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### Fact Sheet – Msgr. Prof. Tomáš Halík

#### *Annotated with key events in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic*

**June 1, 1948:** Tomáš Halík born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, the only child of a middle aged couple, literary historian Dr. Miroslav Halík (1901-1975) and his wife Marie (1904-1986), a homemaker. The day his parents bring him home from the hospital, city bells ring out and field guns fire marking the final takeover of the nation's government by the Communist Party and the "enthronement" of its first communist president, Klement Gottwald.

Though christened by his parents, his childhood was less one of the religion of the church than one of "belief in humanity, a moral code, scientific progress and democracy," as he later would recount in his autobiography.

**1948:** *The months prior to Halík's birth saw some the most pivotal geopolitical events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On February 25, the democratically elected government in Czechoslovakia that briefly flourished following World War II is overthrown in a bloodless coup. A Soviet-style communist government is imposed that severely curtailed freedoms of speech, religion, movement, economics, academia, and virtually every other facet of daily life.*

*The coup is the culmination of rising unrest among the Communist Bloc, namely the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, stirred by the threat of increasingly democratic reforms being instituted by the Socialist party in Czechoslovakia. It is facilitated by communist insiders who – though in a distinct minority – outmaneuver President Edvard Beneš, who had led the nation's government in exile from London during the German occupation of World War II, and a majority of government ministers, most of them non-communist. The resulting imposition of Stalinist totalitarianism extinguishes what was then the last remaining democracy in Eastern Europe. It also leads to a host of global changes that will define the next 40 years including NATO, the rise of the Cold War, and terms such as Iron Curtain, Arms Race, Red Menace, and Domino Theory.*

**1960s:** Thanks to his parents' influence, his childhood interests lean heavily toward history and literature. He eventually decides to pursue an education in sociology, philosophy and psychology at university. His private studies of philosophy, particularly English Catholicism in the works of authors G.K. Chesterton and Graham Greene, lead to his conversion to Catholicism.

**1966:** Enters Charles University in Prague to study philosophy. On his first day of studies, makes his first confession and receives his first communion.

**1968:** *On January 5, Alexander Dubček is elected First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and ushers in the "Prague Spring," a limited restoration of some political freedoms, including experimentation with economic privatization, loosened restrictions on the press, more freedom of movement, speech and other basic civil rights, and the opening of the electoral process to non-communist parties.*

*Despite repeated assurances to Moscow that Czechoslovakia would remain in the Warsaw Pact, Dubček's reforms, especially the decentralization of administrative authority, worry the Soviets then headed by Leonid Brezhnev, who fear a loosening of authority in a nation that serves as a buffer against the forces of*

*the “western bourgeoisie.” On the nights of August 20 and 21, thousands of Warsaw Pact troops, including from the Soviet Union, invade and occupy the country. During the many non-violent protests, dozens of civilians are killed by the invaders. The Czechoslovakian military, confined to quarters, offers no armed resistance. Dubček is reduced to a forestry official, his ministers replaced by a Soviet puppet government, and all reforms reversed, a brutal end to a movement that had inspired a global outpouring of hope. Czechoslovakia remains under Soviet control until 1989.*

**1968:** As Czechoslovakia’s repressive state apparatus begins to thaw during the short-lived “Prague Spring,” he is fully engaged in the student and cultural events of that time. Prominent professors, who were banished from universities in the 1950s, are allowed to return, including to his university. He is deeply influenced by the philosopher Jan Patočka, student and successor of Edmund Husserl, the founder of modern phenomenology. The lessening of social restrictions allows him to meet priests and theologians newly released from years of imprisonment who become his moral role models.

New freedoms allowing citizens to travel to the West leads him to pursue English-language studies at the University of North Wales in Bangor. While there he learns that armies of the Warsaw Pact have invaded Czechoslovakia and crushed the budding freedoms of the Prague Spring. He wrestles with returning to fight the occupation and reuniting with his aging parents, or denying his citizenship to remain free in Great Britain as an émigré.

The solution to his dilemma appears to arrive after he passes the university’s entrance exam and is offered financial support that allows him to stay in Wales yet maintain the ability to return to his homeland. Just before Christmas, following a night of prayer and reflection, he decides that in order to follow “the will of God” he must take up the cause of freedom and return to his native land, which he does within weeks.

**1969:** Soon following his return to Prague for more studies at Charles University, fellow philosophy student Jan Palach commits suicide by self-immolation in Prague’s main square. He helps organize Palach’s requiem and carries his death mask from the church. Immensely moved by Palach’s sacrifice, he realizes the dark future Czechoslovakia now faces and later recounts that it would be that very evening that he takes his decisive step on the path to priesthood.

**1972:** Receives a Ph.D. in philosophy and sociology from Charles University, which honors him by requesting him to speak at graduation. He pockets the official text given to him by the university and, instead, delivers an address which outlines a defense of freedom of conscience – including an assertion that the doctoral imperative to spread truth means not just scientific knowledge but also spiritual freedom. The speech, which concludes with a quote by Czech writer Karel Čapek – “Truth is greater than power, because it is enduring” – places him firmly in the sights of the government, which labels him an “enemy of the regime.”

His status brings police harassment and persecution. He is forbidden to teach at the university or any other state school. His travel is restricted to Warsaw Pact nations, essentially condemning him to his new life of an internal exile.

**1972-1984:** Because of restrictions on his professional pursuits, he works 12 years as a psychologist and sociologist at the Institute of the Ministry of Industry. He simultaneously begins clandestine studies of theology in in Prague with Josef Zvěřina, a priest also banned from public instruction by the authorities (the one state approved seminary, controlled by the government and secret police, only accepted candidates without any prior academic education).

Meets Václav Dvořák, a priest who spent many years in communist prisons, who tells him of a secret clerical community begun in World War II that allows members to share religious witness with nonbelievers, but for appearances’ sake resembles a secular “professional society.” The community explores issues which he has long personally considered, such as the theological and spiritual relationship between civil profession and priesthood, and a future where the church might operate freely and openly.

**1978:** Clandestinely ordained as a priest on October 22 by Bishop Hugo Aufderbeck in his private chapel in Erfurt, a city in then East Germany, an event kept secret even from his mother. Celebrates his first mass, behind closed doors, on the day of the enthronement of Pope John Paul II, which he watches live on West

German television. The pope's first sermon, culminating with the words, "Do not be afraid!", makes clear the potential influence that the first Slavic Pope might have on the Czech church and the fate of all of Europe.

**1980s:** Helps to organize an "underground university" – a cabal of Czech students and scholars – who illegally organize to cultivate contacts with contemporary western thinkers and share their findings with others, acts punishable by imprisonment. The secret society conducts and publishes covert lectures by western professors at private homes, the samizdat clandestinely passed among its members.

In a parallel effort and again, at risk of imprisonment, assists in the establishment of an "underground church" which trains young people for the ministry and helps in the creation of samizdat focused on issues of theology and ethics. As a close advisor, he helps Cardinal František Tomášek, Archbishop of Prague, compose influential pastoral letters to the laity and open letters to the government that make the cardinal a symbol of moral opposition to the communist regime.

Initiates the ecumenical pastoral project "Decade of National Spiritual Renewal" to prepare Czech society for a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy and to create the "moral and spiritual biosphere" for life in freedom.

**1984:** Working within the regime's professional confines, completes a post-graduate course in clinical psychology at the Institute for Medicine in Prague and becomes a licensed psycho-therapeutic practitioner. Takes a position as a psychotherapist for alcoholics and drug addicts at the University Hospital in Prague, until 1989. Lectures to doctors and medical students on doctor-patient communication and on philosophical, ethical and psychological aspects of medicine and psychotherapy.

**May-November 1989:** *In May, following on the heels of the Solidarity Movement replacing the communist dictatorship in Poland, the Iron Curtain is literally breached with the opening of the imprisoning fence along the Hungarian border of Austria, allowing the free flow of citizens outside their nation. On November 9, East Berliners punch through the Berlin Wall as the East German government announces that all citizens of the German Democratic Republic can visit West Berlin and West Germany. The changes startle the peoples of the Communist Bloc who nonetheless fervently embrace them. Western observers are seemingly caught unawares by the rapidity of change.*

**November 12, 1989:** On the occasion of Agnes of Bohemia's canonization in Rome, he is allowed – along with some 11,000 other believers from Czechoslovakia – to attend the celebration. He meets Pope John Paul II at a private dinner and relates details of the underground church in Czechoslovakia. In remarks before a papal audience of Czech and Slovak pilgrims, he speaks of better times for Czech lands, as prophesized to come upon the canonization of Agnes.

**November 17, 1989:** *Riot police suppress a peaceful student demonstration in Prague, beginning a six-week period known as the Velvet Revolution. After a series of demonstrations and strikes, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia soon announces that it will relinquish power and dismantle the single-party state.*

**November 1989:** During the heady, yet still dangerous weeks of the Velvet Revolution, helps Cardinal Tomášek compose his historic speeches that guide an unsure populace through the demonstrations.

**December 10, 1989:** *President Gustáv Husák appoints the first largely non-communist government in Czechoslovakia since 1948, and resigns. Alexander Dubček, 21 years after his Prague Spring deposal, is elected speaker of the Federal Assembly on December 28 and, on December 29, dissident writer Václav Havel is elected president by a unanimous vote of the Assembly.*

**1990:** Immediately after the fall of the communist regime, John Paul II invites him to the Vatican to help prepare the Pope's visit to Czechoslovakia in April 1990, his first trip to a post-communist country. At the end of his stay in the Vatican, the Pope appoints him to serve as an advisor to the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers. The Pope moves him to register for long-distance post-graduate studies of theology at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

Becomes rector of the Church of Holy Saviour in Prague, and later develops the Academic Parish in Prague, a place of dialogue between faith and science, and religion and art, with lectures, exhibitions of modern art, concerts and literary evenings on spiritual themes.

Helps to found the Czech Christian Academy, an independent civic association open to Christians of all churches, and serves as its president continually since then. The CCA is one of the largest civic associations in the Czech Republic with more than 1,750 individual members associated with one of 74 local groups throughout the country.

**1990-93:** Serves as an external advisor to President Václav Havel during his term as the last president of Czechoslovakia. Now able to travel freely, he begins lecturing at universities and international conferences in Europe and the Americas. Serves as General Secretary to the Czech Conference of Bishops. Lectures in pastoral psychology and sociology at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University.

**1990-2014:** Prepares for baptism and baptizes more than 1,200 young academics at the Church of Holy Saviour.

**1991:** Undertakes training courses in Austria, Germany and Israel related to management and communication with the media.

**1992:** Receives the licentiate of theology from Pontifical Lateran University. Meets regularly with John Paul II until the pontiff's death in 2005. Takes higher doctorates at Charles University (in sociology) and at Pontifical Theological Faculty in Warsaw (ThDr.hab. in practical theology).

*1993: Czechoslovakia is peacefully separated into Slovakia and the Czech Republic, a process begun in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but squelched during war and 40 years of communist rule. Havel becomes the democratically-elected president of the Czech Republic.*

**1993-2003:** Continues to serve as an adviser during Havel's two presidential terms.

**1993:** Returns to Charles University as associate professor of sociology and focuses on the philosophy, psychology and sociology of religion, and the relationship of religion, culture, and modern society.

**1994:** Conducts study and lecture tours in India and Nepal and at ten American universities and colleges.

**1995-present:** Participates in international efforts to promote dialogue and understanding between religions and cultures, taking part in talks with, among others, Jewish thinkers in Israel and the United States, Hindus in India and Great Britain, Buddhists in Nepal, Japan and Thailand, and Muslims in Egypt, Jordan and Great Britain.

**1996:** Works with Václav Havel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel and Japanese philanthropist Yohei Sasakawa, to help establish the Forum 2000 Foundation which holds annual international conferences in Prague. The organization pursues Havel's legacy through support of democratic values and respect for human rights, the development of civil society, and encouragement of religious, cultural and ethnic tolerance.

**1997:** Appointed Professor of the Sociology of Religion in the Faculty of Art and named Head of the Department of Religious Studies at Charles University.

**1998:** Though President Havel indicates he would be a suitable candidate to succeed him as Czech president, he refuses any active involvement in politics, in part in obedience to Pope John Paul II's prohibition on Catholic clergy holding elected office. Appointed a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts.

**1999:** Begins frequent participation 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. Meets with Great Mufti Muhammad Tantawi at the Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Suggests that the long intellectual tradition of Catholicism well positions it as a bridge between Western secularism and Islamic culture. Named visiting professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

**2001:** Serves as visiting senior fellow at Oxford University. Delivers Annual Lecture at Calvin College (January series).

**2002:** Appointed member of the International Advisory Panel of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Awarded the Andrew Elias Human Tolerance Award by the Czechoslovak Society of Arts & Sciences for outstanding services in disseminating the values of tolerance and spiritual and intellectual freedom.

Takes part in an Antarctic expedition to research survival in conditions of extreme mental and physical stress. The continent's solitude and remoteness bespeaks his longstanding and ongoing considerations of these forces on the human condition and continue with his annual one-month retreats of seclusion and reflection.

**2003:** Named visiting professor at Cambridge University. Awarded the Cardinal König Merit Award for defense of human rights and spiritual freedom (Austria).

**2005:** *Noc zpovědníka* (*Night of the Confessor*) published in Prague, his ninth Czech language book. (It will become his second book translated into English in 2012.) Delivers annual von Huegel lecture at Cambridge University.

**2006:** Appointed member of the European board of experts (*Comité des sages*) of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) in Brussels. Awarded the Literary Award of the Czech Literary Fund for the book *Noc zpovědníka* (*Night of the Confessor*).

**2007:** *Vzdáleným nablízku* (*Close To the Remote*) published in Prague. It will become his first book translated into English, under the title *Patience with God*, in 2009. Receives the Fenix Prize of Polish Booksellers for best book by a foreign author, for *Both Called and Not Called*. Awarded the Prize of the Czech Society for Science and Art for his literary, scholarly and pedagogical activity.

**2008:** Pope Benedict XVI grants him the title of Monsignor – Honorary Prelate of His Holiness in recognition of his scholarly and pastoral merits.

**2009:** Delivers the first annual Greeley Lecture at Harvard University.

**2010:** *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us* published in English. It is named Book of the Month for July 2010 by the U.S. Catholic Book Club, and European Theological Book of 2009-10 by the European Society for Catholic Theology, the first time that award honors an Eastern European writer. Awarded the Romano Guardini Prize for outstanding merit in interpreting contemporary society (Germany).

**2011:** Awarded the honorary title "Man of Reconciliation 2010" by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, Warsaw, for outstanding services to dialogue between Christians and Jews.

**2012:** *Night of the Confessor* published in English. Awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by decision of Polish president Bronisław Komorowski.

**2013:** Delivers Annual Lecture at Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium (St. Thomas Feast).

**2014:** Awarded the Templeton Prize.

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