

From the Desk of Bishop Braxton

ST. MARTIN DE PORRES

November 3, 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today, the Church honors St Martin de Porres Velázquez, O.P. (December 9, 1579 – November 3, 1639), a lay brother of the Dominican Order, who was beatified in 1837 by Pope Gregory XVI and canonized in 1962 by Pope John XXIII. He is the patron saint of bi-racial people and all those seeking racial harmony. He was born in the city of Lima, Peru, the son of a Spanish nobleman, Don Juan de Porres, and Ana Velázquez, an enslaved free woman. Since his mother could not support him, he grew up in poverty.

By law in Peru, descendants of African people were barred from becoming full members of any religious order. The only route open to Martin was to ask the Dominicans of Holy Rosary Priory in Lima to accept him as a volunteer who performed menial tasks in the monastery, in return for the privilege of wearing the habit and living with the religious community. At the age of 15, he asked for admission to the Dominican Convent and was received as a servant boy.

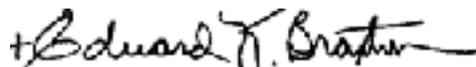
After eight years, the Prior decided to turn a blind eye to the law of racial exclusion and permit Martin to take his vows as a member of the Third Order. Because of his bi-racial ancestry, and the fact that his father never married his mother, many members of the community called Martin a mulatto dog.”

When Martin was 24, he was allowed to profess religious vows as a Dominican lay brother. Ten years later, after he had been given the religious habit of a lay brother, he was assigned to the infirmary where he was placed in charge and would remain in service to the sick and the dying until his death at the age of 59.

He ministered without distinction to Spanish nobles and to enslaved free human beings exiting the ships from West Africa. One day an aged beggar, covered with ulcers and almost naked, stretched out his hand and Martin took him to his own bed. The Prior reproved him. Martin replied: "Compassion, my dear Prior, is preferable to cleanliness."

As we contemplate St. Martin's struggles in the Church as a bi-racial human being and his devotion to the poor and the oppressed, I am sharing with you the essay below. It will be published next week in [The British Catholic Herald](#), the largest Catholic newspaper in the United Kingdom of Great Britain. It is food for thought.

St. Martin de Porres, pray for us!



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton,
Bishop of Belleville



White Supremacists Movements are Incompatible with the Law of Love

By
Bishop Edward K. Braxton

Jesus of Nazareth, drawing on Deuteronomy 19:7-18 and Leviticus 6:4-5, teaches us the Law of Love (Matthew 22:35-40). We must love God with our whole heart and our whole being. And we must love our neighbor as we love ourselves. It is a threefold law. Love God! Love ourselves! Love our neighbor! And, in the story of the man who shows compassion to the stranger, beaten, robbed, and ignored by his countrymen (Luke 10:25-35), Jesus teaches us that our neighbor is any fellow human being of any race, nationality, religion, or social situation anywhere in the world. White Supremacists and White Nationalists movements such as Neo-Nazis, and the Ku Klux Klan, are incompatible with this Law of Love.

Christians seeking to be faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church and to obey the Law of Love are challenged by daily headlines that have placed White Supremacists movements before us in ways that we would not have expected as the April 4, 2018 50th anniversary of the cruel assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. draws near.

Some White Supremacists and White Nationalists represent an ideology that has the goal of ensuring the survival of the “white race” and what they consider to be the superior “white culture, history and heritage.” Many White Nationalists believe that multiculturalism, interracial marriage, immigration of nonwhite people to the United States and the low birth rates among white people are threats to the survival of the “white race” in America. Richard B. Spencer (who denies that he is a White Supremacist), a leading proponent of “White Nationalism,” first began using the term “alt right” (for Alternative right) about ten years ago. His National Policy Institute circulates papers repeating Thomas Jefferson’s claims of the superior intelligence of white people over African American people and stressing the crime rate in African American and Hispanic communities. Speaking at a conference of the National Policy Institute, after the Presidential election, he saluted his audience saying, “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory! His followers responded with the Nazi Salute.

On Friday, August 11, 2017, Mr. Spencer led alt right marchers, who opposed the Charlottesville, Virginia, City Council decision to move a prominent statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee from the city's central square, through Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia carrying torches and proclaiming "white lives matter," "Jews will not replace us," "take back our country" and the German nationalist Nazi slogan, "blood and soil," while using the Adolf Hitler salute, "*Sieg Heil!*" On Saturday, August 12, 2017, there was a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville to protest the removal of the Lee statue. A large number of people turned out to oppose this rally, which was widely seen as a White Supremacist gathering. The event became deadly when White Supremacists clashed with counter-demonstrators (including Black Lives Matter and anti-fascist groups). Since the City Council voted to remove the Robert E. Lee statue, Charlottesville has attracted members of the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis and other White Supremacist groups. After this violent conflict, there was widespread condemnation by civic, political, and religious leaders of the extremist groups that were unambiguous about their racial bias and hatred. Nevertheless, plans for future protests by White Nationalists have been announced.

To many people, the initial response of the President on Saturday, August 12, 2017, to these events seemed forceful but vague. "We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides." Many criticized him for not specifically condemning White Supremacy in any form, especially neo-Nazis. They were deeply troubled by his reference to violence "on many sides," which seemed to imply that everyone involved in the conflict was equally at fault. David Duke, the former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard, expressed gratitude to the President for the honesty and courage "of this initial statement and for telling the truth about Charlottesville and condemning the leftist terrorists involved with Black Lives Matter and Antifa."

On the following Monday, the White House issued a new stronger statement on behalf of the President. But, the next day, the President criticized the media for mischaracterizing White Supremacist protesters in Charlottesville, stating that some of those marching alongside of them were "very fine people." This response surprised many and was quickly criticized by leaders of foreign governments, Republicans, Democrats, Christian and Jewish organizations and the Joint Chiefs of Staff for seeming to suggest there is a "moral equivalence" between neo-Nazis, White Supremacists, and the demonstrators (a mixture of various groups including some of whom advocate violence) protesting against them.

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church stood for a long time on the wrong side of history in the face of the racial divide. Catholic Bishops and institutions "owned" enslaved free human beings. The Church did not condemn or oppose human slavery or the Supreme Court Dred Scott Decision. The Church was not at the forefront of ending segregated neighborhoods, schools or churches. People of Color were not welcome in Catholic seminary or convents. This led some Catholics to conclude erroneously that the mentality of White Supremacists was compatible with

Catholic beliefs and the Law of Love. As a result, some members of the Catholic Church have associated themselves with these movements.

In “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” their 1979 Pastoral Letter on Racism, the Bishops of the United States spoke emphatically, “Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed. In 1958 we spoke out against the blatant forms of racism that divided people through discriminatory laws and enforced segregation. We pointed out the moral evil that denied human persons their dignity as children of God and their God-given rights. A decade later in a second pastoral letter we again underscored the continuing scandal of racism called for decisive action to eradicate it from our society. We recognize and applaud the readiness of many Americans to make new strides forward in reducing and eliminating prejudice against minorities. We are convinced that the majority of Americans realize that racial discrimination is both unjust and unworthy of this nation.”

On August 12, 2017, Cardinal DiNardo, President of the United States Conference of Bishops said: “On behalf of the bishops of the United States, I join leaders from around the nation in condemning the violence and hatred that have now led to one death and multiple injuries in Charlottesville, Virginia. We offer our prayers for the family and loved ones of the person who was killed and for all those who have been injured. We join our voices to all those calling for calm.

The abhorrent acts of hatred on display in Charlottesville are an attack on the unity of our nation and therefore summon us all to fervent prayer and peaceful action. The bishops stand with all who are oppressed by evil ideology and entrust all who suffer to the prayers of St. Peter Claver as we approach his feast day. We also stand ready to work with all people of goodwill for an end to racial violence and for the building of peace in our communities.”

On August 14, 2017, *A Statement from Christian Ethicists Without Borders on White Supremacy and Racism*, signed by several hundred Christian scholars stated, in part: “As followers of Jesus Christ and as Christian ethicists representing a range of denominations and schools of thought, we stand in resolute agreement in firmly condemning racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and neo-Nazi ideology as a sin against God that divides the human family created in God’s image. White supremacy and racism deny the dignity of each human being revealed through the Incarnation. The evil of white supremacy and racism must be brought face-to-face before the figure of Jesus Christ, who cannot be confined to any one culture or nationality. Through faith we proclaim that God the Creator is the origin of all human persons...

We reject the sinful white supremacy at the heart of the “Alt Right” movement as Christian heresy. We confess that all human beings possess God-given dignity and are members of one human family, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or country of origin. We proclaim that the gospel of Jesus Christ has social and political implications. Those who claim salvation in Jesus Christ, therefore, must publicly name evil [and] actively resist it... Therefore, we call upon

leaders of every Christian denomination, especially pastors, to condemn white supremacy, white nationalism, and racism.”

We Catholics, like other Christians, sometimes have only a superficial cultural commitment to our faith. We do not experience our faith in Jesus Christ and his command to love at the deepest levels of our being. Only this deep existential commitment to follow Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life, will impel us to truly live the Catholic faith and reject and oppose all forms of racial prejudice and arguments of racial superiority as completely incompatible with the meaning of the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. This requires true Christian, Ecclesial, Intellectual, and Moral conversion. The Law of Love compels us to affirm that all lives really do matter!



His Excellency, The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D., the eighth Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, is a leading commentator on the racial divide in the United States. Two years ago, he issued his Pastoral Letter, “The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015.” In 2016, he published the companion Pastoral Letter, “The Catholic Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement: The Racial Divide Revisited.” At the invitation of Peter Cardinal Turkson, Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, the Bishop presided over a session of the Vatican’s international conference marking the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples) in April 2017. On September 7, 2017, he delivered the 10th Annual Dorothy Day Lecture at Purdue University. On September 21, 2017, he delivered the keynote address, THE HORIZON OF POSSIBILITIES “THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE RACIAL DIVIDE IN THE UNITED STATES: OLD WOUNDS REOPENED” at a conference on Racial Justice at the Catholic University of America. On October 17, 2017, he delivered the keynote address for the 8th annual Catholic Heritage Lectures, “That We May Be One: Racial Justice in the Catholic Church,” at Jesuit Seattle University.