

## *Inter-Faculty Colloquium*

### Preface

Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2017, the Faculty of Theology commemorated the eightieth anniversary of the untimely death of one of Russia's great polymath thinkers of the twentieth century, Pavel A. Florensky (1882-1937). While introducing this thinker to the academic and student community at the University of Malta, the Inter-Faculty Colloquium sought to celebrate Florensky's interest in bringing together different streams of thought and research in view of a wider, more integrated form of knowledge. True knowledge, he would say, must serve the purpose to open us to new horizons, to overcome one-sided worldviews, to engage us in dialogue with the intrinsic and organic diversity of the world, and to let this same diversity shape the very fabric of our life and thought.

As society becomes, even in academic circles, more fragmented and specialist, Florensky's polyvalent heritage resounds today ever more conspicuously. He worked tirelessly to reform the Church spiritually, internally, at a time when most clerics sought institutional remedies to solve the problems that the Orthodox Church was facing. At the time of the Soviet anti-ecclesiastical rule, he also cooperated with the Government in areas of engineering, chemistry, and applied physics, teaching and researching in many governmental institutions and bringing forward many important projects as well as ground-breaking discoveries. He was also a man of the arts, an admirer of marionette theatres, a critic of iconographic art, an avid reader of world literature – like Shakespeare and Goethe –, and, being a pianist himself, was great friends with musicians like Aleksandr Skrjabin and Marija Judina. He was also a Symbolist; he believed that in the visible world is incarnated or manifested another spiritual world that is distinct but not separate from the physical world we see around us. If one looked closely at the visible world, tears, as it were, could be perceived unto the invisible

## 2 MELITA THEOLOGICA

world. Florensky was also a man of many friendships. His letters reveal a character of extreme intensity and approachability, gentleness, respect and love for others, be they work colleagues, childhood friends, devotees seeking direction, or close family members asking how he and his wife and children are doing.

The Inter-Faculty Colloquium, in fact, sought to celebrate one of the core elements of Florensky's life project, namely, integrity and interdisciplinarity. With this dialogical spirit in view, the Colloquium brought together lecturers and students from eight Departments of the University of Malta: the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Biology (from the Faculty of Science), the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Art and Art History and the Department of Anthropological Studies (from the Faculty of Arts), and the Department of Moral Theology, the Department of Sacred Scripture, Hebrew, and Greek, and the Department of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology (from the Faculty of Theology). The programme itself also sought to enhance this dialogical spirit between the three Faculties. Five of Florensky's papers were chosen, and five pairs of speakers were then given the task of reacting to these papers, each speaker from their own perspective. These five papers were chosen to reflect the vast array of Florensky's academic interests. The present volume contains all the proceedings that were presented at this Colloquium, following this same programme.

The five themes and Florensky's papers that were discussed were the following:

### 1. PHILOSOPHICAL MATHEMATICS

Examined papers: *On the Symbols of Infinity* (1904); *On Types of Growth* (1905)

Speaker 1: Prof. Josef Lauri (Department of Mathematics)

Speaker 2: Mr Vincent Riolo (Department of Philosophy)

### 2. PHYSICS, TECHNOLOGY, AND THEOLOGY

Examined paper: *Incarnation of the Form: Action and Tools* (1922-24)

Speaker 1: Dr Sandro Lanfranco (Department of Biology)

Speaker 2: Rev. Dr Ray Zammit (Department of Moral Theology)

### 3. PERSPECTIVE IN ART

Examined paper: *Reverse Perspective* (1920)

Speaker 1: Prof. Giuseppe Schembri-Bonaci (Department of Art and Art History)

Speaker 2: Prof. Michael Zammit (Department of Philosophy)

4. CULTURE AND CHRISTIANITY

Examined paper: *The Cultural-Historical Place and Perspective of the Christian World Understanding* (1921)

Speaker 1: Mr Ranier Fsadni (Department of Anthropological Studies)

Speaker 2: Rev. Dr Charlò Camilleri (Department of Moral Theology)

5. THE IDEA OF CHURCH

Examined paper: *The Concept of Church in the Sacred Scriptures* (1906)

Speaker 1: Rev. Prof. Hector Scerri (Department of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology)

Speaker 2: Rev. Dr Paul Sciberras (Department of Sacred Scripture, Hebrew, and Greek)

Delivering the Keynote Address at the end of the two-day Inter-Faculty Colloquium was our distinguished guest, Russian Orthodox Archpriest Professor Vladimir Fedorov of the Department of Theology and Religious Pedagogy from the Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy, St Petersburg, Russia. His speech was entitled: *Beauty, Goodness, and Truth in Pavel Florensky's 'The Pillar and Ground of the Truth' (1914)*. Born on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1945, Rev. Prof. Fedorov graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics and Mechanics of Leningrad State University, after which he worked at the Faculty of Psychology of the same University. In 1977, he graduated from the Orthodox Theological Academy with a degree in Theology. In 1978, he was then ordained deacon and priest in the Russian Orthodox Church. Between 1977 and 2001, he taught at the St Petersburg Theological Academy. Between 1998 and 2001, he was a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Munich, Munster, and Hamburg. He was also a member of the Synodal Theological Commission. From 2002 to 2007, he was a consultant for the World Council of Church Commission for Theological Education in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, he is Head of Department of Theology and Religious Pedagogy at the Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy. He also taught at the Department of Psychology, Department of Extreme Crisis Psychology, as well as the Department of Conflict of the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Sciences at the St Petersburg State University. Since 1994, he has been also: Director of the Orthodox Institute of Missiology, Ecumenism, and New Religious Movements; President of the Inter-Church Partnership “Apostolic City–Nevsky Prospekt”; President of the Association of Teachers of Religion and Theology of Eastern and Central Europe; and Vice-President of the East-European Association of Missiological Studies. In 2010, he was awarded the title of Honorary Worker of Higher Professional Education by the Russian Federation.

#### 4 MELITA THEOLOGICA

Two years on, an interest in Florensky's interdisciplinary work is still felt among lecturers and students alike at the Faculty. I hope the present volume could inspire more readers as well as scholars to delve into Florensky's intriguing thought.

Glen Attard  
Department of Moral Theology  
Faculty of Theology  
University of Malta  
Msida MSD 2080  
Malta

[glen.attard@um.edu.mt](mailto:glen.attard@um.edu.mt)