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### **Excerpts from Selected Books**

**by Msgr. Prof. Tomáš Halík**

**[Patience with God](#)**. Doubleday, New York – London 2009.

(From the book jacket)

For all the debate about belief and non-belief in today's world – and how everyone becomes pigeonholed by one or the other – Tomáš Halík teaches that God requires us to persevere with our doubts, carry them in our hearts, and allow them to lead us to maturity. For Halík, patience is the main difference between faith and atheism. Faith, hope, and love are three aspects of patience in the face of God's silence, which is interpreted as "the death of God" by atheists and is not taken seriously enough by fundamentalists.

Using the gospel story of Jesus's encounter with Zacchaeus, Halík issues an invitation to all people who stand (like Zacchaeus did) on the side line – curious but noncommittal. The fact that Jesus gravitated to the poor and the marginalized means that he also has a special place in his heart for diligent seekers on the margins of the community of believers.

*Patience with God* has been translated into 12 languages including Chinese. This book received the Prize for the best European Theological Book 2009-10 from the European Society for Catholic Theology, and in the USA it was named Book of the Month in July 2010 by the U.S. Catholic Book Club.

**[Night of the Confessor](#)**. Doubleday, New York – London 2012.

(Excerpt from the first chapter)

The books that I have written here in the summertime solitude of a forest hermitage in the Rhineland are each of a different genre but they all have something in common: it has always been my intention to share experience from different areas of my activity and thereby also, from another viewpoint, to help diagnose the present-day climate – "to read the signs of the times."

On this occasion, as the title of the book implies, I wish to share *my experience as a confessor*. .... What I would like to share is how the present period – this world and its extrinsic and intrinsic aspects – is viewed by someone who is accustomed to listening to others as they acknowledge their faults and shortcomings, as they confide their conflicts, weaknesses, and doubts, but also their longing for forgiveness, reconciliation, and inner healing – for a fresh start.

For many years of my service as a priest, more than a quarter of a century, I have been regularly available for several hours, at least once a week, to people who come to the sacrament of reconciliation, or, because many of them are not baptized or non-practicing Catholics, for a 'spiritual chat.' I have thus lent an ear to several thousand people. It is likely that some of them confided to me things they had never spoken about even with their nearest and dearest. I realize that this experience has shaped my perception of the world maybe more than my years of study, my professional activity, or my travels around the seven continents of our planet. It has been my lot to have worked in a number of occupations. Every profession involves seeing the world from a different viewpoint. Surgeons, painters, judges, journalists, businesspeople, or contemplative monks, all view the world with a different focus and from a particular perspective. Confessors, too, have their own way of viewing the world and perceiving reality.....

Despite the uniqueness of individual human stories, after years of practice as a confessor one discovers certain recurrent themes. And that is the second aspect of the confessor's experience to which this book seeks to provide a testimony. Through the multitude of individual confessions, which are protected, as has been said, by the seal of absolute discretion, the confessor comes into contact with something that is more general and common to all, something that lies beneath the surface of individual lives and belongs to a kind of 'hidden face of the times,' to their 'inner tuning.'"

[Dotkni se ran](#) (Touch the wounds) Lidové noviny, Prague 2008.

(Excerpt from the first chapter)

During my trip to India my colleague took me to the spot in Madras where legend says the apostle Thomas was martyred, and then to the Catholic orphanage that stands nearby. I was to observe at close quarters the mournful face of poverty throughout my Indian journey, but that frightful place overshadowed all others. In cots that were more like poultry pens lay small, abandoned children, their stomachs swollen with hunger, tiny skeletons covered with black, often inflamed, skin. In the seemingly endless corridors their fevered eyes stared out at me from everywhere and they stretched their pink-palmed hands out to me. In the unbreathable air, amidst the unremitting weeping and wailing of that hell of wretchedness, nuns moved about soundlessly like slim, black angels, all too feeble flickers of help in that abyss of illness and helplessness that gaped with hopelessness, where one chokes with shame to have a healthy skin, full stomach and a roof over one's head. I felt a mental, physical and moral nausea. I wanted to flee – not only from that place, but from the whole of India, or preferably from our entire world – and, like Ivan Karamazov, 'return the ticket' to a world in which children suffer. But at that very moment a sentence came back to me from somewhere deep inside: 'Touch the wounds!' And again: 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.'

I went outside and recalled the entire story of Thomas the Apostle, as I had read it that morning from John's Gospel at the tomb of the 'patron saint of doubters'. And suddenly that all-too-familiar text took on a completely new meaning for me. I cannot believe until I touch the wounds, the suffering of the world – for all the painful wounds, all the misery of the world and of humankind are 'Christ's wounds'. I don't have the right to confess God unless I take seriously my neighbours' pain. *Faith that would like to close its eyes to people's suffering is just an illusion.*

Maybe the doubts of the apostle Thomas were of an entirely different order than we, children of the scientific and positivist age, might assume. Thomas was a man determined to follow his Master to the bitter death. Remember how he reacts when Jesus announces his intention to visit Lazarus: 'Let us also go, that we may die with Him.' He takes the cross seriously – and the news about the resurrection may seem to him too much of a happy end to the Passion story, whose meaning he

possibly understood more profoundly than the other apostles. Christ comes to him and shows him His wounds. This means the resurrection is not the 'effacement' or devaluation of the cross. Wounds remain wounds.

The message of the resurrection means above all that God acknowledges Christ crucified whom people rejected: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. God heard the dying cry of his Son, to which people turned a deaf ear and from which the apostles fled in fear. And what is more, through the cry of His Son, through His cross and death, He hears the cry of all victims in countless nights of our history. "History is written by the victors" – but God hears the victims. He does not permit their lives to tumble into the darkness of nothingness and absurdity. However powerful they may now seem, death, violence and injustice will not have the last word. That is also – and maybe chiefly – the meaning of the message of the resurrection."

[Chci, abys byl](#) (I want you to be). Lidové noviny, Prague 2012.

(Excerpt from the book)

I can't help thinking that God doesn't particularly care whether we believe in Him or not. What really does matter to Him, however, is whether we love Him. Or more precisely: He doesn't care about our faith in the sense that the term is often used, namely, that to *believe in God* is to be convinced of God's existence. I don't think our salvation depends on our religious opinions, notions and convictions. St Thomas Aquinas maintained long ago that we do not know what 'being' means in the case of God, because God *exists* in a different way than things *exist*. What really matters to God and what he will presumably judge us by, are not our opinions, but the nature and degree of our love. He is not concerned with faith in the sense of 'opinions', but faith that is fundamentally associated with love. Faith without love is hollow; indeed it is often no more than a projection of our wishes and fears, and in that respect many atheist critics of religion are right. Faith without love is dead, like salt that has lost its taste: – 'It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.' (Matt. 5.13) 'Even the demons believe that and tremble,' scripture tells us....

God cannot be the *object* of love because God is not an object; objective perception of God leads to idolatry. I cannot love God in the same way that I love another human being, my city, my parish or my work. God is not in front of me, just as light is not in front of me: I cannot see light, I can only see things in light. Likewise I cannot see and visualise God. Even faith does not 'show' him ('No one has ever seen God,' the Bible declares resolutely). With faith all I can do is 'see' the world 'in God'.

**You are familiar with all my ways. From the underground church to a labyrinth of freedom.**

Tomáš Halík's autobiography will be published in German in April 2014 ([All meine Wege sind dir vertraut. Von der Untergrundkirche ins Labyrinth der Freiheit](#)). Herder Verlag, Freiburg-Wien 2014.

(A summary by Tomáš Halík)

The author relates the gripping story of his life against the background of the dramatic changes in society and the church in Central Europe. Born into a secular intellectual family in Prague, he spent his childhood in the period of Stalinism and he came to faith when he reached adulthood and was studying philosophy. During the brief period of the regime's liberalization at the time of the "The Prague Spring" he came to know a number of priests who had recently been released from Communist jails. A second twenty-year period of persecution came in the wake of the Russian

occupation of August 1968. Jan Palach's self-immolation in protest was what first inspired Tomáš Halík to become a priest. He was ordained clandestinely in East Germany and was part of the "underground church" for the next eleven years. Even his own mother was not allowed to know that he was a priest. He took an active part in the events leading up to the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. His ties with the new President Václav Havel were based on years of friendship and close cooperation. He was able to gain a close acquaintance with Pope John Paul II and a number of other political, cultural and religious figures, including the Dalai Lama. Since 1989 he has devoted himself chiefly to inter-religious dialogue, visiting all continents, including an expedition to the Antarctic. He describes his sojourns in the Vatican, in Buddhist monasteries in Japan, in a centre of Sunni Islam in Egypt, in Indian ashrams, and in universities in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, India and Africa. His dramatic account of his unusual life story is interspersed with philosophical meditations and humorous observations.

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