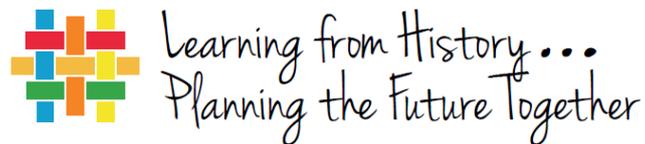




Project: Learning from history ... planning the future together



Biografie Johann Gruber

Theaterprogramm "Der Fall Gruber"
Übersetzung Gerhard Schützinger

Titelseite:
Der Fall Gruber

A play by Thomas Baum

S2:
Cast & Contributors

Johann Gruber	Franz Froschauer
Josef Baumgartner	
Ludwig Pramer	
Père Jaques	Andreas Puerhinger
Sister Virginia	
Katharina Gruber	Katharina Bigus
Vinzenz Blasl	
Fritz Seidler	Alois Kreuzwieser
Sister Hyanzitha	
Sister Pacifica	Tanja Jetzinger
Blind Girl	Anna Valentina Lebeda
Director	Franz Froschauer
Music	Peter Androsch

Dramatic Composition Franz Huber
Lights/Sound Viteka & Lorenz OG
Technics Helmut Weißböck

S3:

The Initiators

Plattform Johann Gruber & Papa-Gruber-Kreis

The play *Der Fall Gruber (The Gruber Case)* was commissioned by the organization Plattform Johann Gruber and initiated by Papa-Gruber-Kreis, a specialized committee of St. Georgen an der Gusen's parish council. People of various ages and convictions work with great passion on shedding light on Dr. Johann Gruber and make his name known to the public. Thus, we saw many activities, many projects being realized, in the recent years: publication, educational material, initiations of cultural projects, various projects to raise awareness as well as the initiative for the legal rehabilitation of Johann Gruber.

Based on the Gruber biography written by historian DDr. Helmut Wagner, we could spark the interests of author Thomas Baum, director and actor Franz Froschauer, and musician Peter Androsch. They made the idea of this play become a reality.

May it be performed on many of Austria's stages. May *Der Fall Gruber* counteract current political developments in Europe and may it help us to reflect and to not forget. We hope that this play will be a pillar against any kind of right-wing extremism in the present and future.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone involved in the success of this play!

S4-5:

Johann Gruber

Teacher . Priest . Nazi-Opponent . Concentration Camp Inmate . Martyr.

1889 birth at Grieskirchen to a modest family, four siblings, early death of his parents

1902 accepted at the educational institution for boys: Petrinum, Linz-Urfahr

1910 accepted at the seminary of Linz

1913 ordination as priest, following years as a vicar

1918 beloved educator and teacher at the catholic orphanage of Linz

1919 – 1923 teacher training focussing on history and geography in Vienna. Studies progressive methods of pedagogy, graduation

1923 passionate teacher at the bishop's teacher-training facility (Bischöfliche Lehrerbildungsanstalt) and at various schools in Linz; enjoys the respect and deep admiration of his pupils

1934 accepted as dean of the Institute for the Blind in Linz, continual commitment for young blind people. Throughout his life, Gruber is straight-forward, following his path without fear of conflict. Clashes with nuns who take care of the blind as they accuse him of a lack of physical distance

1938 Gruber disapproves of National Socialism, charged by the Gestapo for incitement („Aufwiegelung“) and alleged indecent behavior towards mentally challenged, blind girls

10 May 1938 arrestment and show trial at the court of Linz, conviction for incarceration at Garsten penitentiary

February 1940 protective custody and deportation to Concentration Camp Dachau

August 1940 „Protective Custody Prisoner Nr. 43050“ at Concentration Camp Gusen, initially secretary at the sickbay, then responsible for archeological research and administration of the camp museum; initiation of a secret network to help his fellow inmates, provides the „Gruber Soup“, foundation of a camp school, special care for young inmates to strengthen their will to survive and to give them hope for a future outside of the camp

April 1944 his charitable society is uncovered, Gruber’s arrest, torture lasting for days at the bunker of Gusen’s administration building

7 April 1944 Gruber dies in the aftermath of torture. He remains in the grateful memory of his fellow inmates

7 January 2016 complete legal rehabilitation of Dr. Johann Gruber at the criminal court of Vienna.

S. 6-7

The Playwright

Thomas Braun

Born in 1958 in Linz, he started out as a playwright with widely discussed plays such as *Raue Zeiten* and *Kalte Hände*. Recently he wrote *Franckstraße 137* and *Happy Planet* for Linz’s „Theater Phönix.“

He was awarded with the Geneva-Europe Assistance Prize for Television Writing and the TV-Prize for Austrian Public Education for his first screenplay *Im Dunstkreis* in 1991. He received the award for Upper Austrian Regional Culture for his collected works.

He wrote prime-time movies such as *Das Geständnis* and *Ausgeliefert*, several episodes of the TV-series’ *Tatort*, *Der Winzerkönig* und *Die Rosenheim Cops* as well as a documentary episode for *Universum History*. Along with director Andreas Prochaska he wrote the screenplay to *Dead in 3 Days*, for which he was awarded the Silver Melies for Best European Fantastic Film and the Golden Ticket.

In autumn 2015 he published his first crime novel called *Donau so rot*.

Aside from his works as an author and playwright, Baum works as a supervisor, teaching supervisor, life- and social councillor and lecturer at the University of Arts in Linz.

Quite a while ago, Christoph Freudenthaler introduced me to Johann Gruber. Continually and persistently he kept suggesting I should write a play about this controversial and unconventional priest. Initially, I was reluctant because I was still working on my own material. Then, though, I read Helmut Wagner’s

meticulously researched and clever Gruber biography which had me hooked from the first to the very last sentence.

The next significant step was my first meeting with director and actor Franz Froschauer in the area of the former concentration camp Gusen and our subsequent meeting with the highly motivated members of Papa-Gruber-Kreis. It was this moment that sparked my interest, and I put all my passion into that project.

I began going deeper into my research, trying to understand this lively and many-faceted man and his reality: his early strokes of fate, his tendency to charity and economic planning, ideas of reform and resistance as a priest and educator – and his fearlessly critical approach towards politics and clergy.

The spirit of this undoubtedly also difficult grumbler Gruber would in no way be broken. On the contrary. Even in concentration camp, the down-to-earth priest would stick his neck out and use the full scale of his curious skillset for the benefit of his fellow inmates.

Thanks to Plattform Johann Gruber, my writing process enabled me to realize how much meaning- and helpfulness a person can provide despite the most dire straits.

S 8-9

The director and lead

Franz Froschauer

Born in 1958 in Vöcklabruck. Acting studies at Anton Bruckner University Linz. Passed with distinction.

Engagement among others:

Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, Residenztheater München, EDT Hamburg, Münchner Volkstheater, Theater Phönix, Theater Hausruck

1996 head of Festwochen Gmunden (Gmunden Theater Festival). Directed *Kleidertausch (Le Triomphe de l'amour)*, *Totentanz*, *Andorra* and *Eichmann*. Various roles on TV and the big screen, such as *The Quality of Mercy*, *Fast Fuck*, *Vortex*, and *9*.

Frühwirt/Skrabal in Franzobels *HUNT* (won the Nestroy Prize twice, Landeskulturpreis, Vöckla Award), 2015 Stage Art Prize (Anerkennungsbühnenkunstpreis) of Upper Austria for his role as Eichmann.

Various readings and chanson evenings in Austria and abroad.

It started after a performance of *Eichmann*. Christoph Freudenthaler approached me and asked if I knew of Johann Gruber, priest and educator. Well, I reacted just as most people of mine and the younger generations would: „Johann Gruber? No, doesn't ring a bell!“ When Christoph mentioned the „Papa Gruber Soup“ and spoke of him being murdered in concentration camp, it slowly dawned on me.

I began to become more interested and read into it. Quite quickly, I was astonished how such a shining light of humanity could disappear out of the public eye of this country and of the institutions he had worked in. Gruber's character was complex, of course he also had rough edges. But these interested me as much as his good deeds. And when I received the offer to work on the “Gruber Case” in the form of a play, the collaboration with author Thomas Baum was set in stone.

„Don't overdo it again!“, sister Katharina said, to which he replied: „It is better to light a small candle each day than to lament over the darkness!“

His deeds make up the fascination of the character Johann Gruber. I wonder what his place would be in our present world?

S 10-11

The Diocesan Bishop

Dr. Manfred Scheuer

Johann Gruber was a man of god and a philanthropist, someone whose heart was with the youth, especially the education of the youth. He showed a strong inclination towards contemporary and progressive pedagogy. This is a constant doctrine, starting with his work as a teacher and dean in the catholic orphanage, as dean of Linz's Institution for the Blind, and eventually as mentor for the young inmates at concentration camp Gusen. Johann Gruber was a man of action, who even in the system of camp Gusen found a way to realize his beneficence. With his eagerness to reform and his uncompromising character, he was a controversial figure within the church as well. Johan Gruber's life is full of facets. It shows, what pure philanthropy can achieve – to be an „angel in hell.“ But it also shows how deeply we can fall if we succumb to envy and quarrel.

„The Case Gruber“ helps us to remember. We remember Johann Gruber as a victim of National Socialism, but also as a victim of the situation within the Catholic Church at the time. We do not want him to also become a victim of oblivion. On the contrary, it is our duty to preserve the memory of what he stood for and ultimately was murdered for. It is necessary to analyse how and why it happened. Without analysis, commemoration remains a pious ritual. What remains dubious threatens to reappear in new shapes and forms. Close examination of the crimes of National Socialism is not merely a discipline of history studies. It needs to put us on high alert when today people are degraded to mere expense factors and strictly categorized according to economical and technocratic calculations. Commemoration, after all, is also a warning against coarsening and potential setback into barbarity.

The commemoration of Johann Gruber includes the question for the Church how it deals with rivalry and conflict. For this reason, the cathedral, the Bischofskirche of the Diocese Linz, is an appropriate venue for this play. The church's concrete reality still shows damaged and damaging relationships, obstacles, burdens, humiliations, power-plays against our own community. This community has to be rediscovered with the communal spirituality Pope John Paul II described in „Novo Millennio ineunte.“ It includes the „ability to first and foremost see the positive sides of others in order to take and appreciate them as god's gifts. Communal spirituality means to give space to our brothers and sisters as we ‚carry each other's' burdens' (Gal 6:2). It means to resist temptations of the ego which threaten us constantly and create careerism, distrust and envy.“

To foster communal spirituality – this is the great challenge of our Church. It can find significant help in this task by engaging with Johann Gruber and his testimony of faith.

The Educator

Mag.^a Sieglinde Witzany

Since I work as a teacher and thus spend my everyday life with young people, I am especially interested in the teacher and educator Johann Gruber. In him, I see a person who was sensible towards the needs of children, adolescents, and young adults. A contemporary witness says Gruber spoke an “Esperanto of the heart”, meaning that he had the gift of highly developed empathy, which helped him quickly build relationships and trust.

In this concern, I think of his work as a teacher at the catholic orphanage and at schools in Linz, as dean of the Institute for the Blind and as an inmate in Concentration Camp Gausen. Gruber was a reliable key carer, accepted authority figure, and passionate teacher who understood how to convey the value of education. He was like a father who cared for his protégés and who in the years of his imprisonment strengthened the hope of survival and the human dignity of his fellow inmates. Despite all his seemingly undaunted deeds, I do not think that he was completely without fear. Instead, I believe Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous quote applies: “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear.”

Several questions about youth today arise, when I think of Gruber’s devotion to young people. Despite an abundance of materialism and constant digital connectedness, inner emptiness, lack of fundamental relationships and general disorientation become apparent.

Where can young people today find consistent, patient, and encouraging devotion and comfort from adults? Who offers an opposition to the prevailing arbitrariness of our times? Who offers a set of values based on responsibility, mutual respect and humanitarianism?

Where are the protective borders young people require to find orientation and stability?

Who can they trust and who will listen to them without being burnt-out from their own daily lives?

I believe that all of this is important in order to see oneself as a person who is loved and appreciated by god.

The life and death of Johann Gruber is a provocation, since it shows that man and woman are destined to be free and in any situation in life there are opportunities to act on that very freedom:

He counteracts

- blind following of National Socialism with highly aware resistance,
- apathy and the turning of a blind eye with empathy for the hardship of his fellows,
- cooptation and narrow worldviews with a broad horizon and independent thought,
- the alleged fulfilment of one’s “duty” with rigid resistance against evil, be it as culprit, observer or victim,
- the question of “What could we have ever done?” with the honesty of a man who shows us that even under highest ideological pressure it is possible to remain decent and humane.

The Historian

DDr. Helmut Wagner

Interview with DDr. Helmut Wagner, biographer of

Dr. Johann Gruber. Priest – Teacher – Patriot. 1889 – 1944. Nonconformity and its consequences in the times of National Socialism

Which of Johann Gruber's character traits can we trace back to his childhood and adolescence?

Already at the age of twelve, Gruber became an orphan and was responsible for his three younger siblings. This is most significant since throughout his life he was a substitute father figure to many people.

What were the ideological and political dynamics that lead to Gruber's arrest and conviction?

I think Gruber's arrest was based on tragic systemic cooperation: On the one hand, there's the Church with its disdain for his progressive teaching methods, on the other hand there's the Nazi-regime with its determination to "eradicate" pious teachers.

Your biographical approach towards Johann Gruber is in no way glorifying, but highly analytical. How did you managed to find the necessary distance?

There were two important components. First, I had many talks with my historian colleagues, who critically commented on my hypothesis during the research process. Secondly, there was the project's duration (10 years), which helped me find some distance as opposed to initial emotional attachment.

Gruber's many achievements are based on his eclectic and stubborn personality. What is at the core of Johann Gruber's personality?

Gruber's most impressive achievement was, I think, that in every stage of his life – as a minor towards his siblings, as a teacher and dean towards his pupils, and as an inmate towards his fellows – he remained almost radically true to his "calling": to help and strengthen people. Such persistence in character is extraordinary.

Why did the rehabilitation of Gruber's case take so long?

Within the family, there was no knowledge of the opportunity of legal rehabilitation. I also assume that the family was too ashamed of the conviction. Unfortunately, for quite a long time there was the belief within the Church that Gruber was judged by a court, thus being lawfully convicted. This opinion was stronger than the influence of those who strived to honor him.

What do you think is Gruber's relevance as a resistance fighter?

Even though Gruber clearly saw and articulated the consequences of the "Anschluss" (the "annexation" of Austria), I do not primarily see him as a freedom fighter. To me, Gruber is a radical partisan for humanity who would not be kept from following his duties to help those in need – not even by a totalitarian regime. But yes, the "coolness" and the scope with which he created opportunities for his humanitarian acts within the concentration camp could legitimize the label "resistance fighter" against the Nazi-regime.

S. 16-17

The contemporary witnesses

Paul Brusson – relentless advocate for Johann Gruber

Thanks to Paul Brusson, a former inmate of Concentration Camp Gusen and long-time president of the International Mauthausen Committee Belgium, we are aware of Johan Gruber today. Into his old age he would, along with school classes and students, travel from his home in Belgium to Gusen in order to report what had happened to him and his fellow inmates in Concentration Camp Gusen. In the center of these touching reports was his meeting with Gruber, who he would refer to as “Father Gruber” and to whom he owed his life.

Throughout his life he fought for the rehabilitation of his savior. Shortly before his death in 2011 he talked about how close he still felt to “Father Gruber:” “I never stopped thinking about him. He gave his life for others. Without him, I wouldn’t be here to tell his story.”

Paul Brusson entrusted Johann Gruber to us. We keep them both in our memories, in honest gratitude, and deep admiration.

Mag.a Sieglinde Witzany, Member of Papa-Gruber-Kreis

Zdzislaw Rakowski

“He was here and there, you could feel him all over the place. He had friends in every nation of Europe, because he spoke an Esperanto of the heart, which everyone understood. He was fearless, small in appearance but of great character, constantly seeking new ways to help others.”

Renè Dugrand

“A fellow inmate received the holy communion from the hands of the priest. Since this communion had given me hope, I signalled to him that I desired the same. He looked at me for a long time with a loving expression and said: ‘In your current state, soup is more important than the host. Your host, my children, is beet soup.’”

Jean Cayrol

“I was only hours away from death on the day Father Gruber found me. I was starving, feverish, and freezing... Father Gruber brought mashed potatoes. I called my friend and together we ate it all within five minutes. Father Gruber had tears in his eyes... We owe him our lives. He was an extraordinary personality... He fed the patients with motherly patience, especially the sick who did not want to eat anymore as they were awaiting death as their only possible salvation. Food, though, was the first and most fundamental means of resistance.”

Louis Deblè

“In the evening after 12 hours of labour up to 30 young, starving inmates would gather and he appeared like a heavenly saint to distribute his soup. He was our Christ in hell.”

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Kontakt: Mag.a Andrea Wahl, MBA: Marktplatz 7, 4310 Mauthausen, Mob. 0660 229 2906, e-mail: andrea.wahl@bewusstseinsregion.at, www.bewusstseinsregion.at

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Contact: Mag.a Andrea Wahl, MBA: Marktplatz 7, 4310 Mauthausen, Mob. 0660 229 2906, e-mail: andrea.wahl@bewusstseinsregion.at, www.bewusstseinsregion.at