

THE FIGURE OF METROPOLITAN SHEPTYTSKYKY IN THE NON-LINEAR SPACE OF HISTORICAL TIME

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The name of metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky belongs to the history of Ukrainian nation, however, it has not become history, according to the play of words. The Metropolitan is infallibly among us at all turning points in history, because he keeps raising questions which we still fail to answer. To date the entire notional space around his name is a veritable battlefield for several national historiographies, clad in the uniform of ethnic and political ideologies. Each of those ideologies strive to align the history into a clear and non-controversial linear system with the definite poles of good and evil. Some ideologies, depending on the strength of their political footing, even succeed in convincing their adepts that their ideological line is the only correct one. However, with the lapse of time the mighty chair-bound figure keeps appearing before us as an eloquent question mark. And it may seem that it isn't even him, Sheptytsky but the Almighty God through the image of Metropolitan keeps giving us a test that we are unable to pass.

For the lack of time I cannot give an analysis of Sheptytsky conduct on the axis of Polish versus Ukrainian national interests. I will only say that with the lapse of time the allegations of betrayal of Polish people, or vice versa of performing the role of the Polish "Trojan horse" in the Ukrainian camp are gradually lessening in their historical tension. However, the brand of "collaborator" with Hitler regime is still neuralgic and conflict-generating. Therefore I will limit myself to the analysis of Sheptytsky's attitude to the communist and Nazi regimes.

Andrei Sheptytsky expressed his attitude to the former as far back as the tragic year of 1933, when an organised famine was induced at Stalin's orders: "Based on injustice, deceit, godlessness and deprivation, the man-eating system of state capitalism has reduced the formerly prosperous country to complete ruin". The information spreading from the communist East was increasingly terrifying and in 1936 Metropolitan Andriy writes his work "Warning against the communist threat", where he gives a phenomenal evaluation of this ideological doctrine: "Bolshevism evolved into religion, some kind of materialistic pagan religion, which worships Lenin and his like as semi-gods, while considering lies, deceit, violence, terror, oppression of the poor, demoralising of children, humiliation of women, destruction of family, extermination of peasantry and reducing all nation to extreme poverty as the principles of its rule, although all these principles are false. "

The short-term Soviet occupation of Galicia in 1939-1941 served to only confirm Sheptytsky's conclusions. So, the godless nature of communism defined the system of values of Andrei Sheptytsky at that time, which correlated well with the commonly held conviction of Galician Ukrainians that they found themselves between the high German civilisation of Gete and Heine and ruthless Asian East, or otherwise between the poles of good and evil. Thus a linear perspective formed in the outlook of the people and Sheptytsky: communist East acquired the features of absolute evil and the salvation from it could only come from the West. In this perspective the well-known phrase from the metropolitan address as of 1 July 1941 fits quite logically: "We greet the victorious German army, which has

occupied almost entire country, with joy and gratitude for the liberation from the enemy" (I will make a remark in brackets that for Andrei Sheptytskyy critics the key words are "victorious German army", while for Sheptytskyy they are "liberation from the enemy").

Metropolitan Andriy had had to publish statements every time the power changed hands, and almost always he managed to formulate the main premise under which the Christians could recognise the power: observation of the laws of God. Here are just two examples:

Year 1939, the advent of the Soviet power: "The history has made a turn, the new epoch has arrived. Greet it in humble prayers... We will obey the authorities, follow laws since they are not contrary to the Divine law".

Year 1941, declaration of the Ukrainian state after "liberation" from Bolshevism - Sheptytskyy formulates conditions under which the Church will support even its own Ukrainian government: firstly if its decrees are not contrary to the Laws of God and secondly if the state disposes of its power wisely.

The duty of each Christian to follow the Laws of God became the main refrain of Sheptytskyy's messages during German occupation, when Metropolitan Andriy was first disappointed and then appalled by the doing of the occupation authorities. Thus began the period of active intercession on behalf of victims of terror before the Nazi regime and intensive preaching aimed at minimising the adverse effect of the hard times of war on the social morale and the very life of the occupied nation. We can quote at least one passage from his well-known address "Thou shalt not kill": "Some deceive themselves and others that political murder is not considered a sin, as if politics absolves a man from the obligation to follow the Laws of God and justifies a crime contrary to human nature. This is not so... Divine retribution is the greatest evil and misfortune for humanity that may result from the breach of the Law of God".

In 1942 Andrei Sheptytskyy made a final turn in his stance and formulated his verdict for Nazism in his letter to Pope Pij XII "This system of lies, deception, injustice, plunder, distortion of all ideas of civilisation and order; this system of egoism, exaggerated to the limit of absurdity, the total insane national chauvinism, hate for everything that is beautiful and good, this system presents something phenomenal and the first reaction to this monster is speechless stupor. Where will this system lead the unfortunate German people? This could be nothing else but an unprecedented degeneration of humanity".

In two years, when the situation on the front underwent a radical change, the Metropolitan in his letter to the Vatican writes: "The advent of the Bolsheviks may be useful in a sense that it will put an end to the anarchy reigning all over the land." Without doubt, Andrei Sheptytskyy could not forget the doctrine of militant atheism, which the Bolshevik regime was so proud of and therefore had a foreboding that a terrible ordeal was awaiting Church and the people. However the fate of his life under the conditions of the second geopolitical "earthquake" of the XX century was a desperate quest of lesser evil. In 1944 the coming of Soviet army appeared a lesser evil and therefore the borderline between conditional good and real evil already lay in the opposite direction.

The conclusion, as I see it, is simple: historical space is not linear and therefore all "linear" ideological constructs without exception are inconsistent. Even if professional historians refute validity of this conclusion for the entire history of humanity, it will still hold true for the XX century, since it undermined the natural bipolarity of good and evil. The last century engendered totalitarian twins - the two poles of evil, each of whom in turn disguised as good. The real pole of good was at that time dispersed among their victims - those, who starved to death in 1933, groaned under torture in GULAG and Gestapo, suffocated in gas chamber of Nazi death camps.

The lot that befell Andrei Sheptytskyy was to fall between the two colossal totalitarian dinosaurs, who fist amicably demarcated their hunting grounds and then clashed in lethal combat. In this global turbulence of evil, Metropolitan Sheptytskyy strove "not let the mighty destroy a person" (Volodymyr Monomakh) and guide the faithful to honour the Laws of God. Andriy Sheptytskyy as a spiritual leader of his people has a clear conscience, since the cornerstone of his stance consisted not of political or ideological motives, but the people's good, which complied with the credo he formulated for himself: "In all my doings, in every word and every letter I seek only good for the people, who have endowed me with my paramount and holly duties " .

Singularity of this conclusion becomes distorted in the system of distorting ideological mirrors, in which the figure of Sheptytskyy inevitably diminishes and shrinks. The logical sequence is quite simple: the German fascism was the main organiser of the Jewish Holocaust, while the Soviet Union was the principal victor of the Nazism. This defined the main axis of argumentation, a code of a kind for determining co-ordinates of good and evil: all those, who at a point of time laid their hopes on the Germans were held as "collaborators", while those, who laid their hopes on the Soviet Union became champions of humanity. Logic of the winner became ideological mainstream, and breaking it was unacceptable. Everything that fell out of this unambiguous picture was discarded. Ambiguity was defied by Soviet propaganda cliché, didactic history of school textbooks and the mere horror from the comprehension of the apocalyptic scopes of the war devastation.

After the defeat of the Nazis, Sheptytskyy's address, where in the fist days of occupation of Galicia he greeted "victorious German army" with the "liberation of the land" became the main evidence of prosecution. However, it is a twist of fate that communist Moscow was to be the judge, who earlier offered a hand of friendship to Hitler and signed a non-aggression pact. Moreover, Moscow entered WWII by direct military operation on the side of Nazi regime! This mistake of the winner, which transpired into crimes against the victims of Molotov - Ribentrop pack in the least, was later obscured; however Andrei Sheptytskyy's mistake, who did not have a single human life on his conscience, was exaggerated to the scale of criminal "collaboration". Indeed, vae victis!

Thus the objective truth about the two poles of evil was reflected in favour of a psychologically more digestible dipolarity of good and evil and Sheptytskyy himself faced trial, which can hardly be called objective. This trial until now keeps committing several decisive methodological errors.

Firstly, the further the multifaceted truth of war passes into history, the more anti-historic treatment is given to Sheptytskyy's conduct. Due to the strange fact that the figure of Metropolitan is constantly among us, his conduct is evaluated based on the logic of a contemporary, radically different time. The deeds and saying of Andrei Sheptytskyy, which were determined by the adverse circumstances of war tsunami, explode today like the old war mines. Who of us would like to be judged based on the circumstances that will form by the year 2065?

Secondly, Metropolitan Andrei seems to be answerable not just for his actions, but also for the actions of numerous politicians, religious and military leaders and simply bandits. He, almost paralysed and physically feeble, was to become a symbol encompassing the entire nation - and not only his nation. We can certainly console ourselves that this is a manifestation of the real scope of this historic person, however allocating this "integral" responsibility to Andrei Sheptytskyy is obviously unfair. This happens to remind me of the saying of rabbi Zusi, carefully preserved by Martin Buber, "In the world to come I will not be asked, "Why weren't you Moses?" but I will be asked "Why weren't you Zusi?"" Hence, from this viewpoint Metropolitan Andrei can bravely face the Final Judgement for he was Sheptytskyy!

Thirdly, it is a methodological error to interpret the good done by the Metropolitan with strict reference to the political optics of those times or his own mistakes. Here I mean the dilemma of non-recognition of Andrei Sheptytsky as a "Righteous Gentile" by Yad-Vashem. Somehow the testimony of how the two-headed nature of evil manifested in the railway stations on the borders, which were the meeting place of the Jews escaping communist hell and the Jews running away from the Nazi hell is ignored. The two parties could not believe one another: a man cannot live without a pole of good. Andrei Sheptytsky equally could not live without it. For this reason the persistence, with which the Jews rescued by the Metropolitan demand that justice be reinstated is so important for honouring the very principle of reward of justice. Thank you for this!

What I could say today to the members of Yad-Vashem Committee has long ago been said by Kurt Levin in his letter to Prime Minister Shimon Peres, "The State of Israel is in a difficult and perilous situation. Some decisions are imposed by the practical consideration of the critical mass. However, there are things that have to be given consideration from the moral stance, ignoring the practical motives of the moment - and without bias".

However it is not only Yad-Vashem that is temporising. It is also Vatican, which is irresolute about pronouncing Metropolitan the Blessed. In addition Ukraine itself can not solve its national "quadrature of the circle" - that is non-controversially reconcile its earlier irreconcilable ethnical and political concepts. We have witnessed over the decades the insurmountable taboo on the name of Andrei Sheptytsky and today we can confidently say that the main reason for this was the geopolitical status quo - the post-war system of collective security. The fall of the Berlin wall, following which a score of ideological mirrors of the time shattered to pieces, has marked the beginning of the process of liberation of Europe. The status-quo, which guarded Europe for some time nowadays is increasingly guarding itself.

Sheptytsky's figure is also significant in this context, for it signals the possibility of forming a world perspective, in which the two-headed nature of evil can find its non-controversial conceptual explanation.

Is it really possible? I recollect an ironic Jew joke, which, I believe, takes origin from another Hassid parable. It is about a wise rabbi, who agreed with diametrically opposite theses, and when told that it was impossible, also agreed with that statement. There is fundamental wisdom behind this joke, which is so well expressed in Talmud: the world we live in is antinomic, or otherwise logical contradictions lie at its core. Finding a static aurea mediocritas "the golden middle" is impossible until a certain eschatological moment. Therefore it is a duty of each individual to stay incessantly dynamic - repeatedly check the ethical compass and solve dilemmas of moral choice. This is precisely what Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky was doing all his life.

Translated by Olena Kuznyetsova