

If Nuns Ruled the World: Ten Sisters on a Mission

Jo Piazza

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Piazza explores the missions of these ten powerful nuns with admiration and a feminist spirit.

At the heart of the Catholic Church—navigating declining numbers of new nuns, criticism, and internal pressures to uphold prescribed doctrine—so many fearless women are protesting, breaking records, and defying conventions. These women can be misunderstood in a modern world where feminism and Christian religious traditions are frequently at odds, but author Jo Piazza dispels the myth of the obedient and confined nuns by exposing their heroism and independence in *If Nuns Rules the World*.

Through ten chapters, Piazza describes ten very different women—as she puts it, in reference to the Sisters of Social Service, “a cadre of badass women.” Whether they live their lives in security or danger, in a safe-house or on a bus, speaking out or hiding out, these women are living lives of purpose.

If Nuns Ruled the World is written from a secular point of view, which makes Piazza herself as credible and purposeful as the nuns she has spent so much time getting to know. As a self-professed agnostic, Piazza lovingly describes each sister’s relationship to God in the same way she might describe anyone drawn to something bigger than themselves. She sees something beautiful in the connectedness of the sisters but doesn’t try to understand or explain it. Instead, she exposes their extraordinary strength and the impact that they are quietly having on their part of the world. In her own words, “I may not believe in God, but I do believe in nuns.”

Each chapter manages to convey a miniature biography, political or social commentary, and overarching religious context in an astoundingly condensed format. Piazza’s experience as a reporter no doubt gives her a talent for choreographing a complete story into a perfect marriage of urgent and evocative language that never feels rushed or unintentional. Piazza describes what the women wear and how their hair looks and can liken the charisma of a nun to the unique attentiveness Tom Cruise gives to Red Carpet Report, somehow keeping it all in context and never suggesting that her research is motivated by anything other than her overwhelming respect and admiration for nuns.

If Nuns Ruled the World is at times fun and inspiring and at other times devastating and dark. Written in a voice that could easily speak for saints and sinners alike, Piazza achieves a small victory for the women who, if they did rule the world, “would get stuff done.”

SARA BUDZIK (Winter 2015)

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