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## The Church's Ministry to People Who Differ on Issues of National Policy

Richard Jungkuntz  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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# The Church's Ministry to People Who Differ on Issues of National Policy

1. We ourselves are the church. When we speak of the church's ministry, therefore, we are speaking first of all of our own ministry. We ourselves are also people who differ on a host of issues, including those of national policy. Consequently, the church's ministry to people who differ is in the first instance our own ministry to one another.
2. In another sense the church's ministry is a special responsibility of those whom the church has solemnly charged with the public administration of the means of grace. In our present inquiry we also have this form of ministerial function in view.
3. In any case, Christian ministry is not lordship but servanthood, not domination but assistance; above all, it is not (even for "good" ends) manipulation of other persons individually or in groups, but self-effacing service that meets particular needs of particular people. We cannot resist the depersonalizing forces that characterize the systems and structures of contemporary society by becoming party ourselves to depersonalizing counterprocedures and actions.
4. To differ honestly with my fellow Christian on a national policy issue is itself an intrinsic part of my civic service (= ministry) to him. "Differences on the issues are the nutriment of the political process" (Ramsey Clark, *The New Yorker*, Nov. 8, 1969, p.88). It therefore belongs to the church's ministry to sensitize her members to their political responsibilities, reminding them that man under the Law is *homo politicus*. (See also Section II, 3-8 of "The Church's Responsibility in International Affairs.")
5. Such sensitization includes not only urging Christians to engage in the political process but also helping them to identify significant issues in regard to national policy together with the considerations both moral and pragmatic that bear upon the decisions to be made.
6. The church's ministry in regard to political questions entails proclaiming the divine Word in such a way as to maintain "the distinction between law and Gospel [as] an especially glorious light" (FC, Epitome V, 2). Essential to such proclamation is the further distinction between the two modes of God's ruling in the world. (See Section I, 4-11 and 15-18 of "The Church's Responsibility in International Affairs.")
7. The church ministers rightly to those who differ on national policy issues by insisting that opinions rooted in passion, ignorance, or unreason are culpable and undeserving of substantive attention.
8. The church's ministry further requires her to expose every form of demagogic



messianism, ideological self-righteousness, chiliastic utopianism, and "Christian" imperialism.

9. The church owes her members instruction in the hard realities of human choice in an imperfect world, particularly also in regard to political decisions. Under the rule of God's left hand to choose one "good" is to reject another; to reject one "evil" is to choose another; while to make no choice at all is to lend support to every existing and future "evil" and to abandon support of every existing and future "good."
10. There are four essential aspects of the church's ministry as it functions through those whom the church has entrusted with the public "office of the keys." These essential aspects are: the kerygmatic, the didactic, the parenetic, and the elenctic.
  - kerygmatic — reconciling men to God and one another through the Gospel of forgiveness in word and deed and sacrament.
  - didactic — instructing men through the Word of God as to the content of His will and the nature of His rule.
  - parenetic — describing for Christians the Gospel's liberating power in terms of specific contemporary possibilities for doing good unto all men.
  - elenctic — calling men to account

and judgment by means of the Law in its twofold function: for the sake of their salvation, accusing them in their impenitence; for the sake of civic righteousness and social well-being, urging upon them the promise of gain and the threat of pain.

11. My personal ministry to those who differ with me includes the four aspects mentioned above, but beyond that it obliges me particularly —
  - to respect my brothers' civic right to express their political opinions.
  - to honor their personhood by listening to their self-expression.
  - to seek to understand not merely their words, but *them* — trying to discern the personal needs, anxieties, and hopes that lie behind the external words and opinions; remembering always that many influences over which they have had no control have helped to shape their present views.
  - to establish the common ground on the basis of which differing political opinions can be profitably discussed: our common motivation in the love of Christ; our common goal in peace, prosperity, and justice for all; our common means in God's gift of reason; our common inability to foresee all consequences of present decisions; our common vision of the ultimate will of a gracious God.