

Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. **Tomáš Halík**, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic

A leading Czech philosopher, theologian, sociologist of religion, psychologist and public intellectual, Tomáš Halík is Professor of Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Charles University in Prague. A member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts and other scholarly societies at home and abroad, Halík is a recipient of numerous international awards including the 2014 Templeton Prize and the prize for the best European Theological Book for 2009-2010 (*Patience with God*, 2010). Though associated with Charles University for several decades, Halík also lectured at a number of other universities across the globe: in many European countries, in the USA (at 12 American universities and colleges), Latin America (Chile and Argentina), Canada, Asia (Japan, Taiwan and India), Australia and South Africa. He has been a visiting professor and gave annual lectures at universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Pittsburgh, Harvard, Calvin College and the Catholic University of Leuven—to mention a few.

His theological hermeneutics of contemporary history, society and culture, with the focus on interreligious dialogue and dialogue between believers and nonbelievers, is intimately interwoven with his personal story.

Banned from university teaching and persecuted by the secret police as “an enemy of the regime,” during the Communist period, Halík studied theology secretly and was covertly ordained into the Catholic priesthood in Erfurt, in 1978. In the 1980s, he was one of Cardinal Tomášek’s close associates, contributing to the spiritual and intellectual resistance against the regime that led to the “Velvet Revolution” in November 1989. During that period, he helped to organise the “underground university” and clandestine publication of religious and philosophical literature. He also initiated “The Decade of National Spiritual Renewal,” an ecumenical pastoral programme aimed at preparing the Czech society for a peaceful transition to democracy and creating a “moral and spiritual biosphere” for life in freedom.

After the fall of the Communist regime, Halík has continued to offer a prophetic voice of hope, especially for the societies of the Global North facing the challenges of the (post)secular age. His mission of a *bridge-builder* spanned multiple disciplines of knowledge, aspects of faith and domains of public life.

He co-founded the Czech Christian Academy, of which he was president for 23 years; he developed the Academic Parish in Prague, as a place of permanent dialogue between faith and science, and religion and art; and he helped establish a number of other institutions for the promotion of education in the field of religion and spiritual culture. For many years he also assisted President Václav Havel in organising meetings of leading representatives of world

religions as part of the annual international conferences of Forum 2000. In the 1990s he served as one of Havel's external advisers. Despite Havel's suggestion that Halík was an eligible candidate for his successor in the office of Czech President, Halík refused any active involvement in the politics and decided to continue his work as an academic, priest and writer.

Actively involved in the public discourse in his motherland and beyond, he promoted Czech-German reconciliation and the ecumenical reconciliation of the different churches; he has taken unequivocal stands against racial, national, religious and political intolerance and violence around the globe, and has regularly spoken out on issues of political and economic ethics. Halík has also been a frequent participant in international debates and panel discussions with European politicians regarding the widening of the European Union and the cultural and spiritual aspects of the process of European integration.

But it is above all through his books—published and translated in 18 languages and internationally recognised and awarded—that Halík's global impact and popularity have gone far beyond the strictly academic and church circles. His writings focus chiefly on a spiritual diagnosis of our times and the dialogue between faith and atheism. Halík's theological endeavours have helped to develop the philosophical and theological groundwork for dialogue between believers of different religions, and particularly between believers and nonbelievers. His public theologising has taken form of, *inter alia*, re-imagining spaces for mutual dialogue between Christian (and notably Catholic) spirituality and a postmodern culture.

The striking opening of *Patience with God*, one of his most celebrated books, published in 2010, gives one a good idea about Halík's dialogical imagination and theological sensitivities. He writes: "I agree with atheists on many things, often on almost everything—except their belief that God doesn't exist. In today's bustling marketplace of religious wares of every kind, I sometimes feel closer with my Christian faith to the skeptics or to the atheist or agnostic critics of religion." Halík considers paradoxes inherent in the Christian faith as a hermeneutic key to view the current *absence of God* in the world as Kairos, an opportune moment for a new Christianity that, voided of any triumphalist ideology, is essentially kenotic. Against the backdrop of the dramatic societal upheavals of 1968, Halík (re)interprets *the signs of the times*, in our (post)secular age, in a way that avoids reducing one's options to simple binaries. For him, the undeniable culmination of secularisation paradoxically coincides with the so-called return of religion, where the latter is being transformed into political ideology, into philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology, and into spirituality.

Halík's innovative philosophical and theological reflection on the meanings of this new Christianity and its potential to constructively engage with contemporary atheists and agnostics, has already inspired a scholarly debate in Europe and beyond and posed a theme for several doctoral and master's theses at European universities including Louvain, Prague, Krakow and Warsaw. Halík revisits these and similar questions in dialogue with Anselm Grün, in their 2019 book *Is God Absent?: Faith, Atheism, and Our Search for Meaning* (the German original published in 2016), where faith and uncertainty (or doubt) once again appear as sisters *vis-à-vis* various forms of religious fundamentalism, fanaticism and triumphalist ideology.