

Public Justice for All

2008-2009 supplement to the annotated
bibliographical listing of the works of
James W Skillen

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Introduction

This is the January 2010 update of [Public Justice for All](#), an annotated bibliographical listing of the writings of James W Skillen. A first edition listing his writings from 1967 to 2006 was made available from the All of Life Redeemed site in January 2007. A second edition appeared in May 2008 and added extra titles from 2007 and 2008. In the initial listing the articles and broadsheets Skillen had written in his editorial capacity for the Center for Public Justice were not included. The work of itemising all those many writings remains to be done, although the Center for Public Justice [web-site](#) has made available all the articles written for [Public Justice Report](#) (PJR) from May 1989 until Dec 2007 when it ceased publication. It also provides an archival listing for those years.

In 1989, PJR took over from "Public Justice Newsletter" which had been published by the Association for Public Justice since 1977.

[Capital Commentary](#) began life in 1996 and all are available from the CPJ on-line archive. Skillen's own contributions are there identified, including the items he wrote with other Center associates.

Most of the items which we listed in the first edition were of articles published before the availability of the "world wide web". The decision was to leave out the items published by the Center for Public Justice, either in [Public Justice Report](#) or [Capital Commentary](#) or some other broadsheet, although a few of those, from time to time, had been published elsewhere and found their way into the bibliographical listing. Where possible, the supplements to the bibliography will be compiled to also make a link to the web-site where his writings or lectures are available.

In September 2009, Skillen stepped down as President of the Center. Hence we can expect further publications to add to this ongoing listing since he intends to devote much of his time to further research and writing. The plan is to have another supplement published in December 2011. We continue the numbering system we have already developed,

Skillen's writings, and lectures include podcasts and MP3 lectures that are listed as Nos. 293, 322, and in this supplement at Nos. 385 and 387. These form part of his persistent pursuit of a renewed Christian contribution that challenges a political culture that has turned away from the ways of the Lord. His writings are characterised by a consistent effort to avoid "skeptical negativism" (see the entry listed as No. 409) by encouraging his readers to see their citizenship in global terms and as an integral facet of their service to God and neighbour.

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SUPPLEMENT TO
THE ANNOTATED LIST OF PUBLICATIONS
JAMES W SKILLEN (2008-2009)

NB From this point Skillen's *Center for Public Justice* publications - Public Justice Report, Capital Commentary and Root and Branch - have been included in the listing.

2008

370. [Food, Fuel, and Farming](#) *Capital Commentary*, January 4,

This is a broadsheet that explains the way market-distortions that push up the price of food, that encourage the growth of carbon emissions to the disadvantage of farmers in poor countries result from foolish Government policies. The discussion begins with the increases in the price of food and the attempt to promote ethanol production. Actually, suggests Skillen - referring to Robert Samuelson in the Washington Post 12/12/07 - the supplementing of gasoline with ethanol may actually create a false sense of progress and **increase rather than decrease** oil dependency. In a bad year competition between food and ethanol producers could push prices even higher. The latest farm bill produces market distortions which will hinder the development of alternate fuels. Meanwhile support for American farmers makes it impossible for farmers in poor countries to compete on the American market.

371. [Faith and the Presidency](#) *Root and Branch* 10, January 17,

This is a further discussion of the way religion is referred to in the (American) political realm. It covers developments over the last 50 years, including JFK's assurance that a Roman catholic presidency would not mean a church controlled White House. Skillen reviews Mitt Romney's confession of Christian faith in recent times.

The religious affirmation in Romney's speech is quite thin, the values claim general, and the political relevance indirect and largely unhelpful.

Huckabee admits to wanting to amend the Constitution to insert standards that comply with God's law for marriage and the unborn. For the rest - Clinton, Obama, Edwards and McCain - the faith to which they appeal refers ultimately to faith in America and its promises. And Skillen's conclusion:

What we have, then, in the campaign rhetoric is civil religion as ground for moral values and morality as ground for self-government.

But in all this the responsibilities that belong to government and other institutions, organizations and relationships are not clarified.

372. "Pluralism as a Matter of Principle" (Part III Chapter Seven) in John A Coleman SJ (ed Christian Political Ethics Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford pp. 141-152.

This article is Skillen's contribution to a republication of a previously published exchange with David Little's "Conscientious Individualism: A Christian Perspective on Ethical Pluralism" (No. 317) in Richard Madsen and Tracy B Strong (eds) The Many and the One: Religious and Secular Perspectives on Ethical Pluralism in the Modern World 2003. Skillen's 12 page article focuses upon Little's appeal to Roger Williams as justification for his approach (Skillen's other comments on Williams are at Nos. 164, 122 and 135). For Skillen something more basic than "conscientious individualism" is required because

the individual conscience is not the ultimate seat of authority. The Creator and the Creator's moral law function as the authority and the normative standards for human beings.... Biblically speaking, the commandments were not addressed to individual consciences but to persons in community, including those who held institutional authority as parents, priests, elders, judges, kings, and prophets.

The reply to Little begins with Skillen's alternative view of Williams' contribution.

What we might call Williams's strong affirmation of structural pluralism is on display in his distinction between church and state. At the same time, within each of those spheres he was not at all an ethical pluralist and certainly not an ethical relativist.

373. [Civil and Religious Laws in England](#) *Root and Branch* 11 Feb 29

An interesting American interpretation of a lecture by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury suggesting that Muslim (sharia) law be accommodated within the British legal system. On the one hand, the lecture supports freedom of association for diverse "religious communities" even if in a peculiarly English, or British, manner. On the other hand, the Archbishop's argument relates social pluralism to universal secular law. Skillen discerns equivocation in the proposal. He notes that "relating to something other" is not peculiar to Jews and Muslims. There is more to this than merely relating to the British legal system. Skillen notes that the Archbishop affirms freedom of association to avoid a clash of loyalties between state and culture. But can this be the reason for including legal recognition of *sharia* within the British legal system? British Christians (the "mainstream" of secular British society) also owe ultimate allegiance to God who transcends both the Crown and the Church of England. So is Williams suggesting disestablishment of the Church of England to allow it to become but one of many religious communities under the crown or pluralizing the Church in order that some elements of *sharia* be included within its established framework? Skillen's second set of observations they focus upon Williams' proposal to redefine the role of public law. Williams' concern is that minorities shouldn't be allowed to become "too isolated" in their cultural practices from the mainstream. The law should monitor non-mainstream affiliations and ensure that marginal practices incompatible with mainstream understandings of liberty are restrained. Skillen's implied caveat is that this will inevitably impinge upon freedom of citizens (if that is what they are) in marriage, private finance, education and other non-state areas of life. The Archbishop's plea for a reconceived "social pluralism" is not putting the emphasis where it should be placed: if the public laws are not justly serving the actual population then they must be changed through the democratic transformation of the political community.

374. [Is the Economic Crisis a Moral Issue](#) *Capital Commentary* April 11

While the title of this broadsheet links economy and morality, the article begins with a discussion of diverse languages that refer to normative demands in the different social spheres. And so with discussion of the "credit crunch" or the "economic crisis" **one cannot avoid questions of justice and injustice and, hence, the issues are inextricably moral.** This then is a discussion of political morality, of tax policy, bank services, and how people are provided for in order to pay daily costs.

This is not just a consequence of some massive technical glitch which was unanticipated in the workings of some massive machine, the crisis is no innocent accident, *A Financial Times* article explores the gap between rich and poor and notes how the growth in pre-tax income from 1979-2005 was inordinately in favour of the rich (1.3% per year for poorest households, less than 1 per cent for middle income earners and over 200 percent for those in the top 1 per cent of household earnings). In 1979 the differential was 1:8:23; by 2005 1:21:70!. The immorality is not just about the decisions of individuals and businesses; it is also a great deal of *immoral injustice* on the part of government.

375. "The Pluralist Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd" in Jeanne Heffernan Schindler (ed) Christianity and Civil Society: Catholic and Neo-Calvinist Perspectives Lexington Books, Lanham pp. 97-114

The initial endnote indicates that this contribution depends in part on Skillen's 2003 article, "*Philosophy of the Cosmological Idea: Herman Dooyeweerd's Political and Legal Thought*" (see No. 321 above.)

This is a slightly briefer and refined version of the original 62 page journal article. The footnotes have been reduced considerably. The article begins with a brief statement of the basic orientation of Dooyeweerd's contribution to scholarship. A brief account of Dooyeweerd's critical examination of the possibility of philosophical thought, is then immediately followed by an exposition of how Dooyeweerd's general transcendental-critical method explored the **Dialectical Antinomy in Modern Liberalism** (98-101). It comes down to an exploration of the liberal view of human freedom, as developed by Kant, and focused upon practical reason as the origin of moral obligation. If the rational self is autonomous while also obligated then at one and the same time the self is free from all law and is the law that constitutes its own freedom. The subsequent discussion explores how liberal ideology medicated in the American polity

... people cannot live in a complex differentiated society without authoritative government and civic obligations. The liberal ideology foments the illusion of autonomy with a corresponding weakening of governance.

Creation Order as Ground of Societal Pluralism (101-103) explores the way Dooyeweerd's pluralist social philosophy will approach the comprehensive study of social institutions and the social fabric of diverse responsibilities. This is a normative philosophy seeking to identify how the various institutions, organisations and relationships are in fact accountable for how they give expression to human responsibility *Coram Deo*. **Human Identity and Creation's Modalities** (103-104) is a brief outline of how sphere sovereignty is maintained between social spheres in an inter-dependent social fabric. **The Differentiation and Integration of Human Society** (106-106), the author expounds upon the way human society has emerged or developed through history. Humans are called to give shape to their callings in history. Some relationships are founded biotically (in marriage and family), whereas others are founded culturally or historically (a newspaper or a trade union). The discussion broaches the question of healthy social differentiation, which could not have come about without the differentiation of *a public-legal order with its own normative identity qualified by the juridical modality* (p. 106). **Toward a Just Pluralism** explores the structural pluralism by which no one societal organisation or institution has the superintending authority over all the other social relationships. The differences between public and (two types of) private law are expounded. Internal private law refers to the rights of bodies to oversee their internal affairs.

Laws of the state cannot be just if they violate the internal authority and responsibility of the non-government spheres of life. Civil private law (common law) pertains to the realm in which individual freedom and equal treatment should be recognised and guaranteed by the state as a matter of right (p.108).

Here is "the juridical asylum of the human personality", counter-balancing any excessive communal demands within legal life. Skillen exposes why liberalism has got it wrong. Liberalism assumes that this is the original sphere of human autonomy, whereas this sphere cannot come into existence without the public legal power's protections against the over-stepping of public officials of their offices. The State that is responsive to its calling to ensure public justice is undermined by the absolutization of individual freedom or of the state. To conclude Skillen make a brief comparison between "sphere sovereignty" and the idea of a "subsidiary" relationship among associations and institutions. Dooyeweerd's social theory is compared with that which tries to refer to public life in terms of a whole and its parts. This clarifies why from a Christian standpoint it make

no sense to speak of the autonomy of non-state institutions within the state. Autonomy/subsidiarity refers to a whole and its parts. The **Conclusion** draws the state (or political community) as an institution through which humans are called to respond with creative, history-making stewardship.

376. [Political Speech and Action](#) *Root and Branch* 12, May 1

This addresses the common presumption that a common public reason should guide political debate. Skillen broaches two difficulties. The first difficulty is with the manner in which "religion" is defined as the opposite of "secular".

Granting equal treatment to citizens of diverse faiths in our constitutional system does not set the political system apart from religious convictions; it just means that the political community is no longer constitutes as a community of faith.

It is simply not true that public reason is the only thing that people of diverse faiths have in common. People of similar faith may well disagree on public policy, and thus it is quite legitimate for voters to seek to have candidate give an account of how their approach to government is rooted in the faith that shapes their lives. The second difficulty is that the view too narrowly focuses upon the Constitutional protection of religious freedom as if this is merely a matter of recognizing an individual's conscientious beliefs. "Free exercise" is not merely about freedom to have whatever beliefs one has in private. It is also a matter of how a child's education is chosen by its parents; how social service providers serve those in need. Such protection of "free exercise" would lead to genuine pluralism. Citizenship is about membership in a political community in which citizens can freely participate from their diverse points of view.

377. [America and Israel](#) *Root and Branch* 13, June 2

Religions, says the author, are ways of life, functioning like glasses in that they help us get things into focus. The article explores the *American way of life* as a religion. The US support for the state of Israel is expression of this way of life, this civil religious viewpoint. And it is in conflict, at a religiously deep level with other religions.

Skillen explores the dismissal of Robert O'Malley from the Obama re-election team for his suggestion that Israel as much as the Palestinians were responsible for the failure of recent peace initiatives. A bizarre taboo is at work in US public life that means raise questions about Israel are never raised for fear of being denounced by powerful lobbies. But why are Jewish and Christian evangelical voters so pro-Israel.

The author outlines the central thesis that will become part of a book he is writing.

The Christian Zionists, the American Jewish Zionist and America's own new Israelite self-definition come together in a coalition of religious forces that has the power of an (almost) established civil religion. It is the religion of the American way of life that sustains both other conventional "religious" Zionism. For genuine public debate insight is needed about the religious character of the American way of life.

378. [Rule of Law Succumbs to Torture for Safety](#) *Capital Commentary* June 6

Can torture be sanctioned by the President without abrogating the rule of law? Skillen notes:

Pragmatism in support of American safety supposedly justifies the exceptional means that appear necessary to the president to achieve that end.

The argument explains that the "enhanced interrogation techniques" do not make the US any safer Illegitimate methods to obtain information means that a court abiding by the rule of law will not proceed to prosecution. Principle above pragmatism is more and more a political need for the entire political community, for the US and for the world at large.

379. [Does Our System Demand Too Much of the President?](#) *Election Series '08* No 1 July 12

As President of the Center for Public Justice, Skillen introduces an "Election Series '08" for consideration among those who are following CPJ's policy development. This is the only time in the cycle of American elections that the people of the US come together in one election. In this election the entire political community is the electorate. This is the one and only public official elected by them. That is at the root of America's too great demand upon its head of State.

The discussion draws on reflection from Larry Siedentop of Keble College, Oxford about the democratic deficit in the EC. This is seen in the French, Dutch and Irish rejection of the latest EC proposal. While governments are represented in Brussels, the citizens themselves are not integrated into the governance of the Union. It's not just economic benefits, but membership, and adequate representation that is missing. Skillen compares this with the American situation where political cynicism is also on the rise. The US also has a democratic deficit. Representation has become abstracted from the people who do the voting, if they vote. It is against this cynicism that Barack Obama has marshaled younger voters into a nation-wide movement for change. Siedentop misrepresents the situation in the US by comparing it favourably with the EC, but what is lacking is genuine civic education by political parties which have become little more than electoral machines. *Congress is even less democratic today than it was decades ago.* The common good of the national polity needs to be strengthened in a comprehensive way. Democratic renewal must bring about a new and enduring form of political accountability from those elected to govern.

380. ["The Necessity of a Non-Reductionist Science of Politics"](#) paper presented at the conference sponsored by Metanexus Institute, "Subject, Self, and Soul: Transdisciplinary Approaches to Personhood" Madrid Spain July 13-18.

This article includes the author's most recent attempt to build upon discussions in which he has sought to specify the particular concern of political science (see Nos. 6, 19, 20, 27, 42, 48, 62, 67, 127, 153, 229, 376). The article's abstract for the conference reads:

The discipline of political science is still too much influenced by the ideal of finding a method that will do for politics what Newton did for physics (as one author puts it). The quest for a "hard" science of political behavior that focuses on "facts" separated from "values" generally controls much if not most of the discipline. In this century-long quest, the discipline has important assumptions and methods from sociology, psychology, mathematics, biology, economics, and other sciences in various attempts to achieve a cause-and-effect explanation of political behavior. This paper tries to expose the weakness and adequacy (sic!?) of these typically reductionist approaches to political science and outlines an approach that not only rejects modal reductionism but identifies the object of political science as the norm-responsive institutional community that is constituted by government and citizens (or subjects). The political community (or "state" as it is referred to throughout much of the world) is a norm-responsive entity that cannot be properly understood from the prejudicial point of view of a fact/value dichotomy. Instead, it must be recognized as an historically dynamic institution that functions in all modalities of human experience (physical, biotic, psychical, social, linguistic, logical, economic, juridical, ethical, and more) and is distinguishable from other institutions and organizations, such as the family, church, school, and business corporation. Political science, therefore, must be an entity science that entails multi-modal normative analysis with full self-consciousness of its philosophical and religiously deep assumptions. [BCW NB the reference on p. 3 to sociology as a modal or aspectual science - whereas via the appropriation of Max Weber's historical economics there has been a strong tendency to view sociology as a science of an aspect of rational action, this influence has been modified by Durkheim's approach which is to view society in *factual* terms (and hence as a conglomerate of entities) via the analysis of its structural components.]

The paper is arranged with the following sections: an introduction examining the view of Jon R Bond and setting forth an alternative strategy in philosophical and historical terms (pp. 1-3); a discussion **Distinguishing the Analyzable** in which a brief discussion of what is involved in the scientific analysis of reality's modal aspects with a specification of the term political as

.. *that which pertains to the life and operations of the state or political community* followed by an analysis of the 2007 Presidential address by Robert Axelrod to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (pp. 3-10); an attempt to answer the question

What Should Constitute a Non-Reductionist Science of Politics (pp. 10-16) in which the author shows that it is possible to present a workable alternative view of what the discipline should be. This is not just a statement offered "in dissent" but has the reformation of political science in view pointing to a starting point for the science that does not put faith in scientific method itself.

381. ["Is A Science of Politics Possible?"](#) The Global Spiral 2009.09.01

This is a re-written version of the conference paper listed in No. 380. The material is arranged under different headings. After a substantial introduction, a critical representation of the views of Bond and Axelrod is presented, which concludes:

The proper object of study for political science, I would contend, can be nothing less than the institutional political community of government and citizens.

The material is then organised in different sections under the following two headings: **What is the object of study?** concluding

In sum, my starting assumption is that the "political" is not a universal function of all human affairs, the study of which can yield a reductionist, cause-and-effect explanation of human behavior.

and **What Constitutes a Non-reductionist Science of Politics?**

... politics must be an *entity* science, not first of all a *modal* or *aspectual* science.

In Conclusion, Skillen writes

The aim of this paper has been to suggest that the reason for the failures and inadequacies of modern political science is that it has not adequately identified and distinguished the proper object of its study and that this inadequacy is due, in part, to the religiously deep assumptions about human nature and the nature of science with which much of its research begins. A different starting point with different assumptions about human nature, science, and political life is needed.

The implication is that a new view of science is needed and not just of political science.

382. [World Language, Mutual Understanding](#) *Capital Commentary*, July 19

This is Skillen's reflections on multi-cultural global culture. He had been attending a conference in Madrid Spain and attended the famous Prado museum which was but a short distance from the train station where the terrorist bombing had been perpetrated three years previously. It is a descriptive essay about the importance of "diplomacy in many languages". Diplomacy must be developed at a highly sophisticated level to meet the challenges of a shrinking globe (No. 206).

383. [The Fannie-Freddie Bail Out](#) *Capital Commentary*, August 1

How is the recent "Fannie-Freddie Bail Out" to be interpreted. It is a bill which enables the US Government to guarantee of the mortgage creditworthiness of two GSEs - Government sponsored enterprises. Threatened with their collapse the Government had to act to the tune of \$5 trillion. They had been kept viable by foreign investment but with a

collapse in house prices and a withdrawal in investment capital they were threatened with bankruptcy. The broadsheet lays out in straightforward terms what has happened and how it is to be interpreted. Market and regulatory failures are now to be paid for through taxpayer's monies. The losses have been socialized. The public bails out the market's investors so that they will stay and keep the free market wheels turning. Skillen explains why adequate regulation of the market is needed to ensure that private investment failures are not paid for by tax payers.

384. [Campaign Attention to "Religion"](#) Root and Branch 14 Sept 2

The Presidential campaign has seen both Republicans and Democrats giving attention to the "religion factor". The views of Dean Gerson, speech-writer for President Bush, are examined. Gerson, an evangelical Christian, had written in the *Washington Post* offering advice to candidate Obama but does so ambiguously.

Gerson is among those who want a religious America, not a secularist America.

According to this view, the presidential campaign is about which candidate should be authorized to represent the true American faith and way of life. In analyzing the respective merits of McCain and Obama, Skillen interprets their campaigns are two options within the dominant civil religion. It is a question of whether the old fashioned civil religion, or a new expression of the dominant faith will prevail. Skillen predicts a McCain victory seems unlikely.

385. [Interview](#) with Chris Laidlaw, Sunday Morning Programme, Radio New Zealand, 7 September

The interview lasts 19 minutes, covering a range of questions about the orientation of the Center for Public Justice. The discussion covers the long tradition of Christian attempts to control government, or of turning national political communities into communities of faith. US civil religious nationalism views the US as God's means of leading the world forward and it is currently fired by a profound anxiety about America's No. 1 status. Why is the US political system so caught up in civil religious fervour? Skillen suggests that the way American's view politics, and the structure of America's system of political representation including the way the president is viewed, makes a major contribution to this. The president represents the people's love of the nation which actually is also deeply suspicious of government itself. The election while presupposing that the US is God's chosen nation to lead the world, expects so much and yet continues to search for a small federal government. This civil religious anxiety fills the vacuum brought on by the absence of national political parties.

The discussion reviews the prospects of McCain and Obama in the forthcoming election. Skillen briefly comments on CPJ's policies - neither candidate comes close to agreeing with "most of what we are for." The problematic structure of US governance is evident in the election but this is not raised as an issue by the candidates. Whoever is elected will have to negotiate the many tensions, complexities and ambiguities.

386. [The Root of the Problem](#) *Capital Commentary* Sept 26

The root of the problem - the problem being: why have so many mortgage assets lost their value and become illiquid? - is a lack of trust.

Banks and investment firms had enticed people to take out mortgages not adequately backed by the value of the homes they were buying. Lending institutions and homebuyers were gambling that housing prices were on a perpetual climb. Government policies encouraged individuals and companies to buy now and pay later. The trust was lacking to begin with; why should people put their trust in the government bail-out plans?

Trust will not be restored until real responsibility and genuine accountability are re-established at every point around the circle.

387. Taking Citizenship Seriously: Christian Responsibility in Today's Political Context. Francis A. Schaeffer Lectures, October 2-5. Covenant Seminary.

Speaker: Dr. James Skillen, President, Center for Public Justice

Presidential Politics in a Post-Everything America - with GOP Congressman John Hancock.

<http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/7893/>

McCain vs. Obama: Christian Electoral Tensions

<http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/7894/>

Cynicism and Idealism: Redeeming Political Structures

<http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/7895/>

God Bless America and Global Politics: Where Is Jesus?

<http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/7896/>

Christian Leadership in Poverty and Family Initiative Reform

<http://www.resourcesforlifeonline.com/audio/7897/>

Skillen's 2003 Francis Schaeffer Lectures "Jesus and Caesar; Christian Faith and Political Process" are available at

<http://www.livingchrist360.com/thelivingroom/resourcesforlife/podcasts/89/>

388. [McCain, Obama and America's Two Exodus Stories](#) *Election Series*
'08, No 8 Oct 15

Skillen continues the Election Series articles by giving a further account of how American civil religion manifests itself in contemporary political life. It is the backdrop against which most political debate in American makes sense.

The first story is that of the Puritans who, in covenant with God, took their exodus from oppression in Britain and set out to the new promised land.

The second story was authored by America's slaves - mostly in song. Both exodus stories had distinctive views of America's system of governance. In the first story the federal government was to be a servant of the states, not the head of a national polity. In the second story a strong federal government led the fight against slavery and established equal civil rights for all citizens. Skillen explains how McCain and Obama relate to America's dominant Exodus stories - McCain representing the Puritan errand into the wilderness, and Obama the aspiration for a new day when equal rights for all is realised.

The views of the candidates with respect to freedom and government are examined. In terms of national defense, for example, McCain approaches the military as the expression of the nation's love of freedom; for Obama it is one department of government. Finally, the weaknesses of the two Exodus stories are canvassed. The first story runs off the tracks with American exceptionalism, while the second sees progress in more and more identity groups claiming their "rights". The author encourages readers to move beyond these stories when they consider how to vote and concentrate

...on the hard work of building a sustainable and trustworthy republic that can, with modesty and forethought, conduct the hard work of multidimensional diplomacy in a shrinking, warming, warring world.

389. [Guidelines for Voting](#) *Election Series '08*, No 9 Oct 29

Here is a brief catalogue of CPJ's "Guidelines for Voting". What is outlined here is a summary of CPJ's [policy platform](#), and an analysis of how the candidates stand in relation to these various policy areas. 1. What is a political community? 2. What are the tasks of government in the political community? 3. What is the task of citizenship? 4. How should welfare policy be framed? Who "provides" welfare? How should welfare provision be regulated? 5. Education policy - does it promote justice for families, schools and equal treatment of all citizens? 6. How is human life protected at all stages? 7. Homosexuality - how do candidates define marriage? Is marriage a civil rights matter? 8. Security and defense. 9. Religious freedom. 10. The environment. 11. The family. The approaches of both major candidates in each of these policy areas is examined. Critical questions are raised concerning the administration of justice in relation to pressing problems.

390. and Amy Sherman with help from Rudy Carrasco [Toward Civic Justice and Economic Empowerment](#) 5th Nov, 13 pp.

This is the fruit of a nine-month collaborative effort in which the authors seek to provide guidance for biblical Christians to attend to their callings as creational stewards, as those who seek God's shalom for their cities. It is outlined in terms of a "two step" method of presentation - **Foundational Principles** - the way things ought to be; the way things are; the way of the King - and **Practical Applications** with **Eight Principles of Christian Economic Empowerment** to enable readers to begin to apply the principles and avoid politically correct and socially popular ways of economic life. These include 1. a high view of human dignity, potential, creativity, freedom, and responsibility; 2. recognizing our identity as stewards to form genuine opportunities for resource management of up and coming generations; 3. affirming the amazing creational diversity and complexity of personal and social life; 4. affirming the important contributions of governments, individuals, families, and the associations of civil society for a healthy, prosperous society; 5. respecting entrepreneurial activity; 6. emphasizing a distinctive Christian approach to business; 7. affirm the role of government in economic matters; 8. acknowledging our Christian responsibility to protest against economic injustice.

391. [The Obama Victory](#) *Capital Commentary* November 7

Obama's election confirms a process by which it has become more and more evident that this national political community demands national governance. His victory puts paid to the view of the American republic that allowed the structure of the republic to take care of itself. It cannot do that. Skillen reviews the role of the federal government since Roosevelt's new Deal and Johnson's great society. Reagan and Bush represent concerted efforts to arrest the trend, or the speed, at which the United States has proceeded toward a national polity in which it is no longer merely a federally protected collection of State polities. Moreover the US is no longer able to set its own course in its own terms. The US has moved beyond the governance advocated by Roosevelt and Johnson (Democrat) and Reagan and Bush (Republican) and now requires coherent and accountable national governance. This changing context also requires a very different foreign policy. Obama's victory however does not necessarily draw attention to the structural problem now presenting itself to the US - its Constitution militates against the kind of national governance the country now requires. The national polity of the US is "underserved" domestically and internationally by an out-of-date governing system. How can the structure of the republic be reformed over the long term?

392. [The Questions of National Governance](#) *Election Series '08*, No 10
November 17

Skillen has taken the opportunity of the Obama election to enunciate his deepened appreciation for the federal integration of the US national polity. It is Skillen's response to the responses that were made to his *Capital Commentary* (No. 389) where explained how America's political landscape has changed over 75 years.

Federal politics inadequately represents citizens of the national polity. This is seen in the outmoded system of representation in Congress in which members are not specifically held accountable for governing in the interests of the nation as a whole. There is but one office bearer elected by the national electorate. In this skewed system the central government is subject more and more to un-elected interest groups.

It hasn't always been the case that the US is characterized by a genuinely national polity, but it is now, he says, which raises the question of how Americans should view their constitution. He also implies that a polity that lacks valid representation and hence genuine accountability is in part a cause of the nation's economic woes, its ongoing inability to adequately face up to the need for just governance. He illustrates this by merely listing some of the ongoing endemic problems that seem to defy solution; the financial crisis; the lack of an adequately funded health-care system; issues of energy, transportation and environment; the degradation of national infrastructure; the disarray of social security; the inability of Congress to fund the federal governments operations.

All these issues that require sound legislative decisions by both houses of Congress and the president on behalf of the nation as a whole. Yet legislative battles over these issues increasingly lead nowhere because the congressional brokering process works primarily to try to satisfy competing state and regional interests and competing national interest groups.

If the governing philosophies that dominate the polity do not change there will be perpetual emergency reactions, where elected legislators and presidents seek to solve problems short-term in defiance of the political platform upon which they have stood in their election campaigns.

This is clearly an attempt by the soon to retire president of the Center for Public Justice to assist the members and supporters in their ongoing interpretation of political life as the presidency of Barack Obama unfolds and as long-term impacts of legislation are felt in society's diverse institutions. These must be recognised and upheld by government. The responsibilities that belong to these (families, churches, businesses, universities, schools etc) are themselves the most important limits on the federal government's actions. This is the view that the Center promotes, over against those who would put states' rights and individual rights as the primary means of structuring the Federal Government's mandate. And this recognition is by no means the same as the question of the different levels of government. In the US today there is confusion over the politicized role of the judiciary, which is relied upon to define matters that should rightly be defined by law makers. The Supreme Court is not a legislative body, says Skillen. The US is caught in its own political system and at least part of the problem is the blurring that occurs to the difference between the art of campaigning and the art of governance. A very important dimension is also in need of revival - and that is citizenship itself needs to be emancipated from passivity, on the one hand, and reliance upon interest groups on the other. A new kind of nationwide citizens association is needed, he says.

393. [The Left Wing of America's Civil Religion](#) Root and Branch 15, December 3

Also available [here](#). This is an examination of the underlying "left-wing" appeal by Sally Quinn of the Washington Posts' "On Faith" column that President Obama should demonstrate symbolically that he will be an inclusive President by joining the Episcopal Cathedral parish when he comes to Washington. This continues Skillen's examination of America's civil religion and this is identified by him as its "left wing". The inner weaknesses of the argument are exposed; the assumption of Ms Quinn is that to criticize inclusiveness is to reject the equal rights of all citizens. Quinn's article is an attempt to manoeuvre public discussion about the President's faith onto one side in a denominational dispute. Skillen's reply brilliantly exposes the inner weakness of her inclusivist ideology by showing her support for a denominational mind that repeatedly aspires to change churches with their own religious beliefs into religious communities with

the soul of the state. He concludes by issuing a challenge to Quinn in relation to her "inclusiveness": What if President-elect Obama views the office of President as an office in the political community, and not as an office of America's civil religion? Will Quinn think less of the Obamas both as Christians and as the first family, if they decide not to join the Washington National Cathedral?

394. [Entitlement](#) *Capital Commentary* December 19

This Christmas meditation looks at the financial crisis and economic recession in a context where Americans have gotten used to expecting their "entitlements". An exclusive and inordinate concentration upon securing **my** entitlements will misconstrue the overall situation, by concentrating solely upon the way the system's failures impact **me**. The system is revealed as broken and there is a grave injustice in the breaking of promises, the violation of trust, and our failure to provide to others what we owe to them. Christmas reminds us that the coming of the Son of God who was entitled to everything and discounted his claim to everything. Disenfranchised himself of every divine privilege, and became a servant - one who owes everything and claims nothing. Only the entitlements that come from following Him endure forever.

The more we give ourselves to loving and doing justice to those who are also entitled to the love of God, the more we gain.

2009

395. [Inauguration by Fire](#) *Capital Commentary* January 16

Skillen reflects upon three tensions that will test the leadership of the new president. The first is created by the opposing forces of a crisis in confidence that has gripped the country about America's ability to solve its problems, on the one hand and the ongoing pressure to take immediate action to show that something is being done to address these issues, on the other. The second tension deals with America's traditional belief that hard work and self-confidence can get the job done. But are the problems getting too large and too complex? The third tension is about the way a president should communicate to the public. How is optimism to be balanced with a frank assessment of how difficult things are at home and how limited America's impact can be abroad? The truth must be told and responsible government must be encouraged.

396. [Colson on Prayer, Church, and America](#) *Root and Branch* 16 Jan 19

This is a respectful, albeit hard-hitting exposé of Chuck Colson's attempt to maintain his Christian faith while holding on to a remnant of his belief in American exceptionalism. It is an examination of the world-view inherent in [Colson's December 20, 2008](#) Breakpoint radio commentary. The problem with Colson's discussion, Skillen says, is that the church he is thinking about is composed of Americans who have turned away from consumerism. It is as if Christianity has failed if God's mercy is not transmitted to the world via the thrifty, hard-working American Christian church goers. The church in Colson's view becomes a means to the end of fulfilling God's special plan for America.

In praying for the church Colson should think of it not as a mean to America's end but as God's truly chosen people - Israel fulfilled through the in-grafting of believers from every nation into Christ (Rom. 11:13-24).

397. [Can Trust Be Restored?](#) *Root and Branch* 17 February 23

How is trust to be restored/ the question is posed smack bang in the middle of the efforts of governments to tackle the financial crisis by an injection of trillions of dollars into banks and investment companies that have all but nationalized institutions which were thought to be "flagships" of government support for a free market. The separation of commercial and investment banking that came with the abolition of the Glass-Steagall Act has meant that large sums of money have come into the hands of greedy men that should never

have come their way. The Federal Reserve now resembles a public hedge fund leverages at more than 50:1 (Niall Ferguson). What about bolstering supervisory standards in the institutions that led us into this disaster? Bad laws, faulty regulatory systems, negligent oversight and errant patterns of finance and governance need to be exposed before they can be corrected. Can the new president regularly report on his contribution to overcoming this crisis, in a way that concertedly and frankly builds trust in order to begin the work of overcoming these systemic failures? Skillen suggests that President Obama should grasp this problem and realise that the restoration of trust is a top priority that will require frank and open disclosure of what the government is seeking to do to avert disaster with a regular, even monthly, report to the nation.

398. ["New Politics" Still Just a Promise](#) *Capital Commentary* March 13

This is a description of the state of play between the President and Congress. The Republicans in Congress are in denial and simply adopt an opposition mode; the Democrat leadership are trying to grab the spoils, the control of the public's debit card. The American way of doing politics is somehow revealed as a disconnect between what elected office bearers are willing to do now and what they say they intend to do later on. The Washington DC experiment in federal funds for a voucher programme to enable 1700 poor students to attend non-government schools was unable to receive the promised grants in the bill Obama signed into law. Skillen's judgement is terse; *signing the bills exemplifies the kind of leadership he is choosing to exercise today, and actions speak louder than promises*. This is old politics.

399. [Calvin, Calvinism, and Politics](#) *Root and Branch* 18 April 9

This is a discussion of the contribution of Calvin and Calvinism in this 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth. Yes Calvinism has made an indispensable contribution to the strong and enduring culture of institutional diversity in western society and beyond. There is a comprehensive footnote giving recent publications that provide insight into the Calvinist contribution. Skillen's concern is to direct attention to the tendency found among many Calvinist streams and offshoots to identify one or other modern state as a "new Israel", and this, of course finds its way into the US self-definition in 1776. Similar or related views can be seen in the Calvinists of Scotland, England, The Netherlands and among the Afrikaners. Skillen's concern is that the Reformed tradition should have long since recognized that "Christian" nationalism is a patently unbiblical idea. The government's task is the doing of justice in humility and fear before God and in so far as the Reformed tradition has promoted this view of government it has done right. There's no biblical basis for promoting any one government to act out of nationalistic or messianic motivation (see Nos. 393, 335).

400. [Hunger and Justice](#) *Capital Commentary* April 10

This is a discussion of the situation in which 1 out of 10 Americans are reliant on food stamps for their daily food. Sure, a wealthy country like the US can look after its hungry, but the numbers are considerable, and worrying. But then the world problem is worse than that. Something like 20% of the worlds population, at least, are chronically malnourished.

The discussion of hunger leads into a broader analysis of the widespread feeling of injustice that circles the globe. The debt-for-equity demands for bailing out car producers, contrasts with the fact that such a requirement was not needed when the US government bailed out the banks and financial institutions. The widespread sense of economic injustice and the approval of political leaders won't last long if such concerns are not met in concrete ways.

401. "Reformed ... and Always Reforming?" in Sandra F Joireman (ed) Church, State and Citizen - Christian Approaches to Political Engagement Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York.

This contribution (22 February 2006 draft) to a book about the perspectives of different Christian traditions upon international politics begins with discussion of **The Reformed Tradition** and some standard scholarly views about Calvinism, from Max Weber and W Fred Graham. The essay notes that the ideas of sin and predestination constitute the stereotypical view of "Calvinism" and asks:

Is there anything more to it than that? And what about John Calvin himself? Most important for our purposes, what if anything has the Reformed tradition contributed to government and politics, and particularly to international relations and foreign policy?

The "reformed" wing of the protestant reformation, identified with Calvin and Calvinism, is described. Calvin and the early Calvinists were not revolutionaries. They were not seeking to start something new. This approach has a world-wide spread, also in notable centres of learning. But it has also become identified with the doctrines of total depravity and double predestination which gives a lop-sided picture of its actual influence with an overly dogmatic theological tendency. Later in the essay under **States and International Relations** Skillen makes this clarifying comment:

The simplicity and unity of God's creational purposes fall from view, however, if one assumes that reality is constituted most fundamentally by a dualism between this creation and another world, or between the damned and the saved, or between Christian nations vs non-Christian nations.

The emphasis is upon God's one creation and the gospel, as the revelation that in Christ God will indeed bring creation to fulfillment so that His sovereign purposes reach their Sabbatical rest! God keeps His promises.

The essay is densely argued. In one place it notes similarities between Calvin and the Anabaptists in contrast to Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Both added "godly discipline" to the list of marks of the true church. Calvin differed from the Anabaptists with respect to the role of the magistrate - the political community is subject to Christ Jesus in Calvin's view in contrast to "government outside the perfection of Christ" in the Schleithem confession of 1527. Luther and Calvin also disagreed strongly over how government's responsibility is to be understood. In **Theological Distinctives**, Calvin's comprehensive view of "Creation, Fall, Redemption" is outlined, and Skillen concludes by suggesting that in contrast with Luther and the Anabaptists, Calvin was, indeed, a social reformer.

He wanted men and women in society to mirror God again, and that would require the ongoing reformation of every sphere of life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The next section "Church and State" is an important discussion of Calvinism's endorsement of societal differentiation and in the terms of Abraham Kuyper, of "sphere sovereignty". This section starts with an interesting and provocative sentence:

Most Christians today, we can probably say, are Anabaptists in the sense that they contend for free churches in open societies with governments that give equal treatment to all citizens regardless of their faith.

Calvin had assumed that the state should enforce true religion. So how are Calvinists, Christians in the reformed tradition, to take their stand over against Calvin? Hence the *semper reformanda* implied in the essay's title. Kuyper's unconditional disapproval of the burning of Servetus is noted. But the reformed Christians, in reaction to church control of the state have too often allowed their religion to be privatized as a civil religion has dominated the public square. The essay discusses the problem of "secular" politics - Kuyper advocated secularization when that meant de-ecclesiasticization, but resisted

secularization if by that term was meant the religious neutrality of political life. Calvin's notion of the Old Covenant fulfilled in the New Covenant takes the bible of both testaments as a whole. But there has been a negative consequence in Calvin's view of the "covenant community" and that is found in the idea that grew up when new nations were being established whereby a "new Israelite" imagination developed. The New England Puritans, Knox in Scotland and the Afrikaners in South Africa have all been imbued with this notion. It has found a secularised form in the United States with "exceptional nation" of Woodrow Wilson and his latter-day disciple George W Bush.

"Government Due to Sin?" is the next theological distinctive to be discussed. Though Calvinists are usually closer to Augustine than to Aquinas, there is a minority stream within Calvinism that sees the government of the political community based in God's purposes in creation and thus come closer to Aquinas who argued that humans are political **by nature**. Skillen develops this view by reference to the flow of biblical revelation from Genesis to Revelation.

To be sure, if it had not been for sin there would be no need for the retributive functions of government, just as there would be no need for parental punishment of children.

And then, in relation to the stereotypes of Calvinist obsession with predestination, Skillen observes that the development of the political community should be understood in terms of the development of a facet of our creatureliness, our being fashioned in the image of God.

If the reader will grant this hypothesis, at least for the sake of argument, then the meaning of God's sovereignty comes into view not first of all as an overwhelming power to predestine some sinners to heaven and some to hell. Rather God's sovereignty comes into view as the origin of human creatures, made in the image of God and called to love and serve God with everything we are and have, including our stewardship of the political community for the good of our fellow creatures.

There follows "Christianity and Civil Religion" a discussion of how such an understanding of biblical religion puts it on a spiritual collision course with the civil religion that dominates American self-identity, the idolatrous nostrum that the US is God's new lead nation in history.

States and International Relations explains that the normative demand of public justice for our political communities throws any alleged "end of history" brought in by the world-wide acceptance of the liberal state, as a misunderstanding of the historical and cultural task to which humans are called. Nations stand in need of Christ's reconciliation.

Warfare and International Politics reaffirms reformed commitment to just-war criteria by which Governments discipline themselves and their peoples for their own defense. Just-war criteria are as good a point of departure for thinking about strengthening and renewing healthy international relations.

In **Conclusion** Skillen reiterates the importance of a biblical basis for just governance, and the just use of force, in the face of a very serious international situation. Today it is widely assumed around the globe that *governments [should] act aggressively out of a nationalistic, messianic, or totalitarian motivation to try to force the world into the shape they wish it to have*. Justice in humility and fear before God is the exact opposite of this. Governments, all governments, of large and small nations, need to learn to act co-operatively

to uphold laws of distributive justice for the positive good of the commons - both the domestic commons within individual countries and the international commons of the world.

402. "To Look at the World Entirely Afresh" (Editor's Introduction) and "Contending Ways of Life" (Conclusion) in **Prospects and Ambiguities of Globalization: Critical Assessments at a Time of Growing Turmoil** Lexington Books, Lanham

In his introductory chapter, Skillen writes:

Our purpose, as authors, is to try to illuminate the global landscape and to provoke debate and critical reflection in classrooms and living rooms. Americans are go-getters, problem-solvers, forward-looking achievers. We want to get things done and make progress. We don't like barriers that stand in our way. We have a difficult time understanding those who don't share this approach to life. But what if the American way of life is sagging with doubts and hampered by growing weaknesses rather than gathering steam with one success after another? If, to some degree, whether great or small, doubts and weaknesses are growing, then critical reflection on global changes and on the foundations of American life is called for—and perhaps urgently so. . . .

Where will all of this take us? No one knows. The optimists point to all the achievements of globalization that are lifting millions of people out of poverty and are pushing countries toward greater cooperation to achieve their mutual and combined interests. Pessimists point to the growing tensions among peoples and nations over food, fuel, and water, and over control of the direction that global shrinkage should take. More wars and conflicts rather than fewer may be the result. . . .

As Christians we are particularly concerned to gain a deeper understanding of how people throughout the world—all created in the image of God—can deal with their responsibilities for, and their distrust of, one another. Rejecting all utopian illusions about the triumph of human goodness, contradicted as those illusions are by human selfishness, crimes, and hatreds, we also refuse to ignore the constant evidence of God's mercy and grace toward humans throughout all generations, a sustain mercy and restraining grace that make possible forgiveness, renewal, cooperation, and the continuing search for ways to resolve conflict and to build patterns and institutions of greater justice and stability.

There are 6 chapters apart from Skillen's introductory and concluding essays. They are (2) Steven E Meyer, *National Defense University*, Kaleidoscopic Change in World Affairs: Emerging Patterns of Sovereignty and Governance; (3). *Max L. Stackhouse*, *Princeton Theological Seminary* Faith and Globalization; (4). *Rodney D. Ludema*, *Georgetown University*, Globalization and the State: A View from Economics; (5). *Alice-Catherine Carls*, *University of Tennessee*, *Martin* The New Silk Road: Central Asia at the Global Crossroads; (6). *Charles L. Glenn*, *Boston University* Schooling and the Not-So-Sovereign State; (7). *Dennis R. Hoover*, *Institute for Global Engagement* Evangelical Christians: The New Internationalists?

403. ["Celebrating Independence"](#) *Capital Commentary* July 3rd

This is a call of a "Christian patriot" to indeed be thankful to the Lord God for the good things the US has been able to do since the day the colonists declared their independence from Great Britain. A federal republic which initially intended to not maintain a standing army, also experimented in a new style of representative government. The US has survived its own Civil War until today it the world's chief hyper-power. Nevertheless Skillen advises his readers to reflect upon the fact that the US has had to achieve much more than its original constitution had envisaged, even if it is now on the brink of bankruptcy as the world's largest debtor nation. There are many problems that the US has to overcome on the path to being a genuine promoter of public justice, not only abroad but also most markedly at home. The American poity stands in need of a radical revision of its own independence.

404. ["Social Justice, Free Markets, and Evangelicals"](#) American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Tuesday June 22 Wolhstetter Conference Center, 12.00-2.00 pm.

In this exchange Skillen takes on the radical libertarian, who seeks to re-connect the evangelical community to that Republican interpretation of the American story, that views the US as a Christian society with a small and non-interfering federal government. "At this event, Marvin Olasky will discuss the false dichotomy between freedom and justice and offer his ideas on reconciling these aims." Olasky's summary of his presentation begins:

What is the best way to help Americans in need? How we approach this question cuts to our core beliefs about how society should be rightly ordered. For some, the free market is the most natural tool to use in the fight against poverty because it fosters innovation and prosperity while providing equal opportunity to all citizens. Others argue that social justice is best achieved through economic redistribution, in which a benevolent, centralized government levels the playing field and ensures equal results for all citizens. If the free market is the most efficient way to deliver goods and services across the American economy, does the risk of economic inequality make it unjust? If the idealism of social justice stifles economic growth through policies designed to ensure similar outcomes for all, does it take mobility and opportunity from the very people it is trying to save? Society often portrays mercy and equality as goals that conflict with innovation and efficiency. But is it true that free markets are incompatible with social justice?

The presentation, with jokes and cynicism, feeds a blurring of political complexity by simply appealing to some notion of "small government" as a timeless normative principle. Skillen's response is to avoid the cynicism and to try to demonstrate that it is possible to discuss political responsibility without getting lost in idealistic utopias. His approach is to highlight the evident complexities in America's political reality which Olasky's approach reduces to problems concerning large government.

405. ["Prison Madness"](#) *Root and Branch* 19 July 13.

In this broadsheet Skillen reflects on the startling and troubling facts of the decayed and decaying situation in the prison system of the US. One out of 31 Americans - a staggering 7.3 million - are either behind bars, on probation, or on parole, and in all likelihood they carry the scars of added trauma from the abuse suffered while incarcerated. The issue has been pushed to the front of Congressional consideration by a first time Senator.

Christians should be pleading for God's forgiveness for our complicity in a criminal justice system that perpetrates and perpetuates so much injustice. And genuine repentance means turning around to do what is right. Some trenchant responses by readers can be found [here](#).

406. "Islam and the USA: Contrasting Visions of the End of History" in Michael W Goheen and Erin G Glanville eds [The Gospel and Globalization: Exploring the Roots of a Globalized World](#) Vancouver, Regent College Press pp. 217-230.

This is a reworking of material that Skillen has been working on for many decades concerning the distinctive structure of the American polity and how it is predominantly shaped by a civil-religious vision of America's own exceptional place in history. In his 1993 paper "Toward a Contemporary Christian Democratic Politics in the United States" in John Witte Jr ed [Christian and Democracy in Global Context](#) Boulder, Westview pp. 85-99. "Forgotten Depths" (No. 219), Skillen had observed:

What we find in much of the early political history of the United States is a witness to something that stands at odds with the quest for limitless power and freedom that motivates so many people today.

In that paper he outlines an approach to the study of America's political history that would

explain why any "Christian democratic" aspirations of its earliest years as Puritan colonies were subsequently eclipsed. In his more recent publications - [With or Against the World](#) (No. 329), Skillen has explored why America seems to adopt an ambiguous posture with respect to the international order. And this a further refinement of the argument of Chapter 2 of that book, by comparing Islam and the USA. It may appear strange to compare a world religion that dates from the 7th century with the United States of America which is not yet 250 years old. But, Skillen argues, by doing so, the contrasting visions of world history can be clarified, their similarities and differences specified.

The peculiarity of America's civil-religious mission to make the world safe for democracy can now be compared ... with Islam's mission. And that comparison can be enhanced by comparing both to the Soviet communist mission. The comparable factor that can be found in Islam, the USA, and Soviet communism is the conviction that history is moving toward the fulfillment of a universal human destiny and the primary historical force authorized to lead the world to that destiny is a specially chosen vehicle (Islam, the USA, or the communist proletariat), which must overcome diametric opposition in order to fulfill its mission.

After briefly introducing the topic, the discussion is organised under the following headings: **The Dar-Islam and the Dar al-Harb** - Islam is committed to a view that the end of goal of history is the whole world's submission to Allah; **Western Christianity and the Rise of Enlightenment Secularism** - a discussion of the historical inheritance within which the USA has developed its vision of itself *to be both the leading example and the vanguagr of freedom and self-government for the whole world*; **The Third Rome** - an excursus into the way in which Soviet communism - the major threat to the US vision in the twentieth century - was a secularised version of the Caesaropapist leadership of Ivan IV from 1547 who believed it was the Russian imperialism mission to complete Christ's rule over the earth; **The USA: Making the World Safe for Democracy; Contrasting Soviet Communism, Islam and the USA**; and a **Conclusion** which seeks to identify the differing visions of Islam and the USA, and to give an explanation of the reason they both anticipate conflict with each other in the decades ahead.

The chapter Concludes with a series of questions about the future shape of global society. American civil-religious nationalism and Islam (traditional and radical) are among the most vibrant, history-shaping movements in the world today. They need to be examined carefully and scrupulously by Christians who should become more involved in taking their discipleship seriously in all dimensions of their lives.

407. [Crunch Time: American Idealism, the Economy, and Afghanistan](#)
Root and Branch 20 September 2

Skillen takes the three elements - the religious faith directing the 'American way of life', the serious problems of economic management and public fiscal rectitude, as well as waning public confidence concerning the war in Afghanistan - and explains the "deeper questions of this summer".

As with his previous broadsheets over many decades, this is formulated to commend a "stronger, shared vision of what a just republic should be in this shrinking world... sustainable prosperity will require hard work, durable savings, and stewardly investments in place of debt-induced consumption, unending warfare, and limitless grasping for the fulfillment of life's meaning in this age."

408. [The Impractical Pragmatism of Healthcare Reform](#) *Capital Commentary* October 23

In this commentary on the efforts of the president and congressional leaders to broker a health-care deal, Skillen writes his own first "post-presidential" contribution for CPJ. He now signs himself as "Senior Fellow", continuing to focus CPJ's ongoing work in policy

research. In the background of this analysis is Skillen's critical appraisal of the US system of "interest group brokerage" as the preferred path of "do what will work" governance. The critical point is summed up in the following terms:

Today in Washington we are witnessing a political process so weighed down by decades of bits-and-pieces pragmatism (Medicare and drug benefits for seniors; Medicaid for the poor; state-governed insurance companies; tax-free health benefits for employees in some companies; free-market this and government-run that) that continuing along the line of pragmatic incrementalism is no longer practical.... But what they finally come up with will almost certainly not constitute a coherent, long-term answer.

The final paragraphs are an annotated listing of important books and articles that can assist US readers understand why a break with the political tradition of "pragmatism as usual" is an important initial step to face up to health-care reality.

2010

409. [Continuity and Discontinuity in the New Year](#) *Capital Commentary* January 1

This is a brief overview of the political situation that confronts the US - and the world - at the beginning of a new year. The broadsheet is one which echoes with relevance for the ongoing work of the Center. The purpose of the article is to face up to the widespread cynicism and despair that grips politics at home and abroad. And the message is a simply and straightforward one. Political activity, like anything else we do, makes sense as a humble thank-offering to God. We will slip into despair and cynicism if we think we can save ourselves by our own efforts. Christian politics is first and foremost, looking ahead with great anticipation to God's fulfillment of creation and making all things new.

410. ["Christian Counselling in the Public Square: Principled Pluralism for the Common Good"](#) *Edification: Journal of the Society for Christian Psychology* Volume 3, Issue 2, 2009 pp. 5-38

Skillen's article in the lead "Discussion Article" in this edition of *Edification* which features a "Dialogue on Christian Psychology".

The abstract for the article reads:

Increasingly, the psychological profession recognizes the diversity of perspectives on, and approaches to, counseling and the study of psychology. This essay supports the legitimacy of distinctively Christian approaches in this field. This is not to suggest that nothing is common among all approaches, but that what is common in diagnosis, scientific assessments, and accountability standards are often contended from different perspectives. At the same time, psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors with distinctive points of view must carry out their work in a public governance and accreditation context. That context is also regularly in contention, and its rules and laws are made by professional organizations and public officials who operate from different points of view on what is good and just for the public. Christians in the academic and professional field of psychology should not assume that the common terrain of science and public governance is "secular" (and neutral) and that their Christian viewpoint is only of private 'religious' significance. Rather, they should contend for the equal treatment, in their profession and under public law, of diverse approaches in the field, including their own: in other words, genuine pluralism. They should also work openly and cooperatively from their distinctive viewpoint to help shape the laws and rules that will govern everyone in the profession.

Skillen begins his discussion by commenting on the views contained by an Oxford University professor, Tom Burns [Psychiatry: A very Short Introduction](#) (2006). It is debatable, says Burns, whether an entirely 'atheoretical' diagnostic system is possible.

But then in California these days there are more people with psychotic diagnoses in prison than in mental hospitals. Important questions for practitioners are raised about the public demeanor of the counselling professions. The discussion proceeds with a discussion of **Freedom for Diversity in Counselling and research**. This is followed by a section, **Pluralism in Support of the Public Commons. Some Implications for Psychological Services** are then spelled out. Skillen concludes with the following statement:

You as professionals in the arena of psychological services, teaching, and research have some particular gifts and insights that should have an important influence in shaping what will be the all-or-nothing public laws of the land, the up-or-down rules that will govern your professions. If you do not exercise that responsibility in various individual and associational ways as part of your contribution to the Christian enrichment of citizenship, then you will, in essence, be choosing to concentrate only on your private responsibility, leaving the responsibility of shaping life in the public square in the hands of others. That, I contend, we must not do.

There is a good array of respondents: Jaleel Abdul-Adil of the University of Illinois, Chicago; Anna A Berardi and Nancy S Thurston, George Fox University, Portland and Newberg; William Hathaway, Regent University; Bert H Hodges, Gordon College; Kalman J Kaplan, University of Illinois in Chicago College of Medicine; P Scott Richards, Brigham Young University; James M Siwy, Richmond Graduate University; Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, Eastern University. The contribution of van Leeuwen is of particular note in that it outlines the response of the Psychology Department at Eastern University to the kinds of public and political issues that face the profession and which Skillen has outlined.

Skillen also replies to these extensive responses with a four-and-a-half page "Genuine Public Pluralism and the Establishment of Justice" (pp. 34-38). He stresses the importance of keeping different vocations separate and explains why he has used the example of Chaplaincy in the military as one example of the way government forms its contribution to co-operate with the religious diversity at work in the public domain.

Appendix

1990

411. "Government" in Walter A Elwell (ed) Evangelical Dictionary of Theology Baker, Grand Rapids 1990, pp. 477-479. A revised edition appeared in 2001 and the entry pp. 516-519 was unchanged.

This contribution cites some of Skillen's early writings (57, 67, 69) as well as the works which he had reviewed of Mouw (No. 28) and Yoder (No.9), which would indicate that it was composed in the early 1980s. Sadly the later revised edition simply republishes the earlier essay.

The essay begins with **The Biblical Witness** explaining that Government is similar to other forms of stewardship in creation - each with a responsibility for administering part of God's creation under God's authority. The general biblical teaching is reviewed, leading on to a discussion of the positive tasks of distribution and retribution, a "public responsibility".

There is a responsibility to look after the general public health and welfare of the entire society. Though Government administers the legal code it is also subject to law and as such is a part of God's self-revelation - God's Kingship is attested in scripture along with His being Father and Shepherd.

Christian Responses in History reviews the way in which the early Christian

communities functioned politically and what they taught. The Christianization of the Roman Empire coincided with the Romanization (or Imperialization) of the religion of God's grace in Christ. The split between East and West is discussed briefly with the Eastern church following more closely to the Roman tradition, whereas in the West a pattern of ecclesiastical sovereignty developed over feudal estates. Minorities within East and West opposed the earthly entanglements.

The Reformation was in part a protest against Roman dominance over politics and culture. The Anabaptists drew on the previous minority traditions of withdrawal while the Calvinists and Lutherans adapted to the emerging power of the centralized state. In the West Roman, Calvinist, Lutheran and Anabaptist reinterpretations of Christianity led to alternative views of the public legal order. In the East the same ages-old pattern was maintained. Many Christians these days try to adapt their faith to one or other of the various ideologies that struggle for dominance in the political realm of "secular" states.

Key Issues and Questions for Our Day are outlined. The first is the relation of the Biblical revelation to political life. What is the biblical revelation about justice and how does that throw a light upon competing ideologies and policies? The second is: What is the state and how is it's special task to be understood in a complex, differentiated society? Third: How is politics to be understood as a global task for all citizens and their governments everywhere?

The demand for justice is increasingly the demand for **global justice**, and Christians should be leading the way to an understanding of what the proper human stewardship of government means in response to Christ the King.

2009 (1994-1995)

412. ["The biblical call to social responsibility"](#) (March-April 1994); ["The question of authority"](#) (May-June 1994); ["What constitutes a political community"](#) (Sept-Oct 1994); ["Government with representation"](#) (Jan-Feb 1995); ["Political fairness and equity"](#) (July-August 1995); ["Government and the responsible society"](#) ((May-June 1996); ["Freedom of religion; freedom of conscience"](#) (Nov-Dec 1996) in "Advancing a Christian Perspective - Articles Arranged by Date" NSW Council of Churches
<http://www.nswchurches.com/content/Articles.aspx>

These are republications of articles from 1994-1995 from Public Justice Report and are here also linked to the forms in which they appear from the Center web-site.