Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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November 19, 2021
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Many 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." NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters says that Gomez's speech was "dreadful" and projected doom, while Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan writes that Gomez's comments reveal an anti-intellectualism among the church leaders. Following are letters to the editor from NCR readers responding to these pieces. The letters have been edited for length and

clarity.

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Michael Sean Winters gives a wonderful example of hope from Pope John XXIII. His comparison with Archbishop José Gomez is interesting. I think the analysis involving Archbishop Charles Chaput is clear.

These men have chosen a path to the Lord that seems contrary to the example of Jesus. Jesus was not a gloom and doom guy. I think the gloom and doom guys of his day were the Pharisees so I consider the Gomezs and Chaputs the modern-day Pharisees. They love to lord it over — accept the places at table — Jesus knew how to handle them.

I leave it to him to do that with the present-day Pharisees and look for the joy and justice and love of our Holy Father Francis!

**JANE FRANCISCO**

**Charlotte, North Carolina**



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The worst part of Archbishop José Gomez's utterances is that he accuses others and sees no need for conversion. It looks like a blatant case of trying to remove the straw from someone else's eyes, blissful and forgetful of the beam in one's own.

After all the heart-rending revelations on church pastors' shortcomings and even crimes against vulnerable innocent people, Gomez seems to be in absolute denial of it.

All this makes me put the following question to him: What matters for him? Being a faithful follower of Christ, and defend his flock even at the cost of his life? Or is he worried about the prestige of an institution of which he, as a major pastor, is at least morally answerable to all the afore mentioned sins?

Is he going to follow Pope Francis' call to be in synod, listening to what the Holy Spirit has to tell us even from the most unlikely person far from the church, or is he going to continue to preach out in the most Pharisaic way?

**(Fr.) GEORGES CHEUNG, SJ**

**Rose Hill, Mauritius**

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So grateful to have NCR providing journalistic scrutiny to the ravings of an ecclesiastical prince.

I thought we had totally discarded notions like there is no salvation outside the church or Jesus Christ. I have read enough stories describing the "varieties of religious experience" to affirm that there is salvation outside any church.

I formally departed Holy Mother Church a long time ago partly because of the Archbishop José Gomez's of the world. But I have not discarded the inspiration of Dorothy Day, Abraham Heschel, and Jesuit Fr. Pedro Arrupe.

My advice for Gomez would be: Relax, kick back, have a beer and watch the ball game.

**GENE ROMAN**

**Bronx, New York**

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It is unfortunate that some of our shepherds wish to engage in polemics rather than try to keep their sheep in the fold. Archbishop José Gomez's arguments that social movements, which he no doubt misunderstands, constitute a type of secular religion is itself demeaning as well as divisive.

Rather than seeing social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, as a response to widespread discrimination he seems to think those so moved are separating themselves, and all those who subscribe to their movement, by inculcating themselves into a new secularist movement which will supplant sectarian institutions. In other words, a religion of grievance rather than one of hope.

I remember well the tidal changes that occurred with the implementation of the visions of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. Neither was concerned about the church becoming too secular even though I recall members of my own family expressing dismay at many of the changes. Change is itself the only expected constant in an evolving society. The social movements, which Gomez laments, are an expression of an ongoing change or shift in our culture.

**CHARLES A. LE GUERN**

**Granger, Indiana**

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Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan's article was balanced, informative and speaking to today's person of faith.

That is until the final paragraph where he seemingly could not resist the opportunity to insert his political and spiritual bias. "To read something other than the same-old pre-Vatican II British literature (pace Lewis and Tolkien), watch something other than EWTN and Fox News." This last bit demonstrates to me Horan is may share some of the anti-intellectualism of his brethren.

**MARCELLA M. NESBITT**

**Rochester, New York**

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I remember, from my older siblings, that years ago Scripture exploration was as anathema as was questioning, wondering on matters of faith, ritual or religious expectations. As a seminarian, I experienced the tail-end of the requirement to receive a dispensation to use books on the list.

The anti-intellectualism then and likely persisting among these clericalists is more likely to be rooted in an imperialistic domination mentality that is too arrogant and/or protective of their personal status, to brook question, challenge, nuance, objection or even explanation: they are, we're not.

Additionally, their elevated status, their untouchableness, is based upon the institutional structure (which explains the anti-intellectualism of the intellectually limited but ambitious ones). Their ontological otherness is not only sacramental but social class. It has nothing to do with you or I. Their power over us and influence over whatever, is rooted in their sacramental and institutional otherness. They are not answerable in any way which renders not only questions but questioning itself irrelevant and even prejudicial to their power. "If I answer you, it might be assumed that I have an obligation to do so. I don't, so I won't."

Over time, such detachment becomes autonomic and automatic. I think the distinction is important for us to understand in order to break it and or break from it.

**DENNIS MacDONALD**

**Bedford, Nova Scotia**

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Congratulations to NCR on Franciscan Fr. Dan Horan's excellent column, which has rightfully exposed the wider issue of anti-intellectualism underlying the conservative episcopal movement currently within the U.S. Catholic church.

Horan's enlightened approach here could be of great benefit if it was possible to broaden its reach to more areas within the church's religious education ranks.

**TIMOTHY F. O'DONOGHUE**

**Donegal, Ireland**

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With each successive public statement, Archbishop José Gomez — who unfortunately is president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops — sounds less and less intelligent, less and less profound, less and less theologically sophisticated, less and less spiritual, and less and less immersed in the Jesus of the Gospel.

He is an embarrassment to the church, at least for those minority of Catholics who actually have any respect left for the Catholic episcopacy in the midst of the ongoing sexual abuse scandal. From my own social circle, I have heard statements about pulling back from attending Mass because of Gomez's pronouncements, as some people have been made to feel that the Catholic Church is no longer their home. I also know priests who simply say they pay no attention to the bishops any more.

This is a sad time to see such twisted priorities with gutless episcopal silence on so many other issues that scream to have the spotlight of the Gospel shown on them by courageous spiritual leaders who possess fire in their bellies, not bellies weakened by tight, red sashes and the nauseating illusions that go with them.

**JOSEPH A. BRAUN**

**Park Ridge, New Jersey**

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Archbishop José Gomez is a disgrace to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The irony — the real pseudo religion is his idolatry to whiteness — white supremacy.

His utter ignorance and rejection of the suffering and trauma of Black and Brown peoples is appalling. His ignorance of the history of the Catholic Church's complicity in the commodification of Black and Brown peoples is atrocious. Somebody needs to strip Gomez of his leadership in the church and retire him out to pasture with the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Thank God for Jesus because bishops like Gomez are a stumbling block and an impediment to leading folk to the mission of the church — evangelization. Racism is

an impudent to the mission of the church.

Listening to his (Gomez) outright racism — what Black or Brown person in their right mind would even want to deal with an institution that allows this type of hate? Yes, I said hate. Because that is what he is fueling under the guise of Catholic identity.

Lord have mercy and save my soul from lying lips (Psalm 120) of disordered bishops. Then the church wonders why the recent Pew Research report documents the massive exodus of Black folk leaving the Catholic Church. They are not leaving their spiritual commitment to Jesus or their Catholic spirituality, they are leaving the hypocrisy of racists who sit in leadership roles.

Thank God that I worship Jesus in spirit and truth and do not bow to these disordered structures of white supremacy.

**VALERIE D. LEWIS-MOSLEY**

**West Orange, New Jersey**

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