

Memories of a Mother



A digest of The Memoirs of Countess Sheptycka, on the early life of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, with reflections and comments by Brother Vincent Tomaskiewicz.

The Redeemer's Voice magazine published this edited version of the Memoirs in a series of thirteen issues, presenting the vocation and early life of the Servant of God, Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, as seen through the eyes of his mother. The excerpts from her Memoirs used in this series were taken from a prepared English translation of the French version of her book.

Part 1—Roman's Birth

The mother of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky, a candidate for the sainthood, wrote a beautiful biography of her son covering the years that she was with him before he pursued his priestly vocation. Sophia Fredro Szeptycka herself was a very intelligent and cultured woman, writing in a delightful literary style apparently inherited from her father, who was a renowned Polish literary figure of the last century. She could peer into the innermost recesses of her son's soul, for she loved him most dearly and he loved her, the two souls always being intimately close with each other till he became a priest (a not-so-rare relationship in the lives of saints). She was therefore superbly prepared to write a most revealing biography of her son. The articles to follow will contain many excerpts from the lovely Memoirs, with digests and comments added.

For whatever holiness Andrew Sheptytsky attained, the mother must be given some credit. In her maternal wisdom she took special care to bring up the boy religiously, to give him daily catechism lessons, to teach him to pray and to love God and to love him especially by always keeping pure and holy, and to hate sin and evil. The mother nourished the boy with her own overflowing love. Noticing that the boy was gifted with a natural religious piety, the mother prayed for him all the more. The father, also a good Catholic, though a more worldly-minded man, must be given some credit for awakening a religious vocation in his son by telling him stories of his ancestral families, which included a number of bishops. From his father the boy also inherited many traits of leadership. The Count's contribution, however, was marred by his prolonged and passionate opposition to his son's religious vocation later on, for which he repented profoundly.

It has been said that Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky may be the greatest religious leader of Ukraine since St. Vladimir the Great of a thousand years ago. He providentially came in what may be regarded as the most crucial period in the history of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Atheistic Communism was born and took root in Russia in his lifetime.

“My life has been neither easy nor worldly. God has given me to taste and also to understand the cross. He allowed me to see his kingdom grow within my own children.”

And immediately after his death, as we all know, the heinous crime of the liquidation of the church in Ukraine was perpetrated through the cruelest persecutions of the clergy and the faithful. Not knowing the greater role he was to play in history, but being led by the Holy Spirit, the Metropolitan prepared his pastors and flock for the onslaught to come. His basic guide was always the teachings and admonitions of the Lord Jesus Christ and himself setting the example of love, faith, and sacrifice. He constantly exhorted the faithful to lead holy Christian lives, to deny themselves as faithful followers of Christ, to bear crosses patiently, and never to waiver in their faith. How well he succeeded can be appreciated by the religious conduct of the faithful, priesthood, and hierarchy under Communist persecution. Because of their steadfast faith about 1700 Ukrainian

Editor's note: *The spellings of the “Sheptytsky” name are various; this one is preferred here, and is the common version used on this continent. The Polish spelling of the name is “Szeptycki.” The name is also spelled Sheptycky, Szeptyckyj, or Szepticky, depending on the source and the language it is adapted to.*