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## Letters to a Young Catholic: The Art of Mentoring, by George Weigel

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Best also writes about contentious numbers, which he sees as a means for people to use for “spinning” and “cherry picking.” Numbers are selected to support a certain issue at a certain time depending on the issue at hand. All other statistics that are relative to the numbers selected are ignored for the time being.

By the end of the book, the reader learns not to take statistics at face value; statistics are calculations, but the interpretation of these calculations makes an enormous difference in how the numbers are presented and how we understand them according to our own biases and social realities. Best suggests that as a society, we should learn how to better read statistics and calls for a statistical literacy movement that goes beyond mathematical statistic classes. Best suggests teachers of social sciences give lessons on how to actually read statistics and dedicates a few pages at the end of the book to names of sources that promote statistical literacy. *More Damned Lies and Statistics* is a book that could be of interest to people from all walks of life and any profession. For those in the field of education, it serves as a reminder that there are several different variables to consider when serving our students. Societal views often shift, and it is important to balance fluctuating data and theories with a consistent purpose. Anyone who reads this book will look deeply into the true meaning of statistics, how our society directs their outcome, and in turn, how statistics affect the direction of our society.

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## **LETTERS TO A YOUNG CATHOLIC: THE ART OF MENTORING**

GEORGE WEIGEL  
BASIC BOOKS, 2004  
\$22.95, 208 pages

*Reviewed by Bradden R. Kluesner*

Weigel offers young Catholics reflections on a pilgrimage through the Catholic world, focusing on what had a great influence on his own under-

standing. As the official biographer of the recently deceased Pope John Paul II, Weigel's is a voice in the Church demanding attention today. Weigel shares inspiring stories about heroes of the faith, prayerful places worth visiting, wise insights from our tradition, and plenty of anecdotes from history. The author's travels and reflections center mainly on the Holy Land, Rome, Poland, England, France, and the United States.

Weigel writes first of his own introduction to, or perhaps, "osmosis" into Catholicism. Remembering what it was like to grow up in Catholic schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Weigel tells us about many familiar stories that those of the generation share from this era: identifying themselves by their parish, using a Latin-derived vocabulary, memorizing the *Baltimore Catechism*, wearing school uniforms, observing meatless Fridays, and famously, being taught by vowed women religious. There were no doubts about Catholic identity during this era, which has led many to describe this time as a ghetto for the Church. Weigel responds,

The real question is not whether you grow up in a ghetto, but whether the ideas and customs and rhythms of your particular ghetto prepare you to engage other ideas and customs and life experiences without losing touch with your roots. (p. 9)

Weigel concludes that Catholics should have a different vision of the world if they believe the truths they are taught growing up.

One of these truths is the historical reality of St. Peter, the fisherman that Jesus chose to follow him and lead the early Church. Weigel takes the reader immediately to the heart of Rome, St. Peter's Basilica, where one can visit the Scavi and see his mortal remains under the altar. In another chapter on Rome, Weigel retells the story of how the Sistine Chapel came to be with all of its controversy and essentially how we are God's creation. Weigel writes one more chapter about Rome from his visit to Camp Verano that focuses on a deeper explanation of the meaning of suffering and dying from the Christian perspective. Weigel points out the relevance of truth today in people's lives by referencing a comprehensive study of 20th-century martyrs that concluded "more Christians gave their lives for Christ in the twentieth century than in the previous nineteen centuries of Christian history combined" (p. 188).

Christianity cannot lose touch with its own roots; therefore, Weigel offers us tours and stories of the Holy Land. The author visits St. Catherine's Monastery for the Greek Orthodox that was built by the Emperor Justinian in 527 A.D. on the northern slope of Mount Sinai. Here, Moses encountered the burning bush, received the Ten Commandments, and made the covenant between God and the people of Israel. Weigel also takes us into Jerusalem to

visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This is the church built on the traditional site of Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, anointed after he was taken down from the cross, and where Mary received his body as depicted in the *Pieta*. Weigel writes about a visit to the Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion, the place that tradition has Mary falling asleep. Since these places have such a remarkable importance for Christianity and considering that most people will never get the chance to visit, it is at least somewhat satisfying to have the opportunity to read about them.

As for the other chapters, Weigel writes a few chapters about the Catholic intellectual influence of England, giving special attention to Cardinal Newman, G. K. Chesterton, and Evelyn Waugh. Weigel writes passionately about Poland because of John Paul II's vocation, the witness of Father Jerzy Popieluszko's stand against the communist government, and the Jagiellonian University students who gather every Sunday night for Mass in the Basilica of the Holy Trinity. Moreover, one can learn the amazing story of how Chartres Cathedral in France was rebuilt. Finally, Weigel recommends visiting St. Mary's Church in Greenville, South Carolina, and the Old Cathedral in Baltimore for experiencing Catholicism in the United States.

Overall, this book is interesting; however, the title, *Letters to a Young Catholic* and the subtitle, *The Art of Mentoring*, leads the reviewer to ask a few questions, since obviously the author is trying to inspire and to form young Catholic minds. First, why write an entire chapter on Cardinal Newman to young Catholics and not even mention one of his greatest works, *The Idea of a University*, when it is one of the closest experiences to his audience? Surely, most readers either studied at a Catholic university or participated in Newman centers at other colleges and universities and would be interested in thoughts on the subject. Second, many young Catholics are strong advocates for the Church's social justice teachings, particularly in the US and Latin America; however, Weigel shares no stories on the subject. As the official biographer of the most prolific writer and theologian on the subject in history, it is perplexing and disappointing that Weigel does not mention this as shaping his understanding of Catholicism. Finally, of all the Christians who made their mark in Rome over the past 2,000 years, why choose to highlight the life and tragic death of an American seminarian whose spiritual last will and testament was to offer his "all for the conversion of non-Catholics in Virginia. This is what I live for and in case of death what I die for" (p. 178)?

It would take a lifetime to duplicate the experiences Weigel has had in the Catholic Church, and still, only the rarest individual could come close. Add all of the author's studies of the Catholic intellectual tradition, and one truly has a unique mind for young Catholics to learn from today. Moreover, young

Catholic teachers would benefit from reading the stories of the Catholic tradition and Weigel's reflections for their own ministry of mentoring.

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## **MORE THAN JUST A GAME: SPORTS IN AMERICAN LIFE SINCE 1945**

KATHRYN JAY  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2004  
\$29.95, 304 pages

*Reviewed by Wade A. Laffey*

The complete education of a child includes the concept of sport as a purposeful physical activity. Increasingly in modern times, sport has transcended a mere physical diversion to become part of the social fabric of America—mirroring ethical norms, standards of justice, and behavioral tendencies.

In *More Than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945*, Jay tracks the ascent of both amateur and professional sports in the collective psyche of Americans following the end of the Second World War. Using a narrative tone, Jay follows the progress of sports through time, sharing an anecdote about women's golf and recounting the image of Vince Lombardi. The on-field successes and failures are not of paramount interest here; the emphasis is rather on how the popularity of sports has impacted society and how changes in societal norms have affected the nature of sports. Great teams, players, and coaches are remembered, but the impact of cable television, Title IX legislation, and the Black power movement on athletics is also considered in this modern history.

Jay does not follow an exact chronology, but considers various topics and issues in sports relevant to a general time period. For example, professional baseball receives much attention from the author during the late 1940s and 1950s, during which baseball popularity may have reached its zenith in terms of the percentage of the public interested. During later years, as other sports became more popular, baseball stories appear less frequently.