

PART ONE: PUBLIC JUSTICE POLITICS

Jim Skillen has been introduced to Post readers back on the 15th and 21st of August when his two recent books In Pursuit of Justice (2004) and With or Against the World? (2005) were reviewed. Jim was so pleased to hear that his books had been reviewed in Fiji that he agreed to be interviewed so his views could be explored further.

In this interview with Fiji Post's special writer Dr Bruce Wearne, Jim Skillen gives us a glimpse of what Public Justice represents in national and international terms. He has also been asked to give some thought to how Fiji might play its part in promoting justice internationally.

Jim Skillen's PhD thesis was an investigation of Dutch Calvinist political thinking which these days is called "principled pluralism". In his terms "Governments must, in public law, recognize the different natures, purposes, and limits of all creatures. This will entail, among other things, calling individuals, businesses, families, schools, and other institutions back to a recognition of the fundamental ecological conditions of life in this world." Jim works for the Center for Public Justice which views Government as a public trust; Government's God-given task is to maintain a public order where all other human and non-human inter-relationships can flourish in public justice. This view is particularly challenging and should be of interest to indigenous Pacific peoples who seek to make their rightful contribution among all nations in a global economy.

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- **Thanks Jim for granting an interview. Your books have been reviewed in the pages of the Fiji Daily Post, and I suppose a good place to begin is to ask how you in the USA see the South Pacific and Fiji?**

Thank you, Bruce, I'm delighted that my books could be reviewed in the Post. It would be wonderful to visit Fiji and New Zealand and see you again in Australia. We Americans pay almost no attention to the South West Pacific. We are oriented to Europe and now, increasingly, focus upon Asia. We also refer to the "South" but by that we mean Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Yet given the growing connections between Asia and Australia and New Zealand, as well as growing anti-Americanism in all parts of the world, including, I presume, in your region, we Americans are going to have to pay more attention to what is going on in your part of the world.

- **I've been looking at a list of things you've done in your career. You were born in 1944 and you now live in Annapolis.**

Yes I was educated at Wheaton College and then at Westminster Theological Seminary before getting a PhD at Duke University in North Carolina. I am married to Doreen and we have two grown-up children.

- **But what got you interested in politics and political research in the first place?**

To be honest, political interest came late for me. It was after college and seminary that I became concerned about what was going on in the public arena. Studying in Europe in 1969-70 at the height of the Vietnam War had something to do with my decision to move from philosophy to political science.

- **And you spent a free-wheeling year auditing courses at the Free University in Amsterdam.**

Yes, that set me on a path of growing interest in political life and particularly the unusual approach to politics and all of life by the Dutch Calvinists, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, Bob Goudzwaard and others. I wrote my doctoral thesis on that tradition of political thought; toward the end of my time at Duke I met some who were involved in founding the Association for Public Justice - it is now called the Center for Public Justice - I became involved in the early 1970s and it was officially incorporated in 1977.

- **You taught at three Christian Colleges during this time?**

Yes at Messiah College, in Pennsylvania (my wife Doreen was from the church that founded the college), and Gordon College, north of Boston, and also at Dordt College out in Iowa. From 1981 I have been Executive Director and President of the Center.

- **It was 1982 when I met you. I was on my way home having spent two winter months in Boston. You had just moved into your Washington office.**

Our move to Washington was an important moment in the Center's history. The Center is a public-policy-research and civic-education organization. We want to promote a view about the central purpose of government. We wanted to do that in a public way close to where the federal government is located.

- **And why "Public Justice"?**

Government's task in the political community is to do justice. We decided to push the phrase "public justice" right out front. That way anyone looking in our direction would see or hear it. This phrase sums up the kind of "Christian" organization we wanted to be. We believe a political community should be characterized by nothing less than justice for all.

- **Sounds simple enough.**

Yes but it has also brought out into the open some rather strange notions about Christian politics. Still, we should have expected that since we are involved in civic education. The Center for Public Justice promotes public justice and we won't be true to our name if we become just another interest group demanding a larger "piece of the pie" for ourselves. We are not a movement seeking to displace one of the present political parties; we don't lobby for just one cause. We intend to render a service to public officials, concerned citizens and those gifted with Christian political insight and abilities. We seek to bring these people together in various ways to promote the growth of public justice for everyone. The Center will never claim that its ideas or actions represent God's will. God will decide what His will is. We will claim only that our efforts are an attempt to respond obediently to God's call to do justice. That is not only a more appropriate human claim, but it opens the door to dialogue and argument on equal terms with others. If they don't like what we do, or don't think it is just, then our response will be, "Tell us why you object and what you think justice demands." That is the way to spark true and serious civic debate.

- **Would you tell us how your association got to be where it is now.**

The run up to the founding of the Association for Public Justice in 1977 took more than seven years. Two major concerns motivated those who set up the Association. They wanted the association to be of real political service. And they desired to render that service in a truly Christian manner. But to start such a movement in the US means you have to face up to all sorts of problems.

- **In your writings you point out that the liberal constitutional system of the US, like in other countries, lacks a clear and positive identity.**

That's right. At times it seems that "politics" can mean almost anything other than something God has given us in order to look after our neighbours with justice. "Politics" can refer to interest group pushing and shoving, or to election campaigning, or to legislative bargaining, or to the President trying to push a program through Congress.

- **What is wrong with that?**

The root problem is that the Liberal tradition does not have a contentful, communal idea of what the state or political community is. In the Liberal view humans are not naturally political creatures at all; they are supposedly free individuals. A social contract is constructed only because I steal your apples and you try to interfere in my business. We agree to give up some of our autonomy in order to have an umpire authorized to protect our lives and properties. Thus, in the liberal view, government is nothing more than a means to private ends. No wonder that all the procedural aspects of government and citizenship, as articulated, for example, in our U.S. Constitution, are nothing more than procedures for citizens and government to relate to one another. But nothing of the meaning of the political community itself, in its own terms, in its own right, is recognized or defined in our constitution. Consequently, the public trust, or the commonwealth, is never accorded a precise definition.

- **So are you saying that in some sense liberal democracies have given up on trying to understand what the political community is in which they live?**

Yes. Most people will affirm in some way or other the principle of majority rule but when you think about that answer you realize that that principle does not clarify the nature and the purpose of the community that is ruled by a majority.

- **That actually sounds like a pretty basic problem. How do you solve it?**

It might sound simple but the only way to overcome that problem is to educate people to view politics differently. And so at the beginning of our association we realised that if we were going to make a difference we would have to act in a manner that points toward the task of government in its responsibility for the public trust and welfare. We have to work at building our own Christian communal consensus about what God wants the "state" or the "political community" to be. It's education; it's tactics; it's a long term commitment. If we were to promote a Christian view of Government we had to be a

Christian organisation that would insist upon a political community characterized by nothing less than justice for all.

- **What other major problems did your association confront?**

Well, the word "Christian" when connected with politics in the US can mean whatever you want it to mean - everything from right-wing conservatism to Christian socialism. And for Christians who are serious about their responsibilities as citizens there is increased ambiguity when the term "Christian" is poured into the vacuum created by the absence of any clear notion of what the political community ought to be. And so, the result is generally confusion, rather than Christian service.

- **So has the Center for Public Justice seen growth over these decades? Have you been successful?**

When you consider the immense power and complexity of the various political establishments in the US we would have to say that we have grown a lot - we have had to grow - but there is still a long way to go. We have a philosophy in which we cannot allow ourselves to be just another interest group pressing for a "piece of the pie". As I said, we do not aim to displace one of the present political parties. Nor are we an organization of self-proclaimed righteousness that promises Messianic salvation to the somewhat battered American political ego. If we want the United States to become a modest republic we must find a way to be a humble service organisation in an ongoing sense. We try to develop a comprehensive political view and so we do not go in for lobbying for only one cause.

- **So for you Christian politics is not about Christians getting their own way in public life. Explain this approach in biblical terms.**

For years I've been referring to the parable of the wheat and the tares to explain the kind of justice Jesus expects of us in this age. You can find it in Matthew 13:24-30. In the context of the New Testament, this parable seems to suggest that Christians must not try to establish an earthly state or political community that would be for Christians only or that would be fully open only to those who confess Christian faith. It is not Christian justice for Christians to enjoy any political privilege at the expense of non-Christians. Non-Christians must be accorded every blessing in the political arena. We often refer to this commitment or obligation as "confessional pluralism," meaning that government is obligated to treat everyone in the public square without religious discrimination, not just so people can get along with one another, but because that is the way God is treating believers and unbelievers together in the world.

- **So it's a matter of being rightly motivated?**

Yes, the Christian view of political justice should be built directly on this understanding of God's gracious patience and love. If this is done, then Christian politics will begin to manifest itself not as the church's selfish attempt to control the state, nor as an "interest group" effort to "get" benefits primarily for Christians, nor as a campaign to flood political offices with Christians so that Christians can control the government for the enforcement of Christian doctrine upon the populace.

PART TWO: FAITH-BASED WELFARE REFORM

In Part One Jim Skillen explained the history of the Center for Public Justice in Washington DC. He explained the Center's approach to political life and how it wants to share its Christian vision of public justice for everyone. In this second part we explore his view of American society and in a third installment we will ask him to explain his views of international public justice.

- **It's sounds like your association wants to share your view of justice, to spread it around. It reminds me of the prophet "Hey everyone who is thirsty come and get it!"**

That's one way of putting it. The biblical view of justice for every earthly creature will mean that Christians will work politically for the achievement of governmental policies that will protect, encourage, and open up life for every person and every human community, whatever their religious confession and view of life. Justice in political life cannot be based on the biblical teaching about church discipline since earthly states are not churches. The state is not a community of "Christian faith"; it is a community of public legal care for all people which must not favor or persecute any particular group of society.

- **I notice that electoral justice is also part of your vision.**

Yes. For the United States to assure all voters of the representation they deserve as an outcome of their civic participation in electoral contests then we need radical proportional representation electoral reform — the kind of election system that does justice to minorities as well as to majorities.

- **Jim, your Center has made an important contribution to President Bush's "faith-based initiative." Tell us what the Center did and how it has helped change welfare law.**

In 1993, we were successful in our application to gain funding for a project that would examine the crisis in welfare policy. Stanley Carlson-Thies came to the Center to direct that project. That was a time when Conservative Republicans were gaining strength, arguing that government was the cause of welfare dependency. Democrats were continuing to say that government would need to spend more money if poverty was to be overcome. Neither side was giving any attention to the relation of government to the organizations that were actually doing the most to help poor people. These were and are non-government, mostly religious, service organizations.

However, as the Republicans began to cut back on federal funding of welfare they were also giving the states more latitude to innovate. So, the states began looking for the organizations that could help the most. Federal funding (that went to the states) was not supposed to go to self-professed religious organizations - that was considered a violation of the Constitution's First Amendment.

- **You were confronting a set of complex legislative hurdles then.**

*Yes, under the leadership of Carlson-Thies in this area, the Center developed a strategy that argued that the First Amendment required "equal treatment" and non-discrimination by governments toward **all** social-service organizations, rather than the current discriminatory rejection of faith-based organizations. By the time welfare was reformed in a major policy change in 1996, under President Clinton, the Center had helped to draft the "charitable choice" provision of the Congress, which said that government may not disallow religious social service organizations from cooperating with government on the same basis as non-religious organizations.*

- **So what happened then?**

*After passage of that law, Carlson-Thies went to work pushing states to implement charitable choice, and in the process he was invited to consult with Texas officials. That led to his eventually being invited to help design and serve in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives set up by President George W. Bush in 2001. In that Office, Carlson-Thies was really the primary proponent of the double-pluralism argument made by the Center for Public Justice: **(1) structural pluralism**: government is obligated to recognize and do justice to non-government organizations and not simply treat them as extensions of government when public monies are exchanged, and **(2) confessional pluralism**, which is to say equal treatment of all faiths and of those who profess no faith, without favoring one faith, including secularism, over any other.*

- **You're saying you were in the thick of political change, but not involved as supporters of the conventional Republican or Democrat positions.**

Yes indeed, this principled approach taken by Carlson-Thies was not that of the White House or Congress, both of which, however, got caught up in various forms of competitive pragmatism and partisan dealing. So apart from some significant changes in federal administrative law, which Carlson-Thies helped to achieve, Congress and the White House reached a stalemate. And then after 9/11, little if anything has happened in law-making relative to this issue. In 2002, Carlson-Thies came back to the Center, where he is carrying on the effort to promote genuine pluralism in the faith-based policy arena.

- **It sounds exhilarating. So in your view the legislation safeguards the free exercise of religion. It has challenged policies that enforce one definition of religion upon the entire country.**

The law as it now exists is still not fully adequate to protect religious free exercise. It tends to identify self-professed religious organizations as a special category. The reforms have tried to make room for them in the supposedly secular arena under government control.

But our view is that in welfare and education policy government should either be blind to the faith or philosophy of social-service organizations and treat them all equally, provided they meet certain basic service criteria, OR the government should recognize that even secularists are "religious" and in that sense their policies should accept that no point of view or philosophy is neutral.

Given the way the law is now written, the so-called faith-based groups still have more hoops to jump through. On occasion they will still suffer exclusion because of the public bias that is still in favour of non-religious organizations. Moreover there is the view that the government has the monopoly in areas for which it doles out the funds. Thus we see an attempt by government to control non-government organizations as extensions of itself.

- **Hang on a bit. Doesn't this mean that any "success" you have had in welfare reform now needs further legislative reform? Couldn't that take the Center down the path of a single issue lobby group?**

I suppose it could because, in essence, the U.S. still operates (however inconsistently) with the cultural and legal predisposition that religion is a private matter and public life is secular. So if government allows an exception, such as public funding of religious organizations cooperating in a public service, then exceptional reasons and oversight need to apply. This does, in effect, still privilege or “establish” the doctrine that religion is a private matter and the government-controlled arena is non-religious. As I said Stanley Carlson-Thies carries on this work. We really can't afford to leave it where it is now. We need to maintain the patient push for justice in the long term.

- **Apart from advocating justice for non-government and all religious service organisations, much policy work in other policy areas is needed. What does the Center say about Government's role in relation to poverty and civil rights?**

There are, of course, many things that need to be done to address poverty, some of which arise because of race and class discrimination. Much of it, in fact, comes because of the tremendous inadequacy and even failure of the schooling offered and controlled by government. And so welfare reform is not sufficient by itself to address poverty.

- **You'd better expand on that.**

There are two specific difficulties that face us in the United States. Our federal system makes it very difficult for the federal government to address poverty and schooling directly - it has no authority to do so. The states have jurisdiction in those areas. All the federal government can do is to bribe states into accepting federal funds to do what Congress and the President want them to do. But, of course, the bribery process requires wheeling and dealing to get enough state-based Representatives and Senators to go along with the tax increases or other requirements that are being designed to address these issues. Usually that means needing to satisfy enough interest groups and middle and upper class constituencies to get them to buy in. And that also means a watered-down or wasteful law.

- **That's the first difficulty you see. What's the second?**

The second difficulty is that the process of the federal government trying to deal with matters like poverty and racism in our American way produces much waste and inefficiency. And that merely “proves” to the conservative, libertarian wing of the American electorate that government is always part of the problem and never the solution. In other words, it proves that government should get out of the business of trying to solve social problems. That paralyzes policy making.

- **So Government cannot avoid its responsibility for human development. You have no problems with Government being involved in public education so long as it promotes justice in education and so Government also has a positive role in promoting human development?**

That is so. It is covered by the commandment that in all of our doings God calls us to promote the good of our neighbour. Government's responsibility for human development has, in my view, two sides to it. On the one hand, government's first responsibility is to recognize, protect, and uphold the responsibilities not only of individuals but also of nongovernment organizations such as families, churches, schools, social-service organizations, etc. Government shouldn't try to become father, husband, teacher, or social servant of people, thus displacing responsibilities that belong to others.

- **That's one side of its responsibility and the other is ..?**

At the same time, government also bears responsibility for the commonwealth, the public trust, the commons. Government is not merely the protector of rights and property; it is not merely a means to private-market ends. And if government is to fulfill the responsibilities that really belong to it, then it should take all the initiatives necessary to uphold public justice for all citizens and to overcome public injustices that arise from or are rooted in racism, calcified social patterns, failing schools, economic inequities, and so forth. If this requires the distribution of funds and the empowerment of certain kinds of changes that are generated by nongovernment organizations and groups, then government should work with them in nondiscriminatory ways. Equal treatment will recognize and uphold their independence.

- **And this is part of your view of justice for education?**

Yes. I am a firm supporter of government-funded schooling, so that every child, regardless of family income, can get equal-value schooling. But this means that government should play its proper equity role and make sure that every child is having an opportunity to receive the schooling her parents want for her. Government funding, then, should go hand in hand with allowing parents to choose the schools they want and for schools to open their doors on an equal-treatment footing.

- **Doesn't this challenge in some way the underlying assumptions that have been at work in the history of American public education?**

Yes. Today's public school system was built on several assumptions from the early 19th century. Back then, nonsectarian meant protestant and parochial meant catholic. The idea that all children should enjoy a free (tax-supported) education was pushed by those who believed that education was the public's responsibility and that all children - especially Catholic immigrants - should be taught how to become good Americans, how to integrate, how to assimilate. Since then significant changes have taken place and the changes mean that the older assumptions about public education need to be reconsidered.

The main problem as I see it is this: Why maintain the present system of financial discrimination, which confines many poor and minority children to inferior schools and denies equitable support to parents who, for religious or other reasons, want to use non-government schools that have already been approved and licensed by the Government.

- **It seems you have begun to address the "crisis in the class-room" experienced in many places around the industrialized world.**

Yes. American education is in trouble today for many reasons. And one of them is its unjust governance and funding system. Changing that system to be fully pluralistic by using public vouchers will help overcome many injustices now borne especially by the poor whose preferred choice of school is thwarted. A radical change in governance and funding will not solve every educational problem. Nor will it necessarily renew our culture or guarantee excellent education. But it would go a long way toward releasing the innovative energies of parents and educators and restoring public education through government action that upholds justice for all.

PART THREE: IN PURSUIT OF GLOBAL JUSTICE

In his interview so far, Jim Skillen has described the role of the Center for Public Justice and its contribution to President Bush's "faith-based" initiative" in welfare reform. He has also explained how "principled pluralism" applies to a range of social policies - education, welfare and the alleviation of poverty. In this segment we begin with brief discussion of the politics of "gay marriage" and then move on to international affairs.

- **There are many issues we could tackle. Let's just take one controversial one. How does the Center respond to demands by gay and lesbian lobbies that their relationships be given the status of "marriage"?**

Our position is that marriage is a God-given institution for a man and a woman. Marriage is not an institution established by government as a civil right. It is grounded in creation and should be recognized and protected as such in public law. At the same time, all citizens deserve equal protection of their civil rights, including the freedom of association. But people living together in caring relationships should not be discriminated against. This then would also mean that it's not right to discriminate against me for living with my mother and taking care of her. Maybe in the United States and elsewhere broadly worded civil union legislation without regard to sexual practice can be a biblical way to help people care for one another.

- **Isn't that a complex position to take?**

Yes, but it is a complex issue. Keep in mind that the demand that gay and lesbian relationships be given the legal status of marriage is not simply about using terminology. It's also about the way the law will henceforth view marriages. Legally defining a gay relationship as a marriage will also change society's entire concept of parenthood. Gay couples cannot produce children on their own. As hopeful parents they may seek to "rent wombs" and even deny children the right to know their biological parents. It is going to be increasingly possible to produce, buy, and sell children, because in addition to adoption, that is the only way homosexual couples can 'have' children. There are many issues that are raised by this demand.

- **Let's now move on to international politics. The gap between rich and poor seems to be increasing. Can anything be done? How should we think about this?**

The gap between rich and poor countries is a highly complex issue, in part because there is also a huge gap between rich and poor even within poor countries. The causes of both go back to the way economic control and investment have developed over decades and even centuries. Much of the gap cannot be overcome by trying to restrain wealth accumulation, because those who control wealth are the ones who will decide whether and where to invest. Overcoming poverty of the worst kinds really requires better governance in order that governments will invest in the education and health care of their populations. And that has to go hand in hand with real jobs and economic development within countries.

There are important things rich countries can do to help address AIDS/HIV, economic development through nongovernment development agencies, etc., but in the end, if good governments do not emerge, then economic development will always come under the control of either a wealthy elite (whether highly corrupt or not) or international corporations that are trying to buy and sell and make a profit for the advantage of their own investors.

- **So what should be done so that things don't just drift in their current direction?**

Well a part of international justice must be an increase in international cooperation aimed at helping build good governance in all countries. There's much more to international relations than inter-government relations. There will have to be big changes in the ways the rich countries conduct their own business and run themselves. Right now, the gap between rich and poor is increasing significantly in the United States, in part because of the economic policies of the Bush administration. And if it can happen here in the US, then what chance is there for the gap to be overcome in poor countries and internationally, unless many countries other than the United States take up the burden and help force the U.S. to change? Governments on the international stage have to find a way of doing justice that avoids serving national self-interest as the basis for governmental action.

- **You've written a lot about political realism. Your criticism is that it becomes a barrier to justice. "Realism" assumes that national self-interest is the basis and goal of any state's international policies. Can you explain that further?**

"Realists" try to argue that the state is not a moral agent. Morality is to be kept separate apparently; it is retained at the level of individual action. Realists try to ignore the moral meaning of international actions in order to get the political facts - the results of power-plays and self-interested policies - plain. And so they will then imply that lying and cheating, deceit or rule breaking, are at times necessary for the state to achieve its goals, to fulfill its self-interest. The ambiguity in this approach is that such statements can't be made without some kind of framework to explain and interpret such actions by the state in an international context. The terms are still from what are "purely" personal ethics (cheating, deceiving, lying, rule-breaking). In this way realism justifies a state's 'self-interested actions' as necessary and legitimate. The result is a very subtle swindle, a self-deception really, and you really have to wonder what it does to the diplomats or public officials who are the actors and who have to condone and justify such actions.

- **But is there not a realist approach to international relations?**

*Of course. The realist appeals to the modern state's endurance as the almost universal mode of organizing large numbers of people under government. That is the basis for the realist approach to international relations. States, they say, through their governments and citizens understand their own interests and their own power and what they need. But state-focused realism - viewing the entire globe from the standpoint of one's own nation's perceived self-interest - too easily pays insufficient attention to the **reality** of growing international interdependence at many levels, not just politically where government interacts with government.*

- **And realism, you write, doesn't just exist on its own; it often gains anchorage from idealism.**

In so far as realists stand opposed to idealism, they tend to avoid discussion of normative principles, of justice and injustice, morality and immorality. Yet, right at the heart of governance and its legitimacy in the minds of citizens (and of foreigners) is the question of when, how, and even whether military force, or trade sanctions, or diplomatic sanctions should be employed.

Realists tend to focus attention on the state because of its historical endurance in monopolizing force for the sake of governing. Idealists tend to underestimate the tenacity and durability of states because they see so clearly what states have failed to do, namely avoid war, and in the long-term, war cannot serve the interests of people who want to live in peace.

- **And is this kind of thinking operative in the current Bush administration?**

For the current Bush administration "realism" is all about refusing to accept any international authority that the administration believes would undermine the ability of the US to govern itself and to achieve its own goals. Realists tend to discount international, trans-state norms of justice. A state's self-interest is presumed to transcend all other considerations. Bush's intervention in Iraq in 2003 may look like realism plain and simple. But behind that military action was Bush's freedom-idealism which is now based on American military superiority and positioning as laid out in the National Security Strategy 2002. That immodest idealism, rather than any realism, is what produced the false expectations about what would result from the mere dislodging of Saddam Hussein. It was the immodest idealism that kept the administration from squaring with the American people about why it was doing what it did.

- **And how do realists view justice?**

Well, realists don't see public justice as a norm - if they deal with it they view it as an ideal that can never really be reached. They assume that Governments cannot know what such justice for all peoples would mean in international terms. In my view such realism lacks a sufficient understanding of reality. Justice does not allow a free-for-all in international relations, any more than it demands that one nation impose its national ideal upon the entire globe.. The Bush administration is fired by its freedom-idealism, deeply indebted to the approach of Woodrow Wilson. It tries to combine **realpolitik** with an idealistic commitment to international peace and order..

- **So you are saying that there is a Christian view of politics, which is another view of life, another view of the office of Government in the State,**

Yes. From the biblical point of view, earthly political life is a facet, a dimension of God's image, male and female, whose lives are always open before the face of God. Everything connected with human creatureliness reflects God. Political life and government actually reveal God, in part, just as marriage, family life, vineyard keeping, shepherding, music-making, and countless other human activities reveal God, in part. A king, a judge, a chief, a governor, a legislator fills an office for the revelation of God's lordship, justice and righteous rule - just think of all those songs of praise to God in the Psalms. God's condemnation of unjust kings, judges, chiefs, governors, and legislators reveals the normative terms of God's rule by which God judges unjust rulers and all perpetrators of injustice.

- **And how is politics related to God's Kingdom?**

Political life takes place as human generations unfold, and thus anticipates the fulfillment of God's judgment and blessing of the creation, when everything that now defiles the world will be cast out and perfect justice will reign. Every human act of justice, every just aspect of a political community, points ahead to a larger wider fulfillment of its meaning. No single act of justice that occurs, no single political institution that exists during the generation-to-generation unfolding of life in this age, can reveal all things divine and human, for each appears only for a time, on its way to - in anticipation of - the fullness which is to come.

- **And so public justice politics is also a politics of hope?**

Yes, because God is taking care of how everything will be fulfilled, those working for justice can rejoice in that hope in God's coming justice even while they have to endure injustice. By faith such believers can already see the fullness to come. That is why unrighteous authorities are warned and told to tremble, because even the greatest rulers of Babylon and Egypt, of America and Russia, are destined for destruction to the extent that justice is not revealed and anticipated during their administrations.

PART FOUR: IS AMERICA FOR OR AGAINST THE WORLD?

In our interview with Jim Skillen we come finally to discuss the global standing of the United States, the country within which Jim does his work for the Center for Public Justice.

- **So what is your view of the challenge facing the United States?**

The challenge for the United States today is to pursue what I would call "normative statecraft", which necessarily entails the building of trustworthy international and transnational organizations. This means taking seriously the importance of real governing institutions, which today are mostly states, while recognizing that the normative demands of justice increasingly require more than the governance of states by states.

I've already mentioned the Bush Administration's 2002 National Security Strategy. This is freedom idealism at its grandest. The U.S is presented there as simply a servant of the universal cause that is now bringing about the final order of the ages. Everyone, including sovereign states, should submit to it. As President Bush wrote: "The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission." In this document the US is drawn as the lead representative of freedom and therefore it assumes that what America does in the world will advance the freedom of all. This idealist tract calling for the United States to lead in building a new world order of freedom is not what I am advocating. Not at all.

- **But you are saying that there is a big challenge facing the US even if it is not the challenge the US Administration talks about.**

There can be little doubt that the United States will henceforth be thoroughly engaged in the world in an intricate way, almost everywhere, whether its citizens want this or not. The only question is whether the US will try to dictate the terms of the new world order in the name of freedom and its own preeminence, or instead will work to help define the new order as one of accountable governance under law, which can eventually transcend even American sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of every other state.

- **You see domestic and international dimensions of this?**

Yes. To the extent that justice holds for the domestic obligation of states, their governments have real responsibilities to act for the public protection and well-being of their citizens, including the responsibility to defend their countries against unjust aggression.

- **That sounds like conventional politics ...**

Indeed and therefore normative statecraft will mean that national defense should be disciplined by adherence to just war principles.

- **And what of the international dimension of state-crafting ...**

Justice calls for the upholding of the common good of the international public order. This involves ways that cannot be adequately achieved by separate states acting alone or merely in cooperation. Justice requires the building of international and transnational governance capabilities that extend and improve the quality of state responsibilities while also building out beyond state sovereignty.

- **Surely powerful states will be very cautious about subjecting their citizens to rules and regimes they do not control.**

This is true. But it does not prove the invalidity of transnational norms of justice. In fact, the reluctance of states to relinquish even small degrees of sovereignty confirms the limitations of the state system to achieve what will increasingly be needed for the just governance of a shrinking world and the well-being of all states.

- **But we can see so many seemingly unsolvable international problems...**

Yes, but the existence of international injustice does not prove the irrelevance of the norm of justice, it simply reveals the violation of something we can't avoid. We are called to do justice to our neighbour. And the violation of justice can not be corrected if states are oriented to their self-interest above all.

- **So you are suggesting we seek to strengthen global and international governance but you are not proposing a World Government or anything like that?**

Stronger international institutions are needed and they need to be oriented to justice among states. Of all the certainties that have endured, one in particular has been very durable. There is but one world in which we are called to serve God completely and our neighbours as ourselves.

- **You mean that the rich fabric of cultural diversity needs to be supported and respected in political communities where public justice is a living reality?**

*The fact that human cultures and languages are many and the fact that there has been more war than peace in the history of the world does not undermine the certainty that this is one world. Cultural variability only **underlines**, rather than **undermines**, the universal demands of public justice as societies unfold to ever greater complexity and become ever more interdependent in God's one world which we all share.*

Neither Pharaoh, nor the Roman Empire, neither the Middle Kingdom nor Christendom, neither Islam nor the modern state has been able to constitute the world as a political unity. An American Imperium, even if it is only a military security umbrella, will also fail and the world continues to shrink. The challenge to all states, especially to the US, is to decide how to co-operate in governing themselves to build international and transnational institutions that support and encourage, rather than hinder, the normative search for justice for all.

- **And that brings us again to America's war in Iraq. Briefly, how do you assess that?**

I have written a lot on this in recent days. It is a complex issue but one big question is about whether the American war in Iraq has strengthened or weakened global stability and security. Not only Americans have to ask this. Do countries throughout the world now look with greater confidence or with less confidence to the U.S. as the leading representative of just governance both at home and internationally? If they do, then the U.S. has advanced the cause of justice to its own benefit as well as to the benefit of others. If they do not, then the U.S. now stands in a weaker position relative to other states and has diminished its potential for trustworthy leadership in the world. I believe the latter is the sad consequence of the US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath and so the United States has been weakened as has the potential for advancing international agreement on the terms of justifiable warfare and many other dimensions of international justice.

- **Despite these serious problems in the way the war has been waged, you haven't given up hope for a good outcome,**

Even if there is a relatively good outcome in Iraq, for which we can all hope and pray, that will not, by itself, prove the legitimacy of America's engagement in Iraq since 2003 or of its prior involvement before that.

The responsibility for Iraq's governance—especially police and military security—belongs to the American-led coalition of governments and to whatever international body or broader coalition of governments the American-led coalition can muster. And this will be the case for some time after the elections. Having said this we are still confronted by the fact that so many Americans are now disenchanted with the Iraq war, many calling for the withdrawal of troops. If we are succeeding in Iraq, as the President continues to say we are; and if the Iraqi people have been liberated; and if the new Iraqi constitution is as good as the Bush administration says it is; and if our troops are killing enough terrorist insurgents to assure their demise—if all of this is true, then why should there be any questions and criticisms? But there continue to be questions and all of them are unanswerable as long as our thinking and our policies are ruled by an end-justifies-the-means logic, means-to-end arguments which depend on outcomes and consequences for the validity of any action taken.

- **So you are also concerned about the debate about the war, as much as the war itself ...?**

Western Christians have long wrestled with the question of how war should be waged. "Just war" criteria did not govern the decision to go to war in the first place. War can never be justified by starting with goals that leaders want to achieve and then following with arguments that war is a necessary means of achieving those goals. The president keeps on insisting on the legitimacy of his goals and the means chosen to try to achieve them, while critics harp on the evidence that those goals are not being achieved and that the administration's chosen means are questionable or wrong.

- **In conclusion do you have any thoughts about the contribution Fiji could make on the international stage? What public justice role is there for small island countries like Fiji?**

When I think about a small island-country like Fiji, I first think of how a small country like Holland had to develop after it lost its empire. It was surrounded by the French, Germans, and British. It had to perfect the art of relating among other countries so that it could get what it wanted. In time it became the country that knew about the others sometimes better than they knew themselves. Fiji, of course, is not in the middle of a continent like the Dutch in Europe, but perhaps, given its connection to countries like Australia and New Zealand, its proximity to both the Americas as well as Asia . . . perhaps, and remember this is only as yet a dream from the other side of the world, perhaps Fiji has a role to play as the lookout in the crow's nest of a ship; it can look around and ahead to where all these other countries are headed, spotting the shoals and other dangers they are likely to hit, and offering warning calls and prophetic messages about the future. Surely Fiji is more alert to the consequences of global warming than most countries. Surely Fiji is aware of the dependency of all small countries in a world occupied by rapacious, quarreling giants.

- **You're saying that America needs to hear prophetic voices of justice from outside America?**

Yes, this is my imagination but perhaps Fiji could build up and host the best forward-looking think tank in the world, at its own pace, in its own way, bringing in overseas experts for conferences, for research stints, and, from my point of view, it would be great if much of what went into that work had a Christian-democratic, global-pluralist character. That would help us in our work. At the very least, perhaps the Christian-democratic groups in Fiji, cooperating with key Christian-democratic groups in other parts of the world, could become the host of a global worldview center, where the idea of Christian cooperation around the world on many public fronts could be imagined, developed, nurtured, and promoted.

- **How would you sum up your view of Christian politics?**

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that believers have become carriers of God's reconciliation in Christ. In other words, God is reconciling - rectifying, setting right, restoring - "the world to Himself in Christ" and "has committed to us the message of reconciliation". That process continues to unfold right up to the moment at the feet of Him who sits on the throne, on the footstool where we dwell in God's one and only throne room. Just before this Paul reminds us, "We live by faith not by sight."

- **Thanks so much, Jim. Readers who would like to know more about the Center for Public Justice can explore their web-site at www.cpjustice.org or email Jim Skillen at jim@cpjustice.org or write Center for Public Justice PO Box 48368 Washington DC 20002-0368**