Public Justice for All

an annotated bibliography of the works of James W Skillen
1967-2006

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In making this bibliography available I would like to thank a few people.

- I'm grateful to my most helpful adviser, Valerie Ayres-Wearne, who has assisted me as a vigilant critic of my formulations; her critical questions, comments and advice have helped keep this project "on course".

- Steve Bishop has demonstrated his editorial skills by making this document fit for publishing in this useful and accessible format. I'm grateful to him, in the midst of a busy life, for attending to the needs of those who will use the bibliography by his indexing and editorial initiatives. It's been a marvellous experience to be part of the emerging "aethereal" ministry of "All of Life Redeemed". I hope that the availability of this bibliography will encourage others to produce similar archiving material from out of their work that will facilitate the ongoing critical examination of reformational philosophy and the scholars who are contributing to its development.

- This work would not have been possible without Jim Skillen's warm encouragement. It has been part of this work to read and consider the answers and comments he has made to my many queries and critical observations. As well, through the Center for Public Justice, I have gained access to a huge percentage of the articles and books that are listed here. Without Jim's help that would not have been possible. My debt of gratitude is yet only paid in part, since the critical review of the leading philosophical ideas in his political theory and contribution to Christian civic education remains as a further step in this work. I'm very grateful for Jim's encouragement in this project.
Introduction

Since his first published article in 1967, Jim Skillen has continued to write and publish. The pace of production has not slackened as the years have passed. 2007 will mark the 40th anniversary of his initial publication, “The Nature of Man in Karl Jaspers”. Skillen was an undergraduate at Wheaton College from 1962-1966, and this essay, giving his Wheaton College affiliation, appeared in the May 1967 edition of Dialogue, the journal of Phi Sigma Tau, the national honor society for philosophy. He was then 22 and a student at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Thus this annotated bibliography begins at 1967 and lists Skillen’s publications up until 2006. This is a record of his work and the bibliography is still very much a “work in progress.” As long as Skillen keeps writing and publishing, there will be further items to add. But there is also other material that is not included here which means that this bibliography cannot, as yet, claim to be a complete listing. This is a list of 336 items. This introduction describes what it includes in overall terms. But first a brief word is called for to explain what has been left out.

There is a major group of articles not listed here and they are easy to identify. Among them are many of Skillen’s sharpest contributions. I am referring to his regular essays, on a variety of topics, for Public Justice Report, the publication of the Center for Public Justice. He has been PJR’s editor and major contributor ever since its first edition. From 1977 until 1997, PJR was published 10 times per year, and a conservative guesstimate of at least 2 Skillen contributions per issue would mean something like 400 more items to be eventually included in any complete listing of his works. For PJR he also wrote the regular column, “The Testimony”, in which biblical texts were expounded and decisive biblical teaching about governance and justice explained. Some of these have already been collected together in A Covenant to Keep: Meditations on the Biblical Theme of Justice (2000) (see No.283). It is possible that further collections of this kind will again appear in the future.

In recent times, since 1998, PJR has been published 4 times per year, and so this would mean a more restrained output of about 80 more items over that time. We should not forget, however, that in that same period a bi-weekly Capital Commentary, has also appeared (and so more items, say 150, will have to be added to any complete list).

So where does this leave this bibliography as a reliable source of Skillen’s contribution? The works listed here are all or most of Skillen’s major publications apart from those published in Public Justice Report and Capital Commentary. My educated guess would be that this bibliography represents at least 2/3rds of all of his published writings, keeping in mind that no major theme from his total output is absent from the works cited here. Skillen’s political philosophy and contribution to public policy is clearly on display in this listing which includes: longer works, books, chapters, journal articles and so forth. Many, or maybe most, of these works have been written as part of the research expected of him from the Center for Public Justice.

Perhaps there is a filing cabinet somewhere in the Skillen basement which contains other works, unpublished articles, drafts, plans, rough outlines of books, other

COMPILER’S NOTE TO READERS AND USERS OF THIS ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: Please forward bibliographical data of items that have been overlooked, of typographical errors or mistakes in citations to the compiler Dr Bruce C Wearne at bcwearne@ozemail.com.au In the annotations the text printed italics usually indicates a direct quote from what Skillen has written. Thankyou.
unpublished collations, biblical studies, student publications, essays and other projects from student times.

Here we suggest that the scholar who would use this list to investigate Skillen’s contribution, keep in mind the complex relationship between the writer and the **Center**. This annotated list is made available to assist those who would investigate Skillen’s contribution to political science and the **Center**’s contribution to public policy. The annotations provide a descriptive commentary that, if taken together, can give an indication of how Skillen’s *theoretical* perspective has sharpened the **Center**’s public policies and civic education. So there is Skillen’s contribution to political science and there is also the contribution of the **Center** to public debate and public policy research. These are two facets of this bibliography which cannot easily be separated, although they need to be properly distinguished. Clearly the **Center** has provided Skillen with a context in which he has been encouraged to creatively unfold his political theory. He has done so in a way that is not only comprehensive and detailed in a scientific sense but his work has also been fruitful in its contribution to public policy debate and promoting public justice. This important nexus will have to be explored in greater depth by those who will take up this indispensable work and develop it. Whether in the promotion of a reformational political science or in the development of the public policies for which the **Center** has tried to make its name, the contribution of Jim Skillen will require careful and sustained analysis. This bibliography has been compiled to facilitate that kind of critical reflection.

It is almost superfluous to say that we are dealing here with a writer who has published an enormous amount of material. And there may be important facets of Skillen’s contribution that only come to light after a close and critical examination of his “in-house” **Center for Public Justice** publications. But the researcher who peruses this bibliography will be introduced, without too much difficulty, to an adequate and representative sample of the Skillen output in all of its modes: theoretical, educative, public policy and *belles lettres*. These are his major publications, and so this listing deals with analysis and commentary that has been written to extend the work within, but also beyond, **CPJ**’s support base.

William Temple characterised the Christian church as being in existence to serve those who are not (yet) its members. Likewise **CPJ**, as a Christian political association exists to provide a service to those who are already politically involved and to do so with a distinctive public policy stance that promotes public justice. And so it is useful to consider this bibliography as a list of works that have been directed outwards in a variety of ways, to a variety of settings, within and beyond **CPJ**’s own supporting circle. Indeed the bibliography begins with (at least) six works that were written before Skillen became involved with the association that would, from 1981, provide him with the position he has now filled for 25 years. That association began in 1972 (see No. 7) with Skillen, the youthful political scientist, examining the political problems that confronted a group who had recently joined together to form a Christian political association. Then, as a postgraduate student, he brought something from his own independent research to those with whom he would join in promoting public justice.

At this point it may be useful to sketch how Skillen stands in relation to many and varied strands of American evangelical Christianity. He was born in 1944. He was a student of Wheaton College (1962-66) before he went on to Westminster Theological Seminary (1967-69). Graduate study in philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam (1969-70) followed, and on return to the United States he
completed Masters and Doctoral programmes at Duke University, to be granted the PhD in political science in 1974.

Wheaton College was a centre of evangelical education. When Skillen was a Wheaton undergraduate the perspectives of Francis Schaeffer and John Howard Yoder were beginning to make a profound impact upon evangelical reflection, and the rising generation of evangelical leadership. By turning the attention of evangelicals to politics and culture, Schaeffer and Yoder counter-balanced the regnant evangelical view of Carl F H Henry that had prevailed since his 1947 publication *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Arthur Holmes was Skillen’s philosophy teacher. At Westminster, Skillen was encouraged by Robert Knudsen to extend his studies of the Kuyperian neo-Calvinist tradition and in particular of the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. This was to continue with his Free University studies. And then, when he returned to the United States, he enrolled as a higher degree candidate at Duke University, where the highly respected Christian political scientist, John Hallowell, would become his supervisor.

If we consider Skillen’s evangelical background we find that when he was born in Colorado, his parents were employed as home missionaries with the American Baptists. He has recalled how, as a youngster, he was drawn without church or family pressure to profess his faith in Christ. As he matured, presbyterian and reformed influences from his Scots-Irish ancestry seem to have taken on greater significance. In 1966 he married Doreen whose family were involved in the Brethren in Christ, the denomination that supports Messiah College. He was to work as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Messiah from 1973-75.

From this brief biographical sketch we might surmise that we are dealing with an American Christian who has had to find his own place midstream, with many diverging and converging currents. And from the annotated bibliography it will become clear that Skillen has maintained a scholarly dialogue with thinkers from a variety of evangelical traditions. The annotations will show, again and again, how Skillen has set himself to work with, and not simply against, the various strands, the warp and the woof, of American evangelicalism. Beyond that, the bibliography also shows a concerted effort to reach out further to other currents in American Christianity. So in this respect it is a record of a biblically-grounded ecumenical effort to remind Christians of their responsibility for public justice. There are reports of exchanges with many Christian scholars whose writings have a bearing upon political reflection. Some of them include: José Míguez Bonino, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Mary Ann Glendon, Bob Goudzwaard, Stephen Monsma, Richard Mouw, Richard John Neuhaus, Leslie Newbigin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Oliver O’Donovan, Corwin Smidt, Nicholas Wolterstorff, N T Wright, Bernard Zylstra. It will also be evident that Skillen has put a high priority upon keeping abreast of latest developments in anabaptist or “radical reformation” scholarship as variously expounded by Ron Sider, John Howard Yoder, Jim Wallis and, more recently, Richard Hays *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* 1996 (see No. 289).

In his doctoral dissertation (see No. 12) Skillen laid the groundwork for his subsequent creative interaction with contemporary political thinkers, whether they be of Christian or humanist, of socialist, liberal or conservative persuasion. In that work he delved deeply into the history of western thought and presented a creative schematic overview of the historical unfolding of the relationship between Christianity and politics. His dissertation was titled *The Development of Calvinistic Political Theory in the Netherlands, with Special Reference to the Thought of Herman Dooyeweerd*. It traced the development of Dooyeweerd’s Christian political theory in
detail and explored Dooyeweerd’s view of his philosophy’s historical background. By exploring reformational thinking in this way, Skillen not only presented a coherent explanation of how Calvinism responded to the legacy of Western Christendom but also of how neo-calvinism had begun to develop a critical orientation to the rise of modern humanism. On this foundation Skillen has formed his political theory, as well as becoming a leading interpreter of Dooyeweerd’s political philosophy (No. 321).

And so, this is part of the explanation for why Jim Skillen has also been well placed to contribute to the surging American evangelical interest in Abraham Kuyper’s “world-view”. But further, he has been one of a small number of English-speaking scholars who have explored the legacy of Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) for political theory. Within the circle of Daniel Elazar’s Center for the Study of Federalism, at Temple University, Skillen has contributed to renewed reflection on the “covenantal” tradition in political thought by drawing attention to how the views of Althusius have been developed in the 19th and 20th centuries by an emergent neo-Calvinist tradition of political theory. It is in this neo-calvinist tradition that Skillen has decisively located his own work (No. 245).

There are other ways in which the foundational research of his doctoral dissertation has been tested by Skillen’s subsequent engagement with contemporary political reflection, not least when the foundations of the modern political order have been subjected to radical critique. His appreciation of the “neoclassical” perspective of Eric Vögelin dates from his days as a doctoral student. John Hallowell was the editor of Vögelin’s From Enlightenment to Revolution (1975) and as Vögelin has become better more known, particularly among English-speaking scholars, Skillen has been able to draw attention to his distinctive views in various places (see Nos. 12, 84, 124, 184, 284).

Skillen’s doctoral confrontation with Augustinian and post-Augustinian reflection as part of the background of any historical understanding of Christianity in the West, has enabled him to creatively tease out substantial differences between evangelicals in their approaches to social life (see Nos 40 and 60). The dissertation had examined developments in medieval philosophy and that has provided a platform from which he has contributed to discussion about the Roman Catholic teaching of subsidiarity, of natural law and the common good (Nos 208, 251 and 330). More recently, in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attack, he has extended his historical investigations to explore the relationship of Islam to Christianity in both its Western and Eastern forms (No. 329).

But it would be wrong to give the impression that this ability to interact with the kaleidoscopic variety of contemporary political philosophy was achieved by his dissertation studies or that he has subsequently done all the spade-work for this as a lone scholar. Much of what he has put forward has come out of long-term cooperation with various scholars: with Rockne McCarthy in education policy, the critique of civil religion and pluralist philosophy (see Nos. 51, 58, 62, 76, 208); with Ted Malloch in just-war theory defense, the nuclear threat and land policy (see Nos. 77, 78, 92, 94); with Stanley Carlson-Thies in the analysis of Dutch pluralistic politics and principled pluralist welfare reform (see Nos. 73, 225, 244, 275); with Richard A Baer Jnr on education policy (see Nos 183, 201); Keith J Pavlischek on just war and the analysis of the contemporary pacifist movements (see No. 299); and with Jerry Herbert and Joshua Good on civic education programmes (see No 298). There are numerous other examples of cooperative research as well.
The Annotated Bibliography has 78,000 words, a small book in its own right. My initial aim for this work, as bibliographer, had been to produce a listing of the major theoretical articles with a short description of each. But as the list grew, and as I expanded my reading beyond “academic” items specifically concerned with political philosophy, political science and public policy, I came across significant number of articles that were more “educative” than “theoretical” in character. I would use the term “educative”, rather than “popular”, because even when they are short pieces these writings require considerable mental effort. They are carefully crafted attempts at challenging some of the taken-for-granted knots in America’s everyday political life, the ambiguities that arise in public debate in the US, the polity that seems determined to regularly rediscover its true self on the global stage. And so, there is a wealth of material here to assess, including Skillen’s early exposure of the idolatrous religious vision that has given birth to the “America first” doctrine (Nos 11, 67, 329). It is also inspiring to follow the creative and persistent way in which Skillen and the Center for Public Justice have engaged in political education for US citizens and others over the entire range of political issues.

Early on, as a doctoral student, and then as a college professor of political science, Skillen wrote creative pieces that demonstrate how he had been challenged by a neo-calvinistic or “reformational” approach to political science. These articles had a clear “pre-philosophical” intention of encouraging readers to develop a broad political sensitivity to the full range of human responsibility. Since God has restored the human race through Jesus Christ, all of our life comes under His rule and the disciples of Jesus are now called to proclaim that restoration as good news in all of the many responsibilities in which God calls us to serve Him and each other. These articles imply that the biblical teaching of God’s patient rule in Christ has a decisive impact upon the way Christians should view all things. That theme has persisted but its earliest articulations can be found in his contributions to Vanguard - 11 times (from 1971-1980, a journal which was subsequently discontinued) as well as the International Reformed Bulletin - 3 times (from 1971-1977 which was also discontinued). Over the years Skillen has continued to publish articles in The Banner - 16 items (from 1980-2006, the denominational magazine of the CRCNA), Eternity - 10 items (between 1979 and 1988), and Third Way (UK) - 11 items (between 1984 and 1992). The magazine for which he has contributed most articles has been the Christian Legal Society Quarterly - over 30 items - and this contribution was made between 1983 and 1994. There are other academic journals in which his writing has consistently appeared over the years - Christian Scholar’s Review (8 items), Philosophia Reformata (6), Calvin Theological Review (9), Pro Rege (10) - as well as various Christian magazines - Christianity Today, Prism, Reformed Journal (later Reformed Perspectives), Christian Century.

Most of Skillen’s writings, in one way or another, are about politics. Many are about current political issues and suggest “principled pluralist” perspectives to evaluate current public policy.

As I suggested above, Skillen’s writings have a strong civic education motif, which aims to encourage and strengthen citizen involvement in public life. There is persistent support for “Christians organizing for political service” (No. 57) but also for Christian students seeking to develop a “public justice” perspective in their studies. Among the chapters of published symposia, books and articles which review contemporary political theory and philosophy there are other publications which advance an approach to political science that is “reformational” and biblically based (Nos. 15, 20, 153, 302, 321).
So what has motivated this pile of politically-oriented writings? Taken together, as one collection, they are Skillen’s reflections about governance. Politics can be characterised as one human response to God’s rule over all of life, to God’s governance. Human governance is always partial and limited; God’s governance is total, it is over all and unlimited. And if a political viewpoint is to rightly understand the limits of the Government’s task, it will need some understanding of how the political community is structured, it will need to be able to relate specific political responsibilities to all the other responsibilities we have in marriages, in families, in work, and in associations, in churches, in friendships and so on, in all other domains in which citizens are also engaged. Human authority is such that each of its spheres mutually presuppose and limit each other. Even a military coup, which may proceed unjustly in denial of its lawful authority, cannot go forward without a redefinition of the limits of its power. To be limited in our human tasks is also to recognise our responsibilities. There are limits. A marriage, though lawfully registered, is not a state department; a faith community, though composed of people who are also citizens, is something which is qualitatively different from a political community of citizens and public officials. The Minister for Education is not the principal of the national school system, and it is not an act of treason to support a netball team which is opposed to another team captained by the President’s daughter.

This collection of political writings contains repeated discussion of the political significance of marriage and family life, of schools and farms, of military power and the market place, of welfare and religion, of national government and international law, of healthy communities and our bodies. It does so with a strong American emphasis, which is to be expected, but the overall value of this collection reaches beyond any provincial American application.

In brief then, we can say that these writings are about the task of government in the political community (the state) which is, at root, but one way in which we as the human race respond to God’s generation to generation rule over all of our life. To repeat, politics is given to us so that we can look after our neighbours with justice. Politics is about the way a public legal order is established, maintained and developed by duly appointed magistrates, public officials and law enforcement agents. Human social life is diverse and the distinctive integrity of various human responsibilities, institutions and relationships, all need to be respected and allowed to develop in their own way, according to their own character.

Skillen’s writings show that he has a diverse involvement in “politics”, as a political scientist, as a political educator, and as a director of a public policy research facility. Add that to his own responsibility as a citizen in his local neighbourhood, and we begin to sense something of the incredible complexity of the human vocation which, quite obviously, inspires him. It can be said that Jim Skillen seeks to do justice to this state of affairs in which human agents in societies like his own sometimes have a difficult job juggling all the different “hats” they are called upon to wear. He only occasionally refers to his family and married life, but when he does it is as if he has exegeted his domestic experience in order to learn more about his own limits on the domestic front, as well as facing up to a freshly realized dimension of his own public involvement. And here we recall Skillen’s repeated statement that “public justice” is a God-given norm that if followed leads us on the path of blessedness. “Public justice” is nothing other than a calling, a path on which the human community is called to walk in humility.
If those advocating “public justice” begin to talk as if it is merely a brilliant idea, devised by an elite group of Christians, then they are in danger of turning down a dead end. Skillen has repeatedly warned against the impatience that breeds political idolatry, as if Christian citizens by means of their own collective moral power are called to set things right. Under such impatience, even if there are repeated appeals to “public justice”, the true significance of God’s norms for political life will have been lost. One might put all the efforts of one’s lifetime into setting up a thinktank that would grow a new elite of Christian “public intellectuals”, but to assume that norms only come into play when a majority of humans recognise them, or when certain language is formally attached to legislation, is to accept that a normative path is something we create for ourselves. A normative path is what God creates; humans can only form their response along that path. And indeed many seem to live as if public justice is merely the creature of a programme of social construction that has been undertaken by the “good guys”. Public justice is then twisted to become the historical “values” that have arisen from what our heroic ancestors (the ones we choose selectively to remember and honour) have decided concerning what “ought” to be. A critical analysis of Skillen’s writings on “public justice” will provide a well-developed refutation of, and perhaps also provide the ground-work for an equally critical and systematic confrontation with, the social constructionist dogma.

Public justice is a call to humility; it is integral to the calling of every citizen to pursue justice. And in that sense Jim Skillen’s writings are aimed not so much at the “man in the street” but to those who would serve their fellow citizens with public justice, in whatever domain that service be rendered. Public justice is a normative principle that binds citizens and government together in a political community with a task; the pursuit of public justice, the forming of a just public-legal order, is that task. In that sense “public justice” can never become the possession or property of some or other professional elite. It is a path on which professions are called to serve their own communities and, more and more, their neighbours around the world. Political scientists, and all other scientific specialists in many and varied intellectual pursuits, have their own peculiar professional contributions to make which should also enhance public life and promote justice everywhere. But that also requires the development of a social concept that gives due regard to all of the diverse sciences and how they relate to the distinct social responsibilities that constitute our lives at home and abroad. And at that point we have come to the conclusion of our introduction.

Jim Skillen’s writings are part of his persistent pursuit of a renewed Christian contribution that challenges a political culture that has turned away from the Lord God. His writings are characterised by a consistent effort to avoid “skeptical negativism” (No. 39) 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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Annotated List of Publications of James W. Skillen

1967

   
   This is Skillen’s first published piece. He was 23 at the time. It is an essay which systematically explores the philosophical anthropology of Karl Jaspers. It is evidence of the author’s desire to confront the philosophy of existentialism and in particular Jaspers’ philosophical concepts. Though critical, Skillen tries to make the most of what Jaspers has presented and concludes with a sketch of an alternative outline in which the Transcendent One is believed, in faith, to be the One who creates humanity as the image of Himself. In this context Skillen can thus problematise the tendency toward meaninglessness which Jaspers has tried to overcome via his philosophy. The essay indicates a determined effort to read Jaspers in order to benefit from what he has to say.

1969


   The introduction to this brief article reads: “James W Skillen shows his familiarity with Dr Francis Schaeffer’s recent analyses on trends in modern thinking. Although written particularly with fellow students in mind, the article may help many readers to understand current attitudes among the young. More particularly, the article may enable those who have been troubled or shaken by modern thinking to see its root cause, while at the same time bringing them to a clearer understanding of the Christian faith”. In point of fact, Skillen in this article explains the logic of Hegel’s thesis-antithesis-synthesis relativism in a way that Schaeffer never seemed able to do in his writings. The article explains the contemporary “mind” and its problematic adherence to “synthesis” - an uneasy denial of the notion of truth as absolute - and Skillen does so from a Christian standpoint. The discussion uses sexual ethics for courtship as an example.


   In this 6 page article, over one-and-a-half pages are devoted to references and notes. An examination of the 24 footnotes indicates that this article can also be approached as a “bibliographical essay.” It is constructed as a useful introduction to fellow students of literature pertinent to understanding Christian education. It focuses upon the way in which human identity is grasped in contemporary educational thought. It covers contemporary philosophy of religious education. Skillen positions his own Christian philosophical view of education within contemporary debates. He was then a 25 year-old philosophy graduate from Wheaton College and a senior at Westminster Theological Seminary. This is the initial indication that he was reading and digesting “reformational literature”. The conclusion reads: *The people of God must witness with new power from on high to the glorious grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Christian education must take its place in that life-giving witness.*
1971


This is a review of two books - Robert Farrar Capon The Supper of the Lamb 1970 and S U Zuidema De Christen en de Politiek n.d. The review article begins in this vein: Of course the governor has to eat, and the chef may remember to vote every few years, but really now, what in the world has cooking got to do with politics? This is a review by the doctoral candidate at Duke University studying political theory, comparative politics and international relations. It is also evidence of Skillen the wit, Skillen the writer of humorous and perceptive belles lettres. The book reviews Capon’s view of culinary arts in the light of the Gospel message, as well as Zuidema’s book, in Dutch, about Christian political responsibility.

1972


This is a review essay in Vanguard’s “Explorations” department. The three books are David Green The Containment of Latin America: A History of the Myths and Realities of the Good Neighbour Policy (1971); R Harrison Wagner United States Policy Toward Latin America: A Study in Domestic and International Politics (1970); Jerome Levinson and Juan de Onis The Alliance that Lost its Way: A Critical Report on the Alliance for Progress (1970). Here is another publication by Skillen the doctoral student, this time reviewing books that were part of his student reading in international relations. The focus of the essay is upon US policy with respect to Latin America and is an initial exposition of the problematic that would be viewed in North-South terms.


The by-line to this article tells us that it was anticipated that Skillen would soon join the Faculty of Messiah College. The Evangelical Visitor is the magazine of the Brethren in Christ Church, the denomination that supported Messiah College. The essay itself is a statement about the full-orbed responsibility Christians have together for family life. The author’s by-line also indicated that Skillen was “completing his doctoral studies at Duke University.” His curriculum vitae shows that he received an MA in 1972 when this was written; his PhD was conferred two years later.


Taking leave from the “false prophet” who called upon “Workingmen of all countries, Unite!”, Skillen frames an extensive discussion about united political action across the United States by an exposition of John 15:1-5 and John 17:15-23. The seminary graduate shows that biblical exegesis is not just a “church” thing, but of decisive and critical importance for this small group of reformed Christians (NACPA) who were thinking about their political involvement. This was Skillen’s first contact with, and first speech for, the organisation that became the Association for Public Justice.

Skillen extracts 8 points from this translation of Goudzwaard’s manual for Christian political thought and action. Politics is unavoidable. Politics invites human judgment; the facts do not speak for themselves. When confronting various political options, one is inevitably confronting worldviews of those who have judged that these options need to be considered. The gospel is no ideology.


This article written as a member of the Department of Social Sciences at Messiah College compares and contrasts the evangelical eclecticism of the essays edited by Clouse, Linder and Pierard with the biblical theological concerns of John Howard Yoder and Bob Goudzwaard in his handbook (see review No. 8 above). Skillen notes they are all concerned with Christian political responsibility today. As he began his academic career, Skillen saw himself alongside other Christian academics who came from a variety of anabaptist, reformed and evangelical traditions. So, this article for the quarterly Bulletin of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action shows Skillen seeking to responsibly address the variegated readership and audience of IARFA. The article is organised according to how these three books answer three questions: How are we to understand the relationship between the rule of God revealed in the death and resurrection of Christ on the one hand and contemporary human political life on the other? Then, with that question answered, he moves to the next question: How are we to understand the meaning of the creation order and human sin as they determine the character and normativity of earthly government and politics? The final question is: How are we to then understand the relationship between the individual and society, between personal faith and social structures, between a so-called inner spirituality and an outward community responsibility?


In The Christian Patriot May 1973, Volume 29 Number 5, Skillen was introduced to subscribers of the Christian Government Movement’s (CGM) magazine with a front page report of a March 24 conference in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. The report summarises an extensive discussion of the four major historical viewpoints of the relationship between church and state. Skillen is reported to have developed a fifth viewpoint - associated with the thought of Kuyper and Dooyeweerd. From this report it is evident that a problem arose from within the audience about Skillen’s exposition and the way he explained the workings of God’s normative creation order in the life of Christian discipleship. God’s order for government as revealed in Christ has become apparent to the Body of Christ, Skillen is reported to have said, when they become obedient in political deed. This article is subtitled, “Or, what is Christian Politics? Part 2.” Skillen’s article is the second of a Christian Patriot series. It illustrates the Christian world-view in general terms by quoting Harry Blamires (see No. 13) and Robert Farrar Capon (see No 4).
11. “America First?” Politikon Official organ of the National Association for Christian Political Action Vol. 3 Nos. 3, 4-5, 6-7 August 1973 pp.1, 6-7; October-November 1973, pp.1, 4, 7-8, January 1974, pp.6-7

This is a significant series. Critical ideas about America’s view of its own place in the world are explained. It was written when Skillen was Assistant Professor at Messiah College when he was also working on his Duke University doctorate. This is an initial publication as Skillen began the demanding work of subjecting American government policy to careful and detailed scrutiny. As with his articles this is a report of “work in progress”, written to provide a signpost for further theoretical research while distilling the results of his reading, making them available for his students and other readers. Skillen’s work over the decades has retained the “bibliographical essay” format that can be discerned here. The series has three parts - Part I: The Contemporary International Context; Part II Nixon-Kissinger Policy; Part III: Some Questions and Criticisms. It is written when the USA was involved in convoluted peace negotiations in Vietnam.


This thesis was written under the supervision of Dr John H Hallowell and in its Acknowledgements pays tribute to Dr Robert D Knudsen of Westminster Theological Seminary for “important instruction and advice with respect to the Dutch Calvinists during my seminary years”, as well as Dr Arthur F Holmes who “laid a valuable foundation in the history of philosophy during my college years” at Wheaton College, Illinois. After receiving a BD at Westminster, Skillen spent 1969-1970 in graduate study in philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam and from 1972-1974 was at Duke University where he received both MA and PhD degrees. This completed his formal education. He was then aged 30. The work is divided into two parts. Part One In the Struggle for a Christian Politics is in three chapters I. Christendom; II Humanism; III Calvinism. The history that Skillen recounts is very much the view of the earliest beginnings of the church that can be derived from the writings of the major Calvinist social thinkers (Calvin, Althusius, Groen, Kuyper, Dooyeweerd).

Dooyeweerd’s mature political theory constitutes the second half of the thesis. IV. The Transcendental Critique of Theoretical Thought; V. The Basic Religious Motives of Theoretical Thought; VI. The Systematic Theory of Politics and the State; VII. Summary and Conclusions. The focus throughout is upon the “political community” of rulers and subjects, of government and citizens.

1974

13. “Philosophy and the Christian College” The Evangelical Visitor February 10, pp.10-11

The Evangelical Visitor, was a magazine circulating in the community supporting Messiah College, where Skillen was Assistant Professor when he wrote this piece. A photo shows him in conversation with a Dean of the College. This is another of Skillen’s publications which demonstrate his immediate concern to apply his own theoretical reflections to the situation in which he found himself (see No. 6). Here Skillen brings together his philosophical studies at Wheaton College and subsequently, to make a comment about the unavoidability of philosophy within the college curriculum. Rather than problematise “philosophy” as a department, the discussion indicates that philosophy has to do with the way scholars reflect upon the meaning
and the purpose of their study and their teaching and how the ethos of the college welcomes students to question in order to discover Christian questions, and to then question further in order to find Christian answers.


This review by a graduate of Wheaton about the book written by three Wheaton professors begins in this way:

*Three such qualified men should not have allowed this book to go to print .... Part of the tragedy of this book is that not all of it is bad. Very simply, the review can be summarised as: Good topic for discussion; but “a coherent, inter-dependent discussion” of higher education has not been achieved. Webber’s historical call for a biblically-inspired reformation is not heeded by the other two writers.*


Up until this article, Skillen’s publications have mainly been the writings of an aspiring “public intellectual”, a form of journalism for the educated, informed by rigorous scholarly argument. His first publication, the analysis of Karl Jaspers in the journal of the national honour society for philosophy, provides the exception, and also illustrates Skillen’s acumen as a philosophical commentator and analyst. This is the second such analytically-oriented article, in which the philosophy of one thinker is subjected to scrutiny. In terms of the kinds of publications that we would expect would be needed for academic advancement this would, perhaps, be the first of that kind among Skillen’s publications. The article is explicit in noting that it has been written by “James W Skillen PhD” which is also noted in the table of contents and on the header of each page. An indirect but significant recognition by the editors. This article distils the analysis of Althusius that Skillen developed in his Doctoral Dissertation *The Development of Calvinistic Political Theory in the Netherlands with Special Reference to the Thought of Herman Dooyeweerd* (see above reference 12). It is found in Chapter III “Calvinism” where Skillen successively examines John Calvin (pp.180-191), Johannes Althusius (pp.191-217), Groen van Prinsterer (pp.218-225) and Abraham Kuyper (pp.225-273). These are presented as Dooyeweerd’s historical precursors. The Calvinist attempt at political theory has to find a way to counter State absolutism and that is why Skillen, following Dooyeweerd, spends time considering the absolutist formulations of Jean Bodin. Althusius’ theory is not just a minor disagreement but a radical divergence from Bodin’s politics.


Skillen had obviously been developing his literary skills via different kinds of book reviews. We recall "The Governor and the Chef” in *Vanguard* in May/June 1971 (No. 4 above), and his commendation of Robert Farrar Capon to a CGM readership (No. 10). This is the 5th review for *Vanguard*. Skillen takes Novak’s book as another instance of getting the religious character of American political life wrong. He reads Novak’s discussion as a latter-day fulfillment of the view of Walt Whitman that what America needs is a fuller richer, religion of democracy.

This review is critical of Rushdoony’s revisionist thesis that the development of a strong central, federal government in the US, along with the birth of the United Nations with its hope for world peace through world law, is all part of the anti-Christian conspiracy of the last two centuries which has led America away from its Christian order of life that it once had when it was a feudal, local, republican system. Rushdoony had written an Introduction to another of Craig Press’s volumes, Herman Dooyeweerd *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (1960). This is an early indication of Skillen’s awareness that revisionist conservatives like Rushdoony were promoting Dooyeweerd’s philosophy.


This review, unlike the previous one, notes that Skillen was teaching in the Department of Social Sciences, Messiah College. This is a brief review of one of the best known and most important economists writing in America at the time. The book was first published in 1953 and Skillen notes Heilbroner’s other contributions as well. In a concise half page the important names in the history of modern economics are mentioned. Skillen commends Heilbroner for making it possible for even the most unschooled reader to get a good start at understanding the history of economics.

1975


For the start of the 1975-76 academic year Skillen had moved from Messiah College to a similar position (Assistant Professor) at Gordon College. The article contrasts the desire for “independence” and “self-determination” in all modern states, with the increasing international interdependence across the globe. This is an examination of international relations. Skillen traces the history of “possessive individualism”, as a comprehensive political vision, from Hobbes to Locke, to Hugo Grotius. The essay is an explanation of why international justice is short-circuited by the trend which takes “possessive individualism” to the level of pragmatic power politics between states. There is thus a built-in disrespect for international law.

20. “Problems of Theory in Political Integration” *Philosophia Reformata* 40th year, 3rd & 4th quarters, pp.141-159

This is an article for “theorists”. It is an attempt to construct a framework by which to focus upon the theory-conundrum within political science. Then the question is broadened to consider “political integration” and how that can be “theorised”. Then the European Community is referred to as a kind of “case study”. The first section after the Introduction, considers Political Theorising. What is theorising? How can the political system be delimited? And how can we make judgments about progress and/or regress with European integration? The next section, Delimiting the Political System, takes the discussion through the various phases of functionalist ambiguity in the EEC’s reliance upon a continuum between economics and politics. As theorising tackles political integration, the full historical reality repeatedly confronts functionalist constructions with the fact of force or enforcement as a central facet for identifying states.

This is a front page piece which draws attention to the then recent resolution passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” Skillen’s comment encourages this theological community to recall that Zionism in its earlier form saw itself as a movement aiming to colonize an area in Palestine, and make it a political homeland for the Jews. At the beginning it was not racist. It was a Jewish equivalent of the liberation movements of Africa and Asia.

1976


Skillen begins the discussion with some comments from Harry Blamires *The Christian Mind* 1966. Skillen’s summary is pertinent even if it is a difficult paragraph: *This shrinking of the Christian life into a narrow personal and "churchy" world has of course been devastating for education. What goes on in our classrooms, if it is to have any meaning at all, must have something in common with what is going on in classrooms elsewhere. Science, literature, philosophy, art, history - these are not the possession of a few individuals or of one institution. But if there is no Christian perspective, no Christian philosophy, no Christian education, then we only fool ourselves if we imagine that we can have a Christian college without a Christian mind. Skillen’s rhetorical point is that there’s no point in having a Christian College if it becomes the educational place that defends the notion that there cannot be a Christian mind. And it is precisely that view which he is challenging because it is so very prominent. The subsequent quotes from Blamires are concerned with the prevalence of a widespread misconception about Christian love and charity. Just as it is Christian to give way to other people’s interests, so Christians seem to believe it is appropriate to give way to other people’s ideas. This is a notion that is fraught with all kinds of ambiguity and assumes that religious beliefs are a matter of private possession.*


The article is written to commemorate 200 years since the revolution of 1776. The article is another of Skillen’s *belles lettres*, artful contributions to stimulate Christian reflection. In that sense it is not framed in Skillen’s characteristic textual-critical examination of argument in political philosophy. The article is framed by a description found in Margaret Walker’s novel *Jubilee* (1966) in which Vyry, a black/white mother, has found Jesus and Randall Ware is stuck in his bitterness about white racism. From here Skillen considers the deep problem that faces Christians and others when they confess that the United States is a freedom-loving country with a Christian constitution. Such a view remains blind to the division that is present because of a lack of recognition of the place of black Africans in American history. Considering the call of James H Cone for a revolution of disobedience based in an affirmation of the absolute sovereignty of God over his creation, Skillen notes another group of Americans who consider that next to Christianity, the American system of government is the most precious gift to the world. There’s a problem, he says. *If the Constitutional order is so perfectly Christian, how can there be any biblical justification for a revolutionary black power movement today? Or if the original constitution, which supported the states’ rights to slavery, was truly a violation of*
human dignity before the face of Almighty God, then how can Christians possibly view it as the greatest event since the coming of Christ?

24. “Constantijn de Grote en Bicentennial Amerika” RO (Maandblad Reunisten Organisatie Societas Studiosorum Reformatorum), July pp 8-19

A small piece on the revolution of 1776 translated by RO in the Netherlands. It examines the alleged Christian character of the American revolution and the notion that America is “God’s new Israel”. This is usually justified by reference to America’s puritan heritage as well as the impact of John Locke upon the framers of the 1789 constitution. The article also considers the development of American civil religion (Russell E Rickey and Donald G Jones American Civil Religion 1974) as well as the study of Rockne McCarthy “American civil religion and civil rights” in Vanguard (Jan, Feb, March 1976). The current electoral system in USA is also examined and there is some consideration of Karl Marx’s observations of the so-called Christian state.


In the preface to this book Skillen, as Editor, draws attention to a collection of essays from Russia that speak of the spiritual revival then under way. There is a quote from an essay by Evgeny Barabanov which is concluded by this observation “Resurrection ‘from under the rubble’ is only possible through the resurrection of Christ in His redemption of the creation.” The preface contextualises the book’s focus upon North America, and Christian responsibility within US and Canadian polities by reminding the readers that God’s Kingdom rules over all the earth. Skillen’s own piece, the first of five contributions, is a critical examination of why a Christian political standpoint is absent amongst those claiming to be Christian. The problem confronting those who would develop distinctively Christian politics is that most North American Christians see no problem in having sanctified the current secularized political options. The heart of the difficulty is described thus: The deepest religious agreement that American Christians have about politics come not from the Christian faith but from their secular ecumenical faith in the American political way of life (p.3). Skillen develops the view that religion is life - all of life - and it cannot be compartmentalized. State, family, school, business are equally as religious as the church - they are all dimensions of man’s service to the true God or to false gods. This is Skillen’s explanation of why there is so little political agreement among Christians and identifies the compartmentalization in Christian thinking.

1977


A deeply appreciative study of the contribution of Senator Mark Hatfield as found in Between a Rock and a Hard Place (1976). This is one of the most unusual pieces of political literature in American history. No American politician has so relentlessly and determinedly gone back to the Bible to discern Christian foundations for political service. Skillen takes a long-run view. Hatfield raises questions that have long-term and powerful significance for the way Christians, of whatever background, will consider their political involvement. It is in this positive and affirming context that
Skillen tries to unravel the complex structure of Hatfield’s argument. There is a determined rejection of both civil religion and the idea that national self-interest is compatible with the religion of Jesus Christ. Hatfield describes his own approach in terms of a tension between the “purist” and the “apologist”. It is to this framework that Skillen directs his critical comments.


Later (in 1981) this article, with minor editorial additions, was to be Chapter 3 “Christian Principle and Political Reality” of *International Politics and the Demand for Global Justice* (No. 67). Here again is Skillen’s sustained analysis of international politics, an ongoing effort to understand that prevailing “mind”.

The article is Skillen’s attempt to confront the international reality, including the full reality of the impact of such realist policies upon international relations, seeking biblical guidance to provide an alternative normative understanding of how nations and states relate to each other, as they really function in a multi-dimensional way, within the constraints of the creation order. Norms concerning how states ought to view their foreign-policy making have to be clarified. The article again reiterates Skillen’s conviction that the America myth that it must maintain itself as Number One is one of, if not, the most destabilizing myths in the global context. The normative question in 19th century Europe, in the world today, and in the smaller world of tomorrow will remain: “What are the nations of the earth doing to achieve justice for all?” And the question comes with the greatest force and the greatest demand to the most powerful nations on earth.


Skillen is dismayed. Mouw appeals to Abraham Kuyper’s reformational world-view, but still writes to ground Christian political reflection and action in a “Biblical political theology.” Still, the critique is respectful of Mouw’s contribution - he argues that the biblical teaching of creation, fall and redemption is decisive for the way in which Christians approach their political responsibilities. Moreover, Mouw has made a serious effort … to enlarge the dialogue on the subject among anabaptists, dispensationalists, modern liberals and Calvinists. The central weakness in Mouw’s approach is described thus: [Mouw’s stated aim of developing a Biblical political theology] not only fails to make room for an integrally Christian political theory, but it fails to do so by implying that “sacred” “theology” must be brought into contact with “secular” philosophy in order to get a dialogue going between Christians who preach, counsel, and act and non-Christians who evidently deal with politics in a direct and non-theological way.


Skillen carefully dissects O’Grady’s book and finds it to be eclectic and lacking in a systematic presentation. O’Grady rejects a Greek dualistic view of human kind but when it comes to an explanation of who this integral being is, in biblical terms, Skillen observes that O’Grady puts together biblical, Thomistic and existentialist elements with ideas from latter-day Catholic thinkers without any integration at all. The problem is clearly stated Skillen suggests, but there is no solution offered by way of an alternative Christian view.
30. “Jimmy Carter and the World” Vanguard_July-August 11-16

In 27 above Skillen discusses the Carter administration’s involvement in the trilateral commission: ... North Americans, West Europeans, and Japanese ... have become aware, since 1973, that the international economic arrangements established at the end of World War II with the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on tariffs and trade, and a few other charters and institutions, are inadequate to handle the international economic problems of today (p.28).

Skillen, then at Gordon College, writes this article which is printed on 5 consecutive half pages below a parallel article by his Gordon colleague, Bill Harper. Harper reviews Carter’s domestic agenda. Skillen, as the title suggests, looks at the first few months of a ‘new’ foreign policy. He considers successively Western Europe and the NATO alliance, East-West relations and the continuing progress of trade liberalization with the Soviet Union and the SALT talks. The novel feature of Carter’s approach thus far is his public, verbal insistence that the protection of human rights is his top priority.


At the September 1992 National Town Meeting and 15th Anniversary Celebration of APJ Skillen addressed the meeting and with humorous remarks, and commented upon the fact that when the Christian Action Foundation became the National Association for Christian Political Action many withdrew their membership. He went on to say that as a small organisation their aim was not to have fellowship but to always be an outward looking body - this, he said, was what was required if they were to be a genuine political organisation. That mentality has prevailed and it is articulated here, 15 years earlier, in this CJL Newsletter of the Canadian “Committee for Justice and Liberty” article. The development of NACPA was slow but the aim was to understand how to render solid Christian political service.

1978

32. Response #3 to David C Jones “Who are the Poor?” RES Theological Forum VI, 1 February 17-18

In a two-page reply to David Jones’s word study on biblical uses of the term “poor”, Skillen expresses appreciation and develops his own view of the way the various uses hang together in the context of the overall biblical revelation about God’s creation, His judgment upon sin and His ever-active work of grace and mercy to overcome the depredations of human folly. It is their “hanging together” that Skillen emphasizes, over against any interpretation that would leave the two usages simply dangling side by side. Skillen’s comments, as a polite rejoinder, could be boiled down to the following: So what response does Holy Scripture call forth from us now? Skillen’s view is that poverty is a reference to the condition of not being free to enjoy God’s earthly blessings. The proper life for God’s creatures is to be rich in the enjoyment of God’s blessings.

33. “Toward a Neutral Government” Christian Home and School April, 8-9, 24

This article was part of a joint APJ - National Union of Christian Schools testimony before the US House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee in support of Tuition Tax Credit legislation. The final paragraph tells the reader how Skillen understands the political context. The tax credit legislation currently being considered in Congress will clearly not do all that is necessary to establish full justice in the area of education, because even a substantial tuition tax credit from the federal government to parents will not be enough to give the non-government schools equal
standing alongside the public schools. Nevertheless, the legislation is one of the most important and valuable steps that can now be taken in the direction of equity and justice in education. It will give tremendous encouragement to those who want justice, who are oppressed by majoritarian and financial limits to their parental responsibilities and conscientious convictions. Congress should enact tuition tax credit legislation now.

34. “Justice for All” APJ position paper

When APJ (Association for Public Justice) was co-operating with the National Union of Christian Schools, testifying before the US House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee in support of Tuition Tax Credit legislation, this position paper was produced, along with the following one concerned with Education (No 35). This brief and compact statement promotes the Association and makes known its goals. It is a confessional document couched in “layman’s” terms. It explains how obedience to Jesus Christ confronts the Christian with public justice as a norm. Public Justice is then discussed in relation to the State and that is a basis for a consideration of the Government’s calling in the State.

35. “Justice for Education” APJ position paper

This brochure has stood the test of time and more than 25 years later the Association is still working within the framework outlined in this 12 page discussion. It covers basic principles about education, who has the responsibility to educate, how American education has got into a problematic relationship with government because of government’s tendency to view itself as the “principal” authority for schooling which, in APJ’s opinion, it most certainly is not. The pamphlet outlines in brief the problem of educational freedom being compromised by government’s (civil religious) bias to schools which it sets up.

36. “Politics and Eschatology: Political Action and the Coming of God’s Kingdom” Revised version of AACS August Niagara Conference paper

This paper was to be republished, with minor amendments, as “Christian Action and the Coming of God’s Kingdom”, Skillen’s contribution to the book he edited for the APJ Education Fund, *Confessing Christ and Doing Politics* 1982 (No. 69). It is a very significant piece because it outlines Skillen’s biblical vision since his undergraduate years. It concerns the sabbatical structure which pertains to the entirety of the biblical revelation about God’s relationship with His creation. The article begins with a consideration of “quietism” and “activism” - two dominant Christian responses discerned in the historical response to the challenges presented by Augustine (see No 40). The discussion then moves on to the filling out of the general sabbatical framework, and the author then discusses two important images or metaphors that are frequently used to describe or represent the life of God’s people in this world, the metaphors of “sojourning” or “sojourners” and “homesteading” or “homesteaders”. The subsequent discussion unfolds as Skillen’s attempt to explain why the best option for understanding our sojourners is in terms of our role as homesteaders; likewise for our homesteading, insight is to be found from our earthly sojourners.

This is a noteworthy contribution. It is evidence of an early (1978) stage in the long-term co-operative working relationship between Skillen and Bob Goudzwaard (see Skillen’s reviews of A Christian Political Option Nos 8 and 9 above; see also Skillen’s reference to this paper by Goudzwaard and van Baars at No 70 below). It is pointing at a very basic hurdle that Skillen believes has stood in the way of Christian thinking - an inability on the part of Christian people to know how to think and respond normatively. In this sense Skillen takes a key point from the paper: “Thinking from the perspective of norms creates the greatest certainty concerning the steps which ought to be made at the beginning: the thinking from the perspective of future goals renders precisely those first steps that ought to be taken uncertain” (notice the slight alteration of original p.247). Skillen sees great practical significance in this principle. Skillen is appreciative of an emphasis that decisively moves away from a secularist positivism in which “values”, “goals” and “trends” dominate the analysis to an acceptance of heteronomous norms. In this regard he makes his most critical point - which, he emphasizes, is not a major criticism of the paper given its rich and valuable perspective - that Goudzwaard and van Baars tend to discuss the international economic order as if it is solely or mainly about governments and political organisations.


Dale Vree was not pleased with Skillen’s review. Vree’s rejoinder suggests themes and purposes of his book that were not evident in the review nor, presumably, in the book itself. The review is not altogether negative, and shows an interest in Christian-Marxist dialogue. Vree’s interest seems to have been to demonstrate that the dialogue was impossible. Hence Skillen’s concluding quote: The greatest irony of the dialogue, concludes Vree, “is that as it has advanced it has become more and more monological and less and less dialogical. What began as a momentous conversation between two great belief systems has proceeded to become a monologue based on the dismemberment of both”.

39. “What is Living and What is Dead in the Reformational Movement?” Vanguard November-December pp.20-21

This is a significant aide memoire for that particular time. A few months previously Skillen had presented his paper to an AACS conference in Ontario (No. 36). He had also just begun teaching at Dordt College. The two page article was presumably commissioned by the Vanguard editor.

Skillen begins with a “straight up” comment about the title of the piece. To speak of what is dead and alive is to speak with a degree of finality that is only possible at the Last Judgment. I, for one, am unwilling to attempt such a thing. Still he does encourage his readers to test the spirits. That is what the Lord calls us to do. Under the Spirit’s guidance we will have to discern what leads to life and what leads to death.

The article is an unabashed reminder to Vanguard readers of the gospel. It
encourages them to maintain a Christian-cultural hopefulness rather than lapse into any counter-cultural skeptical negativism (or any Gnostic elitism).

1979


The point of this article is summed up neatly in Skillen’s introduction and conclusion. The introduction says: My thesis is that the basic questions about the nature of Christian responsibility for social justice posed by Augustine more than 1500 years ago are still the fundamental ones today, and that the Augustinian formulations of the questions control contemporary evangelical social thought on all sides - Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, and others. The circumscription of "contemporary evangelical social thought" is indicative of Skillen’s desire, as a professor of political science involved in the Association for Public Justice, to develop some historical perspective on what unites and what separates evangelicals when it comes to social and political thinking. And that is why he identifies Augustine as a key focus for sorting through the various views. The article creatively links these variant evangelical viewpoints with three not completely compatible viewpoints that can be attributed to Augustine’s writings as his intellectual orientation passed through different stages during his lifetime. Skillen makes it plain that he is not interested in mere classification. Augustine provides a focus by which Christian scholars, if they take a self-critical path, can begin to compare and contrast their respective contributions, and in such an attitude contribute to the disclosure of a Christian understanding about the way God’s Kingdom stands in relation to earthly responsibility.


Dooyeweerd died in February 1977. This article is a formal response to his contribution. It begins with a brief introduction to the Dutch educational and political context in which Dooyeweerd laboured. Then there is a comparison between Dooyeweerd and Kuhn in order to explain Dooyeweerd’s “law-idea” as well as to explain how he understood the order to which the special sciences were necessarily bound. In the context of this critical examination of the foundations of science, it appears to me that Dooyeweerd’s contribution to the philosophy of the social sciences is twofold. In the first place, he engages in a deeply historical analysis of the development of philosophy and science which helps to show why there have been different schools of thought, even with regard to the same subject matter, and, in the second place, he presents some unique systematic arguments that aid in the distinguishing and classifying of social sciences.

42. “A Biblical Basis for Political Theory and Action” New Reformation Aug 7-10

also published as Chapter 5 “Public Justice and True Tolerance” No 69 & in No 143.

This is what the title says it is - an exposition of biblical teaching about the meaning and purpose of politics. In this sense it is one of those articles in which the author adopts an explicitly confessional approach, drawing upon his biblical studies at Wheaton and Westminster. It is an article that invites the reader to reconsider biblical teaching, to go back and read the bible in a new way with a new insight about the way in which God has made His servants to obey Him in their political stewardship. It gives the distinct impression that Skillen believed he had been given a fresh vision for
biblically-directed politics in North America. His appeal to the biblical parable of Jesus concerning the wheat and the tares was to become a refrain in his writing over the years (taking the 1524 Anabaptist statement of Balthasar Hubmaier as a point of reference see No 25). And it has an important function right at the beginning of his argument, which gives him a Christian basis for asserting that the entire Christian body should be working for justice for everyone. It is not Christian justice for Christians to enjoy any political privilege at the expense of non-Christians. Non-Christians must be given every blessing in the political arena that Christians themselves enjoy. Just as the wheat and the tares enjoy the same sun, rain and cultivation, so Christians and non-Christians should enjoy equally the benefits of God’s grace given to the field of this world in the present age.


This is a strange review of an apparently strange book, but not made any less so by Skillen’s “up-front” statement to that effect. According to the review the book not only has two names (one on the cover and another on the title page) but is really misnamed because it is an introduction to the thinking of Boyd H Bode, a relatively well-known American professor of education during the first half of the twentieth century who was neither a statesman, nor an orthodox Christian, neither a political scientist nor an interpreter of Christian faith. But why did it need to be reviewed at all? The answer is to be found in two facts: 1. De Jong, an educator, considers Bode’s “gospel of democracy” to be a thoroughly secularized version of the Kingdom of God. 2. The author was also a one-time member of the Dordt College faculty (1965-1974).


Skillen’s presentation pp.23-29 is then confronted by an opponent who claims to approach the subject with common sense and a comprehensive review of the development of religious liberty in America. Skillen’s retort (35-38) claims that Mr Doerr has not come to grips with what Skillen sees as the most crucial question, and that is: What’s the nature of “religion” and the practices that people might want to claim as “religious”? He has again and again asserted a certain view of religion which is one view of religion in this country. I don’t want his freedom to hold that view of religion to be abridged in any sense. The question is whether or not that view of religion ought to be imposed on all the rest of us. Skillen follows that up by asking how the religious liberty of those, albeit in the minority, who do not subscribe to Doerr’s view, is to be safeguarded against majoritarian imposition? The point that Skillen focuses upon is the assumption that Government is in fact competent, has the legitimate authority, to run schools and insist that funds go inordinately to its schools. The assumption is then that funding from Government should be dependent upon the school adopting a neutral non-religious character. But Skillen argues that the “neutral” ones in the Government’s view are the only ones that receive money. In other words true pluralism is denied rather than required with the result that government takes the place of the church by controlling schools and ensuring that any school’s educational direction will conform to the agenda of the secular majority Doerr claims to represent.
45. Review of Jan Dengerink *The Idea of Justice in Christian Perspective*
Toronto, Wedge 1978 in *Pro Rege* 7:4 June 29-30

Skillen’s commendation of Dengerink the warrior for Calvinistic Philosophy in the Netherlands and at Reformed Colleges in North America is balanced by a reserve for this book. He notes .. *the author deals only quite generally with the idea of justice* and the book provides only very general guidance as to the details of a normative Christian view of justice. It should be read in conjunction with other volumes, Skillen, advises.


*Whatever the nature of your work*, Skillen concludes, *you will be strengthened and encouraged as a Christian by reading these essays.* This is a collection of essays from *The Guide* the magazine of the Christian Labour Association of Canada. The essays were authored by Bernard Zylstra, Harry Antonides, Al Wolters, H Evan Runner, Calvin Seerveld, Bob Goudzwaard and Ed Vanderkloet.

47. “Toward Just Representation” APJ position paper

In a brief and succinct analysis, Skillen explains why political representation in the United States is at odds with itself. On the one hand, a system of representation has been established at local, state, and federal levels that is designed to allow every adult individual to be represented as part of a single, undifferentiated, political community by means of the majority will of the whole. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear to many people that individuals who identify with a particular group cannot be adequately represented by a system that attempts to form an undifferentiated political community by stripping individuals of their group identity. In a succinct description of America’s system of political representation, Skillen identifies the key problem. Only one “group” is recognized and that is the “whole political community”. Skillen’s analysis is subtitled: *a proposal for revitalizing our system of political participation*. He provides a brief explanation of how a significant but not revolutionary change might contribute to a new understanding of political representation. The pamphlet concludes with a carefully reasoned explanation of the electoral justice that can result from responsible proportionality.


We are informed by the editor, J B Hulst, that Skillen’s article was “written in preparation for the adoption of a political science major” for Dordt College. Hulst gives explicit support to Skillen by this editorial. His ‘rather long article is not only a part of that study (of North American and international political life), but it is also an example of how extensive and demanding that study and the development of ‘a Christian point of departure’ … must be.” This article, with his IRB contribution “International Interdependence and the Demand for Global Justice” (No 27) would be incorporated into the Dordt Press publication: *International Politics and the Demand for Global Justice* (1981) (No. 67) - this article is re-published as Chapters 4 “Unity and Diversity Among States: Roots of the Western Tradition” pp.59-70 and 5 “Three Contemporary Views of International Unity and Diversity” pp.71-98.

The aim of the article is to demonstrate why the political study of international relations is of vital importance to a Christian college curriculum. The first part reviews the development of the new sub-discipline after World War II and Skillen discerns its significance because the problem of political unity and diversity is an ancient one that
antedates both the rise of the modern state and the emergence of contemporary social science methods. His brief glance at Biblical, classical Greek, Roman stocic and medieval traditions is followed by analysis of Hans J Morgenthau, Karl W Deutsch and the co-operative effort of Robert O Keohane and Joseph S Nye.

49. “Can Guzzlers Solve Problems?” Eternity December p.56

This is an article in the “Ideas in Print” department, compiled by the editorial staff of Eternity with the by-line: “A survey of articles in small circulation publications.” It is a summary of an August-September Public Justice Newsletter (sic!) article (presumably of the same name) which examines the President’s moralistic response to the “oil shock”. Carter had revealed a deep contradictory stand when he appealed to the American people to put an end to their selfishness. Skillen was critical of the American assumption that America saves itself. A second reservation concerns the President’s view of the crisis as a loss of national faith in progress.

1980

50. Review of Jan Dengerink The Idea of Justice in Christian Perspective Toronto, Wedge in Philosophia Reformata 45th year, pp.105-106 (also in Christian Scholar’s Review 9:4 p.375; see also shorter review in Pro Rege 7:4 June listed at No 45)

Although this is a brief review, it is significant. It shows Skillen, 6 years after having been awarded the doctor’s degree, is willing and able to critically appraise the work of Jan Dengerink, a “senior statesman” of the reformational movement, and student of Dooyeweerd. There is also an implicit criticism of the book’s publishers in this review - “.. one wonders why the publisher did not provide a more adequate introduction to the book since it was intended for a general North American audience. Any worthwhile scholarly book should lead readers to other works.

51. “God’s Ordinances: Calvinism in Renewal” Pro Rege 8:4 June pp.24-33

A slight revision of this article was reprinted later as “Politics, Pluralism and the Ordinances of God” in Henry Vander Goot ed. Life is Religion: Essays in Honour of H Evan Runner 1981 (No 61).

As with No 48 this article is introduced by Rev Hulst of Dordt College the editor of Pro Rege. The editorial comment includes this paragraph: “As indicated in an earlier issue of Pro Rege (December 1979) the first appointment to the Center was that of McKendree Langley to the Abraham Kuyper Chair. A subsequent appointment placed Rockne McCarthy in the Visiting Lecturer’s Chair. Since McCarthy teaches several courses in the Political Science Department, James Skillen was freed to work one-half time in the center. Next year McCarthy and Skillen will be joint occupants of the Political Theory Chair...” Further discussion in the editorial indicates that work was proceeding on a reader and the three articles in the present edition would not be included in the reader. McCarthy’s article is “Liberal Democracy and the Rights of Institutions” which suggests that attempts are necessary to “clarify the rightful sphere of authority, the unique structural identity and the special tasks of the many institutions, including the state, in society. Langley’s article “God and Liberty” investigations Catholic social teaching from Lammenais who sought to return society to God in a pluralist framework to the teachings of Vatican II.

Here in 1980 is the Editor’s response to Skillen’s article by joining Langley in addressing Dordt College’s supporting community to “… examine the Kuyperian tradition to see if any clearer theory and practice of Christian pluralism is possible.” Clearly a North American context was then being addressed. Seeking to ensure that
Kuyper and Kuyper’s legacy as well as Dooyeweerd and Dooyeweerd’s legacy would not become some kind of advertising pitch for Christian higher education. (see Skillen’s response to Goudzwaard and van Baars No 37).

The article is 11 pages in length with one page of footnotes. It begins with a brief and compelling description of the historical problematic facing Christian people. It is a brief account formulated with the risk of overgeneralization in view. The picture is drawn in terms of the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution and the aftermath in which we now live. Up until the French Revolution Christians, by and large, saw themselves riding through history and when the French Revolution burst upon European consciousness a decisive change was made when it was realized that human beings do not simply ride through history, they actually make history.

52. “Could This Be the Last of the Old Kind of Presidential Campaigns?”
Vanguard May/June 5-6
Skillen the creative, interrogating journalist engages in irony. There are several healthy features of the US presidential election campaign this year, if one only has eyes to see them. These features are about the exposure of basic weaknesses in America’s electoral system. The first is that the candidates offer little that is new. Maybe the American people will realize that and begin to ask for something other than the same old stuff. The second feature is that the pragmatism adopted by the candidates is exposed as an empty, directionless basis for political leadership, a constant shifting in response to events. Maybe “the people” will react by asking for a more principled approach. The third feature is that the differences in viewpoint among US citizens are coming into full view following Vietnam and the emerging energy crisis. The fact that even in the middle of critical domestic problems the candidates must continue to face international issues is good for Americans who are among the last of the world’s parochial and chauvinistic citizens.

53. “De Reformatie van Wijsbegeerte en Wetenschap in de Verenigde Staten”
Beweging 80, 41st year, 3 June pp.34-36
Skillen provides the readers of Beweging magazine, of the Vereniging voor Calvinistische Wijsbegeerte with a review of “reformational developments” in science and philosophy in the United States. Since 1967, the foundational work of Runner at Calvin College, Knudsen and Van Til at Westminster Seminary, and Pete Steen in Pittsburgh has become focused upon the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. In some sense the article seeks to show what has been happening within the United States and thereby take the sole attention away from the controversies that had become associated with ICS, particularly in Reformed and Presbyterian church circles. The dominant pragmatism of American culture is an important factor that needs to be faced. As well, the US knows very few Christian associations outside the domains of church and school.

The Banner Oct 6 8-9
1980 was a presidential election year. This is an article of Skillen the political scientist, making his understanding of the political process known within the CRCNA, to the readership of its denominational magazine. What is missing? The answer is found in the closing paragraph: If you are a US citizen and if you see some decent and meaningful choices, be sure to vote November 4. Don’t give up either before or after the event. But do more than that. Take some time to discuss both the meaningfulness and the emptiness of this year’s campaign with your friends, and then resolve to work for something more honoring to our King and more just to our
neighbours the next time around. Christian are not missing from the campaign this year but a solid Christian vision of public justice from a comprehensive Christian standpoint does seem to be missing. IN THIS SENSE Skillen’s article is designed with his own sense of fiduciary responsibility to fellow church members. One might almost call it a “pastoral letter” of a “political elder”.

55. “Kuyper on Covenant and Politics” The Kuyper Newsletter 2:1 June pp.4-5
This is an important note about Skillen’s involvement in the Temple University Center for the Study of Federalism which has given birth to a subsection called “Workshop on Covenant and Politics.” Skillen presented a paper: “From Covenant of Grace to Tolerant Public Pluralism: the Dutch Calvinist contribution”. This little note tells us that the main purpose of the paper was to show that although the disestablishment of churches in modern states has been accomplished chiefly through a secularization process that has rejected biblical, covenantal thinking, that process has not been universal. Enter the 19th century Dutch Calvinists and principled pluralism with its biblically based view of tolerance. Kuyper’s “unconditional disapproval” of the burning of Servetus is noted. For the state to fulfil its covenantal obligations before God did not require church control of confessional uniformity. Skillen notes that Kuyper began to articulate a concept of tolerant public pluralism which was not a departure from the covenant of grace (as eg Max Weber suggested) but rather as a consequence of his commitment to that same covenant. This is the Workshop that led to the publication of the four-volume work of Daniel Elazar The Covenant Tradition in Politics (see Skillen’s articles No. 291 “Covenant, Federalism and Social Justice” Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 20(2000):111-118 and No. 297 “Can There be Just Politics Without Covenentalism?” in Calvin Theological Journal 36:131-39 below). Of note also is the fact that this paper is referred in footnote 71 of the paper listed as No. 60, “Christian Faith and Political Freedom …” from a 1981 Christian Legal Society Conference. It is referred to as a “soon to be published” paper from the Temple University’s Center directed by Daniel Elazar, and it’s title then was “From Covenant of Grace to Tolerant Public Pluralism: the Dutch Calvinist Contribution.” This title is noted as a contribution to a forthcoming volume from Carolina Academic Press, 1985 edited by John Kincaid and Daniel J Elazar (eds) The Covenant Connection: Federal Theology and the Origins of Modern Politics. In 1996 the Calvin Theological Journal published Skillen’s article with a most interesting and suggestive amendment in the title ie replacing “tolerant” with “equitable”. “From Covenant of Grace to Equitable Public Pluralism: the Dutch Calvinist Contribution.” In many respects this is a summarizing update of the doctoral dissertation (No. 12). The amendment to the title is also significant in that it shows a shift from using “tolerant” as a descriptive term to designate and thereby justify a particular (reformational) understanding of a differentiated social order in an academic context, to a public policy rationale that argues from a normative structural standpoint - “equitable” assumes a normative requirement qualifying the process of societal differentiation - in Skillen’s Doctoral dissertation consideration of Calvin, the term “equity” is emphasized (p.189) as Calvin’s understanding of the God-given goal for (our formation of) positive laws, natural law and the moral law. Reference here can also be made to no 273 “The Theoretical Roots of Equal Treatment” in Stephen V Monsma and J Christopher Soper (eds) Equal Treatment of Religion in a Pluralistic Society pp.55-74.

56. “How I think I’ll vote” Eternity Oct 32-33
Eternity magazine brought together a group of Christian citizens: Larry Richards, a Sunday School educator who was pro-Reagan in the upcoming election; Robert R Lavelle, an executive of an association providing housing loans to the poor who would give Carter his vote; Karin Granberg-Michaelson, a Lutheran social services counselor who favored John Anderson; Ronald H Nash, an academic, who was a Reagan enthusiast; Bob Cleath, a world-view oriented academic who taught communications
and takes a rather cynical left-wing position that none will be able to break through the class structure and bring true equality; and Jim Skillen, who explains why it is that he finds himself voting for the lesser of evils, even as he rhetorically suggests that a vote for Reagan could only be responsible if it could be demonstrated how a limited government would actually promote justice for every citizen, for families and schools, for businesses and voluntary organizations; the final respondent was Nancy Barcus, a former English professor at Houghton College who would vote for Carter because of his Christian humanitarian openness.

57. Christians Organizing for Political Service: A Study Guide Based on the Work of the Association for Public Justice APJ Education Fund

The subtitle “A Study Guide Based on the Work of the Association for Public Justice” gives an accurate summation of what the book is about. It has 113 pages, 7 chapters and an appendix which publishes APJ's succinct constitutional affirmations about Christian political responsibility. It expresses APJ’s vision for Christian political service. The book is also the fruit of the work of the Association. The task of writing this short book was an enjoyable one because it was done in community, for community, and with communal evaluation and support (p.vi). It was compiled at a time when evangelicals were looking for a way to express their political concerns. Though the book, strictly speaking, comes from a group which is distinct in its reformational approach, nevertheless it is compiled with the expectation that the groups who would gather to study the material would have to interact with these evangelical groups. The book is thus an essay and a study guide. Each chapter has a list of suggested readings; the readings are a mix of contemporary Christian responses to politics and standard works that would be found in political science courses at university.

The chapters are:

1. **A Hard Look at the Present Situation** examining the sense of political crisis that had descended and how Christians were trying to find a voice;

2. **The Biblical Basics** - politics in the context of biblical teaching about God’s coming kingdom;

3. **Justice in the Political Community** identifies the structure within which political action makes sense and

4. **Working Together** examines the structure of our citizenship as it coincides with the diverse social responsibilities in which our life comes to expression.

5 **Building a Movement: the Association for Public Justice** provides an outline of the policies and strategies adopted by APJ. The section “Three prongs on one fork” is perhaps the most important 4 pages in the book (pp.66-69) in so far as it gives an account of APJ’s associational self-definition, its modus operandi.

6. **What are the Consequences?** outlines principles for associational development and

7. **Where Do We Go from Here?** gives a summation of the place of APJ in its current (1980) social-political setting. The Appendix as a Christian confession of faith concludes with a statement that indicates the Association’s understanding of the liberated and liberating character of Christian political action.

1981

58. “Justice for Education” (with Rockne McCarthy) in *New Horizons* (Orthodox Presbyterian Church publication) 2:2 February pp.1, 11-12.

See item 35 above.
59. “President Reagan’s View of the World” Calvinist Contact (Ont) April 16, pp.9-10
A transcript of a radio interview (CJRT Toronto) with Gerald Vandezande, published in a Canadian reformed community newspaper. It is about Skillen’s view of Reagan’s emerging foreign policy. It continues Skillen’s critical commentary on Carter’s first year of office for Vanguard (No. 30) also Toronto-based of the same reformed community (see also 31 Skillen’s contribution to the CJL Newsletter as a brief explanation of efforts south of the border which set up APJ. See also No 39.
Skillen has two hypotheses to test with respect to Reagan: one is that he represents a reaction by Americans to the demands of working together in a coordinated fashion with all kinds of other people. The other hypothesis is merely that he represents “America is right”. Much of the discussion focuses upon El Salvador and the over-concern with security. The more the US spends on arms and security the more nervous it becomes.
Later, describing APJ's involvement in a coalition of organizations to seek a better way, Skillen observes: We have been working with groups like Bread for the World. We’re having discussions with those who are trying to get at the heart of what the arms race mentality is because it’s a deep civil, religious, visionary, spiritual problem as well as what people think America should be. As we get full-time staff now in Washington, we’re going to spend quite a bit of time trying to work on those things. But we are quite small.

This paper is an expanded version of the 1979 discussion “Augustine and Contemporary Evangelical Social Thought” (No. 40). The framework for the discussion is set up as follows: The key question, of course, is this: “Do Christians manifest a strong commitment to constructive politics? If so, why and how? If not, why not?” Some other basic questions follow that one rather quickly: “How does civic and political responsibility fit within the priorities of the Christian life? How should it fit? What are the norms of justice which should guide Christians in their efforts to establish good laws and to oppose bad ones? Should we look for anything distinctively biblical in all of this, or are Christians in the same boat as everyone else when it comes to politics and government?” The discussion proceeds as an attempt to penetrate behind our contemporary experiences and attitudes to the historical streams of thought and action that have shaped us. And who is “us”? Broadly speaking Skillen, as a post-doctoral researcher, is trying to grapple with basic ideas that have long shaped western Christianity. For him, Augustine is probably the most influential figure in all of Christendom when it comes to these issues. His influence is evident today in almost every Christian approach to politics. “Us” therefore, refers to the many and varied streams of American (at this stage evangelical and protestant) Christianity who find their commonality in Augustine. But, at precisely this point, Skillen wants to point out that there are at least three different views of political responsibility to be found in the writings of Augustine.
The discussion moves to Carl F Henry and the Moral Majority which seems to be consonant with that of Tim LaHaye of the Moral Majority until it is realized that what LaHaye advocates is an antithetical opposition between morality and humanism. LaHaye seeks to promote an American “love of virtue” that can be shared by Christians and non-Christians. In this he is close to Augustine’s view that the Christian approach should be one of preserving a particular political order in which they have some degree of freedom. The discussion moves on to John Howard Yoder and Jim
Wallis to a discussion of the assumptions that all forms of coercion and hierarchical rule among human beings are excluded from the City of God. Skillen then considers the views of Ronald Sider, who via Evangelicals for Social Action has been busy calling for self-conscious Christian social action. In conclusion, Skillen outlines an alternative constructive approach to politics, indebted in various ways to Augustine, but seeking to overcome the inherent ambiguities that can be found in his thinking.

Politics will have to be connected more directly to both creation and redemption in Christ if this approach is to emerge. Christ’s appearance on earth has consequences for our life of service on this earth as we wait for the new heavens and the new earth. Such a busy waiting must take the antithesis seriously. Augustine’s second approach needs to be questioned because in that approach it is assumed that there are, and can be, no biblical norms for politics.

61. “Politics, Pluralism and the Ordinances of God” in Henry VanderGoot (ed Life is Religion: Essays in Honor of H Evan Runner Paideia pp.195-206 (this is an edited version of 51 above). The first two paragraphs pay tribute to Runner’s Scriptural Religion and Political Task as one of the first that helped me to begin thinking normatively (out of principle) about a Biblical view of political and social life. Further on Skillen notes that Runner’s contribution has helped introduce him to a tradition of Christian thought and life which has led to a revival of concern for God’s ordinances for all of life. A revived understanding of God’s ordinances, His will for all of life, is the key to a revival of Christian social and political life.

62. “History and the Unfolding of Society” Pro Rege 9:4 June pp.2-11

The footnote to this article reads: “As the editorial to this Pro Rege issue indicates, this essay will serve as the basis for an introduction to the section of the Reader on societal pluralism that approaches the subject from the perspective of ‘history and the unfolding of society’. This introduction will be followed by selections from Edmund Burke, Groen van Prinsterer and Jose Miguez Bonino.” Thus it was part of a project in political science initiated within the Dordt College academic context. Later, in May 1991, in the Preface to the volume that was eventually published, Skillen and Rockne M McCarthy wrote: This project began more than a decade ago when we confronted the need in both academic and political circles for a book like this. The Dordt College Studies Institute in Sioux center, Iowa provided the launching pad. From 1979 to 1982, when both of us were teaching and doing research there, the plan was conceived and work began both to collect readings and to write introductions to them in order to produce a volume that would acquaint students with recent traditions of thought that are largely unknown in North American circles. Significant sections of this article are discernible in the introductions to excerpts of the various writers in that work Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society 1991 (no. 208). The aim of the article (and indeed the project which brought the reader to publication) was to help illustrate the argument from history by those who began to argue from history (who) still held onto aspects of older arguments - arguments based on natural law or divine right or hierarchical order - but a new mode of reasoning was emerging.

The article considers Edmund Burke’s response to the French Revolution, Groen’s objections to the Revolutionaries and the Liberation Theology of Bonino (ref to No 101) is also included in this discussion. What this article shows is that at the outset of Skillen’s involvement in the Association for Public Justice, he was formulating an ongoing theoretical project to develop a systematic and comprehensive theory of societal differentiation, a social-political-economic philosophy.
63. “Seeking Genuine Peace” Letter to Editor Christian Science Monitor July 20

A brief comment on William R Brown’s July 8th commentary on Israel’s defense policy. *Israel’s desire for unchallengeable security cannot be met with bigger and better weapons alone.* The search for a perpetual Number One status can not promote genuine defense and world peace.


(see also 80 and 238 for excerpts) The Introduction begins with a discussion of Ernst Bloch *Atheism in Christianity: the Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* 1972 and then moves on to Roger Garaudy *Marxism in the Twentieth Century* 1970 which are both scholarly considerations of Christianity that had emerged from within the Marxist camp. Skillen says that Bloch has posed a crucial question for Christians: *Is Christian faith caught between a fallen creation and an apocalyptic rebirth that will not restore the six days of creation and its original paradise?* Is the Christian hope for a salvation that transcends human action, human responsibility, human history, human freedom? The paper is written on a ‘large canvas’, not only wanting to encourage Christians to listen to Marxist critique but also to engage in a way that articulates a Christian vision that can meet the Marxist eschatology. In this paper Skillen begins to expand on his pluralist social-political-economic philosophy in which justice, love and stewardship are God-given mandates ... *In contrast to Marx and Rousseau (“every citizen should speak his opinion entirely from himself”) I would argue that the creationally dynamic differentiation of human social life requires the normative public integration of social diversity in ways that guarantee justice for all persons, social relationships, and institutions. ... The Kingdom is the Sabbath rest of God, opened up to us through Christ’s resurrection, calling us here and now to stand in His freedom and to act without reserve for justice to be done to all our neighbours.*


This 13-chapter book argues in detail that the Christian mission must be understood in triangular connection with discipleship and justice. Skillen agrees that God is at work in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in ways that many Westerners have not yet fathomed. The book provokes a re-thinking of the way mission is related to life as a whole.

66. “Are Secular Schools Sacred?” A news report of a debate between Skillen and R G Puckett of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State *Christianity Today* November 6 p.66

See No. 72.

67. *International Politics and the Demand for Global Justice* Dordt College Press

This is a book of 7 chapters that brings together previous published writings:

*Chapter 1 Power vs Justice: the Crisis in International Politics*
Chapter 2 America First is based upon the NACPA Politikon articles of 1973-4 (No. 11)

Chapter 3 Christian Principle and Political Reality is a slightly edited version of the article in the International Reformed Bulletin 1977 (No 27).

Chapter 4 Unity and Diversity Among States: Roots of the Western Tradition and

Chapter 5 Three Contemporary Views of International Unity and Diversity were previously published in Pro Rege Sept 1979 (No. 48).

Chapter 6 Human Rights on a Global Scale was specially written for this volume.

Chapter 7 International Justice: Is it Possible? Is a republication of the article by the same name in the International Reformed Bulletin 1975 (No. 19).

68. “What Can We Learn from Poland?” (reprint of an article from Public Justice Report in) The Evangelical Newsletter December 11

This is a reprint from an editorial in PJR. It consist of 5 basic points in response to the rise of Solidarity and this edition is also given the sub-title “On guns and yardsticks and underground mimeographs”. We know that something unusually powerful and important has occurred, but we, and perhaps most Poles, do not yet realize all the implications. Solidarity’s persistent non-violence has been notable. A great deal of political maturation has occurred despite communist oppression. The Solidarity leadership and Lech Walesa have insisted that the problems are first of all political. The Catholic Church has made an important contribution behind the scenes. From the late 60s and early 70s people have been steadily and quietly working away. A few people can make a big difference … What can we learn from Poland? Many things! But we must have eyes and ears open to receive the lessons.

1982

69. Editor & Contributor Confessing Christ and Doing Politics APJ Education Fund

Chapter 5 “Public Justice and True Tolerance” pp.54-62 (No 42 and 143) and Chapter 7 “Christian Action and the Coming of God’s Kingdom” pp.88-103 - a republished version of “Politics and Eschatology” (No.36). This has been a constant theme in Skillen’s work, as he says in a later essay which develops this same biblical teaching (Nos 239 and 277). There is a thread running through the work that some of us have been doing at the Center for Public Justice … the revelatory and anticipatory character of politics and government; it concerns the widest and deepest meaning of political life from a Christian point of view … my aim is to say something about government and politics that is all encompassing, something that actually situates every detail of our civic responsibility (No 277 p.59).

70. “Who is My Neighbour? Politics and Justice in the Global Economy” Pro Rege June pp.17-25

This article was published at the time Skillen had taken up the position of full-time Executive Director of the Association for Public Justice in Washington DC. That is some distance away from Sioux Center where Pro Rege is published. The article attempts to address the widespread Christian ignorance about the “North-South” dialogue with respect to the way in which the world’s resources are unfairly and unequally dominated by the “North”. It is thus an educative piece, as well as an attempt to encourage North Americans to think globally in terms of God’s norms for
love, truth and justice. In the final sections of the article Skillen expresses his indebtedness to Bob Goudzwaard (see 8, 9, 37, 51 above) and in fact quotes extensively from Goudzwaard’s 1978 paper to which he had responded in the Justice in the International Economic Order Conference (No 37). The aim of the article is to stress the political and historical dimensions of loving our neighbours in a global context. 100 new states have entered “our world” since World War II. The “North” meanwhile continues on its way believing “development” and “progress” in advancing national self-interest is the only way to go. The South is usually viewed by the North only in times of danger, threat, famine and disaster.


This article, we are told in a by-line, was prepared for the 1980 Science, Philosophy and Religion Symposium, September 11-13, 1980, Air Force Weapons Laboratory, Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico.

The central part of the paper is a discussion of the inconsistencies and ambiguities implicit in US Defense Policy - problems are viewed in a technical frame of reference where a trust is ascribed to technological know-how to bring about resolutions to problems that are, however, essentially political; the commitment to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons coincides with global proliferation and massive billions-fold increases in spending to develop the US nuclear capability; the third is the search for invulnerability in defense which cannot be guaranteed in military and strategic terms alone.

The discussion of these contradictions is introduced by a section that re-writes parts of International Politics and the Demand for Global Justice Chapter 3, 40-42 (No. 67) and drives home the point with some additions: after outlining the current contradictions in American defense policy, Skillen returns to his analysis of America’s “Number One” false ideal (begun in his NACPA Politikon series of 1973 - 1974 No 11 and continued in No 67 pp.34-38) where the discussion repeats and elaborates on six points (pp.34-38).


Skillen’s debate with the evangelical R G Puckett in the pages of the well-known magazine, highlights the problematic of arguing against a civil religion that wants to cloak itself in Christian civic piety (see No 66 but also No. 44).

Skillen’s rebuttal of Puckett’s evangelical defense of civil religion is in terms of a norm of equity to all religions. Freedom is a precious but frail possession. We must battle for religious and educational freedom as for all other basic freedoms of human life.

The basic concern upon which Skillen builds his argument is justice. America needs to find an equitable arrangement for educating the youth of our land. The issues he raises about the historic marginalizing of Catholics and Jews by a “common school”, biased in favour of the protestant majority in late 19th century America, is not addressed by Puckett, the Baptist.

In Skillen’s view Christians need to have dialogue and discuss the whole structure of education so as to formulate a new equitable system for the education of every student in this country. Tuition tax credits are just one small step in the right direction.
73. with Stanley Carlson-Thies, “Religion and Political Development in Nineteenth-Century Holland” *Publius* (The Journal of Federalism, Temple University) Summer pp.43-64

This is an academic article which is notable for a few reasons. Here Skillen and Carlson-Thies join together in writing an article that brings together material that both of them had studied in depth in their respective doctoral research programs, Skillen studied at Duke University (see 12 above). Carlson-Thies, at that point, was a doctoral student in political science at the University of Toronto. He was writing a dissertation "Democracy in the Netherlands: Consociational or Pluriform?" which explored the role of Protestants and Catholics in the development of Dutch politics and public policy in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is also published in a journal associated with the project by Daniel Elazar at Temple University (see also No. 55 above and Nos. 245, 291 & 297).

The article takes issue with the “Enlightenment bias” that societal differentiation and political modernization is simply a part of the “factual” decline of religious influence in social life. European Christian Democracy was essentially Roman Catholic except in Holland (Fogarty) and the article reviews Daalder’s critique of Almond’s concept of the secularization of political culture when it comes to explaining the religious groups or sub-cultures in Holland. The article briefly reviews the consequences of the revolt against Spain, and the impact of Althusius, critic of Bodin, upon the emerging federated political system of the Netherlands. Althusius provided a basis for a schema by which later generations could begin to give a clear account of the increasingly complex processes of social life by which various social spheres had differentiated themselves and developed their own distinctive character. This was a central facet of the emergence of modern Europe.

It is a subtly written article which concludes in a way that addresses the issues with which it began. *But whatever the current or future state of Dutch political life, its experience of the past hundred years shows that democratic stability can be built on a great diversity of cultural, spiritual communities, and that an efficient performance of government tasks need not require "cultural secularization". Modernization and secularization may go hand in hand; but they may also march in different directions.*

74. “Tuition Tax Credits: an Historical perspective” *Christian Home and School* September pp.18-19

See Nos. 66 and 72. This republishes the main part of No. 72, but does not include Skillen’s rebuttal of Puckett’s views. No 72 gives the five questions Skillen answers in his rebuttal.


In this edition of the *Wheaton Alumni Magazine*, Mark Amstutz leads off a discussion of “rising evangelical involvement in politics” and there follows “6 voices” who answer his prepared questions: Paul Henry ’63 a republican representative in the Michigan House of Representatives; Shirley Halleen ’57 a Democrat serving in South Dakota; Daniel R Coats ’65 Republican US Representative for Indiana (who was Kuyper Lecturer for 1997 see No. 275 below); Richard Halverson ’39 (Chaplain US Senate); Robert P Dugan ’53 Director of Office of Public Affairs NAE; and James Skillen ’66 Executive Director, Association for Public Justice.

In response to a glowing Foreword by Martin E Marty that this is an important piece of research that has not received the respect that is its due, the authors concede that “... he also raised some important questions, and we offer his Foreword as the first step toward the dialogue that we want to carry forward with others on this important subject.” It’s not at all clear that Marty actually understood the basis of “principled pluralism”, but what he wrote seems to have provided a guide for further research and discussion of the history American pluralism. The current problem with the establishment of a secularist definition of religion is traced back to the advocates of a new order for American education based upon the ideals of the Jeffersonian republic.

In a later work *In Pursuit of Justice* 2004 (see No 326), the historical analysis has developed to the point where Skillen advocates a “fourth order of pluralism”. That is in Chapter 4 “E Pluribus Unum and Faith-Based Welfare Reform” pp.59-75. See No 305 for an earlier version and Chapter 6 “Equal Education for All” pp.93-110.

The authors identify the problem as the establishment of a civil religion in America: *an establishment that apparently flies in the face of the principle of religious freedom but which is in fact consistent with constitutional, Jeffersonian principles. ‘Religion’ defined as private opinion, private voluntary associations (churches), and personal piety is, of course, not established politically and remains privately free. But ‘religion’ in the Jeffersonian sense of a common religious morality that undergirds the social harmony of the republic has been established plainly and simply by the constitutional principles of the sovereignty of the people and the rule of the majority. That establishment has been furthered by a governmental imposition of public school system that monopolizes almost all public funds and legal support on the grounds that it is the only common, secular, nonsectarian school system and thus the only system capable of legitimately training all citizens for life in the universal republic... American public education, founded upon Jeffersonian political principles, lies at the heart of the American civil religion (pp.50-51).

The argument of the book is outlined thus:

**Chapter 1 Civil Religion and the Foundations of the Republic** The High Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation and Early American Foundations.

**Chapter 2 The Republican Vision of Thomas Jefferson**

**Chapter 3 Advocates of a New Order for American Education**

**Chapter 4 The Public School Institutionalized** The Eighteenth Century, the Nineteenth Century, Massachusetts, New York City, and the Consequences of the Struggle over School Funding.

**Chapter 5 The Supreme Court Faces the Schools Question**

**Chapter 6 Resolving the Constitutional Difficulties**

**Chapter 7 State Education: European Alternatives**

**Chapter 8 Toward Justice for American Schools**

This is an attempt to deal with the problem of public education and the secularist bias in the public funding of education in historical, legal and social terms.

77. “Justice for Land and People” - kit with Ted Malloch. APJ Education Fund

This kit is introduced in these terms:

*World hunger, continuing population growth, persistent environmental problems, and many resource shortages are bringing us to a new awareness of the intimate connections between human society and the land, air, and water on which we depend for life. Laws and public policies that define ownership and use of land determine the*
rights people have to grow food, build houses, drill for oil, mine for coal and minerals, charge rent, hire workers, and sell for a profit. Competition for land in the United States is intensifying in the multiple quest for industrial development, food and energy production, and housing.


78. “Justice for the Land; Land for the Caring” with Ted Malloch. Position paper for Association for Public Justice

This, the third brochure containing APJ’s “position statement” (the other two were on education No 35 (see also No. 58) and representation No. 47) is a part of APJ’s early education of its members, and hence part of the effort to contribute to “a growing sense of Christian communal consensus about politics, rather than ambiguous confusion” among its supporters and friends (see No. 31).

As with the later leadership in welfare reform issues exercised by Stanley-Carlson Thies, here Theodore R Malloch is Project Director.


In this essay, a contribution to a symposium convened by the Ausable Trails Institute, Skillen asked the question: What should Governments do for the environment?

In a discussion that might distinguish the ethical from the legal but which presupposes that [q]uestions of how we “ought” to live and act are not all of one kind. Skillen elaborates: So-called factual situations cannot be contrasted with just a single set of “value” considerations. Therefore we must clearly distinguish the types of ethical, legal, economic and other normative questions we want to ask about the environment and about our human responsibility for it (pp.227-228). Human responsibility for justice is more than public justice but human flourishing is undermined if Government’s role to uphold public justice languishes.


Paper initially delivered August 13-20, 1981 see No. 64 for original and 238 for excerpts.

81. Justice for the Unborn APJ position paper (adopted October 7-9) see also “APJ Takes Stand on Justice for the Unborn” Nov Public Justice Report pp.3-5

An important brochure setting out APJ’s Christian view of the debate that followed the
US Supreme Court’s decisions of 1973 Roe v Wade and Doe v Bolton. Having set out the brochure’s limits, the discussion continues with a brief overview of the public debate and why change is needed at that level. In discussing the calling of Government and citizens the brochure is clear: Life is never merely a private affair. And then It is unjust, we believe, to remove one small segment of the human population (the unborn in the early stages of pregnancy) from public legal consideration and to treat that segment as simply “at the disposal” of other human beings. This is the basic framework for the discussion that follows. In public law, the brochure argues, the strongest and most basic presumption ought to exist in favour of life - protection of the basic right to life, including the life of the unborn. This is foundational. This is also part of a political principle by which government should give marriage and family every protection.

The argument of the brochure is decidedly against the presumption that human life, at any point, should be left unprotected.

1983

82. “Toward Paralysis or New Vitality” (a column) *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* IV: 1 p.40

In the context of debate about the ability of Congress to do anything positive about the state of the union, Skillen introduces the “ten new directions” provided by John Naisbitt’s *Megatrends* (1982). While ignoring the weakness of America’s political system, Naisbitt has some insight. Whatever the positive merits of new grassroots local political activity, Naisbitt is too quick to bid good-bye to representative democracy. If it is true that we are moving increasingly from a national economy to a world economy (#3), from short-term to long-term thinking (#4), and from an industrial society to an information society (#1), then it is essential that we respond to the new demands of national and global integration being placed upon us. Without structural reform enthusiasts for participatory democracy will find they are “participating more but enjoying it less.”

The one-page article concludes with reference to an *Atlantic Monthly* article which identifies some trends, including the rise of PACs, that has led to a congressional paralysis - legislation that is less coherent and less meaningful.


This is the second listed article Skillen wrote for the CRCNA denominational magazine *The Banner*. Up until 2006 there have been 15 contributions (the first was in 1980). As with other articles of this type, it is an attempt to educate fellow church members, readers of the magazine, on the basis of a principled stand. Moreover, Skillen begins with an explicit statement that it is a useful topic for discussion within which readers can reassess their taken-for-granted views of the purpose of government and the responsibilities of citizens. Skillen does not only apply just war criteria to the question of nuclear weapons; he raises a prior question: If nuclear weapons are used, or if a country even threatens to use them, can the principles of a "just war" still apply? So in this educative piece, written in the context of attempts to wind-up the nuclear stand-off between the US and Russia, with the production of MX missiles and other ICBMs, Skillen is also providing a frame of reference in which to evaluate the debate and provide an alternative approach.

This is Skillen’s contribution to a Festschrift collected together to honor his doctoral supervisor. The Editorial preface by Francis Canavan notes that Hallowell “sang outside the chorus of twentieth-century American political science [and] often felt himself to be a voice crying in the wilderness.” Hallowell studied the decline of ideologies and the emergence of what has been termed the rise of neo-classical political theory. He was an editor of publications written by Eric Vögelin. Says Canavan, "The other main strand in John Hallowell’s thought has been the Christian revelation. James W Skillen draws on it for his answer to the question he raises in [his essay]. The created universe, he says, is complex and pluriform, not uniform and homogeneous. Human society, too, reflecting the order of creation, is inherently pluralistic. The public order that unifies it must therefore recognize society’s pluralistic character and respect the supreme authority of the creator from whom it ultimately derives its character. Any political ideology that suppresses societal pluralism for the sake of a univocal social goal - even of freedom, as in Rousseau - is totalitarian and idolatrous.”

Clark Cochrane, an Editorial Advisor of Public Justice Report also contributes to the volume with “The Radical Gospel and Christian Prudence.”

The discussion ranges over Poland and Nicaragua. Poland had seen the rise of an independent trade union movement that further enlarges the scope of structural pluralism in Poland - a pluralism undergirded by the independence of the Catholic church. Skillen draws on Hallowell’s observation that “only through a return to faith in God, as God has revealed Himself to man in Jesus Christ, can modern man and his society find redemption from the tyranny of evil”, to answer his most profound question: the question of pluralism and the public good. The question is rephrased in these terms: Does the public good of the entire world demand principled support of societal pluralism or does it require the overcoming of that cursed hindrance to global unity? The revival of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, throughout the world, as important as this may be, does not, of course, guarantee public justice.

Skillen’s conclusion is in “Hallowell’s line” and extends it with the help of insights from the line of “principled pluralism.” A healthy response can come only by efforts rooted deeply in principle to build communities of public justice - public legal bonds that integrate a diversity into a complex unity. But the unity must have a very special and limited character, displaying a recognition that God has also given place, identity, and purpose to nonpublic associations, institutions, and individuals, each of which must be allowed to fulfill its calling in the creation.


This is a critical examination of the legal case in which an Arkansas law requiring schools to teach creation-science if they teach evolution had been ruled to violate the principle of separation of church and state on First Amendment grounds. Skillen advocates that States begin looking for ways to design their public support of education so that science can be left to scientists and education to educators in all of their pluralistic diversity. The just way would have given schools the room to be themselves in terms of their own academic convictions. The judge has pretended to settle the difference between “secular science” and “religion” and for creationists to presume that they can establish a non-religious basis for imposing creation-science on everyone, or for evolutionists to presume that they can adequately separate science from religion in order to keep religion out of the schools, is falsely presumptuous for both to the point of offending the consciences and interfering with
the responsibilities of educators, scientists, parents, and a host of Christians and non-
Christians alike.

the Discipline of Communal Dialogue“ in a discussion of “public morality”
Evangelical Newsletter Nov 11.

Skillen is part of a forum which includes Cal Thomas, Moral Majority’s vice-president
for communication and Dale Vree editor of New Oxford Review (with whom Skillen
had crossed swords in his Vanguard review of Vree’s book. See No 38). Vree’s
comment informs the readers that he has recently become a Roman Catholic. The
purpose of the forum is to discuss Richard Mouw’s ”A Thoughtful Approach:
Understanding the Discipline of Communal Dialogue”. Without saying that Mouw’s call
amounts merely to an affirmation that ”Christian social action must be more
disciplined”, Skillen proposes to move on and suggest the political implications of his
general confessional statement.

87. “You win Some … You Lose Some” Christian Legal Society Quarterly 19:4
p.25

This is a reflection on the political “game”. Recent abortion and education decisions
handed down by the courts (including tax-relief for non-State school parents) are
discussed in terms of Supreme Court rulings that win or lose narrowly or by a bigger
margin. In the case of abortion, Skillen refers to George F Will’s comment that recent
legislation had strengthened the rights of the unborn (fetal rights) in many other
matters apart from the right to life itself. That contradiction indicates the kind of work
involved in politics. If Christians are to put in place a whole network of laws that will
deal with the full meaning of life for children, both pre-birth and post-birth then they
have to be ready to do enough homework, pursue enough research, organise, to
”play ball for the whole season”.

1984

88. Review of Nicholas Lash A Matter of Hope: A Theologian’s Reflections on
the Thought of Karl Marx in TSF Bulletin (Theological Students Fellowship)
7:3 January-February p.29

A commendatory review which looks forward to Lash the theological philosopher
exercising his considerable exegetical skills in further studies on Platonic, Aristotelian,
Augustinian, and Thomistic texts as he has done with Marx. Skillen commends Lash
for unveiling the structure and assumptions of Marx’s thought. He sheds important
light on Marx’s narrow and inadequate view of both science and religion. He shows
how Marx’s rejection of “idealist” religion could not do justice to those dimensions of
Christian experience and understanding which are not qualified first of all by
theoretical conceptualization. Skillen identifies some of Lash’s unexamined
assumptions and presuppositions. It is judged to be a serious study which will raise
questions that economists, political scientists and most philosophers do not ask.
Perhaps the most intriguing part of the book is that which is connected to the main
title: a matter of hope. Marxism hangs on its view of a fulfilled future - a culmination
of the historical dialectic of human alienation. Christianity hangs on the expectation of
the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in Christ. Skillen refers readers to his essay (see
64/80/238) and to Johan van der Hoeven Karl Marx: the Roots of His Thought 1976.
89. “Pudding, Politics and Perdition” (a column) in *Eternity* February p.22

Is politics on the way down and out? This is a meditation designed to be read after dinner, which included “dessert” purchased from the local store. But many people do treat politics as “instant politics” just like they eat “instant pudding” dessert. The Bible, however, gives us only “slow-cook”, “long-cure” recipes. *Disciplines leading to endurance, long-suffering, patience, and insight are the biblical rule.* Moreover, the Bible speaks of our relationship with God in enduring terms - father, farmer, teacher, shepherd. It also talks of God as our lord, king and master, judge and ruler in righteousness. So, prods Skillen, pretend politics doesn’t really matter or begin, in Christ, to take politics seriously. Pick up that instant pudding if you must, but put down those mistaken assumptions that have misguided much of American politics up to now... Begin to know the whole truth about following God, and learn the habits of enduring service to your neighbour in public as well as in private life.

90. Review of Nicholas Wolterstorff *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* 1983 in *Eternity* April

A brief review which the author of the book refers to in his rejoinder to Skillen’s larger review for the *Reformed Journal* (see No 98). Wolterstorff was none too pleased with Skillen’s shorter reviews which appeared in *Eternity* as well as *Christian Scholar’s Review*. His interpretation of this review is that Skillen “regards my book as a rather disjointed agglomeration of disappointing discussions, and that he regards me as something of a Johnny-come-lately to political, economic and social issues (“little more than some initial passionate reflections emerging from his socio-political awakening”).

91. “Abortion today in the US” *The Banner* April 23 pp.8-10

This is an article which, effectively, simply applies the principles of the APJ brochure *Justice for the Unborn* (No. 81) to current debate within the US. As with the article on Nuclear Weapons, (No. 83) it is written to educate readers of the CRCNA magazine about the different prominent positions that are being taken in public debate. If a distinctive contribution is to be made to public debate, then there has to be informed understanding about the different views in the debate. The article is a “decade later” discussion of the 1973 Roe v Wade decision. That decision is defined in the opening paragraph as the right of privacy and freedom for a pregnant woman, thus giving her the right to have an abortion. Skillen reviews the changes within hospital culture as a result of the decision and also links this to the developments in medical technology in recent times. There have been other important court decisions and, as well, there is new understanding of the human character of the unborn. All this is evidence of a situation undergoing constant change.

92. with Ted Malloch “Jus in Bello: Discrimination, Proportionality and Nuclear Weapons” in Dean C Curry (ed) *Evangelicals and the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter* Eerdmans pp.66-75

This joint essay is written in response to the Roman Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter on war and peace. In this evangelical symposium of responses, the authors applaud the Bishops and they find few details to criticise in the text. However, the open-ended nature of the nuclear weapons debate requires comment on two general and two particular issues ... The first general point concerns the nature of public responsibility for government policy, and the second concerns the dilemma or ambiguity of a qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence doctrine. The two particular issues that will concern us are the criteria of “proportionality” and “discrimination” in the “just-war”
93. “Association for Public Justice: United States” (with Joyce Ribbens Campbell) *The Banner* July 16 pp.8-9

This is an important “early” introduction to the work of the Association for Public Justice seven years after it had been organized. The article explains its work and how it had in 1983 opened its Washington DC office. The three-fold aim of APJ is put simply; *(1) to influence government by means of (2) an active and growing grassroots membership that supports and participates in (3) creative and thorough policy research.* A brief history is given which includes an account of the intra-organizational discussion that had to overcome considerable obstacles. *It if (sic!) couldn’t be done right, then all agreed not to fool around.* APJ was born when the pastors and teachers who had started the organization were joined by political scientists, lawyers, historians and citizens. An APJ testimony to the Senate Finance Committee in support of tuition tax credits opened doors and APJ was then able to offer written and oral testimony on a range of issues. A brief run-down of activities is given and a schematic view of how the Association is planning to meet demands and challenges. A quotation from *Christians Organizing for Political Service* (No. 57) is highlighted: *We should undertake every civic duty, every political action ... with the avowed understanding that they are not God’s will but only our response to God’s will.*

94. “Just Defense and Nuclear Weapons” (with Ted Malloch) APJ position paper

The brochure’s introduction states: *Important questions should be asked regularly by citizens about the foreign and defense policies of their governments. What limits should be placed on the use of force? What are the legitimate short-range and long-range interests of a state or of an alliance of states? How should the norm of justice oblige governments in the international arena? How central a role should the military have in the shaping of foreign policy?* This the brochure is educative and aims to help citizens to understand their contribution to the administration of just by explaining the problem and debate about nuclear deterrence within the context of America’s national defense responsibilities. The brochure’s discussion is organised under the following headings:

**The Present Setting of US Defense Policy**

**Christian Perspective on War and Peace**

**The Background of the Present Debate About US Security**

**Doctrines and Ideologies Impelling the US-Soviet Arms Race**

**New Realities Confront Old Strategies and Ideologies**

**Calling the US Government to Responsible Defense**

The concluding sentence reminds the Christian reader of the task that needs to be taken on: *Making use of “just war” reasoning, Christians have much to offer in the process of fulfilling their contemporary obligations as citizens.*

95. “Elections Along the American Way” *Third Way* 7:9 October pp.10-12

This is a review of the American election - Reagan versus Mondale - written for those with no close acquaintance with American electioneering. It canvasses Reagan’s nationalism and his attempts to keep his moralistic right-wing supporters. On the other hand *Jimmy Carter’s Vice-President does not seem to realize that Carter failed*
not because he wasn’t practical, hard working and progressive but because he couldn’t pull all the pieces together into a coherent vision of the future. The writer admits that his article is written at the superficial level of American politics. Skillen assumes that Christians ought to be distinguishing themselves by their persistent preoccupation with matters of justice. Economic growth and American defense should be located in the context of a government’s efforts to promote justice.

This is a review of Jesse Jackson’s efforts to gain the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. Jackson is not simply a preacher, but one who has learned the Bible in the context of the cry for justice in contemporary America. The article identifies important features of the American political system and makes suggestions for how Jackson might prepare himself for the presidential race in 1992.

97. “Luther and Marx in 1983” Christian Legal Society Quarterly V:2 p. 21
The East German communist regime had joined in the celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. Luther helped bring down the old feudal order, so Luther fitted into the East German government’s view of history. And consider the weight of Marx, says Skillen. He can hardly be ignored. So then what shall we do with history? The answer is clear: History is the unfolding of God’s creation, stamped by the human choices God allows his own image to make. History is the response of human generations to God, whether in obedience or disobedience.

Luther and his followers did not get very far in political reform but he did point people to the liberating power of the gospel of Christ. In contrast Marxism, though still powerful, points to nothing outside of itself. Let us press on for the reformation of politics and law in the light of God’s word of redemption and reconciliation - the word of justice and hope.

98. “Politics and Justice and Peace” review of Nicholas Wolterstorff’s Until Justice and Peace Embrace in Reformed Journal 34:12 December pp. 17-22
Skillen’s critique identifies the terms Wolterstorff uses to explain his intention. “My project in this book is to ask how Christians should insert themselves into the modern social order.” This formulation is quite consistent with the statement with which he concludes his book - “my call here is not for theorizing that emphasizes the theme of justice; it is for theorizing that places itself in the service of the cause of struggling for justice.” - and with which Skillen expresses sympathy, However it does not stop Skillen from expressing some surprise about the use of the word “insert”. Skillen’s comment [o]ne never “inserts” oneself into a social order, would subsequently draw a rather bitter response from Wolterstorff. But then the nerve has been touched and it appears that Wolterstorff’s theoretical exposition does not actually derive from any transcendental critique of theoretical thought (a la Dooyeweerd) but would turn theory into a justice-supporting activity via a philosophical tour de force.

Skillen’s review of Wolterstorff’s “Kuyper lectures for 1981” at the Free University is constrained. Wolterstorff’s reply is to accuse Skillen of accusing him of being a “Johnny-come-lately”. In fact, given his critique of Wolterstorff’s book, he could, quite rightly have suggested that it still had too many characteristics of the “lone ranger” dabbling outside his own area of competence. But Skillen doesn’t attack in that way, although the review might have gained some greater coherence if this had been stated explicitly. Skillen draws attention from the outset to Wolterstorff’s problematic “critical realism” but then offers his comments from the standpoint of politics. My critical dialogue with him will concentrate on some of the dimensions and themes of
the book most directly related to politics. The problem is that Wolterstorff, the reformed Kuyperian philosopher, presumes to be competent to make a scholarly contribution to the study of justice and peace. But his concepts are uncritically developed. And Skillen points that out in a polite way. Skillen’s review is an attempt to make some positive comments about a very disappointing book. The review does indicate Skillen’s diagnosis of Wolterstorff’s scholarly problematic, in that he has attempted to address political and economic issues in a reflective way but without adequately and critically understanding the contribution of economic and political science to these concerns.

99. “Pray tell” Pro Rege 14:2 Dec 2-6
This is the 1984 Commencement Address at Dordt College by the former faculty member who taught there from 1978-1982. This is an earnest appeal, couched in humour and develops the refrain “Pray tell” from beginning to the final prayer. What’s the meaning, pray tell, of your graduation? Skillen asks these 1984 graduates. He points out that just as they have the dubious Orwellian distinction of graduating as the class of ’84, that he graduated 6/6/66. He reminds the class of Abraham - they will need the faith of Abraham in a life of one long pray tell before God’s face; the Ascension - Jesus drove them out into the world as God had driven Abraham out promising that he would send his Spirit to guide them; and to Augustine who cried out: Pray tell, is there not in this hour an end to my uncleanness and God taught him that the earth is simply God’s footstool. An address to encourage graduates to look for the sure coming of God’s Kingdom in what they do!

100. “A discussion of Leslie Newbigin’s The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches...” (8-page typescript)
See “In dialogue for a distinctively Christian politics” PJR 8:3 December 1984. This is the first of three similarly produced typescripts reviewing important books for attention within APJ so that its work could flourish where growth was becoming possible. Later, APJ was to publish a series of “Background Papers” - a modest effort to push out the boundaries of political reflection by the association’s members. This book is dubbed so outstanding that it should be discussed in some depth wherever a group of Christians gather for worship or conversation. There follows a suggestion for a better title. It is a significant contribution for Christian political responsibility in our day. There is a “Summary and Overview” of the book’s five sections. Newbigin is seeking another model for understanding our world - not just the private world, but also the public world. In the fourth section Skillen highlights the author’s three questions. The first concerns the preservation of “dogma” without degenerating into dogmatism. Then Skillen writes: the next two questions are of utmost importance and almost perfectly set the agenda for the Association for Public Justice. These are then quoted in full: “2. If the Christian revelation is to be taken as the framework for understanding and action in the public sphere - in politics, economics and social organization - how can we avoid falling into the “Constantinian” trap? From one point of view the Enlightenment was part of Europe’s recoil from the horrible religious wars of the seventeenth century. Those wars marked the final break-up of the synthesis of Church, state and society which began with the baptism of the Emperor Constantine. Does my proposal amount to an invitation to return to the ideology of “Christendom”? 3. Does scripture in fact give us any authority for specifically Christian judgments and actions in the public sphere? (p.28).”
101. “A discussion of Jose Miguez Bonino *Toward a Christian Political Ethics*...” (9-page typescript)

See “Does Liberation Theology have a Christian Political Ethic?” *PJR* 8:4 Jan 1985. Bonino has been discussed previously in relation to his view of history and the unfolding of society and compared with Edmund Burke and Groen van Prinsterer (No 62) and in relation to liberation theology’s appropriation of Marxist methodology (No 64). One interesting facet of Bonino’s contribution is that he is a protestant among Roman Catholic theologians in South America espousing the “liberation theology” which was given its initial impetus by Gustavo Gutierrez. The title of the book under discussion indicates the possibility of Christian political ethics but *the book displays the continuing dependency of Latin American theologians on European categories of political and social thought mixed with liberation rhetoric which does not reveal a sufficiently deep and distinctive Christian framework.*

To begin his discussion paper, Skillen quotes Bonino’s opening orientation “‘politics’ [as] the sum total of all the relations that go to makeup life in a particular society” and then asks: *why should I take ‘politics’ (even for a moment) to mean what he (or Aristotle) says it means? That way everything is viewed as having been politicized. Bonino may be wanting to show that Christians cannot escape from their public and political responsibilities but the reason is not that everything has actually become politicized but rather because part of life which we can never escape is the political world in which we live. Politics is not everything - it is not the ‘totality’ of society - but it is integral and important to life.*

102. “A Discussion of Richard John Neuhaus *The Naked Public Square*” (10-page typescript)


In this ten page review, Skillen digs deep into Neuhaus’s well-known and frequently reviewed book. He pinpoints his own dis-satisfaction in these terms: *At many points Neuhaus recognizes that ‘religion’ is somehow comprehensive and at the root of culture and politics. In other words, he believes that politics can never be treated properly if one assumes that it is disconnected from, or left untouched by, religion. At other points in his argument it is “culture” that refers to the more comprehensive reality. Thus he tends to promote the idea that religion is less than comprehensive, a function of something else, a factor dependent on something deeper. This leads, in Skillen’s view, quite logically, to Neuhaus’s low view of politics.*

Skillen leads the reader through Neuhaus’s analysis of ersatz religion in the public and the civil religion consequences of the “Constantinian” approach. Hence Neuhaus promotes a modest and provisional politics avoiding an approach that would enforce God’s rule on others. *From a political point of view, in fact, Neuhaus does not call for much that is different from what the secularists have wanted, namely, a public arena in which no religion has the right of special place or the right of being imposed on others. He calls for little that is distinguishable from Enlightenment politics except that he wants to have the right to join with others in bearing witness to a sacred canopy that he believes covers our American experience. But then this is not just an appeal to making a nice spin on politics. Skillen sees Neuhaus taking a few decisive steps toward entering a religiously deep and politically contentious debate with those who fundamentally disagree with him about the nature of politics.*
103. Review of Lynn Buzzard and Paula Campbell Holy Disobedience: When Christians Must Resist the State in Christianity Today March 1 pp.54-56

This review identifies the book as a collection of timely and highly readable materials on a subject bound to loom even larger in evangelical churches in the volatile days ahead (p.56). The review links the authors’ conservative restraint to their objective distance from the critical question of when to disobey the state even though they make it clear that Christians should be willing to disobey the state in order to remain faithful to God. Skillen suggests that the value of the book in its documentation of historical and biblical approaches to civil disobedience will be found when it is followed by another book that is more specific in evaluating the Christian’s use of civil disobedience as a means to an end. Furthermore, a “sequel” should try to answer some of the questions raised … but not answered. The book asserts that a Christian’s decision to disobey the government should be based on a Christian view of the State. But what exactly should that be? What is a just state, and how do we know when civil disobedience is called for? And if a government is legitimate and just, should not Christians promote change through legal means if they have the freedom to do so? The book apparently distinguishes “actual laws” from a “higher law”. Skillen develops the Christian political standpoint for justice in these terms: Should not Christians view the challenge to state law as coming from divine norms of justice calling unjust laws into question? He continues that it is not a tension between conscience and particular laws but actually between the demand that government rule justly and laws which promote injustice. The possibility of unjust laws raises the important question of Christians organizing not just to oppose unjust laws, but to render practical political service in many ways.

104. “Just Defense and Nuclear Weapons” excerpt from the APJ position paper of this title in Presbyterian Journal April 10 pp.10-14

See No. 94.


If we don’t choose a lawyer in terms of appearance or a spouse in terms of an ability to cook why then do we vote for a candidate because of their stand on a single-issue or because of their appearance? This column discusses the well-entrenched American ambivalence about politics. We want Government and don’t want it at the same time. But Government exists to govern a political community and that public trust is real, requiring citizens and leaders to make wise decisions. The purpose and meaning of our public life in all the different private realms needs to be opened up and clarified in the understanding that Jesus is the King over all of it.


What this review illustrates is something of the difficulty of reviewing “Christian books” in a “Christian journal”. The potential for developing a reputation for “being critical” and “spotting weaknesses” in the contributions of other scholars and academics is real. The kind of measured and restrained discussion of this review is not what could be expected when a seminar convenes. Such a review of a book, or a paper, with the author there in face-to-face discussion, is something different from the “confrontation” that takes place in the pages of a Christian academic journal or a Christian public interest magazine (see next item). Developing critical perspectives is an “occupational hazard”, something which Skillen could not completely avoid; he
extends the discussion from the author’s admission that he was developing a “guess.” This way the critical exploration of the book respectfully acknowledges the importance for philosophers and theological graduates to think about justice and politics.


This too is a critical review. But it is not just a critical review of a “guess” or a theory, but of a critical evaluation of the federal welfare system. Murray’s book is a “real shocker”. The argument *is not just that the antipoverty programs failed to eradicate poverty, but they actually made things worse.* Murray, in Skillen’s view, has something of value to say and at the same does not have it quite right. The reason he doesn’t have it quite right is related to the fact that he hasn’t provided any basis for pursuing better federal social policies. Skillen notes a slightly mocking and condescending attitude in Murray’s analysis. He does not produce any evidence to prove that welfare policies create and reward laziness. A second major fault is his reliance upon “popular wisdom” over against “elite wisdom” of the welfare professionals. This too is an argument that lacks critical grounding. The third flaw Skillen identifies is found in Murray’s view that a structuralist view of poverty has to give way to the older popular wisdom that the *individual is responsible and must be held accountable by the government for his or her own behavior.* This is an early analysis that would be further developed by the Center’s “Welfare Responsibility” project that was a central facet of Skillen’s work in the 1990s. BCW: The definitive CPJ response to the aforementioned crisis in welfare provision is found below in No 225 and No 244. In the latter, Stanley Carlson-Thies’s “Introduction: The American Welfare Policy Crisis: A Challenge to Christian Reflection” notes the cumulative record of ineffective and often counter-productive policies as well as the deep and wide disagreement about the purposes of welfare.


This is a discussion about the concept of law. The discussion begins with the final chapter of the book by Richard John Neuhaus *The Naked Public Square* (1984) in which the author discusses "law" (see here Skillen’s discussion Nos. 102, 112 and 194).

At issue is Neuhaus’s apparent “high” view of law and his corresponding “low” view of politics and government. In this sense, Neuhaus’s rightful emphasis upon a “high” view of law, somehow disconnects the transcendent meaning of life as given by God from the fullness of created reality.


The heading is “Roar of a Mouse” which light-heartedly refers to the quote given from Tutu’s analysis of American (Reaganite) supposed “neutrality” with respect to the dismantling of apartheid. The book is about *Christian vision and endurance, about confidence in God who wants to lead us along paths of righteousness.* In conclusion Skillen confides: *The book reaches a climax in chapter 4, with the record of Bishop Tutu’s response to the Eloff Commission set up by the government in 1982 to investigate activities of the South African Council of Churches. I have not read a more powerful Christian testimony given before government authorities since the apostle Paul’s before Felix, Festus and Agrippa (Acts 24-26). Read this book; be encouraged in your faith; and give thanks to God for Desmond Tutu.*

This article challenges the widespread assumption among Christians which effectively replaces the humanistic view of self-sufficiency with a view that assumes that only Christians are self-sufficient. Would the country be better off with more Christians elected to public office? Skillen says If Christians who have no talent for public life end up filling public offices, then the results could be very bad indeed. A general confession of faith in Christ does not qualify one for public office. This does NOT mean that one’s faith is necessarily private. Rather it means a willingness to follow Jesus by obeying him in all things - by keeping God’s commandments, bearing fruit to God’s glory.


The truly interesting thing about this article, written in anticipation of the November summit meeting between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, is not its historical context, although it is of some interest to see Skillen’s political views developing alongside developments on the wider and larger international stage. The article encapsulates the importance Skillen gives to re-discovering the validity of “just war” reasoning. Having outlined the historical situation that had made the Reagan-Gorbachev summit inevitable, Skillen summarises the criteria for developing “just defense” which he had expounded previously [Nos. 71 (JASA), 83 (Banner), 94 (APJ position paper)].

But here we have a viewpoint that explains why “just war” criteria are not being embraced by the “common sense” driven American population, let alone Christians, still less reformed Christians. Over the past three or four centuries, under the impact of modern nationalism and a growing faith in science and technology, these “just war” criteria have gradually diminished in the public conscience. And thus the world witnessed Nazism, Japanese imperialism and Soviet communism, the dreadful ending to world war II, and the decades-long strategy of nuclear deterrence. Among other things, the newly discovered yet frightening nuclear approach was cheaper in the short run, because the deployment of those weapons was less expensive than equipping hundreds of thousands of military personnel in the field with modern conventional weapons.... Today, even in the West, “just war” thinking has been largely displaced by military relativism, which says that “anything goes” so long as our good cause is better than their bad cause.


See No 139 below. In this article, Skillen develops the theme of biblical obedience as a Christian speaking to other Christians. The discussion begins with an outline of what it means to accept Biblical Revelation as Normative and places his own view over against those who would absolutize Old Testament experiences, laws and customs as the “model” for a contemporary state. Aware of ongoing attempts to “insert” the Bible into American politics, he rejects the notion that the Bible gives any support to the idealization of the US Constitution as a “revelatory” document, nor does he think that biblical prophecy allows one to fit the modern states of Israel and the United States into a grand scheme for the end times in order to concoct foreign policy out of a supposedly special knowledge (gnosis) of God’s hidden will. The positive alternative is given in Biblical Revelation and the Unfolding of Modern History and continues with a discussion of The Bible, Politics, and the Reality of Creation Order. Skillen
explains the error of Rousseau in the *Social Contract*. A person’s citizenship is not the essence of his humanity. *Politics and Sin* is discussed and then an explanation of *American Democracy and Biblical Obedience to Justice*. The essay concludes with a discussion of *The Necessity of an Integral Approach to Political Responsibility* which includes critical comments on Neuhaus’s “low” view of politics (discussed in No. 102). Skillen has taken the opportunity of involvement in Fr Neuhaus’s seminar to expound “principled pluralism” and its biblical basis, as well as to advocate the kind of public involvement that serves in the political arena, to promote a Christian view of politics.


See No 130 below.

114. “Schools, Religion and Fairness: An Opinion about the Supreme Court’s Opinions” *Christian Legal Society Quarterly VI*: 3 pp.31

See Nos 128, 129, 130, 133. This is a comment on the Supreme Court’s ruling in a case that considered schools in Grand Rapids and New York. In both cases the Court ruled the programs unconstitutional because they “entangle” the government too much in “religion” and therefore violate the clause of the First Amendment that prohibits the “establishment” of any religion. Skillen’s opinion on this opinion is that the Court is simply confirming a long-held prejudice in the American legal system based on the notion that religiously based schooling is somehow private and “public” rights and privileges are rightly denied to “private” institutions (ie those schools that are not prepared to deny, cloak or publicly repudiate their actual religious motivation).


As people are trying to come to terms with earthquakes, droughts, famines and floods - so-called natural disasters - Skillen draws attention to this book which places these calamities in a broader global context. The authors, from the Swedish Red Cross and the international Institute for Environment and Development, attempt to show the correlation between social, political and economic decision-making and these disasters. These “natural disasters” are increasingly manmade, the authors claim. “Most disaster problems are unsolved development problems. Disaster prevention and mitigation is thus primarily an aspect of development.” Says Skillen: *While Christians might be disappointed that the book contains no biblical exposition and no theological reflection on the providence of God, they should read this little paperback carefully for what it helps us to understand about the nature of human responsibility in the world.*

1986


This is a slightly expanded version of No. 115. It concludes in this way: *The next time you discover water in your basement or see starving children on the evening news,*
don’t ask God, “Why?” as if he were solely responsible. Ask in faith what God would have us do to alleviate suffering, to re-design housing codes, to enforce zoning laws, to improve international development efforts, and to end both legal carelessness and illegal fraudulence so that the “acts of man” can become “acts of mercy” rather than “acts of negligence and injustice”.


[This review appears side by side with Ronald Nash’s review of Humberto Belli’s *Breaking Faith* 1985 about the Sandanista National Liberation Front rule in Nicaragua.] Richard Fox’s outstanding biography is must reading for those who want to understand the proper role of Christian social and political action in America today.... Not only does Reinhold Niebuhr come alive to the reader, but the American and international contexts of his life are detailed in fascinating ways. Fox’s biography has raised important interpretative questions about a thoroughgoing liberal’s struggle with modern liberalism. Skillen highlights H Richard’s loving criticism of his brother’s liberalism which he called “first aid to hypocrisy”. Biblically rooted political and social thinking cannot ignore Niebuhr, but it must go beyond him and around him in a very self-critical fashion.

118. “Some Theses on Pluralism and Justice for American Schools” in *Educational Choice* June-July p.5

This is a discussion document prepared for a conference “Choice in Education” held at the School of education of the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, April 29 1986. There are five theses and the fifth is divided into 6 sub-points:

1. Parents are the ”principals” in education; 2. Parental principalship provides a basis by which all schools, state and non-state can be treated with equity; 3. Such pluralistic, proportionate and equitable treatment has nothing to do with establishing religion. Equitable treatment of all school systems is the only way to safeguard against establishing one or other religion in a state-established school system that favours one public philosophy at the expense of others deemed “necessarily private”; 4. The government should be concerned with the “public justice” dimension of education - non-discrimination, support for handicapped, society-wide spreading of costs, “truth in advertising” and special regard for needy and new migrants: 5. Schools may stay outside the public system if they choose; each school should be ascribed freedom to define and work from its own philosophy of education; the state should oversee accreditation and the setting of standards for competency; there should be freedom in employment and the setting of minimum standards for teacher accreditation; schools should be open to children who want to attend them; no additional tuition should be charged although schools can raise their own funds.


This interview provides information to a broad range of CRCNA members who have some connection, as a financial supporter or otherwise, with APJ. So there is discussion of farm policy and how APJ goes about making its contribution. “APJ does not ask, ‘How can we react to the farm problem within the present policy framework?’ Rather, it asks some prior questions: ‘What is the full problem? What are its causes? What role has government played in creating the problem? What are government’s responsibilities now? What fundamental structural changes are needed?’” The article also discusses APJ’s work in education and tuition vouchers. The discussion refers to
APJ’s work with Roman Catholics and Citizens for Educational Freedom. Those fighting vouchers take for granted the government’s monopoly of education and don’t talk about justice for schools, families and children but simply take for granted government’s current monopoly over funding and control of schools. The interview also ranges over voting and electoral reform, abortion (see also No 144), and concludes with a brief application of the biblical teaching of office to the many simultaneous responsibilities of people in contemporary society. He appeals to readers to work together as Christian citizens.

120. “Christian Service is Not a Parachurch Activity” Christian Legal Society Quarterly 7:2 Summer p.18

Such action is not “alongside” or “beside” anything. It is inside the reality of being God's people in His world. A version of this, “Christian Political Action is not a Parachurch Activity”, was also printed as an APJ broadsheet for its own members. This simple discussion explains the terms “para-“ and “para-church”. Today there is a host of organizations and activities generally referred to by the designation “para-church” including independent evangelistic and mission organizations, publications, youth clubs, and dozens more.


This is a very interesting review also for what it reveals about the interlinkages within the “reformational” movement in North America. Ms O’Donovan was a student of Professor Herbert Richardson and later Skillen was to contribute to a book of essays honouring Ms O’Donovan’s husband (see No 312). Ms O'Donovan also wrote on George Grant in a festchrift in honour of Bernard Zylstra (1934-1986) which also included Skillen’s essay (an abridged version of No 153 and can be found at No 229).

Skillen concludes with the observation that Ms O'Donovan’s conclusion does not actually go far enough in expounding how Grant’s Christian basis shows itself in his work. One can hope that Joan O'Donovan will go on to another book where she will unfold her own Christian political philosophy in further dialogue with John Hallowell, Herman Dooyeweerd, Eric Vögelin, Reinhold Niebuhr, and other twentieth-century notables.

122. “Don’t Just Do Something; Sit There!” Christian Legal Society Quarterly 7:3 Fall p.31-32

This takes its cue from the book by William Lee Miller The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic Alfred Knopf (1986). The biggest failure of the WASPs, according to Miller, was that they did not have a social and political philosophy that admitted, or criticized, what they were doing. Says Skillen: The characteristic contribution of American religion to American civic understanding therefore has been not perspective, wisdom, nor depth of insight, but the rousing of the sentiments and energies for particular acts of charity, generosity, and social reform.

Hence Skillen is using his report on Miller’s book to justify pointing his readers in a different direction. Instead of “Don’t just sit there! Do something!” he is building a case for “Don’t just do something! Sit there!” Precisely now, therefore, we must be able to assess our circumstances with a critical historical and philosophical mindset.
123. “Can Politics be Saved? What Must Evangelicals Do to Become Politically Responsible?” a paper presented at Calvin College, October 17-18, at a conference on “Evangelical Political Involvement in the 1980s” see No. 164

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This article draws on what Skillen had written in No. 105 where the need for a Christian public philosophy is set forth against the background of the well-entrenched American ambivalence about politics. America wants Government and doesn’t want it at the same time. It is in anticipation of the 1988 election campaign that Skillen advocates the need for a *biblically based public philosophy that orient us toward proper service in our American republic* - the res publica (public thing). This is set forth with a recognition of the growth in evangelical political contributions via such figures as Falwell, Robinson, Colson, Carter and Hatfield. A general moralism or legalism is of no help here. We need to understand the type of morality and legality that is specifically appropriate to the political community.


This is one contribution to the *Theological Forum* “Called to Witness to the Gospel Today”. Paul G Schrotenboer, editor, described the contents as “communal testimony in one or other area of life”, a zonal Kingdom approach. The two page article explains APJ as an independent association of citizens who confess Christ’s lordship over the whole earth. ... *we believe that even civic life is called to repentance and renewal by Jesus Christ*. The Association has a 3-pronged character: policy research; direct government influence; civic education and mobilization. The parable of the wheat and the tares is part of the rationale.

126. “A Bicentennial to Open Our Eyes to the World” *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* 8:1 Winter p.31

The article’s major point is found in the words with which it concludes: *Yes, let’s joyfully celebrate our Constitution’s bicentennial this year. Let’s also seek to make a Christian contribution to the understanding and strengthening of constitutional justice wherever possible, both here and abroad*. The way Skillen draws attention to the American celebration of its own constitution is by drawing attention to the structural tensions that are manifest in societies over their constitutions and the interpretation thereof. This article encourages Americans to deeper reflection in their bicentennial celebration. *By what standards should we evaluate [a constitution’s] relative strengths and weaknesses, its relative justice and injustice? What is a just state? What is good basic law? Why should states be fundamentally limited and defined by a constitution? From whence come higher standards of law and justice?*


In the “Political Science Commentary”, presumably written by Heie and Wolfe (pp.15-
16), Skillen’s approach is described as “less pluralistic” than that of the other contributor, Richard Mouw. “Mouw’s essay reflects a greater tolerance for compatibility between existing ways of doing political science and the Christian faith.” Quite apart from the actual content of Mouw’s essay this judgment already fuses pluralism with tolerance, and to define tolerance with compatibility between existing ways of doing political science and Christian faith. It also assumes implicitly that what Skillen presents as political science is an ideal and not an “existing way of doing political science.”

The essay begins with Karl Deutsch’s positivistic and Hobbesian approach to the study of political systems. It then moves on, having shown how taken-for-granted assumptions leave discussion about the responsibility of government and other social institutions to one side in the interest of understanding “system integration” in conceptual terms - ie according to Talcott Parsons’ pattern variables or the AGIL schema - adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency. All of that proceed with much analytical and conceptual complexity but the nature of the political community to be considered by political science has not been clarified. To say that society is complex is no explanation.

After setting forth some theses about what a Christian approach would involve by way of contrast with such “prestigious” approaches, including the Christian political philosophy of Niebuhr, any Christian approach should approach politics with a very clear and unambiguous assertion about God’s sovereignty and the creation’s meaningfulness Skillen acknowledges Yoder’s recognition of the God-ordained, God-revealed normativity to which we are truly subject as Christians (p.28 ftn 23). His appeal is to the creation order, as the basis of politics and the basis from which political science as a study of creation becomes possible. Christian confession of creational heteronomy stands over against any other starting point for political science in human autonomy. The discussion proceeds with further elucidation of the place of the political community - Government and citizenry - in the context of the cultural mandate. It concludes with a brief outline of how a Christian political contribution relates to the Graeco-Roman, Roman Catholic and Humanistic political heritage in the west.

128. “Wrong Question” (comment on Judge W Brevard Hand’s Alabama textbook decision) Reformed Journal April pp.4-5.

See 133 below. This is a guest editorial and as such the discussion draws attention to the views put forward in the editorial of the Washington Post of March 6 about Judge W Brevard Hand’s decision in the Alabama textbook case. The Post had charged that the judgment was eccentric and “wacko”. Skillen’s contribution is aimed at assisting readers of the Reformed Journal look past the newspaper and media controversy and to see the problem in its historical context.

129. “Justice for Education” Christian Legal Society Quarterly 8:2 Spring p.31

Another article discussing education in a constitutional and legal context. The simplicity of the federal Constitution was partly made possible because the ongoing role of state governments in many aspects of society, such as education, family life and voluntary associations could be taken for granted. But times had changed and for justice in education to be done the entire national scene needs to be kept in view. Reference is made to Disestablishment a Second Time (No 76). The growing tensions over education need to be resolved by a fundamental change in the legal and political structure of schooling. The mistaken assumption that Government should monopolize schooling needs to be abandoned.

(see 113 above) This article deals with the same material that is dealt with in the Amicus Curiae (see No 133). As indicated (see No 129) it is an “update” of Disestablishment a Second Time (No 76), an attempt to develop pertinent historical and philosophical insights about the ongoing legal and constitutional problems concerning the control of primary and secondary schools. Whereas other countries have had long experience of “church controlled” public education, Skillen begins the article by specifying the shape of the assumptions undergirding the predominant public policies that have emerged in the United States. Two assumptions are evident in the history of American education. The first is that the government of a city or state holds the primary and direct responsibility for educating its citizens. The second assumption recognizes the primacy of parental authority in the education of children. By noting the ongoing tension between these two assumptions, Skillen can begin to explore the history, ancient and modern, of the tensions between them. The article does not defend “religion” in education. The point of the article is to bring the discussion back to the first and most important question of who has what kind of responsibility for education. The essay is “visionary” and seeks to stress that it is an argument about the principle of public justice for education. I will have achieved my purpose here if I do nothing more than to point the way to overcoming the injustices now being suffered by families, schools, and many citizens within the majoritarian system of government-controlled schooling.


These are two books published in 1986 in the general field of political science which will give the British magazine’s readers some idea of the way in which political discourse unfolds on the other side of the North Atlantic. One is on foreign policy (Hamilton) and the other on social welfare (Schorr and Comer). Schorr’s “old liberal” perspective, says Skillen, is part of the explanation of why the Ronald Reagan “revolution” could turn the clock back so far with respect to social welfare. The book is also based on the same reactionary dream of an almost undifferentiated national community. As such it represents an alternative to the Reagan mythology on the same assumptions.

132. “The Roots of America’s Crisis” Third Way June pp.24-26

Here is Skillen’s definitive statement on the Reagan presidency. A careful and measured exposé of Reagan’s “pragmatic nationalism” is published here one year before the 1988 election. The article begins thus: The signs and signals might at first appear to be unconnected, but they are not. The Iran-contra scandal shakes Washington. Reagan’s loose administrative style finally comes up for examination. The lack of a coherent US foreign policy becomes the target of increasing criticism. The trade and budget deficits worsen. The President’s considerable popularity begins to evaporate. What is going on in Washington? The article explores Reagan’s ideology, his strategy, his failures and the outcome in terms of the fallen idols that result from the false blend of Christian and pagan symbols into an uncritical nationalism.
133. (with Steve West) Amicus Curiae 11th Circuit Court of Appeals case No. 87-7216 Smith et al vs Hunt et al May 4 1987 (see 128 above)

This is a “Brief Amicus Curiae of the Association for Public Justice”. The counsel was Stephen West, who re-drafted Skillen’s article and put it into appropriate legal format for presentation to the court of Judge Hon W Brevard Hand, Chief Judge, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Alabama. “The Amicus submits that oral argument would be appropriate and useful in this case because of the novel and complex legal issues involved and the voluminous factual record but, however, recognizes that it has no right to participate in said argument under the rules of this Court.”

134. “Christians: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?” Christian Legal Society Quarterly 8:4 Summer p.27

One of the motivations for Skillen’s involvement in the CLSQ newsletter is to encourage the development of Christian lawyers. The idea is not just to promote the idea that one can be a lawyer and a Christian at the same time; it is to encourage the practise of law as a Christian vocation. This is summed up nicely in the conclusion to this article: What will you say to your children about this dark American hour? What evidence will your law practice show that you are part of the solution and not simply part of the problem? Remember, your actions will speak louder than your words! Skillen addresses Christian lawyers to keep on doing what Christian lawyers are called to do. Skillen is not just talking to citizens or politicians. He is addressing legal professionals. A republic cannot be reformed apart from action by citizens prepared to serve their civic neighbours through laws and policies that do justice to all. Political renewal requires political action. Legal reform requires wise jurisprudential acts and judgments. No shortcuts are available. Nothing human automatically takes care of itself. Thus the appeal is made to lawyers in the distinctive integrity of their own profession for which all Christians, as fellow workers of the body of Christ, are also responsible.


(see No. 122) Skillen commends the writer of “this wonderfully written book” and notes that Miller writes as one who can see how religion shaped the First Amendment of the US Constitution, and then also made an impact upon the entire country. The book is an exploration of the historical origins, development and ambiguities of the idea that the founding of America was all about religious liberty. Skillen briefly describes the book’s exciting and intriguing narrative of four parts and the remaining two-thirds is Skillen’s explanation of the American “religion” problem. He goes on to spell out the consequences of Miller’s failure to explore the ambiguity of the word “religion”. His observation at this point is contentious and only partly elaborated. It might read as a political critique of an historical treatise. But he is wanting to sharpen the discussion of religious freedom so that it be distinguished from neutrality. The staunch commitment to separation of church and state that some of us hold is rooted in our religious view of what a state ought to be. And such a view is just as religious as the ambiguous notion that religious freedom is neutrality. In this country we have actually forced into exile contrary views held by those who wish to establish a single church or to force the end of free debate. Miller has shown how America is rooted in part in Christianity, and done a marvellous job showing how the separation of church and state came about. But he has left the question of how competing religions, with different orientations to life and society, can all be treated justly in a pluralistic state.
136. “By This We Know Love: World Hunger Devotionals for Grades 9-12” prepared by Mary Hoogendoorn Hoekstra for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, Grand Rapids.

137. “The Mandate for Justice” *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* 8:4 Fall p.31

This is a bible study, a biblical justification for Skillen’s belief that God’s mandate to do justice, and not simply to wish for it, is an integral part of the daily Christian life. In Matthew 5:20 Jesus was directing his disciples to pursue justice. And who is this Jesus? This is no defeated idealist who has left us to remember Him as a great teacher of private ethics. *Jesus is Lord and King now. As the One who conquered sin and calls us to be joint heirs of His Kingdom, He demands justice.* This is more than mere ethical responsibility. Doing justice is an inextricable part of being in fellowship with God and knowing Him. Jeremiah 22:15-16 is expounded and readers are reassured by the teaching that it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ - not our own - that saves us. To ignore the call to justice is not merely to fail in loving our neighbours, it is also to endanger our relationship with Christ. We are called to a life of doing the will of God (Matthew 7:21). To affirm our allegiance to God without obeying His commands is to engage in deep deceit (1 Jn 2:3-6). *Pursuing justice must be the hallmark of our lives ... God and His mandates are realities of far greater weight than anything else we encounter in our daily work.. Encouraging one another to fulfill these commands is far more than idealistic rhetoric; it is one step toward being in the world but not of it.*


This article is an exposition of Thomas Jefferson’s religious view of life. In an ordered and sequential way, Skillen begins by discussing Jefferson’s positive view of bible reading as background to Jefferson’s religious vision that a common core of moral truth exists and can be counted on to sustain social life. His religion of republican morality was a faith in its own dogmatic essentials. This is the underlying vision that has shaped education in the American republic. And this is also the basis upon which our public school system is the equivalent of an established church, teaching the correct moral dogmas and view of life to all children.


see 112 above

140. “Het Leven na Reagan” *Christen Democratische Verkenningen* The Hague November pp.451-460

(Translated by CDV editors from "Life After Reagan" *Public Justice Report* Dec 1987).

This Dutch language article begins: *Ronald Reagan has made a forceful impression upon the United States. During his period of office the President has had to oversee great problems which have brought dark clouds rather than brighter days to his country. It still remains to be seen what good his successors can make of all these.*

Written for a Dutch audience in a newsletter of the CDA (Christen Democratische Appel partij), discussion begins with a typical comment on the Reagan presidency
from *Time* magazine. The discussion is a critical reaction of the views of William Schneider and Hugh Heclo. The article is also written with the commencement of America’s third century in view.

141. “Kuyper Zag Betekenis van Verscheidenheid Samenleving” *Centraal Weekblad* December 4 p.6 (part 1 of two-part article on the 150th anniversary of Kuyper’s birth)

A translation of the first part of the article “Kuyper was on time and ahead of his time” No 151 below pp.15-17.

142. “Betekenis Calvinisme Reikt Nu Verder dan Nederland.” *Centraal Weekblad* December 11, p.8 (part 2 of two-part article)

A translation of the second part of the article “Kuyper was on time and ahead of his time” No 151 below pp.17-19.


reprint from 42 and 69 above.

1988


(see No 91. Skillen has maintained his “principled pluralist” view of abortion in his articles in this church magazine over the years. Here he reviews developments with respect to abortion legislation 15 years after *Roe v Wade*. Summarizing the views of Dennis J Horan *et al.* *Abortion and the Constitution: Reversing Roe v Wade Through the Courts* (1987) Skillen notes: Justice Blackmun, who wrote for the majority in that case, produced a highly debatable opinion. He misinterpreted history. He dictated a meaning for “person” that is without legal or logical foundation. He proclaimed a “right to privacy” that cannot be inferred from the language of the United States constitution. In addition, the court tried to set limits on the state’s interest in maternal and fetal health that will never remain fixed because of constant changes in medical technology. The main driver of abortion “rights” is a desire to liberate women from the burdens of unwanted pregnancies… Skillen outlines the three legal principles that support abortion: a woman’s right to privacy is understood to be broad enough to include her right to terminate; the unborn is not a person according to the Constitution; a denial of the state’s interest in maternal and fetal health, when it comes to restrictions on abortion. He then gives the outline of a strategy which respects the judicial court process, understands the social and political context and makes a thorough use of medical technology. *Those who want to help Americans kick the habit of abortion should pull together for the long haul to pursue this multifaceted legal, political, and social strategy. Christians, who are supposed to be experts at perseverance in the pursuit of their high calling of love for neighbours, should be leading the way!*

This is “Platform Plank #5”, which presumably was part of an *Eternity* attempt to promote Christian thinking in an election year. The one page article discuss God’s purpose for humankind - to be the **steward** of the earth. *God owns everything and gives us the resources and responsibilities for productive stewardship.* Three basic principles follow: 1. to keep God’s gifts one should adopt a productive rather than a possessive posture; 2. **meaningful work should guide consumption.** Skillen reiterates this in these terms: *God has given us many good things to eat and use and enjoy. But Paul tells Timothy that we ought to be satisfied with **enough** and should not be trying constantly to possess or consume more than enough...* 3. *God’s purpose for His image is **full maturation.** So that each is able to serve God and neighbour freely.* This gives a principled basis for so-called free enterprise. In conclusion, Skillen suggests that *God’s ownership and human stewardship points us toward an economy that aims for productivity by mature and independent people who are free to develop and employ their talents because they have access to widely dispersed capital and economic opportunity.*

146. “The Mandate for Justice” *Catalyst* (Contemporary Evangelical Resources for United Methodist Seminarians) 14:2 January pp.2, 4

(see No. 137 of which this is an expanded version) This bible study is a justification for Skillen’s belief that Jesus Christ mandated His disciples to pursue public justice. So he begins with Matt 5:20 (“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”) and moves on immediately to Paul’s teaching in Romans 13 and backing that up with Romans 12:9-21. Jesus Christ **did not retreat into the heavens (or the grave) as a defeated idealist leaving us to remember him as a great teacher of private ethics or as one who might attain public importance at some later date in history.** Skillen gives a very brief overview of American politics and what an emphasis upon public justice might mean within that context. *In other words, the purpose of public law is nothing other than to constitute just relations among the diverse people and institutions that share the same public trust or commonwealth.* Not all become political activists. But loving one’s neighbour and doing justice, in public and private, is what knowing God is all about. Jeremiah 22:15-16 is expounded and readers are reassured by the teaching that it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ - not our own - that saves us. To ignore the call to justice is not merely to fail in loving our neighbours, it is also to endanger our relationship with Christ. We are called to a life of doing the will of God (Matthew 7:21). **Seeking public service is one dimension of Christian service which belongs to the community of his disciples. This act of service constitutes an obligation to be sure, but one that we should accept gladly as servants who relish the goodness of life in communion with the Righteous One.**

147. *Candidate Profiles: A Look at the Leading Presidential Contenders* Editor with Introduction Zondervan pp.5-15

The Introduction is titled: “The Republic’s Highest Office: Will Justice Rule?” In a brief 10 page essay Skillen explains the structural political context in which voting for president takes place. **We need a person who accepts the mandate to seek justice for the republic in all of its domestic complexity. We should seek as president one who is able to guide both government and citizens in an era of ever-increasing dynamism at the international level. In short, we need a political team leader with a public philosophy adequate to guide his team wisely and patiently through crises as well as routines in the pursuit of public justice.**

The discussion moves through various sections: “Trying to see through the confusion and conflict” and then “Facing up to the future”. A discussion of the terms “Liberalism,
Conservatism and Pragmatism” follows explaining why Reagan’s anti-government ideology was bound to run out of steam. The discussion explores “Going Beyond Pragmatism to Principled Politics,” discussing “The Future of the United States in an Interdependent World”, with “A New Vision of International Responsibility”. In conclusion, Skillen calls on readers to pray according to the vision presented by Job (29:1, 7-17).


This column is written with the 1988 presidential election in view. Skillen, the former professor of political science, knows that political discussion, in all venues, is about power, and he also knows that very often the assumptions about power in human life make it very difficult to make headway in the sense of developing principled perspectives on public justice. So as the title indicates he discusses lame ducks - a lame duck no longer possesses the full power of a healthy duck - and paper tigers to give some perspective on the mystery of power that is held as much by those whose power is waning as by the up-and-comers. God is the source of all power and authority. He gives it to whom He will. Nations rise and fall; kings come and go... but in view of God’s power, every earthly leader is a paper tiger or a lame duck. Power is built and thus it is temporary, ephemeral, belonging permanently to no human creature of institution. The discussion encourages readers to think more about how power should be used, rather than remaining fixated upon who has it. When power is dispersed throughout the world, then it may be less likely that any single country will be able to dominate all the others. The column is another in which Skillen encourages readers to consider the fact that all power and earthly authority is subject to God Himself and any office or power we have has been granted us by God Himself. Lame Ducks come and go, but the creator of all ducks, the Lord of all tigers and the King of all human beings will remain forever. His power will know no end.

149. “A Consensus in Need of a Philosophy” This World Spring pp.136-139


Around this time, in Public Justice Report and in his other writings, Skillen’s emphasis was upon the need for a “public philosophy”. Much later in 2004 (see No. 326) Skillen was to outline his view that maybe the US welfare policy was evolving toward a “fourth order of pluralism.” This review is important because it identifies the importance of keeping abreast with contemporary reflection within public policy if one is to develop an alternative approach. Having summarised the helpful contribution of the book, and placing its analysis in the context of four major reports that had been issued since 1986, Skillen observes, This book is highly valuable in providing a summary of the “new consensus” - the emerging common denominator on which many people now agree. It is a well-written digest not only of a discussion held within one seminar but of a nationwide debate that has been going on for five or ten years. At one point the open-ended pragmatism of the report is commended, and shows a proper humility by not suggesting that it has all the answers for those engaged in welfare service. That being said Several important questions arise, however, from a reading of this book. Why should we have confidence in the further pragmatic efforts of policy makers simply because a new consensus may be emerging among many conservatives and liberals? A consensus existed back when the war on poverty began, and look where that led us. If the problems of poverty are deeply related to a variety of cultural conditions and institutions to which government has not given sufficient attention in the past, has the Working Seminar perhaps underemphasized this reality in the process of articulating its consensual conclusions? Is it possible, in other words,
that the book exudes too much optimism by virtue of the very fact that it highlights a consensus without saying enough about the great cultural odds which still face efforts to overcome poverty? Skillen explains further why the approach is deficient: Without an argument about the nature and responsibility of different institutions in society (government, families, schools, churches etc) the book’s recommendations and conclusions seem far too inconsequential - perhaps no more than expressions of hopefulness. The criticism appeals therefore to the empirical reality of a society in which a plurality of responsibilities face us all. Somehow in the social scientific analysis of this reality this plurality is reduced and the full consequences of this investigation of poverty is thereby avoided.


Of note is the difference between the way Skillen approaches the historical background to his own effort to promote public justice and that of Harry Antonides, his “reformational” colleague from Canada. Skillen summarizes the book in terms of Antonides’ concern to expose the radical subjectivism of liberal Christianity and its roots in the social gospel movement. It is a helpful sketch of some key ideas held by prominent social gospel advocates. One might say that Antonides is preoccupied more with showing the theological inadequacy of Social Gospel liberalism than with uncovering the worthwhile and negative social consequences of the movement. Skillen suggests that helpful insight may have been gained by comparing and contrasting the efforts of the Social Gospel movement with Antonides’s efforts with the Christian Labour Association of Canada.

The Biggar et al book is intended as an illustration of pluralist dialogue between religions. It is a collection from a 1982 Chicago Divinity School conference. Skillen’s comments indicate that he views this book is a helpful beginning but it does not advance the cause of pluralist dialogue.

151. “Kuyper was on Time and Ahead of his Time” RES Theological Forum XVI:2 June pp.15-19

This is the English version of No 141 and No. 142. It is subtitled “an essay on religion as a way of life and societal differentiation”. Kuyper is discussed in terms of his Christian willingness to confront the complex differentiation of society across the globe as well as the spiritual confrontation between different religious viewpoints.

Skillen outlines his own background saturated by a personalistic pietism that dominated our evangelical/fundamentalist subculture. By reading Kuyper he began to see that God’s sovereignty over all of life, over all of the creation order, and this helped him resolve some of my own personal struggles caused by the false sacred/secular dualism.

Kuyper was “on time” because he led European Calvinists in his day to grasp the significance of what was happening economically, politically, and intellectually in Europe. He was “ahead of his time” because the culturally formative action he urged Christians to take in politics, education, scholarship, and economic life anticipated the kind of action that is now essential beyond the boundaries of Holland and Europe and the entire Western world.

The discussion then moves to “The Meaning of Religion” - the unifying power that controls a person’s or a people’s life in all of its various dimensions. Skillen notes that this idea of religion is foreign to the liberal humanistic west which has difficulty understanding the significance and power of a reviving Islam. Then he moves on to
“The Differentiation of Society” with the observation that around the world today cries for solidarity and integration are stronger than those for differentiation. nothing less than a profound and comprehensive Christian vision of society is adequate for authentic and vital Christianity today. Anything less than a comprehensive vision of Christ transforming culture in all its creational diversity will lead Christians away from the truth of God’s sovereignty over history. Skillen concludes by affirming that Kuyper helped spark a revival that involves serving God with all our strength in every sphere of life.


(see No. 48 and No. 67). In this chapter Skillen reverts to the introduction in the Pro Rege article (1979) which had been omitted in the beginning of Chapter 3 of International Politics and the Demand for Global Justice (1981) (No. 67) with a change in emphasis from By attempting to uncover the assumptions that are made about this issue, we will be able to gain a very substantial insight into the contemporary science(s) of international politics (1979) to By uncovering the assumptions about this issue we will be able to gain substantial insight into the contemporary science(s) of international politics and, thereby, be able to clarify the relevance of a specifically Christian contribution to this field.

By way of conclusion, Skillen brings his material together in a way that also differs from what is presented in the book. Now he is keen to contribute to reflection upon the “disciplinary tension” that is ancient, antedating both the rise of the modern state and the emergence of contemporary social science research methods. In the conclusion he asks: Is it possible to bring together the theoretical efforts of Morgenthau, Deutsch, and Keohane and Nye into a larger political scientific project guided by a Christian view of the world? It should be possible but it is going to require a larger vision and great effort.


Skillen is concerned with the “distinctive integrity” of political science as a discipline. He begins this article by alerting the reader to the diversity of answers that will be forthcoming if an inquirer is wanting to know about the current state of the discipline. And so the article is also an attempt to give a Christian analysis of the current position and prospects of political science within the scientific enterprise. In this connection we can see Skillen’s view of the political science discipline and understand why he is not overly impressed with the praxis-oriented scholarship of Nicholas Wolterstorff. In the previous exchange between them, Wolterstorff complained that Skillen had written about his work as if he were a “Johnny-come-lately” to social, economic and political analysis. The implication is that Skillen has responded in a territorial and possessive way as if one who has gained his qualifications in the political science arena cannot accept the contribution of a philosopher. But equally clearly, Wolterstorff’s reply to Skillen shows he is unaware of the stand he is taking within political theory… Skillen simply fails to grapple with the issue I was raising. I was asking, What should be the basic unit of our social analysis? The standard answer in liberal social science is that the basic unit is a society - meaning by “a society”, a pretty much self-sufficient social system. The world as a whole is then seen as a large array of such self-sufficient social systems which interact with each other in various ways (No. 98 p.26). The article is geared to promote Christian consideration of this nest of problems: Christian scholarship in the future must come to grips with all three of these drives. In doing so it should seek to distinguish itself by non-reductionism (with respect to the third point), by an integrally Christian philosophy of science (with
respect to point two), and by an empirical comprehensiveness that shows the relationship among all the functions and institutions of political life which have thus far become historically differentiated (with respect to the first point) (p.38).

A brief outline of the history of political theory is given (pp.38-45) moving through ancient, medieval, and early modern phases up until late in the 19th century. What then follows is a 10 page section “Issues of Strategic Concern for a Christian Orientation in Political Science.” This is set out in terms of three basic questions: 1. What is the ‘political’? Political science, I would argue, is a multifunctional entity science not a mono-functional or modal science. That is to say, it is a science aiming to understand things (entities) called states (or political communities) which are distinguishable from other kinds of “things”. 2. What constitutes a science of politics. In this section Skillen also provides an argument which gives a basis for statistical studies of political behavior, and for comparative sociological analysis of political institutions, and for cybernetic analysis of information “flows” through government to society and back again. It is the empirical reality of states and inter-state relations that is the rightful focus for political science. 3. Political Science and Public Life Skillen notes the recent development in policy analysis and in this context examines Wolterstorff’s “praxis-oriented” scholarship. In conclusion he states we should seek to connect an ever more accurate and comprehensive theory of real political life with the non-theoretical responsibilities we have as citizens, so that both can be more fully informed by the other, each in its own sphere.

154. “Step into My Office” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Summer p.29

This is a brief exposition of the biblical idea of office. In the broadest sense “offices” are the varieties of duties and responsibilities to which God calls us with our diverse talents. Skillen develops a viewpoint that implicitly exposes the fallacy of some widespread presuppositions about life held by Christians. Because this world is not in arbitrary chaos, its historical shape does not arise from us ex nihilo. We can only shape what the Creator gives us to shape. Families, schools, governments and business enterprises take on particular shapes because everything that we do is a creaturely response to the multiple arenas of human accountability God created for us.

155. “Jesse and Pat Ride Out” Third Way August pp.20-22

Most Christians in America are satisfied that their political responsibility can be fulfilled through the ordinary “secular” processes of the two-party system. Nevertheless, in recent years, many evangelical and fundamentalist Christians have come to desire something more. “More” has meant stepped-up involvement in moral-issue crusades against abortion, for prayer in schools, against pornography, and for stronger defense. “More” also shows up in a greater desire to promote people for public office who openly confess their Christian faith. Jesse Jackson stands in the “prophetic/liberationist” stream. His campaign is analysed in terms of the inner dilemmas which derive from viewing America as an undifferentiated community of hope for the better life. Robertson on the other hand identifies the American political system as that which is wanted by the majority of God-fearing, Judaeo-Christian Americans who are the proper owners of this estate that God gave their ancestors back at the time of the Revolution. The secular humanists are those who have sneaked in and laid false claim to the (Christian and moral) liberties that America provides. Both “Christian” candidates represent a Christian civil-religious ideology albeit from differing angles.

This is a continuation of the discussion “Step into my office!” (see No. 154). An administrator is a steward of people and things but such a steward neither creates nor dominates. Service, care, ministering - these are indeed what humble administration is all about. A steward has the power of giving names to things and people. These names identify uses and talents. ... it begins and ends with identifying the needs and expectations of the institution or office that one administers... Some Christian organizations try to do all things for all people and end up failing to do anything well. Administration is a gift, a humble service to help people lift up to God the talents and resources He has given to His creatures. Through faithful administration, Christians can help humanity understand Who really runs this world and how the ultimate Administrator wants the world to serve Him.

157. “Politics Beyond the Party Lines” Eternity October p.14

In many senses this is a summary of No. 147 where the Candidates, and their running mates in the presidential election, were subjected to close and critical scrutiny by APJ’s team of political analysts. In this October contribution for Eternity, Skillen begins: To vote wisely this election we ought to evaluate the presidential candidates and parties from at least three angles at once: changing party identities, leadership fit for the office and the coherence and completeness of their agendas for governing.

Both major parties are trying to outdo each other in pragmatic problem-solving. Thus Bentsen, Dukakis’s running mate, has a voting record making him closer politically to the Republican George Bush. Quayle is there to attract the baby-boomer vote for the republican side. On the second criteria both candidates have executive experience. Both are more administrators than visionaries. It was not at all clear which of the two could actually work with the Congress and offer leadership rather than mere management.


This was subtitled “A Monday morning look from three veterans”. Bush and Dukakis had held a debate and this was the documented “expert” response. Skillen was impressed with the debate. It held more interest for him that he had expected. He notes that politics ... with these two candidates ... has become a matter of becoming adept at raising your flags, at learning what people want so you can target your audience. Further he notes a lack a specific vision for the presidential office. But one doesn't really come away from the debate - anymore from hearing them on the stump or reading their stuff - with a sense of what the urgent matters are that need to be given the attention by the president.

159. “Solvent We Stand, Indebted We Fall” The Banner October 17, pp.8-9

In the face of America’s mountain of debt, the federal government search for a “zero-balanced savings account”, and the Christian hope in the biblical teaching about a year of jubilee, Skillen sets forth an analysis of financial responsibility in terms of alternative ways of understanding frugality. One can be an investing debtor, or one can be a consuming debtor. Now, these contrasting examples of an investing debtor who spirals upward out of debt and a consuming debtor who spirals downward ever deeper into debt may be too simple to explain the financial problems of our present, crazy world. But they do shed some light on our predicaments. Investment debt puts consumption on hold so that one’s economic situation is strengthened. Consumer debt
puts investment on hold so that one’s immediate strengths are derived from using one’s current resources to fund consumption. This brief analysis is reminiscent of the difference noted by Skillen in relation to Goudzwaard and Baars’ analysis (see Nos 37 & 70) with respect to the differences between thinking that is oriented by norms and thinking oriented by achieved goals. The final section of the article explains how the biblical teaching of jubilee might lift the hopes of Christian readers. O Lord, forgive us, as we forgive others, and make us good investing stewards of your whole creation, for the sake of Christ our Lord who redeemed us from destruction with the price of his blood!

160. “Getting Past Political Pragmatism” Moody Monthly November p.10
Having identified the way in which pragmatism as a short-term strategy or technique can sometimes lead to positive and useful outcomes (No. 149), Skillen in this piece for a popular evangelical magazine explains why pragmatism fails the test as a public philosophy that Christians should endorse.

Pragmatists, when confronted by political issues, seldom ask as a first step: “Is this unjust, and does the government bear responsibility to stop or reduce it?” A pragmatic approach might work pretty well when basic institutions, laws, and habits of a society are sound and just. But it is not sufficient when the foundations are shaken... In Politics, pragmatism doesn’t take us very far when the very institutions and principles of society are being called into question. Here again is a statement about the need for a Christian contribution to political responsibility based upon a sound public philosophy. This theme was then recurrent in Skillen’s writings.

161. “Do we Have a Leader?” (on Bush and Dukakis) Third Way Oct, pp.10-12
Neither George Bush nor Michael Dukakis is a visionary with a public philosophy or a coherent agenda. Each in his own way is a pragmatist, a mission specialist, a problem solver. They differ on many issues, and the parties they lead still possess some distinguishing characteristics, but American voters will probably have a difficult time making a judgment this year between the programme and leadership potential of these two politicians. This article assesses the alternative managerialisms of Bush and Dukakis.

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162. Letter to the Editor Commentary April, pp.6-7 (reply to Leon R Kass)
This is a letter that extends the discussion of Leon Kass about the 6-day structure of the creation as disclosed in Genesis 1. Says Skillen, Genesis 1 stresses not simply the distinction among different kinds, but a hierarchy of order ... such that humans are stewards over all, under God. This letter unfolds Skillen’s “sabbatical” view of God’s covenant with the creation, an idea he had had from early on, and an idea that we can see began to be developed when he wrote his earliest publications.

Genesis 1 points to an ontological order of creation and is not a report of simple temporal sequences. This is a view of Genesis 1 that is distinct from readings which assume the need to harmonise scripture with biological evolution, on the one hand, and creation science readings that want to confirm a scientific perception of temporal sequences on the other.

163. “Toward Political Maturity” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Winter p.28
Here is a reflective analysis of what is needed for the post-Reagan era of American
politics. Political reflection seemed to have been dominated by AIDS epidemics among the world’s poor, massive debt levels in the world’s richest and powerful countries, and an international situation characterised by prospects of a change to US-Soviet relations, as other international tensions burst onto the scene. Skillen refers his CLSQ readers to recent Roman Catholic works: Richard John Neuhaus’s The Catholic Moment and the recently installed Pope John Paul II’s encyclical The Social Concerns of the Church. Fundamentalist protestants have been making political noises, but says Skillen Noll’s One Nation Under God? confirms his view that American evangelicals lack political maturity. En passant mention is made of Dobson (family), Colson (prison reform) and Simon (hunger alleviation). But don’t we need more than a multitude of issue groups when it comes to fulfilling our civic responsibilities - that of guarding and enhancing the public trust? Christians have hardly begun to debate with each other about the broad principles that should characterise their political involvement, and are too prone to rest content with the little beginnings they seem forever to be making. As a new Administration and Congress begin their work in 1989, those of us who feel a moral drive behind our public involvement should step up to a higher level of public debate and political thought. Our country, our neighbours and our fellow believers need a higher level of reasoning and public service from us in the decade ahead. Christians must grow up into political maturity and join the contemporary public debate in a newly serious and public way.


(see No. 123) This was a contribution to a conference in 1986. Other Contributors included Lynn Buzzard, Edward G Dobson, J David Fairbanks, Lyman A Kellstedt, Stephen V Monsma, Corwin E Smidt, Ronald R Stockton and J David Woodard. The article begins with a quote from William Lee Miller The First Liberty (see Nos. 122 & 135) about the Puritanism of Roger Williams. At this Calvin College Conference on Christianity and Politics, Skillen fleshes out a policy proposal for Christian political involvement in which it is assumed that all citizens should be given every opportunity to have their political/civic responsibilities expressed by an association of mutual political conviction. This is a proposal that is formulated over against the idea of pluralistic politics that is “eristic” or dogmatic in its orientation The article is described by its author as a challenge to Christians, and it is a challenge on 3 levels: First we need a new heart for political life as part of our new heart for God made possible by the redemption of creation in Christ Jesus. Second, with that new heart we need to gain new habits of “careful-ness” with which to pursue our civic responsibilities - habits rooted in a discipline of obedience to God’s commands worked out in day-by-day detailed handling of civic responsibility. And third, to grow as obedient disciples of Christ in caring for the political dimensions of his creation, we must recover a deep historical consciousness by which to understand both the brokenness and the goodness, both the tensions and the prospects, of our present situation.

165. “Who is the Principal? Toward Justice for Alternative Schools” presentation to the Ontario Association of Alternative and Independent Schools, Toronto, April 12

This is a lecture to an association of non-government schools in Ontario. It explains that education is a public good and therefore necessarily of a political nature. It is one unavoidable pillar of the “common good”. This is an examination of the juridical aspect of education and explains how the “private” dimensions internal to family/school are inevitably linked to “public” dimensions, which means public dimensions that are overseen by Government. The argument is framed in terms of world-wide trends - the process of state-building and the consequences of the (so-
called) Industrial Revolution. These two things - state-building and the industrial revolution - have been the focus of most of our attention for decades, and if you look at school curricula you can see that until fairly recently they have shaped most of what concerns us about how children are to understand the modern world. A new critical style has emerged in the west, especially after the collapse of communism.

166. “The French Revolution and the Present Crisis of the West” Center for Public Justice, Background Paper #89:2

The paper begins in the usual Skillen manner of asking a battery of questions: This year marks the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. Why should we take note of it? Apart from the fact that it came only 13 years after the American revolution, was there anything else noteworthy about the French version? We Americans tend to think of our revolution as the one that gave birth to a model political order for the world. What did the French revolution do for anyone? The paper is an interpretation of recent high profile reviews and commentary about the French revolution in relation to the ongoing crisis of liberalism. It is clearly designed to educate the APJ constituency and to give some guidance. It considers the article of Lawrence Stone in The New Republic April 17, 1989 contrasted with the “horrible” view put forward by Simon Schama Citizens: a Chronicle of the French Revolution 1989.

Skillen moves on to discuss The Revolution as Expression of a New Vision of Life and notes that the spirit of modernity that fired many revolutionaries was the same spirit that inspired many less violent ones who Schama approves. The discussion is brought up to date when Skillen explains that Communism Also Has Roots in the Revolution drawing on Zbigniew Brzezinski’s The Grand Failure: the Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century 1989. The Russian revolution was inspired in part by the French revolution by an appeal to the same spirit of modernity, but Brzezinski’s account contains “an element of unexamined self-congratulation” about the moral superiority and economic efficiency of capitalism (Stephen S Rosenfeld in The Washington Post Book World March 12, 1989). Perhaps today’s failing Communism represents that stream of revolutionary modernism which should be condemned while western democracy and capitalism represent the good parts of modern progress ...?

The next section is Democracy, Capitalism, and the Contemporary Crisis of Western Society examines Jerry Z Muller in Commentary December 1988 which while raising the globalizing tendency of capitalism also draws attention to the importance of non-market institutions in contemporary society. Contemporary society is highly differentiated among a variety of human communities and institutions, many of which are market-oriented and political, but many more possess characters and identities that are not primarily a function of either the market or the political system.

Ideology and Worldview is the next section. We have to ask, “What forms of capitalism, what forms of democracy, and what kinds of differentiated institutions are healthy and just?” This means considering what ought to be our concern in shaping human life in its cultural and social complexity. There follows a discussion of Skillen’s reflections on Sowell A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles 1987, which were provoked in a Wheaton College seminar early in 1989. Sowell’s argument is framed in terms of a distinction between the “constrained” and the “unconstrained” visions of life. Skillen points out that the problem with this arbitrarily chosen framework is that it is unable to account for any “vision” other than those that are generated within the house of humanism. Sowell’s contrast between constrained and unconstrained visions remains confined to the inner tensions within humanism. The dilemma was this: if complete scientific mastery is the key to human power and freedom, then what happens when scientists conclude that human nature itself is completely controlled by the laws of nature which the sciences are mastering? What happens, of course, is that human freedom evaporates.

Finally, A Christian Vision is presented (pp.18-23) which is neither constrained nor
unconstrained on Sowell’s terms. It is humble before God, careful to explore the laws of God’s creation, never imagining that human freedom might escape all boundaries. The notion of a political community need not be dispensed with. A Christian public philosophy cannot grow out of the left-wing or the right-wing of the French Revolution. It must not attach itself to the “constrained” or to the “unconstrained” visions of modernity. It will only emerge from a biblically inspired concern for the full and diverse meaning of life in God’s world, on God’s terms, judged and redeemed in Jesus Christ.

*Equipping the Saints* Spring pp.23-30

see No. 124

168. “What is a Monument to Justice?” *Christian Legal Society Quarterly*
Spring p.31

In this contribution for his CLSQ column, Skillen adopts the role of the self-critical journalist. He tells a story of his lunchtime search in Memphis - presumably he was at a conference that had something to do with Christian politics - for the place where Martin Luther King had been assassinated. It is a reflective piece, that shows the depth of a philosophically shaped political theory in which symbols and monuments have their rightful place, but which need to be put into the context of the call of God to do justice. Instead of a “sacred space”, clearly marked, he found a protesting woman camping out in the streets. Jacqueline Smith, one time Metropolitan Opera aspirant, helped Skillen’s reflections about the tumble-down Lorraine Motel, site of a political wrangle over what to construct with the $8.8 million reserved for a grand monument. Smith said: “Dr King would have wanted the Lorraine and the money to be used to help the poor people of Memphis. The motel is going to be turned into a high-tech tourist trap that will concentrate mainly on the murder of Dr King.” Skillen concludes: Now I’m on the search for monuments to justice. Remembering Dr King’s birthday in subsequent years will take me back to Jacqueline Smith, the Lorraine Motel and the idea of service offered up as monument to justice.


Gary Scott Smith has collated these different Christian approaches in *God and Politics* - the book’s subtitle is “four views of the reformation of civil government” - in order to maintain a level of civil discourse between *Theonomy* (represented by Greg L Bahnsen, Carl W Bogue, Joseph N Kickasola, Gary DeMar); *Christian America* (represented by Kevin L Clauson, T. M Moore, Harold O J Brown); *National Confessionalism* (represented by H. B Harrington, David M Carson, D Howard Elliott, William Edgar) and *Principled Pluralism* (represented by Paul Schrotenboer, Gordon Spykman, Gary Scott Smith and Jim Skillen). When the term “pluralism” is used in American political debate it is often equated with relativism, so that the term “principled pluralism” sounds like “absolutist relativism” or “principled pragmatism.” Christian America, as put forward by Harold O J Brown, is an appeal for a Christianized American imperium and as such is a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s revelation culminating in Jesus Christ. Skillen indicates his view that the viewpoint is not dissimilar from the Theonomic view of Greg Bahnsen. Over against the view that says that Christian political action involves the appeal to the Decalogue or to other Commandments as a basis for political life, Skillen argues: If Christ is the sole and supreme mediator and lawgiver, then every human authority must be
recognized as a limited authority in a particular field of competence. This means we must accept the ongoing differentiation of God’s creation order as intended from the beginning of time ... and consequently a general appeal to God’s law and moral authority is an inadequate basis for any human authority seeking sanction for his or her actions. Without doubt, God’s law holds for us; it is binding on us in this world. But no earthly authority has been given the right or obligation by Christ to enforce all of God’s law everywhere as if he or she were God or Christ.

The counter-point is a crucial one. It is a tension that exists between a so-called “reformational” or “principled pluralist” view and various forms of evangelical political ideology. The reason for the difference can be summed up in these words: no authority possesses competence to enforce all of God’s laws everywhere.

To sum up: the real debate is over who should enforce what part of God’s law in which institutions and situations.

170. “In the service of the King” Paper for 3rd Consultation on the Biblical Role of Civil Government, Geneva College June 1-3
see No. 169


The subtitle of this book provides Skillen with an analogy that gives him critical leverage in his review. The word “landscape” ... is the key to understanding its character. If one thinks of the landscape of American politics chiefly in terms of geography, regions and resources, then this book hits the target. If, on the other hand, one thinks of landscape more as a metaphor for the thought forms, philosophical tensions, and underlying ideological moods and conflicts of the American people, then one will probably be disappointed with it.

172. “Glasnost and Renewed Minds” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Summer p.31

The year is 1989 and the world now has to come to terms with Mikhail Gorbachev, glasnost and perestroika. Skillen’s comment notes George Soros’s verdict on Gorbachev’s “new thinking”: “Gorbachev’s ‘new thinking’ is weakest in economic matters” he is quoted as saying. Well, the Soviet Union may have collapsed, says the columnist, but there are some questions the western nations need to ask themselves: How are we doing then in the West, in the United States? While it is certainly the case that most western countries do not face the crises of the communist giants, neither do they exhibit a health that puts them beyond the need of critical examination. (This CLSQ contribution is a basis for the next one No. 175 which examines the Hegelian view of “The end of history?” by Francis Fukuyama). Skillen notes: If the weakest link of glasnost in the Soviet Union today is its economic thinking and reforms, could the weakest link in American life be its political thinking and action? Skillen encourages his readers to examine America’s public weak links. It is time for renewing the Christian mind in public service, law making and civic participation.

173. “How Do We Solve the Global Debt Crisis?” Christian Century Nov 8 pp.1004-6

This is a contribution to the prestigious magazine of Christian opinion concerning a
“Statement on the Global Debt Crisis” issued by an ecumenical body Interfaith Action for Economic Justice. A “Third World Global/Local Links” meeting had been timed to coincide with World Bank and IMF September meetings.

Indeed, something is wrong with a world in which “the rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer”, and in which the “environment is being rapidly depleted and wastefully exploited to the detriment of all people”, especially “at the expense of the poor.”

Skillen’s judgment is that the statement does its job as an expression of anger and weeping. But the statement fails in its inability to make a sound connection between its moral rhetoric and the goals that it wants public officials to reach. The statement’s judgment about non-payment hangs entirely in the air, outside the context of identifying who should not pay whom, and apart from any argument about whether the non-payment should come about only as a result of debt forgiveness or as a matter of simple refusal by the debtor. The statement, in its lack of specificity, would have been better published if it was styled as an appeal to God for His judgment upon and restoration of the world.

174. “Goodbye Mr Koop” Third Way November p.13

The Surgeon General, appointed by President Reagan, was stepping down. A well-respected man, who used the nine months between his nomination and confirmation (Congressional political jockeying over his appointment) to develop, in his own words, a strategy “to espouse the cause of the disenfranchised - the elderly, mothers and children, handicapped kids and their families, baby Doe, those who needed organs for transplantation.” He was a Christian who had learned to take his past offices seriously. Now he had entered a new office, however humble - the job of chief public health officer for the whole country. Skillen’s column is, in fact, an attempt to express appreciation for Koop’s work in that office; one might almost say it has a pastoral dimension to encourage the man despite all the “Christian” criticism.

175. “Another View of History” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Fall p.31

With the publication of Francis Fukuyama’s provocative article “The end of history?” in the summer issue of The National Interest, Skillen raises questions about how to interpret the earth-shaking events of the time in a Christian perspective. On a deeper level, however, we must not accept the confining terms of this debate. Didn’t a great deal of political philosophy precede Hegel? Doesn’t anyone recall Augustine, that Christian “founding father” about 1500 years older than Hegel who first helped the Western world to realize that the end of Rome would not mark the end of history?

Skillen’s judgment is that Fukuyama’s viewpoint, for all it’s ability to capture the apparent sense of the moment, is closed in important ways. Reflections on the end of history must go far beyond considering the “rationality of capitalism and democracy” to anticipating God’s climactic self-revelation at the great banquet feast in the City of God - the new Jerusalem. The problem with Fukuyama’s view is that it implies a simplistic notion of Christianity, compatible with the confines of the theory of the liberal state, that religion is purely and simply a private matter.

This article continues Skillen’s promotion of Christian reflection in the Augustinian tradition (see Nos. 22, 27, 36, 40, 60, 64, 99).


Skillen, as political theorist, who has already published worthwhile reviews on
International relations, touching on Latin America - see Nos. 5 (Vanguard review); 19, 27, 32 (contribution to RES Theological Forum), 64 (on Marxism), 70 (North-South dialogue), 84 (Nicaragua), 101 (Bonino). Here he reviews this published result of a year-long research project of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship. It’s mandate had been to elaborate “a Reformed approach to the crisis in Central America.” It deals with many aspects of American foreign policy, evident in the region. But the standpoint of the authors shifts frequently and is so empathetic in nature that it keeps on leading the reader to feel many different kinds of pain but without always distinguishing carefully the specific responsibilities that different parties should bear. Still the book is judged by Skillen to be a worthy contribution and his criticisms are focused upon one of the “guidelines for North American policymakers” namely that problems need to be viewed “holistically”. The book is judged as a beginning that does not go far enough. How should these countries go about reforming themselves? How can the US actually help? Should not some “guidelines” have been included for Central American administrators? Skillen does not want to discredit the book, and respects the effort that has gone into it. His review explains why the book may exasperate some readers, and be found to be insufficiently helpful by the policymakers to whom the book had been directed.

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If this were a book for Chinese readers, it is fair to conclude that it is a book to encourage Chinese American Christians to think about their Christian responsibilities, also in their “new land”. The term “social reform” features prominently in the title and throughout the essay and it would seem that Skillen is trying to draw attention to the political reality around the world in which “social reform” is a term that no longer refers exclusively to “socialist reforms”. The recent history of the “welfare state” is outlined. Then Skillen gives two examples: one is the Christian democratic movement of Calvinists and Roman Catholics in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth century. The other example is a strand of neo-conservative and neo-liberal thinking in the aftermath of Lyndon Johnson’s “war on poverty”. It has emerged within the liberal-conservative tension in the polity America - it is generally acknowledged that the state has an integrating and differentiating function to perform for all non-state institutions and communities.

178. “Agony in the City: the Urban Crisis” Moody Monthly January pp.24-25

Another article for Moody Monthly (see No.160) which while examining the urban crisis, emphasizes the importance of developing a Christian public philosophy. Skillen begins with a description of the discouraged state of a Washington-based Christian group seeking ways to tackle the problems of the inner city. The urban crisis does, in fact, confront evangelicals with an immense challenge that we do not fully understand. The modern city, which is rapidly becoming the residence of most people throughout the world, cries out for a vision of “complex community” in a “differentiated society”. A brief sociological overview of the structure of the city leads Skillen to question the structure of predominant evangelical thinking by which politics, economics and the media only come into consideration when drugs, crime, pornography, and illiteracy finally touch us directly. Then we complain about the police, the city bureaucrats, or the secularized media. Skillen explains why the urban crisis is yet another reason why Christians should be developing a Christian mind, a Christian approach to culture in God’s world, a Christian sense of responsibility for complex community in highly differentiated society... God’s people... must live as the
people of God in all the institutions of our urban society.


Skillen’s review is formed in order to be as positive as possible for a book that, he says, should have had the subtitle: “Ethical and Theological Reflections by Some American Presbyterians.” *It does not truly encompass either the Reformed faith or economics.* It is a book in which essays by members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are collected together and published. There are excellent essays by Ronald H Stone and David Little on Calvin’s economics, by Preston Williams exposing the racism upheld by reformed Americans and Gordon and Jane Dempsey Douglas on sustainable food systems, but the book disappoints the reviewer because it fails to deal with macroeconomic and broader policy issues.


This is a republication of *The Testimony* in *Public Justice Report* 13:3 December 1989 and also found as Meditation 20 in *A Covenant to Keep* 2000 see No. 283 below.

This meditation articulates a theme Skillen had been emphasizing for some time. It relates to the political task of Christians in response to the gospel teaching about the wheat and the tares.

If God is patient with those who are committed to following His Son then He is placing the onus on them to be patient in their dealings with all neighbours, believers and unbelievers, as ways are sought to restore, maintain and advance the cause of public justice. *There is a time for everything under the sun including noise and impatience. But when it comes to the urgency of establishing justice, God is not always loud or rushed. The reason is not that God is less concerned with justice than with other things. Rather, it has to do with his character and his purposes.* Jesus did not shout down the Pharisees, or worry about winning arguments. Jesus the servant, anticipated by Isaiah 42, is the one who leads justice to victory and does so by a path in which he had to endure quietly, patiently, without breaking down or crying out. *In this man of justice we can firmly put our trust. In that quiet One the nations should put their hope.*


This is another of Skillen’s journalistic pieces which involve commentary on current media news and views. In this article Skillen is also the political science educator, seeking to illustrate a distinction about Government that may be helpful. *Time* magazine had run with the cover story “Is Government Dead?” Well, says Skillen, to ask whether Government is dead is metaphorically like the question that had to be asked of two collapsed bridges after the California earthquake. “Is it dead?” was a valid question to be asked of the Bay Bridge with its collapsed, though fixable, section. The answer was, apparently, “No!” But ask the same question of highway 1-800 in Oakland and the answer is an unequivocal “Yes!” There’s no way that bridge can be fixed. So what is it going to be? *Which bridge symbolizes our Government in Washington (and perhaps in cities and states around the country)? Will traffic begin flowing again after a few repairs - after congressional leaders and the President work out their differences? Or is something wrong at the very foundations, in the system’s design and construction?* The article concludes with an appeal to a “whole of government” critique - *we need to look at the whole system, and ask about its complete design, complex order, rightness and justice to ensure our government’s*
182. “Morality Politics or Public Justice?” *Third Way* February p.28-31

The article forms a basis for, or is an edited version of, the chapter dealing with “pro-American Conservatives” in *The Scattered Voice* (see No. 190). It is written for a British readership and that may be part of the reason why it is different from the form the argument takes in the chapter in the book. It begins with a discussion of Jerry Falwell’s retirement and an assessment of the aims and strategies of the Moral Majority. The article strongly affirms that Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority are indeed a very important part of American politics. This is a critical review of their contribution, and it concludes that *Pro-American Christians have not produced a comprehensive Christian framework for public justice* - for wise political thinking and action grounded in a biblical vision. *They have taken the system for granted and are simply calling on fellow citizens to help them preserve or recover it.* Further, a pro-American conservative agenda is not sufficient to inspire and support long-term Christian political habits of seriousness, thoroughness, and cooperative endurance. *The Moral Majority proved that.* The Moral Majority has failed to offer sound guidance for political involvement in a political system that they claim is based on Christian principles. *Is our constitutional order one that forever confines citizens to a fight for majority power in order to oppose every immorality they don’t like and to promote any morality they do want? Many pro-American Christians do not have the stomach for long-term political engagement on this basis.* The article includes a critical review of one of the intellectual leaders in the movement, John Eidsmoe. Upholding Jefferson’s view on the one hand, Eidsmoe attacks the educational philosophy of Horace Mann without realising that Mann based his idea of the common school on Jefferson’s Unitarian republicanism. There are indeed deep moral problems facing America but the Moral Majority is neither political nor Christian. When it claims to be acting politically its policies decline to personal morality. It’s appeal to the Christian basis of its movement is revealed as a reliance on pro-American sentiment.

183. Letter to Editor in *Education Week* February 14, p.25

This is a letter to the editor in response to a “Commentary” column by John E Coons, “Choice’ Plans Should Include Private Option” in the January 17, 1990 edition. Other published letters included one from Edd Doerr (see No. 44) and Professor Richard A Baer of Cornell University, a member of the Advisory Council for the Center for Public Justice. Here Skillen writes provocatively and says that the advocacy of “choice” in education, as espoused by “choice advocates” from the President down, compares too closely with election officials in some of the Soviet-bloc countries where the Communist Party is still trying to hold on to its monopoly. Readers may well have found the parallel obscure, although the point will not be lost on Edd Doerr whose letter equates non-State education with “private” wealth, privilege and upper class pretensions. Skillen’s concludes that choice based on wealth only serves to aggravate another problem in American society - the growing distance between rich and poor. (see May 15, 1991 letter to Education Week No. 201).


The present time, says Skillen, presents significant opportunities for the development of a distinctively Christian social philosophy. The communitarian critique of liberalism, is part of a general crisis in the foundations of liberal philosophy and thinkers like Eric Vögelin and MacIntyre have suggested that the crisis will have to be overcome by a rediscovery of the philosophical tradition. By that they mean a rediscovery of classical
and Aristotelian thought. Thus they propose a reform of the dominant tradition by a reconsideration of a tradition that has been left behind. Voegelin and MacIntyre articulate perspectives that are therefore consonant with the communitarian criticisms of Robert Bellah et al. Habits of the Heart 1985, a book which seeks to remind us that American history was founded on republican and biblical understandings of social life. In all of this work, we find the theme of recovery - of remembering what has been forgotten or lost. Voegelin makes a big point of this, arguing that the failure of modernity is its forgetfulness and rejection of normative experience that ought not to have been forgotten. Michael Sandel's argument comes down to a change in liberalism's individualistic view of the person. Sandel advocates a view of the "encumbered self". Michael Novak's The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (1982), as with Peter L Berger and Richard Neuhaus, advocate a strengthening of "mediating institutions", but this effectively retains, as does Sandel's suggestion of the "encumbered self", underlying assumptions in the liberal worldview. This is no return to an idyllic Christian past. No, what we need today is a vision of human life that is large enough to encompass and account for: (1) highly differentiated mega-corporations; (2) highly intimate families and personal relationships; (3) highly diversified cultural and linguistic traditions around the world existing simultaneously at this very moment ...; (4) overwhelmingly powerful states often restricted by a paralysis ...; and (5) technologies that propel both rapid differentiation and inevitable integration at the same time.

A discussion follows about the Christian vision of God establishing His creational purposes through Christ and His people. There follows a brief introduction to principled, structural pluralism and confessional pluralism. This perspective also holds a valuable potential for new social theory. ... We will transcend historicism not by ignoring history or pretending that it does not bind and shape us, but by acknowledging the transcendence of God who is the norm-giver and who calls us in Christ to move toward the new City that he is building in and through us at present.


Once again the discussion of a contentious public issue is handled deftly and in such a way as to promote a better overview of the entire criminal justice system. The article is in part a reflection upon (rather than a review of) Daniel Van Ness's Crime and its Victims published by IVP 1986. Capital punishment requires justice at the foundations of a criminal justice system. Capital punishment is not that foundation. Retribution and recompense should be meted out with a view to restore and promote the search for justice among citizens. Moreover, from a biblical point of view, human vengeance has no place in the doing of public justice. Van Ness observed that Scripture neither prohibits the death penalty under all circumstances nor mandates it in each case where it might legitimately be deserved and Skillen agrees and suggests a critical view of the criminal justice system to avoid the death penalty becoming subject to popular desire for vengeance. There is also a problem with confronting the debilitating and confidence sapping consequences when victims and many people throughout a society believe that justice is no longer being carried out. The way ahead for Christians, Skillen says, is to get busy seeking the reform of the entire criminal justice system.

186. “Will Politics Turn to God?” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Spring p.31

Glenn Tinder had written a cover story for the December Atlantic - “Can we be good without God?” Once again Skillen takes up the journalist’s pen to discuss, in a journalistic fashion, issues that have been given some exposure in the media. He is addressing legal professionals and is therefore justified in assuming that his readers would be reading public affairs magazines and journals. The cover story took issue
with Friedrich Nietzsche; according to Tinder, if we continue to live as if God and Christian ethics are dead, then little hope exists for a political future in which individuals will be respected and protected. Skillen divines a new interest in the Christian foundations of the West, and refers to an editorial of The Economist as well as an article in The New York Review of Books January 18, 1990 by the new Czech President Vaclav Havel.

In conclusion Skillen encourages dialogue between Christians about the way forward as they consider the massive changes that are going on apace round about them. Tinder’s view - Christians may have to accept the necessity of the state even as they denounce it - is not the only possible interpretation of politics from a Christian viewpoint. Roman Catholics, the Orthodox and Protestants need to hear each other about these matters to discover God’s will for their political contribution in the years ahead.


It is possible to see in Skillen’s analysis the beginnings of a systematic overview of American social welfare and education. The structure of the article is important. From what is said in the first two pages, as well as the concluding comment on the last page, Skillen is aware of the recent contributions made by critical sociological studies of education. John Chubb and Terry Moe “Politics, Markets, and the Organization of Schools” American Political Science Review 1988, advocated a system overhaul, opening schooling to a free market that puts control in the hands of individuals and individual schools. (In Disestablishment (No. 76) the initial sociological reference point was Bowles and Gintis Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life, 1976). For the moment Skillen doesn’t direct his discussion to the problematic assumption that links schooling’s purpose and ultimate meaning to GNP (and US world leadership). He writes in a way that assumes that his readers already know about the class division within the educational system which is a central factor in the reproduction of such inequality. Skillen makes a remarkable statement that anticipates some very rich and cogent socio-political research. The institutionalization of schooling, the formalizing of certain language categories, a much-disputed but still dominant public philosophy - all of these are among the elements intertwined in a complexity that has left the Supreme Court and the broader public in a state of confusion and ambiguity over religion and education. This provides a hint of Skillen’s broader architectonic critique of American society.


This is a review of a book published by an evangelical-reformed publisher. The book documents the author’s attempt to test an hypothesis about the relationship between religion and liberal culture. The ruling theories are two. The first is that religion directly supports and sustains American liberal culture. The second is that religion directly challenges liberal culture either by way of counter-cultural radicalism or by calling for a return to an earlier American culture that liberalism has displaced. But Fowler has a dissenting view. Religion’s impact upon America is indirect and inadvertent, providing a temporary and occasional escape from the least satisfying elements of liberalism. The strength of the book is found in its wide survey of literature and recent developments by documenting nearly every influential religious phenomenon that has appeared in the US in the past twenty years. But the author is uncritical about the language he uses, and has not stopped to ask about the religious roots of his basic distinctions. Thus Fowler, rather than offering something entirely new, provides what is, in effect, an updated refinement of the secularisation
hypothesis that assumes that the widely-held assumption about religion being a private and personal matter actually allows religion to find its right place in human life and experience. Fowler has actually described the American way of life, which, as such, is comparable with all other ways of life.

189. “Can Nations be Reconciled?” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Summer p.31

The globe is covered with tensions between neighbouring nations. How can neighbours who have fought long and bitterly be reconciled to each other? Further, what is political reconciliation and how can we promote it? Skillen draws on insights in From Under the Rubble (1974) by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in which the Russian dissident discusses repentance among nations. Self-limitation is the key, he suggests. “Freedom is self-restriction! Restriction of the self for the sake of others!” This is a possible criterion, suggests Skillen, for discerning the way in which nations have achieved reconciliation. It can guide internal conflicts within one nation and also conflicts between nations. The Soviets certainly appear to have been repenting of their (immediate) past imperialism. Solzhenitsyn advances the complex notion that Russians are more prone to do evil to themselves than to others. But, says Skillen, the Lithuanians may disagree, because they see themselves as one of the “others,” nations that have suffered great injustice at the hands of the Russian-led Soviet empire after it forcibly incorporated Lithuania into its union. After 40 years on the “inside”, Lithuanians may agree that they suffered greater evil than the Soviets perpetrated “outside”. What Solzhenitsyn helps us to think about is that with a growing number of people in a shrinking world, states must practice self-limitation if so many different national aspirations must be satisfied. Moreover, if self-limitation on a national scale is crucial, and if its roots lie in the Christian tradition, then the urgency of both preaching the Gospel and working for peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation at the political level will only increase.

190. The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square

Zondervan

The sub-title of this volume: Christians at odds in the public square indicates the book’s purpose. It does not aim to justify the relevance of a Christian view for political life but to examine the contribution of the intra-Christian conflict to the American polity and to make some suggestions about the significance of that conflict for “the State of the union”, and for the Christian political vocation in the American polity.

In his Introduction to this book, Skillen discusses the momentous changes of recent times in terms of a metaphor: shifts in tectonic plates. This metaphor had also been used by his colleague, and Center associate, Roy Clouser. In The Myth of Religious Neutrality - an Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories (1991), Clouser states: The enormous influence of religious beliefs remains, however, largely hidden from casual view; its relation to the rest of life is like that of the great geological plates of the earth’s surface to the continents and oceans. At this time, the work of Clouser and Skillen was coming to maturity, and the use of the same metaphor indicate co-operation. Skillen’s political theory is featured in Clouser’s book, but the fact that the metaphor features in the Introductions of both books indicates co-operative effort in the wake of “techtonic shifts” also felt among supporters of Christian higher education. Skillen examines the variously contending views against the background of a differentiated and differentiating (post-feudal, republican and market-based) society and the conservative-liberal spectrum that dominates and constrains political life.

The initial chapter examines The Roots of Ambivalence and Conflict, a brief statement of the historical calling of Christians to serve the Lord God, showing how
the political responsibility of citizens and Government, is something given, not something dreamed up. The chapters that follow examine Pro-American Conservatives (the Moral Majority, Professor John Eidsmoe, Harold O J Brown, Jerry Falwell and Ed Dobson); the Cautious and Critical Conservatives - Colson, Amstutz, Bandow and Myers; The Sophisticated Neo-Conservatives Richard John Neuhaus (Nos 102, 108, 112, 130, 184, 194, 273) and Michael Novak (Nos 16, 149, 184); Traditional and Reflective Liberals surveys the Catholic tradition of the common good as it had come to expression in the 1986 pastoral letter on the economy by the American Catholic Bishops; Civil Rights Reformers explores the legacy of the civil rights movement and Revd Jesse Jackson (see Nos. 96 and 155) its most recent advocate; Pro-Justice Activists examines Jim Wallis of the Sojourners Community, and Ronald Sider, of Evangelical Social Action. Both had signed the 1973 “Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern”; Theonomic Reconstructionists and in particular the views of Greg Bahnsen (see Nos. 10, 17, 169). Chapters 9 From Contention to Communication and 10 Is There Hope for the Future? spell out the possibilities for Christian political advancement in the American polity.

This is about Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. The question Skillen poses is a simple one: How are we to think about this? It would be one matter if he were a simple thief caught by police; the fact that he controls the Iraqi government and military and has stolen another country makes it quite a different matter. The question is: What does justice demand in the case? Can justice even be done?
In international affairs states are assumed to be sovereign. So how is justice in an international sense to be enforced. Who is the policeman in the case of Kuwait who can force the Iraqi to go home? But there is also another question: who can punish the crime committed by Saddam Hussein’s government and restrain him from further acts in the future? This discussion presupposes the “principled pluralist” view of international relations. A persistent theme in Skillen’s political theory is the biblical vision of Christ’s universal Kingship, a kingship that is not just political but over all of life. Christ Jesus’ authority is such that non-political international relations are also subject to Him.

John Mason, of the Association of Christian Economists and Doug Bandow (see Nos 190, 197) of the Cato Institute, are also featured in this “closer look” at the budget. Mason says the 1990 Budget brought “greater responsibility without compromising freedom”; Bandow says a continuation of treating “the budget process as a special-interest looting expedition”; Skillen identifies positive factors - there is long-term planning vision involved, and the greatest burden is put on those with highest incomes with some relief for the working poor. The problems are described in these terms: The fact that the budget became a crisis in itself has obscured the debate over this deeper and more important reality for which a budget exists (ie policy implementation and program development). Given the huge deficit this budget barely begins to face the deeper political crisis.

193. “We’re Facing a Political Crisis” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Winter p.31
In the run-up to the November elections, a budget crisis had emerged. The fact is, however, that the current budget crisis is not merely budget-related but a
manifestation of a growing political crisis - a predicament in which political leadership is increasingly fragmented, and voters are more and more confused. The American system is not giving voters genuine alternatives. Instead it is all a matter of shifting policy to improve an image in order to give oneself distance from one’s opponent in an upcoming election campaign. The deeper problem is that now we are facing the breakdown of the entire interconnected system that once provided the foundation for individualized pragmatic solutions. American politics is addicted to making do with short-term solutions designed to improve political power but this makes major system reform all the more urgent.


This is a slightly revised version of the 10pp mimeo-ed review circulated by APJ to interested readers of Public Justice Report in 1985 (see No. 102). At the outset Skillen adds a note of contemporary relevance, 6 years after its initial publication. In the 1980s, The Naked Public Square was one of the most frequently discussed books on American religion and politics. It will remain worth (sic!) reading throughout the 1990s.

There are points where the book reviewer has sharpened his statement by deleting passages: Skillen identifies the ambiguity in Neuhaus's argument by reference to the title of the book. This paragraph too, is an edited distillation of what had previously be presented in two complex paragraphs: The title of his book and much of its argument leads the reader to believe that secularism has succeeded in creating a naked public square and that religious Americans need to cover it with religion again. But, as I have tried to argue, this is not the real problem, and Neuhaus himself provides ample evidence that the public square is not naked but is presently the battle ground of contending religions, with Christians and non-Christians on both sides of the conflict.

Further along in the discussion Skillen identifies Neuhaus's philosophical problem: he accepts with little question a typical description of politics as a functional, means-to-ends power struggle. The review, as a re-written statement, confirms Skillen's approach to this and other Christian approaches. They remain on his radar (as does John Howard Yoder) even though he has previously studied them. offering critical and dissenting comments.

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(see Nos. 81 - CPJ Position Paper, 91 and 144 - The Banner articles, and 174 (on C Everett Koop). Where Christian political action tends to be reactionary - that is when it is mobilized in response to proposed legislation or when controversial court judgments are handed down - consideration of the political structure is not uppermost in the minds of those mobilized. Skillen draws attention to how opposing views manifest a growing complexity in the struggle over abortion in the US at both Federal and State levels. The article discusses Webster, a 1989 US Supreme Court judgment, which signaled the possibility of state regulation of abortion by a shift in the Court from the Roe ruling’s defense of a woman’s right to privacy to an appreciation for the nuances of state regulations designed to protect pregnant women, children and the unborn. State regulations may require the parents of pregnant minors to be informed. But as a result of Webster, both pro-life and pro-choice camps have turned their attention to the state level. The article is thus a description of the changing political strategies of the pro-life and pro-choice movements. The detail in the overall abortion policy still needs to be negotiated and the pro-life lobby groups seems to have realized that Roe could be effectively overturned by rules for administering the law (no federal funds to promote abortion
as a way of family planning, informing parents of minors, and tighter restrictions on late term abortions). The pro-life movement had become more open to the possibility that abortion may be allowable in cases of rape or incest. There is a discussion of how the debate is carried in the media with elections in sight and how the issue of abortion arises in many different contexts. The possibility of RU486 is also mentioned. Those who want to advance the protection of human life at all stages will have to become ever more sophisticated to deal with these complexities. They will also have to locate the fight for unborn life in the larger context of children’s health care and medical research. Skillen’s article puts Christian action into an historical context with a view to the future. He affirms that it is impossible to predict the future of abortion in the United States, yet he maintains a future orientation by concluding that the next decade could prove decisive on abortion, but we may need another decade beyond that to understand what happened.


Professor Chewning, an academic with a record of a long-term commitment to developing Christian ethics, has edited a book with various contributions to a Christian contribution to the public square. The chapter first discusses The Contemporary Context, and seven issues are then enunciated: 1. What is the nature of the Government’s responsibility for education - what is the proper distribution of responsibility for education and how should government’s responsibilities be distributed at federal, state and local levels?; 2. How is justice and equity to be established in education?; 3. Is it right that education is supported by public funding?; 4. How should funds be distributed?; 5. How is parental choice to be respected by government?; 6. How should government legitimately intervene in education to improve education standards?; 7. How should public policy for education be related to religion?

The next sections Biblical Principles and The Illuminating Power of Biblical Principles for Contemporary Public Policy include an argument that “the role of government should be that of establishing an ‘agency relationship’ with the community (representing the parents and the broadest needs of a pluralistic society) rather than [the Government seeing itself as] being the foremost ‘principal party’ determining every facet of the educational process in the public arena” (Chewning p.12).

Within such a framework the history of legal judgments in the US is examined in terms of the legal interpretation of public schooling. Parental principalship is pitted against the assumption of the Graeco-Roman tradition that the government of a city or state holds the primary and direct responsibility for educating its citizens. These two assumptions have framed schooling in the US. Up until 1840 parental principalship was recognised. Since then State primacy has dominated. The rest of the section reiterates legal cases that have been reported earlier in Skillen’s published writings.

The final section A New Direction for Education Policy in the United States examines how a national education policy might be framed. Families, children’s needs, education agencies other than those run by the Government, all need to be kept in view. Such a policy is needed for the sake of the equitable well-being of all citizens. Further, such policy should henceforth [take] for granted both the principalship of parents in the education of their children and the right of all schools to receive fair and equitable treatment as they offer their services to the public.
197. “More Disarray Before New World Order” contribution to symposium “The World Economy After the Cold War” published by the Institute on Religion and Democracy April p.13

This “Briefing Paper” from the Institute on Religion and Democracy contains responses to a discussion essay by IRD Economics Associate Fredrick P Jones. Participants included: Doug Bandow (see No 190 and 192), E Calvin Beisner, Robert Benne, Gerald W Brock, Richard Chewning (see No 196), Kenneth R Craycraft Jr, Donna K Dial, Kurt C Schaefer, Herbert Schlossberg (see 231), James W Skillen and Todd Steen.

Skillen commends Jones’s paper and adds: Given his survey, the point at which I would focus attention is the seriously mounting tension between nationalist and protectionist forces, on the one hand, and internationalist and integrative forces, on the other hand. Skillen develops his thesis by focusing attention upon GATT negotiations which broke down due to nationalist and protectionist tendencies. NATO and GATT no longer apply to international society as they did when they were set up. The international system has moved on and developed further. I expect, then, that the emerging era will be defined more by conflict and experiment than by any adequate strategic planning. There will more international economic conflict in the years ahead because more international economic agreements will fail or collapse. Blocs will form in Europe, North America, and in the pacific around Japan. Cooperation among the big three economic regions will be ad hoc and episodic, with the Third World winning and losing by happenstance while having relatively little voice in the decisions that determine international economic relations. The concluding and parting comment seems somewhat pessimistic but appropriate given the prevailing context of collapsing economic agreements around the globe (and presumably a tradition that says such agreements can be abrogated if they are characterized as opposed to the national interest ref comments on pacta sunt servanda No. 27). Perhaps a very critical economic or military situation, such as a global depression or continuing explosiveness in the Middle East, will force leaders of the most powerful nations to create some new and better international institutions. But until that time, I don’t expect to see much firm or enduring agreement about what constitutes the common good of the international community.

198. “Can politics do justice to the land” APJ Background Paper 91:7

In No 196 it was noted that government’s contribution to the political community is completely governed by a “stewardship responsibility” under God, the Creator. This “Background Paper” develops the environmental theme that was canvassed earlier in the life of CPJ with the publication of a position paper and other resources (See No. 77, 78, 79). For the development of this theme in later work see No 257 which then becomes a basis for “Chapter 7 “Liberalism and the Environment” in In Pursuit of Justice: Christian-Democratic Explorations 2004 (No. 326).

Skillen, however, is theorising against a strong political tradition that assumes that Government must accommodate private ownership of land - the "value" of property is determined by ownership or added to it by the owner's initiative with the consequence that any later discovery that private property carries additional public or ecological value will have to be handled by a process of "intrusion" or "interference" through which government seeks to satisfy the later "interest" by buying out or compensating the earlier or more fundamental "interest" of the owner. In such circumstances, compensation will be just if it can be afforded. In other words ownership rules the rules for land ownership. There is a fundamental weakness which allowed the ambiguous identification of African American people ... as people and as property in a way that could not do justice to them as people. The case of child labour laws is also canvassed in this context. Justice must begin with just recognition - proper identification - of every person and non-human entity that exists under law and in the marketplace... mistakes are possible and misidentification does happen but the end
result should be a clarification of what is more fundamental and prior in contrast to what is less fundamental and lower on the priority list ... [f]reedom for slaves is a higher priority than compensation of slave owners.

The point is not obscure IF one keeps in mind the comprehensiveness required by law to administer public justice. In the case of land there has to be appropriate identification of the different types of land which cannot be truly undertaken as long as environmental justice is a political debate to be resolved by one interest group perpetually slugging it out with other, presumably anti-environmentalist, groups. It’s not just adopting a new mindset. It is complex work which requires hard and sustained analysis to understand the current situation, current taxation and other legislative efforts to halt pollution and environmental degradation. It is more than an appeal to moral values that demands respect in nature and the market-place. It involves rethinking the nature and morality of the political system from the inside out and asking what justice demands of human beings in their relationships with the entire ecosystem.

199. “Starting fresh in a broken world” Commencement King's College, Edmonton, Alberta April 27
(see No. 99 Commencement address Dordt college 1983)

An appeal to the graduating class about the spiritual dynamics of the world they are about to enter. The thesis of Christopher Lasch The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics (1991), that the secularized faith in progress is a failure, is compared and contrasted with Abraham Kuyper’s November 9, 1891 address to the first Christian Social Congress (see No. 206) with the aim of clarifying what it will mean for you “to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” in Christ Jesus (Eph 4:1). Lasch, like so many others, is looking for a new faith and seems to believe that we can find our moral guide in many different sorts of lower-class people simply because they have stood up to the progressivist illusion and have recognized some limits to human freedom. By way of contrast, Skillen outlines Kuyper's view of the "little people" who supported a Christian way of life in the Netherlands. And, says Skillen, this Christian humility had a distinctive progressive impact on history contributing to the ending of slavery, to greater concern for the welfare of the poor, to greater respect for women and children, and to limitations on the accumulation of capital for the sake of the well-being of all... The difference between Kuyper and Lasch ... is that Kuyper does not in the end place his hope for the future in the lower classes and their traditions. Rather, he calls all people, both high and low, to humble themselves before the majesty of God. And so the question is redefined as "What faith can guide high and low alike to health and sanity in the coming decades?" The call is made to forsake pride and self-confidence by becoming a willing prisoner of Jesus Christ.

200. “Apocalyptic Visions in Times of Trouble” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Spring p.31

In the context of President Bush’s announcement of the arrival of a “new world order”, fundamentalist dispensationalists fomented yet another round of predictions of rapture, the final battle and a “trumpet sounding judgment”. Scripture, says Skillen, contains many images of the “end times”. The battlefield is only one. Paul lived conflict but he spoke to the church of the coming love feast, the marriage of Christ to His bride and God’s communion with His people, the completion of child-birth. It is more important to do now what Christ calls us to do than to try and map out the last days. We need to act in ways that demonstrate to every neighbour how God is adopting children into His family. This is another step in the development of a comprehensive view of the biblical revelation with respect to our political calling (see
201. Letter to Editor Education Week May 15 1991 (on “Catholic Educators Press to Add Sectarian Schools to Choices Plan”)

The letter addresses the use of the term “sectarian”. Even a casual look at any random selection of dictionaries will show that the term “sectarian” not only has a nasty pedigree but also continues to carry a highly prejudicial meaning. Some of its common synonyms are “bigoted”, “narrow-minded” and “heretical”.

It is instructive to read how Skillen, with Center supporter and Editorial Adviser, Richard Baer, draw attention to the way words are used in an educational magazine. Baer had written a 20-page article in the Journal of Law and Politics showing that the term “sectarian” has been used throughout American history to marginalize Americans who have been committed to the “wrong” kind of religion, or who have been “religious” rather than “secular”. The letter observes that the equation religious = sectarian goes back to Jefferson and actually violates the spirit of the Constitution. At any rate, please stop using the equation “religious = sectarian” it is offensive ...


A discussion of justice which is really an exposition of the biblical view of hope in the midst of suffering (see No. 109) and takes its point of departure from Job. The second Job becomes the One in which hope for justice becomes a reality. Rather, our response must be to demonstrate that since God took on human flesh and suffered death in order to overcome evil in this world, we will choose to live by giving every ounce of energy to promote justice; to encourage people to live just lives; to minister to those suffering injustice; to weep with those who weep; to urge sinners of all kinds to repent; and to seek reconciliation between victims and offenders.

This is a pastoral address, seeking to discuss how criminal justice fits into a larger context defined by the human task of doing justice. Criminal justice is but one side of criminal justice and by no means the central issue. The central issue is whether God and His Word is honoured in our lives, lives which includes our efforts to uphold justice, however they may have to come to expression. And then, via reference to Job, justice is counter-balanced, by reference to the deep sense of “cosmic” injustice we often feel when suffering is our lot as it was with Job.


This book reviews an assessment of American political economic transformation between 1776 (the Revolution) and 1789 (the adoption of the Federal Constitution). If we can read Skillen’s research agenda off his publications, we can say that Increasingly he had been turning his attention to American history. The challenge of the union, from the start, was to overcome the pretensions of state governments without destroying the states. The book is about how the colonies moved from revolutionary independence to federal union. Skillen isolates an observation that has been part of his own explanation of American politics. Colonial America focused its political and economic discourse on the idea of interest, and this is why “Americans had no clear conception of the role government should play in regulating their economic life” (p.11). The implication is that the role of government emerged in the colonist’s thinking shaped by these interests and so the shape of the federal union came about not by forward looking design, but by the gradual accommodation of conflicting interests. Skillen traces the authors’ survey of state government
involvement in economics, in inter-state trade, and the near-anarchy that resulted, which in time meant greater support for a more unified solution. The US emerged as a union defined by, and brought into existence from, economic forces motivated, in the main, by enlightened self-interest. The new union did not solve all problems but it has held and the Constitution now provides some testimony to what might be possible in other regions of the world, such as contemporary Europe, where the federalizing process is at work.

204. “Christian Politics?” a letter to the Editor *First Things* October
(see No. 207 Skillen on Curry). Dean Curry, Professor of Political Science at Messiah College has reviewed Skillen’s book *The Scattered Voice* (No. 190) in *First Things* June/July 1991 pp.49-51. This is a sharp exchange based on Skillen’s (justifiable) complaint that Dean Curry has seriously misrepresented his view having given a rather dismissive review that considers it an analysis of the “scattered voice” of evangelicals. Clearly Curry’s review gets it wrong and he can’t bring himself to admit it in his reply. The problem seems to be that Curry used the review as an opportunity to promote his own version of post-Reinhold Nieburhian political realism as the genuine alternative that Skillen had missed in his analysis. It may well be that Curry’s version of prudential Christian realism does not feature among the various realist views that Skillen discusses in *The Scattered Voice* and the exchange does exhibit the kind of bitterness that often prevails even in the Christian academic milieu in “Christian America”. Curry’s review seems more concerned with suggesting, in a rather pompous way, that Skillen join him in advocating Curry’s view - he says in his reply to Skillen’s letter: “I believe my friend is misguided, however, in his quest to define a uniquely Christian third way.” Curry says he wants to advocate a prudential, rather than a theological, politics and so assumes that Skillen has tried to subordinate political theory to theology.

205. “The Expansion of Our Shrinking Globe” *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* p.4
Skillen’s philosophical colleague, Dr Danie Strauss, would immediately note that the title of this essay has kinetic analogies. This is not to suggest that thinkers who know nothing of Dooyeweerd are incapable of making use of such seemingly contradictory concepts in a coherent way. But it does illustrate how a philosophy can support the kind of intellectual flexibility that is demonstrated in the title of this CLSQ article. This was written more than 25 years after his doctoral Dissertation (No 12). *God is shrinking the world so we can see more clearly its simple unity under His dominion; He claims it all.* This is no “Dooyeweerdian” claim, but it is a view that comes to expression in Dooyeweerd’s philosophy. The article concludes with reference to Pope Leo XIII’s famous encyclical *Rerum Novarum* which in 1991 was in its hundredth year. It sparked Catholic political and economic reform efforts in Europe. It was indeed worthwhile to examine this teaching in the 200th anniversary year of the American Bill of Rights. At the bottom of the page is a note about the Christianity and democracy conference that had been promoted by the Center for Public Justice.

This is a new edition of a speech originally given by Abraham Kuyper in 1891 and translated by Dirk Jellema and published as *Christianity and the Class Struggle* (1950). Skillen wrote the new Preface - *Kuyper is not presenting a technical or academic paper. He aims to illuminate a complex problem and to inspire his audience to action*. In the Introduction Skillen explains the significance of the speech in its centennial year. *While it may be true that various forms of communism and socialism*
are currently in decline, no one can ignore the present reality of poverty, social dislocation, urban growth and squalor, unemployment, and family breakdown. All of these exist today, throughout the world, on a scale much larger than that of one hundred years ago.

This is not simply an antiquarian interest in a remarkable Christian document. The purpose of publication is to challenge the view that Christianity is out of date and powerless to address the complex questions of poverty today.

207. Review of Dean C Curry A World Without Tyranny Crossway 1990 in Calvin Theological Journal November pp.454-6

see No. 204 Skillen’s reply to Curry’s review of Skillen (No. 190).

This review comes one month after the First Things exchange between Curry and Skillen. The first thing that Skillen concedes is that the book should not be criticised because it was written pre-1989 - a great deal of it seems far more dated than it might otherwise have been. This concession is balanced by Skillen's recognition that Dr Curry might feel that the book’s underlying assumptions and argument have been substantiated by present historical developments. Democracy and freedom seem to have a new chance in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The Persian Gulf War shows the United States standing firmly behind Israel. The US appears to be ready now, after two decades of indecision, to use strong force to back up its goals in the world. All of this is to Curry’s liking. In other words, Curry’s book arrives at a time when “prudential realism” might appear to have scored significant victories. There is a significant issue to examine: since his earliest publications, Skillen had been criticizing political realism (since Nos. 25, 26 and 27). His critique defined realism as that mentality dominant in the study of international politics which considers questions about principle to be quite outside the realm of empirical analysis of foreign policy. Realism is simply blind to its own ideals. The notion of “national self-interest” is simply flagged through without any further ado. And this is the underlying “assumption complex” that gives Skillen’s subsequent outline of the book (in 6 paragraphs and one crucial quote) it’s coherence.

208. Editor with Rockne McCarthy Political Order and the Plural Structure of Society No 2 in Emory University Studies in Law and Religion, edited by John Witte Jr Scholars Press

This is a reader on social pluralism. This project began more than a decade ago when Skillen and McCarthy confronted the need in both academic and political circles for a book like this. It began at Dordt College in the late 1970s when both were on the Dordt faculty and co-operated on “the project to develop a Reader to explore the contemporary significance of principled pluralism for our society and the contemporary world” (see Nos. 48, 51 and 62). This book aims to promote a social/ political/ perspective that is lacking in the circles of mainstream American pragmatism and individualism. Their joint editorial work is also to be found in the following written contributions to the book.


Chapter I The Weight of History - an introduction to the readings pp.31-40

Chapter VII The Recent Catholic Tradition - an introduction to the readings pp.137-142

Chapter XIII Progressive Calvinism - an introduction to the readings pp.229-233

Part Four - The Views of Social Pluralism: A Critical Evaluation

Chapter XIX History, the Unfolding of Human Society, and Human Fulfillment pp.357-76
Chapter XX  Subsidiarity, Natural Law, and the Common Good  pp.377-395
Chapter XXI  Sphere Sovereignty, Creation Order, and Public Justice  pp.397-417
Epilogue  pp.419-421

The introductions to the various sections of the reader work from and develop 1979-1981 essays published in Pro Rege, Dordt College’s faculty magazine. There are also brief introductions to each writer: Burke, Groen van Prinsterer, von Gierke, Figgis, Bonino, Pope Leo XIII, Pope Pius XI, Maritain, Bishops of 2nd Vatican Council, US Catholic Bishops. Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Runner, Zylstra, Goudzwaard. (The actual contribution of both editors is not delineated in the volume - clearly some passages can be ascribed to each from comparison with their respective contributions to Pro Rege.)

1992


This article for The Banner is written in a similar style to the piece for Moody Monthly (No. 178). At the conclusion of the 3 page feature article is a note from the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee itemizing the nine programs started for poor inner city people across the United States. The article is a piece of “practical sociology” explaining some of the statistics on child poverty. Skillen calls upon readers to look outside their walls and makes some practical suggestions about how Christians can work together to assist Prison Fellowship in its programs of “restorative justice”, or organizing local groups to assist needy people in providing services like child-care and transportation where none exist. Suggestions are given to make contact with local government and assist cities in delivering assistance. The article emphasizes the importance of “local politics.” Much of what our cities need depends on changes in state and federal laws, not simply on the actions of local governments. Nevertheless, the local government remains the chief coordinator for life in the urban public square. Local public laws need changes - some radical. Christian citizens need to take up their civic responsibilities with new vigor. And they need to do so in connection with their other institutional responsibilities, not in isolation from them. We cannot pretend to be alive and happy in our families and churches, satisfied merely with offering small ministries of mercy, while the cities in which we live or work are falling apart from structural rot.


A meditation on the challenge presented to Christians by the ongoing persistence of poverty at home and abroad. Despite the seeming end of communism, amidst widespread rejoicing, and at times western self-satisfaction, Skillen injects a realistic note. But our thanksgiving should be tempered by a hard look at reality - not only in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but also in the United States and the Third World. The poor are still with us. Western governments’ gradual bridling of capitalism over the past century has helped put a stop to grinding domestic poverty on a vast scale, but urban and rural poverty remains a hideous experience for millions of people. Two quotations explain the generosity that inspires Christian reform efforts. One is from Abraham Kuyper The Problem of Poverty (1891) (see No 206) and the other from John Paul II’s Centesimus Annus (1991). What we need is a richer, more global Christian social perspective.

211. “Perspective” (on the Presidential Election) ESA Advocate May pp.8-9

This two page article for Evangelicals for Social Action discusses political leadership. It concentrates upon Presidential Candidates George H W Bush (a man fit for presiding),
Bill Clinton (*He looks like a man who knows that a new Democratic agenda is needed. But like Bush, he does not appear to have a team ready to lead*), Pat Buchanan (*the soldier-patriot mouthing populist vigor … a near-Nazi*) and Jerry Brown (*he will likely prove to be a minor figure*). It was written before Ross Perot emerged as a serious candidate. The overall thrust of the article is that the US is at a point in its history where real leadership is needed. A mere “presiding” president will not be enough. Americans are looking for leaders qualified to practice statecraft - able to shape the nation into an up-to-date model of democracy... The times in which we live call for more than a presiding official. They call for one who can help us shape a new and better political order in a rapidly changing world. Thus, the article is Skillen's attempt, as a political scientist, to sketch the overwhelming desire of the American citizenry for leadership after the collapse of the Communist empire. The tone of the article is also positive. Skillen does not believe it is all hopeless. Real political leadership can be found even if it will not be an easy task. Such candidates need to have a grasp of the times in which they live, to have a comprehensive vision and program grounded in justice and be capable of team leadership.

212. “Mediating Structures: A Step in the Right Direction” *Stewardship Journal* Spring, pp.30-32

This is a brief and useful critique of the view of Berger and Neuhaus who, in critique of modern individualism, advocate a sociology that makes room for “mediating structures”. In Skillen’s terms they did this to counter the views of modern individualists [who] act as if the only authoritative human powers that exist are individuals and governments. The concept of mediating structures, according to Skillen, is an important step in the right direction. But first there are some problems which require systematic and critical theoretical analysis. “Mediation” implies two poles - the sovereign individual at one side and the sovereign government on the other. Not only does this uncritically retain a means-end frame of reference within social thought and analysis, it merely modifies the utilitarian framework - albeit in a more pluralist direction - rather than replacing it with a fully pluralist/pluriform vision of social reality. In effect, Skillen utilizes a three-fold distinction developed by Dooyeweerd to demonstrate that the “mediating structures” concept cannot adequately account for the social reality of institutions, organisations, associations and networks of complex, variegated relationships. The concept does not allow for a distinction between institutions and associations. A family is no mediating structure, at least not like a professional association which is set up to negotiate between those it represents and government.

213. “Creation Order, Compassion and a ‘New World Order’” *ICS 25th Anniversary Conference*, June 5

This conference became a moment of intense controversy for that stream in the North American “reformational movement” claiming to build upon the teaching of H Evan Runner of Calvin College. Two of his students, Hendrik Hart and Jim Olthuis, stirred intense and bitter controversy by “outing” themselves as advocates of gay rights. The manner in which they chose to make their views public still has reverberations 15 years later. And so this address - by an American, who like Runner also trod a path from Wheaton College to Westminster Seminary to the Free University of Amsterdam, and then back to the US - is significant now for what it can tell us about another perspective that was raised on that occasion.

The paper begins with a quote from President Vaclav Havel about the true significance of the fall of communism. *There are, indeed, good reasons to fear that the new era will produce more disorder than order, more injustice than justice.* Skillen is not indulging opportunistically in a millenarian viewpoint. To the contrary. *Politically speaking, it seems to me, very significant changes are required in our approach to*
statecraft, international relations, and transnational institution building. And then self-critically, with what might now be read as a critical statement aimed at the Hart/Olthuis disclosures, Skillen writes: A deeper and more enduring difficulty with the quest for a new world order is that most of us in the West do not yet appear to be ready to turn a critical eye on the flaws and contradictions in our humanistically closed approach to politics. The demonstration of Communism’s failure is taken as the proof that the old liberal world order view is still valid. Yes, says Skillen, the politics dominant in the West may have had more room for diverse forms of decision-making and differentiated responsibility. Haval notes that the soil of Western political action is now depleted, and the mainstream of modern, humanistic scientism has led to a dead end....


The first thing to notice in Skillen’s chapter is the complete absence of any discussion of the concept of “the common school” - this is not the author’s problem but it does suggest that the editing of the book proceeded in a somewhat ad hoc fashion. In this chapter there are, of course, strong indications of the historical and philosophical roots of the common school. But the overall point of the chapter is to examine the assumptions of liberalism and the leading assumptions guiding the current criticism of liberalism. Material from the Introduction to the published reader (No 208) is developed and edited in this chapter. The neo-Aristotelian and Thomist views of Alasdair MacIntyre are considered as well as the communitarianism of Michael Walzer.

The sections are: Christianity: A Way of Life - With respect to the state and its public laws in particular, I will argue that from a Christian point of view normative justice for a pluralistic-differentiated society is antithetical both to the liberal ideal of tolerance and to classical ideals of a hierarchical or undifferentiated society; The Crisis of Enlightened Liberalism - Liberalism is a project that has now faltered; A Short Detour Through Jeffrey Stout’s Stereoscopic View of Society

Stout’s criticisms of MacIntyre’s individualism emphasizes the elements of agreement which, for Stout, means that our social order as a whole is more rational and less fractured than MacIntyre fears. Stout’s “stereoscopic” view sees diversity and integration in a pragmatic social perspective. He doesn’t want to be a relativist, but his analysis doesn’t seem to provide a firm ground for the various social sectors he is keen to identify; The Differentiation of an Integral Creation Order - The political order should not be mistaken for a total hierarchical “whole” of which all other social spheres are “parts”. This leads to an explicit argument about what ought to be the structure of government policy for education; Toward a Christian Philosophy of Public Justice and Educational Equity - When parents are recognised as the proper principals in the education of their children, a substantial step has been taken toward treating all families with equitable respect. Government-run schools are not the sole legitimate agents of public education; Conclusion - Christians have much work to do in many places if obedience is to flourish and justice promoted. In the public-legal realm Christian political philosophy [should] clarify the demands of public-legal justice in a differentiating world, knowing that obedience in the political realm will meet happily and coherently with obedience in every other realm and will bear witness to God’s providential and redemptive purposes for his whole creation... Radical reform is needed, not just hope for liberal progress. The chapter implicitly shows the importance of structural and normative thinking. The fact that the term “common school” is not used, leaving it the focus of another chapter in the book, makes it clear that public justice is not about identifying one or other social form as the cause or focus for injustice. Nevertheless the absence of discussion about the “common school” and the political implications of its necessary reform, is surprising.

http://downloads.weblogger.com/gems/cpj/ParentalFreedom.pdf  (with footnotes deleted)

The essay summarises American education history with *A Brief Glance Backward* from Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann. But securing the right to private freedoms does not establish public justice. And so the chapter continues in terms of *Doing Justice to Education in a Complex Society*. Skillen argues that “doing justice” is not just the simple matter of pushing the public justice buttons. It is a complex social reality which needs all social relationships to be rightly and justly defined. The education process must be looked at in comprehensive terms. The next section of the chapter *Toward a System of Freedom with Justice in Education*. The discussion is about parental principalship in the light of the US Constitution and the decisions of the Supreme Court. In summary Skillen concludes: *Governments will always need to make laws to protect the public, and they may need to do many things in order to promote an educated citizenry. But all such actions should be based on prior foundations of justice that recognize the independence of families and schools. Government’s consequent actions to promote the public good should build on the recognition of the right of parents to choose schools for their children without any financial or legal discrimination.*


This is another of Skillen’s “academic” papers, written for a scholarly readership. As with his other writings in which the dominant tradition is evaluated from a Christian political perspective, this paper analyses the current problematic facing Europe and does so with a series of questions about how integration is going to be achieved. The guiding vision is spelled out in these terms: *it could probably best be described as a federally integrative, globally attentive composite of the best of the Christian democratic tradition freed from all past Roman imperial ingredients. Christianity holds that the universal rule of God through Jesus Christ is transcendent and global in character and cannot be created on earth in a parochial, European, holy Roman empire. Thus, Christian democratic federalists can humbly reject all past ideals of a European Imperium and concentrate on leading the way to a fully representative, federal political order that puts a united Europe more completely at the service of a justly differentiating and integrating world community.*


This is a report of the speech given at the “National Town Meeting” and 15th Anniversary Celebration, September 18 & 19. The speech has been available in video format and printed in roneo-ed style by the APJ for general distribution. This is an after dinner speech for the CPJ faithful. The video was of a “Town Meeting” (September 18 and 19, 1992) and the *Third Way* account draws from a “recent article” for its October 1992 edition. The roneo-ed form of the speech “It’s time for a second tea party - no more politics without representation” refers to “the most recent US election on November 3” in which Ross Perot became a significant third candidate. This follows rather closely the speech delivered at the town meeting. *We’ve had enough politics without representation. It’s time to renew democracy from the ground up - with proportional representation.*
The Kuyper Lecture - booklet. Center for Public Justice (also 1st draft)

This is a little booklet to explain the Kuyper lecture initiated by the Center for Public Justice. Since that time there has been quite a lot of American evangelical publishing of Kuyper's works and with reflections on his contribution. Earlier (No. 213), Skillen explicitly distanced himself from any attempt to establish Kuyper's thought as a "model" for his own theory. This theme is also present in this brochure: Kuyper is not the only significant Christian political leader to have appeared in the last two centuries. The brochure outlines the philosophy of the annual Kuyper lecture. The focus is upon comprehending the public order, at home and abroad, from a Christian point of view. The lectures aim to draw attention to: 1. religion as a driving force in historical development; 2. Christ, the light of the world whose call requires whole-hearted obedience in all of life lived within a single creation order - in what sense should the Christian hope of final redemption give realistic shape to worldly politics, which often appears to be controlled more by sin than by redemptive hope?; 3. An international Christian community which is also called to serve globally as much as locally since Christ Jesus is the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings.

1993


This is Skillen's contribution to a book based on the "Christianity and Democracy" conference held at Emory University in November 1991. He was not one of the featured speakers and this appears to be the fuller version of a speech he gave at the opening convocation to explain to those gathered the purpose of the conference. It is set forth in an historical context, framed with quotations provided by Jean Bethke Elshtain and John Hallowell about the historically important work of serving God politically.

It also draws on Herman Dooyeweerd's analysis of the inner tension in the humanistic ground-motive between the search for personal freedom and desire to maintain total control over the course of events. The time is ripe for fresh Christian democratic thinking, Skillen says. Often to be pro-nation means to be anti-government; some search for freedom from government control while others believe that the search for freedom must start with government initiative; there are individualist contractual views of the social order and there are traditionalist communitarians who want to restore hierarchy.

A Christian democratic approach to politics must reconcile these extremes not by trying to steer a middle course between them but by articulating a full picture of political order in a complex society. Human development is inextricably linked to historical development and Christians should affirm the good creation order by which God calls things into service. Echoing the late Bernard Zylstra, Skillen notes: God created the world for human historical development leading to an ever more complex society. In a Christian democratic view, Government has a task to identify all that pertains to political life. It's authority is limited to maintain public justice and the political order is a public trust of the commonwealth and should be administered with that in mind. A Christian democratic view must adopt a normative and structural viewpoint of the task of government so that when government actions leads the work in other structures it does so strictly in terms of its own normative responsibility.

Christian democratic politics is as much local as it is national, international and global. Confident of the creation's normative order, wary and realistic because of human sin, and thankfully hopeful because of God's redemptive work in history, Christians will take political life seriously as a public trust, a truly common wealth, while at the same time refraining from the absolutization of politics as means to inhuman ends.
(see No. 202).

221. Editor, and author of “Introduction” (pp.7-12) and Chapter 4 “Educational Freedom with Justice” (pp.67-85) and “Conclusion” (pp.87-96) The School-Choice Controversy: What is Constitutional? Baker
This is a book that seeks to contribute politically to the “school choice” controversy that was alive because of Supreme Court rulings and ongoing efforts to overcome the structural injustice that is perpetrated to non-government schools within the American polity. Skillen’s Introduction provides the history of the November 1991 conference in Tacoma, Washington, jointly sponsored by the University of Puget Sound Law School and the Washington Federation of Independent Schools. Skillen’s contribution (pp.67-85) is essentially the argument presented previously (see Nos 215, and also 196 and 214). The Conclusion is written with Supreme Court judgments pending. Everywhere the issues are the same: how to improve learning for all children, especially for those who are poor and have little or no choice about the highly inadequate schools many of them now attend. The chapter continues with an examination of the Zobrest and Lamb’s Chapel cases against the background of the late nineteenth century “Blaine amendment” which can be found in many state constitutions [and which] prohibits government aid to all “sectarian” activities including religious schools. A voucher system would redress much of the current injustice. Not until religious freedom is fully respected in the education of all children will the school-choice controversy find a fair and equitable resolution.

222. “Is Character Education a Responsibility of the Public Schools?”
Momentum (Official Journal of the National Catholic Educational Association) November/December pp.49 ff.
According to ERIC (Education Resources Information Center <http://eric.ed.gov>) this article is the “No” case in a two-part consideration of “Character Education” written by Skillen (The “yes” case was by Thomas Lickona). It “provides a point/counterpoint investigation into appropriateness of character education as a function of public schools. Lickona describes the implementation and success of various character education curricula across the country, while Skillen suggests that public schools may not be sufficiently pluralistic in their approach to support such education, thereby alienating some of their constituents.”

Developing an argument in the context of Roman Catholic educational reflection about the responsibilities of public schools, Skillen builds his case by illustrating how schools are prevented from adequately dealing with “character education” because government is intent upon policies that enforce artificial uniformities upon schools and children which in fact is a subversion of the parental authority in the raising of children. My point is this: Americans not only lack agreement about the values children should learn, but also disagree about the institutional arrangements for inculcating those values. Under these conditions, therefore, it seems to me that my answer to the original question must be a firm “no”. Education by its very nature requires character training and the teaching of moral values, but public schools as currently structured are incapable of doing that task.

At times the “wholesale reform package” that Skillen is advocating in his political advocacy can be overlooked IF it is interpreted solely in terms of an abstract and isolated political system. Unfortunately, that kind of abstract turning away from the multiple responsibilities that citizens have, apart from their civic responsibilities, is
promoted by the kind of non-pluralist, majoritarian policies that are promoted throughout American society.

223. “The New World Chaos: Should We Take Charge?” The Banner Dec 6, pp.12-14

This article is another in Skillen’s effort to promote political education within his denomination, many members of which support the work of CPJ. It also serves as a statement informing the membership of the ongoing work. The prevailing assumption behind the article, is the contra-nationalist viewpoint that he had been developing since his “America First” articles for NACPA in 1973-4 (see No.11). It’s a brief overview of American and Canadian involvement in the international response to various crises, pointing out that it is important for all nations to realise that they have international responsibilities - it’s OK to help, he writes, seeming to imply that many may assume that since the old order of communism is now dead, then the peoples of the world can simply get on with their business without dealing with the uncertainty, confusion and disorder that had its source in the Soviet Union. Skillen reminds his CRCNA readers that two principles are clear: No country may intervene at will in other countries; all governments share responsibility for international law and order. He does not under-estimate the difficulties - Bosnia and Somalia are cited as two examples where help is needed but the structure of helping is not always clear cut. The article is a low-key reminder of complex international relations that cannot be avoided. The US and Canada as rich countries are not the world’s police force. However both countries (CRCNA is a denomination that cross the border) do share responsibility with other countries to establish and uphold international justice. God’s transcendent authority not only calls for such involvement, but makes such involvement possible.

224. “Public Moral and Religious Argument in a Complex Social Order” paper for “The Melting Pot and Religious Neutrality; the Current Crisis in the Public Legal Order” session, Social Science History Association, November 4-7 Baltimore Maryland

This is an academic paper directed at the latest contributions by the Bellah group in The Good Society, about the latest twist in the seeming crisis-ridden history of liberal social perspective. Alan Wolfe had made the observation, “No longer is a liberal theory of the state linked to a conservative theory of society ...” In this context, where the Welfare State is seemingly continually under threat, Skillen notes the inability of the American polity to sustain anything but undifferentiated moral argument. The Good Society, for example, seeks to overcome individualism with a notion of the “common good”, but they return again and again to a largely undifferentiated idea of democratic participation throughout society to make possible “justice in the broadest sense” - the good of the whole. An appeal to democratic values for social participation does not actually constitute an advance if there is no recognition of the structural and normative contexts in which such participation is to overcome individualistic fragmentation. Undifferentiated moral argument seems to be utilized on all sides of the debate about homosexual rights. At this point in time homosexual political activism was calling for the breaking down of every barrier in society that stands in the way of homosexual practice, which simply means that a demand is being made that homosexual morality should prevail in public life. Those opposed want homosexuality banned altogether. The missing link in both arguments is the intermediate distinction (differentiation) of the public, civil domain, on the one hand, from institutions and communities such as families, churches, schools, and friendships on the other. The political argument that Skillen puts forward is one about social space for all citizens to entertain and practise certain moral beliefs and codes.
1994


This document is a significant milestone. It represents an advance in CPJ’s efforts which, from the outset, sought to foster a growing sense of Christian communal consensus about politics, rather than ambiguous confusion (No 31). It may also be read to indicate new aspects, or a new phase, in Skillen’s own theoretical development. The need for an accurate understanding indicates an emergent theme in Skillen’s writing about the task of Government to accurately define the persons, structures and things in terms of which its own calling to establish and maintain public justice is to be fulfilled.


Here Skillen assumes that his readers are, like himself, prone to activism. The first sentence notes that the exercise is a self-critical one. Activism is a built-in aspect of the American national psyché. Nothing about this topic, it seems, to me, can be taken for granted or assumed to be normatively self-evident. He argues that activism in the American polity will itself be reformed if authentic Christian political thinking and responsibility can emerge with clearly thought-out policies for political reform. An alternative Christian activism to the undifferentiated moralism will not emerge if its concern are limited to one-at-a-time causes. Life is religion, says Skillen. Perhaps proper activism at this moment in American history is to work for the radical reform of the current system in which traditional activism occurs. He then outlines his alternative: So, my thesis is very simple, but its implications require careful judgment arrived at day after day by a community of people who share a sense of historical responsibility and are willing to allow biblical revelation to illumine the entire political path along which they walk as they seek to answer God’s call. In the biblical, covenantal framework our political responsibilities are part of us as God’s image bearers. Skillen admits his position is a minority one - there is scriptural basis for a mode of political action that goes beyond protest and pragmatism, beyond mere interest-group accommodation and moralistic activism. Explaining that such a view should be comprehensive with a differentiated focus, Skillen proceeds to outline how his view would promote electoral reform. This is a development of No. 47 1979 and later statements are found in Chapter 10 “Public Discourse and Electoral Representation” in Recharging the American Experiment (1994) No. 230 and Chapter 8 “Citizenship and Electoral Reform” in In Pursuit of Justice (2004) No 326. A significant change to PR in American national politics would represent from a christian standpoint, both a principled political reform for all citizens and a means through which a more responsible, biblically thorough mode of political action could become possible.


This is an extensive review. Carter wants Americans to get back on track by unbanning religion in a way that will also save America’s liberal democracy. Skillen’s analysis of Carter’s “boldness” has a boldness of its own. By drawing attention to Carter’s wish to “save liberal democracy”, Skillen discerns Carter’s goal and in that sense is able to identify the ambiguities in his position; a tension between radical and critical analysis on the one hand and cautious policy suggestions that retreat from any
228. “Civic Responsibility for Christians” New Horizons October pp.3-4

Again this is a piece, this time for an Orthodox Presbyterian Church readership, about the integral connection between Christian discipleship and civic responsibility. Politics is not just Skillen’s “thing” as if it is something like a full-time hobby. To defend himself and his work against this kind of view he develops an exposition of John 15 (the vine and the branches - it is about life as a whole, about practicing love for one another as an expression of God’s love for us) and Hebrews 10:19-25 (The great need Christians have is for mutual encouragement so they can learn together how to pursue love and good deeds.). This is a call for heavy-duty fruit bearing. The Christian life is an all-or-nothing life. Christ is Lord of all. Politics and government are an important part of that “all”. Therefore, we should move on to the meat of God’s Word and learn how to serve him and our neighbours maturely in politics and government as well as in every other area of life.


This is an abridged version of No. 153, which was an expansion, and publication of an earlier paper written for “A New Agenda for Evangelical Thought” conference sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Christian Studies and the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicalism held at Wheaton College June 2-6,1987.

The essay deletes the first few pages of the Philosophia Reformata article (No. 153) which was a theoretical introduction that had the hallmarks of an argument formed within an academic context about the proper location of political science in relation to the other sciences in the college curriculum. 1. What is the political? Political science is a multifunctional entity science, not a mono-functional or modal science and it stands in need of a definition of the state; 2. What constitutes a science of politics? This question raises three levels of scientific abstraction: i) how is such abstraction to be performed? How can the State and interstate relations be abstracted from all other things in the world?; ii) How can the multiple functions of political order be isolated and abstracted? 3. The third level of abstraction is about distinguishing the “acting subjects, the objects, and the defining norms (or response-demanding standards) of political life.”

The chapter calls for scholarly team-work that is both professional and international to advance a political work that honours Jesus Christ.

230. Recharging the American Experiment: Principled Pluralism for Genuine Civic Community Baker

In what respects is America experiencing a political crisis of moral/legal proportions? This is Skillen’s articulation of a “principled pluralist” answer to that question, his contribution to the debate that had been gathering momentum over a decade by, among others, Stephen Carter (no 227), Richard John Neuhaus and Peter Berger (No 212 and 194), Robert Bellah et al (No 224), Alasdair MacIntyre (No 214), and Robert Booth Fowler (No 188). The book is in three parts: Part I: Politics, Morality and Religion which describes in historical terms the cacophony and the alleged crisis as well as the persistent emergence of what Skillen calls “undifferentiated public-moral discourse”; Part II: Rights, Responsibilities and Jurisdictions which is a case for a just public-legal order that is built on the recognition of structural and confessional pluralism; Part III Reforming the American Polity looks at some of the concrete
political and legal consequences of “principled pluralism”, in terms of morality, religious freedom, schooling and electoral reform.


One might conclude that in giving his critique of the Oxford Declaration on Christian Faith and Economics, that Skillen has left none of its clauses standing. But this might give the impression that he is simply dismissive of this attempt at formulating a Christian approach to economics for the post-cold-war era. Overall his article is the result of looking critically at each of the Declaration’s sections and by pointing to some of the key paragraphs, and highlighting ambiguities and assumptions that require “much more work to be done.” One cannot help concluding that Skillen had, by this time, become critical of an evangelical fashion, which tended to equate “action” with the formulation of unifying declarations. Such declarations need not hide the underlying theoretical differences of its signatories, but this one does, leaving the impression that the declaration is caught falling between its confessional and analytical / scientific aspirations. Skillen emphasizes the fact that, since Christian unity is not based in theoretical insight, it is not necessary to try to overcome the differences in economic theory that mean that the signatories tend to adopt different theoretical and philosophical standpoints. Skillen does not deny the good work that has been achieved in the efforts allied to this declaration. While I am criticizing these somewhat superficial appeals for good to be done, I should point out that the conferees who signed this declaration also spent considerable time developing a separate document that is more detailed in its attention to “credit-based income generation programs.” I will not comment on that document here, but perhaps in its greater detail the reader will find ideas, principles, and a framework of argument that is illustrative of how one might deal with these other issues that the group touched on so lightly.


As with No 231 and 290, Skillen is the final contributor to this volume, providing a critical conclusion and overview of the exchange between the various participants who had been brought together by the Calvin College sponsored Conference on Christianity and Politics. The conclusion begins in this vein: The preceding chapters succeed in demonstrating once again the complexity of America’s struggle to legalize religion. At the surface of the dominant public ideology, everything seems simple and uncontentious: church and state have been separated throughout the United States; thus, the free practice of diverse faiths flourishes apart from governmental interference while politics and the processes of making law unfold as nonreligious practices, free of ecclesiastical bondage and unhindered by religious warfare. But that is not the reality. At least, the reality of the above description of America’s “religion puzzle” is that most Americans are educated to view the above ideal state of affairs as desirable. The word religion is actually used most often in public discourse not to say anything about the nature of different religions but to debate the legal place of diverse religious practices. In other words, the public debate over religion is, for the most part, a debate about how the political order should recognize - and either approve or disapprove - various practices of different religions. Skillen explains that this needs to be said because some of the book’s essayists assume that religion is a clearly recognizable subject. But it is not. Because Americans practice different religions in different ways the assumption that there is an isolable generality called religion will not work. The complexity and diversity of religious life will not yield to the
unilateral imposition of a simple schema that divides life between religious and non-religious spheres. Skillen expects that he will have to defend his position in the context of civic debate. I will have to explain in some detail why I believe that people living under such a constitution ought to have the civil right of practicing their religions not only in churches but in the ways they organize their families, educate their children, conduct their businesses, and so forth. All of this, I will want to show, can be done with the full and equitable support of government as long as government is fair and evenhanded in its treatment of all citizens. With Madison, Skillen says that “the right to practice one’s religion in accordance with conscience” is so fundamental that civil rules lack authority “to interfere with it unless the state’s survival” is clearly at stake. So what happens when a particular religion is associated with religious movements that make it their aim to overthrow the state? Skillen concedes that his view conflicts with other views and that the setting forth of any view must anticipate the debate into which it is entering.

This article for the Evangelical for Social Action magazine attempts to lift discussion of Government out of a means-to-ends framework. In the process both politics and Government is often demeaned. What happened in the American polity, explains Skillen, is that the God-given calling of the political community to do justice publicly, has been ignored because of a view that sees leads to “politics for the sake of politics.” This is an unraveling of a popular (if not populist) aphorism that simply closes down debate with “that’s politics!” It is also an examination of the dogma that politics is autonomous or, in secularist-humanistic terms, “sovereign in its own autonomous sphere”. Skillen’s alternative involves: 1. getting the big picture clear - government as a complex art must deal with more than a isolated and unrelated issues. To the contrary no issue is ever isolated or unrelated to other issues; 2. distinguishing any appeal for public justice from government perpetrated injustice; 3. changing the accepted rules for political rhetoric by respecting contributions of all citizens; 4. promoting differentiated moral discourse in a variety of public discourses; 5. searching for ways to change the basis of political life.

234. “When Citizens Can’t Agree” Christian Legal Society Quarterly Winter p.18
The differences between citizens are both superficial and fundamental and hard intellectual work is needed to distinguish them. Radical disagreement at the foundations cannot be papered over by handshakes and smiles. Radical disagreement at the foundations cannot be papered over by handshakes and smiles. Christians need to learn how to retrain themselves in public debate and by immersing themselves in the arguments of non-Christians they will learn why. This is especially the case with their response to “deconstructive relativists”. Their error, from a Christian point of view, is that they seem to believe that everything is relative. But the moment of truth in their argument is that their own position must therefore be relative. Skillen asks rhetorically: How can such relativism be effectively relativised?

1995

235. “Civic Responsibility for Christians” (reprinted) Ministry Exchange (staff newsletter of the Coalition for Christian Outreach, Pittsburgh. April. (see No 228)
236. “Het aanhoudend verval van de Amerikaanse politiek” Beweging March pp.15-17

This translates into Dutch the major part of No 233 by W Zeldenrust and B S Cusveller.

237. “Defining a Healthy Community: Deep Roots” Community News and Views Spring 8:1 Summer, newsletter of the Urban Affairs Program, Michigan State University p.1

This edition of Community News has “Faith-Based Community and Economic Development” at its theme. Skillen’s piece is the first in the 6 page newsletter. The basic orientation is stated: We need not go through a long theological argument in order to reach the conclusion that those who hold deep religious convictions about life will interpret all kinds of human responsibility (economic, social, political, familial) as dimensions of their responsibility to God. And if they do, then it is a serious injustice for someone else to try to drive a wedge between the religious and the so-called “secular” aspects of peoples’ lives. This is not to say that one may not distinguish among different institutions and relationships such as family, school, business, government, church and voluntary association. But it is to say that people ought not suffer discrimination and even mockery when they try to live coherent, integral lives by tapping into their deepest roots. 10 principles have been formulated by various organisations in welfare, overseas aid and policy research in Washington. They are a reminder giving expression to an ideology that assumes that neither government nor market forces can solve all the social problems that exist. Human relationships and communities must themselves be recognized, respected, strengthened and restored, and that means giving far more attention to what people believe most deeply about in defining the meaning of their lives. Background to this article can be found in “Debate over religion and politics intensifies” in Public Justice Report March/April 1995 p.3 (see No. 242).


Excerpted and revised version of Nos. 64/80. This is an excerpt from Skillen’s contribution to an August 1981 conference convened to consider the challenge of Marxism. The excerpt begins with a consideration of the views of Ernst Bloch and in particular Bloch’s view of the biblical account of 6 days of creation in relation to the Christian teaching of redemption. Bloch challenges Christianity “straight up”. Skillen lists the crucial questions that can be derived from his analysis of this “religious fantasy”.

Skillen’s aim is to identify why the Marxist critique of Christianity can be so powerful - What Marx saw when he described religion functioning as an opiate was very close to reality. What Bloch was observing in the world when he misread the Scriptures concerning creation, paradise, and apocalypse were highly dualistic forms of religion. I, for one, am willing to conclude that the Marxist challenge cannot be met by any form of accommodationist Christianity which fails to take this world seriously or fails to take Biblical revelation seriously.

What follows, as counterpoint to the Marxist vision, is Skillen’s discussion of the sabbatical structure of creation. He refers en passant to Bonino and develops a discussion of the nature of human freedom. Marx was correct in relinquishing the Hegelian and liberal ideas of the “rational state”, but he should have done so by way of reconsidering the Biblical view of justice.

Republished below as No. 277. This is also Skillen’s assessment of the ongoing work of the Center for Public Justice, a stirring speech aimed to convey something of the all-encompassing biblical vision that has inspired his work. It is an attempt to pull out and call attention to a thread running through the work he has been involved in over the decades. It is an exposition of why he has been busy politically. Our life in this world is connected to life in the age to come because of Christ’s meritorious work. He sees us through to eternal life in a work that is still underway. It is the process of leavening the whole lump, bringing all of creation into its God-intended covenantal relationship. Life in this age and in the age to come is tied together in (is constituted by) a single creation order - the seven days created to reveal God’s glory in the fullness of Sabbath shalom. Thus this article is a further articulation of the view initially set forth in “Politics and Eschatology” (No 36).

240. “Prophecy as Political Tool” (review of Jim Wallis The Soul of Politics Orbis) Cross Currents Summer pp.249-253

This is an important review because it identifies a strong secularising trend in the writings of Jim Wallis. Skillen was surprised to discover that the book was something other than he had anticipated. He expected to read a further development of a perspective in which Wallis identified a prophetic Christian stand over against those dominant powers and idols of the age that are leading the masses along the broad way to destruction. Instead he found a great deal about an undifferentiated, immanent, political community … The book breathes the air of civil-religious disappointment out of which the author searches for a new community of moral/spiritual/political inclusiveness. The “we” that Wallis appeals to becomes the key focus of the book. There is an “already” and a “not yet” to God’s Kingdom that requires our recognition of the difference between this age and the coming age. But in The Soul of Politics there is no such distinction. Skillen presents a biblically-oriented view of social inclusion and by way of contrast says that Wallis’ unqualified communal inclusivism in this book does not qualify as a specifically Christian tract. Moreover, those who are not appropriately inclusivistic are the “others” who, ironically, are singled out for denunciation. The question, of course, is how to select the criteria by which to distinguish the universally valid core values which the undifferentiated, all-inclusive “we” can draw out of all traditions, from the mistaken, unworthy, old assumptions, status quo, and ideologies that are still held by those who are wrong, behind the times, and, well, deserving of exclusion. Wallis seems to avoid any appeal to scriptural authority. Lacking are strong arguments to clarify the criteria he uses and to demonstrate the truth of his convictions. The book is a sermon to a church whose one criterion for membership is that its communicants share the desire for a new soul for the undifferentiated political community they all long for. Skillen says that it is a book that views prophecy, or prophetic spirituality, as a political tool. That seems to suggest that Wallis has accommodated an operationalist world-view to his Christian profession with the result that aspects of the Christian world-view that no longer “fit” the inclusivistic demand simply fall from view.


This is a point-by-point analysis of the Christian Coalition’s “Contract with the Family”. The contract proposes a hodgepodge of privatization, tax reform, inconsistent federal
experimentation and symbolic moralism. As short-term political rhetoric it may be effective, but as an agenda for comprehensive legislation and long-term political reform, it is inadequate. The article considers the “Contract” point by point. The contract suffers from its attempt to weld Christian sentiment to majoritarian winner-take-all electoral morality. Skillen asks, [w]hat if there is not a single morally unambiguous American tradition?

If, instead, the reality is that citizens are significantly diverse religiously, ethnically, and especially politically, then perhaps our political system - particularly the electoral system - needs to be changed in order to do justice to that reality. Isn’t it time to let go of the myth of a single-willed moral-majoritarian polity that can be represented by only one winner? We need a better way to conduct political debate, elections and lobbying so that all citizens - minorities as well as majorities - can be represented in accord with their actual diversity. The coalition’s contract confirms that a winner-take-all competition for political power has reached a dead end. Christian should now be working to clarify the principles of a more constructive approach to politics in our pluralistic society.

The Center also distributed an 8-page critique “Civil Religion or Christian Principle?”

242. “Counterpoint: Why I Didn’t Sign the Cry” Prism July/August p.2
(see Nos 253, 241 and 240)

The “Cry for Renewal” was a 23 May statement signed by many leading evangelicals and other main-line Christians in reaction to the Christian Coalition’s “Contract with the Family” which was released on May 17. What is needed is political analysis and a political response. That is what Skillen attempted in his article for The Christian Century (No. 241). The problem is that to sign such a statement puts the signer into a position of reaction rather than constructively contributing to a discussion about the Contract’s assumptions, and it also had a potential to move attention away from the necessary discussion about welfare reform that was then taking place among many Christians. It is a reactionary document, motivated by opposition to the Religious Right. The Religious Right has shown they can organize. The signers of “Cry” haven’t. Instead of getting together through churches and organizations, calling meetings and spending the long hours that it takes to speak with people at the grassroots, they wanted to produce a document for the press so that people would listen to them. In the end the document reflects a sense of political weakness. The document while seeking its own power condemns the search for power. This is not the basis for a political response to the Christian Coalition. Again, the word “we” is the focus and in conclusion Skillen says, I don’t know what that “we” is, and therefore I don’t know how to do what the document wants me to do.

See Public Justice Report March/April “Debate Over Religion and Politics Intensifies”.

243. “My Gun, Myself” The Banner November 13, pp.17-18

A related article “Christians, Guns and the law” was published in PJR 18:5 Sept/Oct. The peculiar language of the US Constitution’s Second Amendment reads: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Interpretations vary, but I agree with those who say that the primary aim of this amendment is to insure that the States can maintain their own militias and police forces. The purpose is not to guarantee individual ownership of any and all weapons or to protect the personal police powers of each citizen... A balanced, moderate, Christian approach to our polarized American situation begins with the recognition that God has ordained government and not merely individual rights. The problem concerns the deep-seated libertarian view by which many have defined justice in terms of their own lives being protected from government and thus there is deep ambiguity with respect to giving
the appropriate respect that is owed to institutional authority.

1996


The one page synopsis of the paper “The Question of Being Human” presented at the Public Justice and Welfare Reform national conference, May 19-20, 1994, is a summary of the material in this chapter. This also represents an important development in the way in which Skillen presents “principled pluralism” as can be seen from the later version of this paper in In Pursuit of Justice one decade later (No 326). Another version “Civil Society and Human Development”, that first appeared in 2002 (No 313), precedes the later version in that 2004 publication. The synopsis begins with a sentence that could have been part of Skillen’s first published paper in 1967 on Karl Jaspers. Basic assumptions about the meaning of life and human nature orient people toward ultimate aims and provides the grounds for their standards of judgment. This is why the crisis in welfare policy is about the nature of human responsibility, and in particular about the relationship between personal responsibility and government’s responsibility. At the 1994 conference, when the opening night’s lectures were given and questions were invited, the first response was a complaint about the conference’s willingness to use the term “responsibility”, which to the questioner implied a desire to affix blame. The synopsis identifies the internal contradiction in common understandings of welfare recipients.

... most individuals should be treated by government as free and independent while, on the other hand, poor individuals should be treated as dependent on government because they are not responsible for their predicament. This public ambiguity in language has to do with the undifferentiated moral frame of reference by which most citizens in the US evaluate public life. ... American citizens do not generally hold a clear idea of the diverse kinds of responsibility people bear in a differentiated society. Governments sometimes form policies with the aim of helping children but ignore their parents, and sometimes Governments treat adults as if they are children. A clear understanding of human responsibility in a differentiated society is needed recognizing the distinct types of responsibility that belong to human beings at different stages of development and in different kinds of relationships... This then leads on to two important policy principles. The first is that no differentiated institution in society, outside the family, should be allowed to displace parental responsibility for child rearing. The second is that public policies should not treat adults as dependents in a way that would allow the state or some other institution to hold boundless authority over them. Human identity comes from being created in the image of God and this means that people are neither individually self-sufficient nor autonomously self-governing. They are creatures responsible for one another in a diversity of relationships and institutions. Government’s task in a differentiated society should be to uphold public justice, to reinforce the accountability structures in which people hold a variety of different obligations. Governments should do everything possible to encourage and strengthen families for the care of truly dependent children, and likewise governments should refrain from treating adults as if they are children who may be legitimately dependent on government. Much of the discussion concerns the way the family, particularly of the newborn, functions as an undifferentiated community of love within the larger context of a society with differentiated authority. Government policy needs to be able to accurately define healthy development and maturation as an important part of its administration of public justice.
245. “From Covenant of Grace to Equitable Public Pluralism: The Dutch Calvinist Contribution” Calvin Theological Journal 31 pp.67-96

This 30 page summary of Skillen’s doctoral dissertation (No 12) had been anticipated in the footnotes of various publications. See note in the short-lived Kuyper Newsletter (No 55). As stated in that annotation, Skillen had been involved in the Temple University Center for the Study of Federalism “Workshop on Covenant and Politics” presenting a paper: “From Covenant of Grace to Tolerant Public Pluralism: the Dutch Calvinist contribution.” That note says that the main purpose of the paper was to show that although the disestablishment of churches in modern states has been accomplished chiefly through a secularization process that has rejected biblical, covenantal thinking, that process has not been universal. This thesis was developed in the article written with Stanley Carlson-Thies for Publius that Center’s journal (No 73). Skillen explains the 19th century Dutch Calvinist background for “principled pluralism” with its biblically based view of tolerance, including Kuyper’s “unconditional disapproval” of the burning of Servetus. The state is called to fulfill its covenantal obligations before God and this does not require church control of confessional uniformity throughout the realm; this insight however was not gained automatically with what Herman Dooyeweerd identifies as the initial formulation of “sphere sovereignty” by Johannes Althusius. Max Weber suggested that Kuyper had in some basic sense accommodated Calvinism to this secularisation process. But Kuyper had begun to articulate a concept of tolerant public pluralism which did not require any departure from the covenant of grace. No, says Skillen, this was in fact a formulation of the state’s role which was a consequence of his commitment to that same covenantal approach to life in its totality. This Workshop led to the publication of the four-volume work of Daniel Elazar The Covenant Tradition in Politics. Skillen’s related articles are No. 291 “Covenant, Federalism and Social Justice” and No. 297 “Can There be Just Politics Without Covenantalism?”. It has already been noted that this paper is referred to in footnote 71 of the paper listed as No. 60, “Christian Faith and Political Freedom ...” from a 1981 CLS Conference. There it is said to be a “soon to be published” paper from the Temple University’s Center. It’s title then was “From Covenant of Grace to Tolerant Public Pluralism: the Dutch Calvinist Contribution.” This title is noted as a contribution to then forthcoming volume from Carolina Academic Press, 1985 edited by John Kincaid and Daniel J Elazar (eds) The Covenant Connection: Federal Theology and the Origins of Modern Politics. So, in 1996 the Calvin Theological Journal publishes Skillen’s article with a most interesting and suggestive amendment in the title ie replacing “tolerant” with “equitable”. In many respects this is a summarizing update of the doctoral dissertation (No. 12). The amendment to the title shows a shift from “tolerant” as a descriptive term to designate and thereby justify a particular (reformational) understanding of a differentiated social order in an academic context, to a public policy emphasis which argues from a normative structural standpoint - “equitable” assumes a normative requirement qualifying the process of societal differentiation - in Skillen’s Doctoral dissertation he discussed Calvin’s use of the term “equity” (p.189) in terms of the God-given goal for (our formation of) positive laws, natural law and the moral law.


While the book is thorough and clearly written, Flower’s commitment to a narrow definition of religion keeps him from critical reflection on his own and the Court’s problematic assumptions about religion. To argue at one and the same time, as the author does, that religion should be kept separate from civil authority and that religious freedom should be unfettered, leads to a dilemma he cannot resolve: What about unfettered religious freedom in public as well as in private life? Skillen observes, once more, that freedom of religion is restricted by the Court’s presuming to be capable of defining ahead of time that secular (ie non-religious) education is the
only education worthy of public support. Flower’s merely assumes that religion is something separable from secular life, and thus advocates legal favor to agree with his general view of religion as necessarily privatized applied to their religious commitment. What he does not recognize is that government’s pretense to secular neutrality itself forces every one to dance to the tune of a single, publicly imposed definition of religion - a privatizing definition that actually establishes the sacred-secular duality as public truth. Skillen reiterates his view that government expenditures flowing to a variety of general causes to a variety of providers, regardless of their religious commitment, will not establish all religions, but is the only way of not fettering religious commitment as required by the First Amendment. The book is unconvincing on the proper relation of religion to civil authority although it is competent in dealing with “church” and “state” issues. Government has no mandate to redefine religion to privilege the “strict separationist” view at the expense of all other definitions. This view now needs disestablishment.


Sometimes, particularly when he is considering the part played by the Old Testament, the prophets and the wisdom literature, Skillen’s writings take on the form of prophetic analysis and a “kerygmatic” exposition of a Christian vision for political life in all of its dimensions. In this piece such a style predominates. It is introduced with a review of contemporary global culture, tossed to and fro between the twin idols of science and human personality, from the standpoint of what the Bible testifies concerning God’s love for the world. Skillen turns to Abraham Joshua Heschel. It is from Heschel that Skillen takes his cue: prophecy, critique, action. In reading the prophets on their own terms, Heschel gradually came to see that prophecy is the “exegesis of existence from a divine perspective.” In his study of modern philosophy, Heschel had been confronted with an either/or. Which prophets would he accept as authoritative? Is it going to be Gadamer whose hermeneutics cannot avoid tradition; or will it be Habermas who still believes in the possibilities of historical liberation if criticism of social justice follows an interest and faith in freedom?

The essay is then organised in three distinct sections: II Prophecy taking its orientation from Heschel’s re-reading of the prophets; III Critique, which outlines the biblical view of history fulfilled by God’s redemptive acts, as Heschel is contrasted with Max Horkheimer. The section concludes with a few sentences which re-affirms Skillen’s articulation of a Christian world-view that has stepped outside of means-end realism. IV Action In this section the views of Jacques Ellul are compared with Horkheimer’s recognition of contemporary idolatry, most evident in Zionism and the different forms of nationalism and power politics running their domineering course all over the world. In two final pages Skillen outlines his rationale for responsible action, living as those who belong to this world, as stewards of the earth, as servants of our neighbors in God’s destined creation. Inspired by biblical prophecy, motivated to engage in hopefilled critique in every area of existence, Christians anticipate the fulfillment of their works in the final completion of God’s prophetic revelation of Jesus Christ. They live not as those locked into some historical fate, but as those who believe that the power of Christ who is risen holds their life together while the same assures them prophetically of His coming again.


The article comes in a section “Politics ’96: Critical Issues”, and takes its cue from Haynes Johnson and David Broder The System, Skillen explains why political responsibility requires candidates (Clinton and Dole) to face the problems endemic within the political system. The crisis of the system is attributable to several factors: parties cannot discipline individual members to reach party agreement on issues;
proposals put forward in Congress frequently aim to establish political advantage for the next election; and interest groups can sometimes keep bills from passage or drive politicians of both parties to back away from certain issues altogether (as both parties have done on Social Security reform). So why should citizens work to develop new policy alternatives if the political system can no longer process them and move toward meaningful conclusions? Skillen focuses his discouragement on the emergence of a global economy. What I’m looking for, however, are ways to recover real, genuinely representative and vigorously disciplined government, and this means looking for ways to change the system. His plea to the candidates is to add proposals for the reform of the political system to their campaign promises. These would involve a commission to report on the state of electoral and governing systems, on leadership in his party to bring greater discipline to the legislature, to work with Congress. Should laws not be enacted then the candidate should promise to put a proposal for system reform at the top of the party’s campaign next time.


A round-table discussion highlighting various evangelical approaches across the political spectrum. Skillen, as chair, asks: How do we get people to see that we’re in this together? And in part the question is, apart from what the government can and can’t do, how can we get those who are able to help not to think paternalistically - not to do something top-down? Further, if the government has to cut back, what implications has this for churches, families and economic enterprises? Later Skillen’s interceptions, are to steer questions away from contentious theories (about macro-economic viewpoints) to consideration of what is it we can do and to what extent do government changes help that to happen. Skillen notes government’s role to oversee public policy but even if the group is convinced that fundamentally it’s individuals, families, and friends that are going to make the crucial difference for the culture they still have to clarify government’s specific role. There had been purpose in Skillen’s encouragement of the group to discuss what can be done “on the ground” - to get some sense of the full social character of inner urban life in the midst of the crises that surround it, so that the role of government can then be put into context by the “doing of justice.” The discussion is frustrating because of an inability on the part of participants to think structurally when it comes to political concerns.

250. “Why Do Parties in Conflict Become Partners in Dialogue?” The Diplomat (London) 1:2 June pp.6-7

see No 234. The Diplomat is a quarterly political and philosophical magazine, published bilingually in both English and Arabic. It specializes in issues concerning dialogue between different cultures and civilizations. Its Editor-in-Chief is Mohamed Elhachmi Hamdi and it is published by Al-Mustakillah Publishing House, London. The article itemizes the strange curiosities of history... the shift from conflict to dialogue that has occurred within certain traditions over extended periods of time. One could say that this is a reflection based on a study of “long term history”. One hundred and fifty years ago, it would have been very difficult to convince American protestants that Catholics could be their close political allies. Anti-catholicism was an extremely strong tendency among Protestants, as was anti-Semitism a little later, and as is anti-Arabism today. But if we go back to the times of the great conflict that produced the dominant culture of the United States before World War II, we discover that the conflictual parties were Protestants versus Catholics, and before then Protestants versus other Protestants. And going back from there we can’t help but notice that it was the Protestant reformation in Europe - representing the great internal conflict within Western Christendom - that produced much of what is now recognised as the
scientific, technological, industrial and post-industrial forces of modernity. And before that, of course, we come to the rise of Islam, the East-West schism of Christianity, and the Christian break-away from Judaism. Could it be that it is the power of secularist ideology that keeps Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Muslims in dialogue with each other? Skillen follows that suggestion with another one asking: Are we sufficiently conscious of the fact that Western civilization is in conflict with itself, suffering internal conflict? Conflict is not just between the west and the rest but particularly within the ambit of Western societies. Western self-confidence, as a general ethic, pervading human society, cannot be explained without reference to its biblical and classical origins. But even here there is conflict concerning the way this fact of self-confidence will be interpreted. Is it to be found in over-coming the immature need for God by putting all that religious and mythical nonsense behind us. Or is it that western self-confidence has become an emptiness because modern secularism ignores the fact that humans never outgrow their need for God? If this internal conflict does characterize Western society then it is worth studying it carefully. Much of what has originated in the West does not belong to the West by proprietary right and should not be claimed exclusively by and for the West. Likewise, much of what now produces conflict within the West should be resolved for the sake of the West as well as for the sake of non-Western peoples. Skillen puts a case for diligent and thorough dialogue between all peoples.


Drawing on Daniel Philpott’s analysis of the constitution of international relations that took shape after the European Peace of Westphalia, Skillen draws attention to the fact that new states claimed their sovereignty in an international context of assent, which, to some degree, helped constitute the rules and terms of their sovereignty from outside the sovereignty. In other words, the constitution of international relations that emerged with the birth of the sovereign states was to a certain degree transnational and nonarbitrary in character. Sovereignty was not as autonomously sovereign as the word might suggest. Though exercising less power than the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire this reconfiguring of political power within multiple state borders gave each state greater capability of actually establishing public law and order within its borders. Political power was concentrated and delimited. States and churches took on sharper definition. The historical starting point for consideration of the modern question of sovereignty is with the historical reality of a multinational Christendom in which wars, ecclesiastical conflicts, and overseas explorations were leading to the redefinition and reconfiguration of legitimate, competent political authority. Now the problem is not simply one of coming to terms with differentiation but rather how to redefine politics at a domestic and international level on a global scale that is increasingly differentiated but also increasingly integrated. Skillen’s view is that the very meaning of sovereignty, which has always to some extent been grounded in an international web of legal norms, is becoming qualified more and more by the very thickness of an international network of human relations that requires just governance across and above state boundaries as well as within them.


This is a republication of “The Testimony” *PGR* March/April 1996 in which Acts 24:1-17 is the scriptural passage under discussion. The biblical teaching is that nations and governments belong to God and thus it is also certainly true that the United States no more belongs to secularists or non-Christians than it does to Christians. On the basis of their belief that God is the one who should be respected as above all they may
claim their right to citizenship. But the aim of political engagement by Christians is not to claim ownership of the nation, not even if they were to win a majority control in the government. Such control is not a matter of taking back America for its rightful owners; it can only be an occasion for service of all, seeking to contend politically with fellow citizens only for the sake of a more just republic.

253. “The Religious Left is Losing Touch” Regeneration Quarterly 2:3 Summer pp 26, 28

This article discusses the problem of the self-designated “religious left”. It takes its cue from a letter of “Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice” supporting President Clinton’s veto of a Congressional Bill, passed by substantial majorities in both houses, of partial-birth abortions. What the signers said could have been said by any individual-rights advocate who believes that the state has no right to interfere in the private decisions of its citizens. The letter writers uphold the pregnant woman - in private consultation with her doctor, her family, and her God - as the one solely responsible for the abortion decision. Why should Christians find it self-evident that sensitivity and compassion should fall on the side of the mother but not on the side of the late-term unborn? These are the political and legal questions that Christians must answer in a clear Christian fashion. I don’t hear the Christian left doing so. The discussion also exams “Cry for Renewal” (see No 242) which fails to come to grips with the political challenges the authors say they are addressing.


The four books reviewed are indeed representative of various viewpoints. Eastland’s compendium itemizes important Supreme Court religion cases with excerpts from judgments handed down and dissenting opinions, as well other views expressed at the time. It is an ideal assistant for those working in the area. The four books are helpful contributions toward a better understanding of the confusion and diversity of views in American public life. Thiemann and Levy set forth views that presuppose the dominance of a liberal perspective but come to completely different conclusions. The question then is how to make room for both of them - along with many others - in the American political arena. Skillen’s conclusion is that Monsma’s “positive neutrality” in government policy provides the best suggestion for comprehensive civil discourse in public life.


Introducing his discussion, Skillen notes the disagreement at a basic level about whether there is a rational, moral “natural law”. In the contribution to this reader which concludes in the top half of the page where Skillen’s piece begins we read, “Natural law is the indispensable basis for an adequate business ethic. It is common to both believers and unbelievers ...” The argument is that because this law “is necessary to avoid antinomianism and its concomitant evils”, then there can simply be no argument about it. So Skillen begins his piece in a way that disagrees with this. The question with which I begin, therefore, is whether an argument for natural law
can ever succeed in demonstrating what the argument takes for granted - namely, the reality of a universal moral ground that is supposedly needed in order for business (and other human activities) to be conducted across religious, philosophical, and cultural divides.

The Introduction to the essay thus explains this problematic. The next section Don’t Dismiss the Bible Too Quickly is addressed to Christians who, eager in their discussion to make contact with non-Christians, are willing to put the Bible to one side as they proceed without adequately understanding the way in which their interlocutors want to dismiss what they see as “religious” discussion. The next section Natural-Law Arguments Are Not Neutral explains that there is no such thing as a common or neutral moral argument. In fact, this is one reason why not everyone recognizes natural law or agrees on its meaning. Clarifying Agreements and Disagreements is the next section. Humans are sinners. My own starting point prepares me for disagreement at a very fundamental level, and seeing it deepens my conviction that all humans share both creatureliness and sinfulness. God and the Creation Order is a discussion of how, as part of their work in the world, Christians are to develop a full-blown view of the creation-order, to draw attention by happy, fulfilled, righteous, stewardedly, just and loving ways that God’s order for creation is good and perfect. All professional areas provide such challenges to rightly define and respond to what is going on in the world. A Biblical Perspective continues the discussion. Creation norms do not originate with individual or social subjectivity and though universal are not “forms” in the Greek sense. Such norms, as God’s word to us, provide a lamp to our feet to illuminate real life in the world. And human obligation is not something that comes and goes with one generation.


This was the inaugural Kuyper lecture, held at Calvin College. Skillen gives the rationale for initiating this annual lecture, as he begins his concluding reflections. He outlines what the Center should learn from the preceding discussion under various headings.

The Cross and Triumphalism: Noll identifies as legitimate the kind of Christian politics that grows from self-denial, that makes no special claims for Christians in this age; Cross and Crown in Tension: Skillen observes that Noll is too quick to place the cross of Christ in tension with a long-standing and admittedly mistaken appropriation of Christ’s crown, Humility and the Meaning of Creation: Skillen’s reply moves on to the calling God gives us to be servants, also public servants in the political arena. Political responsibility means more than cautious and humble attitudes and requires explanation of why real reform of an unjust status quo is needed; God’s Covenant in Christ: the biblical picture of God’s promise-keeping does not require the “miraculous combination of the particular and the universal” as set forth by Noll; Kingdom Politics: this is politics that avoids civil religion and the idolatrous elevation of any one nation to the status of God’s chosen. Political humility means a constitutional political order that directly gives proper legal recognition to [the diverse] spheres of society.


http://cesc.montreat.edu/GSI/GSI-Conf/discussion/Skillen.html

This is an early form, in part, of what was published as Chapter 7 “Liberalism and the Environment” in No. 326. The discussion identifies basic weaknesses in America’s constitution with respect to the doing of justice to the eco-system upon which all life
on this planet depends. For those who cannot accept the possibility that the American constitution is flawed, Skillen explores the way in which the constitution allowed for slavery rather than preventing it. It allowed African American people to be classified as private property (of slave owners). The basic law had to be changed to remove slaves from slave-owners. These changes did not represent illegitimate governmental interventions into the free market. They were essential steps toward public justice for all people - steps that the government was obligated to take since its calling from God is to establish and uphold justice. And so the first principle of public justice cannot be individual freedom and property ownership. In the above mentioned chapter of In Pursuit of Justice (No. 326) Skillen shows how this was in fact part of the legacy associated with the philosophy of John Locke in the British North American colonies. And so the struggle to end slavery was not about negotiating with a pressure group; the struggle was about changing the law to ensure justice. The struggle was about reforming a defective constitutional set-up. Likewise with the environment. And Skillen emphasizes that the path of pursuing justice also involves giving correct definitions to all political subjects. The conclusion of the article, which broaches the possibility that the environmental crisis is not only an indication of a flawed way of doing politics, it indicates a flaw in the constitutional basis upon which politics is undertaken in the American political system. But there is a path of Christian discipleship to be followed here that leads in another direction. In order to be good stewards of the earth, we need to be citizens who work for justice and not merely compete for interests. If we do not find a way to build a just political order that gives legal recognition to certain ecological priorities, then I am not very hopeful about the future governability of the United States.


This article, and the next one (No. 259) come from a “Christianity and Democracy in South Africa” conference held in Potchefstroom 10-12 July 1996. Skillen acknowledges that the US and South Africa both experienced immigrant settlements by Puritan-type English and European peoples who subsequently gained such great historical influence that the countries they settled came to be understood by many of their citizens as new Israels in covenant with God. Strong civil religions took hold in both places, leading to highly ambiguous results .... The difficulty for us today is to try to sort out the good from the evil in our histories, learning to hold onto the good while rejecting and overcoming the evil. That is very difficult work for sinners, even for sinners who confess Christ as their redeemer.

What follows is a discussion of the civil-religious distortion of Christianity in modern America ... The last thing I would want to do is to leave you with the impression that I think the American experience of democracy is an ideal Christian model. The discussion then proceeds in terms of The Colonial and Early Republican Experience (outlining the underlying view of the America experiment and its constitution - those relatively modest settlers soon felt compelled to dislodge and destroy the native Americans in order to secure their small enclaves - and describing how an initial modest search for freedom led to an obsessive drive for more and more power over nature, over natives, and over slaves as the means to an ever increasing prosperity and liberty. The argument is one of an ongoing deformation of Christianity. Still despite that evil, the American constitution gives expression to a form of government that is restrained, limited and defined. Constitutionally articulated civil rights express more than merely an aspiration toward individual freedom; they represent an obligation placed on governments to protect citizens from overreaching, overbearing power. Constitutional rights help define a just state. Skillen then outlines the distinctive characteristics of America’s political heritage (Government should be limited to tasks that protect multiple human responsibilities and such tasks should be codified) which recognize human limits in dependence upon
divine authority in contrast with latter-day dialectical-tensions that can be seen in nationalism, libertarianism and the search for complete equality. The part played by the Civil War in making national unity and economic progress the chief goal of American politics is touched upon briefly. In this context Skillen outlines Contemporary “Christian” Efforts, particularly the Christian Coalition (No. 241), People for the American Way and Cry for Renewal (No. 242). A brief description of The Contemporary Christian Challenge concludes the paper. Slavery in America and apartheid in South Africa were perpetuated by people confessing the name of Christ. We should not be surprised that many people remain skeptical of the idea that Christianity might have something fresh, liberating, and constructive to offer in the political arena. The pluralist perspective that Skillen has been working on is briefly described with a few pages discussing the possibilities of a Christian democratic perspective in redefining the political order as the public trust of a commonwealth. It will have to build on the sound constitutionalism and seek better arguments for structural and confessional pluralism.


The point of departure for this address is in the notion that in contemporary American politics ... politics exists for the sake of politics rather than for the sake of government. (See No. 233). A Christian approach to politics cannot line up on the side of politics for the sake of politics, but with a politics that is crafted for the sake of Government. The biblical grounds for this assertion are outlined. And the simple biblical truth that Governments are directly accountable to God is expounded to show that it contradicts one of the basic tenets of American politics, that politics is ultimately accountable to the people and not directly to God. The dangers of this Christian view are canvassed, in the context of a detailed description of the American Political Experiment. A vision of Christian Politics for the Sake of Government is outlined, followed by a discussion of Unity and Diversity in Society Under Government: The Question of Pluralism. This then is followed by a discussion of Justice and the Identity of a Political Order (which includes a larger version of Skillen’s mealtime discussion about scoops of ice-cream and who should wear glasses with his young children. See No. 268). The failure to identify human beings correctly as persons-in-community and the family as the foremost community for children, when combined with the failure to discriminate properly in law between adults and minor children, leads to the publicly unjust treatment of families and children. The consequence is an unjust state. The concluding section is Natural Law and a Distinctively Christian Politics ... I would urge fellow Christians to go all the way in developing a full-blown view of creation order, fall into sin, and the coming final judgment and redemption through Jesus Christ, as the explicit and publicly acknowledged basis for their political action,... The normative principles and precepts always remain out ahead of us, holding us accountable, calling us to account for disobedience, remaining incapable of being confined within our positivizations.

1997

260. “What’s Wrong With Taxes?” Critique (Ransom Fellowship) pp.1-2

"The purpose of the newsletter is to encourage its readers to think, not to tell them what to think.” Ransom Fellowship is a writing, mentoring and speaking ministry of Denis and Margie Haack. The article emphasizes tax payer responsibility to government. The page includes a caption included for discussion and reflection: “Whine about taxes, dishonor the King.” What does belong to you is a government appointed by God as a servant for your good. Therefore honor it and recognize it as
God’s servant and not merely as your servant... We should be happy to pay taxes, thanking God that we still have a government, for government is a gift of God’s grace.... Pay your taxes joyfully. They belong to God’s servants, who belong to God.

(Skillen emphasizes a point pertaining to Christian civic conduct with respect to paying of taxes. He draws attention to the fickle character of American disrespect for Government that had actually grown in recent decades on the “conservative” side of politics, not least with “Christian moral majoritarianism” jumping on the “You know better than government how to spend your own money” bandwagon of disrespect.

261. “Treasuring the Great Artist’s Handiwork” Fuller Focus Spring p.12

This is a report of the Kuyper lecture held at Fuller Theological Seminary October 31 1996. (see No. 267). The article is framed with a photo of a Skillen-Mouw moment sharing a joke. Every creature is magnificent, each in its own way, he explains. And this is a brief summary of the gist of Cal DeWitt’s lecture.

Every creature is magnificent, each in its own way,
he explains. And this is a brief summary of the gist of Cal DeWitt’s lecture. The biblical idea of economy, DeWitt explains, appealing to Genesis 2:15, is that of serving and keeping creation, not oppressive domination. That is why Christians ought to see themselves as modern-day Noahs, working, for example, to save endangered species... A campaign to save endangered species, therefore, represents a call to human self-limitation.


Capital Commentary Sept 1, 1997 http://www.cpjustice.org/stories/storyReader$202. This is a discussion about justice in education in the midst of great poverty that is manifest in the nation’s school system. Support for school choice among African-Americans had risen from 61% to 86.5% in a year and politicians like Dan Coats (see Kuyper lecture No. 277) were admitting their concern had shifted to poor and minority families. It’s a light but firm way this broadsheet notes that poverty and education are linked and reform must respect parental choice. Let’s do justice to the poor and minorities by establishing a system that offers fair and equal educational choice for everyone. Publicly supported, fair and equal choice of schools for all students is no soft option.


Skillen answers the question with respect to the most recent legislation, the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act”, with a qualified “Yes” that is accompanied by a definite “not enough”. There are three dimensions of injustice that remain to be addressed. First a simplistic moralistic view that sees government as the cause of poverty, or as the primary solution to the problem. If we do not give up our simplistic moralisms, grave injustice will remain. The second dimension of injustice that needs to be addressed is the public’s declining confidence in government. The third dimension relates to the welfare legislation of 1996 being more about balancing budgets that about creative reform of welfare. What the legislation does is shift the focus off the federal government to the states which are now called upon to initiate welfare reforms. To balance the one-page piece, Skillen lists three positives. More and more citizens and public officials are willing to recognize the importance of non-government service organisations. The roots of poverty often lie beyond the reach of public funding and when more people confront this reality, justice can begin to come into view. Second, there is a growing understanding that poverty is structurally diversified, requiring diversified responses. Third, the Charitable Choice provisions go a long way to doing justice to religion. The article concludes with a call to Christians...
to think new thoughts and to develop a more comprehensive public philosophy.


The important fact about the entry on citizenship is its succinct coherent summary of political history similar to the view presented by Herman Dooyeweerd in the early chapter of Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options (1979). The same perspective has been further developed in the analysis of America’s role among the nations (With or Against the World (2005) No. 331). The Voting entry begins with a recognition that there are not only different systems of balloting in different polities but there are different forms of voting in different societal structures. The discussion is limited to voting in political elections.

265. “Political Thought in the Reformed Tradition” Transformation (Oxford UK) pp.7-9

See also “Christian Faith and Public Policy - a Reformed Perspective” No. 288. This is an exposition of political responsibility in terms of the gospel and derives principles for Christian political action. Only Jesus Christ is sovereign on earth as well as in heaven. Human beings are called to live by faith and any imposition of one faith on people is actually to violate their God-given religiosity. This is another way of discussing Christ’s patience as a corner-stone of a Christian political perspective. Structural and confessional pluralism are outlined and the term public justice is defined. It is interesting that in this piece Skillen explicitly affirms that public justice is incompatible with any subsidiary and undifferentiated sphere in which omnicompetent authority is assumed. The order imposed by a political system is discussed as are individual rights and the way justice confronts race and racism. A political order in which majority rule excludes minority expression is ruled out. Skillen provides a brief explanation of the American political system and how “principled pluralism” seeks to address the problems that are raised within that polity.


This is a proposal to investigate State implementation of the “Charitable Choice” provision (Section 104) of the 1996 federal welfare law. A two-track method is proposed: evaluating how state governments implemented the Charitable Choice requirement through revised laws and programs; investigating responses of faith communities to the changing state policies and thereby determine whether the new laws facilitate greater service in the public-square by faith-based organizations. The research will document progress and identify obstacles that still need to be overcome.

1998


Skillen’s advocacy of a comprehensive political perspective means he is aware of the gaps in the work of the Center for Public Justice. There has been some publications on land use and farming (Nos 77, 78, 79, 198) and also on the environment (Nos 115,
The more recent work explains why it is important that it be kept on Skillen’s research agenda. Part of this involves the comprehensive dimension of systematic political theory which indicates that sooner or later there are serious repercussions if tracts of life, let alone tracts of land, are left outside the purview of political stewardship. The final paragraph anticipates further CPJ reflection, public-policy research and civic education, to encourage both government and citizens to do greater justice to the environment. DeWitt also makes a contribution that reminds Christian readers of the importance of expounding the scriptures to hear God’s solemn declaration about His good creation. Looking at the world from this point of view, says DeWitt, we will be able to understand God’s message to Job about Behemoth - the huge, unsightly hippopotamus. God loves this creature, and even though humans might not find it worthy of preservation, God says, "Keep your hands off my hippo!"

268. “Justice and Civil Society” Civil Society Project, Harrisburg PA

A brief education essay about justice, how it comes to expression in different structures (equal scoops of ice-cream for all but glasses only for those who need them) and how those legitimate non-government structures function in an integrated public-legal order in which government upholds justice. The public legal application of the concept to family law is described and, in the process, Skillen sketches the outline of a normative framework in which the sometimes contentious demands of individuals and lobbies in relation to marriage and family-related matters can be evaluated. Schooling is also discussed, in particular the question of public funding and why it should be for all schools as a matter of justice. The question of government over-reaching its legitimate authority by claiming “principalship” for schools (in whole or in part) is also discussed.

269. Review of Stephen V Monsma When Sacred and Secular Mix in Christian Scholar’s Review XXVII:3 pp.393-4

The case Monsma argues in this book is described as a correct one. It advances the cause of justice to non-government organisations that are explicit about their religious basis. Monsma, a university professor, had served as an elected representative to the Michigan House and Senate for a couple of terms. This book pushes further the view developed in Positive Neutrality (No 254) explaining why religious non-profits and schools in receipt of Government funds “are in a legally unprotected, vulnerable situation.” Skillen’s view is that Monsma’s most important insight is that religion cannot be pushed into a corner.


This is a document that has gone through various editions since its initial formulation in a two-part series in Public Justice Report in 1998. What is the Center for Public Justice? Why does it exist? What does it do? How does it differ from the Christian Coalition or a church lobby organization or a think tank? This essay seeks to explain the Center’s identity, it’s commitment to principled pluralism, its comprehensive approach, its international perspective. The most recent version reads as follows: “The Center for Public Justice approaches government and citizenship from a wide-ranging, comprehensive perspective. The Center seeks to do justice from a Christian-democratic perspective by recognizing different religions and points of view and keeping the public square open to people of all or no faiths. The Center believes government’s authority is not limitless and that it should respect the responsibilities and rights of individuals and organizations. We seek to act with a comprehensive,
constitutional concern for political life in all of its dimensions—domestic as well as international” (March 30, 2006). The dissemination of the 1998 essay coincided with “Basic Affirmations of the Center for Public Justice” distributed in May-June 1996 which affirmed principles basic to a 7-part series that ran from March/April 1994 until November/December 1996.

http://www.cpjustice.org/stories/storyReader$924

The Biblical Call to Social Responsibility $924 PJR March/April 1994

The Question of Authority $920 PJR May/June 1994

What Constitutes a Political Community $913 PJR September/October 1994 (NB PJR inside pages for that 1994 edition are headed September/October 1993)

Government with Representation $901 PJR January/February 1995

Political Fairness and Equity $887 PJR July/August 1995

Government and the Responsible Society $861 PJR May/June 1996


A succinct 5-6 page explanation of the “principled pluralist” political outlook. Structural pluralism is outlined. Political constitutions, in identifying the limits of governmental authority, implicitly recognise the differentiated social authorities that lie beyond the legitimate sphere of government in the political community. This differentiated authority cannot be accounted for by reducing it to the social constructions of allegedly free and autonomous individuals, nor is it a single collectivity. These are structures, the norms for which are discovered by human involvement within these relationships. Confessional pluralism is enshrined in the US constitution’s first amendment by which government is obligated to protect the religious freedom of its citizens. Government should not arrogate to itself the right to define as non-religious things that are outside churches and synagogues. In fact, people’s religions should not be identified only with their ecclesiastical practices and affiliations.


This is another contribution to the CRCNA denominational magazine which attempts to explain the current (1998) controversy over educational vouchers. This contentious and ambiguous debate is sketched in outline. The “choice” and “competition” of Republicans is fiercely opposed by Democrats who fear the development of free market dominance in schooling, and further impoverishment of the poor and ethnic minorities. Hence they are strongly supportive of the view that more federal dollars should be channelled into public schools. Skillen argues that for parents to choose a religious school, which has already been accredited by the State authority as a school, does not establish religion.


This is an exposition of 1 Kings 17 in the context of the sabbatical theme by which God taught His people how to live a whole and healthy life. A drought had come as
God’s punishment, in fulfillment of the promised curse of Leviticus 26:19-20 should they fail to keep God’s commandments. The widow of Zarephath, eating her last meal, believed the God of Israel, and God’s blessings were focused upon that small household - the widow, her son and Elijah. Her son’s illness made her wonder whether God had sent Elijah as a curse, but when the child was restored in answer to Elijah’s prayer, her trust was restored. Wealth and poverty are redefined here in terms of faith and unbelief. Our care for the needy today will not spring automatically from the fact of our material wealth. Most of us are rich enough to give away far more than we do now. No, our care will spring, if it springs at all, from our love for, and faith in, God.


In this May 1998 lecture, Skillen presents his vision of Christian politics in the 21st century. The headings from the original English version of the lecture are: **Time for Creative Christian Thinking and Engagement.** Korean Christians are busy in forming a new Christian vision of political responsibility that encompasses the entire globe. This transition moment in human history offers Christians a tremendous opportunity to pray and work together in new ways for new political understanding, for an understanding that will allow us to become more faithful witnesses in politics to the God who rules the world through Jesus Christ. **Three Competing Visions.** Western secularism now confronts revived Islam as well as Christianity. How will Christians respond to the fallout of this confrontation? **Gaining a Christian Perspective in Politics.** Such a perspective must be communal, publicly expressed, critical and related to the real political conditions of the lives of citizens. **What Should Characterize Christian Politics in the Next Century?** 1. a comprehensive approach and focus; 2. a self-critical awareness that we work between Christ’s first and second coming; 3. a continual quest for justice to all our neighbors, image-bearers of God in their many callings; 4. a focus upon international justice; 5. aim to build up an international community of Christian political faith and action.


Skillen reviews the predominant views of 20th century and post World-War Two American political science to ascertain the dominant trends in political thinking about pluralism. First he sets the frame of reference for his article by setting out his own view. A just political order adheres to two pluralist principles: the first is that the laws of the land should respect the societal diversity which is manifest by a wide range of human responsibilities and social institutions. This can only be truly maintained by an open, non-totalitarian and pluralist social order. The second pluralism concerns the variety of faiths and philosophies by which people direct their public and private lives. The laws should do justice to these faiths and philosophies by equitable and non-discriminatory treatment in public, as well as in private spheres of life. The chapter also assumes that modern liberal beliefs are integral to the strict separationist argument that religion has no place in political life and as such if the US is to become a more just society it must disestablish this view that shapes society by means of a bipolar dichotomy of sacred and secular, nonsectarian and sectarian, rational neutral and religiously biased” (p.56). The views of Thiemann (No 254), MacIntyre, Stout and Walzer (No 214), Rawls (Nos 106, 332) and Berger and Neuhaus (No 212) are surveyed. The development of many streams of pluralistic thinking is outlined, in order to show its adherence to the religious assumptions on which the prevailing liberal paradigm is built, even when it promotes a more pluralist, less individualist and potentially more just view of religious equality in public life.

The review of Papini brings this important chronicle about the development of Christian Democrat International to the attention of *Calvin Theological Journal* readers. He concludes his book with reflections on the current crisis in Christian democratic thought and experience. Right after World War II, for example, Christian democrats spent more time debating moral, social, and political philosophy than they *did* economic and social policy. The consequence was the development of a pragmatic frame of mind of those concerned when their parties won control of government. Papini is clear that this poses a problem for the CD movement. It is not certain that the CD movement has a future in promoting a distinctive vision of democracy and international justice.

In his book Perry does not critically assess his own assumptions and thus his dogmatic view is that legislators should only listen to “religious arguments” if a persuasive “secular argument” also comes to the same conclusion. Secular = universal; religious = parochial/ provincial. Such a view can’t understand the reasoning that led to the 1st Amendment.


Skillen introduces Senator Dan Coats (R-Ind) who *applauds economic prosperity and a more limited role of government ... is distressed by the moral crisis of the culture and particularly by the signs of a weakening "civil society" - the web of society's nongovernment institutions*. This was the third Kuyper lecture held on October 30th, 1997. There is a paradox at the heart of Coats’s legislative agenda, his project for American renewal, two dozen proposals to encourage parents, church leaders, nonprofit service providers, and others to act on their moral and religious convictions. The question comes down to this: how should government promote healthy morals without acting in ways that discriminate against citizens who may disagree and hold other moral convictions. Skillen, in introducing Glenn C Loury, Mary Nelson and Stanley W Carlson-Thies, provides a suggested path for a new view of public morality. *Government in its own sphere, as well as families, schools, churches, businesses, and a wide variety of other social institutions, all have distinct responsibilities that together must be fulfilled to make possible the common good. Recognizing and seeking to strengthen this diverse range of human moral responsibilities offers a way out of the founders’ paradox ....Christianity requires a critical reappraisal of all habits and ideologies. Mending fences should take place in the light of God’s revelation, which comes through the order of creation and in Christ’s recovery of the sinfully distorted creation by his redeeming grace.*

1999


This contribution to Bob Gouwzaard’s *Festschrift* discusses the writer’s friendship with the retiring professor and how the Dutch economist had contributed to his own theoretical work and that of the Center for Public Justice (Nos 8, 9, 37, 51, 98, 244).
The Center for Public Justice has not yet focused much attention on issues of political economy. The closest we have come is in our work on welfare reform and on the environmental stewardship of farm land. Consequently, our engagement with Bob’s work has most frequently been at the level of basic principles of economic justice. What follows are 18 theses to orient the theoretical, scholarly and public-policy research of North American Christians as we try to develop a distinctively Christian approach to political engagement in a country whose pragmatic, liberal, capitalist economy leads the world, but allows all too little room for critical reflection. These 18 theses outline the comprehensive rule of God over all He has made, the entire creation, of which nothing is “secular” in the sense of being outside religious responsibility for stewardship. Humans by their diligence are called to discover the norms of good stewardship and repent of wasteful economic ordering. Human stewardship is then elaborated in terms of the restoration and renewal of creation as workers in God’s Kingdom forsake all and follow Jesus Christ the One who rules them and blesses them in their work. The 18 points emphasise the importance of a differentiated society, raise questions about economic justice - the juridical side of economic activity and the economic side of just public order governance. Government responsibility is elaborated, the importance of ongoing development of public policies emphasized, and economic well-being is defined and explained in relation to an open society with free markets justly regulated. A limited government will seek to justly and appropriately regulate non-government organizations. Economic justice has corrective and distributive aspects which must take account of international inter-dependence.

(republication of No. 239)

280. “Moral Majority No Longer” Prism March/April p.18
An examination of comments made by a founder of the Moral Majority who had publicly conceded defeat in the culture wars. There is no moral majority, he says. Same old strategy, says Skillen in this ESA magazine. He now sounds retreat even from all the organisations which the popularist campaigning of the Moral Majority had brought into being. It is the win-everything/lose-everything politics of cultural majoritarianism, which leads Weyrich and others to oscillate between driving for dominance and fleeing for purity…Christians in particular should relinquish the civil-religious ideal of the United States as a mono-cultural, mono-moral “city on a hill” and help build a republic that gives equal treatment to all faiths and cultural commitments.

This Washington Update reports on research that links a declining crime rate (half of the decrease) with the high rate of abortion in the US since 1973. Skillen discusses the viewpoint and also notes the growth of pro-life counselling. Is not this and the non-profit services provided for pregnant mothers, part of the picture? It should spur serious reflection, he says. It will be wonderful if 20 years from now the statistics show that the rate of abortion continued to decline over all those years and that crime continued to go down. And won’t it be wonderful if the researchers can report that the number of pro-life counseling centers, Christian drug-rehabilitation programs, Muslim after-school programs and Jewish job-training programs have all
grown to the point where they have become the primary reason for both fewer abortions and declining crime.


An earlier version of Chapter 5 in No. 328. The word “evangelical” in this chapter’s title, plus its use throughout the article, is worthy of careful examination. Usually the word christian is used, and Skillen does expound a biblically-directed view of social and political life that would be recognizably christian to an evangelical reader. This aspect of the chapter is no longer evident in the later version to be found in In Pursuit of Justice. Moreover, in the opening footnote p.203 Skillen locates himself in relation to the civil rights movement in the following terms: I was a student at Wheaton College (Illinois) from 1962 to 1966 where more attention was paid to the Vietnam War than to the climactic phases of the civil rights movement. Nevertheless, before the 1960s were out, black evangelicals like Tom Skinner (Black and Free [Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1968]) and William Pannell (My Friend the Enemy [Waco, Tex: Word, 1968]) were becoming known in white evangelical circles. Evangelicals had no excuse for ignoring Salley and Behm’s Your God is too White and John Perkins’ A Quiet Revolution [Waco, Tex: Word, 1976], and in the 1970s there were more efforts to bring black and white evangelicals together in the cause of social justice. An example of the latter was the movement that produced The Chicago Declaration Ronald J Sider (ed) (Carol Stream, Ill: Creation House 1974). The first 5 pages 115-120 give a 1999 retrospective on the civil rights movement. The initial sentence reads What was the American public’s understanding of the civil rights movement in the 1960s? On what terms did the majority, including Christians of various stripes, promote or at least acquiesce in the rejection of legal discrimination - legalized racism - against African Americans? What were their expectations of the consequences? It is noteworthy that in the later 2004 edition Skillen amends the question to read What was the American public’s understanding of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s? On page 120 the perspective is drawn since the 1970s. In the book version it takes that back another decade to the 1960s. Antidiscrimination and Societal Complexity (pp.120-122) is replaced in the 2004 version by a discussion of Just and Unjust Discrimination, and whereas the 1999 version has Rudiments of a Christian Public Worldview (pp.123-131) is “replaced” in the later work by a brief two page discussion of The Image of God. The next section of the article An Evangelical Christian contribution to Racial Justice (pp.131-135) is clearly part of the book’s purpose and why this contribution was solicited (or included). It is an argument that seeks to address the absence of a Christian public philosophy to the American evangelical way of life. Cooperation in the civil rights movement of the 1960s among black and white Christians and people of other persuasions contributed little toward the development of a Christian public philosophy sufficient for life in a religiously diverse and institutionally differentiated society. This could be a major evangelical contribution to American public life. Unfortunately, this aim does not occupy the attention of enough Christians. Most continue to approach politics as other citizens do, with a rather simplistic conservative or liberal bias oriented by an interest-group mentality rather than by a public-interest mentality. The article provides a Christian basis for ongoing government attention to the structural injustices that may still be evident in the society long after racism has been made illegal. Once citizens of color are not singled out for publicly enforced exclusion or negative discrimination because of their color, the manner and means of their inclusion must come about in ways that do justice to the responsibilities and standards appropriate to the institutions and relationships that are not racially or politically qualified. Skillen concludes with political admonition. Evangelical Christians need to repent of their racism and, among other things, recognize that even within their own ranks there are all kinds of people, red, yellow, black and white .... What is needed is a movement that can draw together people of all races and faiths for the
cause of public justice in a pluralistic society, justice that begins with equal civil rights for all and continues with the just treatment of people in their diverse non-political roles - in the differentiated institutions and relationships free from government interference - without discriminatory treatment because of their faith.

2000

283. “Faith You Will Always Have With You” National Voter (magazine of the League of Women Voters) June-July p.4

This discussion is about the validity of “faith-based organisations” (FBOs) and how justice is served by the 1996 Charitable Choice provision in welfare legislation. FBOs are not the “solution” to poverty, and Charitable Choice was not simply about getting “more bang for the social service buck”. Skillen is concerned with the injustice in the establishment of welfare as a secular arena where government support for FBOs is ruled out allegedly by appeal to the First Amendment. Government should partner with all varieties of nongovernment service providers, including FBOs, and not establish those that promise to act in a secular and nonreligious way. The Charitable Choice provision removed the religious test to exclude FBOs.

There are two kinds of opponents - those who see government provision to NGOs as extensions of government, and those who believe that religious groups will lose their identity should they be in receipt of public funding. It is all about differing interpretations of the First Amendment. Skillen sees it as a protection of religious freedom. Government needs to rid itself of its acquired habit of religious discrimination. Just as Government can't tell people how to view social welfare provision, so it should not inhibit the religious freedom of those who view their social welfare involvement a part of their religion.


This sarcastic letter was about a front page Washington Post (May 5 2000) article, “Bush Puts Faith in a Social Service Role - Church-Based Providers Freed From Many Rules”. I am thankful for Hanna Rosin’s front-page report on faith at work in Texas (May 5). It was good that the article carefully avoided the mention of any successful faith-based social-service organization. It was also good that it did not mention the failures of any secular social-service providers. I’m also glad that Rosin avoided mentioning Al Gore’s support for expanding the role of faith-based organizations. Altogether the article assures me that George W Bush must be a religious nut and that Gore’s affirmation of support for such programs must have been a temporary lapse into rhetorical excess and political pandering. I also now feel confident that President Clinton’s signature on the 1996 welfare reform bill, which requires states to give equal treatment to faith-based providers, must have been just another of his indiscretions. The letter may be viewed as excessively sarcastic but it does expose a bias in the journalism whereby anything to do with religion is viewed a priori as excessively and obsessively power-hungry.


(published with a booklet The Biblical Theme of Justice) This collection of 75 meditations, mainly from “The Testimony” of Public Justice Report, are organized thematically according to biblical teaching about justice. Skillen does not say that political theory is the necessary grid through which the bible should be interpreted. But he does strongly affirm his view that if we fail to understand that the Bible is also
a political book then we are losing sight of its importance in our lives. To read the Bible and history aright, therefore, is to see and to hear the covenant Lord keeping his promises. This *Covenant to Keep* drama does not occur as only one act or one scene in a larger play; it is the play, the entire production. Sun and moon, sand and sea, plants and animals, angels and humans all find their place in a single drama. The whole cosmos, from origin to fulfillment, exists as the garden and the workshop, the temple and the city, of the Lord’s revelatory purposes. The meditations are framed by essays: **Prologue: the Biblical Drama** To read the Bible and history aright, therefore, is to see and to hear the covenant Lord keeping his promises; **Justice Required** And one of the great mysteries about creation is that God’s exercise of justice will honor and fulfill, not abrogate, human responsibility to do justice; **Justice Restrained** but as long as the Lord’s patience endures, there is opportunity for human beings to repent, to turn from their evil ways, and to recognize that life is sustained by God’s grace and mercy rather than by human ingenuity; **Justice Administered** It has to do, for example, with how we deal with the poor and the needy, the stranger and the oppressed, the thief and the murderer; **Justice Assured** Justice is assured because God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and Christ is the one who will judge the world with justice; **Justice Fulfilled** This vision of all things reordered properly under God, under Christ’s feet, refers to the fulfillment of God’s original covenant with creation when humans were commissioned to bring to God everything that was placed under them (Hebrews 2:5-9); **A Final Reflection** We are prophets of a future that is not our own (Oscar Romero).


This reviews a remarkable book which assesses the philosophy of Eric Vögelin (1901-1985). The review makes mention of Vögelin’s critical point of departure from Max Weber to the post World War II exposition of how modern ideologies represent a revolt against the human condition, leading to the alienation of the soul because of its growing desire to escape from, or to transfigure, this world. For Vögelin the modern desire to “immanentize the eschaton” has Gnostic world-flight roots. Skillen reiterates what he had noted elsewhere with respect to Vögelin’s view of Paul’s confidence about the resurrection (No 247). Vögelin see this as a departure from authentic faith. For Vögelin there can be no bodily resurrection.


In the **Foreword** (pp.7-11), the reason for this 1998 Kuyper Lecture by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese with replies by Stanley J Grenz, Mardi Keyes and Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, is put simply by Skillen and Voll: *One milestone of the twentieth-century was the revolutionary transformation of the status of women. Almost every aspect of life has changed for American women. A special CNN millennium compendium shows that in 1900 only eight hundred thousand wives were working compared to thirty-four million today. With increasing economic opportunities and pressures, more and more women and men now struggle to balance the often competing demands of work and family life. The Foreword then introduces the Kuyper Lecturer for 1998 and the respondents as those who challenge mothers and fathers to rethink their responsibility for their children and to engage in ongoing serious reflection about the Christian vision of life which is about the flourishing of life under Christ’s redeeming Lordship. The **Conclusion** (pp.93-104) begins with identifying three things upon which the participants are agreed: 1. the individualist, autonomy gospel is a dead-end and does not lead to justice for women, children and families; 2. the family is no contract
among autonomous individuals; 3. a Christian approach starts with women, children and men created in the image of God. In this context Skillen and Voll raise the question of the legitimacy of the historical differentiation of women’s roles and responsibilities in all areas of God’s creation. Fox-Genovese has argued that the liberation of women from family service may have come at too great a cost to society and to Christian virtue. The respondents feel that she underestimates the negative features of a social order in which women are confined to the roles of wife and mother.

The discussion moves to “Four Necessary Commitments”:

1. The cultural mandate is about men and women working together as God’s image bearer; 2. Meaning in life is not confined to roles determined by one’s gender; 3. There are responsibilities like children’s responsibilities to parents that cannot be avoided. Likewise with the decision to enter into marriage. Marriage means accepting all the obligations of marriage and mutual service to each other. Fox-Genovese calls on Christians to accept their bond-servant status in these circles; 4. This commitment concerns civil rights and discusses how the public legal sphere meets the marriage/family sphere. Fox-Genovese, Mary Ann Glendon, and others are correct to warn us about the dangers of an individualist mode of legal and political reasoning that, even now, is threatening to dismember families into mere collections of individuals, to set children over against their spouses, and to set spouses against one another in ways that weaken parental, spousal and other social responsibilities. The Conclusion then raises some “Public Policy Concerns”, emphasizing that government policy should strengthen rather than displace or weaken the spousal, parental, and occupational responsibilities that belong to people who are always more than citizens.


The subtitle is “A Reformed Perspective” and it begins with an exposition of John 15:5 The Vine and the Branches “without me you can do nothing”. This is the biblical basis for the teaching about God’s sovereignty over all of creation; of creation as the domain of the Son’s rule; and of human responsibility as a created office given by God and set by Him in the order of creation. The biblical teaching of Meeting Together is not just about cultic observances; it is to do with our wide-as-life tasks as disciples. The two forms of pluralism are expounded and then applied to what racial justice, environmental justice and the just use of force would mean in a polity ruled by public justice.

289. “Genuine Pluralism” World October 7 p.49

A comment on the increase of “God-talk” in the Gore v Bush presidential race. Should government, even symbolically, enclose everyone or every representative in the country under one sacred roof? Or, instead, should it require all religious expressions to remain outside the “secular” public square? Or, as a third option, should it make room for all faiths - both religious and secular - without giving a privileged position to any of them? The last option is the only just one in a republic that calls for justice for all. Genuine pluralism is the just way.

290. “Social Security and the Poor” Prism November-December p.25

This is a comment on the policy statements of Bush and Gore in the lead up to the 2000 presidential election. The new president and congress can avoid imposing some Pharoahesque command only if they enact some combination of reforms that will: 1)
reduce benefits for those retirees who are better off while easing the burden on the poorest workers, and 2) increase the age at which people can begin to draw their Social Security benefits. The article concludes Let’s keep making bricks, but let’s require that the Egyptians (ie the Social Security system) help, perhaps by asking their able-bodied well-to-do retirees to help gather the straw.


All papers are available at http://www.cpjustice.org/stories/storyReader$693. Skillen’s September 28, 2000 Kuyper lecture places the American republic within a cauldron of dissension about the origin, limits and responsibility of political authority in an era of dynamic social innovation and diversification. But, says Skillen, politics is about God’s calling of government and citizens into service. Despite the positive benefits of written constitutions, the Bill of Rights, disestablishment of religion, juridical review, separation of powers and its federal structure, two dominant political traditions have thwarted the development authentic statecrafting as a task for the entire citizenry.

The first tradition sees politics as a function of “unalienable rights” of individuals. There is no direct authority of God over government. The other voice, the other dominant tradition, has a distinctly Christian evangelical sound to it, which can be presumed to be close to the view of groups like the Christian Government Movement (Nos 10, 17, 18) and also other groups classified as “Pro-American Conservatives” in The Scattered Voice (No 190). But when it is examined closely it too has no state to craft, only evils to be punished and a potentially oppressive government to be restrained. There are temporal, secular interests to satisfy and religious freedoms to protect. These two traditions came together to reinforce one another in the shaping of American politics. And the lecture continues to outline a direction by which people can be trained in an alternative statecraft, who are able to meet this civil religious dominance in a way that is refreshingly principled.

After expounding The Individual Rights Tradition, Skillen turns to The Tradition of Government Outside the Perfection of Christ which leaves the State in limbo because of its Government-on-account-of-sin dogmatism. The views of Reinhold Niebuhr (Moral Man and Immoral Society 1932) and Richard Hays (The Moral Vision of the New Testament 1996) are canvassed. In Finding Grounds for Statecraft, Skillen returns to scriptural teaching in order to rework and refashion a rationale for positive Christian statecraft - a stewardship which reveals something about God and ourselves as His image bearers - political life reveals and anticipates and here Skillen brings together in one narrative the biblical exposition he had been working on all along (Nos 239/279, 285). Statecraft Fit for Reality concedes the fears of fellow citizens will have about “Christian politics”, in all of its historical forms. The same theme of Christ’s gracious, patient rule requires equal treatment of everyone in the political field of this world is reiterated. The lecture then proceeds to expound: 1. Christ’s Kingship and the American republic; 2. Statecraft and the Plural Structure of Society; 3. The Shrinking Globe.

In Conclusion Skillen explains the true basis of the American republic and any other state. Political community expresses one dimension of our identity as the image of God and both reveals something true about, and anticipates the coming fulfillment of, the City of God under the reign of Jesus Christ... The most urgent need of American politics and government today is to discover the true basis of, and genuine inspiration for, statecraft. For every political community and government on earth stands under the judgment as well as the promises of the One who at present upholds them all and who holds each one directly accountable.

Skillen is apportioned the task of writing the Conclusion to this symposium. Kuyper's allegiance to Christ and biblical authority was the basis for his social vision with his famous phrase of “sphere sovereignty”. The conclusion is rounded out with a discussion of Christianity’s role in the shrinking globe. Kuyper advocated a biblically-based spirituality that leads to a refreshing ecumenical perspective.


Further development of Skillen’s appraisal of Daniel Elazar found in No 299. This is not a fully developed review essay of Daniel Elazar's four volumes, but a piece written "in appreciation" for a life-time’s scholarship that has highlighted The Covenant Tradition in Politics. Skillen raises some questions about the significance of this work, its finer details and subsequent possible applications. He is aware of its fruitfulness in highlighting the importance of the biblical tradition for western political understanding (see for example the entry under “Citizenship” in No 264). The first set of questions derive from Elazar’s distinction between a (divinely initiated) covenant and a (human) compact.

The second set of critical observations and extensions has to do with the way federalism is conceptualised. How should Swiss and American federal constitutions be understood in covenantal terms. They are part of a covenant tradition but is that all that can be said about them? How does continuity and discontinuity in the covenantal tradition come about? How is it to be maintained and developed? With the rise of contractual individualism in America does it make sense to talk about covenantalism in American and global public life?

The third set of observations, headed Social Justice, arise from Elazar’s view that rights derive from covenantal obligations. For Elazar, political federalism and societal pluralism are often interchangeable terms for the same thing. Can covenant exist without a transcendent grounding? What is the relation between the political covenants of federalism, republicanism and constitutionalism and non-political associations? How should they be distinguished?

If covenant practise is normative for political life, how is individualism (the opposite of covenantal associationalism) to be confronted and (possibly) changed? As long as the US keeps its federal political structure, can it survive the secularizing, individualistic reduction of its social order? Are secular compacts sufficient to sustain a once “covenanted” people?


This CTJ review strongly commends a work about the US constitution’s First Amendment. The first page of the 2+ page review describes the prevailing political and legal viewpoint, buttressed by popular sentiment, that makes the American story into one with exceptional, almost cosmic, consequences.

It is a modern Enlightenment story and is freighted with prejudice. Skillen then identifies 7 commendable amendments, corrections, augmentations that Witte’s book makes to the prevailing story. 1. He explains that constitutional rights and religious liberty originated in the church of the late Roman Empire, and predated America by 1200 years. Moreover Dutch constitutionalism was the first model of how
constitutional government safeguards religious liberty; 2. the book identifies 6 elements that are part of the founding American definition of religious freedom: i. liberty of conscience; ii. free exercise of religion; iii. development of religious pluralism; iv. Emphasis upon religious equality; v. separation of church and state; vi. disestablishment of religion; 3. reminds readers of at least 4 distinct religious groups that had input into the First Amendment formulation - puritans, evangelicals, enlightenment enthusiasts, civic republicans; 4. describes how states dealt with religious freedom before 1947 when the Supreme Court began to trump state laws and rulings; 5. the presentation has an international focus; 6. the technical apparatus and appendices list the different drafts of the religion clauses 1787-1789; State constitutional provisions; US Supreme Court decisions 1815-1997. The review as a commendation of constitutional legal scholarship is a reminder that advocating political reforms requires painstaking juridical scholarship. There are no short cuts where this kind of political-legal research work is concerned.


This is a succinct exposition of Skillen’s Christian political perspective. It expounds the two aspects of principled pluralism - structural pluralism and confessional pluralism. It then explores how democracy relates to Christian discipleship and how the effectiveness of Christ’s rule in the present age is to be measured. The policy consequences of a Christian pluralist view are outlined in relation to welfare, family and educational law.

As Christians, we should be confessional monists; as Christian citizens grounded in that monistic confession, we should affirm that government’s responsibility, under Christ, is to act as a humble confessional pluralist. Confessional pluralism under government is a true consequence, a principled outcome of the Christian confession that Jesus Christ alone is Lord.

In conclusion Skillen notes: We have a long way to go to work out in political life the implications of the truth that all things were created in and for the Son of God, in whom all things hold together. Not until we understand truly the supremacy of the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, will we understand the true meaning of political and civic responsibility.


In certain respects this review of Martin E Marty should be read against the background of No 76 Disestablishment a Second Time. Back in 1982 when that book was published, Martin Marty wrote the Foreword. “This Foreword has implied some minor disagreements. It is not a “blurb” by a fawning admirer... Until and unless we can restore some of that more neutral sense to public education we will find that the public forum as such will disappear completely. America will be left with self-enclosed, solipsistic, mutually exclusive tribes.”

Now with this review on Marty’s on www.beliefnet.com website, Skillen has “carried the dialogue” further, and in fact does so by directly answering Marty’s critical observations this time, building on his discussion of changing assumptions in the public governance of education (No 130), the “friend of the court” appeal in 1987 (No 133), the closer examination of Thomas Jefferson’s religiosity which Marty had referred to in the earlier Foreword (No 138), a sociological critique of Government principalship in education (No 165), and a more systematic discussion of education policy (No 187).
Skillen begins his review of these two jointly written books in this way: Martin E Marty, America’s most famous and most prolific church historian, wants to start a conversation about religion and American society. For the previous 5 years Marty had directed the Public Religion Project. According to Skillen, Marty’s underlying motive is to try to find a way to hold America together ... Diverse and contradictory views can still add up to unity as long as Americans continue to converse about their differences.

In effect Marty desperately wants to retain an American civil religion, even if it consists of nothing more than an agreement that all opinions may be expressed and that the majority will not disagree too strongly with the author... There is little substance in Marty’s concept of the “common good” - keeping all differences in play by conversation is a rather thin basis for any conversation...

This line of critique has been developed already in Skillen’s review of Stephen Carter (No 227), Ronald Thiemann (No 254, 275) and Jim Wallis (Nos 240, 253).

**2001**

297. “Ashes to Ashcroft” Wall Street Journal January 19

A contribution to the Wall Street Journal. Ashcroft promotes the kind of Christian politics Skillen has identified with the “second major trend”, the “tradition of Government outside the perfection of Christ”. That way of viewing politics has no recognition of the political community as a creationally grounded human potential, of God-given norms or standards for the positive, obedient development of Statecraft. From this critical vantage point Skillen argues, effectively, that office-bearers in American government can just as validly come from this tradition as they can from the (so-called) ”liberal rights tradition”. Drawing on his article on Jefferson, and the quote from Jefferson to his nephew Peter Carr (No 138), Skillen shows that Jefferson’s modern-day spiritual heirs, perhaps unlike Jefferson himself, condemn public officials like Ashcroft because his profession of faith transcends the pragmatic usefulness they will concede to religion when it inspires public virtue. But Skillen not only notes that Ashcroft confesses that God is superior to the American republic, he has shown that the American republic has always tried to make room for people who do believe that that is true.

298. Editor, and author of “Introduction” and “Conclusion” in Bob Goudzwaard Globalization and the Kingdom of God (5th Kuyper Lecture 1999) Baker

In his Introduction Skillen identifies the fact that the issue of globalization is here to stay and that the village of humanity, however, is more and more characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty, of optimism and hopelessness ... Further on he explains why globalization should not surprise Christians - the good news, as message of redemption, restoration and reconciliation calls for a confrontation with poverty and degradation.

Goudzwaard sees people hypnotized by acquisitiveness and competition, fearful of falling behind or not getting ahead fast enough, acting like children who believe there is no other way to “make progress”, even though poverty and environmental degradation grow worse rather than better. Like prophets of old, Goudzwaard calls for the fearful to wake up, to shake off their hypnosis in order to become “mature, realistic and open-faced” human beings once again. The Introduction is just over 4 pages in length, while the Conclusion of 17 pages is in fact a significant contribution.

In response to Brian Fikkert’s critical observations, Skillen wonders whether it might not be better to argue that conversion is needed at the “religiously-deep level”, maturation at the level of culture, and waking up as the required response that is needed at the level of everyday experience where people are buying, selling, working,
consuming and investing?

A genuine renewal of global action for justice will coincide with a change in the way we understand self-care and self-regard. Skillen notes that the positive (5-step) admonition set forth by Goudzwaard is an attempt to identify some basic economic principles for application at all levels in any person’s view of reality. Promoting the public good in our rapidly differentiating and shrinking world [requires] learning how to answer the question, Who (which person or institution) bears what kind of responsibility to do what, and how should each one exercise that responsibility in obedient response to God for everyone’s good, including the good of our neighbours who stand in the greatest need? (p.113).


This essay is a slightly expanded version of the previous article (No 293), and is written as an appreciation for Elazar’s work (he had died in 1999). It is also part of Skillen’s attempt to take note of another scholar who, like himself, had contributed to the rebirth of Althusius scholarship after Carl J Friedrich and Frederick S Carney. In certain respects Skillen’s critical observations are those of one who is trying to see how Althusius the Calvinist political theorist is viewed by Elazar the Jewish scholar of federalism. But it does not stop there. It is also an attempt by a Christian political theorist, who had published A Covenant to Keep (No 285), to develop respectful understanding of a contributor to distinctively Jewish /Hebraic political reflection. The new conclusion affirms Skillen’s view that Elazar, though raising more questions than he has actually answered about the biblical foundations for thinking about modern politics, nevertheless has introduced the subject of covenant and its historical influence in a way that no one else has done. In recent decades, the only works of equivalent weight that come to mind … are Eric Vögelin’s Israel and Revelation (1958) … ; Oliver O'Donovan’s The Desire of the Nations (1996); and two or three books by reconstructionists such as R J Rushdoony and Greg Bahnsen. Yet none of these has connected the covenant idea with the emergence of modern federalism and constitutionalism in the way Elazar has done. The review is concluded in a manner that reckons with the importance of cultivating political science traditions as part of the Christian scholarly task.

300. with Jerry S Herbert and Joshua Good At the Political Crossroads: Christian Civic Education and the Future of the American Polity a report for the Saints and Citizens Project Center for Public Justice (175 pp)

With a grant from Pew Charitable Trusts, CPJ and the Center for Christian Studies at Gordon College have initiated a study of the character and quality of Christian civic education in the United States at the turn of the century. This 175 pp research report documents a careful study of a representative sample of Christian organizations that are active in civic affairs, orienting the study around in-depth personal interviews with leaders of the selected organizations (p.1). The purpose of the report is itself educative, alerting a wider public about the aims, purposes and practices of the organizations studied. The organisations studied include schools (Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Seattle and the Association of Christian Schools International), churches (United Methodist Church: General Board of Church and Society; Mennonite Central Committee: The Washington Office; The Southern Baptist Convention: The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; Roman Catholic Church: Faithful Citizenship); lobby organizations (Bread for the World; Network); thinktanks (The Acton Institute; Interdenominational Theological Center/ Faith Factor); mobilizing campaigns (The Christian Coalition; Call to Renewal);
professional/ service organizations (Focus on the Family; Christian Legal Society); community development organizations (Allen A M E Church and Affiliates; The Ten-Point Coalition; Industrial Areas Foundation; Nueva Esperanza).

In conclusion, the report draws attention to the tendency of American Christians to engage in practical problem solving while giving relatively little thought to the strengths and weaknesses of the political system in which the problems arise. Structural questions were largely absent from the conversations held with the leaders of the organizations studied. Generally speaking political problems are not addressed in terms of the structural demands of justice, or the distinguishable responsibilities that belong to citizenship in contrast to other arenas of moral responsibility. The Catholic “system” has great potential for Christian civic education even though many Catholics know little or nothing about Catholic social teaching. The research also confronted very little criticism of public education.


This careful jointly written study about the biblical exegesis of Richard Hays disagrees with the ultra-pacifist claim that the offices of government are off-limits to Christians. The view is derived from the Anabaptist Schleitheim Confession of 1525 that Government is “outside the perfection of Christ”. It is a systematic exposition of the pacifist interpretation of the Richard B Hays, colleague of Stanley Hauerwas and New Testament scholar. It focuses upon The Moral Vision of the New Testament (1996). Skillen would present his critical views of Hays in Chapter 9 of With or Against the World (No 331) and has also referred critically to his pacifism earlier (No 313) and also in Skillen’s Kuyper Lecture for 2000 (No. 291). The purpose is given in these terms: In this essay we inquiere into whether Hays’s attempt to provide exegetical support for the Hauerwasian position is persuasive. Our focus will be upon his chapter entitled “Violence in Defense of Justice” in The Moral Vision of the New Testament (chapter 14, pages 117-146). We will argue that Hay’s hermeneutical framework and his biblical exegesis are deeply flawed, and that if his viewpoint is adopted it will have a profoundly negative influence on Christian political thought, engagement and statecraft. Hays has identified “violence” as the major sin or temptation that Christians are called upon to avoid. The key text of his exegesis is Matthew 5:38-48 and from this he concludes that Jesus and the New Testament call upon Christians to avoid violence in every respect. There is equivocation in the way Hays uses the term “violence”. He asks in the first paragraph whether it is ever appropriate for followers of Jesus “to take up lethal weapons against enemies”? ... But then, he rephrases the question in the next sentence by asking, “Is it ever God’s will for Christians to employ violence in defense of justice?” The question is prejudicial, because the term “violence” typically indicates an illegitimate imposition of force that does harm and injury to another. By definition, “violence” means or implies an act of injustice. How could God call Christians to commit unjust acts in defense of justice? The answer to Hays’s implicit question is obvious (p.425).

The article is a clear and systematic repudiation of Hays’s view of government as something beyond the limits of Christian involvement. The contrary argument is put: an official military, police and judicial system is indeed a God-ordained institution; the use of force to uphold justice, administered impartially, is a gift of God’s grace for protecting and restoring; Christians may serve in all arms of government. The section Soldiers in the New Testament raises questions about Hays’s proscription of military duties for Christians. In discussion of Hays’s Interpretation of the Key Text: Is the Church a Polis? the authors explain why it is misleading to use the polis-metaphor in way he does. Then, Hays on Romans 12-13, concludes the discussion and relates Hays’s argument to the Schleitheim Articles of 1527 which views the sword as ordained by God “outside the perfection of Christ.” The argument taken to its logical implication puts the Father and incarnate Son in direct conflict.
302. “Freedom, Progress and History” Comment (Work Research Foundation, Ontario) July-August pp.16-19

(The republication of an excerpt from No. 208 pp.6-11).

303. “Reason, Community, and the Common Good” Comment September-October pp.13-18

(The republication of an excerpt from No 208 pp.11-18)

304. “Politics in One World” Philosophia Reformata jrg 66 pp.117-131

This address was delivered at the International Symposium “Cultures and Christianity AD 2000” 21-25 August 2000, Hoeven, The Netherlands. The responses were also published: “Is Democracy the Ideal Universal Political System?” Yusufu Turaki, Nigeria and “Response” by Jeong-Kii Min, Korea.

The article begins with a discussion of rights, and how rights emerged in the context of many struggles for the differentiated freedom of science, education and commerce which had begun within the context of the church and the feudal system. What should characterise healthy differentiation? Skillen asks, and how should that come about in a non-Western context? Of great importance is the differentiation of the state from other institutions. If this is recognized now around the world, is Fukuyama right to suggest that the liberal state represents the “end of history”? The discussion continues with Christianity and the Enlightenment explaining how the conjunction of Christianity and the Enlightenment set the stage not so much for progress beyond the authoritarianism of Christianity but for the victory of various streams of Enlightenment authoritarianism. Advocating a Just State argues for a socially differentiated, constitutionally delimited, rule-of-law state - Democracy and Political Order outlines the problem of the accountability of government to the people ruled; how is just governance to be formed in a differentiating society? International Politics discusses the EC, the views of Robert Kaplan (in which multinationals and a few dominant states controlling the globe in their own interests), Martin van Creveld (who sees a decline in the state, the crowning glory of the West), Michael Sandel and Michael Walzer (who are both anxious about the possibilities of a centralised international system - Sandel wanting dispersal of sovereignty and Walzer seeking something looser and more pluralistic than a global federation. The Conclusion affirms the universal legitimacy of representation of the people in the affairs of government and the protection of basic human rights. A constitutionally delimited state is a normative precondition for just governance and human flourishing within the political communities we have come to know as nation states, but it will also have its just corollary in the way the international order is governed.

305. “Uncle Sam’s Charitable Choice” The Banner (136:17) August 27 pp.16-19


There is debate about President George W Bush’s support for charitable choice. What lies behind this? In answer to the question he sets, Skillen describes in brief the development of the three orders of pluralism in American social welfare history. At first it meant a pluralist republic according to the constitution’s First Amendment in which religion was neither established nor excluded; free exercise was not prevented. Then the States followed suit leading to a second order of religious pluralism in the
1830s and 1840s in which Roman Catholicism was defined as sectarian and thereby classed as ineligible to receive public monies for their “sectarian” schools. The third form appeared in the late 19th century and represents a shift in the meaning of sectarian and non-sectarian. Now nonsectarian means secular and sectarian means religious.

A fourth form of religious pluralism is called for to establish pluralism in public and private sectors. The First Amendment does not prohibit the government cooperating with any body in providing for the common good. All religious groups and non-confessional groups should be able to qualify should government decide to fund worthy projects to promote the common welfare.


This is a statement which pulls no punches with respect to the notorious comments by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson on CBN’s 700 Club September 13, 2001 (subsequently revoked by the two evangelists and re-printed on pages 126-7. There are three errors in the comments according to Skillen. The first is the presumption that they know the secret will of God. The second error is to confuse America with God’s chosen people and the third is the sin of self-righteousness. Christians should be spending their time ministering to the suffering and conveying the good news of God’s forgiving love in Jesus Christ, who is fashioning a new people drawn from all nations on earth. And in their civic capacities, Christians should be helping to design and support the public policies to protect the innocent and to punish those who take vengeance into their own hands.


In the Acknowledgements to In Pursuit of Justice (2004) (No. 328) this is wrongly noted as 22,2). The article can be found in the Digital Textual Collections of Princeton Theological Seminary http://scdc.library.ptsem.edu/mets/. This lecture was delivered in the Main Lounge of the Mackay Campus Center on April 11, 2001 when Skillen was awarded the annual Princeton Seminary “Abraham Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Life”. The published lecture was edited and became chapter 4 of In Pursuit of Justice. In this format its introductory two and a half pages sets discussion of Charitable Choice provision in the 1996 welfare-reform law in a 2000 year historical context. Considered from one perspective, the history of modern politics has been the struggle to overcome Christian imperialism, intolerance, and discrimination. The reformation and early nationalism combined with other movements to challenge the claims of the Holy Roman Empire from within Christendom itself. Then, as sovereign states took shape, the question of inclusiveness and exclusivity - of tolerance and intolerance - intensified. Could a unified state be maintained without a common faith or an established church, and if so, how? If Christian faith is no longer a qualification for full citizenship, then what glue will hold society together? One thing becomes clear here: Skillen, in addressing his Princeton audience, is aware of their ability to critically evaluate arguments not only in terms of their adherence to biblical teaching, but also in terms of whether they are framed in ways that can address people engaged in public life - Christian and non-Christian alike. Skillen’s argument - most pertinent to those enmeshed in post-modern incredulity - assumes that the Enlightenment effort to overcome Christian imperialism, intolerance, and discrimination, has run its course and is now at a stage where it is confronted with its own form of humanist imperialism, intolerance, and discrimination which were only ever tenable as long as its own religiosity was denied. Skillen appeals to Christians who bear witness to the God whose rain and sunshine
fall on the just and the unjust alike and confess that none but God may separate the wheat and the tares in the field of the divine kingdom. A basis has been established in God’s word for renouncing the mistaken identification of a political community with a community of Christian faith at the same time that secular humanism begins to understand its own imperialist drive and civil religious movements re-emerge to hold national communities together in “shared value systems”. The final section of the lecture (*IV Why a Kuyperian Moment?* pp.304-305) brings together the argument of the previous three sections. Kuyper had an “all of life” view of Christian discipleship; ... *Kuyper, the Calvinist, challenged the imperial tradition that Christians, including Calvin, had absorbed and accepted for centuries, rejecting religious accommodation and embracing public pluralism; Kuyper had a pluralist vision of the Government service, its maintenance of public justice for all non-government institutions and relationships. Skillen having discussed the three orders of pluralism (*Public Consciousness of Faith-Based Organizations* pp.287-294) and the rise of a secular establishment (*II Challenges to the “Secular” Public* pp.294-296) he had also expounded his belief that a “fourth order of pluralism” which in recent decades had begun to emerge in American public life (*III. A New Pluralism* pp.196-304) and in terms of which the Charitable Choice provision makes sense.

2002

308. “Tanks at the Manger” *Christianity Today* 2 January

This has as its sub-heading: “Some would like to forget that Christmas - and religion in general - has political significance.” Immediately we are reminded of the political significance of the bible (see No 314, 335). *Jesus was, after all, announced and received by His followers as the Messiah, the Christ, the King of the Jews. His life was so freighted with political significance that Herod tried to have Him killed in infancy. And regional authorities finally had him killed because they believed He was a threat to the establishment.* Skillen continues with reference to modernist “toleration” that wants to exclude all religion from politics, and Freud added to the smug secularized dogma that religion can be put to one side by referring to religion as the future of an illusion. But today talk about non-religious politics is the illusion we should be thinking about. This is, once more, Skillen’s articulation of the “quiet and patient push for justice” (No 180).


This dictionary entry summarises the global situation with respect to religion and politics for the early decades of the 21st century. In the west a secular or non-sectarian rationality purportedly common to everyone prevailed, but increasingly people of all and no faiths are considering whether public life is sustainable without some religious “glue”. How can religious pluralism be made compatible with social and political unity? On the one hand Islam is on the rise; Catholics around the world are marshalling a new generation that opposes secularism and relativism as they enter the political arena. On the other hand Enlightenment universalism is uncertain, and maybe in retreat when it is criticised as just another parochial outlook. The US has its “culture wars” focusing upon abortion, which exhibits a deep crisis in American civil religion. And yet most Western Christians do not have a viable political perspective. The 2nd half of the entry discusses: 1. how various forms of religious exceptionalism dominate politics in different ways around the globe. The various religious views held by people that they are special - whether before God, or by the finger of fate, or made so by history - must be a part of the contribution made to resolve political struggle; 2. how different religions view the question of political universalism, and how they consider the policies that believers are convinced are just for all; 3. how the different religions view themselves, as antithetically opposed to movements, trends,
policies, because of the spiritual demands of their way of life.

310. “Complex Societies and the Structure of Reality” Comment Spring pp.14-18

(Publication of an excerpt from No. 208 pp.18-24)


This three page review considers that the book has three remarkable features. The review is then balanced with three critical reservations. 1. Bolt’s book is trans-Atlantic in character and focus. Kuyper is analysed in terms of leading thinkers on both sides of the ocean; 2 Building on the work of Bratt and heslam, Bolt considers Kuyper’s engagement and influence in the US building on the work of Bratt and Heslam; 3. Bolt views Kuyper as a poet in the line of Holland’s Calvinist poets. In criticism: 1. Bolt’s poetic interpretation of Kuyper is alright as far as it goes but it leaves too much room for the view that he was a romantic nationalist and advocate of civil religion (in his poetry and rhetoric). Bolt does not clearly show how Kuyper supported a progressive call for pluralism rather than a Christian nationalism, which difference was at the heart of the ARP/CHU political split. The split is simply not addressed; 2. Bolt assumes that Kuyper’s heritage is to be appropriated in the realm of “public theology” and hence misses Kuyper’s view of the church as the people of God in active obedience in all areas of social life; 3. For Kuyper’s contribution to be dubbed “theology”, even “public/political theology” is to miss important aspects of his contribution to the reformation of the scientific encyclopedia.

312. “What Does it Mean to be a Christian Citizen?” Seed of Scholarship (Gordon College) Fall

This is a brief report for the Seeds of Scholarship magazine at Gordon College of the joint project Saints and Sinners Project undertaken with Pew Charitable trust money to investigate civic education. It gives background to the study At a Political Crossroads (No. 300). It began as an effort by Skillen and Heie to explore Christian civic education. Now, after all of that, Harold and I are ready to move to the next stage, which is back to where we began. We are now, with your help if you are reading this, in search of the next grant or gift that will allow us to develop the means of bringing improved in-depth citizenship education to American Christians.

313. “Civic-Minded and Heavenly Good: How Christians Should Practice ‘Right Politics’“ Christianity Today November 18 pp.50-54

This is another of Skillen’s contributions which consider contemporary pacifist and anabaptist scholarship, this time the work of Stanley Hauerwas With the Grain of the Universe (2001), John Howard Yoder For the Nations (1997) and Richard Hays The Moral Vision of the New Testament (1996). Why does he spend so much time in drawing attention to writers of pacifist persuasion?

Firstly, it is because of their appeal to the bible. To sum up, then, these authors believe Christians are called to live in an entirely new community, a new polis. And this polis should be characterized by, among other things, non-violence. But are these ideas biblical? The article is thus set forth as a contribution to the discussion among Christians as to how the biblical teaching relates to our political life. Secondly, it is
because this appeal to the bible, in this context, actually builds upon a tradition of scholarship that has come to have a new relevance since the events of 9/11. The “war on terrorism” has given new impetus to the pacifist cause. Thirdly, in a later work (No 337 “Reformed ... And Always Reforming?” (2006)) Skillen observes: Most Christians today, we can probably say, are Anabaptist 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 (p.6). It was the anabaptist Schleitheim Confession of 1527 that described the responsibility of government as falling “outside the perfection of Christ”. Many evangelical Christians have a view of politics that confirm this - they do not see government and political responsibility as integral to Christian discipleship.Turning to Hauerwas, Hays and Yoder, Skillen observes that they all believe that Jesus Christ has called his followers to build a new polis. Hays's pacifist view depends on his interpretation of the bible and in particular Romans 12-13 which is read as a condemnation upon all violence including the taking of vengeance upon one’s neighbor. The problem with this view, Skillen argues, is that it leaves no room for Government as God’s servant, which includes within its responsibility the just execution of that vengeance (Romans 13:1,4). Thus the pacifist assertion that government office is off-limits for Christians does not agree that Paul is telling Roman Christians to recognize Christ’s lordship by loving and serving their neighbours for their good, in every office they may hold. In a summary of what Christian political responsibility means for office bearers and citizens, Skillen sums up his differences: I agree entirely with Yoder that the Bible is concerned with the differences between “right politics and wrong politics.” ... Yoder, Hauerwas and Hays confuse the Bible’s teaching on creation and redemption. The material in this review is expanded and developed in Skillen and Pavlischek “Political Responsibility and the Use of Force” (No 301).


This is a contribution to a “dialogue” with Oliver O’Donovan and, as an explanation of the work of the Center for Public Justice, seeks to open up discussion with O’Donovan and, in relation to his book *The Desire of the Nations*, explore differences in interpretation of, and action in response to, the Bible. Welfare Policy and Religious Freedom describes how “Charitable Choice” reflects the two kinds of pluralism that are part of “principled pluralism”. The next section Action on Welfare Reform and Reading the Bible explains the religious basis upon which CPJ has developed its approach to welfare reform. Reading O’Donovan brings Skillen to O’Donovan’s view that it is a mistake to interpret the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a way that ignores its meaning as ‘the restoration of creation’. This becomes the basis from which Skillen argues that O’Donovan’s line of argument here lays the basis for government’s responsibility to acknowledge and uphold all the non-government responsibilities God has given to human creatures. But O’Donovan actually sees “society” transformed but not government. Church, Society and Rulers discusses O’Donovan’s use of the term “secular” by which such institutions are defined as existing within the natural order, the cycle of birth and death. In Romans 13 Skillen asserts that the New Testament, including this passage, suggests, if it does not teach, that political authority and political communities find their proper place under Christ’s authority as revelatory of something larger and eschatologically fulfilling, namely the Holy City, suggesting that such a reading overcomes the problems that are set up by O’Donovan’s conflictual reading of the passage. The discussion moves on to History and the State. Skillen concludes critically that O’Donovan’s political theory is not motivated by a vision of creation regained but is dominated by a structurally narrow understanding of the church as one institution among many in secular society, looking ahead to its eternal destiny while coexisting with governments that are destined to pass away. O’Donovan’s reply appeals to Jonathan Chaplin’s view that Skillen’s theory lacks “dispensationalism”.

128
This essay was subsequently edited and re-drafted to become Chapter Two, with the same name, of *In Pursuit of Justice* (No. 328). The views of Robert Putnam, Amartya Sen, Peter Drucker, Jean Bethke Elstain are considered in detail, as background to the major point of this particular essay which is to apply biblical wisdom to the understanding of human development. Putnam reduces bonding social capital to a means - a means to the end of bridging social capital, which is the role he praises for civil society. Sen’s view of economic prosperity seeks to overcome a reductionistic view that treats humans as little more than producers and consumers. Drucker in certain respects poses two solutions to the question: *Who then attends to, or will attend to, the needs once met by local communities, families, and neighbourhoods?* The two solutions that were posited during the twentieth century - the welfare state to support families and workplace communities to provide a venue for human fulfillment - are insufficient. Drucker poses “the social sector”. Skillen notes that Drucker’s “social sector” (neither government nor corporation/employer but a crucial third factor) is the question of the volume. *Should the hope for development in poorer countries now be grounded in the push for the creation and strengthening of a social sector, or more social space, or a greater number and variety of NGOs in those countries?*

Elshtain, like Sandel, criticizes the mythic liberal notion of the “unencumbered self” and rejects as illusory the ideal that democracy and free markets can survive without undemocratic institutions such as the family. Alan Whaites counters with the view that *Family or clan independence must not be the highest development goal of human society.* The section, *Seeking Biblical Wisdom for Human Development* discusses how diverse institutions and relationships relate to their own normative development. And in this way the arguments about economic development and democracy should lead us to the view that *economic development and democracy should therefore be viewed, at least from one angle, as means to ends beyond themselves.* (Later in its 2004 version the sentence reads: *Economic development and democracy should therefore be viewed in this larger context of human meaning.*) That turns the tables on the standard utilitarian calculus by which all development is seen to be meaningful in so far as it contributes to economic development and democracy. ... commerce, industry, politics and government (should be seen) as meaningful, God-given dimensions of human-life-in-community... Human development is defined as the unfolding, diversifying and complexifying exercise of all the responsibilities that belong to the generations of the image of God, and this occurs in a healthy fashion only when humans steward the earth creatively with all of their talents in obedience to, and in fellowship with, the One who has called them into service toward the destiny of face-to-face fellowship with God. The chapter concludes with five systematic statements.

These two political science books written from within the North American academy relate religion to American politics. In both books, American politics is the subject under examination and the role of religion is the chief concern, but the moralist (Adams) and the scientists (the writers of the Smidt volume) go about their work in very different ways. Adams believes that Americans are adrift from their virtues, their source for building a society that conforms with God’s purposes. A renewal of
Christian community is needed to rediscover authentic civic virtue. On the other hand Stacey Hunter Hecht (in the Smidt volume) does not find a decline of religious values. This innocuous review has implicit respect for empirical social science and “evaluative” cultural critique. Presumably, for Skillen, there is indeed a place for such study of political life (“the system and its underlying culture”) just as much as the “critical” and evaluative scholarship that is the cultural critique of “public intellectuals”.

This first appeared in *PJR* 25:3 2002. Skillen recalls his family’s 1983 experiences of an Annapolis parade commemorating George Washington’s resignation of his commission as general of the revolutionary army after the 1783 Treaty of Paris. At that time the newly independent Americans would not countenance a standing army. But in 2003, the three main branches of the US military have forces spread so far throughout the world that a new department of homeland security is now being proposed to help us defend ourselves against terrorists. Skillen’s short piece is directed at the deeply flawed and problematic “war against terrorism”.

2003

A reply to a reformational political scientist at Dordt College who, along with others in his denomination, present a case for “gay marriage”. Skillen’s own writings on the subject for some considerable time before this, had identified the fact that homosexuals do not engage in sexual intercourse at all. Moreover, as pointed out in the *Public Justice Report* article 2nd Quarter 2004 “Same-Sex “Marriage” is not a Civil Right”, Skillen articulates a view that suggests that van Geest is not only wrong in his understanding of rights but also seriously deficient in his understanding of how government is called to do justice to marriage, and family life as well. This argument also makes use of the view that government, in pursuit of public justice, must correctly identify the kinds of structures that are present in the public sphere. Correct identification of marriage must be one of those, and to argue that same-sex “marriage” should be accorded the same legal rights as the marriage of a man and a woman, not only is a structural misunderstanding, it is a complete misunderstanding of the way friendships operate in a public legal context.

David Little’s “Conscientious Individualism: A Christian perspective on Ethical Pluralism” runs to 27 pages with 65 footnotes. Skillen’s 12 page article has no footnotes but is also a commentary on Little’s argument. It focuses upon Little’s appeal to Roger Williams as justification for his approach (see Skillen’s previous comment on Williams in No 164 where he referred to the view of Williams cited by William Lee Miller in *The First Liberty*. See also Nos 122 and 135). Skillen addresses Little’s attempt to build a case of a “weak theory” of ethical pluralism. Something more fundamental than Little’s “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. The article continues with a section The Origin of Criteria for Making Distinctions? Little’s conscientious individualism does not provide criteria for distinguishing the types and limits of different social authorities. The next section Structural Pluralism and Ethical Legitimacy discusses the diversities that we have to face in our life in God’s world, and this involves two kinds of identifications and distinctions. The first kind concerns the diversities that belong to the legitimate differentiation of human society in this world, created by God. There are different cultures, languages, and types of institutions and innovative human behaviors. The discussion then moves on in an interesting way, a way that is not entirely clarified although it is not lacking in systematic argument. The second kind of identification and distinction has to do with this matter of the correct or incorrect use of a language, or the ethical and unethical types of behavior in each differentiated sphere of life. The next section Conscience in Creaturally Context deals with the problem of allowing people, fellow image bearers of God, to make their own conscientious mistakes. Further Illustrations of the Commitment to Pluralist Principles discusses government responsibility to respect the rights of all citizens, particularly women and the unborn. This is a complex argument. It deals with complex ethical and legal argument in a highly differentiated social context. But whereas the logic of my position could allow for the legal recognition of polygamy as a form of marriage (even though I don’t think it is an ethically obedient form), the logic of my position leads in the political sphere to rejecting the identification of homosexual relationships as a form of marriage. Arguments about good and evil need to be developed. But they need to be given a firm basis by appropriate jurisdictional distinctions among institutions and relationships. For Skillen the plural structure of human society is radically non-reductionist and his view is based in the biblical confession that in God’s creation Jesus Christ is the lord of all, the judge and redeemer of the very reality that was created in, through, and for him in the first place.

320. “American Statecraft, the United Nations, and Iraq” Pro Rege March pp.1-12

The Editor’s note for this lead article for Pro Rege XXX1:1 March 2003 reads as follows: “James Skillen gave a special lecture at Dordt College on October 10, 2002, in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Center for Public Justice and the Association for Public Justice. The following article is Dr Skillen’s expanded and revised version of that lecture.” This is then repeated in the article’s only footnote which is indicated next to the title. The article, written before the invasion of Iraq, is not only important for the development of Skillen’s theoretical perspective, which since the September 2001 terrorists attacks had increasingly been articulated in the pages of PJR. Nor is it important simply for the ongoing work of CPJ as an independent organisation. This is a lecture delivered in CPJ’s “heartland” so it is also an important document in the evolution of the Dordt/CPJ relationship. That is hinted at in the Editor’s note with the historically accurate, but literarily peculiar “double designation” of the Anniversary of CPJ and APJ. In that respect it might have been important in a diplomatic sense not least because that part of Iowa is strongly Republican (see Nos 31, 217).

The Introduction spells out the immediate issue that is to be addressed: how is the United States, the world’s sole remaining super-power, to conduct itself internationally? The National Security Strategy of 2002 is an attempt to respond to a profound crisis in the United Nations (UN) system of international politics, a crisis that has been deepening since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a new form
of international terrorism. This then will also have to be an examination of the philosophy behind the new American strategy which predates 9/11 by at least a decade. How and why is the US responding to the critical weakness of the UN, and what will be the consequences? This is the framework for the article which covers the Origins of the UN System over 350 years of political history since the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Then a description of the International System Crisis is described by which the structure of international relations is ill-fitted to deal with the way terrorist threats exploit the power imbalances that are obviously manifest within the UN system. The National Security Strategy - 2002 with its unabashed freedom-idealism is discussed, and then Support and Criticism of the New Security Strategy explores the strategy's inner contradictions and ambiguities. Skillen makes this telling observation: For the fact is that no state exists solely on the basis of its own sovereignty. This then leads Skillen to the cusp of his point about the “war” on terrorism in Distinguishing the Fight Against Terrorism from War. The language used by the Bush administration to call the fight against terrorism a war is indeed a step on the path to dictate the terms of the new world order. And so the Conclusion summarises the article by suggesting the need of a radical revision of the NSS to stress the US aim of defending itself according to just-war criteria and of helping to build a more just international and transnational system of law and order.

(see Public Justice Report 26:1 1st Quarter 2003)

In this review Skillen says it is really two books that lack integration. The first part is the author’s attempt to list 7 ways politics relates to value systems. There are four major religious value systems ... monism, absolutism, ecstasism and transcendental idealism. The three major secular value systems are egoism, collectivism and civil humanism. Reichley implies that the US founders adopted “transcendent idealism” “a value system that legitimizes both individual rights and social authority and establishes a balance between the two.” He seems to imply that such a system is essential to republican government. Skillen wonders whether Reichley is suggesting a universal resolution of faith and politics or whether it is merely specific to the US Constitution. The second part of the book is historical and the abstract typological categories do not really make an appearance. Reichley's history is worth reading, says Skillen, but he is left wondering whether Reichley believes that the values that come from religion require ongoing religious vitality to refresh them. Skillen is not convinced by this book that religion, as he describes it, is essential to republicanism, as he presents it. And I find this perplexing since I am convinced that Christianity, on its own narrative terms, offers the strongest foundation for genuinely open societies, for recognition of the integrity of both government and non-government institutions, and for the equal public treatment of all faiths.

This is an important contribution to legal and political philosophy and also to Dooyeweerd studies. The article begins with a brief reference to the state of Dooyeweerd scholarship and an outline of what motivated Dooyeweerd's philosophy. Dooyeweerd's philosophy announced the importance for philosophy of giving its own account for the possibility of philosophical thought. Thus the first section after the
introduction is titled The Necessity of a Cosmonomic Idea. For any philosophy to be developed and sustained as philosophy, it needs to give an account of its own cosmonomic idea in its confrontation with the cosmonomic ideas that are basic to other philosophies. Dooyeweerd’s view of The Cosmonomic Idea of Creation Order with a summary of the General Theory of Modal Law Spheres follows. Discussion includes the contribution of Thomas Aquinas and Thomist philosophy having attempted to accommodate biblically directed understanding with Aristotelian concepts. Discussing the “natural law” tradition of philosophy and political philosophy, Skillen devotes a section to Law/Norm Pluriformity. This is a brief outline of an argument by which Dooyeweerd had given critical philosophical grounding to Kuyper’s idea of "sphere sovereignty". Modal and Individuality Structures is a discussion of Dooyeweerd’s philosophical distinction between the modalities of the creation order, on the one hand, and the diverse kinds of creatures and institutions, on the other. So there are various dimensions of Dooyeweerd’s philosophy in play. The sub-sections that follow are: 1. Individuality Structures and their Modal Qualifications - norm-responsiveness is something other than form-embodiment through rational application; 2. Historical Differentiation and Integration - history for Dooyeweerd is about the biblical mandate for humans to fill, cultivate and have dominion over the earth [as] a multigenerational responsibility that unfolds within the cosmonomic order of creation; 3. Justice in Differentiated Societies. The normative considerations that should govern the government’s task in a justly ordered res publica is outlined. Dooyeweerd’s theory is compared with that of Thomas Aquinas, in particular where Thomist philosophy refers to public life in terms of a whole and its parts. The footnotes refer to ongoing critical discussion about the relation of subsidiarity (from the Roman Catholic “common good” tradition) to sphere sovereignty (from the Calvinist “principled pluralist” standpoint).

2004


This article is an excerpt from No. 295. Skillen served as a keynote speaker for the Fall 2003 Francis Schaeffer Lectures “Jesus and Caesar; Christians and Political Process Renewal” which are available at

http://www.covenantseminary.edu/fsi/default.asp


This is a contribution to “The Pew Forum Dialogues on Religion and Public Life” of which Jean Elshtain is a co-chair and Luis Lugo serves as the Forum’s executive director. From the published goals of the Forum, the table of contents and the contents of Skillen’s observations, this seems like a response to the insistence by many that America needs to widen its public discourse. The dialogue needs to be much wider than merely paying attention to the views of one or other sector of “religious opinion.” The dialogue with 39 contributors (plus others) reads as a “Who’s Who” of American religious public debate. Skillen’s comments are in response to two major stimulus contributions by Cuomo and Souder. In his 5 pages, Skillen asks whether candidates for public office are able and willing to articulate their politically religious convictions. Further questions follow about economic justice and how the biblical viewpoint does present a distinctive view which neither Christian seems willing to advocate. Skillen puts forward a hunch; these unresolved and seemingly unresolvable questions fail to adequately identify the basis of the crisis in America’s civil religion. This religion - the glue of the Republic for almost two hundred years - is now in trouble because its nineteenth century tenets no longer grip a large majority
of Americans. Religious diversity in private is acceptable; it is, however, problematic in public and that’s why the truly probing questions directed to candidates at election time need to be about where they stand in relation to American civil religion.


As the author’s by-line tells the readers, this is an edited excerpt from With or Against the World (No 331) which was due to be published the next year. The essay outlines the path the US has taken, choosing to define itself as the exceptional state, with a world-historical mission. It identifies the basic ideas that have motivated the 2002 National Security Strategy. The Bush Administration has a tin ear for the imperial overtones of its security rhetoric, and unfortunately most Americans are similarly tone deaf. It is a form of deafness we can no longer afford. Simplistic freedom-idealism is undermining strategically sound and effective statecraft. The article discusses how Americans typically view themselves and their global contribution. It highlights American blindness when it comes to acknowledging that the position it now occupies comes from a complex historical process in which America has benefited enormously from the work and co-operation of other nations.

The article relates America’s current idealistic interpretation of its hegemony with the New England “New Israelitism” and Enlightenment modernism. The view of freedom on which the NSS is based is a transcendent mission, a supranational standard, a universal eschatological goal, and a world historical spirit, to which the US and other countries must simply subordinate themselves. The US is the purpose driven state and sees no need to ask for the consent and co-operation of other nations. The ICC is not on the US radar. The kind of security strategy devised by Bush and his colleagues is a pre-Westphalian international order in which the US will be the transnational guardian of freedom’s canon law. The perspective is wracked with ambiguity and contradiction. The Bush administration’s international vision is exposed as a presumption that the globe is simply on its way to becoming “federated” under US power. The National Security Strategy of 2002 is, in short, American exceptionalism on overdrive. The outcome is likely to be anything but secure.

327. “Chosen Nation or Modest Republic” The Banner September pp.24-27

This essay published in the CRCNA denomination magazine anticipates the publication, in 2005, of Skillen’s book that examines America’s role among the nations (No 331). America faces great paradox. It’s military strength is enormous but, despite massive increases since 9/11, terrorism and its threats have not been staunched. Afghanistan is still beholden to warlords and Iraq’s stability is in question. The US finds itself co-operating with highly undemocratic regimes and fuelling the criticism of its allies. Toppling Saddam was supposed to hasten a middle east “two nation” solution. America’s foreign debt sky-rockets and the US reneges on the kind of discipline required to support the international bodies it helped to set up. The article in search of answers goes back to the “a city on a hill” commitments that viewed the United States as an exceptional nation. He develops the historical theme that has characterized his work on welfare and education reform identifying the 19th century civil religious unity as the “golden age” to which so many conservatives are wanting to return. But there is no return. Now the US is the world’s last standing super-power. We are, in our own eyes, a “reluctant superpower”, and when we must go into battle it is only in defense. As presidents Wilson and Bush and many others have said, America seeks no empire; greatness is something that has been thrust upon us. Yet to listen to Americans explain themselves one has to conclude that America’s mission is almost as grand as God’s plan for the world. This duality of a checked-and-balanced state under the rule of law on the one hand and a messianic nation with a grandiose mission far beyond our borders on the other helps to account for America’s
approach/avoidance attitude toward world affairs.

The article continues by tracing Woodrow Wilson's first world war crusade and the "covenant" of the League of Nations - centred in Geneva - to George W Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy. Wilson had spoken of God's commission to the reluctant super-power, whereas Bush adopts a secular vernacular when he appeals to the cause of freedom. The International Criminal Court does not apply to Americans - America's mission lifts America to a higher level. But, says Skillen, this is a wine too strong to be contained in the skin of a modest, constitutionally restricted republic. America's refusal to be bound by international laws and restrictions actually foments the very problems it claims to be opposing in its "war on terrorism". The US cannot stop terrorism by itself even if it unilaterally takes distance from its obligations to international law. The way the US can help is by cooperating with States that do respect international law. Cooperation is the key. And in conclusion Skillen quotes from Walter Russell Mead Power, Terror, Peace and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk (2004) “Whoever wishes to be first among you must become the servant of all.” This is not just a piece of feel-good religious advice. It is a sober statement about the way enduring power works.”

328. In Pursuit of Justice: Christian-Democratic Explorations Rowman and Littlefield

This might serve well as a political science text even in university classrooms where the teacher disagrees with Skillen’s views. Chapters 1 to 3 provide Skillen's “Christian Democratic” approach and the titles of these three chapters indicate general questions, answers to which provide Skillen’s philosophy of public policy research. “What distinguishes a Christian democratic point of view?” (Chapter 1) makes a case for a distinctively Christian political contribution, even in polities like the USA, that, in the main, are oblivious to the possibility. “Civil Society and Human Development” (Chapter 2 - see earlier version at No. 315) and “The Question of Being Human” (Chapter 3 - Chapter in No.244) explain why any comprehensive philosophy of public policy has to deal with diverse social responsibilities in which all citizens are called to live out their incredibly complex lives. These two chapters provide a useful perspective in which to explore the political-ethical issues of “body politics” - the widespread civil agitation for the recognition of homosexual marriages; political debate over the use of human seed and embryos for scientific and medical research; the way parental authority relates to psychic well-being; the intersection of race, religion and multi-culturalism. As such they are a basis for the subsequent chapters: Chapter 4 “E Pluribus Unum and Faith-Based Welfare Reform” (see No. 307); Chapter 5 “The Cause of Racial Justice” (develops themes in No. 282); Chapter 6 “Equal Education for All” (a revision of No. 187); Chapter 7 “Liberalism and the Environment” (a revision of Nos. 79, 198, 257); and Chapter 8 “Citizenship and Electoral Reform” (a revision of Chapter 10 in No. 230).


Having read through all, or most, of Skillen’s published writings, it is as if, at some points, the argument begins to vibrate with anticipations about bringing about fundamental change to the political realities that confront the world, at home and abroad. One of the liberating aspects of a Christian political theory that takes note of Dooyeweerd’s transcendental critique is the happy profession that Government exists by the grace of God, and if a good analysis of the structure government institutions can be developed, that too exists by the grace of God. So, to put it succinctly, one can make one’s contributions in political theory and political journalism without the added spiritually exhausting burden of presuming that good government exists by the grace of theory and journalism. And so making a contribution in terms of exposing
underlying assumptions about governance and citizenship in current political practise and policy-making finds its place and can happily step back and survey the overall scene and see what needs to be done next. By taking seriously one’s political responsibility for Christian schools, for example, the political theorist or analyst, can look again for ways to assist in, as is done in this article, the education of Christian citizens. Though this is not an article written for Christian school pupils and students, it is written to encourage Christian teachers and educators to maintain a biblical challenge to those they teach. Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the starting point for Christian citizenship - a willingness to be citizens, but only on the basis of recognizing Jesus Christ as the supreme authority over Caesar. A brief history of Christian understanding, as a background to America’s view of citizenship as something public and different from the freedom Christians have to profess Christ as Lord in their hearts, homes, churches and private schools. And here is the head-on collision with the American civil-religious presumption of its own religious neutrality: Christianity should play an entirely supporting role by helping to shape the moral conscience of individuals who imagine that they create government and hold it accountable to themselves alone. This is a highly condensed version of the way American public policy has evolved through various “orders of pluralism” (see No. 307 and Chapter 4 in No 328). Sectarian understandings of Christianity need to be dispensed with. The Christian way of life is not a private, sectarian way of worship and schooling, but a public discipleship encompassing all areas of life... Christianity and other religions are ways of life, not merely ways of worship. The article is about how Christian schools should contribute to a student’s understanding of citizenship in a way that coheres with the encouragement given by family and church.

2005

330. “Anti-Faith Extremism” Prism (January-February) 36

Reich’s concern about the politicization of churches and other non-profit organizations is quite legitimate. But his diatribe against Bush and conservative Christianity expresses such anti-religious extremism that one can hardly distinguish it from religious bigotry itself. Reich’s use of an extreme to issue a blanket condemnation is a powerful debating tactic but succeeds in pushing over a straw man. And then Skillen identifies the religious motive in Reich’s attack. His aim is to denounce the devil of the anti-modern by urging the renewal of faith in modernism. Those who denounce as extremism something they don’t understand are also a danger to deliberative democracy and an open pluralist society.

331. With or Against the World: America’s Role Among the Nations Rowman and Littlefield

This book describes President Bush’s National Security Strategy of 2002, as an idealist tract, calling for the shaping of a new world order (p.101). That being said, it is not far-fetched to suggest that With or Against the World? is also a tract that adopts an alternative perspective to interpret the same political reality. Skillen develops an argument that culminates in an explanation of why normative statecraft is short-circuited by the prevailing trends of American foreign policy whether they be idealist or realist (Chapter 10, pp.133-147).

Skillen does not attempt to criticise Bush’s idealism from the standpoint of a counter-balancing “Christian” realism. The reader’s attention is drawn to “Forgotten depths” (Chapter 2) which expands upon Skillen’s negative answer to the question “Did 9/11 change the world?” (Chapter 1). The subsequent discussion calls into question the confusing rhetoric of Bush’s “war” on terrorism, providing a credible account of the religious confrontation between radical Islamism and American exceptionalism. Because this “initial exploration” limits itself to itemising a vast range of philosophical, historical and political questions, the volume can be read as an extended
bibliographical essay, a guide to the burgeoning literature, from a “normative statecraft” standpoint (pp.140-147).

As a Christian “tract for the times” it avoids “that dangerous impulse of journalistic superficiality” to which Dooyeweerd drew attention (see *Vernieuwing en Bezinning* (1963) p.54; *Roots of Western Culture* (1979) p.55). Chapters 3, “Earliest Sources of the West’s Design on the World”, 4 “Western Christendom” and 5 “The Rise of the Modern State” provide an account of world history that preceded the American Revolution of 1776, but they are also the most recent contribution to reformational formulations that explain the “roots of western culture”.

In Chapters 6 “The American Republic: Witness to the End of History”, 7 “Wilsonianism: From Witness to Vanguard”, and 8 “Another American Century?”, Skillen outlines the emergence of the “America First” doctrine and thereby explains why it is a spiritual competitor with a biblically-directed Christianity. Chapter 9 explores the question of war, just war and pacifism.

By way of conclusion (Chapter 10 “What Role Among the Nations?”) Skillen sketches a role for America, which for all its global hegemony, must face up to the “great underachievement of the West’s design on the world”, a failure to discover the path to just international and transnational governance. The question is whether the United States will stand with or against the world in rising to this challenge (p.xi).

332. “Introduction: Community, Society and Politics” (pp.253-255) & “The Common Good as Political Norm” (pp.256-278) in Dennis P McCann and Patrick D Miller (eds) *In Search of the Common Good* T&T Clark

This is the Introduction, and initial essay, in the final section of the book headed **Community, Society and Politics**. The preceding sections are, in order: **Biblical Dimensions** in which the commandments, Jonah and Paul’s letters are considered; **Classical Voices** considering Thomas Aquinas, Catholic Social Teaching and how public discourse relates to the common good; **Whose Good? Whose Commons?** Which looks like a motley collection of essays about community and associational life, beauty, privilege and performance. Skillen’s “Introduction: Community, Society and Politics” begins in this vein: **The phrase “common good” covers a multitude of sins as well as a host of constructive and even redemptive ambitions, admonitions, and anticipations. The concerns of the next four essays have to do chiefly with the relation of social diversity to a highest, or broader, or ultimate community that can be considered truly common and capable of representing or realizing the common good.**

After summarizing his own chapter, he provides a précis of the chapters by Max Stackhouse, William Cavanaugh and Robert Jenson. The book originated from the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, in a series “Theology for the Twenty-First Century”. Skillen stresses that for this paper **the common good is a trans-subjective norm for political responsibility rather than, first of all, a common experience or a shared idea.** There may be contention over the common good but this arises because of an inescapable norm-responsiveness built into human existence. Humans cannot escape the demands of justice. In criticism of the viewpoint of John Rawls, Skillen affirms that **None of us, then, is free to assess, from a position of neutrality, the vast array of experiences and ideas about the meaning of life before we enter the world we might prefer.** The search for a neutral standpoint from which to fix our notion of “the common good” **before we assume responsibility for thinking about and shaping society** is a mythic and ultimately futile search. Moreover. our best efforts may not promote the common good at all. A historical discussion of **Views of the Commons and of the Common Good** follows (which in some respects follows the outline on citizenship in No 264) covering **The Biblical Heritage** with reference to Daniel Elazar and N T Wright’s view of the Pauline teaching in critical engagement with the Roman Imperium, **Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions** that allowed for politics in terms of all human associations and functions being parts of the rational moral whole which was the polis. Slaves, women and children are less human than mature men and
rational discernment by wise rulers define the best principles of government; From Christendom to the Modern State By the thirteenth century the Roman Catholic Church was essentially functioning as the widest, largest integrator of social and political life in the European world. Political authorities were diffuse and of many kinds; Modern Synthetic Ideas is a section which considers the ideas of the common good that have arisen in the West since the 16th century. Marxism and anarchism are reviewed in two paragraphs. The undifferentiated political realm of pre-Maoist China is described with its rule by the Son of Heaven which became the default basis from which Mao built China’s “modern” societal integration. It was different from Confucian integration in subtle ways that were administered by the party. The UN Declaration on Human Rights and the Genevan Conventions on warfare are mentioned en passant, and recent theories of William Galston, Alan Gewirth and Michael Novak. The chapter concludes with 4½ pages Seeking the Common Good. The insights of Gewirth and Novak are useful but neither of them answer the question of responsibility for the political commons and of the normative identity of the political community. Better and stronger institutions of transnational governance are needed, Skillen writes, agreeing with Max Stackhouse’s emphasis. Finally the views of Robert Kaplan, advocating a pagan ethos for American politics, are again reviewed (see No 313). Kaplan tries to suggest that a Judaeo-Christian ethic is private by definition and fails totally to appreciate the Christian contribution to the differentiation of human society across the globe. It is a view blinded by its own Machiavellian virtue.

333. “Prologue to Peace and War Report” [CRCNA synodical committee report] Focus (quarterly of Reformed Ecumenical Council (March), pp.7-10

This is the prologue to a CRCNA Synodical Report that seeks to articulate the urgency of establishing and maintaining peace as a proper purpose of just governing and as part of the calling of the people of God in Christ throughout the world. Warfare, if and when justified as a last resort, can only have as its aim the overcoming of injustice that violates peace and the establishment or recovery of a just and peaceful public order. The REC Focus published the initial “Revised Version” of the Prologue in March 2004. The prologue is clearly designed to function as an exposition of the biblical mandate for the Committee’s work - the study of war and peace. The prologue begins with Matt 5:9 and Rom 12:18 “live at peace with all” and then describes the common turmoil among Christians, those who see biblical religion requiring them to defend their country’s military engagement, and those who take a pacifist stance. The first thing we need to remember is that the church - the people of God in Jesus Christ - is a community that transcends all national and state boundaries. The prologue emphasizes Government as a calling from God, with Christians called to support and contribute to the development of just government at all levels even if government, like every human institution, can do evil and perpetrate [violent] injustice. At this point, Skillen makes an observation that relates the variety of views identified by him in his Scattered Voice (No 190) to his Kuyper lecture “American Statecraft” (No 291) where he identifies the deep American sensitivity to the institution of government since it was given “on account of sin”. That is why caution, criticism, constitutional means of accountability, positive proposals for change and at times, civil disobedience are called for in order to encourage governments to fulfill their God-given task. (This lists the various approaches of “cautious conservatives”, “pro-justice advocates”, “civil rights activists”). The discussion then discusses government as a God-given task, Moses and the giving of the law, the view of justice found in the wisdom literature. Israel’s one-time military role in God’s cleansing of the land is also discussed and special attention is paid to the Divine admonition to Israel not to take pleasure in military power. The coming of Christ, who fulfilled the OT law, is truly significant since now all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him, and so His commission is no mandate for a territorial polity, nor a crusade that requires submission to any earthly ruler, but a movement that will from generation to generation take the gospel of the Kingdom to the whole world. The NT view of government is outlined with a brief description of how Christians began to formulate criteria for just governing and
defense that would meet NT standards. The use of force and the threat of force is a limited but integral part of Government’s authority, but it entails much more than this. The criteria for making war justly are discussed briefly and the prologue concludes with a discussion of the dominant American world-view that enshrines idolatrous themes and therefore demands the critical and repentant examination of all Christians.


This is a translation and edited version of Skillen’s article “The Question of a Christian Worldview; Books by Nancy Pearcey and David Naugle” from PJR 18 March 2005. In a New York Times December 5, 2004 article, Ian Buruma raised the possibility of “Islamic democracy” suggesting that Islam, as a world-historical religion, stood in need of its own Abraham Kuyper. The question is raised as to whether “religious politics” can help in the search for a non-imperialistic political order. In reply to Buruma, Skillen says that where statesmen like Kuyper held tenaciously to the conviction that God is sovereign and that no human institution, including the state or church, can be the sole representative of God on earth, then a new pluralistic view of the political community emerged, making possible the democratic participation of all citizens in the political community without dismissing or crushing the faiths by which they live. (This last comment contrasts sharply with Dhimmitude, the submission required of non-Muslims to the dar-al-Islam). Everyone lives by some faith, some world-view. Skillen reviews Pearcey’s Total Truth (2004) and Naugle’s Worldview: the History of a Concept (2002) notes how these books point that out even if they do not concentrate on political life and thought. But if Christian politics is to emerge it will have to be via those who can demonstrate in practice what a Christian world-view means and requires. Nancy Pearcey was part of the “Schaeffer renaissance” at Wheaton in the 1960s referred to in Skillen’s Francis Schaeffer Institute lectures at Covenant Seminary (Nos 295, 324).

2006

335. “Reading the Bible in Public” Comment March 3

There remains a potential in latter-day Christian approaches to politics, even amongst those who adopt a critical, post-Constantinian view of government, that the bible will be read as a private revelation about how God works via the private into the public. That may also be part and parcel of the ongoing residual means-ends mode of thinking that Christians, including those who style themselves as post-Constantinian, or neo-Calvinist, still all too easily adopt. Hence there is an ongoing need for a concerted effort to reconsider our reading of the New Testament and particularly the book of Acts. This little essay follows the essay “Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans” by N. T Wright (see “Rethinking Government’s Calling: Back to the Bible?” Public Justice Report 3rd Quarter, 2003 p.3 and also No. 313 above) in which Wright argues that Paul’s address to the Romans is, in part, a challenge to the Caesar cult in which Caesar was worshipped as divine. The study of the New Testament needs to reflect upon the way the writer (of whatever book) asked the question about location. In the PJR article Skillen writes: Paul thus wants the Christians in Rome to see that their citizenship is not ultimately in Rome but in God’s Kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ... Our location is defined not by Caesar’s empire but by God’s creation and covenant. It is this idea that is worked out further in this most recent article. The article concludes with a re-affirmation of the calling Christians have been given to live and breathe the “air” of the bible, to live in subjection to the One God raised from the dead, the One who will judge and redeem the entire creation with all of its public squares.

This is an entry for a Christian encyclopaedia. It considers the meaning of the term and notes that parties are a modern (post 18th century English) invention, an outcome of the struggle for constitutional limitation of the monarchy and the emergence of parliamentary government. The impact of political ideologies to the work and contribution of political parties is noted. The tasks of parties are outlined and the goal of winning power to influence Government specified. Parties are constrained by the system of representation in which they operate and the laws governing campaign finance. Today parties are subject to significant change in structure and function. The entry concludes with a brief outline of how Christian political parties in Europe and South America operate and how they understand their contribution to the democratic processes of representative government.

337. “Reformed ... and Always Reforming?” chapter in forthcoming book edited by Prof Sandra F Joireman, Wheaton College, on Christian traditions and international politics

This is a February 2006 draft of a contribution to a book about the perspectives of different Christian traditions upon international politics. It begins with reference to *The Reformed Tradition* and some standard scholarly views about Calvinism, from Max Weber and W Fred Graham. 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 tightly argued. Calvin and the Anabaptists in contrast to Lutherans and Roman Catholics 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 Schleitheim 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. In this section “Church and State” are discussed and Abraham Kuyper’s view of “sphere sovereignty” explained as an advance in the line of Calvin. Reformed Christians, in reaction to church control of the state have too often allowed their religion to be privatized while civil religion dominates in the public square. The essay discusses the problem of “secular” politics, and how various notions of the “covenant community” have had an impact upon political developments including among the Afrikaners in South Africa. In its secularised form it appears as the “exceptional nation” of Woodrow Wilson and 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. The development of the political community should be understood in terms of the development of a facet of our creatureliness, being fashioned in the image of God. “Christianity and Civil Religion” is a discussion of how such an
understanding of biblical religion is on a spiritual collision course with the civil religion that dominates American self-identity and its idolatrous nostrum that it is God’s new lead nation in history. States and International Relations explains the normative demand of public justice for our political communities and explains why the “end of history” brought in by the world-wide acceptance of the liberal state is a misunderstanding of the historical and cultural task to which humans are called. Warfare and International Politics reaffirms reformed commitment to just-war criteria and in Conclusion Skillen emphasizes the biblical basis for just governance, and the just use of force, in the face of a very serious international situation.

338. “Speaking of War and Peace” with Kathy Vandergrift The Banner May 2006

http://www.thebanner.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=496 After the completion of CRCNA’s “Peace and War Report”, the editor of this CRCNA magazine “asked two of the committee’s members who have differing views to share their thoughts”. Skillen notes that the report is slightly off focus in not focusing sufficiently upon the Church’s task to encourage Christians to promote peace through just public governance. His concern is that the report has accommodated the view that Churches are on the side of “peace” and governments on the side of conflict. Vandergrift asserts that it is important to focus upon peace rather than war. Skillen replies, Even if governments use force sparingly and never go to war, they must have the right to monopolize the use of force and be prepared to use it against unjust aggression. If you believe that government (as a monopolizer of force) is unjust, then yes, “Reformed pacifism” is an oxymoron.
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