Black Lives Matter is a chapter-based national organization working for the validity of Black life. We are working to (re)build the Black liberation movement.”  [http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/](http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/)
“For the clergy, standing up for justice on behalf of Michael Brown was about joining the work of God in the world. This was a tipping point in the fight against black lives being deemed as disposable. The people I interviewed, and many more, heeded the call of God to call for justice on behalf of Michael Brown and all black bodies that are deemed less than human. This movement has beckoned all of us to see black people as human beings created in the *imago Dei* – the image of God” (Leah Gunning Francis, 18).
What is the *imago Dei*?

massively important concept in Christian theology and ethics with a teeny, tiny scriptural basis (a.k.a. “the most over-cited concept in the bible” – Dr. Brent Strawn)

a piece of the living tradition of the Christian faith (a concept that accrues meaning over time, particularly as people take bodies seriously)
Imago Dei grounds human dignity, which then functions as a Christian criterion for justice of economic systems and increasingly, all systems – criminal justice systems, educational systems ...

“Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.”
“to treat [persons created in the image of God] as if they were less than this, to oppress them, to trample their dignity underfoot, is not just evil as it surely must be; it is not just painful as it frequently must be for the victims of injustice and oppression. It is positively blasphemous, for it is tantamount to spitting in the face of God” (Tutu, *Christianity and Human Rights*, 3)
The function of the *imago Dei* in the context of the BLM movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustaining/grounding</th>
<th>Complicating</th>
<th>Obstructing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>an affirmation of black bodies</td>
<td>affirms the dignity and worth of the perpetrators of violence as well</td>
<td>gives white moderates (and others) a place to rest: “all lives matter”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theologically grounds condemnation of de-humanizing practices and systems</td>
<td>sets parameters for treatment of the other</td>
<td>spiritualizes humanity rather than valuing the flesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compels Christians to act; to resist de-humanization</td>
<td>relational dimension</td>
<td>pushing toward reconciliation at the expense of liberation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
So what?

The *imago Dei* is an ethic (even more than a scriptural concept or theological doctrine).

It is about bodies and the persons, practices, and systems that violate them.

It is universal and relational – and these two features sustain social movements and also complicate them.

The *imago Dei* has a process component: we bury the image of God; we can also recover it and restore it.