

Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

Volume 14

Article 4

12-1-2022

Review – Olga M. Segura, *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*

LaRyssa D. Herrington
University of Notre Dame

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Herrington, LaRyssa D. (2022) "Review – Olga M. Segura, *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 14, Article 4.
Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol14/iss1/4>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium* by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

***Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021. 160 pp. 16269999984204**

Olga M. Segura's *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church* artfully weaves together journalism, personal narrative, sociology, and faith reflections informed by personal experience to provide Catholics with a history of the Black Lives Matter movement and its founders: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and *Pope Francis!* A freelance writer and opinion editor, Segura describes her mission in writing this book as a call to "challenge our white bishops to grapple with the movement's mission," (xv) a mission that according to Alicia Garza's 2018 love letter to Black people via Facebook, desires to fight for a world in which Black women, men, and children are genuinely valued and the lives of Black people are no longer seen as unworthy of human life and dignity. Perhaps the most striking goal of the movement is its promotion of a "culture of discernment, [and] introspection," (15) that is, the movement forces those who choose complacency to contend with their internal biases and privileges. This is where the Catholic Church comes in.

Segura asserts that Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato si*—like the Black Lives Matter movement—focuses on the social issues of the contemporary day which disproportionately affect marginalized ethnic groups within the U.S. context. These include increasing individualism, consumerism, homelessness/poverty, climate change, etc. Despite these similarities, the Church's theology fails to consider the intersectional dimensions of these issues and their relation to racial capitalism. Thus, Segura insists that a call for transparency by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is necessary if there is to be any hope of change.

Transparency, first and foremost, looks like public displays of atonement and reparations for the Church's historical involvement in chattel slavery, as well as her continued ostracization of the spiritual and pastoral needs of Black and Brown laity. Although the USCCB's 2018 pastoral letter, "Open Wide Our Hearts," attempted to address the sin of racism in the U.S. Church, Segura points out that the document fails to provide concrete action plans and presents an ahistorical representation of the Church's role in chattel slavery. Furthermore, it avoids any productive or critical discussion of police brutality and white supremacy,

falsely equating justice with law-enforcement. This, says Segura, demonstrates an ignorance of both the historical roots of modern policing and the prison-industrial complex. (216)

Practical solutions offered by Segura include the implementation of community organizing at the national level, along with ongoing dialogues between bishops and Black, Brown, and indigenous Catholics; calling for bishops to demand the drastic defunding of law-enforcement, demilitarization of U.S. police departments, and the reallocation of resources that address the social, psychological, and familial problems experienced by marginalized communities; the creation of a website for the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism (ACAR), the USCCB's antiracism group that has been inactive since the publication of its 2018 pastoral letter; anti-racist training across dioceses for clergy in formation; and hiring a Black liberation consultant to serve as a liaison between the church and various organizations involved in justice work. (117)

Although not a systematic or moral theologian, Segura does consider the implications of Black Lives Matter as a secular version of Catholic Social Teaching. I wonder though if Segura's proposals for engagement by the USCCB are too optimistic? While the action plans outlined are necessary and important steps for achieving the kind of Church conducive for Black flourishing, one cannot help but recall YHWH's words to Moses in Exodus 4:21. Many of the solutions proposed are currently being addressed by several Black Catholic organizations and groups, yet our collective work continues to fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts. What would it mean to imagine her call to action within the sacramental contours of the church? What would it mean to imagine the Church's repentance from the sins of racism and white supremacy within the sacramental paradigm of *reconciliation*, where genuine expressions of contrition on the part of the Church are followed by public acts of confession, penance, and absolution?

LaRyssa D. Herrington
The University of Notre Dame