



Written by [Patrick Krey](#) on February 18, 2010

## Antiwar Catholics on Ash Wednesday

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. — Matthew 5:9  
Wednesday February 17, 2010 was Ash Wednesday, which marked the start of Lent, the traditional 40-day period of fasting, prayer, and penitence for many Christians around the world. Lent is the period of the liturgical year leading up to Easter. In observance of the day, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and many other Christians hold church ceremonies in which the “foreheads of the faithful are marked with the sign of the cross with ashes made from last year’s Palm Sunday palms as a sign of repentance and reminder of mortality.”



In Downtown Buffalo, New York, [Catholics](#) outside St. Joseph’s Cathedral handed out flyers featuring Franz Jagerstatter which promoted their own unique fast. Jagerstatter was an [Austrian conscientious objector](#) from Hitler’s Army who was beatified (i.e., declared “blessed,” or having possessed heroic virtue) on October 26, 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI.

When the Nazis arrived, not only did he refuse collaboration with their evil intentions, he even rejected benefits from the regime in areas that had nothing to do with its racial hatreds or pagan warmongering. It must have hurt for a poor father of three to turn down the money to which he was entitled through a Nazi family assistance program.... But he serenely decided that he could not allow himself to contribute to a regime that was immoral and anti-Catholic.

The flyer handed out by the “Franz Jaggerstatter People for Breaking the Silence” contained the following explanation for their unique fast: “Inspired by the witness of Blessed Franz Jaggerstatter; angered by the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan by our government and the subsequent acts of terror and civilian atrocities committed in the past eight years, mourning American casualties, both loss of life as well as physical and mental disabilities; we admit our own complicity by our failure to raise our voices more forcefully.”

Such a statement might seem outrageous to the many American Christians, who in [great numbers](#) support an imperial foreign policy of maintaining or increasing troop levels in Afghanistan and Iraq, while expanding operations in Pakistan, Yemen, and possibly Iran. But is the present U.S. foreign policy contradictory to Christian principles? (We already know it is [contradictory](#) to constitutional principles.)

According to Laurence Vance, author of [Christianity and War and Other Essays Against the Warfare State](#), Christians who truly believe in [the sanctity of life](#) should be fervently opposed to war.

Do adults have the same right to life as unborn children? Do foreigners have the same right to life as unborn American babies? Many pro-lifers don’t think so. It is hypocrisy in the highest degree to talk about the sanctity of life, the evils of abortion, the horrors of partial-birth abortion, and to vocally claim



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that one is pro-life, but then turn around and show contempt for, or indifference to, the lives of adults and foreigners. Are the lives of unborn children more valuable than the lives of adults? Are the lives of unborn American babies more valuable than the lives of foreigners? ... U.S. soldiers have now been fighting in Iraq for seven years. They have been fighting in Afghanistan even longer. Countless numbers of Iraqis and Afghans have been killed by American bombs and bullets in senseless wars of imperialism and occupation. Thousands of U.S. soldiers died in vain thanks to the lies of the Bush administration. Hundreds more have died under the Obama administration thanks to the president's failure to bring the troops home from Iraq as promised and the escalation of the war in Afghanistan. Do U.S. soldiers have a right not to have to give their life in vain?

The people handing out the [Franz Jaggerstatter flyers](#) in Buffalo and other cities around the nation have loose connections with Pax Christi, a progressive organization with [priorities](#) more in common with the left such as economic justice (forced redistribution of wealth) and healthcare reform (socialized medicine) than those commonly associated with the religious right — such as opposition to abortion and gay marriage. But does this negate their message of peace? Isn't this what happens when the average Christian abandons the Bible's teachings on peace to the left wing? Shouldn't it be the responsibility of all Christians to preach the gospel of peace?

The end of the pamphlet included the [following prayer](#) which strikes a chord in these times of endless war and Godless government actions.

In Memory of Franz: Lord Jesus Christ, You filled your servant Franz Jagerstatter with a deep love for you, his family, and all people. During a time of contempt for God and humankind, you bestowed on him unerring discernment and integrity.

In Faith he followed his conscience and said a decisive NO to National Socialism (Nazism) and unjust war. Thus he sacrificed his life. We pray that you may glorify your servant Franz, so that many people may be encouraged by him and grow in love for you and all people. May his example shine out in our time and may you grant all people the strength to stand up for justice, peace and human dignity.

For yours is the glory and honor with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

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