

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

ARTS & CULTURE • TELEVISION • TELEVISION REVIEW [Follow](#)

‘Baseball: Beyond Belief’ Review: Sermon on the Mound

A documentary on Fox Sports 1 explores the connection—in the importance of ritual, shared experience and more—between religion and America’s pastime.

By John Anderson

April 2, 2026 at 4:14 pm ET



Gift unlocked article



Listen (4 min)



A Mets fan having a moment. FOX SPORTS

That there are meaningful connections between religion and baseball—the thesis of the docu-lecture “Baseball: Beyond Belief”—seems obvious. Just last October, the Mariners brought the city of Seattle to its knees. Kirk Gibson’s Lazarus-like home run for the Dodgers in the 1988 Series was evidence of divine intervention. Little elaboration is necessary regarding the Miracle Mets of ’69. Generations of Cubs fans left the world wondering if there were any God at all.

But even as it toggles between religious hyperbole and its beatific spin on sports, “Beyond Belief” does make a solid case for the parallels between pulpit and pitcher’s mound, all of which seem obvious once they’re pointed out. The faith. The rituals. The stadium as cathedral. The sense of community one can find in a congregation hungry for spiritual nourishment. Or among 40,000 Phillies fans thirsty for beer.

Actor Joe Mantegna is the official announcer here, but former New York University president John Sexton—author of “Baseball as a Road to God”—qualifies as the color commentator. Having taught an NYU class of the same title for more than 20 years, Mr. Sexton appears in what may or may not be an NYU lecture hall, more or less recreating the class between interviews elsewhere with people who have operated both on and off the field. They include ex-Yankee manager Joe Torre, former player Curtis Granderson, broadcaster Chip Caray, Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, dean of religious life Varun Soni of the University of Southern California and a pair of Franciscan friars, Casey Cole and Roberto “Tito” Serrano. All are in agreement; it’s an interfaith love fest. Which perhaps says something about the communion of baseball.

The film is from Paulist Productions, which leans toward faith-based content, but director John Scheinfeld is more closely associated with music documentaries, and ones of considerable substance—the recent “What the Hell Happened to Blood, Sweat & Tears?” for instance, about that group’s disastrous ’70s tour behind the Iron Curtain. And “Who Is Harry Nilsson (And Why Is Everybody Talkin’ About Him?),” the definitive bio-pic on the late singer-songwriter. “Beyond Belief” is far more schematic, to the extent that the various chapters—nine, to be exact—focus on aspects of the game that correspond to churchly concepts. Ritual, as mentioned, which in baseball includes the national anthem, first pitch, seventh-inning stretch, etc. Or the idea of ballparks as sacred spaces. “Dodger Stadium might be a sacred place,” says Joe Price, emeritus professor of religion at Whittier College, “depending on how much you have to pay for parking.”

There’s a downside to such an organization of materials; an audience tends to tick off the episodes as they come along, knowing, in this case, how many innings there will be. But the chapters do get shorter as the movie unfolds. And the subcategories will speak to fans. Miracles. Conversion. Faith and Doubt. Blessings and Curses (hello Boston!).

No one takes himself or the subject too seriously in Mr. Scheinfeld’s film; if its arguments are convincing, it’s because of a very soft sell. There are moments in the storytelling that skew toward the overly solemn, or overly righteous, and fans of other sports might think they deserve equal time. They don’t. The pace of baseball, so often criticized, is precisely what elevates the soul. Every pause provides space for meditation. Every fly ball invites a prayer. Every pitch is a parable.

Baseball: Beyond Belief

Sunday, 4 p.m., Fox Sports 1