

★ From the Underground Church to Freedom

Tomáš Halík

Gerald Turner, Translator

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With eloquent sensitivity, Tomáš Halík, a clandestinely ordained Roman Catholic priest, pulls back the Iron Curtain to illuminate a dark period of Czechoslovakian history. *From the Underground Church to Freedom* is a memoir enfolded with spiritual wisdom, incisive and frank in its assessment of Halík's life and of the continuing narrative of the church universal as she has moved into the twenty-first century.

"Human life is ongoing self-interpretation," begins Halík. Drawing from a deep well of harrowing and sublime experiences, he traces the arc of post-World War II Czechoslovakian history alongside his personal experiences in the underground Catholic priesthood. Accounts of secret police interrogations, Mass celebrated without vestments in cellars, and samizdat publications are neither rosy nor too bleak. Rather than wallowing in bitterness, Halík transmutes trauma into powerful observations on the human condition and the nature of God.

Hagiography of the church—Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—is not to be found here. Halík relates his bouts of doubt and ecclesial conflict with honesty, including his stint on the Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty just after the fall of the communist regime. His reflections on this dark night of the soul are cathartic—a buoy to those who have been hurt by the church.

A spirit of ecumenism runs throughout. Halík is eager to build bridges between varying sects of Christianity and between other faiths in a more and more globalized society. He describes his first meeting with the Dalai Lama as an encounter with something powerful and good, though it did not convince him to take the Buddhist path, and he is especially keen to repair the damaged relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

Poignant and profound, *From the Underground Church to Freedom* is a needed reminder that hope springs eternal even in the face of overwhelming evil.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (September / October 2019)

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