

Obituary

László László 1925-2008

László László was known to his English-speaking acquaintances as Leslie while his Magyar friends called him Laci. He was born on 6 May 1925 in Kőszeg, westernmost Hungary, to Antal Jesztl and Etelka Kelemen. He was the third of four children. His father was an inn-keeper first in Kőszeg, then in Szombathely and later in Sopron. In 1950 he changed the family name from Jesztl (originally Jestl) to Lászlói. Young László received his early education mainly in these towns, in the local Benedictine schools. In good *burgenlander* tradition (his mother was from Alsópulya, after 1920 known as Unterpullendorf) for some time he also attended a school where the language of instruction was Croatian. From western Hungary his studies took László to various schools scattered in Hungary. He completed his secondary schooling with the Premonstratensiens of Keszthely. For some time he was an aspirant member of the Carmelite Order. In the meantime he attended various post-secondary religious schools in Budapest, and in 1948 and after, in Vienna and Innsbruck. In the latter place his studies focused on law, political science and history.

In 1950 he emigrated to the United States. At first he took on odd jobs and saved his money to continue his schooling. During the mid-1950s he studied at Columbia University in New York. In 1956 he won a Ford Fellowship to study in Europe. While in Europe he did research but also worked for Radio Free Europe. He obtained his M.A. degree and the diploma of the Institute on East-Central Europe from Columbia University. Next he taught at various American military bases in Europe and North Africa. After returning to New York he completed his doctoral studies. For a while he taught political science at the University of Virginia. Next he became a member of the Department of Political Science at Montreal's Loyola College, and when that institution became a part of Concordia University, in that institution's Political Science Department. He continued teaching there till his retirement from academic life in 1988. The two sabbaticals he received there, in 1975-76 and 1983-84 respectively, he spent in Paris, France, and in Rome, Italy. During the latter occasion he did research at the Vatican Archives.

Before his retirement from teaching Dr. László made arrangements for the continuation of his training as a priest of the Roman Catholic Church. He completed his theological studies at the Université de Montréal and St. Paul's University in Ottawa. He was ordained a priest in January of 1991. He was appointed chaplain of Ottawa's Blessed Sacrament Church, as well as the priest in charge of the city's Hungarian Roman Catholics. Later for some time he became the administrator of the St. Ignatius Parish while continuing to serve Ottawa's Hungarian community at St. Elizabeth Church. In 2004 he retired from St. Ignatius but continued his work at St. Elizabeth. For his work among Hungarians and on behalf of Hungarian causes, in 2008 Father László was awarded the Republic of Hungary's Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit.

Dr. László was active in academic publishing throughout his academic as well as his ecclesiastic career. He published numerous papers including some in our journal. One of these was "Fighting Evil with Weapons of the Spirit: The Christian Churches in Wartime Hungary," in vol. 10, nos. 1-2 (1983), 125-143; while another appeared as recently as two years ago: "A Sign that Communism Is Not an Inevitable Destiny: The Revolution and the Churches," in vol. 34, nos. 1-2 (2007), 55-80. The crowning achievement of his academic career was the publication of the book, a revised and expanded version of his doctoral dissertation, *Church and State in Hungary, 1919-1945* (Budapest: METEM, 2004). The volume also appeared in a Hungarian edition. In this work, as well as many of his other publications, László defended the record of Hungary's Christian Churches in the interwar, post-war and especially, the war-time period. He kept reminding those who accused the Churches of remaining "silent" during the Holocaust that the deportation of Jews to Nazi concentration and death camps was halted at one point and the majority of the Jews of Budapest in the end survived □ and that in this development the Churches played an important role. At that time and especially during the last few weeks of 1944 when life became very perilous for the Jews of Budapest, Church institutions sheltered thousands of them, as did the Christian population at large, contributing to the fact that close to 200,000 Jews lived to see the end of Nazi rule in Hungary, the largest number in any country where that rule existed during the war. To this he would add that the men and women responsible for these efforts put their freedom or even lives on the line, while politicians in the free world who could have done more to save Jews, did precious little.

László László died Christmas Day 2008. He will be missed by his Magyar parishioners in Ottawa as a priest, by Hungarian Christians as a spokesman for their country's religious institutions, and by the Hungarian scholarly community as a church historian.