

MSNBC OUTDOES NEW YORK TIMES

In the September issue of Catalyst, there appeared a story about former New York Times executive editor Bill Keller's review of the book, Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy, by John Julius Norwich. After citing several errors, we said we weren't sure who was dumber, Keller or Norwich. After a recent edition of MSNBC's "Morning Joe," it appears Norwich and Keller have competition.

During the episode, Norwich was introduced as "a renowned historian." Even Keller got the author's credentials right when he said Norwich is "no scholar." Another one of Norwich's fans, professor Tony Lewis, recently wrote in the Providence Journal-Bulletin that Norwich describes himself as "an agnostic Protestant who is no scholar." Apparently only the "Morning Joe" savants think otherwise.

On the show, Norwich said that most popes were "very, very mediocre people," which is precisely the kind of remark we would expect from a very, very mediocre non-scholar. Joe Scarborough seemed shocked to learn that absolute power can corrupt even popes; perhaps he would be equally shocked to learn that popes go to confession. Norwich, of course, focused his attention on the Borgia pope, Alexander VI, which is like discussing American presidents by focusing on Bill Clinton. John Heilemann, in search of more dirt, obligingly asked Norwich to name the "all-time worst pope." No one asked who was the best.

Recently, Keller outdid even himself when he said that Catholic teaching on the Eucharist was analogous to believing in aliens. "I grew up believing that a priest could turn a bread wafer into the actual flesh of Christ," he wrote. Now he elects to believe that the New York Times editorial staff is capable of turning fiction into fact, e.g., the weird belief that two men can actually get married.