Fight Abortion, With a Broader Agenda

Pope Francis's interview will have no effect on how American bishops engage in politics because the press has misrepresented what he said.

Pope Francis wants Catholics to be politically engaged, and to be actively pro-life, but he also knows the downside of becoming bogged down in these turf battles.

On Sept. 16, three days before the three-part interview was published, the pope emphatically said that a "good Catholic meddles in politics." The day after the published interview appeared, he said that abortion was part of our "throwaway culture." It is this mentality, he instructed, that "calls for the elimination of human beings, above all if they are physically or socially weaker. Our response to that mentality is a decisive and unhesitating 'yes' to life."

The news media gave a high profile to a small selection of the pope's interview that they liked, but they summarily ignored his remarks prior to and after the exchange was published. This is politics, not journalism.

If we take what the pope said in his interview, and dismiss his comments before and after it was published, it suggests that he is asking Catholics to dial it back on issues like abortion and gay marriage. If we ignore the interview, and look only at what he said about Catholics meddling in politics and the inhumanity of abortion, it suggests he wants a more active role for Catholics in politics.

So who is the real Pope Francis? He is all of the above. In

his interview, he never said Catholics should drop their interest in addressing abortion and gay marriage; he said they should not become "obsessed" by them. He wants Catholics to be politically engaged, and to be actively pro-life, but he also knows the downside of becoming bogged down in these turf battles. When that happens, we lose sight of the big picture, which is salvation.

I applaud the pope's cautionary remarks on getting consumed with a few issues. It applies equally to those on the left and the right.