

Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought

Volume 7
Issue 1 *Women and Leadership: Economic,
Political, and Cultural Aspects*

Article 6

7-16-2013

Daigler, Mary Jeremy. Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church.

John Rok
Salve Regina University, rokj@salve.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/jift>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rok, John (2013) "Daigler, Mary Jeremy. Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church.," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought*. Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/jift/vol7/iss1/6>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Salve Regina. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Salve Regina. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@salve.edu.

Daigler Mary Jeremy. *Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church.*

Lanham Md: Scarecrow Press 2012. ISBN: 9780810884793

Reviewed by John Rok, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Salve Regina University, Department of Religious and Theological Studies.

Salve Regina University In the Preface to her book, provocatively titled “Incompatible with God’s Design”, Mary Jeremy Daigler states her purpose quite clearly – to present (1)the history of (2)the women’s ordination (3) movement in (4) the Roman Catholic Church in (5) the United States. In a well documented and detailed account of nearly two hundred pages she does just that. In addition, she adds some mystery to her method in the preface indicating “the story is partial as well, especially because of limitations using the names of some individuals...who are at risk of disciplinary action by the hierarchy if their words or actions become public.”

Six of the seven chapter titles are coupled with a “design element” such as Braid, Mosaic, Circle, Cross, Spiral; it took this reader some time to appreciate the symbolic connections of content to design. Once I “got it” that imagery proved effective.

The level of detail in the book is impressive. The text is replete with the names of “pioneer” women (and some men) within the movement, dates and in many cases actual registrant numbers at various conferences and conventions and numerous “back-stories” about dreams, successes and obstacles which are a real part of the previous one hundred year history. There are more than enough acronyms (explained in a very helpful Appendix A) to impress anyone familiar with “navy-talk” and facts, facts and more facts in some chapters that echo the Encyclopedia of Baseball – which for this writer is a good thing. Anyone interested in a comprehensive history with the important names and significant events in the women’s ordination movement will find this book extremely helpful and interesting.

Discussing the history of women’s engagement in various aspects of social life over the years, Daigler mentions examples such as the Iroquois women’s right to vote, the outspokenness of colonial icons Anne Hutchinson (a personal favorite given her Rhode Island connections) and Quaker Mary Dyer as well as the 1869 Wyoming territory where women could hunt, fish, cook - and vote. More specifically regarding women’s ordination, the early efforts of the Saint Joan’s International Alliance in England, the efforts of Frances Lee McGillicuddy, Mary Bernadette

Lynch and, later on, Theresa Kane and Joan Chittister are well documented along with the work of many others. In addition, the names of U.S. Catholic bishops who historically were supportive of open dialogue regarding women's ordination reads like an all-star line-up from the 1960's and 1970's – Dingman, Buswell, Byrne, Murphy and Weakland among them.

The power of educational opportunities to shape ideas and events is illustrated by Daigler when she considers the long-range impact of Catholic education in the twentieth century – from elementary parochial schools to the catholic colleges and universities. Opening doors leads to opening minds. In a “once they've seen the city you can't keep 'em down of the farm” observation Daigler writes, in reference to Catholic religious women, “All of these ingredients and influences – and many more – resulted in Catholic Sisters becoming arguably the largest subset of highly educated women on the planet”. Implication – now deal with it!

Daigler notes that in Czechoslovakia, during the post-World War II Soviet occupation, women were “ordained” to priesthood so they could administer the sacraments clandestinely to other women who were imprisoned. She raises the philosophical principle of “epikeia” and references theologian Daniel Maguire who noted:

“Law, again in the Thomistic tradition, is a dictate of reason and law of its essence is also *ad bonum commune* so that unreasonable law that does not serve the common good is no law at all”.

While acknowledging that differing views on how “epikeia” may be interpreted and applied will exist, Daigler suggests that the current crisis specifically in the availability of the Eucharist might justify the invocation of “epikeia” as a rationale for the ordination of women.

In the conclusion to chapter five Daigler writes: “One of the most painful “incompatibilities” in the life of a human being occurs when one's deepest convictions...are at odds with one's life experience”. The sub-title for her book could easily read “being qualified, being desirous, being rejected”. Those two quotations from her work sum up in a way the essential challenge and dilemma facing proponents of women's ordination.

On a very practical and pastoral level, the shortage of ordained priests within the United States Catholic Church raises the question of whether serious theological discussion over options such as a married clergy or women's ordination will make it onto the radar screen. Reports regarding actual ordinations of women draw attention and responses from ecclesiastical authorities at the same time that the new pope, Francis I, stresses the "fundamental" importance of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

The issue of women's ordination remains quite open to reflection, prayer and debate. Daigler's book offers anyone who is serious about gaining a deeper understanding of where the movement came from in order to reach where it is today a valuable resource.