

6. Sheptyts'kyi's Theological Thought.



Originally published in *Morality and Reality. The Life and Times of Andrei Sheptyts'kyi*, Paul Robert Magocsi, ed., Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1989, pp. 165-183.

Sheptyts'kyi's Theological Thought

Petro B. T. Bilaniuk

On 23 December 1945, Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) published his encyclical *Orientales omnes*. In this important document the pope mentioned Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts'kyi and the Greek Catholic (Ruthenian) Church of which he was the head:

While we briefly and concisely mention and touch upon the happy state of the Ruthenian Church, we may not pass in silence over that outstanding Metropolitan, Andrei Sheptyts'kyi, who worked with untiring zeal through almost nine lustres [forty-five years], and stood approved before the flock assigned to him with not only one credential, nor by what pertains to spiritual labor only. During the term of his episcopal office, a Theological Society was established which strongly encouraged the clergy toward the study and progress of sacred doctrine. In L'viv, an Ecclesiastical Academy was established in which the more gifted Ruthenian youths could conveniently study philosophical, theological, and other higher disciplines according to the manner customarily used by universities. Writings of all kinds published as books, newspapers, and commentaries increased greatly and were also highly praised by other nations. Besides this, the sacred arts developed according to the ancient traditions of this people and the talents particular to it. A museum and other art galleries with remarkable monuments of antiquity were established. Finally, not a few institutions were set up and subsidized, by which the needs of the citizens of the lower classes and the helpless poor were served.¹

This statement stressed the achievements of Metropolitan Sheptyts'kyi in the development of theology. Unfortunately, very little else has been written on the theological thought and achievements of this giant of the Ukrainian Catholic and the Universal Catholic Church.² Yet, it was Sheptyts'kyi's theological and profoundly mystical thought and experience that actually constituted the basis for the enormous dynamism that inspired and governed every aspect of his life. This study will discuss some aspects of the Metropolitan's life and theological thinking with particular reference to mystical theology, sophiology, pastoral theology, Christology, and Trinitarian theology.

Sheptyts'kyi's Intellectual Background

The works of Metropolitan Sheptyts'kyi reveal a very sophisticated use of the concept *mysl'*. This is not merely *dumka*, which is "thought" only as a product of the intellect; that is, an abstract concept which can exist in the intellect or be expressed externally by a symbol, a written or a spoken word. For Sheptyts'kyi, *mysl'* was more comprehensive. It was rather the product and expression of the whole human being, the intellect, will, heart, emotions, and the body of the human person. Therefore, the term *mysl'* has not only intellectual, but also moral, voluntary, artistic, sentimental, and material dimensions. Sheptyts'kyi's *mysl'* also had a religious and theological character, for it is oriented toward God. Its object is the Most Holy Trinity and all of divinized reality or the whole of creation in its relationship to and dependence upon God.

In this the Metropolitan belonged to the noble tradition of the Ukrainian philosopher and theologian Hryhorii Skovoroda.³ Both Skovoroda and Sheptyts'kyi were excellent representatives of that sapiential or sophiological mode of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic life and thought which had characterized so many of the ancient Eastern church Fathers.⁴ Indeed, the entire life of the Metropolitan was expressed with the wholeness of his *mysl'*.

On intellectual grounds, Metropolitan Sheptyts'kyi was a product of his era. He was literally caught between the Eastern and Western Christian theological thought as it evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the West, he inherited an extensive knowledge of scholastic philosophy and theology in general, and of St. Thomas Aquinas in particular,⁵ since he received his philosophical and theological training in a neo-scholastic milieu in the period subsequent to the revolutionary encyclical of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), *Aeterni Patris*, of 4 August 1879.⁶ This encyclical called for the restoration of scholastic philosophy because of its close relation to theology, and it mentioned the importance of St. Thomas Aquinas and urged the revival of his philosophy, his spirit of investigation, and his scholastic method.

This method is characterized by a harmony between faith and reason. It is