

BOOK BREAK

The pope's a target in Father Koesler mystery



ESTHER LITTMAN

The clergyman as master sleuth, set against the background of the sacred and the sinister. This has been a winning combination for West Bloomfield author William Kienzle. Beginning with his first novel, "The Rosary Murders," released in 1987 as a motion picture, Kienzle's publications now number 17, with no sign of abatement.

Like its predecessors, "Call No Man Father" (Andrews and McMeel, 1995, \$18.95) is another Father Koesler murder mystery. This time, the devout yet by no means dogmatic priest looks forward to the pope's appearance in Detroit. Yet anticipation turns into apprehension when the purpose of the papal visit becomes clear: To state infallibly "that artificial birth control is wrong for everybody, all the time, no matter what the circumstances." What most non-Catholics and, I suspect, many Catholics don't know is that the current papal position on birth control isn't an infallible doctrine but one that invites (or strongly suggests) "religious assent."

Now the pope becomes the target not only of agitators and extremists but also of the disenchanted — dedicated Catholics who, nevertheless, view birth control as an economic and social necessity.

The stakes are high for people like Inspector Koznicki of Homicide, whose department is responsible for the Holy Father's security. Would he be willing to take a bullet for a man whose intransigence will surely drive his married son from the Church? Then there's David Wallace, a widower still grieving for his young wife who would be alive today had she not been forced to bear a child against the doctor's orders. As choir director, Wallace will have access to the pope. Dare he take revenge? Even Fa-

ther Koesler, having witnessed too often the devastating results of unwelcome parenthood, wishes that something would keep the pope in Rome. What none of them realizes, however, is that their controversial visitor isn't the only one in danger.

William Kienzle, who has never seen the movie version of his "Rosary Murders," comes by his knowledge of Catholic dogma and custom firsthand. Ordained to the priesthood in 1964, he spent 20 years as parish priest and 12 years as editor-in-chief of the Michigan Catholic. After he left the priesthood, Kienzle served as director of the Center for Contemplative Studies in Dallas, Texas. Then came the Father Koesler series.

Since "nuns and priests had made up my principal life," says Kienzle, "I decided to follow the adage and 'Go with what you know.'"

As a one-time insider, Kienzle provides plenty of insight, both positive and negative, into Church politics and practice. Yet from a purely literary point of view, his commentary sometimes becomes excessive. The author is clearly at his best when "showing" rather than "telling." The opening chapter, for example, is a humdinger — a study in diversionary tactics to heighten the element of surprise. Also masterful are the chapters devoted to a group of bored and delinquent teens in Bloomfield Hills, for whom rape and murder of the average mortal is anticlimactic and who now seek to enact the "ultimate media event" by assassinating a celebrity. The characterization of their psychopathic leader rings true, and the action is shocking in its stark brutality.

Kienzle's religious instructions are interesting but need a lighter touch. Nevertheless, an eclectic cast of characters, multiple murders to maintain suspense, and the familiar figure of Father Koesler, whose faith is always wedded to reason, add up to an enjoyable



Murder, he writes: "Call No Man Father" is William Kienzle's latest Father Koesler murder mystery.

summer read.

Esther Littman, a Bloomfield Township resident, is a lecturer in English and German at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield. As an only

child, she grew up regarding books as substitutes for siblings. You can leave her a message from a touch-tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1893. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.

READERS CALENDAR

■ BIRMINGHAM-BLOOMFIELD
Barros and Noble, 6575
Telegraph, (810) 840-4209

Sunday Adventures: Yoga for kids with a demonstration for adults, too! 2 p.m. July 2.

Terry Daunter discusses and signs her book "The Spiritual Dance of Life" 1-3 p.m. Saturday, July 8.

Let's Do Brunch Film Lovers Club: Screenwriter Jim Bernstein talks about the writing process and his experience in film. Join us for refreshments and prizes. 10:30 a.m. Sunday, July 9.

Pocahontas Party: Children of all ages are invited to join us noon to 1

p.m. Saturday, July 15, as we make Pocahontas-inspired crafts and play games based on this summer's blockbuster movie. Look forward to learning more about our local American Indian culture from a storytelling session by area storytellers.

Jim Samaras, local author, will sign "Mom, I'll Stop Crying If You'll Stop Crying," a book about parental loss. 6:30-8:30 p.m. Friday, July 21.

Book Club: Readers will discuss "The Celestine Prophecy" by James Redfield 7 p.m. Wednesday, July 26.

See READERS calendar, 17D

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