



CONTACT: Donald Lehr – The Nolan/Lehr Group
(212) 967-8200 / mob +1 (917) 304-4058
dlehr@templetonprize.org
www.templetonprize.org

FOR RELEASE:
Thursday, March 13, 2014
10:30 AM GMT (London)
6:30 AM EDT (New York)

TOMÁŠ HALÍK AWARDED 2014 TEMPLETON PRIZE

Tomáš Halík, a Czech priest and philosopher who risked imprisonment for illegally advancing religious and cultural freedoms after the Soviet invasion of his country, and has since become a leading international advocate for dialogue among different faiths and non-believers, has won the 2014 Templeton Prize.

Condemned by his nation's communist government as an "enemy of the regime" in 1972, Halík, 65, spent nearly two decades organizing and building an extensive secret network of academics, theologians, philosophers and students dedicated to cultivating the intellectual and spiritual underpinnings for the democratic state he and others envisioned.

Those years of groundwork and counselling to liberation leaders such as Václav Havel and Cardinal František Tomášek helped Czechoslovakia transition to democracy following the "Velvet Revolution" of 1989.

Since that time, Msgr. Prof. Tomáš Halík has advocated religious tolerance and understanding through his writings and lectures by sharing ideas and beliefs among followers of widely varying cultural and spiritual traditions and, notably, non-believers. His approaches to interfaith dialogue include proposing that the long intellectual tradition of Catholicism well positions it as a bridge among diverse Western secularism, traditional religions and Islamic culture. At the press conference, Halík announced that he will continue those efforts with the proceeds from the Prize.

Valued at £1.1 million (about \$1.8 million or €1.3 million), the Prize is one of the world's largest annual awards given to an individual and honors a living person who has made exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. The announcement was made at a news conference today at the British Academy in London by the John Templeton Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

Rigorous intellectual investigations on matters of mind and spirit, including annual month-long retreats of isolation and reflection, motivate Halík's worldview. These quiet pursuits have allowed him to contemplate the very essence of the *Big Questions* that have become a hallmark of the Templeton Prize and reflect the deep interest of its founder Sir John Templeton, the late global investor and philanthropist, in fostering and recognizing spiritual progress. In five videos available on the Prize website, www.templetonprize.org, Halík examines topics including whether evil in the world proves there is no God and whether God is an answer or a question.

To that latter inquiry, he responds, in part, "Answers without questions are like trees without roots. But how often are 'Christian truths' presented to us like felled, lifeless trees in which birds can no longer find a nest? Only the confrontation of questions and answers can return a real meaning and dynamic to our statements. Truth happens in the course of dialogue."

Much of Halík's work to promote a culture of dialogue among different faiths as well as non-believers has been based within the Czech Christian Academy, one of the nation's largest civic associations. It grew out of the illegal "underground university" and "underground church" of students and scholars he helped found during the communist years to create the "moral and spiritual biosphere" to prepare Czech society for life in freedom.

"At the time of the 'Velvet Revolution' 25 years ago, my friend Václav Havel expressed the hope that 'truth and love' would triumph over lies and hatred," said Halík at today's news conference. "That is an enormous and difficult task for the entire remainder of history. In the rest of my life I would like to do some small things that would bring light and warmth to people in our world."

The Templeton Prize, as with the Big Questions posed by the award, is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to human purpose and ultimate reality.

Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr., president and chairman of the John Templeton Foundation, noted today that Prof. Halík epitomized spiritual progress in his pursuit of greater truths. "Whether risking prison to liberate the minds of his nation or daring to engage views that many keepers of the faith would shun as heretical, Tomáš Halík has continually opened vistas that advance humankind," said Templeton. "Rising to these challenges, he inspires us all to break free of repression, whether it comes from a totalitarian government or our own blinkered world view."

In nominating Halík for the Prize, Karel Schwarzenberg, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, praised Halík's ability to bring together people of many different faiths, including atheists and agnostics, writing, "For many years, Prof. Halík has been building bridges

between various religions, cultures and nations. Through his life and work, he has helped foster respect for spiritual and religious values among secular public opinion.”

Halík became dedicated to the struggle for freedom from Communism in his homeland after a fellow student – Jan Palach – killed himself by self-immolation in Prague’s central square in 1969. Soon after helping to organize the martyr’s requiem, Halík resolved to enter the priesthood. He was clandestinely ordained in 1978 in East Germany, an event kept secret even from his mother.

Monsignor Professor Tomáš Halík has been Professor of the Sociology of Religion in the Faculty of Art at the Department of Religious Studies at Charles University in Prague since 1997.

He is the author of many books, translated into 15 languages, which chiefly focus on a spiritual diagnosis of contemporary times and the dialogue between faith and atheism. His book, *Patience with God*, was named European Theological Book of 2009-10.

Prof. Halík joins a distinguished group of 43 former recipients, including Mother Teresa, who received the inaugural Prize award in 1973, Rev. Billy Graham (1982) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1983). Last year’s Templeton Prize recipient, Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, followed the 2012 Templeton Laureate, the Dalai Lama.

He will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize at a public ceremony in London in May.

Notes to Editors

- Further information including biographical information on the 43 previous Templeton Prize Laureates is available at www.templetonprize.org
- Videos of Tomáš Halík answering several Big Questions and highlights of the press conference are available at www.templetonprize.org and www.youtube.com/user/TempletonPrize/
- Follow the Templeton Prize on Twitter using @TempletonPrize and the hashtag #templetonprize

TOMÁŠ HALÍK

Tomáš Halík was born on June 1, 1948, soon after a Soviet-backed coup ended the brief Czechoslovakian experiment with democracy that followed World War II and plunged that nation into a long period of communist dictatorship. Growing up in a society largely free of religion, he nonetheless was drawn to English Catholicism in the works of authors G.K. Chesterton and Graham Greene. Two years after receiving his first communion at age 18, Czechoslovakia experienced 1968’s Prague Spring, a fleeting relaxation of government restrictions on speech, assembly and travel that Halík, like most of the nation’s youth, vigorously embraced.

During that window he began English-language studies at the University of North Wales. Shortly after his arrival, Warsaw Pact forces crushed the Prague Spring, reverting the nation back to full dictatorship. Despite having the opportunity to remain free as an émigré, he returned to his native land determined to clandestinely fight for freedom. Soon after his return, fellow student Jan Palach set himself on fire in Prague’s central square, an event that shocked the nation and the world and led Halík on a deep inner search that would bring him to the priesthood. After delivering a speech at his doctoral graduation at Charles University extolling the need for truth, the government labeled him an “enemy of the regime,” forbade him to teach at the University and forced him into a career as a counselor and therapist to alcoholics and drug addicts.

Yet, all the while he was maintaining a façade of acquiescence to the system during the 1970s and 1980s, Halík quietly built a vast network of students, academics, philosophers, theologians and others who clandestinely communicated and advanced an agenda of knowledge and faith, activities that would have landed him in prison if he were caught, a fate meted out to many of his colleagues.

During this time Halík began secretly studying theology in Prague with Josef Zvěřina, a priest banned from public instruction by the authorities. One day before the enthronement of Pope John Paul II in 1978, he was clandestinely ordained in 1978 in East Germany, a milestone kept secret even from his mother.

With the final fall of Communism in the Eastern Bloc in 1989, the “underground university” and “underground church” that Halík and others had organized and nurtured provided a solid foundation to help launch the new democratic era.

Immediately after the fall of the communist regime, John Paul II invited Halík 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 appointed him to serve as an advisor to the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers.

Besides serving as an advisor to many of the Czech Republic’s political and religious leaders, Halík has been at the forefront of engaging and encouraging dialogue and understanding between religions and cultures including Muslims, Jews, Christians and non-believers. Further, he has introduced unorthodox approaches to long-running conflicts, suggesting, for example, that the intellectual diligence prized by both Muslims and Catholics may help bridge relations among diverse Western secularism, traditional religions and Islamic culture.

In 1996 Halík worked with 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.

Since 1989 Halík has lectured at numerous universities and conferences throughout the world. Among his many awards, he was named “Man of Reconciliation 2010” by the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, Warsaw, for outstanding services to dialogue between Christians and Jews. In 2010 he received the Romano Guardini Prize in Germany for outstanding merit in interpreting contemporary society.

Halík holds a Ph.D. in philosophy and sociology from Charles University (1972); a post graduate degree in clinical psychology from the Institute for Medicine in Prague (1984); the licentiate of theology from Pontifical Lateran University, Rome (1992); a higher doctorate in sociology from Charles University (1992); and a ThDr.hab. in practical theology from the Pontifical Theological Faculty in Warsaw (1992). Since 1990 he has served as rector of the Church of Holy Saviour in Prague. In 2008 he was granted the title of Monsignor – Honorary Prelate of His Holiness by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Templeton Prize

The Templeton Prize each year honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s breadth of spiritual dimensions, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works.

Established in 1972 by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation’s international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the Big Questions of human purpose and ultimate reality. For example, many of the most notable relevant visions of Msgr. Prof. Tomáš Halík correlate in various ways to previous Prize Laureates.

The monetary value of the Prize is set always to exceed the Nobel Prizes to underscore Templeton’s belief that benefits from discoveries that illuminate spiritual questions can be quantifiably more vast than those from other worthy human endeavors.

#