

Editorial: With Biden in office, here is the way forward

Even in a normal year, the juxtaposition of the U.S. presidential inauguration and the anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) is jarring.

2021 is not a normal year.

On Jan. 20, Joseph R. Biden Jr. will be sworn in as the 46th president of the United States. While approximately 22% of all Americans are Catholics, President Biden will be only the second Catholic in 232 years to attain that office.

Like the previous Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, Biden is a member of the Democratic Party. Unlike his predecessor, who died in office in 1963 before a single U.S. state had legalized abortion for any reason, Joe Biden's entire political life has been conducted in the shadow of *Roe v. Wade*.

Two days after President Biden's inauguration, the country will mark the 48th anniversary of *Roe*, a case that the freshly minted junior senator from Delaware declared in early 1973 "was not correctly decided," adding that "the right of abortion was not secured by the Constitution."

That anniversary will be a defining moment in Joe Biden's presidency, and in the history of the Catholic Church in America.

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This editorial board congratulates President Biden on becoming the second Catholic to attain the highest office in the land. We urge him to use that office to bring the wisdom of Catholic

teaching to bear on all aspects of American policy, foreign and domestic. We pray that his own faith will be strengthened, and that he will reconsider those areas in which he personally and politically departs from Catholic teaching – chief among them the protection of the unborn.

As Catholics actively engaged in the public life of our nation, we recognize that no single politician and no political party fully represents the totality of Catholic social teaching. Prudence requires us not only to choose wisely among imperfect candidates but to remain politically engaged even when the imperfect candidate we prefer loses to another imperfect candidate.

Political engagement in those circumstances cannot and should not always take the form of opposition. In those areas where proposed policies are aligned with the vision of the common good set forth by the Catholic Church, we as Catholic Americans should follow the example of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, who have lent their support over the years to all good policies, regardless of the political persuasion of those who have put them forward. Where such policies fall short, we should propose alternatives (again, as the USCCB has often done). And on those occasions when proposed policies would undermine the common good and threaten the health or the very lives of the most vulnerable, we must vigorously oppose such actions – even if the candidate for whom we voted is now the elected official proposing such policies.

As Catholics, our commitment must be to the truth, not to any particular political party, much less to a single politician. And the truth is that those who govern us do so only because, as Christ himself said to Pontius Pilate, God has granted them that authority. That doesn't mean, of course, that every manner in which Congress or the president exercises that authority is necessarily prudent or even just. But when it is just, we are called to assent to that authority.

And when that authority is exercised unjustly, we must stand up for the truth.

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On Jan. 22, 1993, the 20th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, newly inaugurated President Bill Clinton issued an executive order repealing the Mexico City Policy, which banned the distribution of federal funds to organizations that advocate abortion in other countries. First instituted by President Ronald Reagan in 1984, the Mexico City Policy has since become a symbolic way for new presidents to prove their loyalty to their respective party's platform on abortion. And the anniversary of *Roe* has become the time to do it.

On Jan. 22, 2001, President George W. Bush reinstated the Mexico City Policy; on Jan. 23, 2009, President Barack Obama rescinded it; on Jan. 22, 2017, President Donald Trump reinstated it once more.

As U.S. senator from Delaware, Joe Biden changed his position on *Roe v. Wade* before his first vote on abortion in 1973. Even so, he supported the Hyde Amendment (first passed in 1980, banning federal funding of abortions) and the Mexico City Policy, as well as parental-notification laws, the federal ban on partial-birth abortion, and the Born Alive Infant Protection Act. As vice president under Barack Obama, he publicly stated that he did not agree with the president's decision to repeal the Mexico City Policy.

When he ran for president in 2020, however, Vice President Biden dropped his support for the Hyde Amendment, declared that he would rescind the Mexico City Policy, and went further than any other president has in announcing that, should the U.S. Supreme Court overturn *Roe v. Wade*, he would work to enshrine the key points of *Roe* in federal law.

We urge President Biden to reconsider all of those positions and instead follow Catholic teaching on the dignity of human

life. We also especially urge him to break the cycle of using the somber anniversary of a Supreme Court ruling responsible for the deaths of over 60 million unborn children as a way to signal loyalty to a party platform.

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While we hope and pray that President Biden will do so, we recognize that it is unlikely. We urge our readers not to use this as an excuse to oppose any reasonable policies proposed by the president in other areas, however. As a nation, we need desperately to bring our divisions to an end, and it is likely that the only way we will ever arrive at a national consensus that human life is sacred from the moment of conception to that of natural death is by first healing lesser divisions.

We also urge our readers not to grow discouraged should President Biden put his campaign promises regarding abortion into action. Even as we oppose those policies by speaking the truth in charity, we must remain vigilant in our mission to build a culture of life. We should actively seek to protect the lives of unborn children and support their mothers through legislation at the state level and through local action – for instance, by supporting the thousands of local pregnancy care centers that work tirelessly to provide women with alternatives to abortion and with support after their child is born.

Christ did not demand that his disciples win every political battle. What he asked of them – and asks of us – is to remain faithful to the truth and to serve the least among us. If we do that, even as we may lose the battle, we will gain the most important reward.

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