

N. N. LUZIN AS SEEN THROUGH
HIS CORRESPONDENCE WITH P. A. FLORENSKY*

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Introduction

This paper presents new material about the early development of the career of the mathematician N. N. Luzin (1883–1950). This material comes from recently published correspondence from the period 1904–1922 [Demidov, Parshin, Polovinkin & Florensky, 1985]. It shows Luzin's reactions as he encountered various mathematicians and mathematical subjects in the early part of his career. It sheds particular light on the period of indecision that he experienced before committing himself to a career in mathematics. In addition, it locates Luzin in a specific intellectual context of the period immediately preceding the Revolution of 1917.

This context is the Russian religious philosophical renaissance of the early twentieth century [Zernov 1963]. Key to understanding this renaissance, and Luzin's involvement in it, is the identity of Luzin's partner in correspondence, the philosopher, theologian and scientist, Pavel Aleksandrovich Florensky (1882–1937). Florensky is one of the most important figures in this renaissance [Pospelovsky 1988, 77]. His interests included both science and theology [Pospelovsky 1988, 240–241, n. 64]. Indeed, one of his major contributions is an attempt to present a unified world view that includes both science and theology. This attempt resulted in Florensky's most famous treatise *The Pillar and Foundation of Truth*

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