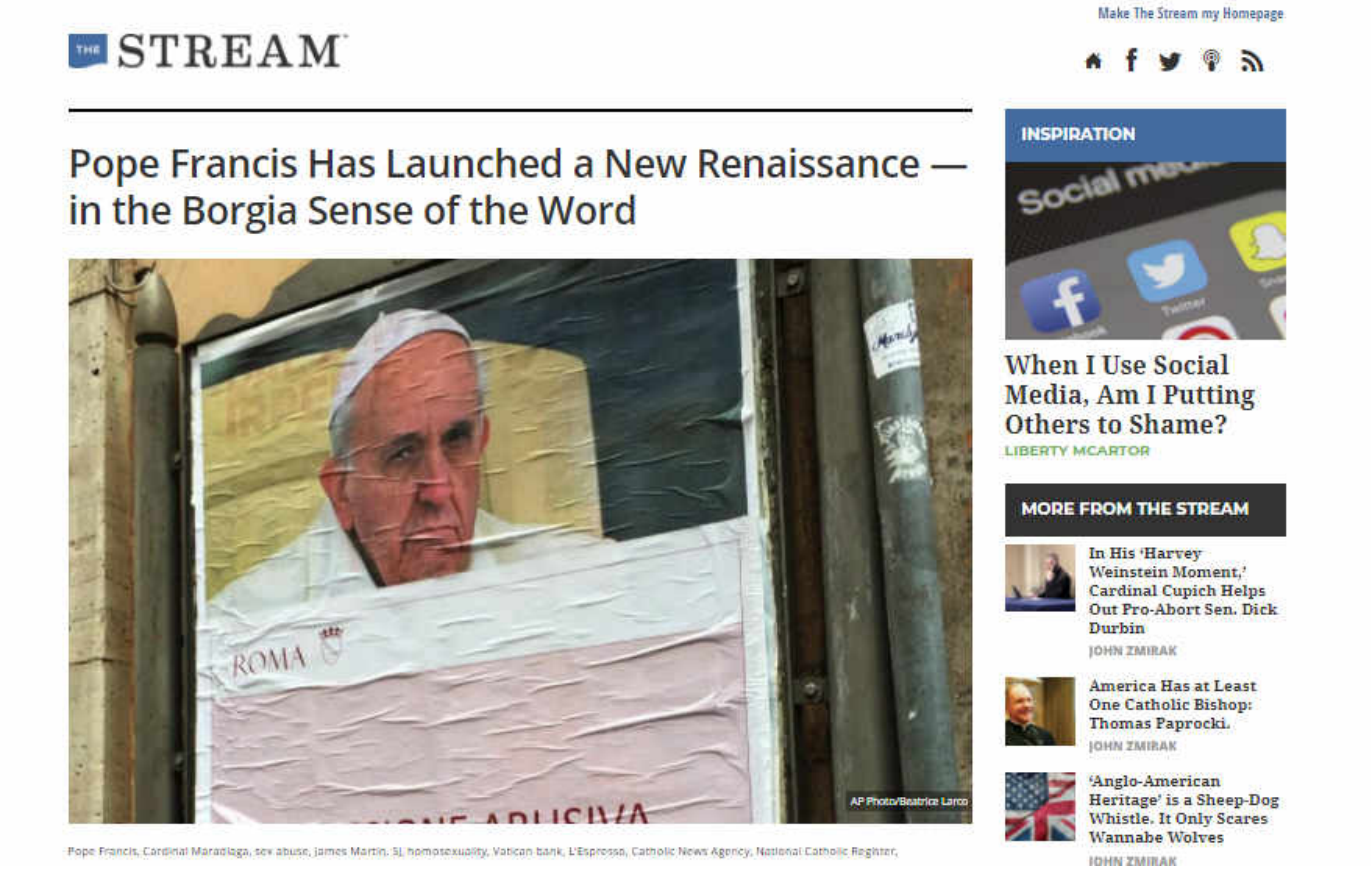
Opinion



Screen shot of an article by John Zmirak on the website The Stream.

by Dennis Coday

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In his review of *To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism, the new book by* New York Times columnist Ross Douthat, Michael Sean Winters criticizes the author for over reliance on unreliable sources. One source that Douthat cites is John Zmirak. Who is John Zmirak?

Breitbart News, where Zmirak is a frequent source and interviewee, identifies him as senior editor of The Stream, a website that bills itself as "The national daily championing freedom, smaller government and human dignity. The Stream offers ... Christian inspiration and conservative commentary while challenging the worst in the mainstream media."

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My search for Zmirak first took me to this page on The New York Times, a transcript of a round table discussion with Douthat, Zmirak and David French, a senior writer at National Review, titled Is Trump a Blessing or Curse for Religious Conservatives? You can read for yourself, but I'd say Zmirak comes down on the blessing side of that question.

What I found most interesting was a comment he made about Pope Francis:

> *In an age when Pope Francis compares critics of the Islamic colonization of Europe to King Herod murdering the infants of Bethlehem (see his 2013 Lampedusa speech), its falling to secular leaders to pass on the authentic Christian political tradition.*

Lampedusa is the Italian island in the Mediterranean Sea that has become the landing spot of migrants and refugees fleeing the Middle East and Africa. It is the first place outside of Rome that Francis visited after his election as pope. Here is what Francis said there, a let me quote at length so you get the full sense of this address:

> Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death. That is how the headlines put it. When I first heard of this tragedy a few weeks ago, and realized that it happens all too frequently, it has constantly come back to me like a painful thorn in my heart. So I felt that I had to come here today, to pray and to offer a sign of my closeness, but also to

> challenge our consciences lest this tragedy be repeated. ...
>
> ... the question has to be asked: Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours? Nobody! That is our answer: It isn't me; I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me. Yet God is asking each of us: "Where is the blood of your brother which cries out to me?" Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the Levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: "poor soul…!", and then go on our way. ...
>
> But I would like us to ask a third question: "Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?" Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – "suffering with" others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! In the Gospel we have heard the crying, the wailing, the great lamentation: "Rachel weeps for her children… because they are no more". Herod sowed death to protect his own comfort, his own soap bubble. And so it continues… Let us ask the Lord to remove the part of Herod that lurks in our hearts; let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this. "Has any one wept?" Today has anyone wept in our world? ...

I just don't think Zmirak's paraphrase, "Pope Francis compares critics of the Islamic colonization of Europe to King Herod murdering the infants of Bethlehem" does the pope's message justice. Yet, as Winters points out, Zmiark is one of the experts Douthat has looked to for his analysis of the Francis papacy.

For a real treat, check out Zmirak's comments on Brietbart News. One headline to tease you: "John Zmirak: Pope Francis Talks Like 'Angry' 'South American Politician' Pushing 'Anti-American Worldview' with 'Hysterical Leftist Agitprop'."

There’s a lot more along those lines. **Check it out if you dare**.

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