when the Church has to speak out, as it were, in her own person or let her public witness go by default. She must speak when some great danger or some great wrong—nuclear war, for example, or the starvation of millions—needs to be countered. She must speak when passions rise high and peace seems threatened. She must warn when the intricacies of technical argument or the pressures of expediency seem to be obscuring the consideration of right and wrong. She must sometimes dispute the rule of experts and the mysteries of government. And sometimes she must call for sacrifices from the nation, of money, of advantage, of prestige, which Governments cannot be expected to call for and can only accept if the nation they serve insists on them. These are some of the circumstances in which the churches have a right and a duty to speak on international affairs.

When they do speak what should they say? We have already said that moral generalities are not enough. At the other extreme, it is rightly felt that the formulation of detailed policies is no part of the churches' business. There is, however, an intermediate course, involving two sorts of action. The Church may point to certain ultimate goals as desirable—the promotion of some form of world order, for example, or the international control of nuclear weapons; but whenever she does this she ought at the same time to put forward some idea of the way by which such a goal might be reached and of a possible first step along that way. This is a salutary exercise for the Church herself. It also gives a certain clear relevance to what the Church has to say, and does not leave her, like a cemetery angel, pointing vaguely heavenwards.

When the Church takes such action she must expect, even after consulting the best advisors available, to be challenged by the political experts on their own ground; and she must in humility meet such challenge as best she may, defending at all cost the principles which have led her to intervene at all and insisting that any policy which does not square with those principles will not do. No one will think the less of the Church for sometimes being wrong when she tries, as any citizen or body of citizens may, to help forward a solution of problems which concern us all.

The essence of this task is a continuous dialogue between pastors, theologians and laity. For this dialogue the laity involved are more than ready, and if the theologians are understandably shy at venturing on such unfamiliar ground and feel themselves out of their sphere, we shall still hope to persuade them to come to our aid. It is only with their help that we shall get that informed prophecy which is the Church's special contribution in a technical age.

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**Jagerstatter: An Enemy of the State**


*by Thomas Merton*

On August 9th, 1943, the Austrian peasant Franz Jagerstatter, was beheaded by the German military authorities as an "enemy of the state" because he had repeatedly refused to take the military oath and serve in what he declared to be an "unjust war." His story has a very special importance at a time when the Catholic Church, in the Second Vatican Council, is confronting the moral problem of nuclear weaponry. This Austrian peasant was not only simultaneously a Catholic and a conscientious objector, but he was a fervent Catholic, so fervent that some who knew him believe him to have been a saint. His lucid and uncompromising refusal to fight for Germany in the second world war was the direct outcome of his religious conversion. It was the political implementation of his desire to be a perfect Christian.

Franz Jagerstatter surrendered his life rather than take the lives of others in what he believed to be an "unjust war." He clung to this belief in the face of every possible objection not only from representatives of the army and the state but also from his fellow Catholics, the Catholic clergy and of course his own family. He had to meet practically every "Christian" argument that is advanced in favor of war. He was treated as a rebel, disobedient to lawful authority, a traitor to his country. He was accused of being selfish, self-willed, not considering his family, neglecting his duty to his children.

His Austrian Catholic friends understood that he was unwilling to fight for Hitler's Germany, yet they argued that the war was jus-
tified because it would lead to the destruction of Bolshevism and therefore to the preservation of "European Christianity." He was therefore refusing to defend his faith. He was also told that he was not sufficiently informed to judge whether or not the war was just. That he had an obligation to submit to the higher wisdom of the state. The government and the Fuhrer knew best. Thousands of Catholics, including many priests, were serving in the armies, and therefore he should not try to be "more Catholic than the Church."

He was even reminded that the Bishops had not protested against this war, and in fact not only his pastor but even his bishop tried to persuade him to give up his resistance because it was "futile." One priest represented to him that he would have numerous opportunities to practice Christian virtue and exercise an "apostolate of good example" in the armed forces. All these are very familiar arguments frequently met with in our present context, and they are still assumed to be so conclusive that few Catholics dare to risk the disapproval they would incur by conscientious objection and dissent.

Jagerstatter's fellow villagers thought his refusal was evidence of fanaticism due to his religious conversion at the time of his marriage in 1938, followed by an excess of Bible reading. His conscientious objection is still not fully understood in his native village, though on the local war memorial his name has been added to those of the villagers who were killed in action.

The peasant refused to give in to any of these arguments and replied to them with all simplicity: "I cannot and may not take an oath in favor of a government that is fighting an unjust war. . . I cannot turn the responsibility for my action over to the Fuhrer. . . . Does anyone really think that this massive blood-letting can save European Christianity or bring it to a new flowering? . . . Is it not more Christian to offer oneself as a victim right away rather than first have to murder others who certainly have a right to live and want to live—just to prolong one's own life a little while?" When reminded that most Catholics had gone to war for Hitler without any such qualms of conscience, he replied that they obviously "had not received the grace" to see things as they were. When told that the Bishops themselves expressed no such objections he repeated that "they had not received the grace either."

Jagerstatter's refusal to fight for Hitler was not based on a personal repugnance to fighting in any form. As a matter of fact Jagerstatter was, by temperament, something of a fighter. In his wilder youthful days he had participated rather prominently in the inter-village gang wars. He had also undergone preliminary military training without protest, though his experiences in the army at that time had convinced him that army life presented a danger to morals.

Shortly after Hitler took over Austria in 1938, Jagerstatter had a dream in which he saw a splendid and shining express train coming round a mountain, and thousands of people running to get aboard. "No one could prevent them from getting on the train." While he was looking at this he heard a voice saying: "This train is going to hell." When he woke up he spontaneously associated the "train" with Nazism.

His objection to military service was, then, the fruit of a particular religious interpretation of contemporary political events. His refusal to fight was not only a private matter of conscience: it also expressed a deep intuition concerning the historical predicament of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century. This intuition was articulated in several long and very impressive meditations or "Commentaries" in which he says: "The situation in which we Christians of Germany find ourselves today is much more bewildering than that faced by the Christians of the early centuries at the time of their bloodiest persecution. . . . We are not dealing with a small matter, but the great (Apocalyptic) life and death struggle has already begun. Yet in the midst of it there are many who still go on living their lives as though nothing had changed. . . . That we Catholics must make ourselves tools of the worst and most dangerous anti-Christian power that has ever existed is something that I cannot and never will believe. . . . Many actually believe quite simply that things have to be the way they are. If this should happen to mean that they are obliged to commit injustice, then they believe that others are responsible. . . . I am convinced that it is still best that I speak the truth even though it costs me my life. For you will not find it written in any of the commandments of God or of the Church that a man is obliged under pain of sin to take an oath committing him to obey whatever might be commanded him by his secular ruler. We need no rifles or pistols for our battle, but instead spiritual weapons—and the foremost of these is prayer."

The witness of this Austrian peasant is in striking contrast to the career of another man who lived and worked for a time in the nearby city of Linz: Adolf Eichmann.

The American sociologist, Gordon Zahn, who is also a Catholic and a pacifist, has written an absorbing, objective, fully documented life of Jagerstatter, in which he studies with great care not only the motives and actions of the man himself, but the reactions and recollections of scores of people who knew him, from his family and neighbors to fellow prisoners and prison chaplains. One of the most striking things about the story is that repeated attempts were made to save the peasant objector's life not only by
his friends, by priests, by his attorney but even by his military judges (he was not in the hands of the SS). He could have escaped execution if he had accepted non-combatant service in the medical corps, but he felt that even this would be a compromise because his objection was not only to killing other men but to the act of saving his own life by an implicit admission that the Nazis were a legitimate regime carrying on a just war. A few minutes before his execution Jagerstatter still calmly refused to sign a document that would have saved him. The chaplain who was present, and who had tried like everyone else to persuade the prisoner to save himself, declared that Jagerstatter “lived as a saint and died as a hero.”

It is important to observe that though the Catholic villagers of his native St. Radegund still tend to regard Jagerstatter as an extremist and a fanatic, or even as slightly touched in the head, the priests who knew him and others who have studied him have begun to admit the seriousness and supernatural impact of his heroic self-sacrifice. There are some who do not hesitate to compare his decision with that of Thomas More. One of the prison chaplains who knew him said: “Not for an instant did I ever entertain the notion that he was a fanatic or even possibly mentally deranged. He did not give the slightest impression of being so.” And a French cell-mate said of him that he was “one of the heroes of our time, a fighter to the death for faith, peace and justice.” Finally, it is interesting to read the very reserved judgment of the same Bishop who, when consulted by Jagerstatter about this moral problem, urged him to renounce his “scruples” and let himself be inducted into the army.

“I am aware of the ‘consistency’ of his conclusions and respect them—especially in their intention. At that time I could see that the man thirsted after martyrdom and for the expiation of sin, and I told him that he was permitted to choose that path only if he knew he had been called to it through some special revelation originating from above and not in himself. He agreed with this. For this reason Jagerstatter represents a completely exceptional case, one more to be marveled at than copied.”

The story of the Austrian peasant as told by Gordon Zahn is plainly that of a martyr, and of a Christian who followed a path of virtue with a dedication that cannot be fully accounted for by human motivation alone. In other words, it would seem that already in this biography one might find plausible evidence of what the Catholic Church regards as sanctity. But the Bishop of Linz, in hinting at the possibility of a special calling that might have made Jagerstatter an “exceptional case,” does not mean even implicitly to approve the thesis that the man was a saint, still less a model to be imitated.

In other words the Bishop, while admitting the remote possibility of Catholic heroism in a conscientious objector, is not admitting that such heroism should be regarded as either normal or imitable. Conscientious objection is still not proposed to the average Catholic as a rational and Christian option. For him, the true heroes remain “those exemplary young Catholic men, seminarians, priests and heads of families who fought and died in heroic fulfillment of duty and in the firm conviction that they were fulfilling the will of God at their post…”

It is still quite possible that even today, in an era of new war technology and new threats of global destruction, when the most urgent single problem facing modern man is the proliferation of atomic and nuclear weaponry, many Catholic bishops will continue to agree with this one. It is true, they admit that there is such a thing as an erroneous conscience which is to be followed provided it is “invincible.” “All respect is due to the innocently erroneous conscience,” says the Bishop of Linz, “it will have its reward from God.”

Of whom is he speaking, of the Catholic young men, the priests, and the seminarians who died in Hitler’s armies “in the firm conviction that they were fulfilling the will of God?” No. These, he says, were men (and the word is underlined) acting in the light of “a clear and correct conscience.” Jagerstatter was “in error” but also “in good faith.”

Certainly the Bishop is entitled to his opinion: but the question of whose conscience was erroneous and whose was correct remains one that will ultimately be settled by God, not men. Meanwhile there is another question: the responsibility of those who help men to form their conscience—or fail to do so. And here, too, the possibility of firm convictions that are “innocently erroneous” gives food for some rather apocalyptic thought.

The real question raised by the Jagerstatter story is not merely that of the individual Catholic’s right to conscientious objection (admitted in practice even by those who completely disagreed with Jagerstatter) but the question of the Church’s own mission of protest and prophecy in the gravest spiritual crisis man has ever known. The heart of the matter, as Zahn sees it, is the Church’s “clear unwillingness to come into open conflict with political authority on matters not specifically and directly involving institutional prerogatives.” This is a forthright diagnosis that will shock and offend many, but Zahn’s book is a persuasive and perhaps unconsciously ironic argument that the theologians who advocate systematic adjustment to the pragmatic demands of secular power and who are normally conservatives, are in fact practicing “the new morality” and “situation ethics” in order to prove their point.

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A New Europe?
A joint European-American effort, initiated in the pages of "Daedalus," produced this volume of essays which deals with what has been called the "silent European revolution." The 27 contributors discuss this revolution: the changing economic, political, intellectual, social and religious climate of the continent.

Cambridge U.S.A.: Hub of a New World
New Yorker staff writer Rand's comprehensive guide to "the new governmental-industrial-academic world," with its center in the suburbs of Boston, is unique in the field of travel literature. The author directs the reader's way to the university laboratories, the research and development companies on "the Space Highway," and through the international centers and schools of foreign study which abound in the area.

The Congress and America's Future
David B. Truman, ed. Prentice-Hall. 185 pp. $3.95.
For this American Assembly publication, eight prominent American political scientists have evaluated the need for reform in structure and in function of both Houses. Each chapter deals with a special area of concern, and there is one devoted to "The Congress and National Security Policy."

Hiroshima: The Decision to Use the A-Bomb
Edwin Fogelman, ed. Scribner's. 126 pp. $2.50.
Another of the publisher's "research anthologies" for use in college, this volume contains two sections devoted to the statements of government leaders and scientists who were concerned with the decision to bomb Hiroshima. A third section is given over to Japanese reactions to the bombing, and a fourth, to some postwar appraisals of the value of the decision in military and moral terms.

The Mission of the Church and Civil Government
The Pacifism of Karl Barth
These little pamphlets are two recent additions to a series which deals "with nuclear and cold war problems in the perspectives of biblical theology." In the first, Professor Morrison distinguishes the Church's mission in the modern world from that of the individual Christian. Dr. Yoder traces the "evolution of the social thought" of the Swiss theologian and his journey, begun about 1957, to a "near-pacifism."

Readers are reminded that worldview welcomes correspondence. Letters may be specific comments on articles in recent issues or general discussion, but readers are requested to limit their letters to 500 words.