

BIOGRAPHY OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, BISHOP ZOLTÁN LAJOS MESZLÉNYI

I. FAMILY BACKGROUND, BIRTH AND STUDIES

Zoltán Lajos Meszlényi the second child of five was born on January 2nd, 1892 in Hatvan, a small Hungarian city not far from Budapest. His parents were Zoltán Meszlényi and Etel Burszky. The assistant parish priest, Béla Szirmák, baptized him on January 15th in the Church of St. Adalbert. His godparents were Árpád Kubányi and Ilona Meszlényi.

Five children came from the union of Etel Meszlényi (maiden name: Burszky) and Zoltán: Ilonka (who later married Kornél Kubányi), Zoltán Lajos, Miklós, Mária (who later married John Héderváry) and Kornél.

The father of the family, Zoltán Meszlényi, at first was a teacher in a Catholic school, later he became school principal in Budapest. Very little information is at our disposition concerning the childhood of Zoltán Lajos Meszlényi. However, it can be affirmed that he was raised in a warm and peaceful family atmosphere, in which the Catholic faith was always present.

In view of the data, we can confirm without a doubt that young Zoltán fulfilled his studies conscientiously and with enthusiasm. He completed his first year of secondary education in the Protestant High School in Rimaszombat (Rimavská Sobota) then from the second to the sixth class he frequented a state school in the eighth district of Budapest. Finally, he completed the last two years of his studies as a minor seminarian at the Benedictine High School in Esztergom. He graduated on June 12th, 1909, with outstanding grades (straight A's). The former abbot of Pannonhalma, Cardinal Kolos Vaszary, the Archbishop of Esztergom (1891–1912), soon recognized his exceptional talents and rare enthusiasm in the academic sphere. Thus he helped the young Zoltán to obtain a scholarship based on the youth's exemplary behavior and achievements. Because of this act, he was able to begin his higher studies.

II. PREPARATION FOR THE PRIESTHOOD AND UNIVERSITY STUDIES

Thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Kolos Vaszary, the Servant of God arrived in Rome in 1909. Here Zoltán Lajos Meszlényi became a student of the Pontifical German-Hungarian Institute confided to the care of the Jesuits. According to the institute's academic guidelines, the seminarians completed their theological studies in the Gregorian Pontifical University. The Servant of God was inscribed to this university. According to earlier comments, he spoke Latin, Italian and French well, and while he was in Rome he further perfected his Ancient Greek. Given that he was staying at the German-Hungarian Institute he also perfected his German. During his university years in Rome, he reached such a level, that the Archbishop had no reason to be disappointed. Zoltán Lajos Meszlényi finished with shining academic achievements: on June 27th, 1910 he obtained his diploma in philosophy, and one year later, on June 17th, he earned a license in the same discipline. Finally, on June 20th, 1912 he achieved a doctorate in philosophy. At the same time, in 1913, the servant of God also gained a diploma in theology at the Gregorian University.

On May 7th, 1915 Zoltán Meszlényi wrote a petition in an official letter to his ecclesiastical superiors asking to be admitted to the diaconate and priestly ordination.

On July 25th, 1915 he finished his Canon Law studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University and obtained a degree.

III. ORDINATION TO THE DEACONATE AND THE PRIESTHOOD

During the First World War, the German-Hungarian Institute transferred to Innsbruck. Here the theological discourses continued. During the summer break of 1915, which Zoltán Meszlényi spent in Hungary, he began his preparation for priestly ordination. His official petition towards his superiors was formulated in the hope that he would be ordained in his motherland. The response was tardy, and the young aspirant to the priesthood had to return to Innsbruck. It was here that he received the official

permission to be ordained and, due to his being underage – he had still not completed the necessary 24 years of age for priestly ordination – the exemption from the age restriction. Thus Monsignor Egger, bishop of Bressanone, ordained the servant of God to the diaconate on October 27th, 1915 and on the following day to the priesthood. He celebrated his first mass in Austria, in the chapel of institute's second founder, St. Peter Canisius.

IV. THE YOUNG PRIEST

After his ordination in October 1915 Cardinal John Csernoch (1912–1927), The Primate of Hungary, named Zoltán Meszlényi pastoral assistant in Komárom. Not long after he transferred him to Esztergom to fundamental services.

Given his exceptional talents and outstanding cultural preparation, the servant of God swiftly ascended in the ranks of Church hierarchy. Primate Cardinal John Csernoch a year later, on March 2nd, 1917 named Zoltán Meszlényi the archbishopric's archivist and master of ceremonies (szertartóvá). From December 15th, 1920 he was the archbishop's secretary. In the same year he was named the Holy See's notary for the diocese of Esztergom. All of this came about in a historical and political atmosphere charged with difficulties, which affected all of the powers of Europe and brought about many painful consequences for Hungary.

A bloody and chaotic period began in 1918, after the break up of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. First the revolution of the autumn rose came about, then on March 21st, 1919 the Advisory Republic was set up. After the fall of the communist regime, Hungary strove for stability. In the Petit Trianon palace, on June 4th, 1920, the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty took place. This act confirmed the break off of West-Hungary, Slovakia, Transylvanian Romania and the Southern Hungarian territories from the Mother country. From this moment, the Croatian Kingdom formed a part of Yugoslavia. At the same time, Hungary became unilaterally independent from Austria. On March 26th, 1921, Blessed King Charles IV unexpectedly arrived to Szombathely in order to reestablish his authority as Head of State. Discussions were held with Nicolas Horthy as well. On April 3rd, the victorious powers submitted their estimation to the Hungarian Government, where they opposed the return of the House of Habsburg. After the deposition of the king and the end of the dynasty, Hungary's type of government changed: it became a kingdom without a king. Nicolas Horthy was made Governor. The largest part of the administrative territory and property of the Archbishopric of Esztergom ended up in Czechoslovakia, on the other side of the country's new borders. Because of this it became almost impossible to maintain communication between the archbishop and the greater part of his diocese. At the same time in organizing questions about its properties, innumerable problems surfaced.

In 1921 Zoltán Meszlényi wrote a study under the title "the King and the Parlemt" concerning these pressing questions of the nation. In this publication the Servant of God expressed the opinion that the king's prerogatives took precedence over the parliament's. This provoked a court case where he was accused of abuse of the press. The State censure forbade the appearance and spread of the document, yet Zoltán Meszlényi published it anyway as an appendix to a magazine called Esztergom. As a result, the Esztergom chief of police started a case against him in 1921. A certain Pest county judge, with the surname Szabó, summoned him to court with the accusation of purposely breaking the rules of the press police. In his response the summoned explained that he did not consider himself culpable of any sort of breach of regulations. After the first hearing, the appeal took place on Gyorskocsi street, on the 23rd of November, 1921. The Royal Court of Appeals of the Pest Region considering the wrongdoing determined that there had been an abuse of press, but it supported the proposal that the sentence be suspended.

After this event, the Servant of God petitioned for a cancellation of his membership in the Hungarian National Defence Association.

Zoltán Meszlényi's reliability and commitment shown during his service, inspired the respect and admiration of Cardinal John Csernoch. For this reason, on the 7th of February, 1922, the cardinal petitioned the Holy Father to grant him the singular Pontifical title of chamberlain in view of his valuable work. In his letter, the Primate emphasized the great pastoral zeal that burned in Zoltán Meszlényi's heart and the exceptional way in which he accomplished his varied public duties at the service of the

diocese. The cardinal also stressed that the Servant of God's behavior was worthy of the priestly dignity and that he always lived in complete obedience to the Holy See.

The Holy Father, XI Pius seeing the Servant of God's extraordinary impetus and staunch fidelity to the Church, granted the request. The response, where Zoltán Meszlényi gained the title of Papal Chamberlain, arrived on the 18th of February, 1922.

On January 30th, 1926, John Csernoch honored the Servant of God with another promotion: he named him the Primate and Archbishop's secretary. In the document naming him to this position, the Cardinal asked him to confirm himself as a valuable and trustworthy assistant as he had up to now.

The Cardinal Primate of Hungary died on June 25th, 1927. His successor was the renowned and very intellectual canon lawyer, Jusztinián Serédi (1927-1945). The new archbishop had clear the exceptional this Servant of God's talents, and the recently named Primate made Zoltán Meszlényi "independent responsible director of the archbishop's house" on July 6th, 1929. With this responsibility, the cardinal entrusted an occupation which demanded the utmost seriousness as well as much dexterity and delicate attention: he administered all of the Primate's possessions.

Not long after this the position of director of the Primate's office became vacant and the Servant of God was entrusted with this new task. In January of 1931, after receiving the support of the Basilica's canons, as well as the support of the Ministry for religious affairs and education nulla osta, Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi granted Zoltán Meszlényi the canon's stallum.

On March 2nd, 1934 Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi named Zoltán Meszlényi as the pre-synodal judge of the Primate's Sea.

Other diocese also recognized Zoltán Meszlényi's excellence as a canon lawyer. On April 14th, 1934, Lajos Szmrecsányi, the archbishop of Eger, named Zoltán Meszlényi as one of the private teachers of The Eger Archbishop's Law Academy, recognizing his broad talent and his extraordinary achievements through his significant publications serving the common good. When the Servant of God delivered a public acknowledgment to the teaching body, he expressed his gratitude that they recognized his training and the merit of his research in his writings on canon law.

V. APPOINTMENT AS AUXILIARY BISHOP, ELECTION AS VICAR GENERAL OF THE APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR

We can gather from the preceding chapter that the Servant of God was an exceptionally cultured, intelligent and trustworthy man. These traits, along with profound obedience towards Church authorities and a unshakable faith in God, won him the recognition and respect of Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi. Between June 1927 and March 1934 the Archbishop bestowed upon Zoltán Meszlényi a good deal prestige along with grave responsibility and significant duties. In the end the Primate desired to place upon the shoulders of the young and humble assistant a duty entailing even greater responsibility. In December of 1933, when the position of auxiliary bishop of Esztergom became vacant, Jusztinián Serédi, voiced the fact that he was convinced that the Servant of God to be the most appropriate for this service. Therefore, on the 21st of April, 1934, he officially requested the Holy See, by means of the Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Rotta, to name Zoltán Meszlényi as the auxiliary bishop of Esztergom. Unfortunately no official response arrived, and the situation remained unresolved for some years. In the end, the Cardinal took the matter in his hands and personally turned to the Holy See on the 1st of June, 1937. In his letter, the Cardinal described the present situation with all of the difficulties that arose from the break up of the diocese as well as the various responsibilities that sprang from the dignity of the Primacy as well as the legal implications. The office of Primate, given its nature, often entailed occupations that implied civil duties. Besides this, the Holy Father granted him the grace of becoming a Cardinal, which implied various responsibilities. Thus, more help was necessary, especially with liturgical functions. In addition to this, Medárd Kohl, the auxiliary bishop of Esztergom, had died just before Jusztinián Serédi took the Archbishop's chair. After this István Breyer named auxiliary bishop by the pope on April 5th, 1929 was made bishop of Győr on the 13th of December 1933. Since then the post had been vacant. The lack of an auxiliary bishop caused problems for the organization of the XXIV Eucharistic congress. For all of these reasons the Cardinal petitioned the Holy Father to name Zoltán Meszlényi pro-norary and canon of Esztergom, auxiliary bishop - leaving his canonicate untouched. To give his petition

a better footing, Jusztinián Serédi emphasized that the Servant of God had already filled various offices in the Church, and on top of that he was culturally very well equipped. He also underscored his language capacities. Besides Hungarian, he was well versed in Italian, German, French, English, Latin and knew a little Spanish and Slovak.

In the Vatican, the petition of the Primate of Hungary was quickly processed. On the 19th of July, 1937 the Prefect of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Cardinal Rossi, informed Jusztinián Serédi that, granted the fact that they recognized the Servant of God's exceptional moral integrity and animation, there could still be an obstacle to his nomination: according to the information that reached Rome, Zoltán Meszlényi had chronic heart and thyroid problems. According to medical documentation, it turned out that Dr. Guhr had treated the bishop nominee for gland problems between August 17 and September 7, 1936. However, he was cured during the period of May 21 and June 28, 1937. Judging from Cardinal Serédi's answer, after two periods in the hospital and in light of the following tests, it could be said that the Servant of God enjoyed good health. The doctors themselves confirmed that his glandular functions completely returned to normal.

After dismissing all shadow of doubt, the Apostolic Nunciature in Hungary communicated to Cardinal Serédi that the nomination of Zoltán Meszlényi as titular bishop of Sinope and coadjutor of Esztergom had been officially confirmed by Cardinal Tardini in Rome. The Episcopal ordination took place in the Basilica of Esztergom on October 28, 1937 (on the Servant of God's priestly ordination's 22nd anniversary). The ordination was presided by Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi. The new bishop's motto was "fidenter ac fideliter" (With confidence and fidelity).

In the same year, an Apostolic Administration was created for the territories of the dioceses of Kassa and Rozsno that remained in Hungary. This happened to assure that a regulated ecclesial life continued in those parishes which, by the new borders, were separated from their bishops who resided in Czechoslovakia. Cardinal Primate Jusztinián Serédi was assigned this duty. He named Zoltán Meszlényi as the vicar general for these two areas. His offices were in Esztergom in the Primate's palace.

On May 14th, 1939 he was also named president of the National Association of Hungarian Catholic Young Men and the Central National Young Men's association.

In 1940 Jusztinián Serédi named Zoltán Meszlényi an extraordinary professor of the faculty of Theology at the University of Peter Pázmány in Budapest. Not long afterwards he became the president of the committee of examiners for religion teachers.

In 1944 the Episcopal see of Veszprém became vacant. Jusztinián Serédi considered his auxiliary bishop fit to receive this honor. However, Pope Pius XII decided otherwise. On April 8th, 1944 he granted the archidiaconal Stallum of Nógrád to Zoltán Meszlényi in the Esztergom chapter. The Servant of God József Pehm (Mindszenty), the abbot-parish priest of Zalaegerszeg, a priest of the diocese of Szombathely, became Bishop of Veszprém.

On March 29th, 1945 Prince Primate Jusztinián Serédi died. In his last testament, remembering his auxiliary bishop, he named him one of the persons to execute his will. The deceased Cardinal commanded with these words:

"Give to Dr. Zoltán Meszlényi, Lord Bishop of Sinope, as a tribute and as an expression of my sincere thanks, for being my zealous auxiliary bishop through long and difficult years my ruby and diamond decorated pectoral cross, the ring that goes with it and my one meter long simple golden necklace.

In September of that same year, bishop Meszlényi asked the chapter of Esztergom to remove him from his office as curator which he had occupied for five months. In his own words he expressed that „in the midst of the difficult conditions of today, everyone must fulfill his duty even to the last breath”. The reason he gave is that in the past, for many years he had dealt with properties and that his health was not the best (even though he did not give details about his health problems).

Naturally the chapter honored his wishes.

The Servant of God, József Mindszenty, bishop of the diocese of Veszprém succeeded Jusztinián Serédi as successor to the seat of Archbishopric of Esztergom. The papal bull was issued on the 2nd October, 1945. Knowing the moral and intellectual greatness of the auxiliary bishop, the new archbishop held him in high esteem from the very start. Zoltán Meszlényi was very faithful to the new Primate and as a sign of his confidence he supported him in all of his functions.

From 1945, Hungary found itself under Soviet occupation and the iron curtain kept her distant from Western Europe. Communism's advance soon made itself felt. The so called "land reform" of 1946 made it impossible to economically sustain church institutions, schools, churches and old folks' homes. In 1948 all schools were taken over by the state. Finally in 1950 all religious orders were broken up. Persecution of the Church became a menacing reality, which took a special form by the affronts made against the leadership of the Church. In the first seating of the Episcopal conference after the war, the bishops voiced their concerns. When the conference greeted the new Primate, József Mindszenty, they spoke of the sufferings at Golgotha.

As the Second World War's finally peace agreements were being arranged, the Episcopal conference, on the 2nd of April, 1946, assumed the point of view that a committee should be formed, which would analyze, based on the experiences of the Trianon Peace Treaty, what lessons would be helpful to take into account with the present peace treaty. The bishops would then make the results of this examination accessible to the envoys who participated in the discussions. This approach was supported by the Episcopal body thus, taking up the suggestion of the bishop of Csanad, Endre Hamvas, they found in the persons of bishop Zoltán Mészáros, János Drahos canon of Esztergom, general vicar, Antal Lepold protonotarius, canon and prelate István Szántay-Szémán, vice chapter director the right persons for the task, because of the experience they received earlier. On February 10th, 1947 the Peace of Paris was signed closing the Second World War. Because of this, the borders of Hungary were reestablished according to how they had been on January 1st, 1938. Besides this, Hungary ceded to Czechoslovakia the towns of Horvátújfalú, Oroszvár and Dunacsún. Ecclesiastical persons were not included in the peace talks. Because of this new more pressing problems surfaced in the area of diocesan governance in comparison to the earlier changes. In spite of all of these difficult historical and political situations, endorsement of the Servant of God continued. On April 10th, 1946 Primate Archbishop entrusted him with the duties of and official of the Holy See for the diocese of Esztergom. Then on the 23rd October, he received the nomination of vice-director of the Esztergom College of Religious sciences.

VI. THE SERVANT OF GOD'S PERSONAL CHARACTER: PRIEST, TEACHER AND PASTOR.

The human, moral and spiritual talents of Bishop Zoltán Mészáros reflect a certain person who did not live the absolute values of Christianity in an ordinary manner. His virtues, apostolic work, generated spiritual blessings, love and trust in all those who knew him, no matter what their social standing was. These are shining examples of the fact that he was an exceptionally pious and dedicated priest and bishop.

He lived his priestly vocation in service to the Church, in such a way that the whole diocese came to respect his person. In his priestly service and spirituality this Servant of God always placed himself in second place. First and above all he wanted to help his fellow men, to proclaim the Gospel to them and, for their good, to exercise love as defined and concrete acts. All of his acts were motivated by love. He was neither a mushy nor fickle. He did not show his sentiments, yet with seriousness and manly resolution he accepted his duties in the Church and the diocese. His disposition to serve his neighbor was characterized by a love that was simple, free of self interest, searching for what is good while desirous to conquer evil. He did not look to glory in his own merits and heroism.

He was very active in his spiritual life, which was founded in the strength of example. Oft time he gave witness to his trust in Divine Providence. He consciously wanted to fulfill his official responsibilities well being faithful in fulfilling Church norms. The behavior of Zoltán Mészáros gives witness to a strong and dynamic person. He never took singular paths and was not an individualist. Everyday he lived the spirit of obedience, his person being subject to Church authority. It was unimaginable for him that his personal thoughts take first place. He was also an optimist, which could be determined by the fact that he considered Communism and its miserable institutions as transitory. When many thought that the Church would be obliterated, he put his trust in Divine Providence. In this manner he was able to fulfill his responsibilities without becoming discouraged or whining.

He liked being alone and thus he did not worry about being popular at all costs. Thus he had no need to "lower himself" to be among the simple people. Naturally he conversed with them without being

artificial. He loved everyone equally. His private life was also exemplary. He did not have any obsessions, he was a man of studies. One received the impression that Zoltán Meszlényi was a well balanced, and lived every moment of life to the full. The Servant of God was an impressive personality as bishop and as teacher. During his presentations he not only taught in detail the material for the day, he also encouraged the seminarians on one hand to remain faithful to the Church and their superiors and on the other hand to fulfill their priestly duties with good conscience and consistency.

Bishop Meszlényi was an exceptionally well formed and extraordinary learned man. He was decisive and resolute. Given that he had studied abroad, besides Latin he also knew many modern languages. Besides this, he was one of the most skilled in Canon Law at home. He wrote many books and legal commentaries. Many of his disciples praised his formation and teaching capabilities while noting that he took care to maintain good relations with his students.

His knowledge of Latin was perfect. With lively love he used it to introduce the students to the person and spirituality of the father of the Church, St. Jerome. Thus he toiled to make sure that the seminarians had a thorough and trustworthy knowledge of Latin. In his personal relationships he was firm and at the same time engaging with his students, whose greatest honor and respect he had won. He was a leader with authority. His presentations, which always confirmed the students in their priestly vocation, were counted as an adventure among. Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi communicated his learning with faith and in a coherent manner. His presentations were characterized by fine linguistic distinctions. In spite of this, his manner of speaking was natural and comprehensible by all.

Besides teaching Latin he always spoke clearly about the virtues which represent the priestly life. He was attentive, never rigid, and he gladly sought out the company of the seminarians and gladly conversed with them. As a teacher he was aware of human weakness, thus he was not too strict. He never exposed the seminarians' childish behavior, pranks or occasional shortcomings; he would rather resolve these situations with a little humor.

The servant of God was authoritative in the field of canon law and concerning concrete questions he enlightened his students in a legal point of view. He was a high priest who presented himself as well prepared to form seminarians as well as in handling church administration. One of his works on the application of Canon Law in marriage which appeared in 1927 is still authoritative in Hungary. The work is not only meritorious from a professional point a view, but also because it offered guidance to many. Its authority was unquestionable and secure nation wide. In questions of doubt his opinion was decisive. Again we have to underline the intellectual activities of Zoltán Meszlényi. In his own field of activity he alone stood out for his productivity. His writings dealt with separation and the various norms pertaining to marriage. These works may still be found in today's libraries. With out a doubt, he was one of the first who made the life of priests' easier when his Hungarian publications dealing with marriage appeared in 1927. These books that were published in his mother tongue, helps to disperse many a doubt and unclear situation.

In the eyes of the seminarians he was the ideal pastor. In a time when the Church had not yet prepared for persecution and martyrdom was still not in consideration, he already shined out with an earnestness which reflected in his own vocation.. He was ready for even the most unimaginable sacrifice.

He did not show his good favor towards priests in a sentimental way, but rather with unflagging service. During his lectures he addressed the affective bond, the deep consideration that creates unity within the priesthood. When forming the seminarians he was mindful to prepare them to accept sacrifice.

VII. THE SERVANT OF GOD'S SERIOUSNESS, PASTORAL COMMITMENT AND MORAL INTEGRITY

The testimony of witnesses during the process of beatification has helped us to fully understand the immense commitment and pastoral zeal that filled the Servant of God from the very first days of his priesthood. This was the way that he tried to respond to his priestly and Episcopal responsibilities, especially as auxiliary bishop and apostolic administrator. According to the testimony of witnesses we notice that Zoltán Meszlényi always fulfilled his priestly responsibilities with interior genuineness and piety in such a way that he won the respect of faithful, subjects and superiors alike.

The servant of God received that difficult task to reorganize the administration of the Archdiocese of Esztergom after the destruction that the two world wars and the division of the diocese caused. The

largest part of his job description was to supervise the diocesan economic situation and keep it under control. He dealt with the Church's patrimony as a faithful administrator: he exercised apt thoroughness such that many – who did not exercise their business properly – were upset with him. He was a true man who always dealt with the church's patrimony in the most transparent way. At that time, ecclesiastical life continued among very difficult circumstances. Zoltán Meszlényi acted satisfactorily even with the biggest of challenges: his task of acquiring the necessary economic basis to operate.

As auxiliary bishop he always obeyed in full the orders of the Archbishop. Zoltán Meszlényi dealt with the patrimony of the Archdiocese of Esztergom with exceptional delicacy and total commitment. Meanwhile he also devotedly fulfilled his duties as an auxiliary bishop with total surrender. The Servant of God did not only deal with administrative matters, he also founded church institutions for the needy and orphanages in the diocese. The Episcopal conference even delegated him to deal with these houses on a national level.

As auxiliary bishop he often administered the sacrament of confirmation, looking for the faithful in parishes that were very contrasting. He attended in the community prayers of general chapter, where he participated with full attention, piously interceded and in such a way edified all. He enthusiastically and responsibly fulfilled his duties, which sprang from his prominent position in the church. As bishop he often presided over the liturgy in the cathedral. During these functions he was never rigid and his behavior was capable of remedying difficulties that a spontaneous visitor may have harbored.

Besides his administrative and pastoral duties bishop Zoltán Meszlényi was the Holy See's vicar general for the Archdiocese of Esztergom. He was an considerate and somber servant of the People of God. He was always available for those who turned to him with their problems. As administrator he also worked in favor of the employees and was quick to handle and arising difficulties. All the while he showed that he strove to be just and impartial. He also made sure that the employees received their due salary. Those who worked on the lands of the Primate often described that under the direction of bishop Meszlényi the patrimony of the church was kept in excellent condition. He personally went to inspect the various properties. During these visits there was no negligence, nor did any serious conflict arise between church authorities and the managers of these domains. He visited the properties often, with no advance notice, and each time he revised bookkeeping the economic status. After the supervision he would always speak with the employees and would ask them if they had noticed errors in anything. He encouraged them to turn to him with their problems. Always showing them consideration, he would engage them in conversation. Many problems arose, but the auxiliary bishop brilliantly resolved them. Beyond these services, bishop Meszlényi was also the president of National Association of Hungarian Catholic Young Men and the Central National Young Men's' association. He was also the director of the Association of Child Protection. Because of this position he directed the orphanage that was located next to the Church of St. Ann in Esztergom. This fact reveals his pastoral devotion towards those young people and children whom he served.

He led a simple and humble life. Those who knew the Servant of God's and his relatives and friends, unanimously agree that he showed equanimity, that he was very cultured, unbiased and a man who totally obeyed divine and ecclesiastical law. Besides dealing with administrative affairs, he was also an ecclesiastical judge. In each case, especially in matrimonial matters, he exercised extreme caution and only declared an annulment when the situation was able to be verified.

When a part of the northern country side was given back to Hungary by the I Viennese decision, was given the responsibility of organizing the returned territories' state of affairs. Again, with exceptional care he fulfilled his responsibilities.

IX. EPISCOPAL SERVICE DURING THE YEARS OF COMMUNISM. ELECTION TO THE POST OF CHAPTER VICAR

The Servant of God, Zoltán Meszlényi also discharged his Episcopal service in the historical and political context of Hungarian Communism. Whoever remained faithful to God and the Holy See was to expect open persecution. Those priests and bishops who were faithful to Rome we constantly threatened. A sad end awaited many, who did not sanction unjust force: first they were put under surveillance, then

persecuted, then they were detained and, if they did not bow down to the will of the State they often met with a barbaric execution.

On March 29th, 1945 Pius XII named József Mindszenty as successor of the deceased cardinal and Primate, Jusztinián Serédi. From the start, the new archbishop put the highest trust in Zoltán Meszlényi, and confirmed him in all of his official duties. From another angle 1945 brought a new turn of events into Hungarian life: the Soviet Union occupied the country. The Iron curtain was pulled between the West and the East.

Under disgraceful circumstances, in the midst of an openly totalitarian, anti-church atmosphere, the Servant of God, József Mindszenty, was detained on December 26th, 1948. It is obvious that hatred towards the faith was the setting for this act. Canon János Drahos, the Archbishop's General Vicar, took into his hands the matters of the diocese. However, on June 15th, 1950, he died. The cathedral's general chapter had to choose a new Vicar. In this time of totalitarian dictatorship, the State wanted to manipulate the church in order to destroy it. Thus there was a campaign to influence the electors in order to have them elect a personality that was accepted by the regime.

On June 17th, 1950, at 12 noon, immediately after the funeral of Canon János Drahos, the general chapter convened to elect a new vicar in one of the rooms of the basilica of Esztergom. At this seating, 11 canons participated. Among them was Zoltán Meszlényi as well. Due to sickness, three of the canons were not present. As in similar situations, different groups supported their own candidates. Among the candidates resounded the name Miklós Beresztóczy, whose election was supported by the communist government. The Hungarian Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference titled so called "subject dossier" has preserved the reports of the agent made during the gathering.

One of the entries, which bears the date of June 17th, 1950, recounts the funeral of János Drahos. "The funeral ended a few minutes before noon. At 12 o'clock, 11 of the chapter's members gathered in one of the Basilica's rooms in order to elect a new vicar".

The government tried everything in order have its candidate selected. Before the funeral, Lajos Balázs, the parish priest of Downtown Budapest sought out many of the canons. According to him, Fr. István Balogh entrusted him with the message that the government would gladly look upon the election of Miklós Beresztóczy, in spite of the candidate's prison record. Mihály Török, the Esztergom basilica's chapter provost, who substituted the infirm István Császárszky, high provost, led the chapter session. Before the session begun, he made reference to a meeting a day before, where Béla Witz, the Archbishop's representative in Budapest, suggested that auxiliary bishop Zoltán Meszlényi be selected. In reality, the only task to be done was to expand his sphere of influence. Bishop Meszlényi, with typical modesty, did not think of himself. Many had taken the election of Béla Witz as certain.

Not long after the beginning of the session, the secret ballot revealed 8 votes in favor of Béla Witz. He did not accept the election. His excuse was that he was not the man for the job, and that he was sick. Thus he would not be able to fulfill the service of vicar.

Before the chapter seating Miklós Dudás, bishop of Hajdúdorog of the Byzantine rite, arrived to Esztergom. He presented himself as having had a conversation with Primate József Mindszenty in prison. Bishop Dudás sought out Gyulá Czapik who had arrived in Esztergom for the canon's funeral and was in the archbishop's palace. He told him that he had come from the Primate. From what he said, Cardinal Mindszenty suggested the election of Miklós Beresztóczy. After this Gyula Czapik and Miklós Dudás went to the basilica in order to promote the election of Beresztóczy. They summoned out of the room canons Zoltán Meszlényi, Gyula Mátrai and Lipót Gregorovics where they were in session. It was then that Miklós Dudás communicated Cardinal Mindszenty's supposed message. Czapik especially took a stand for Beresztóczy, because he him as a man who saw cooperation with the State and an answer. After this, they called Beresztóczy out of the session, so as not to discuss about him in his presence. According to the secret agent's report, Czapik spoke about Beresztóczy, as if he was completely convinced of the State's candidate's election.

During all of this Zoltán Meszlényi, mentioned in the meeting room that this message of the Primate should not be considered. This was because the Cardinal had prepared a statement before his detention, that they should not take anything seriously that he should communicate while in prison. However, if they were to take the message of the Primate seriously, there would still be the canonical

doubt, should they elect anyone at all, for the archbishop governed by his message. They asked Béla Witz once again to accept the election, but he did not accept.

After this they no longer considered the message and they called Miklós Beresztóczy again to join the session. During a secret ballot Zoltán Meszlényi, received a majority of the votes. 6 voted for him, three for Mátrai, and one vote for Béla Witz and one for Beresztóczy. The session was concluded at 1:45. During the preceding day's chapter pre-election Meszlényi mentioned that he was not the right man for the assignment, especially considering the present situation. Yet, when he was faced with the fact that the majority had selected him, he accepted the mandate. He could have well known that this decision, sooner or later, would lead to the loss of his liberty. In the end he stated: "If your lords consider that they should elect me, let them elect me". This decision was a challenge for the government that wanted to suppress the Church.

After the election Gyula Czapik blamed Lajos Balázs for what had happened. Meanwhile, the canons were afraid of Beresztóczy. Gyula Czapik mentioned that, "We will be the ones to suffer for the deeds of the canons. It could happen that they take Meszlényi away just as they did with Giegler, and then what will happen?"

Thus the election of Meszlényi, vicar of the Archbishop, was against the wishes of the State. Imagine, the exceptionally competent Miklós Beresztóczy, canon of Esztergom, had been excruciatingly worked over in prison so that he would serve all the expectations of the regime. It was not incidental that he became the first president of the National Catholic Peace Priests' Committee in 1950.

After this, Zoltán Meszlényi, the chapter vicar's inauguration took place. For the occasion he wrote in a diocesan circular letter: "As a faithful pastor of Christ, I have never denied the faith, nor my fidelity to the Church". On June 19th, 1950, Meszlényi wrote the Holy Father and narrated the events of János Drahos' death and his election as vicar of the chapter. He then added his petition that the Holy Father approve of the election. On that same day, Zoltán Meszlényi, informed József Darvas, minister for public instruction and religious affairs, that the Esztergom General Chapter has elected him as chapter vicar and that he had assumed the direction of the Archdiocese.

VIII. DETENTION

Zoltán Meszlényi, chapter vicar, took over his office in very difficult circumstances. As a decisive and staunch lover of the Church, he was a very serious obstacle for the realization of the communistic dictatorship's plans. Thus it became necessary to get rid of this man who would never comply when confronted with force. This was obvious to this disciple of the detained Primate, and he showed this later by his behavior during the voting process. Bishop Meszlényi, a morally flawless man, who would never come to terms in questions of faith, by objecting to the election of Beresztóczy and by accepting his own election, had signed his own death sentence.

In the end, barely 12 days after the election, on the 29th of June, 1950, bishop Zoltán Meszlényi was detained. From this moment on nobody saw him again. Public and official hearing never took place. It is miraculous that some information managed to get out from the detention camp. From these bits of information we can construe what type of treatment this Servant of God was subject to, and what could have possibly caused his death (and when).

From the moment of his detention, absolute shroud of silence engulfed his person. This was one of the preferred instruments of the past century's despots: the deliberately suppressed all information; neither the press nor the radio knew anything. The communistic regime did everything in order to maintain the matter in complete secrecy. It is as if they were afraid to give the Church a martyr. In this matter they were right, considering the respect and love which surrounded Zoltán Meszlényi.

Considering the scarcity of documents that were able to be saved from the wrath of the communists, it is very difficult to reconstruct the last period of Servant of God's life. Considering all of this, it is clear that his election as vicar was the reason for his detention. The totalitarian terror's anger also revealed itself by the fact that on the evening of his detention, they completely ransacked his house in Esztergom and went off with his high priestly ornaments and ceremonial dress. After his detention, there was no public sentence, in which the exact contents could be defined. The official accusation against his person with all probability was "antidemocratic behavior".

Zoltán Meszlényi for a short time was held in the Budapest detention center and then they transferred him to the intern camp at Kistarcsa. Here he was separated from the other prisoners in a room with no windows where freezing temperatures in the winter and scorching temperatures in the summer made the prisoner's life unbearable.

The Servant of God had only committed one sin: he had held high the cross of Christ and had not bowed down to the power of the State. It is quite obvious then that the communist authorities had been motivated by hatred for the faith (*odium fidei*). It became apparent to them that they had to destroy Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi, given that he had never denied his faith and had never cut a deal with the regime's materialistic and atheistic ideology. His election to be the chapter's vicar in reality sent the message that the Church would never bow to force. Because of this, his acceptance of the election was signing his death sentence.

All of this is in unison with the testimony of witnesses, which were summoned during the beatification process. All of them considered his detention as an act of hatred towards the faith. We should not forget that Bishop Meszlényi supported the Servant of God Cardinal József Mindszenty in his stance against communism. They both assumed this position in defense of the rights of the Church, of the faith and of the priesthood. Thus it is understandable that the first goal of the government was to get rid of the Primate of Hungary. In the second phase, it was necessary for the anger of the aggressor to strike his closest collaborators. In spite of all of this pressure, Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi maintained his calm, interior peace and equanimity. By accepting the election as vicar, he gained the enmity of the government. This is the reason why he was detained so quickly, then sent away and thrown in an unidentified prison. He had barely been in office for two weeks. The dictatorship did not even dedicate a thought to maintaining some form of observable legality. There were no official hearings against Bishop Meszlényi. With all possible speed they wanted to clamp down on him and thus send a message to all who were not inclined to deny their Catholic faith. Through all of this the communists followed a meticulous, well worked out plan, which can be determined by the way with which they treated him. He was immediately transported to an unidentified place, they covered up all traces of evidence and destroyed all possible documentation. For this reason, in the case of Zoltán Meszlényi, we have no access to any type of official data: Arrest warrant, legal hearing proceedings, official sentence, places and times of his detention centers, cause of death, death certificate.

All of this places us before a modern day martyrdom. This is martyrdom where the dictator was meticulous in preventing any type of witnesses, either of his torture or of his death. We are speaking of a silent martyrdom. The procedures show a refined and well elaborated method (the testimony of the witnesses in the beatification process reveals this). The regime treated the Servant of God's affair with deliberate care. For this reason they maintained his detention, internment and death in secret.

After the illegal and unjust arrest of Cardinal József Mindszenty not only the Archdiocese of Esztergom, but the whole Hungarian church was engulfed by a two sided Communist terror. Besides physically breaking them down, the events caused a psychological effect as well. The hearings against the Primate were a mock trial which had not legal basis. After his condemnation, fear and dread took hold of everyman's heart. The faithful of the Hungarian church had suffered a trauma. Nobody felt safe. Anyone could be arrested, or killed for that matter, for any reason. This was the atmosphere in which the detention, imprisonment and death of Zoltán Meszlényi took place. What really happened? After his election, events happened quickly. We do not know the details, yet based on his person and spiritual build we can suppose that he did not agree to any type of meetings against the church, nor would he have supported any type of decision that would have harmed the Church. The government had already formed the so called "peace priest movement". This movement consisted of priests who supported the regime. In the course of his official duties Zoltán Meszlényi would have had to take some type of leading role in this institution. However, he showed no type of openness towards the movement. He did not want to undermine the Church's unity and faith. For this reason his detention and martyrdom took place. His stance was confirmed by a very rare proceeding for that time: they did not even make an attempt to make a mock trial to sentence him. They simply imprisoned him in an unknown place, and

did not even place his name in the registers of political prisoners, detainees or even among the criminals. They simply made him disappear, as if he had never existed.

They detained him for a year. At that time, the regular proceeding was not to detain a prisoner in one place for a long time. When they had more or less become accustomed to the difficult surroundings, they would bring them to another prison where the situation was even more appalling. Besides the lack of food and the bodily beatings, they also made use of another physical trial: during the winter they did not heat the cell. They would even remove the window in order to prevent even the breath of the prisoner from heating the space.

Because of this treatment the prisoners were completely destroyed. It was forbidden to send them to a doctor. If their system was not strong enough, various bodily torments helped to quickly finish them off. With all certainty, this happened with the Servant of God, Zoltán Meszlényi. Likewise, those who were detained "without a number" were not treated as human beings. When they died, they were buried in the most contemptible manner.

IX. THE MARTYRDOM OF ZOLTÁN MESZLÉNYI

Even though we do not have any precise data, we can assume that the Servant of God, beyond any doubt was detained and killed by the communists. Based on the data of priests who gained their freedom, we can paint a picture which shows us what type of treatment ecclesiastical persons received in prison: inhuman bodily and psychological torture, which in many cases caused death. Back then, everyone in Hungary knew that if someone did not come home, it was because they were killed for their fidelity to Rome. The communists were terrified of creating martyrs, so they proceeded with the greatest of caution. They took the greatest precautions to make sure that no reports, which revealed the terrible tortures, reached the light of day. During the beatification process, the prepared documentation showed, that during the thousand year history of the Hungarian Church, there had never been a greater affliction caused than during the communistic years. Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi was not just an unbreakable priest, but a leader of the church. For this reason he was an obstacle to the realization of their plans: this was the reason why they had to make this man, who would never have agreed with them, disappear without a trace.

All official sources show in apparent terms that their goal was the complete destruction of the Servant of God. One year of torture did their job. The dictatorship even went so far as to humiliate their deceased victim. His death was kept secret and a worthy burial was denied. Many years and the fall of communism were necessary so that light could be shed on these deeds.

Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi was detained on the 29th of June 1950. Following, there was a short stint in prison, and then he was incarcerated, with all probability, in Kistarcsa on July 13th. These events could be reconstructed thanks to the investigation of professor Frigyes Kahler. In the archives of the State Security office, he found a so called "service form" ("szolgálati jegyet"), which an officer of the state police had filled out on July 13th, 1950. In this note the officer on duty wrote that, on that day, they had incarcerated the Servant of God in the camp. In the same "service form" the officer also mentions that the prisoner definitely arrived to the camp and he was received. He was placed into solitary confinement. Concerning his detention in Kistarcsa we have the witness of other prisoners. Fr. Ádám Frics, a salesian, had also been detained in Kistarcsa. According to him, Bishop M was detained in the same camp, yet they did not permit him to speak with the other incarcerated priests. The witnesses attest that the Servant of God died in the camp. József Trimmer's testimony also supports this fact.

We will briefly consider the question as to the date of the bishop's death. After the first series of inquiries, his date of death was set at the 4th of March, 1951. The cause of his death was attributed to heart thrombosis. In opposition to this professor FK, who extensively dealt with the Meszlényi case and had prepared a very detailed study, opined that the death of the Servant of God would not have been in March of 1951 but in January of 1953. He reminds us that there was no official documentation concerning the death of the bishop. There is only one known report, a letter that General Kálmán Czákó wrote to Mária Meszlényi, the sister of the servant of God. In the document he informs her of the death of her brother. The letter is dated June 3, 1953. Professor Kahler supports his opinion given that the above mentioned "service form" also contained a note, which mentions that the prisoner died in the

Mosonzi hospital in the 11th of January, 1953. Further, that he was buried in the Újköz cemetery. From the same document we are also told that, before the burial, the body was sent to the collection house, that was to prevent any trace of the prisoner in reports or birth certificates.

Given that the question is enveloped in a thick blanket of silence, we have to content ourselves with what is stated above. Given that absolute secrecy was guarded, the date of his death remains questionable: was it March 4th, 1951 or January 11th, 1953? Taken all into consideration, the earlier date should be held as the more probable (given that Cardinal Péter Erdo indicated this in a conference). The main reason for this is that a trustworthy witness, who was present at the burial in the Újköz cemetery, as well as at the exhumation in 1966 and the transfer of the remains to Esztergom, testifies to this date.

Besides these considerations, we should not forget various other points. First of all the communists wanted to free themselves as soon as possible from the Servant of God. Thus a nine month incarceration is more likely than a three year one. On the other hand, according to reports, prison conditions were so wretched that the more likely situation would be an earlier death. In order to weaken the will, beatings all over the body as well as physical and psychological torture were regular. We must also remember that the long cold winter in a windowless cell would have broke down the human body's health and strength. Considering all of this, could Zoltán Meszlényihave lived through three years of prison?

The reason of death is also dubious, obviously because the communists did not speak about it. In this case, it was a principle to maintain silence.

The testimonies submitted during the beatification process do not mention anything about what caused his death. Testimony given by a Salesian religious is the only one that mentions something about the deceased. He places the time of his death in the year 1953 (with out specifying). He did not know what caused his death.

In the letter written to the Servant of God's sibling by General Czakó, on June 3rd, 1953, there is only mention that during his incarceration he died of some sickness.

Taking to task the impossible to unravel situation, professor Kahler refers to the book of Károly Hetényi Varga, "The Fate of Priests' in the Shadow of the Swastika and the Red Star". In this work, the author opines that Zoltán Meszlényidied because of the daily tortures or because of the cold caused by the room with out a window (and thus provoking a fatal sickness). Of one thing we are certain: the Servant of God was detained because of the faithful fulfillment of his priestly vocation. This he never compromised, not even to save his own life. They let him die, so that he would never again win his freedom.

X. THE EXHUMATION OF THE EARTHLY REMAINS AND THE BURIAL IN ESZTERGOM OF THE SERVANT OF GOD.

Given the historical and political context of the country, the exhumation, transfer and burial of the earthly remains of ZOLTÁN MESZLÉNYI in Esztergom took place on June 22nd, 1966.

Present at the procedure, were canon Antal Meszlényi, parish priest Mihály Meszlényi, József Szabó the pastor of Sörház street and Miklós Esty the vice president of St. Stephen's Publications. These men represented the general chapter. Also present were the deceased's brother-in-law János Héderváry and Kornél Meszlényi widower.

All were present by 9:30 a.m. at the grave, which was half emptied of earth. Thanks to József Szabó, they did not have to wait long as the hearse with the grave diggers arrived shortly after. They grave diggers continued their work and shortly the grave vault appeared. Shortly the skull, then the arm, shins, pelvis and various other bones appeared. At the request of Antal Meszlényi they dug further to find the jaw bone, which was unearthed shortly afterwards, along with a hand sized piece of cloth which was probably the remains of the coat that the deceased had worn. The two sides of the skull were wider . The forehead revealed the signs of having been completely bald, yet a few strands of hair were still there. All of this is in agreement with the structure of his head. The jaw bone still had two teeth. Lorinc Bartl had spoken to his deceased servant and the servant had told him that his master had dentures. This was because all of his teeth had fallen out but two. The black piece of cloth was of some sort of coat, and was probably the deceased's. According to the grave diggers, only those who were legally

imprisoned were buried in prison clothes, while those who were not were buried in their own clothes. In the 50's coffins had been made with wood panels. The pieces of rotten wood paneling that came to the surface were in agreement with this. Only those who were buried in a special grave received coffins. Those who know the deceased well were of the opinion that they had exhumed the earthly remains of Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi.

By 10:30 they had finished their work. The uncovered members of the deceased were placed into a smaller coffin, which was lined with water proof paper, brought by the grave diggers. After this his remains were transferred by the hearse to the inspection center of the graveyard where, after a medical examination, they sealed the cover of the coffin. On the following day, the Servant of God's earthly remains were transferred to Esztergom.

On the morning of June 23rd, 1966, around 10:30, the coffin arrived to the Esztergom Basilica. The sacristan János Kopataki received the earthly remains of Zoltán Meszlényi and brought them down to the crypt.

Imre Szabó, auxiliary bishop of Esztergom, officiated at the funeral on the following morning after the holy mass. First, mass was celebrated in the Bakócz chapel, then the funeral rites were held in the crypt. In accordance to the guidelines given by governor Artur Schwarz-Eggenhofer, everything was held in silence. Only the chapter members were present at the rite, accompanied by a few priests from Esztergom (among them were aula members), the seminarians and a few faithful who happened to be present in the Basilica at the time.

On June 27th, 1966, Imre Szabó auxiliary bishop reported to Endre Hamvas, Archbishop of Kalocsa, the president of the Episcopal conference, that the exhumation and the burial in the Basilica had taken place. "We avoided all pomp. The bell did not toll. There was no wake in the basilica. The burial took place in simple circumstances."