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by NCR Staff

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Black Catholics responded with dismay to a Nov. 4 speech from Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, who claimed that some modern social justice movements were Marxist-inspired, anti-Christian "pseudo-religions." Following are letters to the editor from NCR readers responding to this speech. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

I am dismayed at such complacent self-sufficiency. Instead of a full mea culpa for the shortcomings of unworthy pastors, the blame is laid at the door of others. It's so convenient to find a scapegoat.

I fear Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez's plan for the church is just another facial lift cosmetic, designed to keep clients from abandoning his shop, even if he just continues to sell them unpalatable and useless articles. That is unworthy of someone who calls himself a follower of Jesus.

When will they ever learn? He has certainly not heeded Pope Francis' call to the current synod, to listen and learn from everyone, Catholic or non-Catholic, believer or non-believer, for everyone has something from God to tell us.

(Fr.) GEORGES CHEUNG, SJ

Rose Hill, Mauritius



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As a white Irish-born, bilingual Mexican-enculturated, U.S. citizen living in Guatemala, I, too, am appalled by Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez's words.

He seems to have forgotten or missed the centuries of official Catholic social doctrine encyclicals by the popes. Whether his ignorance is ignorant or willful, it is still ignorance, and maybe even prejudiced. And coming from a man of Mexican descent, it also demonstrates an astounding lack of self-awareness.

I can't understand why he would be in such a high position in the U.S. bishops' conference. Really sad. I apologize to my black brothers and sisters for this slap in the face — for what it's worth.

J. PAUL LENNON

La Antigua, Guatemala

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I share the dismay of our Black brothers and sisters who read Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez's poorly chosen remarks. Perhaps he does not recall, or is not aware, that people of his ethnicity have been discriminated against. Perhaps he is also unaware of the history of anti-Catholic bigotry of which I am old enough to recall when it was far more common than now.

Black Lives Matter is a response to stigmatization and acts of prejudice which are all too common in our society and which many people in influential positions, like Gomez, try to dismiss. Although some individuals seem to think making others aware of prejudice demeans their own demographic, failure to discuss our national history of discrimination will only lead to more division and interracial rancor.

The Catholic Church in America, itself a target of bigotry in the past, more so than now perhaps, should be in the vanguard against all attempts to demean and separate our people along racial, ethnic, or religious lines. Having the head of the bishops' conference dismiss that as a "Marxist -based religion" in an attempt to point out the sins of our culture is tantamount to excusing all the bigotry perpetrated against all demographics, including Catholics, historically. It is also tantamount to not just excusing egregious behavior it gives sanction to bigotry. Gomez should know better or his brother bishops should educate him.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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Has Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez become a student of his auxiliary, Robert Barron?

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

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I totally agree with Fr. Bryan Massingale's and Tia Noelle Pratt's critiques of Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez's speech in Spain. I share their dismay, but not disbelief.

During his leadership of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and as current president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Gomez has been consistent in following the tenets and direction of Opus Dei. There's hardly a doubt that this was the very reason he was installed in Los Angeles in 2011.

In his quiet and low-key manner, he has tried to solidify a pre-Vatican II environment and trajectory for the archdiocese and, to a certain degree, for the Catholic Church in the U.S. In this regard, it is my understanding that even the archdiocesan seminary is slowly transitioning to significant Opus Dei involvement in leadership and faculty appointments.

EDWARD L. MARTINEZ

Viroqua, Wisconsin

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Rather than criticizing Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez for his comments about movements like Black Lives Matter, I would like to thank him for answering a question I have had from my youth: Why was Jesus crucified? Gomez has clarified that for me after all these years: because Jesus was "woke"!

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

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Oh how I ache when I read these words from Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez, a leader in our church.

As a practicing Catholic, my heart aches when I hear leadership speak in these terms and continue to feed the divisions in our country. How about more speeches, homilies based on the words of our Jesus in the Beatitudes?

JUANITA McKEEVER

Anoka, Minnesota

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I cannot see how Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez came up with his speech or proofs of his argument except by listening (even if a little) to the rhetoric of biased and inexperienced opinions of the fearful conservative right-wing. This kind of speech reveals only one thing: ignorance!

If he and the whole of the hierarchy would get out there and live and share (in any way) the experience and suffering of what these social movements stand against, then such arguments would collapse under the weight of compassion for the marginalized people these movements serve.

The ignorance is obvious when he said protests were a pseudo-religion when they are not a religion or religious to begin with. And neither are they political or Marxist. The protesters do not claim it to be one or the other. They do, however, claim their movements (in one way or another) as a lived Gospel value.

We must remember that Gospel values such as "everyone being the image of God" are not religious or Christian in origin, but Catholic. Therefore, it is not a political or religious value being sought, pursued, and realized, but a universal one.

JOHN FORBUS

Corpus Christi, Texas

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