

The Vision of Antje Baumann: Dutch Resistance to Nazi Terror

Laurence Power

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Set during the German occupation of the Netherlands, The Vision of Antje Baumann is a historical novel that is horrifying and hopeful by turns.

Laurence Powers's moving historical novel, *The Vision of Antje Baumann*, concerns the searing effects of the Nazi occupation on a Christian family in the Netherlands.

The middle class Baumanns are absorbed in their own concerns when Nazi forces invade. Their strong family bonds and Christian faith seem to promise safety, even as the shadows of war begin to engulf their town. The story follows the family from the occupation through the war and continues into the first year of peace.

Nine-year-old Antje's first communion coincides with Nazi troops entering her city, and the book's early chapters portray family events and celebrations that push the Nazis into the background. Friends and relatives enlarge the cast, addressed with enough details to keep them in focus as their fates play out.

Central to the story are the Baumanns' three children. Calm, capable eleven-year-old Nelis narrates from a point in the post-war future. His protective concern for his younger sister, who was born with multiple physical challenges, shapes the book. Gerrit, the youngest, is heedless and mischievous when he's six; like other members of the family, he's forced to develop skills that help his family to survive.

As ordinary citizens join the Dutch Resistance, the children's father agrees to build a false wall in a Jewish safe house, and later adds one in his own home, becoming one of many ordinary people who incurred risks to protect others. Soon Nelis and Jan, a teenager the family takes in when his father has to flee, are also involved in resistance work. Everyone in the family knows what's going on but says nothing, even to each other, lest a confession made under torture put others in jeopardy.

The action is slow; scenes develop in real-time detail. Realistic conversations between Nelis and Jan suggest that they have matured beyond their years, while descriptions of being pinned under Nazi fire, and of myriad chances to make unlucky choices, lead to palpable fear. Nelis's accumulation of knife-point details and events give the text the feel of a memoir, and the book works toward a close-up final section of the family struggling to go on, resolving to salvage and restore their homeland.

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SUSAN WAGGONER (July 9, 2020)

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