



Toward a Ministry of Societal Guidance

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In 1967 Paul Ramsey used the title of one of his books to raise a serious question with leaders of denominations and of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches. Concerned about the adequacy and legitimacy of public pronouncements by ecclesiastical bodies on social, political, and economic issues, Ramsey directly asked, “*Who Speaks for the Church?*”¹

Today the importance of the question is not diminished in the midst of what appears to be an increasing number of denominational and conciliar bodies, religious groups, and autonomous coalitions and networks generating pronouncements and positions on public issues. In the following pages, a proposal is sketched to offer a view of ecclesial pronouncing and pronouncements in the area of public policy, though the approach and response taken will differ markedly from that taken by Professor Ramsey. Briefly stated, the proposal claims that public policy statements by religious bodies are fundamental expressions of their ecclesial identity, obligation, and validation. Ecclesial public policy expression is a demonstration of a *ministry of societal guidance*. As such, it is subject to internal and external criteria for the adequacy of its contribution to the human situation.

I. A CASE IN POINT

This proposal is introduced by a contemporary case which has generated great debate over “who speaks for the church?” The case is the pastoral letter of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*.² The development of the pastoral letter attracted significant criticism of the bishops from elements in their own constituencies, from sectors of the general public, and from some government officials. On the one hand,

¹Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* (Nashville: Abingdon).

²United States Catholic Conference (Washington, D.C.: 1983).

their technical competence and political knowledge to address matters of national and international nuclear policy were challenged. Their actions appeared to violate the prerogatives of the technical and political experts and, accordingly, they were accused of not being sufficiently modern. On the other hand, their role in the political and technical areas was questioned on the grounds that they violated institutional boundaries of church and society. They were not traditional enough in their sense of place and function. It should be noted that the bishops are not alone in having received such criticism. Most denominations have faced such a critique whether

the pronouncement is in keeping with a history of practice or is an innovation in ecclesial expression.

A proposal for a ministry of societal guidance must take into account the criticisms noted above as the debate about the relation of the church to the public realm is pursued. To make such a proposal suggests a reshaping of some elements of the debate about the relation of the church to the total societal enterprise. The reshaping need not dispense with the historical and contemporary relevance of issues surrounding the relations of church and state, orders of creation and redemption, expressions of religious freedom and practice, and permutations inherent in the relation of God, church, and world. However, these issues may well reflect deeper matters of historical awareness and consciousness of ecclesial and societal structures. The two criticisms directed to the Catholic bishops suggest the deeper set of concerns.

The criticisms may be rooted in what Colin Williams calls a “divided consciousness” in modernity which tries to support “two views of reason’s rule struggling unresolved within the culture.”³ The two views may be put simply. One holds that human inquiry takes place in light of the wisdom and tradition that a reliable and meaningful worldly order provides us. This view claims a universal view of truth in which humankind is held together “under a transcendent canopy of shared meaning.” The other view of human inquiry assumes patterns of thought which rely on experimental processes which are “self-justifying.” Problem solving can be value free and autonomous from the claims of traditional wisdom.

Identifying the locations for the expressions of these views of human inquiry introduces a rich complexity of analysis. For one cannot assume that it is within the church that traditional reason is employed and that in the state or secular realm we find the use of autonomous inquiry. Inquiry within both ecclesial and societal bodies struggles with mixtures of these methods. Today that mixture results in such tensions as are expressed through the resurgence of fundamentalist and restorationist movements within the great monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Ecclesial and governmental leaders attempt to control the direction of society by depending primarily on understanding from the tradition and the past while learning in the process that such development lacks a congruence between both past and future. In contrast to such movements, there are those religious and conciliar groups which attempt to cross the boundaries of tradition to inform their shared discussions with insights from the physical and social sciences, which they use to help make sense out of the historical, political, and economic processes of our time. In this latter

³Colin Williams, *Ethics, Religion and Governance* (New York: Aspen Institute, 1981) 10.

approach, the search for a usable future sorts through the continuing usefulness of tradition.

II. ECCLESIAL AND SOCIETAL IDENTITY

While it is useful to consider the paradigms of tradition and modernity, a more productive line of inquiry into a basis for a ministry of societal guidance rests in a consideration of that historical consciousness and awareness which shapes and reshapes our expectations of ecclesial and societal institutions. In this essay, the element of historical consciousness considered as both emergent and shaping of the contemporary human community is the consciousness of “the people.” Such consciousness transcends and informs ecclesial and societal identities.

An examination of the report on the 1981 Cyprus Consultation sponsored by the World Council of Churches' Commission on the Churches' Participation in Development is illustrative of the consciousness of "the people" in emerging social-ethical and ecclesial thought. While the consultation considered emerging political theologies in several global contexts, the outcomes of the discussion centered on ecclesial and societal formation and development. Important to this discussion was a differentiation of three approaches to political ethics. The first approach is church centered and focuses on an extension of the love of one's neighbor within political structures. While the model of Christian activity is responsible participation in those political structures, one may still resist such structures out of obedience to God. A second approach focuses on the political process and is less oriented to church-state relations. It seeks the achievement of such political goals in movements for human dignity and freedom in a wide field of endeavor ranging from addressing human rights to meeting physical human need. This approach recognizes the legitimacy of political process as the arena in which justice is demonstrated. In some ways, this approach continues the separation of churchly and worldly realities noted in the first approach. A distinction between religion and politics is affirmed to prevent the sacralization of politics and to assure continuation of religious liberty. The final approach focuses on the aspirations of the "people." To be sure, the term is not without ambiguity. It is expressive of a new political reality that elicits new efforts at reflection on and interpreting meaning for the human enterprise or project. The term "people" must be apprehended within and beyond any particular form of analysis, though those methods that focus on class systems, group empowerment, relationships of the oppressed and oppressors, and national, political, and social identities offer valuable insights into the concept. Foremost, the term points to the transformation of societal and political realities under a dominant vision of the redemption of the human enterprise—a vision that draws heavily on the symbols of the covenant community and the messianic kingdom.⁴

The proposal for a ministry of societal guidance developed in this essay draws upon this third approach, seeing in it a way to engage critically not only the "divided consciousness of modernity" but also the divided structure of authority between what we later shall more clearly differentiate as the ecclesial

⁴*Perspectives on Political Ethics*, ed. Koson Srisang (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983) 23-26. This volume contains not only the consultation report but essays prepared for the event.

and the societal. For a ministry of societal guidance is rooted in an understanding of what constitutes the human project and how that enterprise engages in those practices which fulfill a more comprehensive vision for humankind. José Míguez Bonino articulates well the comprehensiveness of a view of the human project. In speaking of the future of the political aspirations of the peoples of Latin America, he notes that their future will be rooted in a vision of the human prospect which, while not fully realizable in history, will nonetheless be mediated in "political, social, and economic contours...sufficiently concrete to provide a guide for action and to elicit commitment."⁵

The significance of the relationship between human understanding and consciousness and the appropriate actions that should be taken to shape the human project undergird this proposal for a ministry of societal guidance. The proposal reorients, though does not diminish the

importance of, the question of “who speaks for the church?” At issue are the questions surrounding what ecclesial phenomenon is occurring and what criteria inform the occurrence. Exploration of this reoriented question takes us to a closer examination of what is meant by societal policy, societal guidance, and ecclesial expression or ecclesiality.

III. SOCIETAL GUIDANCE: AN INTEGRATED VIEW

The mode of grasping the meaning of social policy in this essay is indebted to the work of Gibson Winter. This work has focused on the science of human policy and the interpretive framework which enables policy study to be a discipline to offer foundational understandings of the human project. For Winter, the study of policy focuses on a basic human problem: of our coping with our future. Humans are both makers of and made by history. Thus, he says:

Policy brings to statement what is judged to be possible, desirable, and meaningful for the human enterprise. In this sense, policy is the nexus of fact, value, and ultimate meaning in which scientific, ethical, and theological-philosophical reflections meet.⁶

The study of policy, however, is subject to inquiry into foundational understanding of that human enterprise. Winter notes a dilemma of policy study which suggests a problematic in identifying that which is foundational. Two ethical constructions continuous with each other inform policy formation. A *secondary ethic* deals with decisions and policies designed and implemented in accord with certain societal values, principles, and norms. This secondary ethic takes into account the question of how the societal imperatives of a cultural heritage are delineated. However, it takes a *foundational ethic* (or original praxis) to elicit “the creative disclosure in which societal possibilities are expressed.”⁷ What this suggests, according to Winter and his colleague Alvin Pitcher is that:

⁵José Míguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 52.

⁶Gibson Winter, “Toward a Comprehensive Science of Policy,” *The Journal of Religion* 50 (1970) 352.

⁷Gibson Winter, “Human Science and Ethics in a Creative Society,” *Cultural Hermeneutics* 1(1973) 166.

Policy study...is...simultaneously a proposal for awakening to the true source of existence and an imperative for action that unfolds possibilities issuing from this source.⁸

A foundational ethic, then, is one “in which the human enterprise comes to awareness of its possibilities as an authentic human order.”⁹ If policy science only uses secondary ethics, according to Winter, then a crisis is engendered which constitutes a “complicity with the destructive powers of an age.”¹⁰ Policy science from a perspective of a foundational ethic yields what Hans-Georg Gadamer terms “effective historical consciousness” which is an understanding not only of the effects of objective history upon humankind but also is a clear seeing, a deep apprehending of a consciousness of the human situation.¹¹

Policy, then, directs humankind to an effective dwelling or being in the world. Dwelling is a metaphor which Winter has appropriated to encompass the interrelationship of human

beings-not only their being “there” in the world, but also the potentiality of human building, cultivating, and constructing a world. That dwelling is authentic when the interplay of human potential is fulfilled rather than diminished by alienative instrumental manipulations.¹² Thus, human dwelling is the grounding to understand human participation and activity. The moral vision of authentic dwelling informs the possibilities of human participation which is that patterning of human actions which both preserve human tradition but also enable innovation in human dwelling.¹³

Societal guidance, then, becomes a demonstration of effective creative participation. As with the term science of policy, societal guidance requires definition with regard to its fundamental contribution to the human enterprise. It must be viewed in light of its ability to enable humankind authentically to build a human dwelling. In many ways the term is a difficult one, as Jürgen Habermas has indicated in his criticism of functional social theory. In that criticism he claims that “steering performances” within social systems can be used to limit the recognition of “fundamental contradictions” in social formation and to support dominant ideologies.¹⁴ However, the use here of the term societal guidance draws upon the work of Amatai Etzioni who sees in such activity the capability to transform human structures.

Etzioni identifies two dimensions of participation which cut across social scientific categories: active-passive. Simply put, active participation or activity is the ability to engage in a world of action which is malleable. A passive orientation, or passivity, is to be under the control of natural or social processes or under the control of active others. An active orientation is informed by three components which mark an active society: (1) social options and conditions for

⁸Alvin Pitcher, “Perspectives on Religious Social Ethics,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 5 (1977) 83.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰G. Winter, “Human Science and Ethics,” 166.

¹¹Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 267-268.

¹²G. Winter, “Human Science and Ethics,” 163-164.

¹³Gibson Winter, *Liberating Creation* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 67.

¹⁴Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon, 1975) Chapter 1.

change; (2) historical perspective which brings to awareness social contexts, periods of transitions, and continuity of change; and (3) a transformative mode of change based on human intentionality, concrete projects, and resources to mobilize the society.¹⁵ The significance of the active-passive distinction for ecclesial bodies is that some have perceived their relation to society with a passive stance either through withdrawal or noninvolvement. Some ecclesial institutions have been overactive, that is, the relation to society has been one of limited differentiation and of overinvolvement. Understanding activity within the social realm is important for a proposal for societal guidance ministry.

In affirming the malleability of the world of action, Etzioni suggests a discipline of discourse appropriate to the analysis of societal activity:

We refer to it as a *language of societal action* and to the theory advanced with the terms of this language as a *theory of societal guidance*.¹⁶

The language characterizes the properties of societal action, but, more specifically, defines the elements of control which are components of an active orientation. The language may be that of withdrawal or involvement within the society. The language of societal action serves several functions. Two are important for our consideration. First, it clarifies the languages of the social sciences. On the one hand, it alters the voluntarist approach in which activity emanates through the “great person” or through critical interests. It is an a-structural view emphasizing the hyper-activity of will and competing interests. On the other hand, the language of societal action offers an alternative to the concepts of collectivist approaches, as in the case of systems theories, which see a social system composed of units holding together to form a macroscopic super unit. In this way, the particular structure of the “whole” is created. The action of the actor tends to reflect that of the whole system. While changes may take place within individual persons, the actor is finally unable to control these changes even partially. The language of societal action reflects an integrated conceptualization of an active society. As such it “renders the collectivist approach more active and the voluntarist less hyper-active.”¹⁷

The second function of the language of societal action is to offer fundamental criticism. Etzioni distinguished fundamental criticism from “bit criticism” which is a type of reality testing to see if particular societal contexts cohere with a wider “community of assumptions.” A community-of-assumptions is that set of shared views and perspectives of a social unit about itself, its context, and its world. However, because communities-of-assumptions usually are without awareness of their hypothetical nature, there is a lack of organized knowledge appropriate to institutionalize a revision of the community-of-assumptions. Fundamental criticism functions to critique and challenge the communities-of-assumptions in the face of divergent viewpoints and in the context of opportunities or needs for societal transformation.¹⁸

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¹⁵Amatai Etzioni, *The Active Society* (New York: Free Press, 1968) 6-10.

¹⁶Ibid., 70.

¹⁷Ibid., 66-70.

¹⁸Ibid., 178-182.

task of providing fundamental criticism is fulfilled by critical sub-units who appropriate the language and concepts of societal action in order to provide societal guidance. Societal guidance movements, then, offer critiques of societal processes.

The contribution of Gibson Winter’s thought at this point is that a language of societal guidance presses through an examination of societal processes to those fundamental groundings of human dwelling and creative participation. Language, indeed, probes into and reveals human being and becoming in history. Moreover, it is expressive of the intersubjectivity of human beings with each other and within their communities of dwelling.

An understanding of ecclesial life now completes our discussion of societal policy and societal guidance. For ecclesial life is both an activity and a process of understanding human being in the world. Edward Farley’s work provides a bridge to our proposal for the validity of church pronouncements as authentic, though fallible, expressions of ecclesial life. With Farley, the argument of this essay holds that *ecclesia* is not a synonym for sectarian and institutional entities. Rather *ecclesia* refers to “a unique corporate historical existence” which is an

“intersubjectivity shaped by redemptive consciousness.”¹⁹ The aspect of intersubjectivity is critical for the consciousness of the *ecclesia*. As Gibson Winter notes: “the intersubjective world is the pre-given reality within which mind, self, and society are possible—the milieu of symbolic activity.”²⁰ In this way, *ecclesia* involves the intersubjectivity in human dwelling which interjects those communities in practices of authentic building of and creative participation in the human enterprise.

While Winter emphasizes the paradigm of creation and Farley the paradigm of redemption, both theologians claim that depth human sociality is elicited both retrospectively and prospectively by profound meaning shaping symbols. For Farley the Adamic-Gospel story constitutes ecclesial existence and undergirds the emergence of depth social structures which find their communal expression institutionalized. Ecclesiality, then, is a deeply interrelated process and an institutional manifestation. Ecclesial process is the “ideal-historical term for the ecclesial community’s persistence through time as an occurrence of redemption.” Institutionalization is required for “the social persistence of intersubjectivity.”²¹

A product of the process of institutionalization is a certain linguistic sedimentation established as expressive of the redemptive process. Farley notes:

Not only do linguistic sedimentations require institutions as their matrix of social persistence, they also require a correspondence between themselves and the *kind* of institution present. That which establishes this correspondence in ecclesial existence is redemptive process.²²

The point is that ecclesiality is guided by what could be called a language of guidance. The language is the collected concepts, perspectives, understandings,

¹⁹Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) xiv.

²⁰Gibson Winter, *Elements for a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 94.

²¹Edward Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 250, 251.

²²*Ibid.*, 251.

and meanings which underlie and inform the active and passive manifestations of a society’s institutions. That language has moments of what Farley calls portraiture, a comprehensive reflective grasp and presentation of redemptive existence. Three literatures inform the portraiture of ecclesial life. All three introduce hermeneutical problems. The first and primary literature is that of the kerygma rooted in the symbols of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ and in the kingdom of God. Second, the literature of the faith of Israel is expressive of territorial and experiential reflection on the divine presence. The third literature is interpretation which embraces not only the years of history informing the other two literatures of the Christian community, but it also “marks the community’s unceasing attempts to formulate the Christian mythos at levels of belief, understanding, and even knowledge.” It deals both with doctrine and institution and with the ongoing occurrence(s) of redemption. Such a formulation of the literature of interpretation is vital to Farley’s agenda which sees theology based in a house of authority and, thus, limited by the past it cites. Interpretation takes into account the continuing occurrence of redemptive life. Theological reflection as redemptive has as its goal “the transformative illumination of everyday

social and individual life.”²³

Critical here is the redemptive paradigm informing and energizing societal guidance reflection. For redemption is a critical paradigm which

identifies the human problem as a social and individual idolatrous bondage which pervades the very structure of human history and historicity.²⁴

This central paradigm means that ecclesial life must refuse to claim any culture or political system or societal movement as the *a priori* of salvation. All particular cultures, institutions, and movements in history are subject to the occurrence of redemption. At the same time, to participate in ecclesial existence and institutions is to participate in the transformation of historical life.

At this point we claim that ecclesiality is grounded in a mode of guidance. Within societies and cultures, ecclesiality contributes to the dialogic discussion of societal guidance. The language well could address what Winter calls the secondary ethics of programs and strategies. But if it stays at that level, the complicity with the powers of destruction and evil may continue due to a lack of reflective insight into the basic human condition. Most likely an ecclesial contribution to matters of policy will be an exploration into and an articulation of a foundational ethic which seeks to disclose the human possibility, a possibility mediated through the paradigm of redemption.

IV. AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE PROPOSAL

At this juncture we shall return to the constructive proposal that public policy statements as a ministry of societal guidance are fundamental expressions of ecclesial identity, obligation, and validation. Our claim is that the policy statements are the disclosure of the continuing interpretation of the occurrence

²³Ibid., 191.

²⁴Ibid., 256.

of redemption, As this section proceeds, the Catholic bishops' letter *The Challenge of Peace* becomes the point, again, for illustration of the proposal.

The first claim of this proposal is that ecclesial social pronouncements offer a fundamental contribution to the societal discourse which informs options for societal guidance activity. Such is the position of the bishops who argue that they are not only citizens but individuals involved in discourse which is to offer a “conscious choice” by which humanity is to be saved from nuclear destruction.²⁵ This discourse is from within an episcopal ecclesiastical community, but its intent is to be “a contribution to the wider public debate.”²⁶ The pastoral is based on the process of a search, an urgent looking for direction, a seeking after ways to shift from norms of violence to norms of peace and justice in the world.²⁷ True discourse, then, does not manipulate reality but opens society to dialogue and self-understanding,

In a significant way, ecclesial discourse contributes to an aspect of what Jürgen Habermas terms “communicative competence.” For Habermas, the outcome of societal communication is clarity of what can be claimed to be the truth about social interests and emancipation for self-

reflection and social change,²⁸ While Habermas' point may be tied too closely to his theory of critical interests and his attempts at language analysis directed to the constitution of ideal language forms, the point is that at the intersection of competing policies is the necessity that society be guided through discussion of greater depth and comprehensiveness than can be attained through purposive-rational-instrumental reason. Ecclesial reflection and reason appropriate the priority of fundamental ethics as a basis for communicative depth and, as such, are informative of secondary ethics,

Second, the discourse yields a mode of social participation. Ecclesial policy pronouncements are a statement both of who participates in the societal context and of their perception and consciousness of being in a particular time and situation in history. Certainly the pastoral letter is written by elites, though the tone of the letter is that of identifying something new: a time of discovering human dignity and national integrity. The claim of the letter is that someone besides policy makers is now in the discussion about human survival. A "sign of the times" is the awareness of the danger of destructive force. Certainly there is not the sense of the "people" in the pastoral letter expressed with the clarity as it is articulated in the Cyprus Consultation document referred to earlier in the essay. But the pastoral letter is a presentiment of the peoples' voices. The document is representative of a consciousness of impending disaster for humankind and of a demand for greater participation by people to seek relief from the threat.

Third, the ecclesial pronouncements, as the communicative discourse for societal guidance, may be seen as texts for theological interpretation. They are unique in the ways they both interpret the texts of society (policy statements, government program designs, etc.), serve as texts themselves for further inquiry

²⁵*The Challenge of Peace*, vii.

²⁶*Ibid.*, ii.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 17.

²⁸Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon, 1973) 15, 17, 24.

(church pronouncements, denominational planning documents, etc.), and offer a continuing record of religious communities claiming fidelity to the continuing occurrence of redemption. The bishops' pastoral letter is a record of how technical thought and reason are subsumed under fundamental issues of human understanding. Of note is the discussion of "deterrence" as a nuclear option. While the document recognizes the role of defense in human societies, it also judges the inadequacy of that position in the light of the fact that the weapons of defense are as terrible as those used to attack. "New steps beyond our present conceptions of security and defense policy" are required. Rival national powers need policies grounded in a fundamental view of human interdependence rather than in competing technologies.²⁹

As well, ecclesial texts are expressive of the obligation of ecclesial communities for the care of their world. Farley claims:

The Christian community as ecclesial lives in an ever moving horizon of space or environment in the primary mode of care. This care, while pertaining in principle to all human needs and sufferings occurs under a particular paradigm of redemption made insightfully present in proclamation and bodily present in sacraments.³⁰

Pronouncements are a text of proclamation which should elicit hermeneutic inquiry with diligence and care. For the texts offer disclosure of the evidences of redemption occurring within the human enterprise. The texts run as much the risk of fallibility as, for example, do the writings of Paul which on the one hand affirm relations of master and slave, though transformed through redemption, and, on the other hand, announce a new universe of relationships among slave and free, Greek and Jew, male and female.

Fourth, ecclesial pronouncements are texts through which the unity of the church is focused. The bishops' letter, while directed from one communion, is remarkable in its inclusiveness. While the letter was directed from and to the Catholic community, a wider audience is addressed. Such may be the model for ecclesial conversation where the pronouncements of many groups become shared texts. Interpretation of the occurrences of redemptive reflection is an appropriate agenda for ecumenical dialogue.

V. THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIETAL GUIDANCE MINISTRY

The implications of this proposal are several. First, a ministry of societal guidance is distinctive. For matters of illustration, it may be compared briefly with and differentiated from other types of social ministry. At least one aspect of

²⁹*The Challenge of Peace*, 62, 80. The drafting of the United Presbyterian *Confession of 1967* occurred with no little controversy over the way the church would address matters of national and international security. The final draft of the *Confession* claims that in the search for peace, the nations are required to "pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at the risk of national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding." The matter is addressed, again, in the 1980 Presbyterian pronouncement "Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling."

³⁰E. Farley, *Ecclesial Reflection*, 258.

ministry could be termed activity ministry which places the church (denomination, congregation) in the areas of service and advocacy. Community interests are supported through church backing. An example is the support of or sponsorship of neighborhood health agencies. A second mode of ministry would be an autonomous ministry of agencies which may be supported financially by and represent church concerns but claim independence from supporting bodies. Such is the case with the industrial mission movement, training centers, and other mediating groups within society. The third societal involvement ministry is that activity where the churches join in coalition with other groups. Community organizations and peace movements are examples of particular programs and strategies. A fourth ministry could be termed holistic, for there is a conscious attempt to blend service, public advocacy, and policy influence. A congregation with task forces in each of those areas is an example.

Finally, a model of societal guidance ministry places the resources of ecclesial reflection in the matrix of social policy discussion and the allocation of a society's capabilities and resources to act upon itself in transformative ways. Societal guidance ministry informs societal practice with understanding of a depth sociality mediated through redemptive symbols and fundamental perceptions of the human project. At the same time, practice is assessed in terms of its truthfulness and faithfulness to the potential for human dwelling. Examples of this are not only in the pronouncing of positions on societal matters. Societal guidance ministry is supported by ecclesial groups through establishing offices of church and society, having interpretive offices

in levels of government, and supporting financially the policy reflection centers.³¹ Societal guidance ministry conceived in this manner is not an aberration of the purpose of ecclesial life; it is a creative way ecclesial life shapes the fabric of a society. As a result, the redemptive identity of the ecclesial community finds clarity.

A second implication of the proposal is that the teaching and preaching of the churches is to be informed and stimulated by the texts of pronouncements of societal guidance. Certainly *The Challenge of Peace* is such a document rich in an understanding of the avenues of peace for the Christian communities to explore. However, it does not stand alone, but within a corpus, a continuing canon of the occurrence of redemption. It is one of multiple pronouncements by several ecclesial traditions. Within and among these traditions, the pronouncements should serve as texts to inform preaching and teaching. Such activity should articulate hermeneutical and exegetical expertise. And they should demonstrate homiletical and educational competence.

At this point it should be admitted that the social pronouncement texts do emerge from differing and sometimes competing societal guidance projects of ecclesial bodies, movements, and independent coalitions. Finding criteria to understand differences and to open dialogue among the groups is a continuing effort to be produced in another essay. However, the issue opens the discussion of the final implication of the proposal in this article. A ministry of societal

³¹A creative example of this is the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, an ecumenical center for research and consultation located on the campus of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

guidance should be self-critical. It should not be limited to the “bit criticism” of the communities of assumptions. Certainly it will draw upon technical thought to engage in the language of societal guidance, but it must not be limited to technical reason and instrumental ideology as the final source for its reflection on human beings in the world. Thus it may not join unreflectively with interest groups. Nor will it engage in concordats with civil bodies under the illusion that a social or political utopia is thereby possible. If any human expression of depth sociality should be able to recognize the pervasive threat of evil in this world, it should be those ecclesial entities for whom redemption is both a recognition of persistent evil and a sign of new possibility for the human enterprise. The language of societal guidance challenges a divided consciousness which is unable to see the depth of the human project and which is intent on restricting the possibilities for human reflection and action. The language of societal guidance ministry presents the vision of the human prospect within the communication shaping societal policy.