

## Vatican to venerate conscientious objector

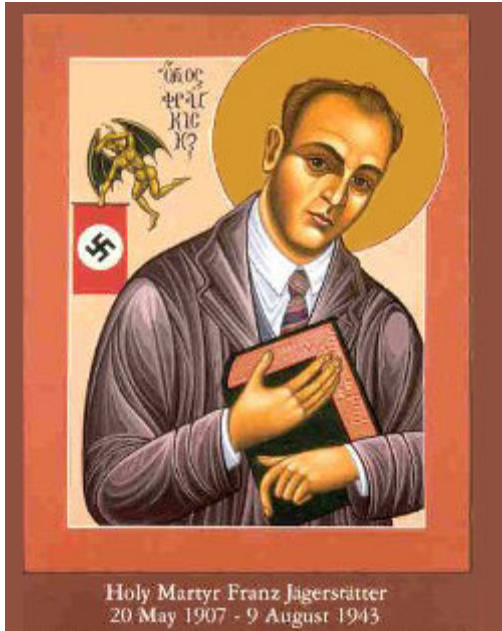


Franz Jagerstatter; soon-to-be Catholic Saint

By Logan Laituri. September 19, 2007

Many conscientious service members have been speaking out despite an often oppressive and unforgiving atmosphere. Some of us have even been persecuted and attacked while exercising our civic duty of speaking truth to power in times of moral crises. The Rev. Lennox Yearwood, an Air Force chaplain, faces accusations of working against national security. Liam Madden, fellow Iraq Veterans Against the War member and co-founder of Appeal for Redress, is defending his project against comments that are similarly repeated daily to men and women in the armed forces who are speaking out; effectively demanding that our GIs remain silent and obey our leaders blindly.

In a few months, the Vatican will beatify a fellow conscientious objector who stood for peace over prejudice, humility over arrogance. Like a growing number of servicemen and women in our modern conflict, this soldier of conscience would not bend to demands that he serve the country's militaristic intentions. He faced accusations of cowardice and outright treason, even of threatening national security. The book "In Solitary Witness" by Gordon Zahn, revealed that Franz Jägerstätter, an Austrian farmer, was beheaded by the Third Reich in August 1943 after refusing to serve in the German army. The Catholic Peace Fellowship reports he will be beatified on October 26, 2007, in his home country, and provides information on how Jägerstätter and countless other Christians have chosen conscientious objection, often in the face of significant harassment from Christian and secular critics alike.



The United States is not, nor will it ever be, Nazi Germany, but Jägerstätter's witness remains relevant and powerful for our current context. As Jägerstätter's testimony attests, the question of how a pacifist would address the problem of violence as manifested by Hitler has a response: The blame does not rest solely on Hitler, but is shared by the social classes (including the German church in status confessions) that enforced strict nationalism in the pursuit of economic revival, killing its own prophets, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the process.

If every soldier obeyed God and their conscience rather than human leaders, as Jägerstätter did, the world would be spared just as much from the likes of the German war machine as we would the American military industrial complex. Franz Jägerstätter, just as Saints Maximilian of Tebessa and Martin of Tours before him, was courageous enough to stand by the conviction "Miles Christi ego sum; pugnare mihi non licet: I am a soldier of Christ; it is not permissible for me to fight."

Logan Laituri is a six-year Army veteran with combatant service in Iraq during OIF II and experience with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Israel and the West Bank. He is an active member of Iraq Veterans Against the War and currently resides in Camden, New Jersey, in an intentional Christian community called Camden House, where he continues to seek ways to wage peace wherever he goes. He blogs at [courageouscoward.blogspot.com](http://courageouscoward.blogspot.com).