

# The Craving for Concreteness of Thought: Father Pavel Florensky's Research Methodology

The paper discusses Florensky's research methodology, which was explicitly formulated in the late 1910s and early 1920s. The *locus classicus* for the subject is "Paths and Centres (*Puti i sredotochiia*)" (1994-1999, 3(1)/34-40), the second introductory chapter of *At the Watersheds of Thought*. Florensky contrasts the two ways of thinking—linear and circular—decisively giving preference to the latter. "Circular thinking (*krugloe myshlenie*)" cannot be identified with circular reasoning; it rather means a specific type of relation between a whole and its parts, alternative to the linear one. To visualize this alternative, Florensky used the *fabric* (*tkan'*) or *network* (*set'*) conceptual metaphor accentuating its *dynamical* aspect: the fabric is *being woven* (*tkëtsia*) and the net is *being made* (*pletëtsia*). He emphasized unfinished, incomplete, and open character of the circular manner of thinking. There is no absolute centre, no starting point, no final point, and no linear type of order in this case. Multiple centres (knots, nodes) are connected by numerous paths (threads, lines) and our thought is able to travel endlessly all over the web making bizarre loops and discovering ever new routes. Florensky systematically used musical, biological, and hydrological metaphors to describe circular thinking. In the conceptual pair of "path" and "centre", he stressed the latter: centres determine paths, not vice versa.

The further details of this methodology can be found in *The Philosophy of Cult* and *On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises of the Christian World-Understanding*, created in the same period. In the works just mentioned, one of Florensky's key concepts is that of *orientation* (*orientirovka* or *orientirovanie*) (2004, 111-112). A distinctive feature of the Christian world-understanding is "orientation toward Christ (*orientirovanie na Khriste*)" (1994-1999, 3(2)/457; 2014, 110; cf. 2004, 115-116). Given the chosen orientation, the multiplicity of concrete *categories* can be "deduced" (1994-1999, 3(2)/467; 2014, 123-124). Consider Florensky's example of Holy Cross as such a concrete Christian category (2004, 30-41). Such concrete categories constitute the principal nodes of a circular intellectual network.

Again and again, Florensky contrasts two modes of thought. The first mode is circular living thought, inevitably fragmentary, sketchy and antinomic (1994-1999, 3(2)/467-468; 2014, 123-124), but unified by a specific variant of the everything-in-everything principle (*vsë vo vsëm*) (1994-1999, 3(2)/431; 2014, 73). The second mode is a complete and logically consistent system of "frozen thought (*zastyvshaia mysl'*)" (2004, 49). The first one is *concrete* while the second is *abstract*. A concrete living thought fabric requires a specific type of study, a sort of *histological* (from the Greek word *ιστός* that means "fabric" or "tissue") investigation (cf. 2004, 101). Florensky's numerous terminological and etymological studies should be considered in this very context. Thorough account of the metaphors used provides a decisive insight into the conceptual framework of the living thought in question.

The methodology was both described in detail and practised by Florensky. My main concern in the paper is to study how this methodology works in Florensky's peculiar approach to Christian theology and metaphysics, in his study of art and language, and in his way of doing science and mathematics. What does it imply to make all these diverse endeavours *concrete*?

## References

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P. FLORENSKY, *Filosofiia kul'ta [The Philosophy of Cult]*, Mysl', Moscow 2004.  
P. FLORENSKY, *At the Crossroads of Science & Mysticism: On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises of the Christian World-Understanding*, Tr. and ed. by B. Jakim, Semantron Press, Middletown 2014.