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Weigel in JP II Heaven

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

George Weigel's article at InsideCatholic "Remembering Pope John Paul II," begins with the reminder, as if any were needed, that Weigel spent more time with the late pontiff than you did. As one Vatican official said to me when Weigel's biography of John Paul II came out, "After reading it, one is left with the question: Who is that man standing in white next to George Weigel?"

Here Weigel makes the point that "everything he did was the accomplishment of a radically converted Christian disciple." I do not doubt that the Pope was a disciple, even a "radically converted one" but it also seems to me that Pope John Paul II was a more complicated figure than his hero-worshipping biographer makes him out to be. We certainly know he was a deplorable judge of character as witness by the corruption of those he placed in positions of authority. We know that Pope John Paul II - and Weigel - praised Father Maciel and held up the Legionaries as a model for the future of the Church. I will set aside the question whether Weigel's ignorance of Maciel's misdeeds was willful or not, but he knows that now and surely, the details of Maciel's dealings with Pope John Paul II and his inner circle must make anyone cringe. That does not make John Paul II less saintly in my book, it makes him more human, but Weigel prefers a cardboard cutout hero to a real person with real flaws.

Weigel's other point in this article, linking the beatification's falling on Divine Mercy Sunday with the cultural inability of the West to find forgiveness and mercy for its many sins, is more salient. Of course, Weigel does not push the obvious point: The devotion to Divine Mercy is quite at odds with the tenor and flavor of today's American conservatives with their protean, Ayn Rand-worshipping, poor-bashing social Darwinism.

Why anyone publishes George Weigel is beyond me. There is not a less interesting writer on the planet and, sad to say, he seems hell-bent on making his hero, John Paul II, as boring as himself. It is too grim.

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