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A President Donald Trump supporter breaks a window at the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 6

A President Donald Trump supporter breaks a window at the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 6, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Leah Millis)



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January 14, 2021

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Among the many threats during last week's attempted coup at the U.S. Capitol were the words "Murder the media" written on a door. Journalists caught in the melee outside were chased and their camera equipment smashed. Reporters covering the counting of electoral votes inside grabbed gas masks when they, along with members of Congress, were moved to a secure location as the insurrectionists broke into the building.

It was a terrifying but sadly not unexpected ending to a presidential term marked by disdain and threats against the media — not only collectively as "enemy of the people" but often individually at press conferences and on social media.

President Donald Trump had no respect for the media's essential role in a democracy, for freedom of the press as guaranteed by the First Amendment or

frankly for truth itself — which journalism is dedicated to revealing and sometimes to exposing.

Thankfully, that did not stop the Washington press corps and other media from doing their jobs these past four years. If anything, it deepened their dedication and, in many cases, solidified their subscription bases as many Americans realized how essential the truth is when a leader is flirting with fascism.

The phrase "Murder the media" is seen written on a door to the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jar

The phrase "Murder the media" is seen written on a door to the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 7, 2021, one day after supporters of President Donald Trump breached the U.S. Capitol. (CNS/Reuters/Erin Scott)

At NCR, as part of our mission to cover the intersection of faith, the church and culture, we, too, have taken seriously our job to hold government and church leaders accountable during these unprecedented times, especially since some half of U.S. Catholic voters selected Trump — not once, but twice — and the president was surrounded by and propped up by several conservative Catholics and Catholic media outlets.

I'm proud of the work of NCR reporters, opinion writers and editors over the last four years in bringing to light the extremes among some on the Catholic right — and I'm grateful to see other Catholic media outlets finally voicing similar concerns.

Under our previous executive editor, Tom Roberts, NCR led the way in pointing out the connections between various right-wing Catholic individuals and groups — and most importantly, investigating the money supporting such groups. Our work supplemented the stories by secular media that focused on evangelical Christians' support of Trump, by pointing out the "evangelical" wing in our church, too.

Now our attention turns to the next administration, one headed by only the second Catholic president in our nation's history.

Roberts, writing in a recent essay for NCR, finds some consolation that after Jan. 20 "the unhinged, incompetent and absurdly self-indulgent would be replaced by competence and intelligence, even compassion, and, above all, regard for democratic norms that had become tattered."

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That is our hope. But the media's job remains the same: to tell the truth, uncover what may be hidden and hold the powerful accountable. Sure, we can now exhale, because power rests in the hands of someone who is clearly saner and more responsible than the previous office holder.

Joe Biden does not get some kind of pass because he is a fellow, practicing Catholic. But our shared faith means we can draw on that tradition and those values in our coverage of him.

In fact, shortly after NCR was done reporting about the election and its immediate aftermath, we turned our attention to how we could, as fellow Catholics, make our voices known as Biden prepares to roll out his priorities during the months of productivity known as a president's "first 100 days."

So we turned to a number of Catholic scholars, activists and politicians and asked them to propose policy arguments for the Biden administration, based on Scripture, Catholic social teaching and papal documents, especially those of our current pontiff, Pope Francis.

Contributors have included Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine, U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, Social Service Sr. Simone Campbell, Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, activist Dwayne David Paul and others.

The common denominator — whether the essay was about capital punishment, abortion, income inequality, war or LGBTQ rights — is the need to return to some sense of the common good in our country.

A smartphone showing the suspended Twitter account of President Donald Trump Jan. 8, 202

A smartphone showing the suspended Twitter account of President Donald Trump Jan. 8, 2021, is held up showing the White House in Washington in the background. (CNS/Reuters/Joshua Roberts)

The four-week project, "Building a Common Future," takes its name from Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, in which he wrote, "At a time when everything seems to disintegrate and lose consistency, it is good for us to appeal to the 'solidity' born of

the consciousness that we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future."

In addition to the daily essays, the Common Future project includes weekly Facebook Live events with some of the essay authors. Those events will continue on into the first 100 days of the Biden administration.

We launched the series on Jan. 4, only to have news of the attempted insurrection eclipse any and all other news later that week. Trump's future after the presidency is unclear and may still be newsworthy (We don't plan to "shun" Trump, as Jesuit Fr. Tom Reese suggests, though it is a tempting idea!)

But we are ready to turn our attention to Biden and his administration. We will profile Catholics in the cabinet, opine about his administration's policies, explain his references to Catholic culture ("On Eagle's Wings," anyone?) and, most importantly, hold him just as accountable for his leadership, as we have previous presidents.

We pray Biden, unlike Trump, will respect the media for doing that job.

A version of this story appeared in the **Jan 22-Feb 4, 2021** print issue under the headline: How Catholic media should cover Biden.