian theological books, including several volumes of Bulgakov. Florensky is considered "speculative" by many Orthodox who think that Orthodox theology should not venture beyond parroting the Fathers of the Church and the dogmatic formulations of the Councils. Florensky was not afraid to go outside the boundaries of established formulations, like many other Russians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries also did. And it was their creative - and sometimes "speculative" - contributions that enabled the renaissance brought about by Russian, Greek, Serbian and Romanian theologians in the 20th century, including many who settled in America. It's a fascinating book. But I experienced a serious problem with it. Twice I ordered this book through the marketplace and both times I had to return it because of a significant defect. (And both times I had to pay shipping cost to return it to the sellers - which I felt was very unfair, considering that I was returning a defective book.) The defect was serious: 40 pages missing! (pages 515-554) I contacted the publisher, Princeton University Press, about the problem and I received a quick reply to the effect that this was a known issue and it has been corrected. They will now ship me a copy. So my best advice to prospective buyers is either to order directly from the publisher, Princeton University Press, or from , not a seller in the marketplace. If there are still defective copies out there, they're more liable to be in the stock of the marketplace sellers.

Deep. Not for the faint of heart. Pretty much for scholars or technicians.

Paval Florenski's "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth" is an outstanding example of Russian theology when it comes to the orthodox understanding and explanation of the Trinity. A Christian understanding of being partakers of the Divine nature is also explored with keen insight in a very practical way. Written at times as a letter to a beloved brother the theology is very practical and illustrates what it means for an individual's life practices to be a pillar and ground of truth, truth with a capital T. Complex at times this book is best read with a contemplative attitude. Tumwater1

The Pillar and Ground of the Truth is essentially an investigation into Christian epistemology, looking for how we can find genuine Truth and live according to it. The book is an ornate combination of theology, philosophy, mathematics, logic, and artistic sensibility, showcasing Florensky's depth of learning and subtlety of thought. It is written as a series of letters, addressed probably to a dear friend of Florensky's, which showcases some of the themes of the book. It's not at all clear to me that the Friend could be thought of as Christ, as some claim. He begins the first letter by challenging traditional axioms of logic such as the law of identity and non-contradiction, claiming that they betray the sinful state of alienated and isolated humanity rather than the fulness of Truth which is found in a mutual relationship and interpenetration of all ideas, objects and persons. Rationality unaided by faith cannot progress past doubt, leading to either agonising indecision ('epoche') or nihilistic despair. For Florensky, the search for Truth leads inevitably to the Trinity, as the fulness of Being and Knowledge. The Trinity shows how all things can be both separate and of the same essence. A growth in holiness and contemplation makes us more able to perceive the Trinity and therefore the Truth. It also discloses the inner unity of 'antinomies', doctrinal truths that appear contradictory but are actually just facets of a higher truth. This shows the spiritual basis of true certainty, and therefore the moral element of epistemology. Sin is essentially a persistence in holding on to a false view of the self, and Gehenna (hell) is the final judgment and rejection of this false self in the light of Truth. True knowledge involves a knowledge of the creation, which is obtained first by detaching ourselves from dependence on it (ascesis), and then learning to contemplate its spiritual reality. Sophia is the true form of creation as it is perfected in eternity. Contrary to another reviewer on this site, Florensky does not view Sophia as a fourth hypostasis of the Trinity. Rather, as 'fourth' hypostasis Sophia represents God's openness to allow creation into the Trinitarian life, the process of 'deification', and its root in his eternal knowledge and will. Finally, true knowledge leads to a personal love of others, to friendship as pure, interested love, and the desire for perfection in this relationship ('jealousy'). This is a very rich and detailed work, and will need to be reread, paying attention to the vast amount of footnotes. A knowledge of orthodox monasticism will help with understanding some of the theological concepts. I'm not sure what blurb writers are thinking sometimes. On the basis of the back cover, you would think this was a work largely about same-sex unions and a feminist doctrine of God. This is based on a short discussion in the final letter on a 'brotherhood' liturgy and other theologian's concepts of Sophia. Oh well, perhaps they know what sells books.

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