

MARTIN JANEZ DIMNIK, CSB (1941–2020)

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REV. Martin Janez Dimnik, CSB, Fellow Emeritus of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, passed away on 15 November 2020 at Presentation Manor, Scarborough, the retirement home of the Basilian Fathers of Toronto. He is survived by his sister Susan Revai and his niece Adrienne.

Martin Dimnik was born on 6 October 1941, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, the son of Martin Dimnik and Zorka Perlić. His early years were marked by the vicissitudes of the Second World War. Yugoslavia had been invaded by the Axis Powers on 6 April 1941. In the ensuing political unrest, which saw the formation of several competing military and paramilitary organizations, his father and three uncles fought against the Communist Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito; in September 1943, Martin Dimnik senior was killed and his brothers were pursued by Communist Partisan supporters. Fr. Dimnik never had an opportunity as a child to know his father, but much later in life during a research trip to the Balkans, he came upon a plaque commemorating the execution of four combatants, his father being one of them. According to family recollections, the remaining family fled their Slovenian homeland for Austria in May 1945, first reaching the town of Viktring. After roughly two months spent without shelter along with thousands of other displaced persons, the family was taken to another camp in Kellenberg for a short time, and then to Spittal. During their time in the internment camp in Spittal they were interviewed by Canadian Immigration officials who were looking for able-bodied persons to work in the sugar beet fields in southern Alberta. The seven-year-old Martin Dimnik, his sister Susan, and mother were permitted to emigrate to Canada with the other members of the family. In March 1949, the family left Spittal by train for the Salzburg Lehener Kaserne, headquarters of the International Relief Organization (IRO), and were then transported to Bremen Tirpitz Camp in Germany.

They left this camp on 2 April 1949 for Hamburg, and in Cuxhaven they boarded the vessel *Scythia* and sailed out on the North Sea to the French port of Le Havre, where about 300 more refugees boarded for the trip to Canada on 12 April 1949. They arrived in Halifax on 16 April 1949, travelled by train to Lethbridge, and then by vehicle to Raymond, Alberta, where they worked on the sugar beet fields for two years. Another year of labour followed at the McNally farm just a few miles outside of Lethbridge, to complete their three-year contract with the Canadian Government. The family then settled in Lethbridge.

Martin Dimnik attended school in Lethbridge, graduating from St. Francis High School in 1960. He then entered St. Basil's Novitiate, Richmond Hill, Ontario, taking first vows on 15 August 1961. After profession, he lived at St. Basil's Seminary, Toronto, while pursuing a degree in Slavic Studies at the University of Toronto. He received his B.A. in 1965 and then taught history and geography at St. Michael's College School. In 1967, he returned to St. Basil's Seminary and earned his M.A. in Slavic Studies in 1970, and his M.Div. through the Toronto School of Theology in the fall of 1971. At the same time, he taught a course on Russian Civilization at the University of St. Michael's College. He was ordained to the priesthood on 26 June 1971, by Cardinal George Flahiff in Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Lethbridge. Fr. Dimnik moved to Oxford, UK as a doctoral student at Linacre College, where he was awarded the D.Phil. in 1976 for his dissertation, "The Life and Assassination of Mikhail of Chernigov: An Investigation of the Sources." His doctoral supervisors were the eminent historians John L. I. Fennell, Professor of Russian, and Dimitri Obolensky, Professor of Balkan History, both at the University of Oxford. He formed several long-lasting friendships during his time at Oxford and often returned to the same house he had boarded in as a doctoral student.

Fr. Dimnik was appointed to the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, where he remained for the rest of his academic life, serving as Institute Secretary, Praeses, and Academic Dean. He became a Junior Fellow of the Institute in 1977, and that same year, Associate Professor at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto. He was promoted to Senior Fellow in 1983 and Full Professor at the Centre for Medieval Studies in 1986. The courses he offered at the Institute and the Centre for Medieval Studies, beginning in 1977, were

Kievan Rus' to the Middle of the Thirteenth Century, The Orthodox Church in Kievan Rus', Medieval Institutions and Legal Traditions, The South Slavs in the Middle Ages, The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius (Reading Course), Slavs in the Byzantine "Commonwealth," Early Slavic Christianity in the Balkans, and Byzantine Numismatics (Reading Course). In 1992, he was named Professor at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Toronto, and in 1999, he was engaged by the Faculty of Theology, University of St. Michael's College, to teach a course on Early Slavic Christianity in the Balkans.

A research leave afforded him the opportunity to join the fifth season of archaeological investigations at ancient Mytilene (Lesbos) between 19 May and 7 August 1987. The excavation was funded in the main by the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada and was under the co-direction of Professors Caroline Williams and Hector Williams of the University of British Columbia. Sheila Campbell, Fellow Emerita of the Institute, who was a member of the large group of faculty and students at the site, recalled that Fr. Dimnik found the experience very much to his liking, but also a little more "physical" than he had expected. It seems to have been his first archaeological expedition, but he quickly adapted to his role as part of the team. The experience struck a chord with him. Another colleague, Dr. Volodymyr Mezentsev, recalled that Fr. Dimnik maintained contacts with local archaeologists in Kyiv and Chernihiv and travelled throughout the Chernihiv province, Ukraine, visiting many historical sites and excavations in the 1990s and 2010s. The year 1992 found him at a site in the town of Novhorod-Sivers'kyi, Chernihiv Oblast. In the 2010s, he took part in the archaeological expedition sponsored by Chernihiv University to excavate a Viking hill-fort dating from the tenth to twelfth century, located near Shestovytsia Village, Chernihiv Oblast. Fr. Dimnik, who was financial director of the Baturyn Project Fund from its foundation in 2001, frequently took part in the Canadian-Ukrainian archaeological excavation of Baturyn, the Cossack capital razed in 1708 by the troops of Peter the Great, and together with Dr. Mezentsev co-authored the annual reports for the project.

In his term as Secretary, 1987–1990, Fr. Dimnik was the general editor of a commemorative volume celebrating fifty years of the Pontifical Institute, *Jubilee 1989*. During his six-year term as Praeses, 1990–1996, tensions between the Institute and the Centre for Medieval Studies came

to a head. The two organizations had collaborated closely on academic matters since 1971, but strains in the relationship had been noticeable since 1979, and in 1996 the Memorandum of Agreement of 1990 between the Institute and University of Toronto was not renewed. Fr. Dimnik sought ways to navigate the troubled waters. A highlight of his years as Praeses came in 1995 when Sir Peter Ustinov was the keynote speaker at a fundraising dinner and was awarded the Doctorate in Medieval Studies, *honoris causa*, at that year's convocation. Although Fr. Dimnik formally retired in 2007, he remained active at the Institute, serving as its first Academic Dean and chairing the meetings of Academic Council, which were memorable for the strict one-hour limit he imposed.

Fr. Dimnik's early prowess as a quarterback in high school continued to impress through his years as a Basilian scholastic. He was also an enthusiastic tennis player, and enjoyed many matches with his Basilian confreres and University faculty members on the tennis courts that were formerly located behind St. Basil's Church in Toronto. A well-known hobby was jigsaw puzzles; each year over the Christmas break, he commandeered a seminar room at the Institute to complete the latest puzzle he had received. These invariably found their way to the Christmas Tea and Raffle in support of the Friends of the Library the following year. Fr. Dimnik served as Superior of the Institute House from 1985 to 1989, and assisted in parish ministry on Sundays at churches in the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Over the course of his nearly four decades at the Institute, Fr. Dimnik established himself as an internationally respected authority on Kyivan Rus'. His research focused on Kyivan princely dynasties, the fruits of which were four highly regarded monographs. His interest in Slavic culture and Balkan history saw two more books published. He authored sixty-one encyclopedia entries and published thirty-seven articles. He acted as an appraiser for the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as many academic journals including *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, *Mediaeval Studies*, *Speculum*, *Florilegium*, *the Slavic Review*, and *The Russian Review*. He was a consultant for the translation from Ukrainian into English of volume two of Mykhailo Hruschevsky's *Istoriia Ukrainy-Rusy*. In 1997, he joined the Editorial Board for the theological journal *Bogoslovni vestnik*, Faculty of Theology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia,

and in 2003 the Editorial Board of *Druzhynni starozhytnosti Tsentral'no-Skhidnoi Ievropy VIII–XI st.*, Chernihiv, Ukraine. He was a member of the Advisory Committee for the 19th Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament and Associated Congresses in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2007. Numismatics was another significant interest; he was a member of the Organizing Committee for three meetings of the International Numismatics Congress in Croatia.

In later years, Fr. Dimnik's health deteriorated, necessitating his move to Anglin House, the Basilian Fathers Retirement Residence, in 2014. In November 2018, he moved with the Basilian Fathers Retirement Community to Presentation Manor. As he came from a family of mixed religious background, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, it seems fitting to wish him both *requiescat in pace* and *вечная память!*

Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.

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