In Solitary Witness Study Guide

In Solitary Witness by Gordon Zahn

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Franz Jagerstatter is an ordinary peasant farmer when the Nazis move into his home country of Austria. Jagerstatter is ordered to report for military training under the Nazi regime and does so but then refuses to serve in the military, citing a conviction that the Nazis are evil and that war is unjust. He is arrested and imprisoned for his stance. Despite being given opportunities to change his mind, he refuses, continues to stand for what he believes to be a necessary position in the eyes of God, and is sentenced to death. Though he knows he will be executed, he refuses repeated offers to forego the execution by serving in the military. He is even offered a non-combat position but refuses that as well, saying that any service for the Nazis will be tantamount to defying God and earn himself a place in eternal hell.

Jagerstatter's story is told from the perspective of a researcher who found documents in the form of commentaries written by Jagerstatter and letters from Jagerstatter to his wife, written from prison. He also interviewrf family, friends and acquaintances. His family takes the stand that he did what he believed was right in the eyes of God, withstood urging to capitulate and died an honorable death. Most of the people from his home village see his death as a senseless waste. The villagers say that Jagerstatter's refusal to serve in the military did not change the outcome of the war at all and that he gave his life in vain. Though the people of his village continue to respect him as a person, they feel that he allowed religious fanaticism to take over his life, ruling him to the point of a senseless death.

Jagerstatter's life is typical of men of his location and time period. He is described as something of a wild youth and possibly fathers an illegitimate child. At some point, he changes, casting away the mischievous aspects of his youth and becoming a serious and devout Christian. He marries a woman who is likely also devout and the two go to Rome for their honeymoon where they see the pope. Some attribute Jagerstatter's changed life to this visit to Rome but the author believes the change occurred before his marriage.

Through his letters, Jagerstatter urges his wife, mother and three daughters to remain firm in their belief in God and to work toward an eternal reward. A priest who is with him just before his execution describes Jagerstatter as calm and composed, peaceful with his decision and his assurance that he is going to join his Heavenly Father.

An Introduction, St. Radegund, and the Young Ruffian

An Introduction, St. Radegund, and the Young Ruffian Summary and Analysis

The first chapter is titled "Franz Jagerstatter: An Introduction." In this chapter, the author describes how he conducted the research. The author also discusses the people he interviewed and how those people were connected with Jagerstatter. Finally, the author asks the reader to carefully consider the information provided and to keep in mind that the "sensitive" reader will gain an understanding deeper than the words presented by the author.

The second chapter, "St. Radegund," is a description of Jagerstatter's background, including his home village of St. Radegund. The town lies about a mile from the highway that leads to towns such as Salzburg. The town hosts a passion play and the author notes that it is ironic that Jagerstatter plays the role of a soldier during one of those plays. The author notes that there is little for certain about the final day of Jagerstatter's stay in St. Radegund before reporting as the Nazi Party orders, but that he would probably have gone by the church where he served as sexton and more than likely stopped to visit the priest at the rectory. The author notes that the priest who had originally been Jagerstatter's spiritual advisor, a man named Fr. Karobath, is in exile at the time Jagerstatter leaves St. Radegund. Karobath is, reportedly, unsupportive of the Nazi Party, resulting in his exile. A younger priest has been sent in Karobath's place but Jagerstatter and this man never become close.

It is noted that Jagerstatter has undergone a serious personality change prior to his arrest and the author notes that there are several possible causes and several effects of that change. One effect is that Jagerstatter seldom steps into any of the local taverns. This can be explained as his effort to live a more spiritual life but the author notes that it can also be that Jagerstatter is trying to avoid situations in which he is called on to defend his political stand. By this time Jagerstatter's decision to refuse to serve in the Nazi Party's military endeavors are common knowledge. He has decided that the war is "unjust," that the leading regime is "immoral," and that that serving in the Nazi's war will make him evil. The author sums up the information about the village by saying that St. Radegrund is "too small to have its own post office" and that it is so remote that there is little traffic The author then points out that the tiny village is home to the man who dares to defy Hitler, the dictator who brought Europe "to its knees."

In "The Young Ruffian," the author discovers that people who knew Jagerstatter describe a dramatic change in Jagerstatter's personality. As a young man, he is somewhat wild though most people say that he was not extreme in his rebellious actions. The most serious of these "indiscretions" are told only by Jagerstatter's closest friends. It is noted that Jagerstatter's mother and father were not married, that his father

was killed in battle, and that his stepfather—proprietor of the Leherbauer land—adopted Jagerstatter. The author notes that illegitimacy in this case is probably not a huge ordeal for Jagerstatter to get past and that it could have been that his mother's marriage to his biological father is prevented by his father's untimely death. His grandmother probably influences his religious tendencies. He is a good student though not outstanding but does excel in other areas, such as being known as the first in the village to have a motorcycle. He is probably a prominent member of gangs of young men that rule the area at the time, sometimes taking matters of justice into their own hands, such as disciplining a man who marries a woman much younger than he.

Jagerstatter is said to have been exiled from his village for a time though the reason for this exile are disputed. Some say he fathers an illegitimate daughter but others say there is an argument over trees cut on someone else's property. Some people say that Jagerstatter was not the father of this child but had volunteered to pay support anyway. Jagerstatter's wife, Mrs. Jagerstatter, says she knew stories of this illegitimate child and that the children did as well, but that she was not the one to tell them.

The letters written in prison by Jagerstatter to his wife include encouragements, such as an urging that she remember that Christians have always been persecuted and that God will give none of them a "heavier cross than he can bear."

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The author's description of St. Radegund is extensive and include a myriad of details such as the location of the parish church which is "perched just under the brow of the hill overlooking the river." The description also includes information about some specific people, such as a cousin who is "a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses." The author notes that this man and his family are the single exception to the otherwise Catholic population.

The author notes that the village of St. Radegrund is a small community and that the author, an outsider, is somewhat surprised to be welcomed. The author notes that the people of the village have every right to "protect" Jagerstatter's memory against the scrutiny of an outsider, but that the people are very open. Despite this, the reader should keep in mind that there might have been a tendency on the part of those interviewed by the author to either keep negative comments to themselves because of their approval of Jagerstatter or have been overly negative because of their disapproval. Most people seem to believe that Jagerstatter is a good man and that his death is a tragedy.

The author notes that there are people who say Jagerstatter's youth and any mistakes he made during that time are irrelevant to his later actions, including his decision to go to the executioner's block rather than do something he believes to be evil and wrong.

The New Man, From Enns to Berlin

The New Man, From Enns to Berlin Summary and Analysis

In "The New Man," the author notes that some people feel that Jagerstatter's change was fairly sudden but that others think the change was gradual. One group says Franz marries in 1936 and that he takes a honeymoon trip to Rome with his bride. There, the couple are in an audience that sees the pope. Some people feel this makes a tremendous change in Jagerstatter and that seeing the pope is responsible for the change but others feel his marriage prompts the change. It seems likely that the change occurred prior to both of these events and some suggest that he made a previous trip to Rome. The author believes that the change happened prior to his marriage and that his choice of a pious wife in keeping with this new focus in his life—and their decision to visit Rome for their honeymoon—was the result of this change in his life rather than the other way around. The author believes that Jagerstatter's illegitimate child could have prompted his focus on Christianity though there is nothing definite to prove this conjecture. Some people say that Jagerstatter had, during this time, avoided drink altogether, but Mrs. Jaggerstatter says that her husband continued to drink homemade ale and indulged in an occasional drink. She says that the reason for his avoiding the tavern was to avoid the arguments that often occurred there, because of both political and religious disagreements.

During this time, there are examples of Jagerstatter's personal sacrifices. He sometimes skips meals for fasting and at other times distributes food to the needy. Jagerstatter also makes pilgrimages to the Altotting shrine and becomes the sexton for his church. As it becomes evident that Jagerstatter is going to be required to join the military, his resolve to refuse solidifies. It is here that Jagerstatter apparently confides in the young priest assigned to the village parish but the man seems to realize that he has neither the solid relationship with Jagerstatter nor the experience to deal with the question and advises Jagerstatter to seek counsel from others, advice he apparently heeded. The priest, Fr. Furthauer, tells the author that Jagerstatter was away, apparently undergoing the first round of military training, when the Furthauer arrived in the village. The church sexton had died and Furthauer, noting Jagerstatter's attendance daily at mass and his serious devotion, asks Jagerstatter to take on those duties. Jagerstatter was required to learn a series of prayers in Latin, which he did in record time in order to take the post. He took his duties seriously, to the point that he often closed the doors so that latecomers could not slip in unnoticed. Furthauer tells the author that Jagerstatter was not fanatical but "thoroughly sound." Jagerstatter's tombstone recognizes him by name but also points out his position as sexton and as the owner of the family farm.

Jagerstatter's opposition to Hitler's regime becomes more vocal and while many salute with "Heil Hitler," Jagerstatter is known to have said "Pfui Hitler." He refers to Hitler's successful advance into Austria as a dark situation and compares it to the Jewish

crowd's decision when being given a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. The people are offered the opportunity to vote for unification with Hitler's forces and the vote is positive. The author notes that there is not a single "no" vote cast in Jagerstatter's village though he says voted against it. It seems some people feared reprisal and his vote was somehow eliminated from the count.

The Nazi rule does not make a great deal of difference in daily life and Jagerstatter continues to farm. He is accused by some people of not producing enough but there is no real evidence that he changes his farming methods or that his production changes, though he may have made more time for religious activities and this change in routine may have been misconstrued. He refuses all government subsidies though his family is struggling to get by and he continues to give food to the needy. The author says that there are a couple of stories that illustrate Jagerstatter's lack of concern regarding his family's needs and his willingness to allow them to do without necessities for the sake of his religious and political views. One of these stories is that his daughter has a limp that might have been corrected but that Jagerstatter will not accept the medical and financial services of the Nazis. The author notes that it is more likely that the limp is barely noticeable by the time Jagerstatter is arrested and that it had seemed a matter of such concern. Another is told by a priest who accused Jagerstatter of being so self-absorbed in his own political and religious views that he ignored the needs of his family by making the decision to refuse military service under the Nazis. The author notes that Jagerstatter apparently considers the family but takes the opinion that it is not acceptable to do wrong, "even for the sake of family." There are, however, more stories that exemplify Jagerstatter's desire to help others, to be a good provider for his family and to take care of his children.

In "From Enns to Berlin," Jagerstatter writes to his wife from Enns where he is to report for military service. He urges his wife to be strong and tells her to be kind to his mother, even if she is angry over his decision. His decision to refuse to serve in the military is not a surprise to his wife because Jagerstatter serves a training period and returns home very vocal about his intention to refuse to serve again. He cites both the fact that his service for the Nazis would be wrong and that being in the army would present incredible opportunities to sin as his main reasons. Several people try to talk him out of this course of action. One police official tells Jagerstatter that if he were to refuse to report for military service, someone in his home village would have to arrest him. The insinuation is that the police official does not want Jagerstatter for force the official into that situation. That is likely the reason Jagerstatter leaves the village, reports for duty at Enns and only then refuses to serve.

Over the months prior to his order to report for duty, Jagerstatter asks advice from several people. One priest recalls being very careful in his answer for fear that it is a Nazi spy setting a trap. The priest reminds Jagerstatter of his civil duties and advises that Jagerstatter report as ordered. The author points out that there was a man who refused military service who was hiding in the area of Jagerstatter's village and that no one had betrayed his presence. In fact, the people went out of their way to help him obtain necessities, including medical care. The author notes that Jagerstatter probably never actually considered hiding out because he had decided that he would give his life

as a statement that the Nazi regime was "unjust in its war and it its persecution of the Church."

Jagerstatter reports for duty at Enns, probably on March 1, 1943, and is then put under military arrest for his refusal to serve and moved to prison at Linz. The prison at Linz is home to many military prisoners, most of whom had also been arrested for military offenses of some sort. While there, he tells his wife that he has "converted two condemned men" during his stay. He also mentions other conversions of faith, including "SS-men." He urges his wife that, if she is asked her opinion about his stand, that she simply tell the truth. The author makes the note that the letters to Jagerstatter are no longer available and that some of Jagerstatter's letters make references to comments others apparently make to him. One instance of this is that Jagerstatter tells his wife that "you should not be sad because of my present situation," apparently referring to a comment she makes in a previous letter. Jagerstatter also addresses his daughters, Rosalie, Marie and Aloisia, saying that he is pleased that they pray for him so often and promising to pray for them as well.

Jagerstatter urges his wife to give up any notion of visiting him in prison. The author notes that this might have been to spare her the sorrow of seeing him in prison but may also have been to avoid the inevitable emotional parting. The letter Jagerstatter writes to his wife on April 9 is blotched and the author notes that it might have been Jagerstatter's tears shed while writing the letter or his wife's while reading it. That letter is written on the couple's seventh anniversary and Jagerstatter extols the virtues of his wife and his good fortune at having found her. Though Jagerstatter tells his wife that he is not allowed to receive food, the rules are apparently bent at least on a few occasions and in this letter he thanks Rosalie for the gift of an apple.

Jagerstatter says that he is glad that he cannot know the date of his death because it means that he can continue to live each day as it comes. He continues, "the important thing is that we do not let a single day go by in vain without putting it to good use for eternity." Jagerstatter comments in this vein several times, saying that he has plenty of time in prison for praying and that he continues to use his time in that way. Jagerstatter then writes a "brief note" to his wife, informing her of his impending transport to Berlin to the Military Investigation Prison, or "Berlin-Tegel." He ends that letter with the encouraging words, "Do not worry any more about me. The Lord will not desert me in the future either."

The author notes that this marks the end of Jagerstatter's letters from the prison at Linz. He says that during his research, a Linz newspaper called "Linzer Volksblatt," runs a story about his project and he is contacted by two sources who claim to have known Jagerstatter during his time in Linz. One of those is Rev. Franz Baldinger who writes that he counseled Jagerstatter to accept that he would have to serve in the military. The priest says that Jagerstatter was fully aware of the fact that if he accepted the military service, he would be released from prison, but held to his conviction that such an action would be wrong.

Mrs. Jagerstatter receives a letter from a fellow prisoner who recalls that Jagerstatter "prayed day and night." This fellow prisoner says that he gained his freedom but fled the military and waited for the arrival of the Americans. Another fellow prisoner, Gregoire B., says that Jagerstatter was a "hero" and was "never afraid to confess his faith openly in spite of the taunts of the guards and his fellow prisoners." Gregoire says that Jagerstatter was religious, sound of mind and had "a fanatical love for his country, Austria." Gregoire also says that Jagerstatter knew he would be executed for his stand but believed he was doing the right thing and that he could not back down.

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There are several Biblical references in Jagerstatter's letters. The comparison of Hitler's advance into Austria with the Jewish people's choice between Jesus and Barabbas is interesting in that Jagerstatter does not seem to see the people as powerless against Hitler's invading army. He seems to believe that the people had a choice and could have stood against him, just as the Jewish people—given the option to allow either Jesus or Barabbas to escape punishment by the Roman soldiers—could have opted to release Jesus, sending Barabbas to the cross instead of Jesus.

The author notes that peasants were typically religious but not overly so. They attended religious services but usually did not have the time or the training to do more than what was required of them within these services. He says that because of this tendency toward moderation, it may have been that Jagerstatter attracted a great deal of attention if he routinely stopped during the day to pray.

One of God's Special Friends

One of God's Special Friends Summary and Analysis

In "One of God's Special Friends," Jaggerstatter writes to his wife from Ragensburg when he and his traveling party stop there on the way to Berlin and then from his prison cell in Berlin. In that prison, the rules have changed somewhat and he is allowed to write letters only once a month though he can receive mail whenever it arrives. He references this in his letters to his wife and children, urging that his daughters not forget him though he is unable to go home at all and allowed to write only monthly.

The author notes that he discovered that an attorney named F.L. Feldmann was assigned through a friend in the military courts to defend Jagerstatter. Feldmann remembers the case well and tells the author that he had no inkling of Jagerstatter's religious endeavors but that he did everything possible to save Jagerstatter's life, though the odds were against success. On July 6, 1943, Jagerstatter and Feldmann appear in court for a trial. Feldmann says that Jagerstatter is told that to refuse military service will result in his death and that he said he understood. Feldmann says that the court officials were "pleading" with Jagerstatter to accept some non-combative military position in order to avoid the death penalty but that Jagerstatter refused, saying to do so would be to accept an evil compromise that would appear to be only an effort on his part to avoid the death penalty. He is then sentenced to death. He writes a letter home a few days later and does not reveal his sentence, but says that there will be a resolution in his case soon. He tells his wife, children and mother that he is praying constantly for them all, then says that he hopes they are each praying for him as well. He urges the children to be good and promises a meeting—either on earth or in heaven. Meanwhile, Feldmann knows that the death sentence can still be reversed and urges the prison chaplain to try to make Jagerstatter change his mind. Jagerstatter is not so sure and believes that if he agrees to serve in the military, he will be sent to some combative position at the front lines where survival is unlikely. Feldmann appeals both to Jagerstatter and to the military officials, both to no avail. The author notes that Feldmann's efforts could have been dangerous because standing up for Jagerstatter against the Nazi regime could have resulted in the end of Feldmann's career or even in his death.

Jagerstatter's wife comes to visit him along with a priest, Fr. Furthauer. This is to be the last time husband and wife see each other on earth and they have only about a twenty-minute visit with armed guards standing over Jagerstatter. Mrs. Jagerstatter says that she tries to make her husband change his mind in order to save his life. She says that she knows he will die otherwise and does not want that to happen. She says those who believe she did not tried to make him change his mind do not realize how hard she had tried. However, Jagerstatter, in a letter to his wife after the visit, says that a man who has a wife and family is not excused from his duty to God and that he is not able to make concessions to that duty just because he also has a duty to his family. He goes on

to write, "Why is it so hard for us to make sacrifices for heaven?" He says that the "path to ruin" is sometimes easier to follow.

The author states that there are "two more documents" related to Jagerstatter's prison time. One of those is his formal farewell letter, written on paper specifically for that purpose. That letter is sent to the prison authorities who then send it to Jagerstatter's widow. In that letter, Jagerstatter says that he and several other prisoners doomed to die are moved by automobile to Brandenburg on July 14 and he is told he will be executed that afternoon. He pleads with his wife for forgiveness for any trespasses and that she beg forgiveness on his behalf of anyone else he might have wronged. He addresses his mother in the same tone and urges that they both remember their duties to God. The second document, apparently written by Jagerstatter prior to that formal farewell, is written on a large card, is barely legible and is something of a mystery. The author notes that it is uncertain when Jagerstatter writes it. That letter is also a farewell but is somewhat different from the formal farewell in that Jagerstatter takes a sterner stand against the Nazis, though not against those who feel they have done nothing wrong in serving the Nazi military. He tells his wife that she should "not think evil" of those who decide to serve in the military, but that "it is much better to pray" for them.

The author notes that this is the end of Jagerstatter's time in prison but that he has a couple of additional sources of information, including the memories of a chaplain named Father Bernhard Kunza who recalls Jagerstatter as a man who swears he cannot "reconcile" his beliefs with military service for Hitler. Kunza urges Jagerstatter to accept the military offer to serve in a non-combat capacity, saying that there will be a need for men like Jagerstatter after the Nazi regime comes to a an end. A second source is the Archpriest Rev. Jochmann who is with Jagerstatter prior to his execution. Though Jochmann dies between the year of Jagerstatter's death and the author's research, a nun reports that Jochmann noted that Jagerstatter was composed as the time of his execution arrived, that he declared himself in command of a close relationship with God and without need of intervention. Jochmann is said to have referred to Jagerstatter as a "saint," the only one Jochmann ever met. The author notes that Jagerstatter's ashes are later moved to the parish in his home village.

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The author notes that Jagerstatter's treatment while in prison is fair and that he is not railroaded through the military court system. This is interesting considering the civil court system at this time has a tremendous reputation for corruption and unfairness. The author says that the fact that the military is in charge of this case is the reason for the differences. The author then goes on to point out that Jagerstatter's stand—though against what the military officials want to hear—probably gains their respect simply because Jagerstatter is doing what military leaders are expected to do: take a stand and stick with it. His firm commitment despite the fact that he knows he will be put to death for it is a sign that Jagerstatter truly believes in his position. The author goes on to say that there is no record of which military officials are in the room and involved in the court proceedings against Jagerstatter. He seems to believe that it could have been the same

officials who later make an assassination attempt on Hitler because of dissatisfaction with Hitler's regime, but there is no way to prove that point.

The farewell letter written by Jagerstatter on the card has an interesting thought related to Jagerstatter's belief about soldiers who serve in the Nazi military. He says that someone who believes they are doing nothing wrong in taking that oath has not sinned. He says that in his case—because he knwos that serving the Nazis is wrong - it would be an irrefutable sin.

A Train to Hell and The Martyr and His Village

A Train to Hell and The Martyr and His Village Summary and Analysis

In "A Train to Hell," the author states that the previous chapter concludes the story of Jagerstatter's life, but says that there remains the "difficult task of explaining why Jagerstatter decided upon his solitary rebellion" and examining the impact of that rebellion on others. There are some people who believe that Jagerstatter's stand was influenced by his cousin. The two men are close and spend a great deal of time together but the cousin is not a member of the Catholic faith, as Jagerstatter is. This cousin is actually a Jehovah's Witness and Jagerstatter apparently admired the fact that the sect stood against war as a matter of principle. The author notes that this admiration may have impacted Jagerstatter, even if the principles of the sect as a whole had not. As to the question of the cousin's ability to make an impression on Jagerstatter, this cousin's wife tells the author that Jagerstatter was intent on bringing his cousin back to the Catholic faith and that their conversations revolved about this topic.

Jagerstatter writes a series of documentaries prior to his imprisonment and the author includes a series of excerpts from these in an effort to explain Jagerstatter's theological ideals. One of these is titled "On the Question of Our Day: Catholic or Nazi?" This commentary includes details of a dream Jagerstatter has sometime in 1938. He says that he has trouble falling asleep but finally does and dreams of a "beautiful shining railroad train." Children and adults rush to board the train and "could not be held back." Jagerstatter says that he hears a voice say, "This train is going to hell," and then, "Now we will go to purgatory." He says that after he wakes and analyzes the dream, he realizes that the train represents National Socialism, a plague that Jagerstatter says is "creeping in upon us" through the Nazi party's groups. Another of the questions addresses the idea of political opposition and religious commitment. Jagerstatter says that Christians are giving in to Nazi demands, regardless of what those demands might be. Jagerstatter says that the Nazis have long opposed the church and that the church is now approving the decisions of the Nazi party.

In another commentary, Jagerstatter says that "every sin carries its own consequences" and that this sin is "accepting Nazi rule." The author notes that refusing to accept the Nazi rule is not an automatic death sentence because the party tries to win opposition over to their side. Jagerstatter compares the Nazis with idols demanding sacrifice and says that many people try to remain publically obedient to the Nazi regime and privately devoted to their personal convictions. He says that it is an impossible situation and that the Nazis allow it because of the damage to the church. He says that people who know these "double dealers" come to believe this is acceptable and mimic their actions. Another point Jagerstatter makes is that even if he were to "bear the hardships" of

military life, the Nazi party would still regard him as an enemy because he is not a voluntary recruit. He says that he has been urged to fight for "the Fatherland," but says there is no "Fatherland" in a country which gives its citizens no rights.

In another commentary, Jagerstatter prophesies of "terrifying weapons that the human mind has invented" and that this weapon will be capable of "smashing the entire world into ruins."

The question of whether Jagerstatter would have agreed to fight in any situation is raised by the author. Both Mrs. Jagerstatter and the priest in Jagerstatter's village say that is not the case and that he would gladly have fought against the Nazi occupation in the first place. The author notes that Jagerstatter is not objecting to military service because he is afraid to die because he knows that he will likely be killed for his refusal. There seems to have been no communication between Jagerstatter and any organized Nazi resistance.

In "the Martyr and His Village," the author says that most people of the village who knew Jagerstatter hold the opinion that his death is a waste and that he should have accepted his military service. When there is a monument erected to the memory of those killed in the war, Jagerstatter's name is included because of the insistence of the local priest who is also a war veteran. The author says that some of the villagers recall helping Mrs. Jagerstatter around the farm after her husband's arrest but the author says that Mrs. Jagerstatter does not remember that. Instead, she recalls that most of the villagers try to avoid her, probably to avoid any indication of aiding a Nazi subversive. The author notes that this is the one time that Mrs. Jagerstatter cries during his interview with her. He takes this as a sign that there might have been "more animosity than people are inclined to remember." Some of the villagers seem to believe that Jagerstatter is unbalanced and that he becomes so fanatical that he is set upon a course of self-destruction.

An interesting point made by the author is that few of the villagers are willing to call Jagerstatter a saint and the few who are willing to say that he had "done something great" are inclined to put limits on his actions, still holding to the idea that Jagerstatter did not make much difference in the grand scheme of things. As one man says, even if hundreds followed Jagerstatter's lead, there would not have been any difference noted in the war. Several note that if Jagerstatter had gone ahead and served in the military, he would have had at least a chance of surviving the war and returning home to his family. The author points out that the priest of the village sees Jagerstatter's actions as based on theological beliefs but that most people see it as a political action of little value.

The author notes that few of the young people he is able to interview have a favorable opinion but the general feeling of the town's people is that it is not a scandal to be covered up though it is seldom discussed at all. The daughters say that they are not subjected to any significant "unpleasantness." One of the daughters, Marie, says that she is glad the author is going to tell the story of her father's actions and says that the fact that some villagers are not really willing to talk is the result of "an uneasy conscience."

The author notes that newspapers learn of his project and send reporters to gather information about the project and about Jagerstatter, though the articles are "exaggerated" and emotional. The author says that the result might have been detrimental to his project but that several people react by talking to the author in an effort to "set the record straight."

The chapter closes with the author summing up the situation by saying that Jagerstatter's family see his actions as heroic and approve of his decision to follow his conscience. However, the people of the village see it as senseless though they still favorably remember Jagerstatter as a member of their community.

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The author notes that Jagerstatter's commentaries are clear and well thought out though there are some typographical errors and grammatical mistakes. He says that these errors are of no special interest other than to make clear the fact that Jagerstatter is not a well-educated man. The author says that there is no effort to reproduce those errors when the text is translated from Jagerstatter's native language.

The author presents an interesting question in whether Jagerstatter and others know of the atrocities being exacted on the Jews and others by the Nazis. While Jagerstatter's writings indicate that he does know, at least to some extent, the author points out that many people claim to have little or no knowledge of what is being done in the concentration camps. The author says that there was a concentration camp called Mauthausen which was located near Linz and that trains filled with human cargo passing through the area on the way to Mauthausen probably created more awareness than most people want to admit. The author seems to indicate that people claim—in 1961 when he is doing this research—that they did not know anything about the atrocities being committed.

Jagerstatter writes an interesting analogy, comparing those in positions of religious authority to road signs that are blown away by the wind. He says that following directions when the road signs are blown about is impossible. He then says that some in a position to give advice or instruction are unwilling to give information or even give incorrect information in an effort to end the questions. This seems to be a reference to those who tell Jagerstatter that he should accept his duty for military service in order to avoid persecution by the Nazis.

The Martyr and His Church and The Martyr as Rebel: A Sociological

The Martyr and His Church and The Martyr as Rebel: A Sociological Summary and Analysis

In "The Martyr and His Church," the author points out that Jagerstatter wanted support from his priests—the officials of his faith—but that none gave it. The author says that the majority of these men advise Jagerstatter to accept his military assignment and that most of them probably want to save Jagerstatter's life, but that they probably do not think of the war as unjust. If they thought the war was morally wrong, more of them would probably have stood with Jagerstatter. As it is, Jagerstatter stands as the "solitary witness" for his faith." Fr. Baldinger publishes an article in 1963 that includes the text of Jagerstatter's farewell letter and in this article, Baldinger refers to Jagerstatter as "a saint, for he had sacrificed everything—his possessions, his family, and his life—for his conscientious convictions." Baldinger does warn that this kind of rebellion is not demanded of everyone but says that Jagerstatter was "chosen." The author notes that Jagerstatter had not shared that opinion and that he wrote to his young daughters to remind them that suffering was a part of Christianity.

The author continues that Jagerstatter's choice of a time to rebel is unfortunate because so many of the church community chose to conform. One piece of evidence on this point is seen with the medical personnel who seek a "loophole" to avoid being held accountable for the involuntary sterilizations they perform at the Nazi party's instruction.

The final chapter is titled "The Martyr as Rebel: A Sociological Summary." In this chapter, the author discusses the framework of the book and the impact of this framework on the presentation of the information. He includes a definition by author and social theorist Robert K. Merton who describes the martyr as "the historically significant non-conformist," or "a distinct type of social deviant." The author goes on to discuss forms of social deviations, including those who are urged to resist because of the tradition of particular groups. The author notes that, for the most part, church objections to the Nazi regime are "institutional forms of protest and only incidentally and consequentially did it relate to the individual level of behavior." The author also says that Jagerstatter's stand could be used as a measure of the advancements of the church and the advances still left to make. The author's notes conclude with his statement that Jagerstatter's stand "exemplifies the relationship between the instituations of church and state in a crisis situation involving a convflict of values." He states that each reader should find what he believes to be the most meaningful part of Jagerstatter's stand.

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The author admits the truth of the statement that Jagerstatter's stand does not hurt the Nazi regime. He also points out that if there had been a hundred or even a thousand

men just like Jagerstatter who all stood against the regime and refused military service, the result would have been no different. The author says that, unfortunately, the church officials of the region felt that Jagerstatter's sacrifice was useless.

It is important that the reader not confuse the use of the word "deviant" as used by Zahn in the final chapter. Though the word carries a negative connotation because of popular use in modern language, a deviant is anyone who varies from socially accepted norms of behavior. In this case, it' i those groups that resist the requirement to serve in the military and the author talks about several of these groups, referring to the "deviant groups or communities" as being churches or religious sects, in some cases.

Characters

Franz Jagerstatter

An Austrian who hates the Nazi regime and all it stands for. When Jagerstatter is called to military service, he reports for training but when he is recalled for fighting he refuses on the basis that the Nazis are evil and that he is not going to be part of that effort. Jagerstatter is something of a wild youngster though most people says that he is not any worse than many others. At some point, there comes a major change in his life and he becomes devoutly religious and devoted to his family. He marries about this same time and some people believe that the marriage changes him though others believe that his marriage is something of a result of his change. The author is of the opinion that Jagerstatter actually chooses his wife because of this changed life. This devotion to his faith is such that he and his wife go to Rome on their honeymoon and see the pope while there. Though Jagerstatter is arrested, imprisoned and knows he is likely facing death, he continues to wrote words of encouragement to his wife and children. Jagerstatter is remembered by fellow inmates as having prayed constantly and having been willing to share his meager food rations at mealtimes. Though Jagerstatter knows that he could reverse his position at almost any time in order to gain his release, he continues to stand firm in his conviction that the Nazis are evil and that he cannot serve in their military. He is eventually executed for that stand.

Mrs. Jagerstatter

Wife of Franz Jagerstatter, she is a pious woman who probably approves of her husband's stand. Some people believe she encourages his stand and that she is wrong for having done so, but Jagerstatter's letters seem to indicate that he had little or no encouragement from her on this point because he encourages her to be honest about her opinion on his stand, if someone asks. Mrs. Jagerstatter apparently wants to visit her husband while he is in prison though he opposes the idea, possibly because he does not want her to see him in that condition but probably also because he knows that the parting will be emotional. Mrs. Jagerstatter holds the family farm together with her three young daughters after her husband's arrest. Ironically, some people feel that she spends too much time in church, thereby neglecting her duties related to the farm—the exact same thing they say about her husband prior to his arrest. The author notes that she carries on the interview with him about her husband's arrest, imprisonment and execution without crying but that she does cry when she talks about the way the villagers treat her after his arrest. She seems to recall little in the way of support or kindness from the villagers though at least one cites the fact that the villagers help her keep the farm going. Mrs. Jagerstatter says she tries to talk her husband out of his stand in an effort to save his life, but is unable to sway him.

Gordon Zahn

The author of the book, he becomes a part of the book by expressing his opinion on several points. An example of that is seen when Zahn has conflicting information from two sources; Zahn is more inclined to believe one over the other. Zahn says that Jagerstatter's case is virtually unknown until Zahn's research begins. Over the course of his work, he interviews a number of people who know Jagerstatter well and searches out those who had encountered Jagerstatter, some during his time in prison.

Rev. Franz Baldinger

A priest who knew Jagerstatter during his term in prison in Enns, Baldinger writes to the author after learning of Zahn's research regarding Jagerstatter. Baldinger says that he advised Jagerstatter to take the military oath in order to obtain his release from prison.

F.L. Feldmann

The attorney assigned to Jagerstatter's military case. Feldmann says that he recalls the case very well and that he is assigned to defend Jagerstatter because of an acquaintance who is an authority in the military court. Feldmann claims to have done everything he could possibly do to save Jagerstatter's life though he knew the odds were against him.

Father Bernhard Kunza

The priest who encountered Jagerstatter while he was in prison. Kunza is a chaplain and tries to encourage Jagerstatter to accept the military offer to serve in a non-combat capacity. Kunza apparently uses a tactic not utilized by others who try to talk to Jagerstatter by saying that there will be a need for good men like Jagerstatter to serve the country after the Nazi regime falls.

Archpriest Rev. Jochmann

A chaplain who is with Jagerstatter shortly before his execution. Jochmann recalls Jagerstatter's calm composure as his time of death approached. Jochmann offers to help Jagerstatter by praying or giving him religious reading material but Jagerstatter says that anything from an outsider would interrupt his personal communication with God. Jochmann says that Jagerstatter was a saint, and the only one he ever met personally.

The Cousin

A member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, he is very close to Jagerstatter and the two men often talk about religion. Some people feel that Jagerstatter's stand of refusing to serve in the military was prompted by this cousin though the cousin's wife denies this to be the case. It seems possible that the stand of the Jehovah's Witnesses as a whole might have impacted his resolve, though the cousin's wife says that most of the conversations between Jagerstatter and his cousin are spent with Jagerstatter trying to convert his cousin to the Catholic church.

Marie

Jagerstatter's daughter, she says that she is glad the author is going to tell the story of Jagerstatter's stand against the Nazi regime. Marie explains that some of the villagers do not want to talk about her father because of an "uneasy conscience," but does not explain what she means by this comment.

Fr. Furthauer

A priest who arrives in Jagerstatter's village while Jagerstatter is away for his initial military training. Furthauer takes the place of a priest who is exiled from the village for his anti-Nazi stand. Furthauer asks Jagerstatter to become a church sexton after witnessing Jagerstatter's apparent devotion to the church. He is with Mrs. Jagerstatter when they visit Jagerstatter just before his execution.

Objects/Places

St. Radegund

Where Jagerstatter lived as a child and as an adult prior to his arrest.

Leherbauer

The name taken by anyone who is proprietor of the property of Jagerstatter's family. It is noted that this notation is passed to the landowner, regardless of that person's last name, and passed in Jagerstatter's case to his daughter and her husband.

Enns

Where Jagerstatter was ordered to report for military service.

Linz

Where Jagerstatter was initially held in prison.

Linzer Volksblatt

The newspaper in Linz that ran the story about the author's project, resulting in two additional sources of information about Jagerstatter's stay in prison in Linz.

Regensburg

Where Jagerstatter apparently stopped on his way to Berlin and where he wrote a brief letter to his wife.

Berlin

Where Jagerstatter was moved to serve in prison after leaving Enns.

Brandenburg

Where Jagerstatter was executed.

On the Question of Our Day: Catholic or Nazi?

The first of a series of commentaries written by Jagerstatter prior to his imprisonment, this includes the dream about the train.

Mauthausen

A concentration camp located near Linz.

Themes

The Need to Stand Up for What's Right

The need to stand up for what he believed to be right was the driving force behind Jagerstatter's actions and he had total faith that God would provide for him in eternity. Though he knew that he would be put to death for his stand against the Nazis, he refused to agree to serve in the military. Jagerstatter was urged to capitulate by family, friends and advisers, including church officials. The author notes that several priests told him that the right thing to do was to take the military oath and agree to serve. Though Jagerstatter was promised a non-combat position by the Nazi military leaders, he could not serve an evil regime, even in that capacity. He argued that, if he were working as a corpsman, he would simply be releasing someone else from that duty, allowing them to take his place in fighting.

For Jagerstatter, the question became whether he could serve the Nazis and still expect to be accepted into heaven. He believed to serve in the military would be to jeopardize his eternity in heaven. The author pointed out that there is no basis in the idea that Jagerstatter might have been a coward who feared being killed in fighting. In fact, Jagerstatter knew that he would be put to death for refusing to serve in the military but believed that to be the correct stand. Jagerstatter's wife also indicated that he would gladly have taken up arms against the Nazis, had the Austrians fought when the Nazis invaded their country. Through the months in prison, Jagerstatter seemed to occasionally have grown depressed and some reported that he might have considered taking a military position, but he never did.

Conformity

The tendency to conform to the attitudes and actions of the masses was a problem Jagerstatter faced head on. He decided early during the Nazi occupation that the Nazi regime was evil and that he would not participate in it. This was a difficult stand for him because he was almost completely alone in his dissent. The author notes that there were medical personnel who performed involuntary sterilizations at the Nazi party's behest who sought a "loophole" that would exonerate them from responsibility for their roles in this torture. The church seldom spoke out against the Nazis and did not seem to require any individual responsibility at all for actions taken during the Nazi regime. The author addresses this tendency for conformity and says that Jagerstatter also talked about the fact that the church was not standing up for what was right, but was choosing to take the less-hazardous road of conforming to Nazi policies.

An interesting point is made by the author who says that one priest told of Jagerstatter's joy upon learning of another priest's rebellion against the Nazis. This is an aspect of rebellion that Jagerstatter sorely misses—a group with which he can conform or unite.

The author also notes that Jagerstatter is denied the support of his church, even after his death.

Subjectivity of Memories

The author conducts his research on Jagerstatter and the events leading up to his death some twenty years after Jagerstatter's death. The fact that he waits this length of time means that some of the people he interviews are unable to recall specific events or remember details that do not mesh with documented research. A prime example of this is seen when the author learns from a villager that the people of the village—Jagerstatter's neighbors—helped Mrs. Jagerstatter with the farm work after Jagerstatter's arrest. However, when the author asks Mrs. Jagerstatter about that, she begins to cry and says that she received little support from the villagers. This seems realistic in one sense because the neighbors might have feared reprisal from Nazi officials if they aided the family of an imprisoned subversive. However, the villagers are known to have hidden a deserter for some time, providing for him and even providing medical aid without ever betraying his whereabouts to the authorities. In situations such as this, the author presents his own opinions as to which of the memories are correct and why.

Another example of this is seen with an informal farewell letter, apparently written by Jagerstatter while he was in prison, in the possession of Mrs. Jagerstatter. However, she cannot remember how she came to possess the letter and it differs somewhat from the "formal" farewell letter written from his cell and handed to authorities a short time before his execution.

Style

Perspective

The book is written in first person from the perspective of the author. This is somewhat unusual in a book of this kind because the author is not part of the story other than as the person conducting the research necessary to write the book. Nonetheless, the author puts himself into the action of the book repeatedly. One example is seen early in the book when the author is describing his efforts to discover the reason Jagerstatter changes from a wild youngster to a serious and devout young man. The author presents several theories based on the research and comments from people he interviewed with two people disagreeing on whether Jagerstatter had made pilgrimages to the Altotting shrine prior to his death. The author then states, in parenthesis, "I incline to favor the pastor's account in this instance." This is an indication that the author includes his personal views in some cases though he does continue to base the majority of his information on interviews and documentation. Another important aspect of this perspective is noted by the author who realizes that the interviews he conducts are subject to the memories, biases and ideals of those being interviewed. For example, some people may not remember fully the actions of Jaggerstatter because those actions may not have been especially important at the time they occur. People trying to recall those actions later may elaborate. People may not be willing to tell negative stories about Jagerstatter considering that he is eventually executed for his beliefs. Others may recall more of the negative side of the situation because they do not agree with his stand. The author also notes that he believes the majority of the people interviewed are willing to tell the truth without holding back. Again, it is left to the reader to determine whether all those interview are completely truthful.

Tone

The tone of the book is complex because the reader knows from the beginning that the main character, Franz Jagerstatter, is doomed to execution. Jagerstatter also knows that he is likely to be held in prison indefinitely or executed and the majority of the story is presented from Jagerstatter's letters written to his wife. With this knowledge, it is inevitable that there are points of sadness and emotional lows evident in Jagerstatter's letters. These emotional lows are presented as they occur but the majority of Jagerstatter's letters are upbeat and encouraging. These letters are evidently efforts to encourage his family to achieve spiritual heights though he also speaks of other aspects of both his own life and of his family's. He refers to his mother and seems to worry that she is not happy with his decision to refuse the Nazi Party's demand for his military service. He also seems to worry that his family might be criticized or harassed for his decision. His wife seems to want to visit Jagerstatter in prison but Jagerstatter seems to want to keep her away, probably so that he will not have to have another emotional leave-taking from her and to spare her the emotional toll of seeing him in prison. The fact that Jagerstatter remains in prison for a long time without being sentenced seems

to wear on him and it is probably a great deal of the reason he has the emotional lows evident in his letters.

Structure

The book is divided into ten chapters. These are named Franz Jagerstatter: An Introduction; St. Radegund; The Young Ruffian; The "New" Man; From Enns to Berlin; One of God's Special Friends; A Train to Hell; The Martyr and His Village; The Martyr and His Church; The Martyr as Rebel: and A Sociological Summary. The chapters vary greatly in length. The first chapter, the introduction of Jagerstatter, is only about five pages in length. Several of the chapters are more than twenty pages, including the fifth and sixth chapters. The book also includes a brief preface that is only about two pages in length. After the final chapter, there are two appendices, titled simply Appendix I and Appendix II. The first includes "The Jagerstatter Documents" and is the author's comments related to the documentation discovered during his research. The author notes that there were several unexpected documents, including some letters that no other researcher had discovered. The final appendix is divided into two parts, "A Methodological Note" and "A Note on Secondary Sources and Bibliography." Both are self-explanatory. The book includes a great number of quotations from the various letters discovered by the author during his research. The majority of these are written by Jagerstatter to his wife during his time in prison. These quotes are presented in boldface type and that distinction is described by the author in a footnote.

Quotes

"The villager's memories of the changed man emphasize two major points: his intense and open religiosity and his thoroughgoing opposition to the Nazi regime. These two characteristics of his later thought and behavior are so closely interwoven that it is sometimes difficult to treat them separately." The New Man, p. 40.

"He likened him to a man who finds a little worm while digging in his garden and holds in his hands the choice of letting it live or cutting it in two with a stroke of his spade—for no cause and without justice. Such was Hitler who wished to dispose of the lives of those he oppressed at his pleasure." From Enns to Berlin, p. 79.

"I would have liked, too, to spare you the pain and sorrow you must bear because of me. But you know we must love God even more than family, and we must lose everything dear and worthwhile on earth rather than commit even the slightest offense against God." One of God's Special Friends, p. 100.

"On that very same evening, Father Jochmann was to say in the company of the sisters, 'I can only congratulate you on this countryman of yours who lived as a saint and now died a hero. I say with certainty that this simple man is the only saint that I have ever met in my lifetime.'" One of God's Special Friends, p. 107.

"But his references to terrifying weapons that the human mind has invented and will probably continue to invent, or to the possibility that man could invent a weapon capable of smashing the entire world into ruins, serve merely to introduce what he considers the most dangers weapons of all, those weapons of the spirit and mind with which one tears the true Catholic faith from the children and from men's hearts (or no longer permits it entry there)." A Train to Hell, p. 127.

"While all the others 'did their duty' by accepting without protest or hesitancy the military service demanded of them, this man—and only he—took an open and final stand against the regime, against the war, and even against the victory for which the rest of them were hoping." The Martyr and His Village, p. 138.

"It was recognized by all that the death penalty was a foregone conclusion in this case and that there could be no charge of even suspicion that he was motivated by cowardice. One veteran of the war gave the most explicit statement when he said that Franz had forfeited all the chances of surviving the war that men in the service enjoyed." The Martyr and His Village, p. 140.

"To sum it up succinctly, the community continues to reject Jagerstatter's stand as a stubborn and pointless display of essentially political imprudence, or even an actual failure to fulfill a legitimate duty." The Martyr and His Village, p. 146.

"To the family, the rebel's behavior was accepted and honored as obedience to a moral imperative imposed upon him by his religious commitment—a commitment which, in

their eyes was not excessive, although they certainly recognized it as exceptional. The rest of the village, on the other hand, saw Jagerstatter's refusal to serve in the arm as a thoroughly tragic and ultimately senseless act of religious fanaticism, born of a sadly disordered mind." The Martyr and His Village, p. 159.

"A hundred or a thousand Jagerstatters marching heroically to the executioner's block in preference to serving in the tyrant's armies would not have weakened those forces enough to cause or even hasten his downfall." The Martyr and His Church, p. 178.

"Now anyone who is able to fight for both kingdoms and stay in good standing in both communities (that is, the community of saints and the Nazi Folk Community) and who is able to obey every command of the Third Reich—such a man, in my opinion, would have to be a great magician." The Martyr as a Reble: A Sociological Summary, p. 193.

"As yet, however, very little attention has been paid to the special problem posed by Jagerstatter: the need to take a stand against a government that would lead its Christian citizens into committing murder." The Martyr as a Rebel: A Sociological Summary, p. 206.

Topics for Discussion

Describe Franz Jagerstatter's life and death. The author presents several possible scenarios about the life change that occurs in Jagerstatter's life. Which do you believe to be true? Why?

What is Jagerstatter's reaction to the Nazi occupation of Austria? What is his reaction when he is called for military service? What is the reaction of the villagers regarding this stand? What is the reaction of his wife? What is the reaction of his mother?

Jagerstatter seeks out advice prior to his refusal to serve in the Nazi military. What is the advice he gets? Why is it important that he sought this advice? Why did he refuse to follow the advice? What is the significance of the advice he received?

Jagerstatter and his wife are each criticized for spending too much time in prayer and in church. Why did people believe that it was a problem? Was it? Support your answer.

Describe Jagerstatter's advice to his family and friends from his prison cell. What is the tone of these letters? What does he say is the most important consideration in earthly endeavors? Do you believe his wife and children heed that advice? Support your answers.

What does Jagerstatter's family believe about his refusal to serve in the military? How does the villagers' opinion differ? What is the basis for the opinion voiced by the villagers? Are they correct? Could Jagerstatter have made a stand in some other way?

What is Jagerstatter's opinion of the Nazis? What does he mean when he calls the Nazis' efforts an "unjust war?" Was the war "unjust?" Some call Jagerstatter a "saint" or a "martyr?" Was he? Why? What does the author say about "social deviants?" Does Jagerstatter qualify under that definition? Why do you believe Rev. Baldinger says that not everyone is called on to make this kind of stand?