NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Pope Francis: Don't bury the lead

Thomas Reese | Sep. 24, 2013 NCR Today
Pope Francis

After spending scores of hours talking to journalists about Pope Francis, I finally concluded that his message is "Don't bury the lead."

Journalists know that the most important part of a story is the lead, the first sentence or paragraph that has to grab readers so they keep reading. In the old journalism epitomized by wire service reporters, the lead was also supposed to sum up the whole story. Today's reporters are more likely to start with a graphic story that catches the reader's attention. Pope Francis knows the importance of a lead. He can tell a good story and sum up his message in a sound bite.

Pope Francis is like the new editor of a newspaper who is setting a new tone for his publication. He is telling the church leaders that they have been burying the lead. What is the lead? "Jesus has saved you." In his interview in America [1], he says, "The proclamation of the saving love of God comes before moral and religious imperatives. Today sometimes it seems that the opposite order is prevailing."

In other words, for too long the church has lead with rules and regulations, with condemnations and exhortations, and buried the love of God in the 25th paragraph. That means when you meet a gay person, you don't start with "you're a sinner." No, you say, "God loves you, and I love you."

When you come home for Thanksgiving dinner, you want to be hugged, you want to feel your mother's warmth, affection, and love. For too long the church has been like a nagging parent who before you cross the threshold scolds you for all the things you did wrong last year.

In the church, like in a family, style is substance.

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[1] http://www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview
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