

The following editorial, from the National Catholic Reporter, talks about how the papacy of Benedict XVI is subverting its own goals.

A hierarchy deeply damaged from within

The first half of 2010 has been a particularly bumpy patch for the papacy of Benedict XVI. It wasn't supposed to be this way. This pope had as goals to sharpen the teaching of the world's largest Christian denomination, to do battle with secularism and relativism, and to convince the world, Catholic and otherwise, that Christianity authentically lived is more about possibilities and new freedom than about "thou shalt nots" and other restrictions.

His program has been seriously sidelined by the lingering effects of the sex abuse scandal in the United States; the explosion of the scandal in Ireland, Germany, Italy and now Belgium; and the diminishment of the episcopal office, particularly in those countries most affected by the scandal.

Are we witnessing the ecclesial equivalent of one of those slow-motion depictions of implosion, the kind where a seemingly invulnerable structure falls in upon itself, laid waste by some well-placed explosives? Perhaps.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that what is imploding is the church. The church is, in many ways, just fine. What is imploding, rather, is a culture of clericalism, especially the hierarchical layer of that culture, which has become so disconnected in many of its expressions from the core mandates of Christian scripture that it seems to barely function at all.

The authority that has been slowly leaking from the structure for decades is now gushing out as bishops contort themselves in attempts to convince the world of their good intentions and transparency while simultaneously railing against those within the church and without who are working to reveal the truth.

... The erosion goes on, at a quicker pace, ugly in details that keep heaping up for the world to see. The pope's brother admits to slapping choir students who didn't perform properly -- a human imperfection made all the more perceptible in an arena long wrapped in a façade of seeming perfection.

Meanwhile, the world outside this favored culture is beginning to realize that one of the most powerful men within it during Pope John Paul II's papacy, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, once secretary of state and now dean of the College of Cardinals, took money from the likes of the late Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legion of Christ. Maciel was a favorite of the former pope, and a man who abused his young seminarians and is accused of fathering children, including a son, whom he also allegedly repeatedly abused.

Sodano was one of Maciel's most ardent backers.

That Sodano should be nowhere near any level of control at the Vatican is apparent to most everyone who has given this scandal the slightest thought. But there he is, still posturing, offering paeans to a beleaguered pope during liturgies, and dismissing the growing chorus of charges against fellow bishops as petty gossip.

And when one of those fellow bishops, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Austria, dares to call him out, as someone should, in one of the more rational comments that anyone inside the culture has yet made, Sodano is able to manipulate a meeting with Schönborn and the pope. The world

is subsequently informed that such criticism is not to occur cardinal to cardinal. Such power is reserved for the pope alone. The pope remains silent and Sodano remains influential.

... The sex abuse crisis, as we've said in this space before, is a crisis of the clerical culture, a crisis of authority and ecclesiology. The sex abuse crisis is the awful symptom of much deeper problems.

Projection is occurring on a global scale as the bishops grasp for ways to explain how so much has gone so wrong so quickly. Relativism! Secularism! Cultural influences! All those bad things out there, they reason, are influencing the people to revolt, to backslide, to not believe as they should, to disregard the hierarchy's rulings and pronouncements. It is the bishops who fail to recognize that they, themselves, are the best living examples of the relativism and secularism they decry.

The great irony in all of this, of course, is that the hierarchy need not thrash about wondering how to adjust their culture and lives to the demands of an educated church in the 21st century. The great questions of this age -- and its demands for accountability and transparency -- were anticipated by the church, which began to deal with them during the Second Vatican Council, the reform gathering of the mid-1960s.

There was reason -- perhaps the Spirit responds when so many openly seek its guidance -- why the texts of that council's documents were different from any before, why those texts are filled with notions of dialogue, of acceptance, of restraint in judgment and punishment, of the new description of church as the people of God.

Perhaps those at the council anticipated that the hierarchy of the future would have to structure itself differently, lead differently, and see the world differently. ...

Rachel Donadio reports for the Associated Press from Vatican City. Laurie Goodstein contributed reporting from New York.

Vatican Sets New Rules on Responding to Sex Abuse

In its most significant revision to church law since a sex abuse crisis hit the United States a decade ago and roared back from remission in Europe this spring, the Vatican on Thursday issued new internal rules making it easier to discipline priests who have sexually abused minors.

But in a move that infuriated victims' groups and put United States bishops on the defensive, it also codified "the attempted ordination of women" to the priesthood as one of the church's most grave crimes, along with heresy, schism and pedophilia.

In its revision, the Vatican doubled the statute of limitations in abuse cases from 10 to 20 years from the victim's 18th birthday and added possession of child pornography and the sexual abuse of mentally disabled adults to the list of crimes handled by the Vatican's doctrinal office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In a statement, the Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said the changes were a sign of the church's commitment to addressing child sex abuse with "rigor and transparency."

But the revision fell short of the hopes of many advocates for victims of priestly abuse: It does not contain measures to hold bishops accountable for abuse by priests on their watch, nor does it require mandatory reporting of sex abuse to civil authorities even in countries where it is not required by civil law.

Instead, the changes codify as law special procedures that allow the Vatican to try priests accused of child sex abuse using faster juridical procedures rather than full ecclesiastical trials, making such procedures the rule, not the exception.

“This a very important step from the point of view of canon law,” the Vatican’s internal prosecutor, Msgr. Charles J. Scicluna, said at a news conference at the Vatican on Thursday, his first public appearance since the sex abuse crisis erupted this spring.

... Critics immediately said the revisions announced on Thursday did not go far enough. “History has shown that church abuse policies are rarely followed. But even if these new guidelines are obeyed, their impact on the ongoing crisis is likely to be insignificant. Defrocking a predator, by definition, is too late,” SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said in a statement.

Bishopaccountability.org, which tracks cases of sex abuse by priests cases worldwide, said the changes “amount to administrative tinkering of a secretive internal process.”

“Given his authority, Benedict could implement meaningful change,” the group said in a statement. “He could direct bishops to report every allegation of child sexual abuse to the police, regardless of whether civil law requires them to do so. He could threaten punishment of any bishop or church official who enables or fails to stop a child-molesting priest.”

... The revision announced on Thursday codifies a 1997 ruling that made attempting to ordain women as priests a crime punishable with excommunication.

The Rev. Roy Bourgeois, an American priest with the Maryknoll religious order, said that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sent him an excommunication letter within two months after he participated in a ceremony ordaining women, but that the Congregation had taken years while it considered the requests of bishops to defrock pedophiles.

“What I did, supporting the ordination of women, they saw as a serious crime,” Father Bourgeois said. “But priests who were abusing children, they did not see as a crime. What does that say?” He added, “It’s leading to this ever-deepening crisis in the church in which so many people have left or are questioning how they can stay.”

For more than two decades, polls have showed that large majorities of American Catholics favor allowing women to be ordained as priests. The latest poll of American Catholics by The New York Times and CBS News, released in May, showed that 59 percent favored ordaining women, while 33 percent were opposed.

WOC responds to the Vatican.

Today, Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) Executive Director Erin Saiz Hanna made the following statement in response to the Vatican's announcement that priests who sexually abuse minors, view child pornography, or sexually abuse mentally disabled adults, along with those

who ordain women or women who attempt to be ordained, will now be included among the list of "delicta graviora," or the most serious crimes against church law. The ordination of women is now classified as a "crime against the sacraments," which includes any action that defiles or desecrates the Eucharist.

The Vatican's decision to list women's ordination in the same category as pedophiles and rapists is appalling, offensive, and a wake-up call for all Catholics around the world. This new canonical declaration which names women's ordination as a serious crime against the Roman Catholic Church is medieval at best. The idea that a woman seeking to spread the message of God somehow "defiles" the Eucharist reveals an antiquated, backwards Church that still views women as "unclean" and unholy.

It is clear this recent decision was made out of fear of our growing numbers. The Vatican is using this attempt to extinguish the widespread call for women's equality in the church. In a statement published on May 29, 2008 in L'Osservatorio Romano, the Vatican's official newspaper, all women who "attempt ordination" and the bishops who ordain them are automatically excommunicated, known as *latae sententiae*. Adding *delicta graviora* as a scare tactic to already "excommunicated" women and the priests who support us is ridiculous and does not make a bit of difference. Excommunication will not work, and neither will this. In the face of one closed door after another, Catholic women will continue to make a way when there is none. We will continue to speak out. And women will continue to prophetically answer their call to priestly ordination with or without the Vatican's approval.

Furthermore, we are extremely disheartened that the Vatican did not appropriately use this opportunity to meaningfully address the handling of sexual predators in its ranks. While some strides were made in this revision the 2001 sexual abuse policy, it does not go far enough. We are calling on our members to take action: express their concern and call for real accountability by demanding that the hierarchy release the names of all accused Catholic leaders; reach out to survivors and take steps to make sure children are protected now; and, discontinue all financial contributions that benefit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

As does CORPUS.

CORPUS (The National Association for an Inclusive Priesthood) is appalled by a recent Vatican announcement that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would treat any "attempted ordination of a woman" as a serious crime against the church. In fact, such an 'attempted' ordination would be classified by the church hierarchy as the same category of offense as sexual abuse.

CORPUS would like to point out that sexual abuse is not only a crime against the church, but is a civil offense as well, whereby convicted offenders are sentenced to lengthy jail sentences. Does the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith propose that women called to ordination, and those who support these ordinations, should be arrested, tried and sentenced to prison? This perhaps would have been the case during the infamous Inquisition. However, this is the twenty-first century, and women have long claimed their rightful place in society as equals to men.

CORPUS began over thirty-five years ago as a supportive and collaborative organization for ordained celibate priests who later entered into marriage. As our organization grew, we came to realize that we could not truly call ourselves inclusive until we fully addressed and supported the

call of women to ordained priesthood in the Catholic Church. So, we have moved from being an organization devoted exclusively as a means of support for married priests and their wives to an organization that embraces all called to ordination, inclusive of women.

CORPUS has come to embrace the fact that the Eucharist is central to all Catholics, whether they be on the liberal or traditional side of the spectrum. Due to a severe shortage in the number of ordained celibate male priests, our organization has sought creative ways to bring consecrated elements to believers. In this respect, we fully endorse the ordination of women to the priesthood and we will continue to support women who are called by helping to nourish their journeys and to be a visible presence at their ordinations.

An inclusive church continues to be a reality, with or without the support of the Vatican.

Jim comments on last Sunday's Gospel and ties it in to Fr. Keating's article from the last post.

One way of looking at the gospel story of Martha and Mary, is to see Mary as the contemplative and Martha as the person who is active in the world. In reality both are necessary. The Trappist monk is able to develop the contemplative life but does so in a community in which the work of each member and the community itself exists in the larger world. The Trappists sell their jams and cheeses to that outside world and can only exist because of the many goods and services provided by that outside world.

Fr, Keating has enriched our world through his founding Contemplative Outreach. But it is good to remember that each of us responds to the world from our own particular perception, which is based on our own experience. Fr. Keating has been living as a celibate Trappist Monk for over 65 years.

Let me share some of my own thoughts, having been in both the prep seminary since I was 14, the major seminary for six years, served as a priest in Brooklyn for 15 years, married 35 years and worked as a psychologist and family therapist since 1971.

The Trappist monk lives in silence. The married person lives in an ongoing dynamic interaction. Both seek intimacy, the monk with Ultimate Mystery, the source of all that is; the married person with the beloved. (Both are a path to union with Ultimate Mystery.) The danger for the monk is emotional isolation. The danger for the married person is emotional fusion. Emotional isolation leads to a pseudo self and emotional fusion leads to a lost self. Let me give you a little background.

Back in the 1960's there was a psychiatrist, Murray Bowen, who was on the faculty of Georgetown Medical School. That was a time when psychiatrists still did therapy. In dealing with couples he discovered that a major cause of marital discord was something that he labeled *emotional fusion*.

During its first few months of life the infant is emotionally fused to the mother, i.e. the infant has no awareness of any emotional boundary between itself and its mother. From the infants point of view he and the mother are one and the same. This emotional fusion is so normal to the developing child that it continues to some extent for the first few years of life. You are sitting reading the paper. Your toddler, who is walking behind you, falls down. The baby cries and

then comes and hits you. From the baby's point of view you are responsible both for the fall and the pain since he was looking right at you when he fell.

Unfortunately maturation doesn't by itself eliminate emotional fusion. It is the main source of marital and other relationship difficulties throughout life. Two of our main desires are to be our own person and to achieve true intimacy in relationship. What we often get instead is a cut-off of the relationship from someone for whom we have strong feelings both positive and negative, or a painful, stuck emotional fusion in which we experience a loss of self. How so?

Emotional fusion is based on an intellectual blunder, namely that you are responsible for how I feel and for what I do. "I didn't want to do it but you made me". "You are making me angry". "You made me love you". The message is the same - that in no way am I responsible for anything that's happening inside me. You are the one who makes me feel, do, think - whatever. I am only a powerless, helpless victim.

The reality is that your feelings are your feelings. You have a reaction, a response to the actions of others but it's you who give those other persons power in your life. It's true that if someone that you deeply loved were to start verbally attacking and berating you, you'd have some very strong feelings. You'd probably feel hurt and angry. Not so if you were walking down the street and some poor seriously mentally disturbed person shouted equal insults your way. You would much more likely feel sorrow and sympathy for her. The strong feelings that you have for the people you love and care about are YOUR feelings. You are the one who makes them important. The reactions and responses that you have to their words and behavior are YOUR reactions and behavior.

Listen to the difference:

"When you said that you made me feel..." It's what you are doing to me. I am a victim of you.

"When you said that, I felt..." It's my response to your behavior. I own it.

This is much more than semantics. The first and main rule if you want to have a relationship that works is that it is built on respect. Respect is a very interesting word. It comes from the Latin. *Specio* means *to look at* and *res* means *the thing or something*. So respect is the awareness of the otherness of the other. You are not me and I am not you. You and I are persons. You don't own me and I don't own you. Differentiation is the opposite of a cut off just as intimacy is the opposite of fusion.

When I emotionally fuse with you there is a confusion as to the emotional boundary between us. When I fuse with you, I lose me and it feels terrible. Fusion ALWAYS leads to some sort of emotional cut-off. (Note that there are very few ALWAYS in human relationships.) In an emotional cut-off I attempt to preserve ME by cutting you out - and it doesn't feel good, or I cut myself out in order to keep you. The ME I discover is not the true ME but a ME defined as not YOU. To attempt to keep YOU by negating myself is too high a price to pay. The consequence is swirling stress and upset. I don't know where I stop or start emotionally. (One of my clients gave me great cushion years ago. Written on it were the words "I'm in search of myself. Have you seen me anywhere?")

When I differentiate from you I am ever more aware about the emotional boundary between you and me and you emerge much more clearly. Intimacy is the opposite of fusion. In intimacy I discover myself and it feels wonderful. The greater the differentiation, the more I am able to know you as you are. Here's the other big payoff. The greater the degree of intimacy the more I discover myself. And as the intimacy grows, you emerge ever more clearly which leads to ever greater intimacy and differentiation. Believe me! It's a continually delightful process that literally can add years to your life.

What occurs in such marriages is a depth of intimacy, joy, freedom and happiness unknown to most. It is a continuing growth in respecting and cherishing the other and of an ever deeper awareness of oneself. We may be in a very intimate relationship but since each of us is his or her own person it means that the basis of our relationship is both freedom and respect. Since I would never hold you as a prisoner, the only reason that I want you to stay is your continuing choice to be with me. I can never take you for granted. This is one of the major secrets for creating a marriage that grows deeper and stronger as the years go on.

Both celibacy as Fr Keating speaks of it and marriage can lead to growth, intimacy, differentiation and to our ongoing quest for union with Ultimate Mystery. But as one celibate priest once told me, "if I had to be married to be a priest I would have chosen another profession." Working with hundreds of married people, not everybody grows or thrives. Celibacy and marriage are both means to that end but neither are ends in themselves. Both need to be freely chosen. Enforced celibacy and forced marriage are both horrible. As regards priesthood, it seems to me that to demand that a candidate must be celibate is as bad as demanding that a candidate must be married before ordination. That's about power over the candidate and not about the individual's search for the Beloved and for Ultimate Mystery.

Bob continues the conversation.

I have found the remarks by Jim Jennings concerning Abbot Keating illuminating. I think they (both Jennings and Keating) give a possible way of understanding how and why different ones of us are in diverse places relative to our faith and the Church.

Perhaps I can share how I see the differences. It comes down to emphasizing one or other levels of human experience, and then transferring that to God and to the Church. Here is how I see it.

On level one we have what I would call our persona or mask or public face. This consists of our habitual way of being in the world, with all the behaviors readily available to carry it out. So, for example, one person may be a clown, another may be the hit of the party, another may be a geek or a nerd or a bookworm, another may be a mascot or a nice guy. Switching into this favored mode is automatic; it takes no present choice or even intention.

In the Jewish Testament, Yahweh has a persona. In an account generated out of a tribal and agricultural world, Yahweh comes off as a successful landowner, a benevolent patriarch who oversees his world and shares it as He will with others. In the New Testament Jesus assumes the persona of a rabbi, a teacher, a wise man who speaks differently than the Scribes and Pharisees. Our ecclesiastical leaders strive to present themselves as a combination of Yahweh and Jesus. They would be most happy to be seen as such readily by others and quite easily project that image; that is, until they are threatened.

Which brings us to a second level of human development and experience. In face of threat, in and through the experience of fear, and with the increase of anxiety, the human being seeks means of control and safety. This means the trying out of, and accumulating of, defensive maneuvers. As they protect, they also create a new being, an ego. Its task is to be in charge, to control, to protect. It does this by separating from whatever causes fear and anxiety, and joining with whatever gives meaning and security while diminishing distressing feelings.

When the plans of Yahweh get challenged, either by non-faithful Jews or by pagan opponents, He punishes both, often quite brutally. Gone is the benevolent landlord; present now is a determined military leader who will brook no opposition. Later, during the time of Jesus, God and His Son embrace a different protective tactic: passive aggressiveness now, but final victory assured hereafter. God's Will will be done. Our ecclesiastical leaders, when threatened, play out the roles of Yahweh and Jesus. When they have the power to be aggressive, they unleash their Crusaders and Inquisitors with a fury that rivals the aggrieved Yahweh. When they don't have that material power, they cajole and blame and threaten damnation. They paint dire pictures of the future time when in the last days, Christ will come in glory, surrounded by his ministering angels, ready to pass judgment on the evil goats and drive them into eternal torment. In the end the Church and its ego-driven authorities will be vindicated.

We live today in a Church that is threatened. It has been in this condition for ages, certainly since the Protestant Reformation. It is essentially a Church of Ego, one that has only momentary peace that allows for the wise and benevolent persona to come forward. There is nothing wrong with having an ego as there is nothing wrong with protecting oneself. But distortion comes when the ego and its protective mechanisms claim to be the whole show, when ego=I=the human being. Here the ego becomes an imposter, taking to itself what it is not.

The third level of human experience and development is that of the self or the person. This is a complex web of values, purposes, goals, meanings, vision, and significant experiences that make this human being unique and different from every other human being. It develops through choices made that flow from that web while also deepening and expanding it. It is not a reaction to fear and anxiety and threat as the ego is; it is rather a growth that happens through choices, more or less free, but still choices.

Yahweh reveals a self in community. "I will be your God, and you will be my people." So does Jesus: "I will be with you all days, even until the end of the world." Both choose not to be alone. Both choose to create a people, to nurture and befriend it, and to open up spiritual depths of experience to those they love. Certainly, the Church in its rhetoric claims a self identical with the self of Yahweh and Jesus. Clearly, some of its leaders, some of its holy ones, have lived as selves in community, like Yahweh and Jesus. Somehow, they overcame the defensiveness of the ego and relegated it to its subordinate position. Has the Church ever been, as an institution, a community? Not in my experience.

For those who may live, at least now and then, on this level of self, another level of human existence may open up. It is one of chosen unity, not the unchosen unity of the infant, but the deliberate act of love that unites. (Freud could never understand mysticism as anything other than infantile regression because he did not distinguish between unchosen and chosen oneness.) It happens when the self opens up to what it loves: to life, to energy, to God, to growth and movement and dance so as to become one with it. In this state, both the self and the other disappear so as to leave only the vibrating, living relating. Here being is not, only becoming is. Here we is.

Jesus reveals God as Father. He also maintains that He and the Father are one. He reveals that God is love and life. He assures us that Divine love and life will inhabit us in and through His Spirit. In that Spirit we may have our very being, a being becoming ever more holy and divine. Jesus knew this and he urged us to follow Him there. Mystics know this; they know a unity that surpasses all visions and all telling and all doctrines and all dogmas and all commands. All that remains is a choice.

Sal forwarded the following column by Charles Wilkinson.

LETTING GO BY LETTING BE

It is a difficult lesson - and skill - to learn. Once one "gets" it, however, one can find an inner peace and freedom seldom known. The lesson is all about "Whose life is it anyway?" and "Who's got the problem?"

The lesson teaches that living one life is a full-time job; that to try to live or even manage any other life is misplaced, oftentimes hurtful and ultimately wasted energy.

To "walk in others' shoes" or "live in an other's skin" is a vivid and sensitive way of describing empathy and understanding. But taken as a prescription for how to find a meaningful life, either phrase can seduce anyone away from the task at hand - accepting, owning, managing and nurturing the only life one has.

Sound selfish? Please stay with this.

When anyone tries to manage or control another, or take on another's problems as if the problems are their own, they can miss the point of what their life is all about. If, as has been said by the saints, "the glory of God is a person fully alive," the challenge everyone faces walks in their own shoes and lives in their own skin. But that is simply where it all begins. Should the challenge settle there, then it becomes selfish in the harshest sense of the word.

Any person seeking fullness of life needs to be connected with others, needs to be concerned and caring. No one, wrote John Donne, is an island. Not even recluses or hermits. If a butterfly's wing can send ripples through creation, reaching out a helping hand does even more.

"Letting go" does not mean "disappearing" or imploding into a narcissistic nook, thinking "To hell with you; I am taking care of me!". Letting go means "letting be" in the simple sense of accepting, making space for and learning from others - and life - while "being there" in order that becoming can happen.

Life demands involvement; involvement means relationships that respect the gifts and talents of all. Accepting and appreciating one another can leave a self open to the surprises of continuing creation. "Letting go" usually elicits an audible sigh of relief; "letting be," on the other hand, requires the simple abilities of widening one's eyes and of holding one's breath in awe of life - within and all about.

Roseanne Santos produced the following video on "Celebrating Sacraments with a Married Priest" in collaboration with CITI.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L_9H8DKa9w

Also, the link below will take you to a short video on FutureChurch's optional celibacy campaign.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6tB0lWsnhQ>

George Wynne composed *A Christian Peace Prayer*.

"Christ The Prophet And Peacemaker"

Blessed is the Peacemaker and the Prophet.

Peacemakers are Prophets for Christ, The Peacemaker.

Peace is the gift of innocence. We are all called to return to innocence.

Peace is the gift of Christ; Christ is the instrument of our Peace.

Peace cannot be reached through war.

Peace is kindness and love; war is violence and hatred.

Peace condemns war and the weapons of war.

Peace on our planet comes from Peace in our heart.

Peace in the family overcomes violence in the family.

Peace is an acceptance of Christ dwelling within us.

Peacemakers are courageous witnesses for Christ.

Peace is not an eye for an eye; Peace heals our eyes to see Christ in all.

Peacemaking is not part time; but a full time journey for and with Christ.

Peace of Christ is sharing in the Eucharist of Christ.

Peace and Love are the primary teaching of Christ and His Gospel.

Peace is built by works of peace. (Paul VI.)

Blessed are the Peacemakers, (Matt 5).

From *The (London) Tablet*, James Roberts writes of the courage of Bishop Dowling.

Church in the World: Dowling criticises leadership of Church

Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg has launched a scathing attack on the leadership of the Church and the manner in which it exercises its power.

“I think the moral authority of the Church’s leadership today has never been weaker,” he said in an address to Catholic laity in Cape Town last month. “It is important in my view that church leadership, instead of giving an impression of its power, privilege and prestige, should rather be experienced as a humble, searching ministry together with its people.”

Bishop Dowling argued that Catholic Social Teaching provided the way forward for the Church. “Here we have very relevant principles and guidelines to engage with complex social, economic, cultural and political realities, especially as these affect the poorest and most vulnerable members of societies everywhere,” he said. “These principles should enable us, as Church, to critique constructively all socio-political-economic systems and policies – especially [as they affect] the poorest and most vulnerable in society.”

However, the bishop insisted that if the Church is ready to criticise governments and other bodies on the basis of democratic principles, then it must be prepared to introduce such principles into its own governance.

“When thinking people of all persuasions look at church leadership, they raise questions about, for example, real participation of the membership in its governance and how in fact church leadership is to be held accountable, and to whom,” Bishop Dowling said. “If the Church and its leadership profess to follow the values of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, then its internal life, its methods of governing and its use of authority will be scrutinised on the basis of what we profess.”

Bishop Dowling gave the example of the principle of subsidiarity – according to which decision-making is devolved to the lowest appropriate level – as one that was highly relevant to current needs. “However, I think that we have a leadership in the Church which undermines the very notion of subsidiarity; where the minutiae of church life and praxis ‘at the lower level’ are subject to examination and authentication being given by the ‘higher level’, in fact the highest level,” he said.

He then went on to criticise what he called the “mystique” surrounding the figure of the Pope. “There is more than a perception, because of this mystique, that unquestioning obedience by the faithful to the Pope is required and is a sign of the ethos and fidelity of a true Catholic,” he said. For these reasons, he argued, it has become more and more difficult for the College of Bishops as a whole, or in a particular territory, to exercise their “theologically based servant leadership”.

The church leadership should recognise and empower decision-making at the appropriate levels in the local Church, he concluded, so that the whole Church could be enriched through “a diversity which truly integrates socio-cultural values and insights into a living and developing faith”.

This is not the first time that Bishop Dowling has chosen to confront the church hierarchy. On the vexed issue of using condoms to prevent the spread of Aids in Africa, Bishop Dowling has said that when people choose not to follow church teachings forbidding sex outside marriage “they should use a condom in order to prevent the transmission of potential death to another”. On his way to Africa last year, on the papal plane, Pope Benedict XVI told reporters: “You can’t

resolve [the HIV/Aids crisis] with the distribution of condoms. On the contrary, it increases the problem”, by promoting promiscuity.

Neither the Vatican nor the South African bishops had responded to Bishop Dowling’s remarks when The Tablet went to press.

To submit comments and articles, send them to tony@tonyercolano.com