News



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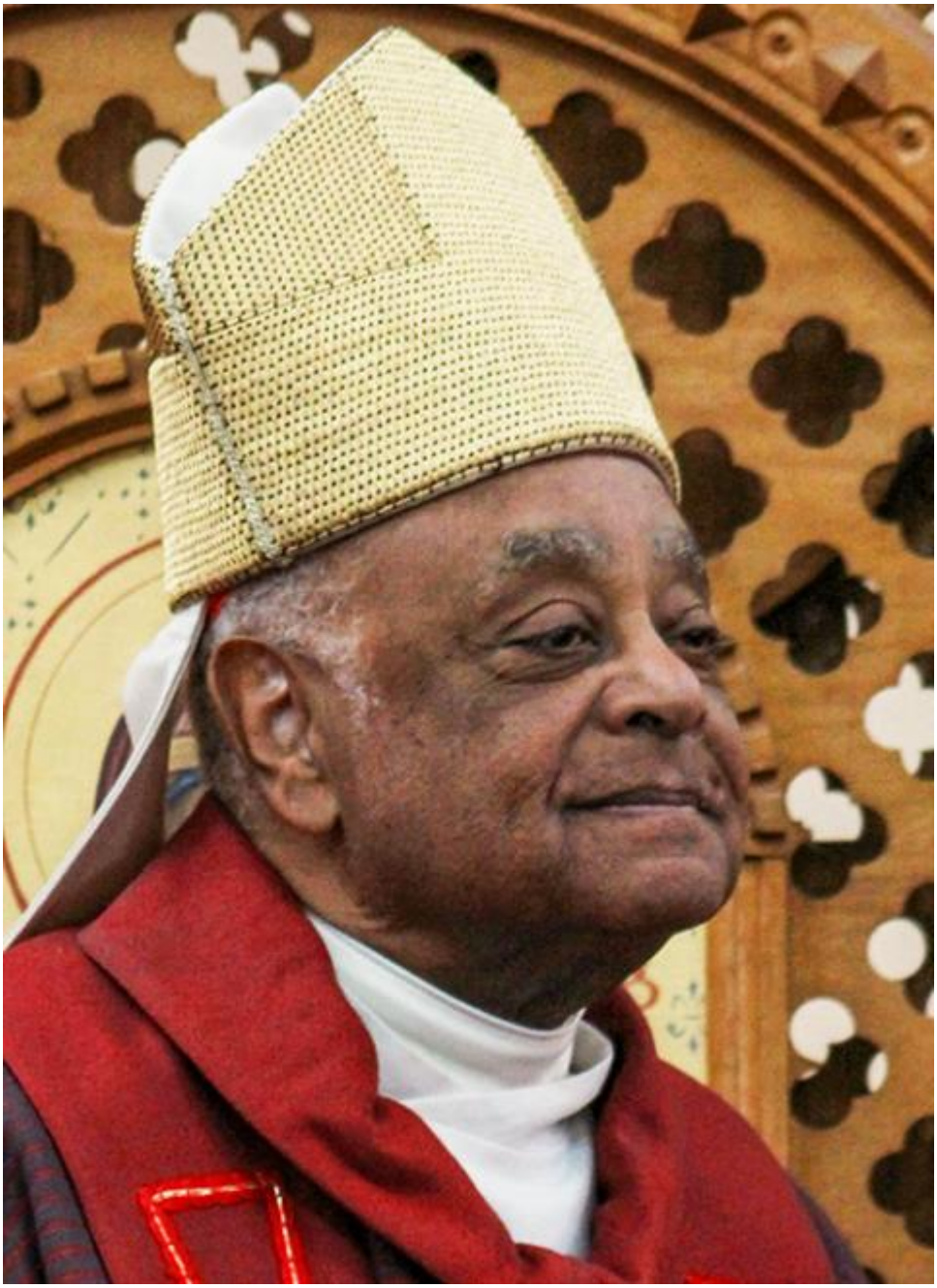
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Speaking in respectful but frank terms on the CBS Sunday morning show "Face the Nation," Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., likened President Joe Biden to a "cafeteria Catholic" who is "sincere" in his faith but ignores some of its teachings as do "a number of other Catholics."

Gregory, who in November 2020 said he would not deny Communion to Biden for his support of abortion rights, told CBS News moderator Ed O'Keefe on Easter Sunday that while the president, a Democrat, attends Mass "regularly with great devotion," he also "steps aside" or exploits certain "hot-button issues" to his political advantage.

"Which it's not, it's not the way, I think, we would want our faith to be used," Gregory said during a half-hour pre-recorded panel discussion with O'Keefe and Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of Washington.



Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., is seen on March 3. (OSV News/Gina Christian)

Gregory's remarks, made during a segment where he and Budde offered their thoughts on the intersection of faith and politics during what is expected to be another contentious presidential election year, quickly generated headlines in conservative media outlets that emphasized how a leading Catholic prelate had taken Biden to task for his position on abortion.

In recent days, Biden had also come under fire from social conservatives and others for proclaiming the Transgender Day of Visibility, an annual commemoration held for the past 15 years on March 31 that in 2024 coincided with Easter Sunday.

Overlooked in some of the recent media coverage were remarks where Gregory and Budde both warned about the risks of religion becoming enmeshed with partisan politics. Budde warned that the United States is "walking on very thin ice."

"In a democracy, faith serves the common good, full stop," Budde said. "If it serves the common good, it belongs in the public arena. If it doesn't, it doesn't belong there."

Asked by O'Keefe about former President Donald Trump hawking a "God Bless the USA Bible," both Gregory and Budde said the holy book should not be sold for profit or appear with political texts like the United States Constitution.

Both religious leaders — who described each other as friends and added that they met just before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in 2020 — also spoke of the need for interfaith and ecumenical dialogue in a pluralistic society.

"We have to be very careful in describing our nation so that we don't end up isolating people who are very much a part of this nation," Gregory said.

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Because of his positions on abortion and LGBTQ issues, Biden for years has been a target for outspoken conservative Catholic prelates, several of whom wanted the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2021 to declare that Catholic politicians should not receive Communion if they support abortion rights.

During a year of intense debate that followed Biden's election and later ended in a compromise document that summarized Catholic teaching on the Eucharist, Gregory eschewed proposals to deny Communion to the nation's second Catholic president. Gregory said he preferred to engage Biden in dialogue that sought common ground while pointing out the president's divergence from Catholic teaching.

Gregory's words reflected that careful balance on "Face the Nation." While adding that Biden is "very sincere" about his Catholic faith, the cardinal said the president also ignores "the life issues" or uses them as a "political pawn."

Gregory, who has criticized Biden on other occasions in recent years for his remarks about abortion, said he would prefer that Biden employ a straightforward approach and explain why as a politician he does not champion the Catholic Church's anti-abortion teaching. The cardinal also said that he "would not be at all surprised" if Pope Francis has communicated similar concerns to Biden.

"One of the things that I think Pope Francis does, and does extraordinarily well, is that he engages people," Gregory said. " He encounters people, he doesn't attack them. But he encounters them. And he invites them to respond to their better angels."

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