

Godspell 21st July 2024 Saint Anthony's Parish Clontarf Out of Darkness by Austin Iverrigh PART 3

During July/ August the Parish Newsletter takes a break. I would like to invite and encourage you over the coming weeks, to read this article which was written in The Tablet Magazine on 20th February this year by Austin Iverrigh. It was inspired by a book entitled "Afternoon Christianity" by a visionary Czech.

Priest- philosopher, Fr Tomas Halik, who sees the crisis facing the Church heralding not the extinction of Christianity, but its transformation.

The old category of dividing belief from unbelief, practicing from non-practicing are insufficient.

A extract from the article will be printed each week. Perhaps you could read it as an alternative to my sermon! Fr Larry

RETURNING TO WHAT was now an underground Church, he gained a doctorate in sociology and philosophy from Charles University, then blew up an academic career in an act of spiritual courage. Having been asked to read the graduation speech, he prayed to the Holy Spirit, ditched the official message he had been handed, and paid homage to truth, which, he said, was greater than power. His parrhesia led to the communist authorities banning him from holding academic posts. He worked as a sociologist in an industrial institute and as a psychotherapist in a clinic for alcoholics and drug addicts. But on the side, in the shadows, he received a formidable post-conciliar theological formation which set him on the road to priesthood.

Although his "first love" was the Jesuits, he opted to join a clandestine association of secular priests. Secretly ordained in Erfurt, in East Germany, just after the election of the first Polish pope, he became a key figure in the underground Church of the 1980s, a close associate of Cardinal Tomášek, and regularly harassed by the secret police. By day he was a psychotherapist for addicts; at night he was part of a network of philosophers who met in private apartments to read and discuss Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur. Through those networks he became friends with Czech playwright and later president Václav Havel. Following the 1989 Velvet Revolution, Halík was an adviser both to Havel and to Pope John Paul II, who kept him close and named him as a consultant to the Vatican body in dialogue with non-believers. He was also, finally, able to take up a career as professor of sociology at Charles University.

And it is there he has been these last 25 years, pumping out books on religion and spirituality and collecting awards and prizes, including the Templeton Prize in 2014, and serving as pastor of the academic parish of St Salvator. His is the country with probably the world's highest proportion of "nones" – those who tick "none of the above" when asked for their religious affiliation. A hotbed of reform movements and upheavals, religious wars and authoritarian restorations, Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic has since the nineteenth century undergone what Halík describes as three waves of secularisation: industrialisation, communist persecution, and postmodern culture. The result is a "strongly dechurched" society, within which apatheism (indifference), agnosticism, religious illiteracy, anticlericalism and many kinds of spiritual seeking and spiritualities co-mingle. Halík's books show his commitment to the dialogue with contemporary modernity as a social scientist and psycho-therapist. But he does so not as a detached observer but a pastor who has given his life to Christ.

In his new book Halík shows how impoverished is the believing/non-believing distinction, how not just institutional Christianity but also dogmatic atheism is in crisis. Young people's allergy to churches is more often the result not of unbelief, he points out, but something more like faith: a conviction that the Church has become alienated from its mission, captured by identitarian ideology, aloof from contemporary questions and concerns, and something like a corporation, interested only in itself. Halík sympathises. When he hears certain sermons or bishops' declarations, it strikes him "that we should not only investigate why people leave, but also where the ones who remain get their strength and patience."

I am struck by how closely this diagnosis matches Cardinal Bergoglio's homily at Aparecida in May 2007, when he likened the Church to the paralysed woman in Luke's Gospel, unable to see beyond the small area round her, while "the People of God are off somewhere else". It wasn't so much that people had left the Church, but that the Church had left the people. Halík approvingly quotes Bergoglio's speech to the cardinals in March 2013, how Jesus is not so much knocking at the door asking to come in (Revelation 3:20) as trapped in the sacristy, knocking to be let out, to the peripheries

TO BE CONTNUED NEXT WEEK

