

L. L. HAMMERICH

PHIL. 2,6 AND P. A. FLORENSKIJ

Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab  
Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 47, 5



Kommissionær: Munksgaard  
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### Synopsis

In a study from 1966 L. L. Hammerich proposed that *harpagmós* in *Phil.* 2,6 be translated "rapture" (as in *mystical experience* where the elected is carried up to God), not "robbery", as usual. Later Hammerich became aware of a study in Russian by father *P. A. Florenskij* where the same interpretation had been proposed independently and based on different arguments, mainly taken from the Greek theological tradition. In this paper Hammerich expounds and appraises Florenskij's arguments. In addition he gives a sketch of Florenskij's life and scientific achievement, his personality and religious attitude.



## Preface of the Academy

On November 1st, 1975, the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters lost one of its most outstanding members, Professor Louis L. Hammerich, who reached the age of 83, being born on July 31st, 1892. From 1922 to 1958 he was professor of Germanic philology in the University of Copenhagen, and from 1941 to 1970 he held the post of editor of the publications of the Academy. Louis Hammerich was elected a member of the Academy in 1936, and this was only one of the numerous honours bestowed upon this eminent germanist and polyhistor. His obituary has been written by Professor H. Bach for inclusion in the Academy yearbook for 1976–77.

On the very day of his death, Louis Hammerich sent the manuscript of the present publication to the Academy together with a short note, seeking the advice of a couple of colleagues on certain points and requesting the publication of the paper. It is a sequel to a former contribution he made in 1966 to which he refers in the first lines. The final lines convey to the reader not only the thoughts of P. A. Florenskij, but also a message from the spiritual world of the late Louis Hammerich.

The Academy is pleased to publish this paper in memory of its distinguished author, and extends its thanks to professors Carl Stief, Børge Diderichsen and Povl Johs. Jensen and to N. J. Green-Pedersen, cand. mag., for their bona officia and to the Carlsberg Foundation for a grant towards the printing expenses. The only editorial comment needed is a statement of the fact that the notes contained certain lacunae which could but partly be completed. Consequently, the notes have been renumbered and rewritten, as far as they reached, in the hope that the reader will miss little if any information.

*Erik Dal*, Editor.

In 1966 I published a little book "An Ancient Misunderstanding (Phil. 2,6 "robbery")."<sup>1</sup> The idea was that in οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι Ἰσα θεῶν the word harpagmós was not to be understood as "robbery"—the theologians discussing whether this has to be defined as *actus rapiendi* "the act of taking, robbery", or *res rapta* "something which has been taken, robbed", or *res rapienda* "something which has to be taken, robbed"—but as a passive *raptus* (English *rapture*, French *ravissement*, German *ein Entrücktwerden*, Dutch *een weggeruktzijn*, Swedish *ett hänryckande*, Danish *en bortrykkelse*). It is not a vile robbery—as predicate of God the Father or God the Son, it is so absurd that even the Paulinian negation gives no sensible meaning. No, it is a high rapture, a being taken into the presence of God, as known from mystical experience, where the elected one is taken away to be like God. But to Christ, who was already in the form of God, this likeness with God did not consist of a passive rapture, but was something of which he himself had command, so that he could also relinquish himself, deprive himself of his likeness with God.

Most of the existing translations differ very little from each other. The Authorized Version may be representative of the old theory: Phil. 2, 5–8, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled*

<sup>1</sup> An Ancient Misunderstanding (Phil. 2,6 "robbery") (Hist. Filos. Medd. Dan. Vid. Selsk. 41, no. 4, Copenhagen 1966).

*Reviews:*

Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift 1967, 58–59 Ragnar Leivstad; *Vichiana*, Rassegna di studi classici, diretta da Francesco Araldi e Carlo Del Grande, IV, 1967, 95–98, Giovanni Barra, *Noterella di filologia "Erasmiana"*; Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift 30, 1967, Niels Hyldahl; *The Expository Times*, 1967, 253–259, D. W. B. Robinson; *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 23, 1968, 4, Günter Haufe; Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift 36, 1973, 195–196, Otto Foss; cp. also T. Francis Glasson, *Two Notes on the Philippians' Hymn* (11, 6–11) (*New Testament Stud.*, 21, pp. 133–139), esp. 1. An idiomatic phrase ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγείσθαι. Glasson contrasts the interpretation of the Eastern Church "prize" with that of the western Church "rapina". (Jakob H. Grønbaek, dr. theol., kindly drew my attention to this important article).

himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

A version according to the new theory would read: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, while he was in the form of God, considered that to be like God was no rapture; but he himself debased himself, took upon him the form of a servant and became a man like we are; and when he appeared like a man he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross.*

To obtain this result, I went into the details of a rather extended theological complex, considering on one hand the misunderstanding attached to the translation "thought it not robbery", as well as the theological discussions based upon this translation, and on the other hand the advantages of the new translation "rapture" (in the Paulinian sense of the mystic) as well as the firm connection with the verb *harpázein*, as found in Greek literature from Homer to Byzantine time, so that *harpagmós* is to be understood as "the being caught away by a divine servant or God himself to an existence in heaven with God or the gods."

I also tried to show the consistency of this explanation with the doctrine of Paul and the Old Church.

Of course, I thought that this interpretation of *harpagmós* was a completely new idea.

But after "An Ancient Misunderstanding" had been printed, a German-Danish scholar, who had partly been my pupil, Dr. Heinrich Roos, of the University of Copenhagen, drew my attention to the following passage in the *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément V* (Paris 1950) in the article *kenose*: col. 24. "Nous citons ici pour mémoire l'opinion d'un théologien russe orthodoxe, dont nous devons la connaissance á M. L. Žander. Il s'agit de P. Florensky, *Ne voskhitchenie nepstcheva*, Sergiev Posad, 1915, p. 55, et dans la revue *Bogoslovskij Vestnik* [= *Messenger de théologie*], 1915, n. 7-8. L'auteur rapproche ἀρπαγμός de II Cor. XII, 2 ἀρπαγή le "rapt" mystique de S. Paul, et l'entend non d'une usurpation, mais plutôt d'une élévation, d'un ravissement; son état d'égalité avec Dieu était pour lui non une chose désirée, qu'il pouvait atteindre ou usurper, mais un état naturel qu'il a délaissé pour prendre la forme de l'homme."

From the University Library of Helsinki—to which books



printed in Russia were statutorily delivered until the independence of Finland—I borrowed the relevant volume of this periodical, the title of which is “The Theological Messenger”, and I read the article which extends over 50 large pages and is called *Ne vosxiščenie nepščeva*, i.e. the translation of the Greek oukh harpasmòn hēgēsato. I read it and translated it into German, but since my knowledge of the Russian language is indeed slender, I found it a decidedly great help to consult a rough translation made by a friend and pupil, Mr. Georg Sarauw.

The contents are as follows:

Father Florenskij sets out (512–517) by mentioning that harpasmós may be understood in its bad sense *in malam partem* as “robbery, rapine, ravage”, defined as “an unjust appropriation of something that does not belong to the appropriator”.

Only something conformable to one’s nature, a throne, a title, rule over others, some possession, may be appropriated—possibly by “robbery”.

But—Father Florenskij quotes Chrysostomos—man cannot appropriate anything in order to be like an angel, a horse cannot appropriate anything to be like a man.

Equality with God cannot be appropriated at all—not by Christ since He (who, according to St. Paul, is in the form of God) already possesses equality with God, and not by a human being, for equality with God is against and above man’s nature.

How could St. Paul then contemplate ascribing to Christ this attributive of robbing equality with God?

The interpretation has been given that this “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” was an expression of Christ’s humbleness. But how can a denial of an impossibility be an expression of humbleness?

No, harpasmós must be understood in its good sense, *in bonam partem*. It must stand for something good: something which in a person other than Christ would be something good, so that when its presence in Christ is denied, this serves to emphasize His difference from other beings, its absence in Him is a sign of His divinity.

The verb *harpázein* and its derivations can be used in a good sense “clutch and vigorously embrace”. This is how St. Paul uses it in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 12,

verses 1–5,<sup>2</sup> telling how he himself was caught up to the third heaven, to paradise, i.e. relating a mystical experience of being caught up.—Father Florenskij attaches importance to this last-mentioned nuance “up”.

Human beings may covet being caught up, but not Christ.

When it is said about Christ that He did *not* consider becoming equal with God in being caught up, this is a negative complement to what is said positively immediately before this, that He was in the form of God.

Christ *was* in the form of God; so in His case there could be no question of being caught up to obtain equality with God.

The mystic covets equality with God in his ecstasies. There can be no question of this in the case of Christ; He *possesses* divinity.

In a second chapter (517–533), Father Florenskij now tries to prove that, from the time of the ancient Fathers of the Church to the end of the Middle Ages, there was a widespread use of *harpázein* and its derivations to signify the highest stage of the mystical ecstasy.

He mentions twelve, to some extent detailed, and greatly interesting passages<sup>3</sup>—most of them in Greek—from the Alexandrian-Jewish Philon (1); approximately A.D. 35; the Neo-Platonist Plotinos (2) in the 3rd century; one of the Fathers of the Church, Athanasios (3); the so-called statements of the Fathers (Apophthegmata Patrum) in the 4th century (4); Johannes Cassianus (5) from the 5th century (in Latin); Nilus Sinaiticus, also from the 5th century (6); Johannes Moschus (7) and

<sup>2</sup> 2. Cor. 12, 1–5: . . . . I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago . . . such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man. . . . How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

<sup>3</sup> (1) Οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ θρασεῖαν ἰόντες, οὔτε ἐξ ἔθους, οὔτε ἐκ παραινέσεως ἢ παρακαλήσεως τινων, ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ἔρωτος ἀρπασθέντες οὐρανοῦ. καθάπερ οἱ βακχευομένοι καὶ κορυβαντιῶντες, ἐνθουσιάζουσι μέχρι ἂν τὸ ποθούμενον ἴδωσιν. (Philo About the Contemplative Life ed. by Fred. C. Conyblare, Oxf. 1895, p. 41–42).

(2) ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἀρπασθεῖς ἢ ἐνθουσιάσας ἡσυχῇ ἐν ἐρήμῳ καταστάσει γεγένηται . . . (Plotin Enn. VI 9, 11).

(3) ἤσθετο ἑαυτὸν ἀρπαγέντα τῇ διανοίᾳ καί, τὸ παράδοξον, ἐστῶς ἔβλεπεν ἑαυτὸν ὥσπερ ἕξωθεν ἑαυτοῦ γινόμενον, καὶ ὡς εἰς τὸν ἀέρα ὀδηγούμενον ὑπὸ τινων. (Athanasius, Migne Patrologia graeca 26, 933 C–935 B).

(4) ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκστάσει, factus est in excessu mentis – . . . ἐγὼ εἰς τὴν κρίσιν ἤρπαγην καὶ εἶδον, ego ad iudicium, raptus sum et vidi . . . εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν



Johannes Climacus (8) from the 7th century; Isaak the Syrian from the 8th century (9); Simeon Neos Theologos from the 11th century (10); Gregorius Sinaita from the 13th century (11); to Nikolaos Kabasilas from the 14th century (12).

Most of this is lucidly and convincingly presented upon the basis of the tradition of the Eastern Church; particularly interesting are the two oldest, Philon and Plotinos, as both of them have

ἦρπάγην, καὶ εἶδον τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἐκεῖ ἰστάμην ἕως ἄρτι, καὶ νῦν ἀπε-  
λῦθην, ego in coelum raptus sum . . . (Aprophthegmata patrum, Migne PG 65, 409 A).

(5) Pio Domini nostri munere memini me in huiusmodi raptum frequenter excessum, ut obliviscerer me sarcina corporeae fragilitatis indutum, mentemque meam ita omnes exteriores sensus subito respuisse, et a cunctis materialibus rebus omnimodis exsulasse, ut neque oculi neque aures meae proprio fungerentur officio; et ita divinis meditationibus ac spiritualibus theoriis animus replebatur, ut saepe ad vesperam cibum me percepisse nescirem, ac sequente die de hesternae absolute jenuinii penitus dubitarem . . . (Joannes Cassianus, Migne Patrologia lat. 49, 1130 B–1131 A).

(6) Ἔστι . . . προηγουμένη τῶν τελείων προσευχῆ ἀρπαγὴ τις τοῦ νοῦ, καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν αἰσθησιν ἕκτασις ὀλοσχερῆς, στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις τοῦ πνεύματος ἐντυγχάνοντος τῷ Θεῷ τῷ βλέποντι τὴν τῆς καρδίας διάθεσιν ἀναπτυσσομένην ὡσπερ ἐγγράμματον βιβλίον, καὶ τύποις ἀφθόγοις τὸ ἑαυτῆς ἐμφανίζουσαν βούλημα. Οὕτως ἕως τρίτου ὁ Παῦλος ἦρπάγη οὐρανοῦ, ὅστις εἴτε ἐν σώματι ἦν, εἴτε ἐκτὸς σώματος, ἀγνοῶν ἦν· οὕτως ἄλλοτε ἐν τῷ νοῷ προσευχόμενος ἐν ἕκστασει γεγένηται, καὶ ἤκουσε τῆς τῆς καρδίας αἰσθήσει (τοῦ γὰρ σώματος ἡ ἀκοή μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθητηρίων ἤργει διὰ τὴν ἕκστασιν) . . . (Nilus Sinaiticus, Migne PG 79, 1004 A–B).

(7) λόγον θεοείκεν, μηκέτι κατὰ τὴν ἀρπαγὴν νοῆσαι τι, ἀλλὰ μετὰ πολλῆς σκέψεως καὶ πολλῆς μακροθυμίας, non iam amplius per *subreptionem* quidpiam agere, sed cum maturo consideratoque iudicio, et magna longanimitate procedere. (Johannes Moschus, Migne PG 87 III, 3016 C).

(8) Ἀρχὴ μὲν προσευχῆς προσβολαὶ μονολογίστως διωκόμεναι ἐκ προοιμίων αὐτῶν. Μεσότης τὸ ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις ἢ νοουμένοις μόνοις εἶναι τὴν διάνοιαν. Τὸ δὲ ταύτης τελειὸν ἀρπαγὴ πρὸς Κύριον, raptus in Deum. (Johannes Climacus, Migne PG 88, 1132 D).

(9) ἀρπαγῆ ἦρπάγη ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων. (Isaac Syriacus, Florenskijs note 44).

(10) ἡ ἴδια ἀλλοίωσις καὶ ἀρπαγὴ θέλει γένην τότε εἰς τοὺς Ἁγίους, καθὼς γίνεται εἰς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐδῶ . . . ὅτι ὁ δεῖνα Ἁγιος ἦλθεν εἰς θεωρίαν Θεοῦ, καὶ ἀρπάχθη ὁ νοῦς τοῦ. (Simeon Novus Theologos, Florenskijs note 46).

(11) Ἀρχὴ τῆς νοεῶς προσευχῆς, ἡ ἐνέργεια, εἴτ' οὖν ἡ καθαρτικὴ τοῦ πνεύματος δύναμις καὶ ἡ μυστικὴ τοῦ νοὸς ἱερουργία· ὡσπερ ἀρχὴ τῆς ἡσυχίας, ἡ σχολή· μεσότης δέ, ἡ φωτιστικὴ δύναμις καὶ θεωρία· καὶ τέλος, ἡ ἕκτασις καὶ ἡ ἀρπαγὴ τοῦ νοὸς πρὸς Θεόν. . . Ἐκστασις δὲ οὐ μόνον τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεων πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἀρπαγὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς αἰσθήσεως ὀλικῶς ἕκτασις· ἔρως δὲ ὁ διττός, ἡ τῆς ἐφέσεως νικητικὴ μέθη τοῦ πνεύματος. (Gregorius Sinaites, Migne PG 150, 1277 C).

(12) ὑπὲρ οὗ καὶ νομίζω καὶ βιαστὰς αὐτοὺς λέγεσθαι καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν ἀρπάζειν, ὅτι μὴ τοὺς δώσοντας ἀναμένουσι οὐδὲ τοὺς αἰρήσομένους ἀποσκοποῦσιν, ἀλλ' αὐτόματοι τοῦ θρόνου δρᾶττονται καὶ ταῖς παρ' ἑαυτῶν ψήφοις περιτίθενται τὸ διάδημα. Second quotation: ὁθεν ἀρπαγες εἰκότως ἂν διὰ τοῦτο καλοῖντο καὶ βιασταὶ τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν, εἰς τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν αὐτῶν ἑαυτοὺς εἰσφουόντες. Οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ τὰς ψυχὰς μισοῦντες καὶ ἀπολλύντες καὶ τοῦτων τῶν ψυχῶν δεσπότην ἀντιλαμβάνοντες. (Nicolaus Cabasilas, Migne PG 150, 714 A–B).



the direct juxtaposition of *harpástheis* "being caught up" and *enthousiásas* "having been made divine". In the case of Philon it must further be understood that the passage is found in his book "On contemplative life", which describes an ascetic-mystic Jewish community; this was, however, from the 3rd century on actually taken by the Fathers of the Church to be a description of one of the oldest Christian communities. In the catalogue of the Danish Royal Library Philon is quite simply to be found under "Fathers of the Church"! And Father Florenskij may have been of the same opinion.

Philon's book is older than any of the epistles of St. Paul, and the question whether St. Paul may have been influenced by Jewish-Alexandrian circles—in practice by Philon—is probably still open. We can only guess as to what happened during the years that St. Paul spent after Damascus in "Arabia" (Gal. 1,17).

The pagan Plotinos (3rd century) was—like Philon—from Alexandria (although he spent the last decades of his life in and near Rome). It is no doubt a reasonable assumption that he was not unfamiliar with Jewish-Christian thoughts (his teacher, Ammonios Sakkas, is considered to have been originally a Christian and is reputed to have been the teacher of Origenes too) but how much this meant to Plotinos is perhaps still an open question. Father Florenskij probably thought it possible to group the thoughts of Plotinos among the ideas of Christian philosophy.

In Chapter III (533–554), Father Florenskij now tries to compare such "carrying off to some other world" with general human ideas as well as with ideas characteristic of Ancient Greece.

He seeks his first comparison upon a folkloristic basis—which seen from the point of view of the history of learning is probably characteristic of the beginning of the 20th century. In particular he quotes—at second-hand—a book from 1769 by L. F. Rømer, a government official in what was then Danish West Africa, about the negroes, who believed that those who were sacrificed to the fetish were carried away during the sacrifice by a mysterious storm.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> L. F. Rømer, *Nachrichten von der Küste Guinea, Kopenhagen und Leipzig 1767*, S. 67.

He treats the comparison with ancient Greek ideas far more thoroughly. He relates how pagan Greeks in antiquity had a double conception both of death and of man's chance in encountering death. Already in Homer, death may generally be taken to mean precipitation into an underworld of shadows, but for the elect there is also the chance of being carried off or caught up from this world to life with the gods, especially to blessed life with the gods, as happened to Ganymedes and Kleitos. Being thus caught up does not imply decay of the body, and there is a possibility of returning from the other world.

Much later, at any rate after the Persian wars, the idea develops that in dying most human beings do indeed make a precipitous entrance into an unknown world, where those who die ignorant must laboriously try to adapt themselves as does a new-born child to this world. The elect, however, have obtained an intimate knowledge of the other world and they have transmitted their knowledge to priests, who in the mysteries, e.g. the Eleusinian mysteries, have established actual schools in the art of dying, so that when the initiated wake up after the faint of death, they know how to behave, know the cross-roads and paths in the other world.

As an aside, I may add that during Antiquity ideas of the topography of the other world developed, presumably from a centre in Iran, from where they arrived primarily in Alexandria and Christian Egypt (a major writing on this subject is the apocryphal Vision of St. Paul from the 2nd or 3rd century). From here, accounts of visionary travels in the other world were passed on to Byzantium and from there to Russia; some found their way to the West (especially to Ireland) and some were later taken over by Islam. During the late Middle Ages influence from Ireland and from Islam converged in Spain, France, and Italy, until the literary culmination was reached with Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the magnificent, visionary voyage of discovery, appearing approximately one century before the voyages of discovery in the real world began, some from China and some from the Iberian Peninsula.

Father Florenskij gives more detailed treatment to the ideas of being carried off, caught up, to the other world; he maintains that the Greeks imagined that this happened either by a storm

or a whirlwind (*thyella* from the verb *thyein* which has the double meaning of “rushing along like a stormwind” and of “sacrificing”) or—especially during most ancient times—by the action of the harpies.<sup>5</sup> The word *harpigia* has the same root as *harpagmós*, and it means a female being who violently clutches something and takes it with her (in German “die Rafferin”). Father Florenskij points out that the original function of these beings was that of carrying human beings off to the world of the gods, and that not until some time during Antiquity did they become horrifying, defiling beings similar to birds of prey. The old function is known especially from the *Odyssey*, the new function from e.g. the Argonauts’ expedition. In the *Odyssey* both Telemakhos and Eumaios complain that they know nothing for certain about Odysseus; if he was known to be dead he might be given a funeral in an honourable manner, but he has probably been carried off by the harpies.<sup>6</sup> The Argonauts, however, had to protect the blind King Phineus, who had the gift of prophesy and who, against the wishes of the gods, had helped the Argonauts on their way. They had to protect him against the harpies, who defiled his food at the command of the gods.<sup>7</sup> The storms competed with the harpies: Penelope despaired at the absence of Odysseus and the unwelcome attentions of the suitors; she wished to be either struck by the arrows of the goddess of death or carried off by the storms.<sup>8</sup> In his dialogue “Phaidros”, Plato gives an unforgettable account of the myth about the north wind, Boreas, who carried off the virgin Orythia from the Acropolis.<sup>9</sup>

But Father Florenskij is wrong when he also finds an association with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydike in the Underworld. For one thing, the antique etymology which derives the name Orpheus from the same root as *harpagmós*, *harpázein*,

<sup>5</sup> Father Florenskij quotes Pauly-Wissowa and other current works of classical philology, as well as some articles by himself in *The Theological Messenger*, and his work on *The Meaning of Idealism* (1915).

<sup>6</sup> *Odyssea* I, 241 f. νῦν δὲ μιν ἀκλειῶς ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρέψαντο· οὐχέτ’ ἄϊστος, ἄπυστος, . . . *ibidem* I, 235 οἱ (ἑοὶ) κείνον μὲν ἄϊστον ἐποίησαν περὶ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, . . . *ibidem* XIV, 371 νῦν δὲ μιν ἀκλειῶς ἄρπυιαι ἀνηρέψαντο.

<sup>7</sup> Apollonius Rhodius *Argonautica* II 289.

<sup>8</sup> *Odyssea* XX, 61–64 . . . αἴθε μοι ἤδη ἰὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι βαλοῦσ’ ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλοιο αὐτίκα νῦν, ἧ ἔπειτά μ’ ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα οἴχοιτο προφέρουσα κατ’ ἠερόντα κέλευθα.

<sup>9</sup> Plato *Phaedrus* 229 B.



*hárpyia* is false, and for another the Orpheus legend does not deal with ascension into heaven, but descension into the underworld.

In Chapter IV, Father Florenskij also attaches doubtful importance to some antique ideas contending that not only Boreas was found in the mountain caves of Macedonia, Thrace and Skythia, but also the harpies were found here, and establishing that these regions were the special sites of mystic cult.

Reverting to the text, Father Florenskij maintains that in the Epistle to the Philippians, chapter 2, verse 6, the meaning of “mystic carrying off/mystically being caught up” is both clear in the context and deeply motivated, and he asks why St. Paul has found particular reason to stress to the community of Philippi in Macedonia that Christ’s equality with God was *not* caused by his being mystically caught up. Stressing all the miraculous accounts in the Acts, chapter 16, of how St. Paul and his companion, Silas, managed to reach Philippi, he is of the opinion that the Philippians lived in the heart of a region full of mysticism and mysteries, so that they might possibly err and believe that Jesus Christ was like one of the initiates in the mysteries (even if the highest initiated being), like a mystic who is initiated in ecstasy, caught up, to be like God, whereas Christ is himself of divine nature.

I would consider this a theological over-interpretation.

And the same is true regarding the following argumentation: just as in the mystic experience, the experiencing subject and the experienced object are united, the interpretation of *harpagmós* as “being mystically caught up” is said to concur with both the active *raptus* “snatching, robbery”, and the concrete meanings *res rapta* and *res rapienda* “what has been carried off or is to be carried off”. He contends that details may be left to the philologists. This is self-contradictory, and is probably only intended to cover him against ecclesiastical attacks for heresy.

Suffice it to stick to Father Florenskij’s own judicious summation: Men may strive to be ecstatically caught up to be equal with God. The Son of God cannot do so, His nature *is* divine. The Son of God did the opposite: He humbled himself *ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν* with emphatical word-order, instead of *ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτόν*.

The strength of this treatise is to be found in the logical,

severe criticism of the "criminal" interpretation of *harpagmós* in former times; in the insistence upon the "good" meaning; in the demonstration of the long Christian tradition in the Eastern Church of using the verb *harpázein* and its derivations about being mystically carried off or caught up; and in the demonstration of the ancient Greek background.

In all essentials, the result is the same as in my treatise appearing half a century later. There is also accordance in the argumentation. Father Florenskij has the great advantage of having included Philon among the passages quoted in support of the theory, and the harpies. I have the advantage of having been able to lean on Greek lexicography and on the grammatical work of classical philologists throughout an additional fifty years.

Who was the author?

Pavel Alexandrovič Florenskij was born in 1882 and died—perhaps—in 1948.<sup>10</sup> He was born in Tbilisi, where his father Alexander taught mathematics and biology in a high school for girls; his mother Ol'ga Pavlovna came from an Armenian family. Pavel started with the same interests as his father. Together with a schoolmate, A. Elčanin, he wrote an article on the illuminating power of the glow-worm, which is said to have been printed in a German zoological paper in the 1890's.<sup>11</sup> In 1900 he matriculated at the University of Moscow to study mathematics. He finished his studies in 1904 and is said to have been offered a grant which would enable him to become a teacher at the University. Instead he wrote, in 1905, a political pamphlet, 'The Voice of the Blood' (*Golos krovi*), on the suppression of the revolution in Moscow.

Even while studying mathematics and physics, he had also occupied himself with the humanities, classical philology and archaeology. In 1905 he was inscribed at the Theological Academy in Moscow, graduated in 1908, and started lecturing the

<sup>10</sup> Evgenij Modestov, P. A. Florenskij i ego sovetskie gody (P. A. Florenskij and his Soviet years). *Mosty, literaturno-chudožestvennyj i obščestvenno-političeskij al'manach*, 2, 1959, p. 419–434, Munich. (Bridges, Literary-artistic and socio-political almanach).

<sup>11</sup> I have not been able to find this entomological paper in the German scientific journals. (The Fluorescence of *Lampyrus Noctiluca*).

history of philosophy in 1909. In 1911 he married the sister of a friend and was ordained a priest in the Orthodox Church. During the following six years he continued to teach at the Theological Academy and published articles and treatises—mostly in the forementioned journal, *The Theological Messenger*—shorter ones such as *Lekcija i lectio*, on the old-fashioned university lectures; *Praščury ljubomudrija*, 'The wisdom of our forebears', on the most ancient Greek philosophy; *Naplastovanija egejskoj kul'tury*, 'Stratification of Egean culture', on the recent results of Evans' excavations on Crete; and longer works such as *Smysl idealizma*, 'The meaning of idealism', on the development of Platonism from antiquity to the beginning of the 20th century—200 pages of comprehensive learning. He quotes the book on Shakespeare by my countryman Georg Brandes, and a nice treatise by the young Viktor Žirmunskij on German literature about 1800. The forementioned treatise on Phil. 2,5 belongs to this series.

In 1914 he published his main humanistic work, *Stolp i utverždenie istiny*, 'The pillar and ground of the truth'—the title is a quotation from St. Paul (1. Tim. 3,15): στῦλος καὶ ἐδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας), a work several hundred pages long and arranged in twelve letters.<sup>12</sup>

The articles and treatises I have read partly in Russian, the great book I have only seen in a German translation from the 1920's.

This book is the real expression of Florenskij's own religious philosophy. He was a follower of Solov'ëv, an adherent of what is sometimes called a Russian religious renaissance about 1900. He was likewise averse to the Orthodox High Church and to the dissolution of the ecclesiastical forms in the life and doctrine of Lev Tolstoj.

After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, the Theological Academy was closed. Florenskij had never completely given up his scientific interests; in 1916 he published an article on the theory of numbers. He now obtained permission to give some

<sup>12</sup> *Stolp i utverždenie istiny*. In the publication "Östliches Christentum", edited by Nicolai Bubnov and Hans Ehrenberg; Philosophie II, München 1925, pp. 28–194, there is an extract in German translation: Vorwort. 1. Brief. Die beiden Welten. 2. Der Zweifel. 3. Die Trinität. 4. Das Licht der Wahrheit. 5. Der Tröster. 6. Der Widerspruch. 7. Die Sünde. 8. Das Gehenna. 9. Die Kreatur. 10. Sophia. 11. Die Freundschaft. 12. Die Eifersucht. Nachwort. Personalnotizen.



courses in mathematics and physics at the Polytechnical High School. His transition from the humanities to the sciences is neatly marked by some courses which he gave at the Academy of Arts on *Obratnaja perspektiva* 'Reverted perspective'.

Soon he went more decidedly over to the technical sciences and became a professor of electrophysics at the Polytechnical High School in Moscow. Moreover, at the beginning of the 1920's he was one of the top experts in the grandiose electrification of the Soviet Union and is mentioned as such in the Soviet Encyclopedias. He was responsible editor-in-chief of important parts of the Soviet Technical Encyclopedia. Although he wrote many technical articles, especially on electrophysics, he never gave up scholarly work, and as time went on he found opportunities for writing on the progress of science proper. He wrote not only reviews, but also independent articles on quantum mechanics (Max Planck), the theory of relativity (Einstein), nuclear physics (Niels Bohr and others).

He was long a prominent figure in social and scholarly circles in Moscow. Several memoirs mention his Armenian long nose, his peculiar gestures, his abrupt transitions from muteness to proclamations of scientific news, scholarly opinions, mystical belief.

In the NEP period he was untouched being one of the bourgeois experts. Moreover he found special goodwill because he remained in the Soviet Union in 1922—the year of the Rapallo treaty between the Soviets and Germany—when all the religious philosophers were offered their passports and most of them departed (e.g. Berdjajev, Bulgakov).

But Florenskij overdid it. In 1926 he appeared to lecture in the Physical Society of Moscow in his sacerdotal robes! This insolence was forgiven, but certainly not forgotten. From 1931, when Stalin began to persecute scholars, the star of Florenskij started to decline. His name disappears from the newspapers and the encyclopedias. It became fatal that he had had the special protection of Buxarin, who had used Florenskij as his personal expert on scientific matters.

When Stalin crushed Buxarin and had him executed, Florenskij also fell. He was deported to Siberia for hard labour. Since 1938 there is no definite information about him. He is

said to have been killed accidentally when felling trees, but the exact year of his death is unknown. He was still alive in 1941, and some say that he lived till 1948 (when he would have been 66 years old). Others contend that he died in 1944.

The uncertainty as to the time of death of this prominent man is no credit to the regime of his country. There can be no doubt that P. A. Florenskij was an outstanding scholar, a quite remarkable personality in the spiritual life of Russia between approximately 1910 and 1935, and that he should be more widely known in the West—not only by philologists accidentally concentrating on problems of Pauline christology.

Let me finish with some words from the treatise which P. A. Florenskij wrote on Phil. 2,6:

“Have you ever climbed the high mountains—up to the border of the snow or even higher?

Then you must have understood, or at least felt a presage of the enthusiasm that fills the soul as a virile and controlled rapture (*vosxiščenie*), ready at the next moment to catch the soul, which is worshipping on the heights, and let it dissociate in the azure.

You will then also know that neither fatigue nor affliction nor anxiety shall subsist. Pure air, high and refreshing, shall pervade and penetrate your body, till it glides over the towering rocks, half weightless, as carried away by a mystical tempest. In such a time, which is full of eternity and shorter than a second, the lassitude of the flesh disappears, the vanity of existence, the mists of the soul, the miasma of evil passions that had been accumulated through months and years. And the sun, purified in the ether, pierces your heart and kills the serpent that had hidden there. And the virginal, illuminated soul has fallen in love with the light coolness of the royal peaks, and it is caught off to the creative cave by a rapture akin to the ether of heaven, descending from the hyperboreans, longed for by nations now corrupt, petty, mercenary.”

Do you hear, even through my poor English, the beauty of the wings of medieval eternity? Of the Russian spirit of Mission?



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