

Featured Book Review

Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church. By Olga Segura. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2021. xix + 137 pages. \$20.00 (paper).

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Written for Catholics, especially white or Caucasian Catholics and people of goodwill, Olga Segura composed and published a powerful book. It could be viewed as a pastoral plan that examines the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) with a critical call and critique for the church to be even more deeply engaged in this movement and not just settle for the general response that “all lives matter,” or ignore the symbolism and relevance of the senseless and unnecessary disposal (i.e., murder) of human life by police officers and vigilantes, especially Black lives.

Informing her work as a writer, Segura writes that papal documents such as *Rerum Novarum*, *Pacem in Terris*, *Deu Caritas Est*, and *Laudato Si'* assist Catholics in understanding the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching (60). Segura explains that the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching, such as human dignity, solidarity, community, and common good, among others, are distilled from these papal documents (65, 66). She discusses the pastoral plan published in 2018 by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*. Although this pastoral plan is beautifully and spiritually written in theological and biblical abstractions, Segura offers a searing critique accusing *Open Wide Our Hearts* of missing a grand opportunity to see the BLM as consistent with the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church. That is, it does not mention BLM, and it does a timid and weak job with offering a formidable discussion on the elimination of racism and all of its evils. It seems, instead, to want to preserve white Catholic comfort on a very contentious and publicly displayed contemporary topic.

Founded by three African American/Black women Christian leaders, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the hashtag Black Lives Matter (BLM) and call to action is symbolic of the fact that “all lives

matter." The struggle for life, liberty, and the pursuit of justice and happiness, especially for Black people in this country is not a new or innovative idea. These three women founded BLM as "an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" (65). As Christian leaders, they expanded chapters between 2014 and 2016 as a decentralized network of activists with no formal hierarchy.

For Segura, BLM parallels and coheres with what the church entails, exemplifying in so many ways what the church teaches and what Jesus Christ modeled for us to follow. It is a shame, indeed embarrassing, that too many in the church hold such piercing silence about BLM as manifested in a lack of open engagement and participation in this modern-day civil rights and social movement (48, 91). The church preaches and teaches that when one part of the Body of Christ is suffering, experiencing social injustice, or death, that we are all adversely impacted too. Hence, as social beings created in the image and likeness of God, Segura maintains that the role of the church, of Christianity, of the US bishops (76) must be to promote caring "about making a freer, more equitable world, for our local communities, and for those people and groups who are on the margins in the United States and the world" (70). Indeed, the church has a pivotal and primary role to play in helping eliminate the sin of racism and all of its evils (83). It must boldly promote its opportunities and accountabilities (91, 92) as these exist for the flourishing and dignity for the whole of humanity.

Segura's *Birth of a Movement* offers readers a bold critique and an opportunity, challenging the US bishops, the church, Christians, and people of goodwill to promote all human life in the pursuits of social justice through the lens of BLM. This book can be viewed not only as a social critique and social analysis of BLM, but as a pastoral plan of action. It can be used as a textbook, or as a supplemental textbook for those in parish adult formation programs, undergraduate and graduate students, theology or religious studies programs, theological reflection/prayer circles, among others. It can be used for those who are examining Catholic Church teachings, as well as its relevance, accountabilities, and responsibilities in light of social injustice, suffering, or death, as these impact human life, human dignity, and human flourishing.

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