



The Rosary Murders

William X. Kienzle

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IT BEGINS ON ASH WEDNESDAY ...

Priests and nuns are his targets. A plain black rosary entwined between the fingers of each victim is his calling card.

The police don't have a clue, but Father Koesler sees a pattern --- a consuming religious obsession that can drive one man to serial murder. And to an unexpected and terrifying encounter inside Koesler's own confessional ...

The Rosary Murders Details

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Author : William X. Kienzle

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From Reader Review The Rosary Murders for online ebook

Laurel says

The Rosary Murders is the first in a series featuring Father Koesler, by the late William X. Kienzle. The mystery is set in Detroit, Michigan during the '70's. At that time, Detroit was famous for its monstrous murder rate and widespread crime. Contributing to this madness, is a murderer who is killing priests and nuns, around the holy season of Lent and Easter. Father Koesler is the editor of the "Detroit Catholic", a newspaper for the city's Catholics, including both clergy and church followers. He knows a wide range of people....priests, nuns, parishioners, and city officials. In his spare time, he enjoys reading "who-dunits", as he calls them.

Since these murders are taking place in the '70's, Kienzle includes lots of interesting cultural details, which made for a nostalgic read for me. On occasion, Father Koesler is reading *The First Deadly Sin*, a widely popular book that I read during that time. One of the victims has a membership at a gym called Vic Tanny's, which was one of the early franchise gyms in the 60's and '70's. My mom had a membership there when I was in high school. You get the picture. For anyone who remembers this era, there are lots of references to take you down memory lane, if you are so inclined.

Not being Catholic myself, it was quite interesting to find out details about the daily routines of priests and nuns, and to have a peek inside how some rituals work, especially the concept of confession. Additionally, there is some suggestion that there were vast differences of opinion among priests, nuns, and parishioners, about the content and impact of Vatican Two. Kienzle was a priest for more than two decades, but left the Catholic Church in 1974 because he did not agree with its position regarding the remarriage of divorcees. So, the behind the scenes glimpse he provides are realistic, adding to the interest I had in the book's progression.

Father Kienzle joins forces with the police, in an attempt to solve the "Rosary Murders", thereby introducing us to some interesting characters along the way- some of whom, I suspect, may show up in the next instalment in the series. There are 24 books in the series. I am not committing yet to reading them all, but my curiosity has been aroused. The next one is *Death Wears a Red Hat*. Incidentally, *The Rosary Murders* was made into a movie starring one of my favourite actors and fellow Canadian, Donald Sutherland. Thanks to my friend Michael of GR, who suggested this book to me when I was looking for a book set in Michigan, for my Road Trip USA Challenge.

Juli says

The Rosary Murders was one of the first real adult suspense thrillers I ever read. In fact, as a teenager, when I brought it to the check-out counter at my small hometown library, the librarian called my father to get permission to check it out to me. Still makes me laugh to this day. My dad's response to the librarian? He'd rather I read murder mysteries than bodice ripper romance novels with half naked people on the front. I found that funny because the book cover has a dead woman in a bathtub.....it doesn't show anything vital, but the naked is implied. I guess dead naked people are acceptable, while half naked women contemplating sex with rogues is less so. :)

But I digress.....I remember that I thoroughly enjoyed the novel. And the movie with Donald Sutherland (even though it made significant changes). But for whatever reason, I never returned to read more of the

Father Koesler series. I was a teenager....who knows what I was thinking. :) There are several series that I started when I was younger and never finished....I've decided to backtrack and read them! The Father Koesler series is one....and the Dana Fuller Ross Wagons West! series is another. Just to mention two.....there are more, but I will never get to the review for The Rosary Murders if I keep rambling.

Back on task.....

The basics: Father Bob Koesler is a priest in Detroit. A killer is targeting priests and nuns in the city. Killing them brutally....then draping a black rosary around each one's hand before leaving the scene. Koesler works with the police to try and catch the murderer. They struggle to investigate as more killings occur. The case heats up when one victim lives long enough to scrawl a clue in her own blood, and then Father Koesler has a frightening run-in with the killer inside the confessional. Koesler cannot reveal what the killer said to him in the confessional. He struggles to aid the investigation without breaking the seal of confession. It all builds to an exciting conclusion!

Although it can't be much of a surprise that a story centered around murders of Catholic priests and nuns would contain a lot of details about the Catholic church, for non-Catholics some of the details and situations in this book might be a bit confusing, or at times, even boring. There are many details about church politics, conflicts over Vatican II changes, Catholic practices and the duties of priests and nuns. I grew up Catholic so I didn't find it tedious. Others might though. I rewatched the movie starring Donald Sutherland as Father Koesler after I finished the book. The movie made a lot of changes to the story, but some were obviously made to keep the focus on the murder mystery, rather than Catholicism. As usual though some changes between the book and film versions seemed arbitrary and ridiculous. For instance one murdered nun in the book is middle-aged and a religious coordinator for a church in Dearborn, but in the movie she is young and beautiful, preparing to renounce her vows to get married. I guess they wanted to add a little extra drama? *eyeroll*

Kienzle wrote so well about the Catholic church, its inner issues, politics and drama because he was a priest from 1954-1974. He left the priesthood over doctrinal differences.

I'm so glad I re-read this novel. This time I didn't have to get parental permission. ha ha. I'm going to read more of this series (there are 24 Father Koesler books). I'm interested to see how Koesler's character develops throughout the series.

Lorraine Rankin says

I like all the Fr Koesler mysteries, so enjoyed this one. Kept my interest.

benebean says

I know this is written by a former priest, but I don't understand why the priests in the book have so much swearing and taking God's name in vain and constant sexually dirty jokes. I'm not catholic, but I know pastors aren't like that, and I thought by reputation Protestant pastors often come across as a flakier lot on average.

Sara Nowlin-Edens says

The Rosary Murders, first published in 1978, is coming to readers again. This cozy mystery is fun, easily followed, and easily read. The Rosary Murders was made into a movie, starring Donald Sutherland, in 1987. This book is one of some twenty-four crime novels featuring Father Robert Koesler.

William X. Kienzle spent twenty years in the priesthood after leaving due to a disagreement with policy. He was editor of MPLS Magazine in Minneapolis, then later was director of Center for Contemplative Studies at University of Dallas. His wife carries on his publishing career today.

Kienzle leads us on a merry chase as the seemingly innocuous death of a priest near death in a hospital becomes more important as the first death in a series of murders. Key elements are the joking between colleagues in the police department and the conversations between priests during meals. The trust the Catholic priests and nuns place in their parishioners is important. Not only in real life, but in The Rosary Murders, that trust is what makes priests and nuns so susceptible to danger, especially when working in the less desirable areas. The police wisely pay attention to Fr. Koesler as he offers his help and is open to their suggestions to catch the culprit and solve the crime.

This is a short, easy read. Fun and not complicated. The Rosary Murders makes a good read for a quiet day or to lull to sleep at night. Because the reader may be accustomed to today's technology, please remember this is an older book. Cell phones are not around every corner.

All in all, I'd give this a 4 out of 5 stars for its ingenuity of the time and the easy writing style. So what are you waiting for? Go read it!

Lisbeth Zabihi says

HVAD BOGREOLEN GEMTE!

Jeg har endnu engang dykket ned i bogreolen og fisket en god gammel ven frem. Jeg husker da jeg fik bogen - for mange, mange år siden - og dengang var jeg super begejstret for bogen. Det er jeg sådan set stadig. Det der trækker bogen lidt ned, er at den virker lidt gammeldags i det. Men kan man forvente andet? Krimien er skrevet i 1979, så alderen har nok til dels indhentet den. På plussiden er naturligvis genkendelsens glæde, men også det gode plot i bogen. Præster og nonner bliver myrdet, men hvorfor og af hvem? Jeg nød gensynet og sætter bogen tilbage hvor den kom fra. Lur mig om ikke jeg hiver den frem igen om nogle år. ?

Mary JL says

William Kienzle wrote at least 20 mysteries featuring Father Bob Koessler. Like any series, they vary a LOT in quality. Some are splendid; some are average.

This is the first one ins the series and the plot is pretty good. Try it and see if you like the character--because they are all somewhat similar in being character-driven mysteries.

I find them light, easy mysteries and usually with a good puzzle and not too much graphic violence.

Ann says

This book is a run of the mill police procedural, made more interesting by its portrayal of the state of the Catholic Church and the city of Detroit in the late seventies.

Sandy H says

I'd read the first three or four books in this series back in the early 90s, if I recall (based on how old my kids were at the time!). I had remembered enjoying them so decided to pick up the series at the beginning again now. I think I remember now those things that had bothered me then. The first book in the series was written in the 1970s and has a 1970s view on women and people of color, so that is irksome. Some of the dialogue is awkward and uncomfortable for me to read now. However, I do like the main character of Father Koesler and the mystery was interesting enough--I think that's what kept me reading further novels in the series. I haven't decided if I'll keep reading more in the series this time around--perhaps I'll skip ahead a few to see if later novels, the ones I hadn't gotten to the first time, evened out and grew in their depiction of characters other than white males. To clarify--the mystery was good, the descriptions of parish life feel pretty realistic, and Father Koesler is a likable character. It's simply whether the rest of the novel aged well to still be an enjoyable read now thirty-some-odd years later.

Larry says

"The Rosary Murders" is the first book in the widely popular Father Koesler mystery series. At times I thought the prose was a little stiff and maybe there was more Catholic Church history in the book than I really wanted to read. When I started this novel, I thought Father Koesler would have a prominent role as a sleuthing priest, but at times he was almost secondary. Also, I thought the solving of the mystery was a little contrived and just too convenient. Since I have downloaded a second Father Koesler book to my e-reader, I'm willing to give it a second chance. I just hope the author, William X. Kienzle, fleshes out his main character more completely.

Ellen Dark says

I just finished a reissue of William X. Kienzle's first mystery novel, *The Rosary Murders*. I hadn't read it when it first came out in 1978, but I did recall that Donald Sutherland had starred in the movie of the same name.

The book, set in Detroit, opens on Ash Wednesday, and an elderly priest is killed while waiting to die in a hospital. Two days later, a nun is murdered in her bathtub. Soon, other priests and nuns are murdered, each left with a rosary in their hand. Soon a police task force and newspaper reporters are investigating. Father Koesler, editor of the *Detroit Catholic*, and an avid mystery fiction fan, is drawn into the case as well.

The book is half police procedural, half amateur sleuth, and includes lots of priests and nuns. Kienzle had been a priest for 20 years before leaving the priesthood and launching a writing career. There is much talk about the gulf between the laity and the priests and religious, and the changes in the church in the recent past. There are also many examples of priests eating and drinking and resenting their parishioners. Father Koesler smokes a lot, but then it was the 1970s.

The Rosary Murders wasn't a hard book to read, although I had a hard time keeping track of all the priests. There is no graphic violence or language.

I will look for the second in the series, *Death Wears a Red Hat*.

Kathie H says

This is the first in the Father Koesler series by the late William X. Kienzle. It was quite good. I believe this was his first novel too. I could definitely relate to this because I'm a lifelong Catholic. I understood the references to Vatican II & how it changed the Church (especially in the late 1960s & 1970s). This is a gripping murder mystery that I think will engage the reader regardless of one's religious persuasion (or lack thereof).

Kienzle did get a little hokey & repetitive when it came to "priest humor." Anyone raised Catholic, especially in the 1960s, will recognize the quirky disconnect that priests have from laypersons & "normal life." There's a reason so many dumb off-color jokes begin with, "A priest & a rabbi walked into a bar..." Kienzle, as an ex-priest, was one of these men who just didn't "get it" (at least for awhile after leaving the priesthood, & perhaps for the rest of his life).

I couldn't help thinking about how much Father Koesler smoked. I know Kienzle died of a sudden heart attack & wonder if he was a heavy smoker, too (assuming a lot of what Kienzle wrote about Father Koesler was autobiographical).

Also, although priests & nuns both take vows of poverty, any priest I've ever known has treated himself pretty much like a king (driving luxury vehicles, drinking expensive booze, owning season tickets to professional ball games, going to cocktail parties & lavish restaurant dinners, etc.), when, in stark contrast, the nuns who taught me (I went to Catholic school my whole life, including college) lived in little more than cells with glorified Army cots, & gave every penny extra they got (which was a pittance) to the poor. Priests I know act like they're entitled to be treated like royalty, drinking Cutty Sark from Waterford goblets & muttering complaints when a penitent straggles in just before 5 PM Saturday night to have his confession heard.

This was the second of Kienzle's I've read (I started with *Till Death*). I'm going to get the second in the series

soon because I want to see how the author progressed in honing his art.

The reader of this recorded book, Edward Holland, has a pleasant reading voice which is only accentuated (in a good way) by his slight speech impediment. He also read the edition of Till Death that I read earlier.

Hapzydeco says

Although convoluted the plot is an interesting premise. Father Koesler is no Rabbi David Small.

Debra Pawlak says

This is an oldie, but I really enjoyed it--especially all of the details about the Detroit area. I understand there are another twenty books in the series and if I can find them, I will definitely read them. They are funny and remind me of a precursor to Stephanie Plum. Thoroughly enjoyed this quick read from days gone by!

Connie says

This was a very interesting book about Father Koesler in Detroit. Very interesting how the priests live and work. I have the original book club edition that was published in 1979 and something about reading an older book and seeing what was important during the late 70's was like walking down memory lane. I am not a Catholic, so some of the things were new to me, but I did enjoy this book. There were a couple of editing errors that kind of threw me off, but they were minor.

This is the first book in the Father Koesler series. I am hoping to find more of this series so I can see how Father Koesler progresses. The police in this case were very interesting too. It was amazing how they solved the murder. This was filled with wit. I loved the fact that priests told jokes at the dinner table and couldn't get the punchline out because they were laughing so hard. You felt like you were in the room with them the way it was told.

I would recommend this book if you like a good police procedural. It is a little slow in a few places, but not enough to make you stop reading. It is more about the plodding along that makes you want to finish it up.

I am giving it 4 out of 5 stars. This book is not a cozy, so bear that in mind when reading the book.
