

## Catholic Bishop says debate over racism more complicated than statues

- [Christopher White](#), September 22, 2017, NATIONAL CORRESPONDENT



Bishop Edward K. Braxton of Belleville, Illinois, is pictured at the Pontifical North American College in Rome April 5. Braxton spoke at the 12th National Black Catholic Congress July 6-9 in Orlando. (Credit: Robert Duncan/CNS.)

WASHINGTON, D.C - Bishop Edward Braxton of Belleville, Illinois says the debate over Confederate and Civil War statues does not have a one size fits all solution but will come down to local, communal debates.

“My thought is I don’t know...I think in some cases it might seem clearer than others,” said Braxton.

The bishop’s remarks came in an interview with *Crux* in between two presentations at the Catholic University of America on Thursday focused on bridging the racial divides in the United States.

“Take someone like Roman Catholic Robert Taney, Chief Justice, who penned the Dred Scott decision, why would we honor him in a place of prominence in Baltimore?” Braxton asked.

“Well, one learns he was apparently a very good Catholic, a very good person in many ways, but this is such an egregious thing. It is, as I call it, a flaw at the foundation that feeds all of the rest of this.”

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Braxton, however, isn’t intent on excusing shameful history, but rather, on a campaign to make sure that Catholics, in particular, learn their history.

In his first address, “Old Wounds Reopened: Confederate Monuments, White Supremacists, History and Culture,” Braxton outlined his approach to navigating the current divides both in the culture and the church.

“Listen, learn, think, pray, act,” is his five-step method that Braxton believes will help dial down the rhetoric and allow American Catholics understand what’s at stake.

Braxton is hoping that the events of Charlottesville lead to an examination of conscience.

“I tend to think those conversations should not be made at the federal level but as a part of local conversations,” he told *Crux*.

In 2015, Braxton issued a pastoral letter on racial injustice in the United States in the wake of numerous events throughout the country that had prompted widespread attention, most notably the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed eighteen-year-old killed in Ferguson, Missouri by a police officer.

In the letter, Braxton, an African-American, shared his firsthand experiences of racial profiling. He has since gone on to become one of the leading members of the U.S. hierarchy to speak both boldly and critically about the movement for racial justice.

In an interview with *Crux*, Braxton lamented the fact that many participants of the Black Lives Matter movement - a grassroots movement founded in 2012 to advocate for racial recognition - have failed to reconcile certain tenants of their mission.

“The Black Lives Matter movement rightly calls attention to the fact that some in our society don’t seem to respond with great empathy to the concerns of people with color who are not given equal opportunities,” he said.

“But some of the Black Lives Matter movement want to call attention to the white police officers who seemingly interact violently with young men of color, but the fact that young men of color die at the hands of other African-American men is hard to talk about,” he continued.

“The fact that many young African-American women use abortion as a way to end a life that they don’t feel ready to nurture but when that developing fetal life is swept away from the womb, that black life mattered.”

At a time when many U.S. Catholics are engaged in a robust debate over the limits of “pro-life” activities, Braxton is aiming to help connect the dots.

“Some groups of American Catholics that are very pro-justice and peace and would like to bring an end to the racial divide, do not place a great emphasis on the question of fetal life on the womb and abortion,” he told *Crux*.

“Just as there are some Catholics, not all, but some, who are very defensive of unborn life in the womb are not as exercised about pro-life for the poor person of color shot on the street by a police officer or the poor young men of color who are imprisoned for small offenses or for the systemic social injustices that exist in employment, housing, education, etc. and even the Catholic Church,” he said.

“I’m not saying it’s an either/or. It’s a both/and.”

Following the events of Charlottesville, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have pledged to combat the sin of racism in a more robust manner.

In August of this year, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the USCCB, announced the formation of a new ad-hoc committee against racism.

Among the plans for the U.S. bishops is a new and updated pastoral letter on racism, an update to the 1979 letter, “Brothers and Sisters to us,” on racism from the bishops.

“My hope would be that it [the new pastoral letter] would be widely distributed, widely read, and widely implemented. That it not just be read by a few small groups in African-American parishes but large suburban parishes with no people of color would read it. That the bishops themselves, and priests, sisters, and deacons would read it and maybe go back to *Brothers and Sisters to us*, which in some ways has more teeth in it than the new one,” Braxton told *Crux*.

“That’s my hope - but my fear is that will not happen.”

On the whole, Braxton professes a hope in the gospel that it contains the solution for our present divides, but a skepticism of our earthly institutions.

“In the end, the racial divide of the United States isn’t going to be bridged by a president,” he told *Crux*.

“We know that, painfully, from the heroic efforts of his predecessor Barack Obama, who was always circumspect, always prudent but some would say the racial divide was exacerbated by his presidency.”

In his remarks at the Catholic University of America, Braxton returned to one of the founding motto’s of the United States: *E pluribus unum*, meaning “out of many are one.”

“If we understand the meaning of *E pluribus unum*, there really cannot be minority Americans, minority citizens. Every single person of the United States is a citizen in the exact same way and all should be equal before the law,” he said.