

★ **The Afternoon of Christianity: The Courage to Change**

Tomáš Halík

Gerald Turner, Translator

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Analytical and prescient, Tomáš Halík's stunning theology book *The Afternoon of Christianity* makes projections about the future of Christian faith in light of the sweeping demographic and cultural changes it faces.

Clear and concise, the book addresses the decline of Christian denominations alongside considerations of factors like the clergy sex abuse scandals that resulted in empty pews and closed churches. In tracing such changes, it argues that old religious categorizations no longer fit—including stark divisions like believers versus nonbelievers: “people’s spiritual life has evolved away from the forms offered by the churches; the demand for a more mature and specialized form of spiritual life outstrips what the churches have to offer, which is too narrow and stereotypical.” It locates hope in this perspective, saying that faith has been set free: Christianity, it claims, is now less a religion than a spiritual movement, with limiting traditional concepts having been moved beyond, though courage is still needed to take the next steps.

Organized to reflect two competing impulses in contemporary society, the book thus addresses faith where it is life-affirming and growing, and the faith of old, which is used to foment tribalism and give rise to Christian nationalism. Its approach is thoughtful and scholarly, incorporating the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard, the mysticism of the fourteenth-century contemplative prayer text *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and biblical references, as to Abraham seeking to discern God’s aims. Its persuasiveness is further bolstered by the fantastic rhythms of its prose, which move it toward its prayerful final expressions of hope.

An impressive work of theology that’s rooted in Catholic teachings, *The Afternoon of Christianity* applies prophetic sensibilities to the question of how Christianity is changing.

JEREMIAH ROOD (March / April 2024)

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