

## THE MAJOR FEATURES OF JÁNOS BALOGH'S LIFE WORK

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I take it as a gift of my fate that at the age of 18, in 1947, I could meet the then 34 year-old JÁNOS BALOGH, and from 1952 on I worked together with him for 50 years at one and the same department, in a room situated not far from his. Although he was not my master, both of us were ENDRE DUDICH's students, he as one of the first ones and I as one of the last. Besides the fact that I could learn a lot from him in cenological and production biological terms, with time our relationship became deeper both in terms of the various aspects of education and the discipline itself. I took it as an honour that he often wanted to hear my opinion correlative various matters, shared his problems with me, and sometimes even talked about himself. This fifty years' period of our acquaintance has encouraged, or rather bound me to ask for the floor today and let you know about the features of standing value I detected in his personality, the features that I think were so decisive of and characteristic for his successful, colourful and rich scholar's career.

He was a natural born scientist-biologist, a flaming torch, with an immense working capacity and discipline, an enthusiast who disrupted his researcher's, professor's and so enthralling educator's activity for the inevitably necessary period when he had to meet a previously made commitment. We who surrounded him at times found it hard to keep pace with the fireworks of his ideas but gradually came to realise that he kept working for us, as well, after all, thereby furthering our progress with our career. Maybe many tend to lose sight of the fact that this scholar – alongside with his frequent appearance on TV and lectures he held countrywide – would most of the time sequester himself within the confines of his university office and spend the time with calm and meticulous research work or withdraw himself to his country house.

And now let me turn to my task and tell you about JÁNOS BALOGH the man, as I knew him, and the features that laid the foundations for and imbued this exceptional career.

JÁNOS BALOGH had a quite unambiguous three-tier approach to the world surrounding him. These tiers are: people, the scene of our earthly life, i.e. the biosphere, the Universe.

I am trying to express what I have to say almost in annotations only. Whatever I am going to tell you now is – as he himself was convinced of – the outcome of the evolution founded by the discipline he was taught at the orphanage and the knowledge and ethos he received in the course of his eight years' studies at the Lutheran Secondary School (Fasori) he could never forget.

He would keep his mind and heart open to everyone, had an inherent respect to other individuals, would always patiently listen to everyone – and not just listen

but even understand them as he himself could always be understood because his speech was clear, unambiguous, and conveyed the well-refined style and music of Hungarian. Whenever he had something to say, he would do that with a natural empathy, and could always strike the right note with everyone. He radiated optimism and warmth when talking to small children or schoolchildren.

His unpretentious and modest bearing and way of thinking were imbued with humanity. He had a straightforward attitude that was free of complacency or pompousness, and no success or award caused it to waver. Nothing was more alien to him than hypocrisy. Despite his eternally flaming enthusiasm and sometimes inordinately changeable observations, his behaviour and way of thinking always remained staid and disciplined. Even when his temper occasionally ran away with him, he did not take long to become appeased.

Although he tried to avoid hurting anyone's feelings, if he felt that levelling criticism was a must, he would never refrain from doing so. Needless to say: however hard he tried to be objective, even he was mistaken from time to time. However, he was at all times ready to admit to his mistakes and adjust his position. Just by way of a side-remark: his mistakes were often attributable to the open-handed and well-meaning way in which he approached an issue. Let me here make mention of that experience which will still be memorable to some of us, when JÁNOS BALOGH and GUSZTÁV SZELÉNYI (the renowned scholar of the Plant Protection Institute of The Hungarian Academy of Sciences), these two leading figures of Hungarian zoocenology unfolding in the 1950s, would take advantage of serial open sessions to indulge in tough and noble fights in defence of the diverting views of two international schools. And after these rounds of disputes (though they never managed to convince one another), these two magnificent scholars, if possible, developed even closer relations with one another than before.

He was peace loving and always ready to make a compromise, and – to a reasonable extent – accommodating. Whenever, by any chance, he had a conflict with someone, it was always him to take the first move to resolve it, even when the other party could be blamed for the tension. Whenever he found that there was unrest amidst the people surrounding him, he was always trying to get these people, by gentle persuasion, to sort out their problems. He maintained informal and friendly contacts with his colleagues and was generous to everyone.

He was a devoted scientist, with a whole range of talents, unwavering enthusiasm, sense of vocation and care about his discipline. His family, microscope, lab, professor's desk, the community of his fellow-scholars and students, the world of the tropics, and – last but not least – the publicity offered by the media involved his scene of life.

He was never jealous of younger scholars, the young in general, on the contrary, he was always more than happy to further their progress by his advice or in any other way. He was never too busy not to converse with his students.

Although he was not a born fighter, whenever he deemed it necessary, he would always struggle for important and good causes, be it ecology or environment, and for anyone if he felt he could be of use. He would always make thorough preparations for these “fights” and would always take responsibility for the word said or written down.

As regards ethical issues of social or official relevance, he was exacting and consistent, he abhorred dishonesty, even though in specific cases he could assess the circumstances with understanding.

When travelling around in tropical countries, he was not just interested in pedology, the biological procedures, the all-encompassing reciprocity, the fantastic scenery, and the beauty of the world he always kept in such a great esteem but every human aspect, as well: the family and social relationships of the third world’s peoples, the way of life, beliefs, superstitions, and customs of those remote regions, in brief: the very special combination of simplicity and depth.

I think I need to point out another two qualities of JÁNOS BALOGH:

Although he hardly made any mention of it, he had a definite national awareness, which he regarded as a basic component of his mentality. In this respect he regarded the general enhancement of Hungarians’ erudition, the population’s ascend to the middle-class, thereby adequate living conditions and sober national awareness, of basic importance.

And last but not least, even less than his national awareness did he make mention of his firmly anchored faith that all the revealed or not yet revealed laws of the Universe and the reality of the human soul inevitably assume an infinite creative power, which made the recognition of the Lord’s existence evident to him. And this was the most solid basis of everything JÁNOS BALOGH’s human and scientific achievements were built on, in the diversity that today’s memorial session is outlining for us.