



Lumen

Pastor, Ben (Author)

ISBN: 0965763943

Van Neste Books

Published 1999-08

Hardcover, \$24.00

Fiction | Mystery & Detective | Historical; Fiction | Mystery & Detective | Police Procedural

Reviewed 1999-08-02

PW

Mixing elements of a psychological thriller and an existential meditation, Pastor's debut follows a German army captain and a Chicago priest as they investigate the death of a nun in Nazi-occupied Poland. Mother Kazimierza's alleged power to see the future has brought her a devoted following; her motto, "Lumen Christi Adiuva Nos" ("light of Christ, succor us"), gives the novel its title. In October 1939, Captain Martin Bora discovers the abbess shot dead in her convent garden. Father Malecki has come to Cracow at the pope's bidding, to investigate Mother Kazimierza's powers. Now the Vatican orders him to stay and assist in the inquiry into her killing. Meanwhile, the Germans are consolidating their hold on their Polish territory, dispossessing farmers, beating civilians and forcing Jews into labor gangs. Though stunned by the violence of the occupation and by the ideology of his colleagues, Bora never deviates from his Prussian duty. After three months, two suicides, much detective work and some speculation about Catholicism and faith, choice and chance, good and evil, Bora and Malecki discover the true story of the abbess's death, which implicates Bora's fellow army officers. Pastor's examination of Bora and his colleagues illuminates the many contradictions of life in the service of a criminal state. The narrative's explications of Catholic belief and theology defy readers to reconcile faith, or inner light (lumen) of any kind, with the realities of the Nazi regime. Pastor's plot is well crafted, her prose sharp, but her novel is meant to be more than light entertainment. She raises again the questions recently posed by Bernhard

Schlink's *The Reader*: how can art explore the human side of a victimizer without seeming to forgive the unforgivable? Pastor's disturbing mix of detection and reflection is a provocative though not definitive answer. (Sept.)

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